

**A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE BRAHMINS
OF KERALA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO THEIR DOWNWARD MOBILITY**

A Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment for the Degree of
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C E R T I F I C A T E

This dissertation entitled "A Sociological Study of the Brahmins of Kerala with Special Reference to their Downward Mobility" submitted by Shri F.M. Suresh Kumar for the Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University. We recommend that this dissertation should be placed before the examiners for their consideration for the award of M.Phil degree.

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

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CHAPTER ONE

PART - I - I N T R O D U C T I O N

Society is innumerablely stratified.¹ Further, it is dynamic also. Hence the position of individuals or groups is subject to recurrent fluctuations.

Social mobility refers to moving up and down of individuals - groups or family - in the social position, viz., caste, class, occupation, power, etc. It "is the movement of individuals, families and groups from one social position to another."²

Based on the direction of movement (up or down) social mobility is divisible into two :

- 1) Upward mobility; and
- ii) Downward mobility.

Upward mobility is the ascending of individuals or groups towards higher grades on the social scale. Downward mobility or "the descending movement of individuals and groups" or the "withdrawal of status respect"³ is a complex process involving social and economic, cultural and motivational factors.

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1. 'Stratification' means the differentiation of a given population into hierarchically superposed classes - sorokin (Pitirim A), Social and Cultural Mobility, The Free Press, New York, 1959, pp.11.
 2. International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol.14, The Macmillan Company, The Free Press, 1968, pp.429.
 3. Hagen (Everett), On the Theory of Social Change: An Adaptation, Vakils, Faffer and Simons (Pvt) Ltd., Bombay, 1962.

Broadly, downward mobility can be categorised into two.⁴

- a) Domain specific decline; and
- b) Generalized decline.

Generalized decline* refers to total decline of a unit of society, i.e., individual, family, group and nation. Domain specific decline would mean downward mobility of these units in a particular domain or aspect. It also results from mobility of a particular type, or as an unplanned or unforeseen consequence of a particular type of mobility. Generalized decline can be categorised into two on the basis of the decline itself :

- i) Structural decline; and
- ii) Positional decline.

Structural decline follows changes in the organizational principles of the society; positional decline in contrast, implies only a movement of persons within a continuing structure of society.

Since mobility inevitably warrants strata, the nature of the strata has a direct bearing on mobility. The two types of strata representing a continuum are : the open class system and the closed class system**-

4. Sharma (K.L.), "Downward Social Mobility : Some Observations", Sociological Bulletin, March 1953, Vol.I, p.59-61.

* The word 'decline' is used synonymously with downward mobility by Sharma, K.L.

otherwise known as "class" and "caste".

An open class system is one in which vertical social mobility is possible. This means that there are no restrictions, or at the most only very mild restrictions on the upward and downward movement of individuals with respect to the several strata. In the polar case there would be no restrictions whatever; class status would be completely achieved by every individual and never ascribed except at the very beginning of life. A closed class system on the other hand, is one in which vertical social mobility is considerably restricted and perhaps at one or more points on the scale, even prohibited. In the polar case, class status would always be ascribed to the individual and never achieved by him. His class status would continue to be that of his family and he would be required in addition to choose his marriage partner from his own class.⁵

As to how mobile is social mobility depends upon the society.⁶ Not only is there is difference in the case of open and closed societies, variations occur among

** The words 'strata' and 'class' are synonymously used. See Bottomore (F.B.), Classes in Modern Society, Alfred-A-Knopf Inc. and Random House Inc., New York, 1966, pp.3.

5. Bierstedt (Robert), The Social Order, McGraw Hill Book Company, New York, 3rd ed., p.438-9.

6. Dressler; op. cit., p.398.

different societies of the same type - either open or closed - as well as variations are seen during different - periods of time in a particular society itself. The stringency of the criteria which affects the individual's placement in a social class probably varies with the size of the community in which he lives, and the position of the class to which he aspires.⁷ The smaller the community and the higher the social class, the more likely it is that an individual's rank is determined by his personal attributes. As one moves down the social class ladder, and the size of the relevant classes becomes large, men employ more general attributes as criteria for placing an individual in the structure like occupation, income, education, consumption style, ethnic origin and religion.⁸

Caste and class are both systems for limiting and ranking social participation, but they differ in the degree to which they permit an individual to change from his birth rank. Unlike caste, however, class stratification allows an individual to change his birth rank and his group of his intimate participants in his lifetime by changing his class-typed participation, behaviour and symbols.⁹ In

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7. Lipset (S.M.) and Bendix (R), Social Status and Social Structure, British Journal of Sociology, 1951, p.167-168.
 8. Warner (W. Llyed) and others, Social Classes in America, Science Research Association, Chicago, 1949.
 9. Wilson (Logan) and Kolb (William, L.) Ed. by R.K. Merton; Sociological Analysis - An Introductory Text and Case Book, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1949, p.480.

caste, a person's ascribed status is his life-time status. Birth determines one's occupation, place of residence, style of life, personal associates, and the group from among whom one must find a mate. A caste system always includes a notion of pollution, the notion that physical or even some form of social contact with lower-caste persons is degrading to higher-caste persons. The caste system is also protected by law and sanctioned by religion.¹⁰

Since social status in caste society is simply dependent on birth and not material possessions unlike that of class society, "in the caste society, individual's status amounts to caste's rank in the caste hierarchy".

Caste system is "one that is composed of ranked groups."¹¹ Relative rank affects almost all social relations. Most interactions among people of different groups involve considerations of superiority and inferiority, and superiority means greater privilege, precedence, and a large share of the good things in life. Each group is a firm entity, named, bounded, self-aware,

10. Green (Arnold, W.), Sociology - An Analysis of life in Modern Society, McGraw Hill Book Co. Inc., 1956, (Sec. Ed.), pp.192.

11. Berreman, "Caste in Cross-Cultural Perspective : Organizational Components," in "Japan's Invisible Race", George De Vos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma (ed.), Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, pp.275.

culturally homogenous. Because interaction between people of different groups is limited and that within a group is more intense, the members of a group tend to share distinctive cultural characteristics.¹² A caste system is therefore one of cultural pluralism.¹³

The higher, privileged groups hold that the social order is static; the lower strive to improve their status.¹⁴ A measure of individual mobility has also been possible although the changes tended to be small and slow in coming.¹⁵

Being a caste-ridden society, the organically closed character of its social system as well as the political structures and conditions that existed in the past, social mobility - both upward and downward - was not very much

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12. Mandelbaum (David, G.), Society in India, Vol.II, Change and Continuity, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 1970, pp.664.
13. Berreman (Gerald, D.), "Stratification, Pluralism and Interaction : A comparative analysis of caste", Reuck (A.de) and Knight (J) ed. In Caste and Race : Comparative Approaches, J. and A. Churchill, London, pp.46-50.
14. Mandelbaum (David, G.), op. cit., p.664.
15. Saberwal (Satish), "Status, Mobility and Networks in a Punjabi Industrial Town", In Saberwal (Satish) ed., 'Beyond the Village Sociological Explorations', Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1972, pp.113-14.

pronounced in India. What occurred was, as Bernard Barber¹⁶ points out mobility at the individual level within the system since the essential features of the caste system remained unaltered and changes occurred within.* But in recent years, changes have become pronounced in Indian society as a result of the introduction of industrialization, process of modernization, growth of urbanization and emergence of urban culture. Not only traditional social institutions are changing, but values and attitudes are also undergoing varying degrees of change.¹⁷ As a result, caste as a rigid structure becomes less viable and hierarchy based on superiority and power becomes less stable.

Downward social mobility in the context of caste has not yet been analysed adequately by sociologists. The notion that downward mobility is involuntary and not desired at the levels of group, individual and family, is now identified to be unwarranted and unfounded. Downward social mobility does occur and is a complex process involving

16. Barber (Bernard), Social Stratification - A comparative Analysis of Structures and Process, New York, Harcourt, Brace World, 1957.

* The mobility, although existed, was feeble and not remarkable. It mostly remained at the individual level. Even when group mobility happened, it never disturbed the system.

17. Nagpaul (Hans), The Study of Indian Society - A Sociological Analysis of Social Welfare and Social Work Education, S. Chand & Co. (pvt.) Ltd., New Delhi, 1972, pp.89.

social and economic, cultural and motivational factors. Downward mobility due to organizational change should be related to structure, ideology and behaviour of the people and its consequence also be taken into consideration. Thus there is need to investigate into downward mobility in the context of both organizational or structural change and positional change.

In other words, downward social mobility resulting from social and economic innovations and transformations on the one hand, and the failure of the groups and individuals generation on the other hand has not been seriously investigated.¹⁸

The present study aims at an analysis of the concept downward social mobility in the light of a case study of Brahmins in Kerala.

Before we pass on to the traditional caste structure in Kerala, it is necessary to have a glance at 'caste as an institution' in the Indian context.

Caste is a paramount social institution which had been in existence in India since distant past. It stratifies the population into hierarchically arranged, mutually juxtaposed, distinct entities called castes, functioning in an interrelated and interdependent fashion forming a system called 'caste system'.

18. Sharma (K.L.), "Downward Social Mobility", Sociological Bulletin, Vol.I, 1973, p.61.

A general scheme which divides all castes into four major orders as is found in ancient classical and religious writings like vedas etc., is termed "varna". Brahmins (the traditional priest community) formed the first order of the Varna, then follows Kshatriyas (the warrior community), then comes Vaishyas (the traders) and finally the Sudras (artisans, service castes etc.). Since medieval times a fifth varna called "Panchama" was added, especially in the South.¹⁹ The entire bulk of Panchamas formed the Untouchables. Sudras were also not fully free from this. This division of the population into Varnas was a clear segmentation with regard to power, status, sociability and interaction.

Caste as a traditional social institution in India had the following characteristics :

- a) Castes as endogamous groups - (subject to exceptions like hypergamy, connubium etc. which are but not commonly found).
- b) Castes as territorial - Though caste system was an ubiquitous system which formed a network covering the whole of India, each caste is essentially a territorial entity. i.e., Even if all the castes can be grouped in the "Varna" frame work, each caste coming under the Varna will be

19. See Ghurye, G.S., Caste and Race in India, Popular Prakashan, Bombay.

specific to some territory (exception to geographical migrations).

c) Caste interaction minimal - Caste interaction is minimal in the structural sense (In the functional sense interaction is inevitable because of occupational specialization - All the functional specializations merge together to form the functional system in the society). The factors which govern the interaction are primarily "pollution and purity". Each caste was assigned a level of purity for its interaction with other castes; the more the pollution of a caste, the lesser its purity and hence interaction also with other castes above them. (The caste hierarchy in addition to an occupational hierarchy or status hierarchy was "pollution hierarchy" also). The usual manifestation of pollution was through 'repulsion' - in all walks of life.

d) Caste as a hierarchical system - By hierarchy is meant an order of precedence. The hierarchy of Varna based on "colour" (as the term Varna implies) is baseless, because though this colour distinction might apply to extremes, in the middle it is merged. Basically, it is a hierarchy of status - the Brahmins occupying the highest position and in the descending order down to the Sudras and the untouchables. The hierarchy of status has a ritual connotation. The caste hierarchy could also be conceived

in terms of an "occupational hierarchy" - where those engaged in divine occupations like the "priestly" were graded high, running down to menial jobs like barber, washerman, scavenger etc., which forms the lowest.

The caste hierarchy could also be considered as a "pollution hierarchy" where those who were deemed to have high intrinsic pollution is religious (and not due to any other external or internal factors).

e) Caste system as occupational - This occupational categorisation of castes was possible because caste occupations were hereditary. Change of occupation was not entertained.

f) Caste system and religion - Caste system was rooted in religion. It was kept intact by religious beliefs and sanctions.

The present study is a discussion of downward mobility as a fact of social change in Kerala. It is true that the Brahmins in other states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Tamil Nadu etc. had also lost much of their former glory and underwent considerable downward mobility. This is discussed in the works of Yogendra Singh, K.L. Sharma and others. (Passim : Yogendra Singh, 1977; K.L. Sharma, 1953). But due to scarcity of time and resources this study is limited to a probe into social change in Kerala

with a special reference to downward mobility. The Brahmins of Kerala, in this study, mostly comprise the Namboodiris.

With this brief and general outline of caste in India, we will now see the traditional caste structure in Kerala.

PART - II - THE TRADITIONAL CASTE STRUCTURE IN KERALA

Kerala is a land of diverse communities.²⁰ The geographical position of Kerala - a narrow strip of land hemmed in between the western Ghats and the Arabian Sea - has provided a kind of insularity from the political convulsions which shook northern India, and hence, "Kerala was able to evolve its own way of life and social institutions unhampered by excessive interference from outside."²¹

The people in Kerala were divided in their social relationships into various castes, the caste system and inequality being far more acute than anywhere else in India.²² Swami Vivekananda's remark about Kerala as "the Lunatic Assylum of India" was based on the caste system, the worst features of which prevailed in Kerala.²³ In the pre-British days, the caste system was at the same time a system of political administration, the highest

20. Mahadevan (K.), "Social Differential and Caste Formation in South - Western India - A Case Study of Matrilineal Nayers, Izhavas and Kurichiyas", In Journal of Kerala Studies, Department of History, University of Kerala, Vol.IV, December 1977, p.531.

21. Menon (Sreedhara), A Survey of Kerala History, N.B.S. Kottayam, 1967, p.2.

22. Namboodripad (E.M.S.), National Question in Kerala, People's Publishing House, 1952, p.3.

23. Gopalan, (A.K.), Kerala - Past and Present, Lawrence & Wishart, London, p.30.

caste being not only socially superior, but supplying the rulers and administrators.²⁴ The economic disparity among the different sections of the people runs parallel to the communal and caste composition of the population.²⁵ They were divided and subdivided on the basis of caste and sub-caste into hundreds of mutually exclusive groups, hierarchically organised as it was, "there was always ground for complaint of domination by another."²⁶ On the highest rung of the caste ladder stands the Brahmins, the scheduled castes on the lowest, the Nayars, other Hindus, Christians and Muslims occupy intermediate positions.²⁷ Christianity and Islam were only later introductions, 5th and 8th centuries respectively. All the Hindu castes in

24. Gopalan (A.K.), Kerala - Past and Present, Lawrence & Wishart, London, p.30.

25. Joseph (S.C.), Kerala - The Communist State, The Madras Premier Company, Madras, 1959, p.29.

26. Nair (R. Ramakrishnan), Constitutional Experiments in Kerala, Academy of Political Science, Trivandrum, 1964, p.14.

27. Gopalan (A.K.), op. cit., p.30-31.

Kerala can be categorised under five broad groups.²⁸

(1) Brahmins and allied castes, (2) Kshatriyas and Nayars, (3) Ambalavasis, (4) Low-Caste Nayars, (5) Polluting castes. However, this classification is only a broad grouping and not strict segmentation, because the complexity of inter-caste and intra-caste (inter subcastes) relationship in Kerala is such that a precision in the status position of many of the subcastes is difficult.*

Caste distinctions precluded social mixing. Each group lived relatively isolated from the others, and performed its allotted functions. Caste divisions were both vertical and horizontal.²⁹ It was horizontal in the

28. Thulaseedharan (k.) classifies the various Hindu castes in Kerala in seven broad groups : (1) Brahmins and allied castes, (2) Kshatriyas and Nayars, (3) Antarala-Jatis, (4) Low-Caste Nayars, (5) Polluting castes, (6) Agricultural labourers and (7) Chandalas. But the bifurcation made between polluting castes, agricultural labourers and Chandalas seems to be incorrect. Polluting castes is a broad group including Pulayas and Parayars who formed bulk of the agricultural labourers, and also Chandalas who are also polluting castes. Again in a strict sense, Nayars also polluted Brahmins. Hence they should also come under that category. Thulaseedharan (K), Studies in Traditional Kerala Society, 1977, College Book House, Trivandrum, Kerala, pp.21-24.

* ^g Nayars claim themselves to be the descendents of *Kshatriya caste*. But Kshatriya caste themselves in Kerala who refutes this. Again, among those Kshatriya group, a marriage between a man and a woman of their non-caste, is not deemed to give rise to a Kshatriya progeny, but only to Nayars of different groups. To them, only marriage with a Nambudiri Brahmin male could give Kshatriya children. Then again Antarala Jatis consider themselves to be next in status to Brahmins, claiming Brahmin parentage. But Nayars consider them only as lower in status to them. Amongst Nayars themselves some subcastes like Menons claim to be very superior. But other Nayars disagrees this and points out only territorial difference.

29. Singh (Jitendra), Communist Rule in Kerala, Diwanchand Information Centre, New Delhi, 1955, p.3.

sense that there were high and low subcastes within the four major caste groups and the former would not mix or intermarry with the latter. It was vertical in the sense that the entire caste groups were not randomly dispersed, but hierarchically arranged.

Caste system in Kerala was near to perfection characteristic of such a system because all the elements which are ingredients of caste system were vigorously observed, although anomalous contradictions to the rule were also not rare. However, these exceptions never interfered with the structural and functional framework of the system, but operated within it always in favour of the higher groups.

The general and specific norms which governed Kerala's caste in terms of sociability and interaction :

- i) Repulsion,
- ii) Pollution,
- iii) Hierarchy,
- iv) Endogamy, and
- v) Hereditary specialization.

(i) Repulsion :

When we say that the spirit of caste reigns in a society we mean that the different groups of which that society is composed, repel each other rather than attract, that each retires within itself, isolates itself, makes

every effort to prevent its members from contracting alliances or even from entering into relations with neighbouring groups. A man refuses to seek a wife outside his traditional circle, he will moreover refuse any food not prepared by his fellows and regard the mere contact of "strangers" as impure and degrading. Such is the man who obeys the "spirit" of caste. Horror of misalliance, fear of impure contacts and repulsion for all those who are unrelated, such are the characteristic signs of this spirit.³⁰ Thus the position of a caste on the commensal hierarchy can be assessed on the principle that eating the food cooked or served by other caste denotes equality with it, or inferiority; and that not eating denotes equality or superiority. Those castes which are most exclusive eat from nobody else, and the lowest castes eat from nearly every one.³¹ The element of 'repulsion' is seen to be more associated with the notion of pollution, in Kerala.

(ii) Pollution :

Castes are ranked ultimately in terms of the shared "intrinsic worth" that is ascribed by birth to the

30. Bogle (Celestin), Essays on the Caste System, Trans. by D.F. Pocock, Cambridge University Press, 1971, London, p.9.

31. Mayer (Adrian, C), Caste and Kinship in Central India, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1960, p.34.

individuals who constitute them. This criterion of rank is defined and expressed through "purity".³²

The hierarchical segmentation of castes were based on evaluation of differences into which both religious and more mundane considerations enter. The belief in a differential innate purity of each caste is foremost in its evaluation. Purity is ascribed to caste members at birth and rewards them for the quality of their actions in their previous life.³³ Pollution in the context of caste meant "the degree of repulsion" between them expressed through the observance of pollution codes. The three levels of pollution observed in Kerala were (1) Untouchability, (2) Unapproachability, and (3) Unseeability. The scale of contacts prohibited or avoided as impure, represents, in general terms, the fact of the graded interaction between castes as experienced in real life.

The social distance between the Namboodiri Brahmins at the top, and the ostracized, degraded Pulayars (the main Kerala Harijan caste) at the bottom was immense. It was concretised in what has become known as "distance pollution". In Kerala, a low-caste person could pollute a high caste person merely by coming within a certain

32. "International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences",
& Vol. III, The Macmillan Company & The Free Press,
33. U.S.A., 1968, p.334-340.

distance of the latter. In extreme cases pollution could be transmitted by simply sighting a low caste person.³⁴ The pollution codes, although unwritten, but tacit enough and cautiously observed was as follows :

"A Nair may approach but not touch a Namboodiri Brahmin, a Chogan or Irava must remain thirty six paces off, and a Poolayan slave ninety-six steps distant. A Chogan must remain twelve steps away from a Nair, and a Pollayan sixty-six steps off, and a Pariar some distance further still. A Syrian Christian may touch a Nair but the latter may not each with each other. The Poolians* and Pariars*, who are the lowest of all may approach but not

34. Fuller (C.J.), The Nairs Today : Changing Culture, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, London, 1976, p.11.

* 'The Polliyans' are more generally known as 'Pulayans' and 'Pariyars' as 'Parayans'.

touch, much less may they eat with each other.³⁵ However, it is interesting to note that Namboodiri Brahmins had permitted sexual contacts with Nair women and in that they never felt themselves polluted. But the children of such relationship remained in the Nair family for reason that they might pollute their fathers. However, this notion of Brahmin superiority in Pollution was not universal everywhere in India. Here mention need be made of the Pallars of Tanjore. The Pallar untouchables of Tanjore district (Tamil Nadu) believe that if a Brahmin were to enter the pallar Hamlet, he and all the Pallar would fall prey to illness and misery. (See K. Gough in Leach (ed.), "Aspects of Caste", p.49-50).

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35. Hutton (J.H.), Caste in India : Its Nature, Function and Origin, 1963 (4th ed.), (First published-1946) Oxford University Press, London, p.2.

See ^{also} Burton Stein, "Brahmin and Peasants in Early South Indian History", V. Raghavan Felicitation Volume of the Adayar Library Bulletin, 1967-68, p.244. Often Syrian Christians - (a caste group totally outside Hindu religion) - were called in as pollution neutralisers when higher caste person gets polluted by the touch or sight of a lower caste person. The then economic power of the Syrian Christians along with their indirect protection from the British rulers might have made the Brahmins to delegate some of their monopolised authority in this matter to draw them also in the orbit of the caste. However, in other aspects of pollution - A Syrian Christian may touch a Nayar, but not eat with each other - the Nayars were regarded as socially superior to them in the caste structure. However, it is seen that these exceptions never interfered with the structural and functional frame work of the system, but operated within it always in favour of the affluent group. In Tamil Nadu, the Saivite Vellalas, a prominent and prosperous non-Brahmin community during the medieval times enjoyed a special relationship especially ritual concessions with Brahmins for substantial periods.

(iii) Hierarchy :

The groups constituting a caste system are differentiated, interacting, and interdependent parts of a larger society. Often, and perhaps universally, they are economically interdependent and/or occupationally specialized. Their members view themselves and are viewed by others as relatively homogenous elements in a system of differentially ranked component parts rather than independent and mutually unranked self-contained systems. In a caste system, everyone belongs to a caste and no one belongs to more than one caste.³⁶ These castes in the system are not spread at random. But they are arranged hierarchically so that differentiation such as 'high' and 'low' are virtually possible. The Brahmins stand on the highest rung of the caste ladder, and the scheduled castes on the lowest; the Nayers, other Hindus and Christians occupy intermediate positions. Hierarchy entails differential evaluation, differential rewards and differential association.³⁷

Each rank in the hierarchy of the caste system is occupied by socially distinct aggregates of people who recognize that they constitute discrete, bounded, and ranked entities. The size and degree of corporateness of such groups vary widely. The members usually share a group

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36. "International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences",
Vol. II, op. cit., p.333.

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name like Nayar, Namboodiri etc., they interact with one another in characteristic ways and there are identifiable symbols of group memberships, ranging from skin colour to cultural features, such as language, occupation, dress or place of residence. Only members of the group are one's peers. Where group affiliation is relevant, individual attributes are irrelevant. "Caste system are indeed rigid system of stratification, but they are also systems of socio-cultural pluralism."³⁸ The case of Kerala testifies this.

That the system is a hierarchy implies that it is a differential evaluation, differential power and rewards and differential association, in short, a system of institutionalized inequality. Ranking is accompanied by differential power and other rewards contingent upon caste membership : access to goods, services and other valued things. The ability to influence the behaviour of others, the source of one's livelihood, the kind and amount of food, shelter, and medical care, of education, justice, esteem, and pleasure - all these things which an individual will receive during his life, and the very length of life itself, are determined in a large measure by caste status.³⁹

"In the number of ceremonies practised, the total amount

38 and 39. Ibid., p.333.

of fine imposed*, and even the rate of interest paid, varies with the rank of the castes and that in all circumstances the Brahmin receives the maximum profit and suffers the minimum loss.⁴⁰

A caste hierarchy is to a large extent an inter-
 actional hierarchy. Social interaction is inherently
 symbolic, that is, it has meaning. Rank is expressed and
 validated in interaction between persons. It is manifest
 in the patterns of association. Everyone is a superior,
 a peer or an inferior depending upon caste. Only within
 the caste, is status equality, found. Between castes, any
 kind of interaction defies or jeopardizes the rules of
 hierarchy is taboo, even when such behaviour does not
 directly challenges the official bases of the rank system.
 Thus there is always a more or less elaborate etiquette of
 intercaste relations which is stringently enforced from
 within and above. The interactions constitute the network
 of hierarchial interaction between birth ascribed groups.

40. Steele, Law and Customs of Hindu Castes, pp.230-280.

* "There was a double standard even for trial by ordeal in case of alleged offence. The type of ordeal to which a person was subjected was determined by considerations of caste. Ordeal by balance (Tukku) was reserved for Brahmins, fire for Kshatriyas, water for Vaisyas and poison for Sudras." - Cited in Menon (Sreedhara), Survey of Kerala History, p.265.

The interactions range from informal social encounters to marriage and include a wide variety of networks - such as those based on occupation, economics, politics, ritual and friendship.

The multiple roles played by individual members of a caste are equivalent in the status they confer. Thus a person of high ritual status tends also to be of high economic, political and social status, as was the case with Brahmins. These statuses tend to coalesce, and people are thus enabled as well as enjoined to interact with members of other castes in an unambiguous, consistent, and hierarchical manner. Underlying the hierarchical interaction between castes is the existence of 'status summation'.⁴¹

Because intensive and status equal interactions is limited to the castes, a common and distinctive caste culture is assured. This is a consequence of the density and the quality of communication within the group, for culture is learned, shared and transmitted. More is inevitably held in common between those intimately communicating (i.e., between caste members) than between such

41. Barth (Frederik), "The System of Social Stratification in Swat, North Pakistan", In Edmund R. Leach (ed.), Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and N. West Pakistan, Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology, No.2, Cambridge University Press, 1960, p.113-146.

people and outsiders. Hence in all matters like speech, dress, food, way of life etc., identity is seen among members of the same caste, and diversity with members of other castes.

Caste hierarchies are discontinuous. Caste systems are maintained by defining and maintaining boundaries between castes. They are threatened when boundaries are compromised. Even when interaction between castes is maximal and cultural differences are minimal, the idea of mutual isolation and distinctiveness is maintained and is advertised among those who value the systems. Similarly, even when mobility within or subversion of the system is rampant, a myth of stability is stolidly maintained among those who benefit from the system. The religious supremacy of the Brahmins enabled them to achieve this.

The key stone of the whole edifice is, the universally recognised primacy of the Brahmin caste. However diverse the caste may be and however closed the one to the other, a common respect for the Brahmin orients them in the same direction, and weighs upon all their customs. The society itself grouped in tiers, the measure for this being the extent to which they are close to or far from the priestly class. The unquestioned superiority of this class is one of the constituent principles of social organization. The Brahmin is a special species; he has by birth virtues that no other can acquire; on this matter

rests the power of the Brahmin caste.⁴²

Cultural distinctiveness and dissensus found among castes on key values and attitudes display a "cultural plurality", for "cultural plurality obtains when two or more different cultural traditions characterize the population of a given society."⁴³ Since the social system is based on intense cleavages and discontinuity between differentiated segments, the community values or social relations between these sections will be correspondingly low. This is precisely the structural condition of the plural society.⁴⁴ A plural society is held together by power rather than by consensus. Institutional distinctiveness and independence (except in certain spheres, notably economic and administrative ones) are also key features of pluralism. The dominant caste keeps status quo just as does the dominant group in a plural society. There is invariably an official rationale which indicates that the system functions by mutual consent, by consensus.⁴⁵

42. Bougle (Celestin), op. cit., p.52-56.

43. Smith (Michael,G.), The Plural Society in the British West Indies, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965, p.9-10.

44. International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol.II, op. cit., p.336.

45. International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol.II, op. cit., p.336.

Social cohesion need not rest entirely on common motives and values. It can, and more commonly does rest on the articulation of divergent motives and values. Consensus is not lacking between castes - they could not function within a society if it were - but it is a distinctly limited consensus. People largely agree on the facts of the behavioural and interactional hierarchy on the membership of particular castes and in their publicly accorded status. They agree on the hierarchical meaning ascribed in the society to particular attributes and behaviour. Disagreements are often observed by power relations and sanctions, threatened or applied.

In caste systems, as in all plural systems, highly differentiated groups get along despite widely differing subjective definitions of the situation because they agree on the objective facts of what is happening and what is likely to happen : on who has the power; and how, under what circumstances, and for what purposes it is likely to be exercised. This is mostly reinforced through religious sanctions as was evident in Kerala. This keeps the system rolling, rather than getting stuck.

To maintain the sharp boundaries, the hierarchical ranking, and the power relations among castes, there are numerous rules, and restrictions regarding interaction between them. They take the form of restrictions on marriage, sex relations and on living together, on eating

together, on sitting together and on a variety of other forms of interaction symbolic of social inequality.

(iv) Endogamy :

There is however one sphere in which the protectionism of caste raises yet higher barriers : "more than a matter of food, caste is a matter of marriage."⁴⁶ Marriage outside a caste is strictly forbidden.

The caste system in India was regerously endogamous. In the strict sense - barring instances of hypergamy whereby a low caste girl married an upper caste boy among some communal groups in some areas in North India although it is not universal there. In Kerala, instances of hypergamy are noticed between Nayars and Kshatriyas, and Namboodiris. The rationale for this might be an attempt of upward mobility by the former castes and the Nairs of such groups always claimed a higher status than other Nairs.

While there is a wide circle within which a Hindu must find a wife, there is a narrow circle within the first in which he may not marry. Many castes, in initiation of the Brahmins, divide themselves into gotra, the members of the same gotra may not inter-marry. These rules of

46. Elliot, Memoirs on the History, Folklore and Distribution of the Races of the N.W. Provinces, 1st ed., Beames, London, 1869, p.67.

endogamy are complex and vary according to the caste. In general, there is a rigour of general rule which isolates castes and tends to keep them eternally closed to one another. The fact that remained was that only "pure" marriage is that contracted between people of the same caste, that the public conscience, by the sanctions which it applies, manifests its concern to maintain this ideal and that, even more than a change of occupation, a marriage outside the caste carries with it a degradation of status : to such an extent is this separatist tendency inherent in Hindu society. In some cases, in Kerala, Nayar girls marry Namboodiri Brahmins. But this is only a "principal marriage", soon after which this relationship ceases and the girl contracts "secondary marriage" with men of her caste. However, Namboodiris never considered it as a marriage.⁴⁷ Among them only the eldest son marries a Namboodiri girl while others enter into connubial relations with Nayar women. As for the Nayar girls' primary marriage, for the Namboodiri who figures in it as the spouse, it is only a ritual in which he plays the part of tying the tali around the woman's neck, a "rite de passage" in which there is no husband.⁴⁸ Here mention may be made of territorial

47. Dumont (Louis), Homo-Hierarchius, p.119.

48. *Ibid.*

hypergamy* in addition to caste hypergamy, also noticed among some communities, like Nayers in Kerala. Among the Nayers, in marriages, generally, preference is shown towards grooms from north. Such marriages are considered to be prestigious.

(v) Hereditary specialisation :

Caste is essentially hereditary. It is the transmission of the same situation and potentialities from father to son. Where there is no heredity, there is no caste.⁴⁹ This was true of traditional Kerala society. So far as the occupation of the various groups affected or influenced their social interaction, their hereditary segregation under the caste system greatly determined their social life.

The son of a blacksmith will be a blacksmith just as a son of a warrior will be a warrior. In the assigning of tasks no account is taken of expressed desires nor of manifest attitudes, but only of filiation. Race and occupation are bound together. None other than the son can continue the work of the father, and the son cannot

49. Gizort, La Civilisation en Europe, Paris, 1882, p.138. Cited in Bougle (Celestin), op. cit., p.9.

* Instances of territorial hypergamy are also met with among Rajputs where East-West territorial filiation was preferred in marriage.

choose any other occupation than that of his father. Professions become the obligatory monopolies of families, to perform them is not merely a right but a duty imposed by birth upon the children.⁵⁰ Under the hereditary specialization in the caste system, caste and profession are interlinked through the intermediary of religion. This is obvious from the case of ritual specialists like the Barber, and the Washerman.⁵¹

Descent and Inheritance :

The Namboodiri Brahmins have a patrilineal and patrilocal joint family in which a man, his wives, his sons, son's wives and son's sons, his own unmarried daughters and his sons' married daughters live. Nayers had the unique matrilineal and matrilocal systems. A Nayar household is formed by a woman, her sons and daughters, and her daughters' sons and daughters. The husbands of the daughters stay in their own houses and visit their wives occasionally. Children never had any right over their father's properties. The community of "Asaris" were patrilineal and patrilocal but followed fraternal poliandry.⁵² Among Ezhavas, both patrilineal

50. Bougle (Celestin), op. cit., p.8.

51. Hocart, Cited in Dumont (Louis), op. cit.

52. Karve (Iravati), Kinship Organization in India, op. cit., p.249-296.

and matrilineal system are encountered. So too the case with Muslims. The Syrian Christians - the traditional affluent Christian groups in Kerala - who claims Namboodiri descent follow patrilineal and patriarchal like Namboodiris. "Caste difference is not simply a matter of social segregation, but also of cultural distinctiveness."

Political and Economic Relations :

The caste system pervaded not only in social, but also in economic relations of the people. The economy being typically agrarian, the economic relations were basically the agrarian relations known as "Janmi-Kudiyani" relations. The Janmis were the landowners who were the Brahmins. The Kudiyans were lower caste people who supplied manpower. The Kudiyans had no right over the land, and all the land belonged to the Janmis. Land, the only source of production, being centralised in ownership, all other castes had to revolve in their occupational orbit with landowners as the nuclei. Here it is seen that the caste relations and class relations remained merged together in the system. In this perspective, "there are only two kinds of castes : those who hold the land and those who do not." The former is thus the "dominant" caste enjoying economic power, since it controls the means

of subsistence, and political power, allowing for its subordinate position within larger territorial units, say, its subordination to the king whose function it reproduces at the level of the village.⁵³

53. Dumont (Louis), Homo-Hierarchius, op. cit., p.106.

CHAPTER TWO

PART - A - CASTEISM IN INDIA AS A BRAHMANICAL INSTITUTION

Distinction by birth has been usually recognized by many primitive peoples and almost all the major civilizations of ancient times. The primitive people, in so far as their arts and crafts are neither many, nor highly specialized, have few classes whose status is fixed. Well marked status-groups within society, distinguished from one another by rights and disabilities, separated from one another by the absence of freedom of intermarriage, may be considered to be a common characteristic of the mental background and social picture of the Indo-European cultures (Ghurye, G.S., 1969 : 163). Specialization of occupations and great unfreedom about their choice, was a feature common to the ancient and medieval times.

Caste has always been an obtrusive but conspicuous and inseparable aspect of Indian social organization, that several attempts have been made from time to time to expose and justify its origin and evolution. The history of evolution of caste in India is available from the Vedic literature.

These literary accounts on caste mostly centre around these four orders in society, namely : Brahmin, Kshtriya, Vaishya and Shudra, and not the multifarious groups which are the present day castes.

In the Rigveda, the earliest work, three classes of society are very frequently mentioned and these are named Brahma, Kshtra and Visha. The first two represented broadly the two professions of the poet-priest and the warrior-chief. The third division was apparently a group comprising all the common people.

It is only in the later hymns, the celebrated Purushasukta, that reference has been made to four orders of society as emanating from the sacrifice of the primeval Being. The four orders, Kshtriya, Brahmana, Vaishya and Shudra, are said to have come respectively from the mouth, the arms, the thighs and the feet of the creator. The particular limbs associated with these divisions and the order in which they are mentioned probably indicate their status in the society of the time, implicitly worked out in the hymn.

In some of the later works like Taithriya Samhita, for example, ascribes the origin of these four classes to the four limbs of the creator and adds an explanation. The Brahmins are declared to be the chief because they were created from the mouth, the Kshatriyas are vigorous because they were created from vigour; the Vaishyas because they were created from the stomach, the receptacle of food are meant to support the former, referring to their liability to excessive taxation. The Shudra, because

he was created from the feet, is to be the transporter of others and to subsist by his feet.

In this particular account of the creation, not only is the origin of the classes interpreted theologically, but also a divine justification is sought to be given to their functions and status.

The theory of creation is here further amplified to account for certain other features of these social classes. God is said to have created certain deities simultaneously with these classes. We are told that no deities were created along with the Shudra and hence he is disqualified for sacrifice. Here again, the social regulation which forbade a Shudra to offer sacrifice is explained as an incidental consequence of the creation. It is noteworthy that the basic discrimination between the various groups in religious writings takes root from here.

The aforesaid classes or orders are regularly referred to as Varnas in the later literature, although in Rigveda it is not mentioned. Since "Varna" literally means "colour", the reference to Arya and Dasa can mean a reference to Varna, since these terms mean fair and dark colours respectively.

Rigvedic literature stresses very strongly the differences between the Arya and the Dasa, not only in

their colour, but also in their speech, religious practices and physical features. Here comes to picture references to Brahmin superiority. Brahmin is superior to the Kshatriya, whom he is able to embroil with his incantations or with his knowledge of rituals. He is said to ensure a king's safety in battle by his prayers, and the king's offerings are not acceptable to the gods unless they are offered with the help of a Purohita (Brahmin). Even in instances when the Brahmin pay homage to the king, the fact is explained in such a way as not to affect the superiority of the Brahmins. It is even suggested that the king rules by the authority delegated to him by the Brahmin. The necessity of cooperation between the Brahmin and Kshatriya for the complete prosperity of both is often reiterated.

The "Shatapatha Brahmana" sums up the rights and duties of the Brahmins amongst which receiving gifts and observing purity of descent are mentioned. It is also said that no Brahmin should accept whatever has been refused by others, and the sanctity attaching to the Brahmins is carried so far in the "Panchavimsha Brahma" as to foreclose any inquiry into his Brahminhood.

According to the "Shatapatha Brahmana", the murder of a Brahmin is alone a real murder, while the "Yajurveda"

declares it to be a more heinous crime than that of killing any other man. In any legal dispute between a Brahmin and a non-Brahmin, an arbitrator or a witness must speak in favour of the former.

The "Shatapatha Brahmana" even enumerates freedom from being killed as a privilege of the Brahmins. According to this, the Brahmins are regarded as the propagators of civilization. The functions of a Brahmin may be said to be teaching and officiating at sacrifices, and his aim was to be preeminent in sacred knowledge.

Ghurye opines that "the rigidity of the orders (Varna) was only strengthened during the post vedic periods.¹ Thus it developed into a more rigid stratification and internal solidarity....." (Ghurye, G.S., 1961). But K.M. Pannikar has noted that "this fourfold division is only ideological" and it is not in any manner based on

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1. G.S. Ghurye outlines four periods of social development in India - The Vedic period which in his estimate ended about 600 B.C. was succeeded by a period in which the trend towards a thoroughgoing caste structure had begun. During the third period a number of features of "classic" caste society became crystallised. This then (since 10th or 11th century, A.D.) continued with considerable consistency for about a thousand years.

See, G.S. Ghurye, Caste and Race in India, 1961, p.40-42.

the facts of the social system (Pannikkar (K.M.), 1956, p.7). His view coincides with Dumont observes : "The Phase", "the caste system of India", is best taken to refer to that set of ideas about society that many people of India share and that they use systematically in governing their social relations. Salient among these ideas is the view, implicitly held and sometimes explicitly expressed, that most social relations should be hierarchically arranged (Dumont, 1966).

This means that the statements about varnas (later termed castes) should not be taken as divinely ordained rites or prescribed sanctions, but only as historical writings of the nature of the caste system which existed at that time. However, it is then important that the mythological and legendary stories should be distinguished from facts to understand the system clearly.

It then follows that the "Varna model of caste" is really a hierarchy² in the sense that the priestly varna

2. Here the author disagrees with M.N. Srinivas in his observation (Srinivas (M.N., Social Change in Modern India, 1966, p.4-5) : "The ordering of different varnas is clearly intended to support the theory of Brahmanical supremacy". (The descriptions of varna, when viewed apart from the mythological tales associated with it, amounts to a historical writing rather than an attempt to initiate and perpetuate a system.) At a time when religion had its powerful influence over the people, these writings stuffed with religious connotations might have indirectly contributed towards reinforcing the system. But it does not mean that these writings ordered the formation of the system in that fashion. The rationale of Brahmin superiority posed in these writing is characteristic of any "caste-like system" where hierarchy has its basis on religion inseparably.

is placed at the top and the criterion of ranking is derived from religious considerations.

Factors that governed the social life of the various castes in the intercaste matrix of the caste system shows a high precedence to Brahmins, others being inferior to them. The caste system as a whole is always focussed around the prestige accorded to the Brahmins (Hocart, 1946, p.49).

Casteism in India, as many writers have pointed out, is more "territorial" in the sense that castes in one locality differ from the other in another locality in various respects.³ But its generality lies in the universality of Brahmin superiority and inferiority of other castes.⁴

The hierarchical order of castes is further bolstered by cultural differences among them. The

3. Here reference is made to M.N. Srinivas's concept of All India Hinduism, Peninsular Hinduism, Regional Hinduism, and Local Hinduism. As the area of spread decreases, the number of ritual and cultural form shared in common increases and vice versa. This is due to the wide varieties of castes encountered in various localities.

For a detailed discussion of these concepts, see, M.N. Srinivas, Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, Oxford, 1952.

4. Only in Southern India the artisan castes have always maintained a struggle for a higher place in the social scale than that allowed to them by the Brahmanical authority.

scriptural, ritual differences reveals a steep difference between the top most and the bottom most blocs. Brahmins were considered purer in their *diety* than are the members of lower caste. They tend to be more fastidious ritually than are the members of lower caste. Diacritical details of costume, such as sacred thread, usually distinguish the higher from the lower. Men of the Brahmin jatis are - or are supposed to be familiar with some of the main scriptural concepts, or are linked in other ways, with the great sacred literate tradition of Hinduism. This is in contrast to people of the lowest jatis who do not, and formerly could not, learn the sacred scriptures. Not only in style of life, day-to-day rituals and jati ceremony, but also in conugal relations, this difference between castes is reflected. Among groups at the top of the social scale, a woman at marriage enters a permanent inviolable relationship that must endure through all the here and the hereafter. Widows must never remarry, divorce is prohibited. No such taboo is placed upon women of the lower jatis, who may divorce and be divorced and who may remarry whether they are divorcees or widows.

Priests are ritual leaders and must observe more stringent purification than do laymen since they were in close and frequent contacts with the *diety* (Harper, 1964, p.176). The traditional explanation for pollution and

purity⁵ is that people of higher castes are less defiled and keep themselves purer for the purposes of religious ritual than are the most polluted and least able to have close relationship with the higher gods and the higher jatis. Thus, there is a close inter-relationship, if not merger of the hierarchy of status and superiority and that of the degree of purity which leads to the inference of a "pollution hierarchy" with Brahmins as the figure of perfect purity.

The main emphasis of the ritual criteria is on pollution rather than on purity. Fear of pollution barred a person from people who are not so polluted as he is, lest his defect disable him also. Pollution and purity are central to worship in that participants in religious ritual must make themselves pure for such acts. An experience in one sphere of conduct is symbolically taken to influence and to represent the whole range of possible secular contacts. These concepts are compulsively applied in that a defect in a part compels men to treat the whole as defective.

5. The formal ranking of castes is defined in terms of the belief in ritual purity and pollution. Rules of social distance between castes issue from this belief. See, Kathleen Gough, "Caste in a Tanjore Village", In Leach (ed.), Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and N.W. Pakistan, 1971.

Hence the touch of a member of any caste lower than one's own, defiles a person of the higher caste. In Madras and especially in Malabar, this doctrine is still further elaborated so that certain castes have always to keep a stated distance between themselves and the Brahmin and other higher castes, so as not to defile the latter. In Kerala, there was a fullfledged pollution code for each and every caste.⁶

Even the occupational allocation to each caste showed this differentiation of purity. Those castes whose occupation is to wash clothes are ranked above those who remove dead cows, eat their flesh and work with their hides. The degree of a caste's permanent pollution is a prime factor in ascertaining "who may cook for or eat with whom, who may work for whom, or work with whom, or worship with whom" (Stevenson, 1945, p.50; see also Ghurye, 1961, p.1-27).

Caste pollution was not only reflected in inter-personal relationships (between members of different castes), but also in social segregation. In Kanarese and Telugu regions, impure castes were segregated and made to live on the outskirts of the villages. In some

6. This is mentioned elaborately elsewhere in the following chapters.

parts of Gujarat, the higher castes had even distinct quarters of the town or village allotted to them. In Tamil and Malayalam regions, very frequently different quarters are occupied by separate castes and sometimes the village is divided into three parts : that occupied by the dominant castes (Brahmins), that allotted to the Shudras, and the one reserved for untouchables. In Southern India, certain parts of the town or village was inaccessible to certain castes.

The lower castes suffered from serious disabilities and discriminations also. In the South India, the disabilities of the lower caste went so far as to prescribe what sort of houses they should build and what material they might employ in the construction thereof. The Shanars and Izhavas, toddy tappers of the eastern and the western coast respectively, were not allowed to build houses above one storey in height. In Malabar, a house is called by different names according to the occupants' caste; and people of inferior castes dare not refer to their own homes in the presence of Namboodiri Brahmin in more flattering terms than as dungheaps.

The Izhavas and Shanars of Malabar, were not allowed to carry umbrellas, to wear shoes or golden ornaments, to milk cow or even to use the ordinary language of the country. In Malabar, the Brahmins alone were permitted

to sit on boards formed in the shape of a tortoise, and if a member of any other caste were to use such a seat he was liable to capital punishment. Men and women of all castes except the Brahmins were expressly forbidden to cover the upper part of their body above the waist.

Among rituals too distinctions were observed. The Vedic ritual, regarded as of greater sanctity, was reserved for Brahmins while the Puranic ritual of lesser sanctity was devised for other castes. Certain sacraments could not be performed by any other caste than the Brahmins. The most sacred literature could not be studied by the Shudras. The innermost recesses of temples could only be approached by the Brahmins, clean Sudras and other higher castes. The impure castes and particularly the untouchables, could not enter even the outer portions of a temple, but must keep to the courtyards.

A Brahmin never bowed to anyone who is not a Brahmin, but required others to salute him; and when he is saluted by a member of a non-Brahmin caste, he only pronounced a benediction. Some of the lower castes carried their reverence for the Brahmins, especially in Northern India, to such extremes that they would not cross the shadow of a Brahmin. The Brahmin on the other hand, was so conscious of his superiority that he never condescended to bow even to the idols of Gods in a Shudra's house.

The Brahmin has been regarded as the most important subject needing protection from the king, so much so that the king was styled the protector of the Brahmins and the cows and other subjects being regarded as too insignificant to be mentioned.

There were severe restrictions on feeding and social intercourse also. All food was divided into two classes - Kachcha and Pakka (the former being any food in the cooking of which water has been used and the latter all food cooked in ghee without addition of water). As a rule, a man never ate Kachcha food unless it is prepared by a high caste-man, which in actual practice meant a member of his own endogamous group, or else by his Brahmin "Guru" or spiritual guide. In practice, most castes seemed to take no objection to Kachcha food from a Brahmin. A Brahmin could accept Kachcha food at the hands of no other caste;⁷ even for the "Pakka" food it was taken by a Brahmin at the hands of some of the castes only.

There were severe restrictions in marriage. Each caste was subdivided into minor subcastes which form the

7. In Gujarat and Southern India, generally speaking, Brahmins never even think of accepting water, much less any cooked food from any other caste.

endogamous groups. Barring a few instances of hypergamy (especially in Rajasthan and Bengal), the only authentic case where intercaste marriage was allowed was among some of the artisan castes of Malabar.

This rigidity in the choice of marriage prevented the various groupings (sub-castes) from coming together and merging. Complete acceptance of the system in its broad outlines by the groups making up that system and their social and economic interdependence not only prevented the exclusivist organisations of the groups from splitting up the system into interdependent units, but kept intact the insubordination towards groups (castes) above.

CONCLUSION

In every caste system there is one or more clearly defined "dominant caste" (Pocock, 1957), the members of which are in a markedly privileged position. They form a high status corporation for whose benefit the whole of the rest of the system appears to be organised. This is true of Indian caste system also. The system centres around Brahmins - the high status corporate group. In this sense, the Indian caste system can be rightly regarded as a Brahmanical institution.

PART - B - SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF BRAHMINS :
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

If individuals were arranged according to their degree of political and social power or influence, it would be found in most societies that the same individuals occupied the same place in this hierarchy as in the hierarchy of wealth.⁸ These classes represent an elite, as "aristocracy".⁹ The Brahmins in Kerala very well represent the elites of the past.

The elite is not simply raised high above the rest of society. It is intimately connected with society through a sub-elite, a much larger group...¹⁰ The Nayers in Kerala served this function of a sub-elite.

The Brahmin population of Kerala* comprise of (i) Malayali Brahmins, (ii) Non-Malayali Brahmins. The Malayali Brahmins or native Brahmins includes both

8. Bottomore (T.B.), Elite and Society, Penguin Books, 1964, p.8.

9. Pareto (Wilfred), Les Systems Socialistes, Paris, (1902 First Ed.), 1926 (Second Ed.), p.28.

10. Morca (Gaetano), The Ruling Class, ed. by Arthur Livingston, Cited in Bottomore, op. cit., p.11.

* The State of Kerala was formed in 1956. It includes the till then princely states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar.

Namboodiris* concentrated on the north and Pottis in the South. The non-Malayali Brahmins include those immigrant Brahmins such as from neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

The non-Malayali Brahmins came to Kerala from neighbouring states, at a time when there was Brahmin supremacy in Kerala.** It was hence a golden opportunity for them to accomplish the high social status*** that the Namboodiris were enjoying.¹¹

* The words 'Namboodiri', 'Nambudiri' and 'Namboothiri' have been variously used by various authors. Hence wherever they are used here, it is one at the same. So too 'Nayar' and 'Nair'.

** The immigrant Brahmins were not like gypsies who wandered from one place to another. When they came, they came with a purpose and settled down for ever. See Nair (Balakrishnan), Dynamic Brahmin, 1959, p.101.

*** "By status is meant a position in a social system occupied by designated individuals, by role the behavioural enacting of the patterned expectations attributed to that position. Status and role in these terms are concepts serving to connect the culturally defined expectations with the patterned behaviour and relationship which comprise social structure".

Ralph Linton, The Study of Man, New York, 1938.

11. Jeffrey (Robin), The Decline of Nayar Dominance - Society and Politics in Travancore, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976, p.12.

Speaking of Brahmins in India, Weber¹² mentions the status interests of Brahmins as related not only to economic rewards for the performance of their role, but also in keeping priestly role concentrated in their hands. They were authorities on questions of ritual propriety, being priests, theologians and jurists.

Mencher, speaking of Brahmins in Kerala mentions : "A wealthy aristocratic landed caste group of highest ritual and secular rank, who maintained their position by the practice of primogeniture and a complex relationship with lower ranking matrilineal castes."¹³

The Traditional Social Structure :

Certain salient features of the social structure of Kerala were crucial in delimiting the traditional roles and statuses of the Namboodiri Brahmins in Kerala. Perhaps the most critical features were (a) the existence of a loose, feudalistic type of political organization, permitting considerable local autonomy and (b) the system of primogeniture found in South India solely among the Namboodiris. This system, despite the mystery of its origin, permitted

12. International Encyclopaedia of Social Science, Vol.XVI, Sills (David, L.) ed., p.497.

13. Mencher (Joan, P.), "Namboodiri Brahmins : An analysis of a Traditional Elite in Kerala", Journal of Asian and African Studies, 1966, Vol.I, p.183-4.

the consolidation and maintenance of power and wealth in individual families.¹⁴

In Kerala due to the ecological factors, the settlement pattern has always been of the dispersed type, with each middle and upper class family living in its own spacious compound set off from the neighbouring houses. On the whole, authority tended to run from the large landlord family to those under him, in a way reminiscent of the European feudal manor. Village organization was always very loose, and it has always been difficult to say where one village began and where another ended. Village unit was always a nebulous concept. Living under the grip of this feudal chain, there was always due insubordination towards the group who held the land. Together with that is the rigidity of the caste system and its religious element reinforcing it. When both these tended to coincide in one group, the "Dominance" and "superiority" crystallised. "Served from the administrative machinery the caste system acquired a new content when it became a rough index of the economic status of the people, the highest caste being the most prosperous and the lowest one being economically the most oppressed."¹⁵

14. Ibid., p.184.

15. Gopalan (A.K.), Kerala Past and Present, Laurence & Wishart, London, p.30.

I. Economic Status of Brahmins :

Traditional Kerala had an agrarian economy. In a society that is predominantly agrarian, individuals are given recognition on the basis of the area of land they possess. The lower caste people had no land. Most of them were either slaves, serfs or agricultural labourers. Others served as village cheru Jenmakkar, such as Veluthedans (washermen), Ambattans (carpenters), Tattans (goldsmith) etc..¹⁶ The Nayers who were affluent among the lower castes (the term "lower" is here used broadly to denote all castes lower than Brahmins) - lived as caretakers of Brahmins especially in looking after their properties. Though the Nairs constituted the largest number of land tax payers in the state, it did not mean that they were the wealthiest in the state. Most of the land they owned was not under their possession. But as owners they had to pay tax. It was the property of Brahmins.¹⁷ The Nayers were only the caretakers while Brahmins were the actual owners.

Though all land belonged to the Brahmins, they never cultivated the land themselves. They appointed Nayers as supervisors of their land; it was the Nayers who cultivated

16. Thulasiedharan (K), Studies in Traditional Kerala Society, College Book House, Kerala, 1977, p.121.

17. Nair (Ramakrishnan, R.), Constitutional Experiments in Kerala, The Academy of Political Science, Trivandrum, 1964, p.16.

the land with the help of the Pulayas - the Brahmins who were the real landlords, never actually came into contact with those who cultivated the land. "It was a kind of qualified absentee landlordism which had scope for very little social intercourse."¹⁸

The system of land ownership, in the remote agrarian system of Kerala was typically called the "Jenmi-Kudiyam" relations. The landowners, called Jenmis are Namboodiris, who are top-class Brahmins.¹⁹

The caste system was the paramount Institution within which other aspects of social structure like landowner-tenant, cultivator-labourer and patron-client relations and; to a certain extent, religious and familial relations were structured. Landowners and cultivators - the employers of agricultural labourers - generally belonged to higher castes, while agricultural labourers belonged predominantly to scheduled castes and to a smaller extent to the backward castes. As a result, cultivator-labourer relations became an aspect of the wider intercaste relations, with the privileges of the former and the social disabilities of

18. Philip (Mathew), Transition of Social Life in Kerala; In "Church, Society and State in Kerala, the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion & Society, Bangalore, 1960, p.5.

19. Kerala Under Communist - A Report, Democratic Research Service, Bombay, 1959, p.63.

the latter.²⁰

The Brahmins came to Kerala from the north in the 8th century A.D. It was in the 12th century A.D. that the "Janmi system" came into vogue and the ascendancy of Namboodiri Janmis can be traced to this. Hence we could infer that it was at this time that Namboodiri Brahmins became a powerful factor in the public life in Kerala.²¹

By the peculiar system of primogeniture which confined inheritance to the eldest member of the family, who alone married in his own caste, they were able to preserve their property in that and maintained their social influence.²² Structurally, this was one of the most significant difference between the Brahmins of Kerala and other Brahmins in South India. The younger sons either remained celibate, or else formed permanent or semi-permanent liasons with women from the somewhat lower matrilineal castes called Nayars. These liaisons though mostly regarded as marriages by members of the matrilineal castes, were not considered as such by Namboodiris. The

20. Alexander (K.C.), "Changing Labour-Cultivator Relations in Kerala", In Social Action, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, July-Sept. 1976, Vol.28, No.3, p.224.

21. Menon (Sreedhara, A.), A Survey of Kerala History, N.B.S. Kottayam, Kerala, 1967, p.117.

22. Pannikkar (K.M.), Malabar and the Portugese, Taraporevala Sons & Co., Bombay, 1929, p.19.

children were brought up as Nayars in their maternal homes. This practice was crucial in maintaining their position as landed aristocracy and their local power base. Only permitting the marriage of the eldest son meant that the property of the Illam* was never subject to partition. The large Nambudiri estates thus remained intact, and any new addition by gift or purchase only served to increase a family's position. These wealthy landlords had far more influence and power than they would have had if their property had been split every generation or two as was the case with the Brahmins of other parts of India.²³ However, this does not lend sufficient proof to believe that the evolution of the system of primogeniture was deliberately directed towards this end of economic security. In Tanjore, there was no primogeniture system among the Brahmins. Still they were very powerful even economically. Elsewhere, joint family itself served to consolidate holdings among Brahmins. But once it originated, it served this function also.

II. Political Status :

The Brahmins in Kerala were priests and landlords who held the country and even its rulers under their control.

* Illam refers to the prestigious family house of the Brahmins.

23. Mencher, op. cit., p.189.

They being priests and scholars were expected to keep the ethics of the society and be its guardians. They wielded tremendous influence over the kings as well as the public. Too often, they were consulted before any policy or decision was made. In matters of doubt, they were the jury. Therefore, traditional Kerala might aptly be described as "priest ridden".²⁴

The political supremacy of the Brahmins during ancient days is mentioned in "Keralolpathi", according to which the Brahmins were awarded the whole land of Kerala after fixing the Taras (Nayar villages) and sanketams (division of the Brahmin dominions) by Lord Parasurama, who established 64 gramas or villages and introduced a sort of republican government.²⁵ Whatever be the truth in this legend, the fact remains that the Brahmins had supremacy in the political sector as well as in other sectors in ancient Kerala.²⁶ It is said that the actual Government was vested in four councils, known as Kalakams, which were elected exclusively by the Brahmins. Each Kalakam in turn elected a representative who used to be designated as Avarodha Nampi. These four councillors were elected by the entire Brahmin community. Thus the Brahmin chief administered

24. Thulaseedharan (K.), op. cit., p.25.

25. Menon (K.P.P.), History of Kerala, Vol.II, p.374.

26. Thulaseedharan (K.), op. cit., p.128.

the country with four councillors. It is said that when the Brahmins found it difficult to carry on their political administration, they brought a Kshatriya king from outside Kerala and so, the Permmals started ruling the country.²⁷ Though there was a king the rulers were the Brahmins and the Kings were mere servants of the Brahmins.

They even directly reigned some of the principalities (small provinces). For example, "Purakkad" or "Chempakassery Kingdom" was ruled by a line of Brahmin rulers know as the "Devanarayans". Similarly, "Edappally", a small kingdom situated in the vicinity of Cochin was founded by the powerful Namboodiri Brahmin who performed priestly duties in the temple of Trikkakara lying in the territory of Kalkarained. Also "Parur", a small principality was ruled over by a Namboodiri chief.²⁸

III. Social Status :

Brahmins enjoyed dominant status. They owned no territorial loyalties and were under the jurisdiction of the Namboodiri chief, Azhuvancheri Tampurakkal, who alone could give them any punishment. The Namboodiri jannis who were trustees of temples also enjoyed the power to award capital punishment to their tenants (Kollum Kolayum).²⁹

27. Elankulam, Studies in Kerala History, p.187-191.

28. Menon (Sreedhara), *op. cit.*, p.195-96.

29. *Ibid.*, p.189.

Slavery in the most primitive form prevailed in the land even in the beginning of the nineteenth century. A large number of slaves were subjected to agrestic slavery in the sense that being attached to the land and its owner, they could be brought and sold like chattels by the land-owning class. The "Jannis" (Brahmins) had even the power to put them to death without being called to account. In short, the slaves were not being treated as human beings entitled to any rights or privileges. None of them could enjoy social amenities like keeping cows, wearing fine clothes, moving in conveyance, living in tiled houses, using metallic utensils etc. Women of lower castes including Ezhavas were prevented from wearing blouse. Several Sudra castes including Nairs were also denied certain social privileges and amenities.³⁰

To secure immediate recognition of such classes, they were required to be uncovered above the waist; they were not allowed the use of shoes, umbrellas, fine clothes, and costly ornaments. The holding of umbrellas was prohibited to all castes except Brahmins on public occasions. The proper salutation from a female to persons of rank was to uncover the breast.³¹

30. Ibid., p.376.

31. Mateer (Samuel), Native Life in Travancor, London, 1883.

The levy of a tax, on some pretext or the other, from a backward community was the surest way of raising revenue for the state. The members of the low caste had to pay a certain fee for the conduct of their marriages. They had also to pay a kind of house tax for their huts. The looms, oil mills, boats, nets etc., were all taxed. Every occupational class had to pay some cess or other to the state or do service without being remunerated. The use of public highways was forbidden to outcasts : anyone daring to pass on within polluting distance of a high caste man would be cut down at once.³²

Though "the division of the Hindu population was into two broad classes, the super-caste Hindu represented by the socially and economically backward Eshavas, Thiyas and Harijans", "the authority of the Nairs was restricted by the sacerdotal claims of the Brahmins."³³

The Brahmins in Kerala were occupying the highest position in caste hierarchy in Kerala.³⁴ The Brahmins were at first of the system. All other castes were known and

32. Menon (Sreedhara), op. cit., p.376.

33. Murthy (K.G.K.) and Rao (G.L.), Political Preferences in Kerala's Radhakrishna Prakashan, Delhi, p.16.

34. Cheriyan (C.V.), "Socio-Political and Religious life of Christians in Ancient and Medieval Kerala", In Journal of Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Vol.IV, 1977, p.525.

defined by their relation of service to them. For example, the sub-castes among Nayars : Illathu Nayar (Illakar) was the name added to that group who assist the Illams or Namboodiri house holds.³⁵ Similar is the case with other service castes like Vilakkithala (Barber), Veluthedan (washerman) etc. Again in matter of pollution also it was possible to measure the social status of a caste by finding out how closely it was entitled to approach the Namboodiris.³⁶

"The Brahmins, as a caste, separated themselves from the rest, as a result of development of ritualism in religion and they can legitimately be described as the only integrated caste in Hindu society. They have a common body of religious rites and broadly speaking a common attitude towards life."³⁷

Caste system essentially involves "ranking". Ranking does not involve an evaluative judgement of "better" or "worse". Such evaluation depends on what society regards as valuable.

35. Sinnatampy (J.R.), "Kerala in Classical Writings", Journal of Kerala Studies, University of Kerala, Vol.IV, Dec. 1977, p.534.

36. Srinivas (M.N.), In forward to A. Aiyappan, Social Revolution in a Kerala Village, Asia Publications, 1965.

37. Pannikar (K.M.), Hindu Society at Cross Roads, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1956, p.7-8.

IV. Judicial Status of Brahmins :

The law that prevailed in the land was not equalitarian. The upper castes enjoyed exemption from the payment of land tax. The Brahmins held a major hand (authority) in the administration of law and order and the invariably constituted the judicial body. It was also the prerogative of Brahmin Judges to give judgements in all important cases. The penal code was extremely severe as far as the lower castes were concerned. The death penalty was imposed even for ordinary offences like theft, killing of cows etc... The members of the backward communities were treated in the most inhuman and barbarious manner by the officials of the king. In fact, they were subjected to the worst form of tyranny with the connivance of person in authority.³⁸ The Brahmins even enjoyed immunity from death penalty.

In case of disputes concerning lands and tracts, when such disputes are brought forth before the Dārbar, a few Brahmins together with a few learned men of age and experience well versed in the laws relating to land holders and tenants, are assembled together to hear the parties and to recommend a settlement. In the matter of crimes, such as murder, injury, theft and caste offences, the accused person is arrested and tried before Brahmins and four or eight other learned men and the sentence decided by them

38. Ibid., p.373.

according to the existing laws of the time.³⁹

There was a double standard even for "Trial by Ordeal" in case of alleged offence. The type of ordeal to which a person was subjected was determined by considerations of caste. Ordeal by balance (Tukku) was reserved for Brahmins, fire for Kshatriyas, water for Vaisyas and poison for Sudras.⁴⁰

Apart from Untouchability, unseeability and unapproachability also existed in a dreadful form. A Namboodiri who happened to be seen by a Nayadi or Pulaya considered himself to have been polluted. Failure on the part of the lower castes to make away for the Brahmins on the public road even led to their being murdered with the connivance of the custodian of law and order.⁴¹

V. Religious Status of Brahmins :

Apart from their direct political control, they were often able to exercise considerable indirect power because of their status as the highest spiritual authorities in Kerala.⁴²

39. Menon (Padmanabha), History of Kerala, Vol.II, p.291-294.

40. Menon (Sreedhara), op. cit., pp.265-268.

41. Ibid., p.267.

42. Mencher (Joan, P.), op. cit., p.186.

According to the Brahmanical tradition, the creation of Kerala resulted from the Parasurama; having no where to live, he won the permission of Varuna, the God of the sea, threw his axe to the sea, the sea reduced from Cape Comorin to Gokarnam, and thereby Kerala came to existence. To populate the new area, Parasuram introduced a special race of Brahmins - the Namboodiris - and gave to them, the ownership of all the land and unique customs which prevented their return to India on the other side of the Western Ghats. Next he brought Sudras - the Nayars - to act as the servants and bodyguards of the Namboodiris. He bestowed on the Nayars the marumakkattayam or matrilineal system of family inheritance, and decreed that Nayars should have no formal marriage and that their women should always be available to satisfy the desires of the Namboodiris.⁴³ The legend constitutes an attempt to justify some of the most important features of traditional society in Kerala : The hold of high-caste Hindu on the land, the matrilineal system of Nayars, and their close relationship with the Namboodiris, and the Nayar's military role.⁴⁴ Such superstitions beliefs soaked in religious spirit, helped to preserve the "social order" of the system and thereby leaving the Brahmanical

43. Aiya (Nagam), Travancore State Manual, 1906, Kerala Government Press, Trivandrum, Vol.I, p.249.

44. Ibid., p.15.

authority unchallenged.

Brahmins' supremacy was highly backed by the religious beliefs of the people. The (priests) Brahmins were the intellectual specialists of the time, and they seldom failed to use their ability to their advantage. They couched their religio-political arguments in favour of their superiority in unnumbered wily aspects, until at last they convinced the people.⁴⁵ "Whatever exists in the universe is all the property of the Brahman, for the Brahman is entitled to it all by his superiority and eminence of birth."⁴⁶ This was at the base of the religious doctrine which they imbibed.

Another indirect consequence of their spiritual supremacy was that they were often able to function as "neutrals" between different religions. Thus, they had the unique role of being considered above and beyond territorial concerns.⁴⁷

In Kerala, the concept of Pollution was refined to a unique complexity and was capable of being transmitted not merely on touch, but from a distance. "...a Nair may

45. Muir (John), Vol.I, pp.463-473.

46. Burnell (A.C.), and Hopkins (E.W.), Ordinances of Manu, Oriental Book reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1971, p.13.

47. Mencher (John P.), op. cit., p.187.

approach but not touch a Namoodiri Brahmin. A chogan or Irva must remain thirty-six paces off, and a Poolayan slave ninety six steps distant.⁴⁸ This is not the only version of the appropriate distances. Others varied a yard or two,⁴⁹ but the important ^{lies in what} pollution gave to abstract ritual status; the seperateness of various groups, was, thus reinforced in the minds of Travancoreans.⁵⁰

VI. Educational Status :

Almost always the priests of a society tend to become the oracle of the people, the Hindu society is not an exception. In fact, Hinduism offers a classic example of this. Brahmins were probably the most learned priesthood of the ancient world. There may be some question about the social value of their learning, but, so far as volume of literary production and zeal for conserving it are concerned, they were unsurpassed. The memories of the learned priests were "repositories of literature".⁵¹ While orally transmitted knowledge was the only means of bestowing their heritage.

48. Hutton (J.H.), Caste in India, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969, pp.79-85.

49. Awksworth (A.H.), Day Dawn in Travancore, C.M.S. Press, Kottayam, 1860, pp.8-9.

50. Jeffrey (Robin), Decline of Nayar Dominance : Society and Politics in Travancore, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976, p.10.

51. MacDonnel (A.A.), India's Past, p.52.

It is true that the Brahmins had a monopoly on learning; in one sense, however it was a natural monopoly. After the literature had accumulated to much large quantities it became necessary for the individual to devote virtually his whole life to committing it to memory. He had to start as a child and the unfailing interests of schooled parents became the best means of leading him into the arduous tradition. Hence the transmission of sacred knowledge became natural. But the priests capitalized this normal situation and ruled out the possibility of any outsiders entering the field. Whatever material emoluments accrued to their office were reserved to themselves and their children. Indeed even when writing became available they were loath to transmit their knowledge by manuscripts.⁵² It was to the interests of priests... that the sacred texts which they taught in their schools should not be committed in writing. By this means they kept a very lucrative monopoly firmly in their hands. He who wished to learn something had to come to them rightly, and they had it in their power to withhold their texts from those circles whom they wished to exclude from sacred knowledge.⁵³

52. Cox (Oliver, C.), Caste, Class and Race, Monthly Review Press, p.112, New York and London, 1948.

53. Schweitzer (Albert), p.35.

The emergence and dominance of Brahmins is commented by Weber as follows : "a genteel literati whose magical charisma rests on knowledge". Such knowledge was "magical" in content in a holy literature, written in a holy language remote from that of everyday speech. This displayed pride in their education and "unshakable trust" in their special knowledge."⁵⁴

Like differentiation, ranking is value-neutral and different from evaluation. It is concerned primarily with questions of "more and less" rather than "better and worse". But ranking and evaluation often correlate in very similar ways in different societies, but these common patterns of correlation are due to the presence of common value. Thus, the amount of nobility in one's lineage significantly determines one's evaluation as superior and inferior in all those societies where nobility of descent is considered important. In both the amount of nobility in the lineage and the judgement of how much value is to be ascribed to such lineage, the Brahmins occupied higher grade.⁵⁵

Although, in general the social status Brahmins in India as a whole was high, it was not strictly universal

54. Weber (Max), The Religion of India, Glencol, Illinois, 1955, pp.135-145.

55. Tumin (Melvin M.), Social Stratification - The Forms and Functions of Inequality, Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey, 1967, p.21.

feature. For instance, the Lingayats of Mysore claim superiority to the Brahmins. They do not eat food cooked or handled by the Brahmins. They have priests of their caste who also administer to several other non-Brahmin castes.⁵⁶ However, in Kerala, Brahmins' superiority was unquestioned and efforts of "Sanskritisation" among some low caste groups have always been to claim either nearness or equality with them rather than surpassing them.

C O N C L U S I O N

The resources which determined a group's power in the ancient days could be placed under four general heads.⁵⁷ It is noticing that the Brahmins fulfilled these requirements. First was the Government itself. Though all kings were not Brahmins, many of the others had Brahmins as Dewans and yet others preculding all these, attributed Brahmins to have an ultimate say in the affairs. Second was the groups. Thus some men - Brahmins - were Gods on earth and other were so vile that they polluted. Ritual status justified enslavement, and the exclusion of some groups from the whole arena of social intercourse. Third was the land and in a largely

56. For details on this see Srinivas (M.N.), Religion and Society among Coorgis of South India, Oxford University Press, 1952.

57. Jeffrey (Robin), op. cit., p.34.

subsistence economy, where cash did not play a great part, land was the most prized possession. Brahmins directly or through temples owned the entire land. Finally, the trade, in the absence of a trading community (Vaisyas), trade was vested in ~~the hands of~~ their hands (especially non-malayali Brahmins).

Thus, the Brahmins fulfilled all the characteristic of a dominant caste.⁵⁸ "A dominant caste has relatively eminent right over the land, ...power to grant land and to employ other castes... (and thereby) to build up a large clientele, ...power of justice...., generally speaking, monopoly of authority....,the dominant caste is often a royal caste..."⁵⁹

58. According to Srinivas (M.N.), A Caste is dominant "when it is numerically and politically the strongest in the village or local area, and economically and politically exercises a prepondering influence. It need not be the highest caste in terms of traditional and conventional ranking" (underlinings mine). Taking the traditional Kerala context this definition is not fully apt. Brahmins in Kerala were undoubtedly the dominant caste of the time; true they exercised considerable economic and political influence. But they were numerically the smallest and they were essentially graded highest in the "traditional" and "conventional ranking".

59. Logan (William), Malbar, Vol.I, p.597.

CHAPTER THREE

DOWNWARD MOBILITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The analysis of social change implies consideration of a given social system (cultural context and interaction process), that is being subjected to stress, generated either internally within the system or impinging on it from an external culture. These stresses emanating from and instituted into the cultural setting constitute the configuration of social forces, that demarcates a historical period.¹

In examining the enormous social change that swept over Kerala during the latter half of the 18th and early 19th century, the following questions emerge :

1. what were the factors that brought about the change?
2. what was the nature of the change?
3. what were the mechanisms involved?
4. its effect on the caste structure in relation to mobility and the dominant caste.

The social change that resulted in the impairment of the caste ridden traditional Kerala society, which resulted

1. See Panchanadikar (K.C.) and Panchanadikar (J.M.), "Process of Social Change in India under the Colonial and Decolonial Era - An Analysis of Changing Rural-Urban Complex", In Sociological Bulletin, Vol.XIV, March 1965, p.7.

in the downward social mobility of Brahmins can be analysed in terms of three basic aspects :

1. Structural change;
2. Change of values; and
3. Positional change.

Structural Change :

The major factors which caused structural change can be identified as follows :

(i) Weakening of the reign of Maharajas, (ii) arrival of Westerners and early administrative innovations, (iii) introduction of Western education, (iv) work of Christian Missionaries, (v) industrialization and Urbanization, (vi) socio-religious Movements, (vii) rise of communal organisations, (viii) socio-political Movements, (ix) impact of legislation on the economic system, (x) changes in the economy, and (xi) emergence of Middle Class.

The Brahmin-King relationship was more a commensal relationship between "status" and "power". The Brahmins had the supreme status, but they were materially dependent on the ruler for protection. The ruler had power - the legitimised force - the perpetuation of which required the spiritual backing of the Brahmins. But once the stability of the kingdom tended to be shaky - mainly through British suzerainty. Though the Britishers never directly intervened

in the traditional system, their authority above the king weakened him as well as their innovations imbalanced the system - the protected life of Brahmins were also affected. They began to be exposed to the changes in the system and aberrations in the environment.

The Britishers after their arrival and subsequent colonization introduced several administrative modifications which were alien to the native system.

The most important and the pioneering step in this direction was the abolition of slavery. The administration in all the three territorial units of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar was overhauled with a view to bringing it into conformity with the modern concept of government. Hereditary offices were abolished. A judicial organization based on Western principles was introduced. Apart from a regular chain of civil and criminal courts, codes of civil and criminal laws in the Western model were introduced, with a view to systematising judicial procedure. The innumerable feudal imports and cesses which interfered with individual freedom and stifled free economic activity were done away with. Compulsory labour (Uzhiyam) for the government without payment of remuneration was abolished and the system of service based on payment of wages and salaries were introduced. The restrictions in regard to the use of conveyances, ornaments and dress were gradually removed.

These innovations, to a great extent served to put an end to caste-based inequalities.

Education as a catalyst for change :

The introduction of Western education acted as a catalytic agent. The British administration recognised no caste barriers in the matter of recruitment to the services.

Education in the ancient times was the privileged possession of the higher castes. Rudimentary education, which was available to the rest was nothing more than infallibility of the Vedas and the unquestioning belief in the caste system.² The new education soon became a basic necessity for any job. Caste and creed became the least concern for jobs or position. This had two main effects. More people were attracted towards education and members of the various castes working and studying together brought about greater social intercourse, thus crossing over the main hurdles of caste.

The different communities of the land, particularly, the Nayars and the Christians soon took to western education in order to become eligible for recruitment to government service.

The conservative practices and beliefs and their traditional Sanskritic authority, held them away from school

2. Philip (Mathew), op. cit., p.7.

thereby intensifying their gradual decline, while other communities underwent occupational mobility, thus releasing themselves from caste occupation.

In other parts of South India, especially Tamil Nadu, it was the Brahmins who were the first to sense the advantages of Western education and the new generation left the villages and emerged out as officials and professionals. The new education provided them with high occupational and spatial mobility. They began to get Westernized discarding their old Brahminical ways, which the other castes were busily trying to acquire.³ This accrued them glory and dominance later on despite the period of anarchy which was prevalent there at that time. In Subramaniam's words⁴: "He (the Brahmin of Tamil Nadu) was prepared to study and understand the new social situation without prejudice, sulking or regrets". Thus there was a successful carry over of traditional respect from ritualist Brahmin to the new professional Brahmin.

3. See "Industrialization and Urbanization of Rural Areas", Sociological Bulletin, Sept., 1956, Vol.V.

4. For an elaborate treatment of the emergence and dominance of Brahmins in Tamil Nadu, see V. Subramaniam, Economic and Political Weekly, July 1969, p.1134.
See also, Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: competition and collaboration in the later 19th century, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p.107-113.

Kerala was the centre of the evangelical work of the Christian missionaries. They not only helped the growth of modern education in the land, but considerable effort has been expended for the propagation of Christianity. Their great attraction was that once a person - no matter from whatever caste he be - converts himself to christianity, he automatically became immune to the rigid caste practice.* This undermined the strength of the caste system.

Movements and Organisations in change :

With the spread of education and liberal ideas, the members of the backward communities became restive because of the inequalities which they were subjected to. The reform movements which made the greatest impact on the public life of Kerala were of local origin and were led by the Chattampi Swamikal, and Sri Narayana Guru.

Chattampi Swamikal was a Nair reformist who revolted against the existing social order in which the Brahmins enjoyed a monopolistic position. He wanted the major Hindu communities like Nayars and Ezhavas to play their legitimate role in society.

Sri Narayana Guru was an Ezhava saint who made a solid contribution to the social changes against Brahmin

* However, though they got freed from much of the caste practices and improved their social position considerably, the upper caste Hindus especially Brahmins never considered them equal. They still held slight degree of pollution in them.

ascendancy and campaigned for the mitigation of the rigours of caste. He consecrated shrines in several parts of Kerala (a right which was forbidden to all except Brahmins) and permitted entry into them by the Pulayas and other low castes considered inferior to the Ezhavas in the social scale.

The mass response to these reformers emerged out as a socio-religious movement striving to uproot the caste system and supremacy of the high caste.

Communal organizations first evolved as a result of the socio-religious movements to supplement the activities, although later it took to politics and ~~and~~ formed part of the socio-political movement of the time.

Thus, came into existence the S.N.D.P. Yogam under the inspiration of Sri Narayana Guru and it soon developed a representative organization of the Ezhava community, whereas the N.S.S. emerged out representing the Nayar community. The scheduled castes - Pulayas - formed Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam.

All these communal organizations basically aimed towards uprooting the caste barriers and mitigating the caste evils.

The major socio-political movements were the Vaikom Satyagraham (1924) and the Guruvayur Satyagraham (1931) which were intended towards accomplishing "temple entry"

to all Hindus irrespective of caste. The movement encountered success when the famous temple entry proclamation was made by the then Maharaja of Travancore. The proclamation was the first of its kind in India. Soon proclamations of the same sort was announced in Cochin and Malabar areas too. This helped to bring down the ritual status of the Brahmins.

The first mass movement in Travancore came in 1932, when a new constitutional reform was introduced.⁵ The new reforms did not satisfy the majority of the people - the Ezhavas, Muslims and Christians - who together constituted more than 70% of the population. So these communities participated in a joint agitation by boycotting the elections and formed a countrywide mass organization against it.

In Malabar, the socio-political movements were far more radical than in Travancore and Cochin.⁶ In Malabar, it had a distinct political character because it combined "political opposition of the middle class with struggle of the peasantry against feudal exploitations and oppression".

The role of literature in the social transformation was seldom unimportant. The literary writings of Kerala's writers during the period gave insightful analysis and

5. Gopalan (A.K.), Kerala, Past and Present, Lawrence & Wisharat, London, p.55.

6. See Victor (Pic. M.), Kerala, Yunnan of India.

profound grasp of the problems and realing of the time. These writers took themes from their daily experience, grasped certain realities, understood the relationship between man and society and designed - characters to give adequate expression to certain basic contradictions prevalent in Kerala's life.

The main characteristics in the content of the writings of the time were :

- (i) protest against traditional and accepted values which were outmoded, and against the unjust social structure;
- (ii) their approach to the problem was such that it usually provoked conservatives. Most of the writers had a bias in favour of the down-trodden;
- (iii) it was not the salvation of individuals but the well-being of society that they had in mind while writing their works. Also most of them viewed people not as mere individuals but as representatives of different classes.

This literary output with a distinct class interest essentially forms part of the leftist movements which militated against Brahminic hegemony.⁷

7. For a detailed discussion of this, see, Kurian (C.O.), Literature and Social Transformation, M.Phil dissertation submitted at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1975, Ibid., p.78.

Changes in Economic System and Economy :

The complicated relationship between the landlords and tenants in Kerala necessitated the introduction of land reforms from the 19th century onwards. One of the earliest pieces of land legislation was the "Pattem Proclamation" of Travancore (1865). More than anything it protected the tenants from the fear of arbitrary eviction. Subsequently came the codified Janmi-Kudiyam Regulation, which defined the rights of tenants and landlords, and conferred full property rights on the Kudiyams subject to the payment of Janmi Karam.

In Cochin land reforms were introduced to prevent evictions and grant payment rights to the tenants. A royal writ (1883) prevented eviction of Kanam tenants before a period of twelve years. It was replaced later by the Tenancy Act and after that by the Cochin Tenancy Act (1938) and imposed further restrictions on eviction of tenants.

Finally came the Verumpatamadars Act (1943) which protected the interests of the tenants-at-will and granted security of tenure to lessees and sublessees in respect of their holdings.

In Malabar, acts like the compensation for Tenants Improvement Act (1887) and Malabar Tenancy Act (1930) were passed.

These and many other agrarian legislations directly challenged the unquestioned - superiority of the landlords - who were mostly Brahmins - and established the rights of the tenants (the low caste) on the land. The labourers who were attached to the "Jenmis" either became wage-labourer elsewhere or got guarded by anti-eviction procedures and became small cultivators.

The Namboodiris Act was another setback to the solidarity of the "Illem". With it the children of all junior members became legal heirs to their property. The economic system of indivisible Illem was no longer possible and the right to claim partition and changes in management was also enhanced by laws. This also led to the weakening of patriarchy.

The pressure on land leading to subdivision and fragmentation of holdings and the recent land reform measures had left most of the Brahmin households landless.⁸

Changes happened in the traditional agrarian economy too. With the increased trade and commerce, the cash economy began to widen and provide free competition regardless of caste or religion. This was advantageous to Christians and

8. "They lost access to the leased out land and eventually became landless". Srivandan (P.), "Economic Backwardness of Harijans in Kerala", Social Scientist, March 1976, p.13.

low-caste Hindus. "The Brahmins could neither share the gain nor bargain, lacking as they did the experience, expertise and interest in trade and commerce. The new trends affected the Illem" as it was ill-suited to a cash economy".⁹

Industrialization and Urbanization :

The opening of factories led to rapid urbanisation, resulting in the increased migration of population from rural to urban areas and the rapid expansion of the means of communication. Because the industrial society is an open community encouraging occupational and geographic mobility and social mobility; it is against tradition and status based upon family, class, religion race or caste.¹⁰ The new education served to equip a labour force fit enough for the new avenues thus created thereby increasing the number of intermediary positions in the stratification hierarchy and widening the opportunity for upward movement from the lower levels, irrespective of caste applications.

One basic outcome of industrialization was its impact on traditional "caste-occupation structure". This happened in three ways. The exercise of a certain number of

9. Radhakrishnan (.), Book Review of Decline of Nayar-Dominance, In Social Scientist, July, 1977, Vol.V, pp.77, 1978.

10. Kerr (Clark), et al., Industrialization and Industrial Man, Harvard University Press, 1960, pp.35-37.

traditional caste-linked crafts has been made impossible by the increasing import of manufactured goods at competitive prices. Thus, for example, many weavers have had to turn to agriculture in the advent of textile mills. Secondly, the ancestral occupation which was less remunerative began to be dropped, for the sake of a job in newly opened factories where attractive remuneration was available. Finally, the administration itself offers unexpected openings - one can become a clerk, agent, superintendent, tax collector etc. Hence it is not merely occupations which changed, but they vary social situations. Together with specialization, the traditional hierarchy was overturned.

The emergence of a new category of "middle class" recruited from various castes created a group distinct from a caste group, was a point of departure from the merged "caste-class" system of traditional Kerala.

All these factors brought about a complete transformation of the structure, an overhauling of the traditional caste-based social order of Kerala society. "The village became less and less sufficient, more and more dependent on the world market. The system of education and culture which was built on the socio-economic basis of a caste-ridden division of labour, became outmoded, and was therefore, necessarily broken when new social relations came to be established. Taboos regarding inter-caste dining, inter-

caste marriage and so on increasingly done away with. All this weakened the hold of those venerated aspect of Indian civilisation on the minds of the growing generation who began increasingly to take to new ways of life. This was the death blow delivered to the three institutions of caste, village community and joint family".¹¹

Regarding this change, applying Berreman's¹² contention: "To the degree that consensus increases, in fact, we may expect to find the importance of power declining and caste breaking down, to be replaced by class organization with its greater fluidity; contrary-wise, to the degree that caste distinctions break down, we may expect to find consensus increasing". What happened in Kerala society was contrary to this. Without a consensus of all affluent castes¹³ involved, their power declined. Hence "consensus" as Berreman uses it, has to be conceived in a limited sense -

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11. Namboodiripad (E.M.S.), "Castes, Classes and Parties in Modern Political Development", Social Scientist, Vol.V., No.v, 1977, p.14.
 12. Gerald, D. Berreman, "Stratification, Pluralism and Interaction - A comparative Analysis of Caste", In Renk and Knight (ed.), Caste and Race - Comparative Approaches, J & A Churchill Ltd., London, 1967, p.70.
 13. Here "affluent caste" refers to upper castes, with some exceptions like in Kerala, where the Nambudiri Brahmins forming the highest order of the Varma and the Nayars although from the Sudra Varma were the affluent castes, in the sense that their proximity was close and the social distance between them and other lower castes too great.

"the consensus of the affected groups",* because it is the former who do not hold power and hence the question of their power breaking down does not arise. Even if consensus is limited to the consensus of the lower castes, "caste breaking down, to be replaced by class organization" will not hold good, because it is not the caste which has broken down, but the caste barriers. Once the caste barrier vanishes, it tend to resemble a class organization.

Since the means of production ("land" in the traditional economy) does not remain concentrated in the hands of the upper caste¹⁴ alone, caste-stratification and class stratification cannot coincide. In cross-checking this with Berreman's second statement, "to the degree that caste distinctions break down, consensus increases" - it is seen that this cannot hold valid because where caste distinctions had broken down (vanished), the general consensus had not increased. The continued influence of caste in politics (whether it be in India as a whole or Kerala in particular) shows this. Hence it is "consensus within castes", or in other words "caste consciousness".

* Affected group means the non-affluent and deprived group.

14. The dominant caste - basically in terms of ownership, landholdings and wealth - differs widely in various villages, no matter whatever be its position in the caste hierarchy.
See, Srinivas (M.N.), Social Change in Modern India.

This bipolar observations of caste distinctions (barriers) breaking down while caste consciousness increasing - inevitably shows the "structural change of the system" without caste disorganization. This change can be described to be a change from tradition to modernity in the history of caste.

Change of Values :

Along with the structural change (change of structure), a change of value has also taken place. Old values which were till then dearer and nearer were swept away and they were replaced by new values.

Elaborating on this change of values, Balakrishnan Nair, in his "Dynamic Brahmins" points out that the older values in the native traditional system was manipulated by the Brahmin cultural conquerers. The structural change happened which undermined Brahmin dominance has been coupled by change of values also. This is pronounced in South India. The Brahmin cultural conquerers in South India played an ethno-expansionistic¹⁵ role, never socialized himself adequately but instead had credulously sought to socialize the native communities by using his mimetic faculty. This means that the non-Brahminical masses had to surrender a good deal of what had remained of their conscious modes of religious worship and behaviour patterns in order to

15. B.K. Nair, The Dynamic Brahmins, p.150.

mechanically react to the Brahminical mode of life.

The change of values - from the tenacious, rigid values which the Brahmins had induced, to the new liberal values of the west - which primarily resulted from "acculturation" with the Westerners, enabled the masses to perceive their bondage.

Thus while the Brahmins succeeded in styling the non-Brahmin's way of life and mode of speech to some extent, he could not obviously succeed in reintegrating the personality of the natives after its disorganization through the deliberate design of social control. The cultural training that he supplied to the non-Brahmins did not have a wide coverage or durability.

The sacred values of knowledge, character and religion which have been profaned by being transformed into the instrumental values for their self interest at the expense of others was thus exposed. This perversion of values undermined their structural prestige and finally led to the loss of their structural status and power.¹⁶ Whatever be Balakrishnan Nair's explanation of the mechanism of the change, it is doubtless that a change of values catalysed the structural change, the structure being built on old outneeded values.

To explain in the Parsonian way, taking for instance

16. Ibid., p.151.

a basic element of caste system namely "hierarchy", "Action" since oriented to the attainment of goal involves "selection" in relation to the attainment. This leads to "evaluation", which operating in the context of a social system gives rise to a "rank order", and for the stability of the system there is an integration of "value standards" of the component units to constitute a "common value system". So "rank order" or "hierarchy" is a structural manifestation rooted through values in the value system. Hence, for instance, change of values affects "hierarchy", because to introduce hierarchy of ideas, things and people is to adopt a certain value.¹⁷

Positional Change :

The structural change resulted from the influence of various factors (already described) coupled with the change of values has resulted in a positional change.

The superiority of the Brahmin caste is no longer obliged to the rituals associated with caste which distinguished the low-caste as inferiors is no longer

17. Dumont's generalisation of "values" to equate it with "Hierarchy" seems to be disagreeable. Because "to adopt a value is to introduce hierarchy of ideas, things and people" is not sound. Values are countless and every structural element has a value in the value system. Hence it can be modified as "to adopt a certain value is to introduce hierarchy of ideas, things and people". See Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, Paladin, 1972, p.54.

For a detailed treatment of hierarchy and values, See, Talcott Parsons, "A Revised Analytical approach to the theory of Social Stratification", In Class, Status and Power, Lipset and Bendix (ed.), Glencoe, 1953.

observed. A movement from caste society to class-like society¹⁸ is noticed. The qualitative and quantitative¹⁹ changes that affected the society had brought about a positional decline²⁰ of the Brahmins. "Just as the status of a group is diluted by the downward mobility of its members, so it is weakened by the upward mobility of its outsiders."²¹ This was true of Brahmins in Kerala. Not only that they underwent downward mobility when compared to their past, the other castes much lower in position, moved up.

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18. The new society has some of the features of a class society, but still retains some of the caste features also. It is not sure whether it is the transitional phase towards class society. Hence "class-like".
19. Qualitative change refers to a shift in the structure of a social system from one kind or type to another. A qualitative social change can be said to occur only when a social structure has disappeared and another has emerged to replace it. Quantitative change denotes the degree of change. Both qualitative and quantitative changes are related to social mobility, either group mobility or individual mobility.
See, Punyodayan (B.), "Social Mobility and Economic-Development", In, Sociological Bulletin, Vol.26, 1967.
20. Social mobility, as it exists within the caste system of India can seldom be regarded as group mobility. For inspite of the fact that the caste groups transform their status collectively and move upwards (Sanskritization) or Downwards on the scale of ritual differentiation, they merely operate to preserve the existing structure and are far from changing it.
For details see, Srinivas (M.N.), Caste in Modern India and other Essays, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1962, p.307.
21. Horton & Hunt, 1968, p.275.

A Socio-Economic Survey on castes/communities conducted by the Government of Kerala in 1968* which throws light on the current socio-economic position of the Brahmins is tabulated and given in Appendix (See Appendix - Tables 1 to 6).

C O N C L U S I O N

Although downward mobility can be demarcated into (1) generalized downward mobility and (2) domain specific downward mobility, this distinction cannot stand air tight in all cases.

In the case of Brahmins in Kerala, although it was generalized downward mobility that they underwent, in the sense that they as a social group had lost the social status they had been till then enjoying, it was domain-specific also since their status which rooted distinctly in various domains were specifically affected resulting in their general decline. "It was a generalized decline resulting from multiple domain-specific decline."

To the extent that the various movements - socio-political and socio-religious were aimed "against" Brahmin dominance and Brahmin supremacy, their downward mobility

* "Socio-Economic Survey on Castes/Communities, 1968", Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala.

can be regarded as a primary-structural downward mobility. On the other hand, the extent that these movements were aimed "towards" the uplift of the till then lower castes (to improve either their caste position or to get rid of the rigid bondage of caste) it can be regarded as secondary structural downward mobility. Both these have operated in Kerala society because it is evident that not only the Brahmins were pulled down, but the lower castes ascended high up in the social scale. In other words, the traditional social distance between castes and diminished. Both these forces tended to bring about a new social order.

C O N C L U S I O N

Caste system remains to be an obtrusive but conspicuous and indelible aspect of Indian Social Organisation.

It is a fact that caste in a big country like India varies widely from place to place (territorial in nature), but the basic features or frame work - such as hierarchy, endogamy, pollution, repulsion etc. - on which they have been built are undoubtedly the same. It stands out still as a matter of controversy among researchers and scholars on caste in India, that which of the feature is the basic feature and others the subordinate feature akin to the main. That is, if "Hierarchy" is the basic feature, then other features like endogamy, pollution, repulsion etc. was evolved to preserve it. Hence they are subordinates, but reinforcing the basic feature. Instead, if "Pollution" is the main feature, "endogamy" was evolved to preserve it, "repulsion" was necessary to promote it and "hierarchy" was a necessary consequence of it.

This study of the caste system to understand its orientation and frame is tantamount to a probe into its evolution, which is still shrouded in mystery and assumptions.

The Indian caste system can be rightly be regarded as a Brahmanical institution,* because in every caste like system there is one or more clearly defined "dominant caste", the members of which are in a markedly privileged position. They form a high status corporation for whose benefit the whole of the rest of the system appears to be organized. This is true of the Indian caste system also. The system centres around Brahmins - "the high status corporate group".

The Brahmins in Kerala, enjoyed unchallengable status in all arenas of life - social, economic, political, educational, judicial etc. - They were dominant with "...relatively eminent right over the land..., power to grant land and to employ other castes..., to build up a large clientele,...., power of justice..., monopoly of authority..."

The period between 18th and early 19th century was a period of rapid transition in the history of Kerala society. The wave of social change that swept over Kerala** brought about tangible changes in the caste structure. The "structural change" coupled with "change of values" resulted in an overhauling of the old order and "mobility" of caste groups. The Brahmins, till then dominant and high status groups underwent downward social mobility.

* See Chapter Two - Part A.

** This is discussed elaborately in Chapter Three.

Although it was generalized downward mobility that they underwent, in the sense that they as a social group had lost the social status they had been till then enjoying, it was domain specific also, since their status which rooted distinctly in various domains were specifically affected resulting in their general decline. "It was generalised decline resulting from multiple domain specific decline".

Their downward mobility can be regarded as primary-structural downward mobility, since the various movements were aimed "against" Brahmin dominance and supremacy. On the other hand, to the extent that these movements were aimed "towards" the uplift of the till then lower castes, it can be regarded as secondary-structural downward mobility. Both these have operated in Kerala society.

Contemporary Kerala Society reveals a paradox. The traditional social distance between castes had diminished and caste discriminations have "vanished from sight". But although "caste discriminations" have considerably vanished, "caste distinctions" seems to be growing.*

The "involvement of caste in politics" has given way to "caste-politics", with castes forming their own political parties furnishing their own men to participate in elections.

* The contemporary developments in Kerala lends evidence to this.

The caste had necessarily undergone modifications in "forms", but not in "content". Mandelbaum's observation seems to be relevant. "People throughout India commonly keep to traditional social patterns while adapting themselves to modern circumstances. Abstract ideals are most readily revised, but fundamental motifs of cognition and motivation seem little altered and are evident in the newer arenas of competition... The jati continues to be the principal unit of endogamy, a significant attribute of identity, a common locus for interaction and important vehicle for social mobility". (Mandelbaum, David G, 1970 : 655).

This tendency, getting vigour, shows that the "old concept" of man "progressively getting away from caste and becoming independent, from it", seems no longer true. Instead, man is only increasingly depending on caste in a different way than in the past -in a way that is suited for a complicated and changing society.

Both at the state level and at the local levels, the higher castes of the past including the Brahmins, have been pushed far back from these events. They suffer from sound organization and leadership. The reservations for education and employment of all types of the backward and scheduled castes have considerably increased their occupational and social mobility. The tremendous flow of money from those working in Gulf countries have fetched them high economic

potential. With all these, the traditional phenomenon "caste-class" coincidence (i.e., the higher castes being more economically affluent also) is undergoing thorough change. The conventional picture of a low-caste (so called) person* - a skeletal figure, clad in rags, dwelling in a hamlet, crining before his master - is becoming an unnatural sight.

However, much research has not been done so far in this area. "Mobility in the context of change" needs further investigation in different societies and at different periods of time.

The reaction of social groups (especially rigid groups such as "caste" and their preparations, adaptations and resistance towards change needs more attention. Especially, in the world of today, characteristic of speedy transitions, it is imperative to pay greater attention to this developing branch of sociology.

Mobility is essential for motivation - "the will to advance and improve in life". Without it, life becomes monotonous and repetitory. Mobility at the individual level causes less strain to the system. But when it assumes group effect, the delicate balance - the balance between the interacting groups in a society - is jeopardized. In a rigid system like the caste system, it can cause

* Negligible exceptions are not ignored.

disruptions also. Hence, the study of social mobility in its totality and its relation to the micro and macro societal structure needs emphasis. The concepts such as "status" and "role" (Ralph Linton, "The Study of Kin", New York, 1938) in relation to the social system, so far not effectively studied in Indian Sociological studies, needs much attention. Similarly, the concept of "spread" (M.N. Srinivas, "Religion and Society among the Coorgis of South India", London, 1952) has not been exhaustively explored in relation to the particular situation of the Kerala Society. So too is the case with the other key concepts like "Ethnocentrism" and "ethnoexpansionism" (W.G. Sumners, "Folways"); "Routinization of the charisma", and "Typology of Adaptation". Further researches are necessary.

A P P E N D I X*

* Source : The tables in this section are adapted for the purpose of this dissertation from A Socio-Economic Survey conducted by the Government of Kerala (Bureau of Economics and Statistics) in 1968.

Table No. 1

Educational Standard of Brahmins

Community	Illiterate	Literate but below primary	Primary	Middle	S.S.L.C.	Above S.S. L.C.
Brahmins	15.09	21.16	19.20	17.29	17.09	9.51

Table No.2

Activity (Employment) Status among Brahmins

Activity	% of Persons
Student	36.36
Employee (Daily wages)	1.49
Employee (weekly wages)	0.14
Employee (monthly salary)	12.28
Employer	2.75
Self-employed	5.10
Unpaid family enterprise workers	1.69
Unemployed	3.66
Others	36.53

Table No. 3

Land ownership of Brahmins

Land owned in cents	% of Households
No:land	28.39
1-5	8.67
6-10	6.21
11-25	8.41
26-50	4.87
51-100	9.08
101-200	8.96
201-500	12.55
501-1000	7.59
1001-1500	1.78
1501-2500	1.40
Above 2500	2.19

Table No. 4

Annual Income of Brahmins

Annual Income	% of Households
Below Rs.300	0.01
301-600	2.36
601-1000	4.31
1001-1500	10.47
1501-2000	9.94
2001-3000	17.75
3001-4000	14.91
4001-5000	12.04
5001-6000	9.80
6001-7000	4.94
7001-8000	2.51
8001-9000	2.24
9001-10000	1.83
10001-11000	1.62
11001-12000	1.56
12001-13000	0.62
13001-14000	0.56
14001-15000	0.48
Above 15000	2.05

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Table No. 5

Type of possession of dwellings among Brahmins

Type of possessions	% of Households
Owned	64.10
Otti	1.20
Rented	28.55
Kudikidappu	2.50
Kudiyrippu	1.15
Parampoku	0.07
Others	2.43

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