

CONTESTED MODERNITY: THE QUESTION OF CASTE

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Master of Philosophy

GAYATRI NAIR



**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110067
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जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110 067

Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences

Tel.: 26704408
Fax.: +91-11-26742539

July 22, 2011

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled 'Contested Modernity: The Question of Caste' submitted by Gayatri Nair to the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University.

We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

S. Visvanathan

Prof. Susan Visvanathan
(CHAIRPERSON)

Chairperson
CSSS/SSS
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Maitrayee Chadhuri

Prof. Maitrayee Chadhuri
(SUPERVISOR)

Prof.
CSSS/SSS
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067



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Gayatri Nair

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

On the 9th of September 2010, the Union Cabinet after several months of deliberation and discussion in the parliament decided to give their assent for the conduction of the first caste census in independent India. Expectedly, the move was preceded and followed by much debate on the subject, with much speculation being based on the exact motive of the state for undertaking such an exercise. As academicians what was of interest was to note the reasons people put forth for the reasons the state should abstain from such an exercise. And primarily the one dominant voice that emerged was one that came cloaked in anxiety over the implications of drawing caste into the practices of the state. It claimed that caste had no place in a modern state and that an enumeration exercise would grant caste legitimacy that it had been previously denied. In some ways, this was true. In an independent India, where the practice of untouchability was a punishable offense and where discrimination based on caste was against the law, talking of caste outside of the domain of academics did come to gain a certain illegitimacy. Yet it is also true that the practice of caste did not disappear. This sense of unease stemmed from what was read as the ‘persistence’ of caste in a modern society.

This relation between caste and modernity thus is a complicated one. And it is not as though it has been a subject of neglect within the social sciences. The nature of the relation between the two, the impact of one on the other etc has been a subject of much engagement. Yet somehow, dominant discourses within the social sciences continue to see the operation of caste with a sense of bafflement. With the initiation of universal adult franchise, and the consequent rise of lower castes in electoral politics, there came to emerge the idea that caste had been ‘revived’. As Kothari pointedly notes,

Everyone recognises that the traditional social system in India was organized caste structures and caste identities. In dealing with the relationship between caste and politics, however, the doctrinaire moderniser suffers from a serious xenophobia... Those in India who complain of 'casteism in politics' are really looking for a sort of politics which has no basis in society. They also probably lack any clear conception of either the nature of politics or the nature of the caste system. (Many of them would want to throw out both politics and the caste system.) (Kothari, 1970: 5)

Today when the debate re-emerges over the place of caste within the state and its practices, it reflects on such an idea. Anxious voices claim that through an exercise of enumeration caste will lead to the imposition of a social identity and contribute further to mobilisation on grounds of caste. But the question that really needs to be asked is whether in fact this was absent before and why is it that the caste seems to underscore so much of the working of the Indian nation. Furthermore, why is it that studies on caste and modernity have worked with the assumption that caste will either disintegrate with the coming of modernity or that it has been enlivened under the forces of modernisation.

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The answer to these questions forms a core part of the argument made in this work. Locating the argument in a historical context, it will be argued that the manner in which the nationalist movement developed in India left little space for the articulation of caste and its related problems. In such a context, anti-caste movements came to be marked as anti-national by the dominant stream of the nationalist movement, simply because they prioritized the question of caste over that of the nation. Further, it is also argued that such a development was not just borne out of the fact that much of the bourgeoisie that led the nationalist movement came from the upper castes, but also owes its origin to the fact that the bourgeoisie in India was relatively weak, especially when compared to the feudal order. This meant that such politics could not be based in opposition to the interests of the feudal order on whom they were still dependent.

This in turn also points us in the direction of the main question: the relation between caste and modernity. Much of the imagination of social sciences, especially in countries with a colonial history like India, has been occupied with the question of modernity. Engagement with the West, still seen as the standard bearers of Modernity meant that the question of modernity has coloured the debates and struggles of the colonies, significantly so in India, so that there was always much anxiety over this question. This tussle with modernity is one that has continued to exist so that even today scholars are debating over what modernity is, whether it has a definite trajectory and whether or not we are in fact modern¹. In this regard my academic engagement with this subject is not new. In trying to chart out what constitutes Indian modernity, I am merely relying on albeit also adding on to the existing corpus of knowledge on the subject and therefore base myself on a review of literature on the subject.

However, what I am attempting to do is to use the caste census as a starting point into this enquiry because I think it affords an important vantage point to those interested in the subject. The caste census comes at a very interesting and crucial time for India. A time when on the stage of world politics, the nation must prove its modern credentials and ironically because of which must also address questions of caste inequality which are seen as residues from a not so modern 'past'. Therefore while arguments for and against the caste census have largely been waged on the ground of social justice and whether or not counting caste will achieve that end, it also comes to be significantly tied into this question of modernity. Several critics claim that enlisting caste would fix the identity of citizens (and consequently the nation) into a non-modern, parochial category of caste.

If we begin by accepting that modernity does not follow the same path of development in every society, then it leads us to understand the specific social-economic conditions that may lead to the development of different forms of modernity. In India thus, the process of modernity did not take the same form as say in Europe. Here, colonial modernity was introduced in a way that did not allow it to be preceded by the crushing of feudalism. Modernism thus was imposed over the

¹ Dipankar Gupta's argument of 'Mistaken modernity' for instance.

existing social structure as it was. Consequently, its development incorporated these existing pre-modern social structures such as caste in its working.

While there has been an acknowledgment of this fact within the social sciences, as mentioned before, it was still assumed that eventually caste would wither away as the forces of modernisation grew stronger. However this did not occur. The point to be noted is that this assumption in many ways is derived from a notion that caste existed in a pre-modern society in order to fulfill a function which would be rendered meaningless with the coming of modernity. Therefore, they assume that caste would be destroyed under the forces of modernisation, since modern institutions would take the place of caste and the functions it served in society. Such a structural-functionalist approach to caste, although popular in sociology at one point of time, has over the years come to be subject to much critique especially over the top-down approach to caste it assumes. However it is in light of the recent debate over the caste census that one discovers that the arguments of this school of thought have not really been laid to rest, especially when it comes to the critical question of the relation between caste and modernity.

It is therefore perhaps imperative in order to pin-point the logical fallacies in such an argument that it is necessary to revisit some of the main arguments as well as concepts developed by the structural-functionalists in relation to their study of caste in India. Thus, concepts such as Sanskritisation and Westernization, while useful to mark changes occurring in a society, also point to the faulty assumptions that guide them which come to be based on a rather skewed view of the caste system. As will be elaborated in the course of the coming chapters, the argument made for Sankritisation and Westernization is in effect teleological, since it assumes that lower castes sanskritise and upper castes westernise. In this regard in spite of explicitly identifying sources of westernization for the upper caste (such as an English medium education, jobs with the colonial state etc) which were also available to the lower castes, there has been little study of the impact of such sources of westernization on the lower castes. When it has been alluded to, it is once again assumed that lower

castes cannot westernise (read modernise) successfully². Thus as scholars such as Rege and Pandian point out, Dalits and lower castes have always been conceived of as lying outside of the scope of modernity and being the 'other' of what is constituted as the modern.

Thus in spite of the fact that contemporary approaches in sociology to the study of caste make attempts to move away from such arguments and assumptions, it is to be noted that for the large part 'mainstream' sociology has been restricted to studying and locating change within the parameters of social mobility, reference groups and relative deprivation(Guru, 1999). As Guru claims such a point of view is one that has been utilized by the state and within academics to serve particular ends. The problem with adopting such a perspective in academics is that it collapses under the weight of evidence from the fact that dalits do not face a situation of 'relative' deprivation but rather one where they are completely cut off from access to critical resources such as land, water etc. Thus, he claims,

... While it denies to sociology a critically subversive character it also denies an emancipatory consciousness to the groups under reference. It impels the Dalit groups to organise their thought and action not in their own authentic terms but in term of those privileged sections whose hegemonic world-views underlines the structures of domination.(Ibid:41)

Further, Guru also claims that it works to the state's advantage to use claims of relative deprivation in order to prevent the formation of a common consciousness of the lower castes in India. This is especially desirous for them to do since according to Guru many anti-caste movements, especially in Maharashtra professed aims such a total redistribution of land which would have severely affected the rural rich or the feudal class.

As mentioned before, it is these links of the feudal class with those who are part of the modern state that has led to the prevention of any sustained action towards the

² Srinivas for instance points to this in his essay on Social Change in Modern India. (Cited in detail in Chapter 3)

destruction of the caste system. And it is this particular relation that has come to be under theorised in sociology, which in turn contributes to the misunderstood relation between caste and modernity. Thus when concepts such as relative deprivation become the definitive argument to identify changes in the caste system, it also prevents a critique of the “Indian state and the lopsided economic development” (Ibid: 140) that continues today.

Thus, pegging this debate on the relation of caste and modernity on the recent debate on the caste census affords us the advantage to understand how mainstream sociology continues to understand caste in limited ways. The debate on the subject also allows us to recognise that in spite of recent scholarship on the subject that has decidedly proved that caste did not ‘persist’ with the modern but rather became part of the modern, the view that caste and modernity are antagonistic to each other remains.

In this regard perhaps sociology is currently best equipped to tackle the problem of actually engaging with this question of the enumeration of caste. This is not only because arguments used both in favour and against the exercise are those that arise from the theoretical terrain of sociology but because sociology is a reflexive discipline. It thus allows for us to look into why a particular strand of thought has not only grown with such strength within the discipline and outside but also allows us to reflect on how the practice of sociology in India has in so many ways come to be tied in with the larger project of establishing the nation state. This is related in some way to the colonial legacy of studying the society of the natives. But it took on another dimension with the establishment of independence and the need for the state to manufacture for itself the identity of a cohesive nation-state. The role of the sociologist in the formation of this nation-state was seen as integral and as Srinivas claims,

The government of India has an understandable tendency to stress the need for sociological research that is directly related to planning and development. And it is the duty of the sociologists as citizens that they should take part in such research. (cited in Pandian, 2002)

Further the particular role of the researcher and its implications are also significant. As Pandian points out Srinivas had been forced to acknowledge that his identity of a Mysore Brahmin meant that he emphasized more on the role of caste in politics and on the question of reservation, 'where he was sensitive to the distress of fellow Mysore Brahmins'(Ibid:1738). But as mentioned before the reflexivity of sociology puts it in a particularly advantageous position to deal with problems such as these.

Such reflexivity thus comes in handy to understand the context in which questions such as the relation between the caste and census and by extension caste and modernity become crucial. Furthermore, it also points to the role the discipline itself may have played in fashioning a particular relation or an understanding of the relation between caste and modernity.

Thus in order to elaborate on the argument on why caste and modernity have been seen as antagonistic to each other, the historical context laid out must also take into account the development of how sociology as a discipline came to study them. It is therefore that this work lays out a large context to understand the nature of this relation. We begin with the colonial context, where the role played by the census in the formation of categories of enumeration including that of caste played a crucial role in how we came to understand Indian society is examined. The strength of ideas on caste that emerged through early administrative and academic engagement with the subject of caste through the census is also reflected through the articulation of caste in the Constituent Assembly. An examination of the debates in the Assembly thus allows us to understand how caste in many ways was inscribed into the working of the modern nation state. All of this though comes to a fore, at the time of Mandal and now a post-Mandal scenario where the question of representation and the need for social justice comes to be highly contested. Both, the time of Mandal and the recent move to enumerate caste (although not specifically for the purpose of reservation) has highlighted the deep seated anxiety not just amongst upper castes over their loosening hold over resources of importance today- higher education, jobs etc - but also amongst academicians who located in demands for reservations the strengthening of communities over the individual (Beteille, 1992).

It is the attempt of this work to build an argument by engaging with each of these historical contexts as well as with sociological theories to understand why it was that caste and modernity were not seen as coeval.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A note is perhaps in order here about the theoretical framework adopted as part of this work of research. Guided by a deep interest in the subject of caste and modernity on India, this work draws on a number of themes with Marxism acting as a unifying point here in the methodology adopted.

Marxist theory has often had a very troubled relationship with the study of caste in India. It has often been claimed that in that its use of class as a category of analysis, Marxist theory leaves little space for understanding structures and categories such as that of caste. In a similar vein accusations have also been made at the communist movement and parties in India to claim that they only paid heed to class at the behest of caste which in turn contributed to caste finding its way into trade unions, workers associations etc. Such accusations stem from the belief that to a Marxist scholar the base comes to be informed by relations of production and categories such as caste are part of the super-structure that come super-imposed over the base.

These assumptions and accusations about Marxist theory can be laid to rest through a careful analysis not just of the theory itself but also of the practitioners of the theory in India (even if we do look at slightly unconventional theorists by standards of academics!).

In order to allay fears about the use of a Marxist framework it is important to point out that in employing it, one is merely pointing to the need to recognise that systems such as that of caste are not based on a ritual plane alone but are grounded in productive systems and the relations they engender. Thus the caste system is one necessarily based on a system where those who own and control resources are also those who lie at the top of the caste hierarchy. It therefore does not base itself on an assumption that caste is a mere manifestation of such relations of production but rather that it is part of the system that determines the relations of production in a

society. If seen in a light different from what is crudely termed as the base-super structure relation , it would be clear that what is being argued is that such ideology that would rationalize the caste system must be based on certain conditions of life in which humans find themselves (in the case of the caste system the control over resources). As Marx says,

Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking. *It is not consciousness that determines life but life that determines consciousness.* (emphasis mine) (Marx: 1964, 42)

In his study of kinship systems, Engels claims that the division of property and labour and kinship takes place along a similar pattern. As a cultural system, the kinship pattern is not one that is built over such a division of property and labour but rather is one that is part of such a division and informed by it. Thus as Engels traces it, the move from the matrilineal system to a patrilineal one is informed by the development of private property and the concomitant 'need' to pass it down to heirs who must be now recognized as members of the family (hence also the development of the monogamous family). The argument is especially critical to note in the context of India, where cultural production has not been seen with regard to a larger structure. This is true, especially when it comes to the caste system, where determining kinship and controlling female sexuality play an important role in sustaining the caste system. It is therefore that scholars such as Ranadive, Lohia and Namboodripad recognise that caste is an important means for people to organise their struggles for democracy towards ultimately destroying the caste system. Lohia therefore remarks that the destruction of caste privileges will have to be based on the preferential treatment towards the lower castes (Lohia, 1964). Thus while continuing to emphasize on the fact that the annihilation of caste can only be achieved through the transformation of the agrarian system wherein relations of production will undergo a change, Marxist scholars also recognise the significance of measures such as those of reservation.

This work will focus on the work of two such scholars, Lohia and Ranadive to look at how they understood the problem of caste in India and worked to posit a theory of modernity that took caste into account.

In light of the above it is important to note that this work adopts a Marxist framework not just to defend its position in the face of sustained attack over the years but also to point to why it is necessary to adopt such a methodology in the study of caste in India. It will be argued in the course of this work that the caste system in India is one based on a system of production with an ensuing caste based division of labour. This allows us to locate caste outside of its ritual dimension alone, in turn contributing to a more critical understanding on caste and the changes it is undergoing. Thus for instance, sanskritisation can be read very differently as the change in lifestyle a caste may undertake upon gaining access to resources previously denied such as the use of water, ability to purchase better food (thereby giving up on consuming carcasses) etc.

It is important to note that while it is possible to understand caste as being part of the relation of production, it is also important to note that such a view is not restricted to Marxist theory alone. Srinivas, an important thinker of the structural-functionalist school also considered caste on the same grounds. However, ironically, in his analysis of the changing state of the caste system where he argues that market forces would lead to the destruction of the caste system, he makes a fundamental mistake which Marxist scholars are often accused of – that caste is a super-imposed category over the base structure. In arguing that caste would wither away with the monetization of the rural economy Srinivas posits that a mere change in the way the economy comes to be organized will bring about the end of caste. By doing so he fails to look at the particular way in which caste is built into the relations of production so that monetization of an economy does not do away with caste at all but rather only gives the system a changed face. Thus, for the dalits, the workers of the land, a switch from the *jajmani-balutedari* system where they were paid in grains meant little if it only effected a transition to a system of zamindari where they paid exorbitant rent for the land. Ranadive therefore claimed that capitalism only gave “monetary expression” to the state of the peasants who now under the new system came to lie in a hereditary state of indebtedness.

Furthermore, another advantage of using a Marxist methodology is because of the strong use of history it makes. As mentioned before, a neglect of history leads to the generation of fallacious assumptions which have contributed to ideas such as that of caste ending with the coming of modernity. Instead the use of history to understand the colonial context in India, the rise of the nationalist movement, its social composition, its politics etc allows us to understand why the belief exists that caste can have no space for articulation in a modern nation-state. This allows us to understand the roots of literally a theoretical double-speak on caste in India today, where the place and role of caste is accepted (in politics for instance) and at the same time dismissed (in declaring that caste can have no space in a modern state).

A Marxist framework allows us to arrive at the very foundation of the structure of the caste system in India and thereby allows us to deal more effectively with questions about the precise nature of the relationship between caste and modernity and allows us to recognise that it is entirely possible for caste to have a coeval existence with modernity.

A MAP OF THE ARGUMENT

Having laid the grounds for the main argument of this work it would be helpful to lay out how this argument will proceed. The chapters seek to proceed by laying out the historical context for the argument being made. Moving from the point of colonial interest in the question of caste it crosses into the period of the post colonial state and looks at the engagement of the social sciences and the state with the question of caste. Ultimately it seeks to tie the argument together of the nature of the relationship that caste and modernity hold and posits a theory of Indian modernity.

The *first chapter* is based on a historical review of the academic engagement with the subject of caste in India and seeks to highlight the particularly interesting relation that caste and the mechanism of the census have come to hold from the time of colonial rule in India to the later day practice of sociology in India. In light of the history of colonialism in India, it focuses on how there came to be formed an inextricable link between the study of caste and the use of the census. In this regard, the manner in which categories within the census were developed and the role of the colonial state

and its related politics had on the theories that fed the census are also examined. Tracing the historical trajectory of the debates on the census we thus arrive upon the current debate on the caste enumeration exercise. The following section is thus a review of the various positions that have been taken on the subject, where ultimately it is highlighted that the essence of the argument and anxiety about the current enumeration exercise stems from the troubled relation that caste and modernity are seen as having.

The *second chapter* focuses on a sociology of the study of caste. This chapter looks at the articulation of caste in India and the spaces and ways in which caste came to be articulated. Within this context it seeks to highlight how earlier work done on caste and popular imagination on the problem of caste meant that it came to be understood in a particular way. By reviewing the available literature on the subject, it will examine both how caste has come to be understood academically as well as how it has been sustained, undergone changes. It will dwell into the relation between caste and gender, the misunderstood link between the two and examine what this has meant for an understanding on the subject of caste and patriarchy. In how its politics plays out it will look at the links that the two are seen as having with modernity. Furthermore, this chapter will also look at the historical debates that have taken place on the caste question. With a special focus on the Constituent Assembly Debates, it will draw out a historical trajectory for how caste comes to dominate political thinking in India, from the time of the nationalist movement to the present. And examine how caste came to be inscribed within the domain of the modern nation state.

The *third chapter*, in extension from the earlier two, draws on the idea of an Indian modernity. This is especially since modernity and caste are always seen as antagonistic to each other but also in that sense seen as being inextricably linked to one another. In this regard it examines and interrogates the concepts of Sanskritisation and Westernisation that have been dominant in most sociological understanding of change in Indian society. In this regard while pointing out the teleology in arguments which claim that upper castes westernize while lower castes sanskritise, it seeks to highlight how there has been an under theorization of the effect of westernisation or modernity on dalits and the lower castes in India. From here it moves to looking at two theorists of modernity in India, Ranadive and Lohia who put

forward a theory of modernity while critically examining the role of caste in India. In this regard they also put forward assertions on why caste came to never be tackled with by the modern nationalist movement as well as the modern nation-state. This in turn helps us understand the reasons for the continuing anxiety on the subject of the state and caste in India.

In attempting to arrive at a theory of modernity for India then it is significant to take note of how concepts of caste, gender, nation and the state are articulated. This is not say that previous studies on modernity have not taken this into account but merely to suggest as mentioned before, the vantage point of study chosen allows us to understand the same in new light and to understand the long history that modernity and caste seem to have shared but which has been misunderstood for long.

CHAPTER II

A TANGLED HISTORY: CASTE AND MODERNITY

This chapter will focus on what can be said to be the beginnings of the tangled and linked history that caste and modernity have come to have in India. This is curious especially since popular opinion and dominant ideas within the academia works with the idea that caste and modernity are actually antagonistic to each other. Yet there is a reluctant even shameful admission of the fact that caste continues with much gusto in modern India.

This particular idea on the relation that caste and modernity hold is one that has been developed through the course of our history. The particular manner in which the nationalist movement developed especially played a role in this. In this chapter however, we will focus on the ways in which caste began to be understood, for much of what we understand of caste is based on how we conceive of caste as a category. In this regard, a review of how caste came to hold the attention of scholars first emerging from the colonial administrative circle and later within Indian academia has had a particular effect. Furthermore, it is especially significant to locate this beginning in the context of the census in India, when attempts made at enumerating citizens also took into account the category of caste.

This particular relation that the modern colonial state held with caste through the practice of enumeration is an important history for us to dwell into, precisely because of how the debate emerges again today. Much of the arguments both for and against the caste census draw on this history of enumeration to make a case. And it is therefore imperative to briefly examine this history. Furthermore, owing to how contentious an issue the question of enumerating citizens and marking difference has come to be in a modern nation state today, much of the debate evokes the census as an event in history. In order however to understand it as a process, to gather how it was that categories were conceived of and introduced it is important to locate its history of inception.

The subsequent sections of this chapter thus move from the beginning to trace this history of the census, in order to locate how caste came to be seen an important marker and significant category in the study of Indian society. Ultimately returning to the question of the recent debate on the question of enumerating caste, we seek to locate where anxiety over the question of counting caste stems from and to underscore why the loss of modernity is central part of this anxiety.

THE POLITICS OF MODERNITY AND TRADITION IN INDIA

As sociologists' from India, perhaps one of the biggest dilemmas we must deal with is with is our engagement with the question of caste. For several years scholars have debated back and forth whether caste is a defining feature of Indian society or not. The fact that most studies in the sociology of India tend to engage with caste at some level or the other would lead one to believe that it does play a significant role in shaping Indian society. At the same time however while engaging with the question of caste it is also important to be able to see it and understand its working in a framework different from that set and established in scholarship by those who work from an Orientalist perspective and therefore see it as the hallmark of a society steeped in tradition.

It is in this light then attempts have been made to understand caste practices and their beginning. Are they testaments to the strength of tradition or are they creation of modernity brought on by colonial intervention in the study of Hindu society. These questions of the beginning of caste are in essence more fundamental questions of the relationship between tradition and modernity. The social sciences have tackled with this question in a variety of ways posing it as either antagonistic to each other or seeing them as stages on a continuum of progress. What is noted of course is how one never gives way for the other completely, but is also in this context that the way this comes to be analysed must be noted. For instance, Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) point out to how studies conducted on the subject of modernity and tradition differ depending on the context they are set in. Thus studies of western, apparently 'modern' societies will refer to the continuity of tradition as practices fulfilling some basic need of the society, whereas for 'traditional' societies like India, the continuity of tradition

is treated as its persistence in the face of an attempt to be modern. To them, tradition and modernity must be treated as being dialectically related to one another.

What such a position allows one to do is to understand how elements of tradition, structures, practices etc can come to be shaped around practices of modernity. The operation of caste in modern democratic politics allows for such an understanding because of the way apparently traditional identities come to be fashioned around the needs and imperatives of democratic politics. The rise of 'modern' caste associations then are an interesting example of how caste has been reoriented as a modern identity useful to lobby and garner privileges and benefits for one's own. An understanding of caste and Indian politics thus is a significant subject of study not only because it throws light on the subject which has come to be of increasing significance in our understanding of Indian society but also because it helps clarify several important theoretical issues. Further it helps us get to the heart of simple but fundamentally political questions – who is a citizen, what constitutes citizenship who can lay claim to politics and how.

Western political theory has always begun with the notion of an individual as separate from the state. This individual identified as the citizen is identified through his relation with the state. And this is the only marker the citizen is supposed to have with the state, that of the citizen for the practice of democratic politics it was deemed that the citizen should have no other marker, in order to be treated as fair in the eyes of the state and its extension the law. This notion of a universal citizenship with the unmarked citizen at its core had to be one of the most important historical shifts in thought to have occurred. Yet it must be noted that the concept of universal, unmarked citizenship, progressive as it might have been in its ideals also allowed for disguising the vast inequalities that went on. An unmarked citizen might have existed in theory however in practice the normative citizen came to be the propertied, white, male. There is wide amount of scholarship³ today on this subject to highlight how the

³ Carol Pateman's 'The Sexual Contract' for instance which deals with how women especially seem to be excluded in such notions of citizenship.

initial making of the nation state in their very conception were made seemingly for a select group of citizens.

In the context of India what has to be noted that both positions are equally significant; in a nation haunted by a past where structures of inequality have perpetuated and have often been allowed to grow with official sanction, a political system that seeks to treat all citizens as undifferentiated and equal holds great political value. At the same time it is also important to note that it is precisely because of this history marred by a sense of injustice that it is important to take cognizance of those who have suffered and make it imperative on the new nation state to ensure not just equal representation of marginalized groups but also a grant of benefits that would ensure a level playing political field.

These have been significant questions to deal with through the course of the nationalist movement in India. Much of what came to be understood of the modern nation state here, came to India not from its subjection to colonial authority but rather from its elite, the upper castes and classes of India, the first to be exposed to a 'western' education. Schooled in western ideas and ideals, it was not surprising that in its early years the Indian National Congress which was at the helm of the nationalist struggle for independence built much of its discourse on grounds of a notion of a united India with multitude of citizens being seen as one people, and all necessarily equal. It is important to note that marking out differences within citizens did not make political sense for the dominant voices in the nationalist movement. This can be seen on two grounds; the first which scholars such as Rudolph and Rudolph point out to, is that nation state formation in colonies tends to be part of a larger project of modernity. In such a scenario assertions on grounds of caste tend to be viewed with much suspicion, since they are seen as harking back to parochial identities which can only adversely affect the unity of these already fragile nation states. Thus according to them,

A strategy more likely to achieve modernization with stability, effectiveness and liberty is one that provides those who represent natural associations with conditions and incentives that enable them to foster the interests if the

groups in ways and contexts that also lead towards modernity. (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967: 66)

To argue that this was the point of view with which the nationalist movement operated would be based on conjecture. But suffice to say that it was thought that the question of identities (and therefore seeing caste implicitly as a problem of identity not a structure) could be dealt with at a later stage and that it was imperative to put the question of the nation ahead of caste.

The second reason for such assertions not being treated with pleasure by the nationalist leaders have been argued by leftist scholars such as Lohia (2002) and Ranadive (2002) on grounds that assertions of caste could not be given support because it would have upset the base of the dominant group who at this point come from the rural agrarian order. Tactical alliances were struck here with the feudal land owning order in the course of the nationalist struggle because it was the propertied feudal class that wielded power at this point, the Indian bourgeoisie being too weak at the time. The nationalist intelligentsia saw itself as having no option but to surrender to the interest of the feudal order.

Therefore caste and modernity, especially under the auspices of colonial rule and heavily laden with the nation building project in India, have come to form an inextricable link. As mentioned before perhaps one of the biggest fallacies made within academics was of its treatment of this relation. Caste was not only seen as a static traditional institution but was also treated completely antagonistic to modernity, which allowed for a “blindness of insight” in how caste could endure with modernity.

THE CENSUS AND CASTE IN INDIA

In the context of this relation between caste and modernity the census came to play a rather interesting role of an intermediary. To those who believed that caste would disappear with the coming of modernity, the conduction of the census and subsequent petitions received by census authorities was evidence to the fact that caste continued unabated. To several others this evidence was read as testament to the fact that colonial modernity caused the enlivening of caste.

The census and caste system in India have thus had a rather interesting history and one that developed in the specific context of a country subject to colonial rule. However, this is not to suggest that caste had no place in India before the advent of colonial rule, in fact this section will dwell on that debate as well, but merely to argue that the tangled history that caste and the census share is specifically rooted in a certain notion of political theory, intellectual prejudice and a view on the structure of 'pre-modern' societies. These ideas then not only contributed to the beginning of documenting caste in the census but also fed into later scholarship on the subject, which derived much of its conceptual notions from these documents.

The census operations in India as Bernard Cohn points out in his landmark essay '*The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia*', did not begin with the explicit intention of understanding the composition of people under rule. It began at first in an effort to understand and possibly modify the revenue system at work. Thus one of the earliest censuses conducted was in the city of Benares, where it is noteworthy that people were not enumerated individually. Rather an approximation of the population was arrived upon through calculation of the number houses/household structures (Cohn, 1987). The first census in this regard was a Gazetteer of India written by Walter Hamilton-'*A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries*' produced in 1820. Cohn points out that a more detailed census was attempted in 1861, however he adds that owing to the Mutiny of 1857 complications arose. Further the British now took on a position of being more wary of carrying on any activity that could be construed as interference in the lives of Indians. It was then 1871, Cohn adds that a census of both the princely states and provinces were conducted. In his essay on the census, Cohn claims that enumerators often faced problems during the conduction of the census exercise most often those of categories not being clearly defined. A problem in particular that came to plague them was on how to define an agriculturist, whether an agriculturist was to be treated as a land owner, tiller etc. It is possibly also in light of these problems and the fact that colonial administrators identified caste as a key feature of the social structure in India that caste (also because of its apparently clear association with occupations) began to be included in the census documentation.

As mentioned before, it is dilemma for most social scientists whether or not to treat caste as the most significant aspect of Indian social structure. And it is also in light of this that it must be seen whether this importance accorded to caste within the social structure had its beginning with the census and its efforts to document caste, especially since much academic discourse on the subject of caste has borrowed heavily not only in data but also in terms of a larger understanding, from the census. As Cohn mentions this remains one of the most noteworthy points raised by social scientists such as Srinivas and Ghurye- on whether caste grew stronger or at least was altered, in how it was embodied within the social structure owing to the impact of the census operation. Cohn claims that official and academic scholarship on caste certainly grew under the auspices of the census, since they drew most of their illustrations and data from the census. Thus according to Ghurye,

The conclusion is unavoidable that the intellectual curiosity of some of the early officials is mostly responsible for the treatment of caste given in the census, which has been progressively elaborate in each successive census since 1872. The total result has been as we have seen a livening up of the caste-spirit. (Ghurye, 1932: 279)

There has in the recent past also been much work to claim thus that caste was in fact a fluid social identity that came to take a rigid form only under colonial rule and its attempts to document it, consequently manufacturing caste as the core identity of Indians. Caste, in this sense was seen in many ways as having been invented in many ways by the British, by according it a status it had never previously enjoyed. Needless to say there has also been much criticism of such a perspective seeing it as distinctly post colonial perspective to adopt towards Indian social life, where especially its troubling features are seen as colonial inventions.

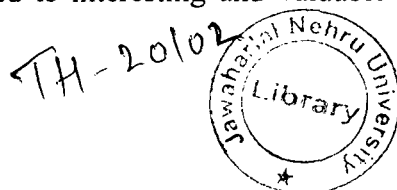
While this is significant, what is important to pull out of this debate is also the question of the process through which we came to understand caste. Cohn's primary argument in his essay is that under the influence of colonial rule, culture grew as significant not only in terms of its contents but also in the manner in which we came

to look upon culture and his claim that there took place a certain objectification of culture, so that one could seemingly stand outside of it and not merely decide on its elementary constituents but also define it in particular manner. His most potent example in this regard is how several nationalists and scholars like spoke of a Bengali Renaissance-

The idea of a 'Renaissance' is clearly Western in origin; it draws directly on Western historical experience as well as on the Western form of historical thinking, which is linear, in which it was possible for Humanists to see the past in relation to themselves and to think of a process by which the past is redefined, and purified and selected aspects of it utilized for models or prescriptions for behaviour in the present. Eighteenth and nineteenth century European scholars developed the idea of the Renaissance to denote a particular period in Western history and the development of a distinctive culture associated with that period. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries both indigenous Asian scholars and intellectuals as well as some Western historians viewed the development of intellectual stances among groups in Chinese, Indian and Islamic societies as the same kind of experience that Western Europe went through in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There has been an attempt to broaden the concept of 'Renaissance' to cover the movement of cultural change brought about by the contact of Asian societies with the ideas and forms of thought developed in Western Europe. (Cohn, 1987: 225)

It was in this regard that he saw the census as being extremely crucial to this process of the objectification of culture, where elements were broken down into official categories, listed and required explanation.

The course that the censuses that began from 1872 onwards until 1931 when caste came to be documented is interesting and valuable then not just for the wealth of



information it throws up, but its very process is one that lends itself to understanding how caste came to play its role as political category and community, organising itself around the pivot of the census.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CENSUS CATEGORIES

Initially the collection of any data for the census proved to be an extremely arduous task simply because people seemed wary of handing out information. Both Cohn and Dirks mention several rumours that were in circulation at the time which claimed that the information collected from the census would be used against the people in some way. Furthermore, owing to social norms of the time, collecting information on women and their occupations also proved hard for the census officials. This meant that at the end of the day they were often left with sketchy information for most of the populace, but especially women. In some ways then one can argue that the inclusion of caste in the census aided officials in some ways. For one it help clarify some information on categories, the colonial administration recognising the large degree of conformity between caste and caste specific occupations. But it is also significant to note that when collecting information on caste and relying as they did on 'local scholars' most of whom were upper castes, the British also fresh from the 1857 Mutiny, were careful not to shake the foundations of the social order very much whilst seeking to gain information and knowledge on it. Through some sort of social sanction as they got, they relied on the caste category to give them much of their information. This also meant that they worked well within the boundaries defined by caste and its norms which meant as mentioned before that information on women continued to be limited, perhaps even conjectural. In fact Waterfield claims the Memorandum on the Census of British India, "Very little information is given about women in the Census reports respecting the occupations of the women in British India. In most cases they have either been omitted from the returns, or included with the men in such a manner that the two classes cannot even be separated." (cited in Dirks, 2001:205)

Second, the construction of categories of castes, as Cohn claims came to create major confusion as the census officials came to realise, where similar caste names were used by multiple castes with differing caste statuses as well as the fact that relying on a uniform list of sorts soon proved that it was difficult to move around with a common

table of names enlisting castes for the entire country. It is largely owing to this that there were several recommendations to do away with caste in the census since it seemed to pose multiple problems. Occupation were often relied upon as a criterion to mark out difference but minor differences and variations in that (as Cohn points out especially in the occupational category of Agriculturist) caused further problems in documentation. Yet, caste continued within the census, in fact census commissioners such as Baines, according to Dirks, asked for caste and religion to be enumerated separately in order for the census to document caste amongst other religious communities of the Muslims, Christians etc. This continued presence of caste in the census then in the face of several problems, owed its presence as Dirks claims to the constant acknowledgement that there was something central and integral to India about caste and that it required colonial understanding. This notion of 'understanding' however was not altogether benign. Scholars such as Dirks have pointed out how in many ways caste became not just a central feature of India but also the leitmotif of and justification for colonial rule in India. In the modern west's colonial encounter with Traditional India, caste becomes at once both, the fact that prods India into being modern as well the inhibitor in 'achieving' that modernity. But for the British as Dirks points out caste also became the reason of why they could see themselves as ruling over India for an unlimited period of time because they saw it as preventing the formation of a national community.

This process of conduction also lends insight into the kinds of political and social theory dominant at the time. As Cohn mentions, this was also the time when caste and race was seen as being inextricably linked and the British thus often came to rely on information provide by the census on the 'kinds of people' and used this information to recruit people for instance in the army (martial races being suitable). But this is not the only reason why caste and race came to be curiously linked in India. Dirks gives much of the credit for this to Herbert Risley who took over as Census Commissioner in 1901. It was during the course of his work on the collection of information on the castes and tribes of Bengal that Risley drew the conclusion that caste endogamy had allowed for the preservation of racial purity in India. As Dirks notes, borrowing the methods of French anthropologists Paul Broca and Paul Topinard, Risley began to keep record of the anthropometric details of the various castes and tribes in Bengal, information that went onto become his four volumes of the 'Tribes and Castes of

Bengal'(Dirks, 2001: 213). This link that was drawn between caste and race also emerged owing to an understanding of how the caste system arose as being based on the coming of a foreign race (the Aryans) to India. The fact that such views also got endorsements from early census commissioners such as Baines meant that it held great strength in colonial discourse. Thus according to Dirks, Baines and others saw the caste system developing out of,

...peaceful occupation and accommodation rather than invasion or conquest. Doubtless finding solace in the historical parallel between Aryan and British colonisation, racial separation was seen as the necessary and laudable basis for the generation of an imperial social system based on separation and difference. (Dirks, 2001: 210)

As mentioned before to Risley, the strict rules of caste endogamy had preserved racial purity and thus India became presented itself as the perfect setting to study this relation between caste and race. In the face of other justifications given for the caste census such as an ability to decide on laws and policies, Dirks notes that ultimately Risley came to treat caste in the census as a 'scientific project' of sorts which took precedence over the census itself. And it is in light of this, that Risley introduced a measure in the caste census that came to almost dominate the imagination of both officials and those enumerated and which continued to have hold over the census even when the practise itself was done away with. This was the introduction of enlisting castes on the basis of social precedence.

Drawing from his notion of the relation between caste and race, Risley saw hierarchy as integral to the idea of the caste system which he saw as central in maintaining peace and order (as opposed to conflict that should have arisen with the coming of new 'races'), and it is to take into account this feature, that he decided on caste being listed on the basis of its social hierarchy and to take into account 'native opinion' on the subject and thus Dirks claims Risley wrote to "...deputy magistrates, subdivisional officers, inspectors of local schools and survey directors" (Dirks, 2001:215) and asked for these local officials to make available to him detailed lists of castes in the region on the basis of local social precedence.

It is no surprise of course that what constituted “native opinion” in the eyes of administration were voices of upper caste scholars and a heavy reliance on sources such as the *Manu Dharama Sastra*'s. The empirical project of documenting caste thus came to be heavily entangled within the folds of colonial knowledge based as it was on Orientalist discourse and as Dirks notes, Brahmanical opinion on the subject. According to Dirks, Risley's understanding of the caste hierarchy came to be organised around central brahmanical notions such as the ‘acceptance of food or water, obligation towards Brahmans, origin stories concerning duties and obligations and ritual proximity.’ Thus caste in its administrative avatar took the shape of a social system defined in terms of brahmanic rituals and practices.

The force that this move of taking social precedence into account was something that Risley had not taken into account, presuming as he had its nature as a given. However, as soon as the census began noting the hierarchy of castes, census officials came to be flooded with numerous petitions by people petitioning for their caste status to be documented differently. Most in their petitions would also send along origin stories of how they lost their original place in the caste hierarchy over time or even rely on obscure sources as proof of their better status. Although petitions of such sort had been received from the beginning of the census operations in India, it was with the 1901 census when the census list came out in terms of such hierarchy that these petitions grew more in number. The people now realised that the census document held far more weight than just an official enumeration it was the official document on the political scene of the time. Caste groups started petitioning together and sustained efforts often even led to changes being made within the census. Thus Dirks mentions one of several instances where the Khatri of Punjab and the United Provinces waged a struggle to be classified as Rajputs and where eventually they met with success and Risley used the instance as a vindication of the fact that “native opinion” on the subject of social precedence was of supreme importance. The fact that as mentioned before much of his native opinion stemmed from the upper castes or that such contestation laid to bare the fact that hierarchy wasn't always as neat as portrayed by his sources both textual and otherwise didn't seem to shake his beliefs. In fact so strong were his ideas on this caste scheme that much in the fashion of Orientalist discourse that treats ‘tradition’ as constantly static he saw nothing changing about the caste system. In the face of technological changes that were sweeping the country at

the point such as the introduction of the Railways, spread of the printing press etc as Dirks claims, he believed that the caste system would only grow stronger since these changes would contribute to the diffusion of “brahmanical influence.”

What was interesting then was also how Risley never seemed to fully understand the power that he had unleashed through this particular way of documenting caste. What he constantly read as a vindication of his scheme of classification, the numerous petitions that came to census officials, was viewed by others as nothing but trouble. And it was therefore in 1911, from the very next census onwards that the British government decided to drop from the census the practice of enlisting caste according to hierarchy, although they did continue to collect caste related information. It is to this end, that Risley is also credited for the beginning of the modern caste identity, one that respondents were acutely aware of but more so for the kind of organisation that took place on a new scale with the coming of his scheme of classification. As Cohn and Dirks both point out, this was the period when one saw the rise of a large number of *caste sabhas*. As mentioned before, when it first began, the people came to be extremely wary of the census with a wide variety of rumours floating on what the information collected from it would come to be used for. Gradually however not only did people come to furnish this information but also astutely realising what was to be gained from it came to organise themselves in these *sabhas*, where not only did they petition as a community (while also representing themselves albeit in a limited way as a political community) but in this regard came to publish literature on how communities were to define themselves when being enumerated for the census. Pamphlets, circulars and the like thus came to be widely produced and circulated by these *sabhas* instructing their members on how to answer questions from the census and what specific caste name to give when asked. The caste census was no longer an obscure government survey in the eyes of the people it was a political document of immense value and one that would to them play a central role in determining the life the caste was to lead under the colonial state.

It does not matter then that the last caste enumeration in the census came in 1931, the link between the two had been forged through a recognition of the economic, political and social implications of a caste identity, not to say that this did not count earlier or that what it gained from the census was official sanction. However, what it did gain

was a note of acknowledgement that caste was rooted in power and therefore had a bearing on the social structure.

CASTES AND THEIR 'CREATION'- AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF THE COLONIAL STATE

Dirks in one of his most significant pieces of work 'Castes of the Mind' argued much as Ghurye and Srinivas did in their work, that caste was produced to a large extent in its encounter with colonialism and its consequences i.e. colonial administration, discourse etc. Thus, according to Dirks, colonial rule in its attempt to understand Indian society and enable better rule (including justifying its rule) began a census that came to include the enumeration of caste. This exercise he believed led to the production of 'modern caste identities'. In its attempts to study tradition, and underscored heavily with the Orientalist discourse, the British in India, made caste as one of the key markers of this tradition. And according to Dirks in this creation that lived on, 'caste became the apparition of a traditional India that lived on.'

I am suggesting that it was under the British that "caste" became a single term capable of expressing, organizing and above all "systemizing" India's forms of social identity, community and organization. This was achieved through an identifiable (if contested) ideological canon as the result of a concrete encounter with colonial modernity during the two hundred years of British domination. In short colonialism made caste what it is today...by making caste the central symbol of Indian society. (Dirks, 2001:5)

Dirks fundamental argument thus on British intervention producing caste identities (not the creation of caste per se), rests on the premise that caste was turned into the marker of Indian tradition and its significance brought on and highlighted through the importance attached by both officials and natives to question of caste, seen when it was introduced through the census. He does claim that this does not mean that caste did not exist prior to British rule, or that it was not inscribed in power relations or

even that it was static and did not change with time, but rather to claim that under the watchful eyes of the colonial administration caste took on a new form where it seemed to become one of the two markers of social identity, the other being religion.

While it is extremely important to recognise how social identities can be constructed around categories produced for administrative that are in turn built on the basis of theories whose ideological motives must be questioned; it is also important to recognise that colonial intervention can explain its significance, not its beginning. Caste being governed by relations of power, would have played a role in determining access to resources which would have had the power to define one's social identity simple because it would have a direct bearing on the life one lead. Something as basic as access to water in the village would be determined on the basis of one's caste identity and this was not an outcome merely of colonial interest in caste. The fact remains, that when caste enumeration began in the census, it initially only recorded the caste name. The introduction of caste in the census on the basis of social precedence and taking into account local opinion on it began much later. Yet as soon as the caste question came within the census people began petitioning over their recorded status. The people thus were always aware of their caste and what it meant for them, what changed with its enumeration was the benefits and privileges they thought they could accrue from the state through it. And it is perhaps in that sense, that one can capture best how caste has come to be operate almost like a modern identity, in not just how the state played into it but also in how with the coming of democracy caste begins to be initiated into the practices of modern institutions.

It is therefore that we can continue to see the significant role played by caste in India. Not merely owing to its generation as a social identity by the colonial administration but also owing to the fact that caste began to get incorporated into the functioning of the modern state both colonial and post-colonial. This is a view even put forth by Dirks who claims that caste drew its modern identity from the birth it received through colonial hands, yet he claims that such a position should not lead one to believe that the role caste plays in contemporary politics is due to this alone, but rather must acknowledge that caste has always been inscribed with relations of power. And thus as opposed to conventional views on the subject that saw caste as meeting an early demise or even as opposed to the views of scholars such as Risley who saw

caste as growing in its traditionalism under the impact of the changes it was subject to, caste merely changed, and adapted itself to its new settings.

The noteworthy point here is how are we to understand this play of caste in politics, are we to see it as in some ways an aberration within the otherwise modern democratic practice of politics or can we see it as part of this larger process. Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) claim that much like Marx contemporary social scientists believe that the fulfillment of certain basic conditions of industrialisation, urbanisation and education need to be met before modern democratic politics can take ground which otherwise the continuance of tradition would not allow for. They further draw on Marx to claim that the peasants do not form a class, there is no unity or consciousness of common interest amongst them and therefore politically cannot represent themselves but must be represented. Thus their leaders turn out to be those who can bestow favours on them, protect them from other classes etc. In India however they point out that the masses did not look at political masters for the grant of benefits or seek to ally with the industrial proletariat but rather resorted to changes in traditional structures to make it more amenable for play in modern politics.

The leading and most pervasive natural association of the old regime caste has responded to changes in its political and economic environment by transforming itself from below and within, hierarchy, privilege and moral parochialism no longer exhaust its secular significance. Caste has become a means to level the older orders inequalities by helping to destroy its moral basis and social structure. In doing so, caste has helped peasants to represent and rule themselves by attaching them to ideas, processes and institutions of political democracy. (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967: 19)

While this holds true it is important to recognise that such a change emerged because of the particular manner in which the nationalist movement and the process of

industrialisation developed in India⁴ which also meant that the rural feudal order remained a force to reckon with.

Further one must acknowledge today that discussions on caste in politics have several implications. Caste is not only important in rather crude terms of determining compensatory benefits to be achieved but in fact plays a central role in the idea of modern citizenship in India today and thus by extension underscores every argument made on the concepts of citizenship, modernity and nationhood. Every caste related phenomena then holds value to our understanding of these concepts, the continued presence of caste related violence, caste “vote banks” or even the seemingly innocuous practices of matchmaking within the ‘community’.

It is not as though early leaders and thinkers of the country were altogether ignorant of this potent connection that caste seemed to now share with ideas integral to the modern nation-state. It was exactly because of this that even though there was a strong acknowledgement of the fact that economic, political and social backwardness in India was determined largely owing to caste it came with a sense of immense shame and thus as Dirks claims “colonial shame and colonial discourse was writ large upon the initial social ventures of the Indian state”- namely the social welfare programs enacted specifically to target those oppressed by the caste system.

It is also because of this relation that caste held with ideas of modernity and necessarily built into the new independent nation that caste based reservation also met with such mixed opinion on the subject. The colonial shame while it existed also came along with a sense of the acknowledgement coming from a betrayal in some ways to the newly formed state. This was so since caste based reservations under the colonial state was supported and enacted largely through the efforts of the anti-caste movement that took place in different parts of the country and which also tended to be in support of colonial rule to a large extent. This meant that caste based reservation often lost out on a lot of support not only in academic quarters (Ghryue for instance

⁴ For instance, while India did see industrialisation, it did not see the proletarianisation of its people, owing to the colonial context in which industries developed.

seeing such movements as being anti-national and politicising caste to that end) but also in political circles. And it was in light of this that Ghurye, even lamented how ‘caste solidarity’ had given way to competition and ‘caste patriotism’⁵. Thus what Leach saw as the end of the caste system, both Ghurye and Srinivas read as its birth in a more ‘dangerous’ form.

This leads us onto the question of the relation between the state and caste and the intersection between caste and the state and therefore examine how caste functions as political category and community. In this scheme then, what does a conduction of a census operation mean and stand for. Is it strengthening notions of community or is reifying caste as a political category. A theorisation of Indian politics and how it plays out allows us to traverse this ground of examining caste. For it is precisely in how caste comes to be exercised within politics that allows us to understand whether it the two conceptions of it (political category, community) are either mutually exclusive or whether it can at once be both. Further colonial history as Dirks points out complicates the politics of modernity. How does this modernity operate, if it does at all. Scholars such as Dirks point out that the relegation of caste to the private sphere seems to allow for a smooth operation of modernity (if possible at all) but continue to provide a renewed link and reminder to tradition.

THE CURRENT DEBATE ON THE CASTE AND CENSUS

Having traced the historical trajectory of the debate on the caste and census allows us now for a more fruitful understanding on the subject that has one again emerged in recent times owing to the governments declaration of undertaking an enumeration exercise for caste, initially as part of the census and later as part of enumerative exercise of the National Population Register. What is interesting to note is that in the course of what is now over sixty years the fundamental issue that continues to haunt the debate as it did in the pass is that of modernity that lies at stake for the Indian nation. There are of course other issues such as those political gain, notions of justice,

⁵ It would be important to note here that the notion of caste solidarity itself was one that drew heavily from colonial Orientalist discourse on the subject; a subject which will be dealt with in the following chapter

citizenship and even logistical feasibility and many of these arguments not only draw from academic discourse that emerged around the question of the caste and census in the colonial time, but also further build themselves on the basis of those very arguments. It is critical therefore to have approached the current debate having looked at the context of the question as it had emerged during the colonial period. As Dirks constantly reminds us, colonial history not only coloured our way of understanding ourselves but also effected changes to enable such thinking.

The contemporary debate on the subject of the caste and census has found an equal number of supporters and opponents with both academicians and political groups and their affiliates split on either side. As Satish Deshpande and Mary John (2010) have pointed out arguments for and against the enumeration of caste are largely played out on two terrains political-moral arguments and arguments on grounds of the logistical feasibility of the entire exercise. Further as they point out that while arguing for or against the issue, there seems to be the constant invocation of different models of both caste and the census. It is useful for our purpose of reviewing the current debate to have a brief overview as well, of what these models employed in various arguments are. Thus, according to Deshpande and John there are largely four models on what the census is primarily (Deshpande and John, 2010: 39) - these are; first, where the census is treated as an extension of welfare programmes or social justice schemes introduced by the governments and in this regard the census is seen as enabling these schemes to be more efficient and effectual. The second sees the census as essentially an apparatus for fixing identities of citizens and manufacturing in this regard “compulsory identities” which inhibits the notion of a certain universal citizenship that is sought. Third, the census is seen as a large scale research project of sorts which as Deshpande and John claim are “designed to produce the truth about categories it counts”, a view very similar to that of Dirks and Cohn. Lastly, Deshpande and John talk of a model that has been seemingly restricted to discussions on the subject within the Hindi press, and which sees the census a “collective self portrait”, the census here becomes a way of representing the nation they claim, much like the flag or map or any other such symbol allows for presenting a concrete picture to the notion of an abstract imagined community.

The three models of caste that emerge in the course of these debates according to them are (Deshpande and John, 2010: 40), first, one which reads caste as only a lower

caste identity. The second, which drawing from social anthropology treats caste as “ a complex meaning giving institution” and therefore by extension also concludes that caste cannot be reduced to categories of either race, ethnicity etc. Third, a model which views caste as being “a web of distributional relations that determine the distribution of power, privilege and material resources in conjunction with class” and thus sees caste as being “necessarily relational.” And lastly, a model that locates caste as being one of the major obstacles to modernity in India.

It is useful to make use of the models delineated by Deshpande and John because they are what underscore most arguments on the subject and having laid them out here enables us to move directly to the pertinent issues that emerge from the various debates. There are thus primarily three issues that emerge from the debate the question of social justice, feasibility and modernity including the notion of citizenship and how the census has a bearing on it. Of these, the question of social justice and modernity are particularly significant to us, the question of feasibility of the exercise while important is also one that is used often only to bolster an argument made on grounds of the other two.

Both Deshpande and John in their defense of the enumeration exercise thus lay claim upon the quest for social justice. They posit that in the debate that has raged on so far, the status quo is treated as a neutral scenario, which as they claim is a major fallacy. The caste census in this regard according to them allows to make a break with the “caste blindness” that has been part of inscribed into the working of the post colonial state in India. According to them with the ban on caste in the constitution there also came an end to any public discussion on caste, with “SC’s and ST’s being treated as a regrettable exception to the rule of caste blindness.”⁶ Under the working of this apparently casteless Constitution they claim that caste inequality continued unabated since besides banning caste no other concrete attempts were made in its direction to

⁶ It would be significant here to take note of Upendra Baxi’s differentiation between the Constitutional state and the political state, the former which engages with the more normative aspect of the notion of a state which sets limits to itself and the latter engaging with the notion of an actual contestation for power. In this regard then, the constitutional state would be seen as one by Deshpande and John which would formally seek to abolish caste while other critics might point to the working of the political state as using caste as a way of garnering votes, privilege etc

do away with the system. It is in light of this that they claim that Mandal came a time when the paradox of the situation really dawned upon the lower castes, that what they were politically entitled to had little in relation to their actual stake in the nation. Further Deshpande and John add that what compounds the problem is the caste blindness that the upper castes display. Having secured their access to resources of wealth, education, even health through now apparently “legitimate” means where they no longer need to explicitly state their caste they have come to believe that caste holds no value in the ‘modern’ world and thus arguments against the counting of castes usually emerge from these castes who now sanitise themselves as being modern classes.. Deshpande and John however firmly believe that the census is just one significant way of doing away with this caste blindness that seems to have permeated the system. It is a way of making visible everyone’s caste, both upper and lower castes will now be exposed for full visibility under the state’s otherwise apathetic eyes. What this will achieve according to them is that it will allow to, not only shine light on a situation of dis-privilege and disadvantage, but also show its related side of those who have been privileged owing to their caste. A move which they claim will highlight “..this mutual connectedness that we have tried so strenuously throughout our post colonial history.” (Deshpande and John, 2010: 42) But critics such as Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2010) claim in what has become one of the most potent and oft used arguments against the census, that any effort made towards documenting caste would translate into a fixing of identities- “You will be your caste, no matter what”, he claims. Justice he claims would become the way for asserting compulsory group identity, as opposed to finding a way to break out of it. In fact Sundar (2010) and Mehta both believe that like in the past the counting of castes would produce a social identity that would be imposed upon the people and their imagination.

Nandini Sundar’s contention on the subject of justice is that somehow the idea of reservations has enveloped the entire notion of justice. So that social justice comes to be equated with reservations alone, this in turn, necessitates the counting of caste. Mehta too claims that deprivation of health, education, food etc can all be dealt with a universalisation of these services as opposed to a count of caste and related backwardness. But it is here that it must be understood that if we see caste as not just a manifestation of the relations of production in society that determine control over resources, but rather that see it as part of the system that produces the relations of

production then we recognise that while universalisation of services is important it cannot be the only step, at least at first. Undoing the workings of the caste system requires that the system of privileges that has been skewed against the lower castes for thousands years be remedied first by granting them 'privileges' in order to gain access resources. To assume that the universalisation of services translates into a level playing field where everyone can partake of such resources equally, ignores a long history of caste oppression.

Sundar further adds that in a scenario where the larger share of employment comes within the unorganised sector, reservations she claims cannot be seen as the principal solution to the question of resolving inequality. Additionally, she claims that if it is social justice that is to be achieved through the counting of caste then the same does not seem to have occurred for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes who have been enumerated; in fact policies and provision of services do not seem to take into account this data. Not only she claims has there thus been little imagination over the years in working out solutions but also she points to the possible agenda for the state to introduce such a census. Both Mehta and Sundar, in a vein very similar to Dirks also raise doubts about what such a census will unleash. Drawing from the past instance of the enumeration exercise, they claim that counting of caste will lead to further mobilisation along caste lines and even lead to the building of caste patriotism⁷ where caste comes to be politicised for the wrong reasons. But here let us also understand that caste mobilisation of the kind they warn us against is precisely what has led to some sort of lower caste representation in politics, especially in North India, which did not see any sustained anti-caste movement during the colonial period. It was only when parties such as CSP (Congress Socialist Party), SSP (Samyukta Socialist Party) and later the SD (Soshit Dal) emerged that the Congress which had otherwise dominated the political scene was forced to acknowledge the presence of such lower caste groups (even if it was to eventually co-opt them), ensuring at least some amount of lower caste representation.

⁷ It may be asked whether such caste patriotism is new at all? For have not oppositional groups in society always acted out of a sense of group loyalty.

Sundar claims that one must draw attention to the possible uses of the data and moving away from the almost mundane argument now of the data being used by politicians to shape up caste based vote banks⁸ she instead claims that such a census would yield itself to the larger agenda of the state, which under the current UPA government has been demonstrably one drawing people away from land and resources with the promise of formal employment in order to take over these land and resources. If at all something substantial is to be obtained from this data, Sundar claims it will depend solely upon the manner in which the data will be processed. Unless the data is broken down into sub-categories to yield information on for instance the sex ratio and rate of literacy based on castes it will be of little use. However the census would give region-wise data which would be useful. Ultimately Sundar argues that the counting of caste can only be the beginning to a measure of disadvantage not an end in itself.

In the current context, one where it has now been declared that caste will not be enumerated as just another variable in the census but would be counted separately as part of the exercise of the National Population Register which would also undertake the collection of bio-metric information of respondents means that most seem to have realised that the information on caste coming through this will not only be compromised but also of no value at all since it would not give any return along socio- economic indicators which would have come through other returns of the census. Even if caste comes to measured in a Below Poverty Line census, it will remain limited in its scope since it will merely provide information for those who constitute the poorest in the nation. As has been argued a critical part of acknowledging caste within the modern nation-state would be to realise that caste had a bearing on everyone- the rich and middle classes included.

This notion of justice stems from the idea that justice should be reparative in nature, especially since all citizens at least notionally are equal. Given that this notion of universal citizenship is critical to the identity of a modern nation it is therefore not surprising to find that the most potent and often heard argument against the census remains that of a threat to modernity. Critics of the census then see the counting of

⁸ Upendra Baxi claims that this argument would hold little strength because it does not say how this would be any different a scenario then from the last six decades when caste has not been enumerated.

caste as wiping away every attempt that has been made by the post colonial state in the direction of modernity. Dirks had made a rather pointed observation when he claimed that a colonial history seemed to haunt the idea of modernity. Opponents of the caste enumeration such as Mehta then seem especially vociferous on the subject of this loss of modernity. He in fact claims that counting caste and subjecting institutions to such a “test” would undermine its legitimacy. In the conduct of modern democratic politics it is deemed that categories and identities such as caste seen as necessarily parochial in nature must have no place. While one may dismiss the arguments of critics such as Mehta as being close to paranoid that a mere count of caste would somehow do away with modernity completely in India. The question we must ask ourselves is whether caste is coeval with modernity.

Thus what we must recognise is that it is integral to the being of a modern state that seeks to establish equality as a working rule that caste must be recognised. The last sixty years of functioning as a democracy have shown us how caste has continued, changed and even grown new forms and shapes. Modernity, what was often conceived of as that perfect antidote to caste, did not seem to work. And in this misunderstood relation between caste and modernity, where caste was always seen as lying outside if it, what occurred in India was a mere extension of rights proclaiming equal citizenship to all, without an accompanying structure to ensure that equal citizenship. Today, enumerating caste (and here I argue through the census, not the National population Register) would perhaps allow us to acknowledge the place of caste in modern India. And it is only by doing so that the modern nation state can live up to its commitment of equality through a process that allows for creation of a structure that can ensure equal rights and citizenship for all.

In this regard the subject of caste, volatile as it is seems to be both a dangerous and yet perfect suitable to the occasion vehicle to move forth on the subject that has constantly baffled, enraged and engaged academicians in and from India- that of modernity in India. the next two chapters seek to engage more deeply with the notion of modernity and caste in India to be able to understand why the relation between the two continues to be misread and seen as antagonistic as opposed to seeing the intricate connections that have come to be formed between the two based on the way that the nationalist movement and the post-colonial state came to be developed in India.

CHAPTER III

THE ARTICULATION OF CASTE IN INDIA

This chapter in an extension from the previous chapter will seek to map out the articulation of caste in India. While the last chapter noted how caste came to be written of and understood first by colonial administrators and later anthropologists in their attempt to study Indian culture. This chapter will focus on how early academic engagement on the subject had to deal with the legacy of this colonial intervention on the question of caste. The subsequent sections will also look at how this legacy was one that also intervened in many ways in how the nation and the nation-state was conceived off and the role caste was seen as playing in it. It is fruitful to trace this historical trajectory to also understand the operation of caste in democratic politics today. Furthermore through it one can also chart out the trajectory of change in contemporary discourses on the subject of caste. In this regard the relationship between caste and gender which has often been relegated as a subordinate question both within academics and activism is also dealt with. The reason for tying in the question of caste and the social sciences, the nation-state and gender is because it is argued that this relation was one that came to be linked to the larger question of modernity in India. This chapter then through an exploration of the articulation of caste will seek to map the changes that have taken place in how we have come to understand this relation.

CASTE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

Caste as it has been studied in India has followed an almost curious trajectory. While it has and continues to be seen (although with great discomfort at present) as a fundamental feature of Indian society, the terms and contours of the concept of caste have changed. In this section I argue that the manner in which caste was understood by positing a difference in its theoretical conception and empirical operation was in effect a logical fallacy that seeped into early academic understanding on the subject and thus failed to make us understand the real workings of caste.

Early academics on the subject of caste in India developed out of the historical and political context of being a subject colony of the British Empire. As is widely acknowledged, initial engagement on the subject of caste came from the British administration's need to understand caste to intervene on subjects of law, polity and most importantly revenue. As was dealt with in the earlier chapter, in their need to generate a cohesive framework for understanding Indian society, British administrators-turned-anthropologists made caste the defining feature of Indian society, a system which they thought provided the basis for social order for Hindu society. What is interesting here is that while such studies in many ways very astutely pointed to caste as being a defining feature of Indian society they somewhat missed the point by identifying it as a central feature based on the idea that for them Hindu society and Indian society were conceptual categories that collapsed into one another. By doing so not only were they blinded to the presence of caste within other religions such as Islam and Christianity, especially when lower castes converted to them, but also by virtue of assuming the presence of caste only within Hinduism they turned towards a study of Hindu scriptures alone in their study of caste.

Drawing on references and validation of caste from these scriptural sources in addition to their high caste informants on the subject⁹, studies on the subject waxed eloquent about the *varna* system comprising of four castes- the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras*, (the untouchables were not seen as part of the system). What was curious is that in this neat scheme with *varnas* being seen as based on a neat division of labour and the hierarchy being based on their productive contribution to the system, both the labour and productive role performed by these 'untouchables' came to be ignored. Furthermore, it also posed the problem for the British, as well as later Indian academicians investigating the subject of caste that in their everyday observations on caste they realised that the neat model of caste that has been built did not conform to what they saw. In reality caste operated in extremely complex ways and although tended to be guided by a hierarchy similar to that proposed by the *varna*

⁹ Refer to previous chapter to see how individuals belonging to the higher castes were employed to provide details on caste hierarchy especially with regards to information gathered from the Census.

model, it was never restricted to just that. The essence of caste lay in a system of graded hierarchy, where hierarchy lay not just between various caste divisions but also within castes, between *jatis*. And there were multiple divisions into a multiplicity of *jatis* within each caste.

Furthermore, it is also significant to note that while *varna* became the operational concept, the ideological system guiding it was that of the *varnaashramadhrama*, which not only informed the division of labour but was also guided by the purity-pollution principle. What is particularly interesting is to take note of the specific historical moments in which this ideology has been taken recourse to. Any attempt to lay aside the critique of the caste system usually began with an invocation of the *varanaashramdharma*, where caste in its current form as hierarchical was seen as an aberration of the original. Gandhi was the most vocal defendant of this where he even went on to say that the practice of hereditary following of occupations was not wrong but what must be eliminated from this reformed caste system must be the idea of hierarchy (Pillai, 1947). And within this it was the plight of the ‘untouchables’ that came to be highlighted the most. It is in this context of building a sense of a nation, a national community that would be at the helm of the nationalist struggle for independence that there began a public critique of caste which came to be equated with amelioration of the ‘untouchables’ now termed by Gandhi as *Harijans* or the children of god.¹⁰

It is therefore interesting to note how these varna divisions were considered and understood at a time when nation building seemed to be of primacy. Drawing from thinkers such as Vivekanda, it became imperative on those who sought to bring their ‘modern’ ideals and Hindu belief together that they came to understand varna in a new light. As Bayly claims “These were moralists who held that caste had a place in the lives of modern Hindus, by which they meant that it could be remade as a bond of moral community at the national level” (Bayly, 1999: 166). Varna here got interpreted in fresh light so that what was once conceived of in terms of a religious division into

¹⁰ It is no surprise then that when Ambedkar went to address the Jat Pat Todak Mandal (a group that sought to end caste oppression) and declared that the terrible state of the depressed classes could only be ended with the ‘Annihilation of the Caste’, but was then requested to not deliver the lecture.

labouring classes now gets seen as communities that would contribute to the making of the nation. In fact Bayly contends that jati affiliation in a public arena came to be seen as a manifestation of citizenship. In many ways this way of thinking preceded Gandhi; for him, the problem of the caste system came to be seen as one of a situation characterized by hierarchy. Thus, if the practice of untouchability could be removed and an ethic of work could be cultivated, then there no longer remained a problem with the system. And it is from this notion of their being nothing inherently wrong with the varna system that his belief in it comes. Caste in such a scheme of thought was not conceived of as a political problem.

While it is not the case that early sociologists such as Ghurye, Srinivas and the like did not understand this concept of jatis or of the existence of a graded hierarchy, what was surprising is that they continued to rely on or at least make explicit references to the varna model. It is therefore not surprising that when it came to understanding the changing dynamics of caste, in a post independent scenario of democratic politics the continued conceptual division of caste into *Varna* and *jati* continued to explain the political behaviour of castes. Thus in the introduction to his book on *Caste in Modern India*, Srinivas claims,

The point which needs to be emphasized here is that for purposes of sociological analysis a distinction has to be made between caste at the political level and caste at the social and ritual level (Srinivas, 1962: 5)

It was almost as though once adopted the *Varna* model could not be dropped and thus it continued to haunt any academic engagement with the subject of caste even if only as a conceptual apparition.

Thus not only was it a logical fallacy to continue working with such a dual notion of caste so that any explicit association of caste with politics was seen with a certain sense of bafflement and had to be explained but was also problematic simply because it did not lend itself to an understanding of the relation of caste to power and seemed to contain caste within its ritual dimension alone. Thus when Srinivas has to explain the rise of caste in the practice of politics and administration he once again falls back

on a ritual explanation- the loosening of the concept of pollution. Even the ushering in of modern forces is called for because of how it would force a change in the concept of labour and what is seen as being polluting.

The mechanization of labour and the provision of underground drainage everywhere will make unnecessary the personal handling of material which is considered not only very dirty but defiling. A new type of education in which the fingers are used for other things besides driving a quill should inculcate not only a respect for but also a love of, manual labour. Widespread industrialisation ...will usher in towns in every part of India, and the heterogeneity and habits of urban life should help somewhat in reducing inter-caste tension (ibid: 76)

Thus he claims that the end of the caste system too would come with the processes of increased industrialisation and urbanisation; where increased mechanization of labour as well as an inculcation of the spirit of manual labour would do away with the notion of polluting work and also where the heterogeneity that is a consequence of increased urbanisation would lead to intermingling of people and therefore the end of caste.

But clearly as we know today none of the above actually led to the end of caste. In fact caste seemingly got well absorbed in the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation to lend itself to new forms of manifestation. For instance, early labour recruitment in industries - especially the mills of Bombay - took place along caste lines, where workers brought caste fellows from the villages to work in the city. Furthermore migrants to the city in search for jobs often relied on the skills their caste based occupation had provided them to pick up new jobs; thus tanners in the village now worked in the tanning industry. In fact if anything migration to cities and work in the new industries often further strengthened the link between castes and various occupations. Urbanisation and migration to the cities took place but there was nothing to stop housing patterns to develop along lines of caste. Further, Bayly argues that for a large part the maintenance of clean, sanitized households in cities depended on the labour performed by sanitation workers often drawn from the lower castes- these were the night soil carriers, the sweepers and launderers. Even the military with its needs

recruited along similar lines. Bayly thus claims, “Untouchability as we now know it is thus very largely a product of colonial modernity, taking shape against a background of new economic opportunities including recruitment to the mills, docks and Public Works Departments, and to the labour corps which supported both the British sepoy regiments. ...the modern workplaces so often reinforced the ‘untouchable’s’ low status.” (Bayly, 1999: 226)

This emergence of colonial modernity and its almost twisted links with caste (producing alternative types of modernities in its wake, an issue that will be taken up in the next chapter) developed in many ways through an early understanding that had developed on caste, where as mentioned before caste remained largely de-linked from an association with explicit power, but was rather seen in its ritual terms, so that even when it came to so called modern institutions such as courts of law to arbitrate on matters of control over resources such as land, it took recourse to the ritual. Susan Bayly in her study on caste points out an instance of how Tamilian landowners realised the significance of this ritual notion of caste.

...judges were likely to abrogate their privileged revenue rights if they were represented as having been acquired in the recent past by known historic acts of purchase or endowment. (ibid: 110)

She claims in her study that such landlords learned to tell the courts that they should be permitted to keep their landholding simply because they were Brahmins or Vellala lords of the land; thus although they had a clear sense of where their landholding rights came from yet they claimed their sense of ownership came from higher ritual status and “divinely mandated tradition”, although it went in contradiction of the Colonial State’s own proclaimed superiority of ‘political and individualist legal principles’.

This example is significant since it highlights how the ritual was privileged over other constitutive elements of caste. Notwithstanding that in this specific instance there was the modern principle of legality to be taken recourse to, even otherwise in an understanding of caste it was the ritual dimension alone that seemed to cloud the imagination of British administrators and later Indian scholars on the subject alike.

Furthermore, this is a pointed example to pick up because it points out to how caste was about the control of resources in society. It was the system that guided an understanding over who could control what and how. In fact it is Bayly's argument that caste is not so much a social entity as a material and political one and one that existed before British rule in India. In fact she also cites the work of Ibbetson, who mapped the caste status of *Jats* and *Thakurs* based on their control over land as opposed to their ritual status to highlight how caste has always been about control over such material and political resources. Thus caste must be read as a relation of power between those who wield it and those subject to it. In light of this, caste conflicts which took place with the British stepping in to adjudicate on the matter also, according to her, did not mean that caste either grew a new life or form under British presence.

What was to be noted however was that in the face of modern forces unleashed by the British, caste did not disappear but rather changed and adapted to become an integral part of modern institutions. But what has to be carefully noted is that unlike what scholars such as Dirks and later Ghurye and Srinivas claim- that caste grew afresh under the British- what has to be noted is that while its existence preceded the British, the changes introduced by the British in the economy, polity and society lead to an ensuing change in caste as well. Srinivas in fact alludes to this

It was *Pax Britannica* which freed castes from these vertical barriers. The improvement of communication, the introduction of cheap postage and printing enabled members of caste living far apart to meet occasionally and to keep in regular touch with each other. This, together with the preferential treatment extended to the backward castes by the British, laid the foundations of modern 'casteism' (Srinivas, 1962: 79).

His use of the term- 'modern casteism' is interesting because it betrays his belief, as mentioned before that the British in many ways contributed to this 'persistence' of caste in India, as well the fact that the granting of benefits to the lower castes, in conjunction with the spread of horizontal mobility of caste lead to a spurt of caste assertion that would have otherwise been absent. In fact the argument of preferential

treatment to the backward castes as contributing to casteism, is one that has been so strong that almost all any lower caste assertion or political demand is seen as being anti-national and driven by this British policy of appeasement towards them, which to the dominant groups stemmed from the British policy of Divide and Rule.

In many ways this was a point of view that was strongly held within academia. A major reason for this has been that the institutionalisation of sociology in India took place in the background of the ideology of nationalism. For many early scholars such as Ghurye, sociology had a significant role to play in the project of nation-building (Upadhyaya, 2007). His attempts therefore at shaping the department of sociology in Bombay University along the lines of studying Indian culture, institutions etc were all part of an attempt to lay bare the unity of the Indian nation. As Carol Upadhyaya (2007: 245) states-

His thought was shaped by the experience of colonialism, the constructed memory of India's 'past glory', and the nationalist project of future emancipation, and his perspective reflected a complex mix of nationalist, Orientalist, and reformist ideals, reworked through the diffusionist and empiricist framework of early twentieth century anthropology. Placed against this background, Ghurye's understanding of Indian society- his conception of the nation as essentially one, unified by a common religion and culture and structured by the basic social institutions of caste, kinship and family-appears almost inevitable.

Given this, for scholars such as Ghurye any attempt to radically mark out difference or fractures within the concept of Indian unity, especially in the face of colonial rule were seen as an anti-nationalist. It is therefore, that for Ghurye, the 'politicisation of caste' as it took place with the anti-caste movements especially those of Ambedkar were seen as going against national interest. And consequently the British policy of granting privileges to those from backward castes was also seen as being ultimately derived from an agenda of promoting colonial interest and quashing the spirit of nationalism in India.

All of this lies starkly at odds with the view held by several strands of the anti-caste movement on the question of Pax Britannica. For a large part they recognised that it was under colonial rule that they were able to loosen the bonds of the caste oppression to some extent. However this did not mean that there was no recognition of the adverse effects that colonial rule had on the lower castes. Ambedkar for instance noted in a speech how while the British must be credited for introducing educations, jobs etc to the lower castes it was also essential to recognise that it was British policies of extracting profits from capitalists and landlords that in turn contributed to the sustenance of the caste system. While these were points of view strongly articulated within the Ambedkarite and other anti-caste movements, little heed was paid to them.

In the subsequent sections I will examine what such caste assertion has meant for the lower castes as well as how it came to be understood, both in the period immediately before and after independence (relying on the Constituent Assembly Debates), as well as during the 1960's and 70's which first saw the rise of lower caste parties in North India. In fact the continuing discomfort with the presence of caste in politics, which was mentioned in the earlier chapter, is reflective how the normative understanding on what constitutes the 'national community' holds no place within it for castes of any kind apparently, but specifically locates the problem with lower caste assertion. The next section which will begin with an interrogation of the Constituent Assembly Debate is also in many ways an examination of how colonial and early Indian social science discourse on the subject as well as the nationalist movement has influenced the way in which caste was understood. So that first, caste was explicitly associated with the lower castes and second how lower castes were seen as never fully partaking of the modern nation.

CASTE AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN NATION

As part of our efforts towards understanding this relation that caste holds with modernity it is critical to look at how caste was understood and got inscribed into the workings of the modern nation. And in order to understand this as part of a historical process it is significant to look at the Constituent Assembly Debates- a work that documents the making of the nation step by step. What is especially significant is how

this assembly was made up of scheduled caste representatives who came from a wide range of political affiliations and thus the way caste was articulated in relation to the making of laws and the reaction that some views might have received often reveals more than the law itself.

Conscious perhaps of the task they had at hand- the building of the nation- one finds that one of the most vociferous debates to have occurred in the assembly was on the subject of the Aims and Objectives of the Nation. A resolution moved by Jawaharlal Nehru, it enshrines the principles which were to guide the making of the nation and one of the most significant clauses of this Resolution was, the extension of rights and privileges it extended to the minority groups. It is this clause that gave rise to continuous debate and argument not only over its validity but also of how the minorities (seen here as the Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Sikhs, Anglo Indians and the Depressed Classes according to the May 16th Cabinet Resolution) were to be treated.

Given the history of how the nationalist movement developed, the minorities came to be seen in particular light in the Assembly. Thus, it was often assumed that they represented the interest only of their community, while 'nationalist' leaders represented those of the nation. Given this context, what was surprising was that often a history of oppression was what was used to cite the lack of commitment of the representatives of the minorities to the national cause. Drawing on a relation between oppressions, a member of the assembly, Hansa Mehta representing the Congress from Bombay, declared that the new nation would be one that would provide not just equality of status but also that of opportunity for women who have been hitherto oppressed; however in the same breath she also goes on to declare that as a member of an oppressed group and representing women, they unlike other minorities have never demanded for "privileges", i.e. reserved seats, quotas or separate electorates. While claiming that what they strive for is social, economic and political justice, she also claims that these should arise out of a spirit of "mutual respect ...and co-operation". This need to be seen as universal and as making 'equal' claims for citizenship is a decidedly modern turn. And it is precisely from here that the discomfort for acknowledging any difference stems. And it is in such a context that in spite of all members representing constituencies, it is those who are seen as

representatives of minorities who are seen as suspect because of the claims they will make on the nation.

Drawing from this it is interesting to also see the various ideological strains that are represented within the 'Depressed Classes' in the assembly, and the manner in which they recall a particular history for themselves; how they conceive of themselves has an effect on how they articulate and demand for their rights in this new nation.

The two most obvious fault-lines along which those from the Scheduled Castes fall are those who see themselves as part of the larger Hindu community and those who see themselves as completely distinct. Amongst the latter come also those who, no doubt borrowing heavily from earlier British studies, declared themselves as the original inhabitants of the land and thus saw not only the British but also Caste Hindus and Muslims as colonizers of the country. And it was in light of this that they demanded for rights for themselves as being the 'rightful' citizens of the nation.

For those who came within the first category- those who saw themselves as part of the larger Hindu community (largely Congress representatives), the 'depressed classes' were not technically to be considered as a minority group in the sense of other minorities as defined by the May 16th Cabinet Mission Plan i.e. largely seen as religious minorities. But rather they demanded that they be treated as "political minorities" who must not only be given adequate representation but also saw those such as Ambedkar who argued for the same as being anti nationalist in light of the previously concluded Poona Pact. In many ways drawing from Gandhi's politics such representatives were eager to point out that they were in fact talking of national interest and the building of a national community when they spoke of representation whilst staying within the folds of the larger Hindu community. Some of these representatives drew on resolutions passed to claim that its declaration of power residing and stemming from the people was a guarantee of the safe future that "Harijans" were to have in India. They went on to say that "harping on separatism" yielded little and the state of harijan's would not improve from the provision of constitutional safeguards but rather the "moral safeguard" that would come with the nation keeping them in mind (Gour, 1946).

In a similar vein discounting the Communist party's cry of giving the land to the tiller, a speaker (representing the Congress party) declared this as an appeasement tactic and claiming that the communists "take their inspiration from some outside quarter" (ibid) asked for the 'harijans' to come together with the nationalist forces of the country (Patesker, 1947).

While it is simple enough to understand that the Congress wanted to be seen and perhaps saw itself as a party that had the best interests of the Scheduled Castes at heart, it is interesting to note how it usurped for itself the title of a nationalist force. The implication of such an assertion therefore is also that all others are seen as anti-national. The hegemonic nature of the nationalist struggle is one that has been brought to the fore recently, especially within the sphere of dalit studies. They claim that by virtue of seeing the Congress at the helm of the nationalist struggle, all other alternative movements came to be seen as anti-nationalist in character; such an understanding also came to inform much academic understanding on the subject. Thus as Rege claims,

the nationalist labeling of the dalit discourse as anti-national, ideologically specific to certain castes or as emergent from the British policy of divide and rule resonated in the institutionalization of disciplinary knowledges in post colonial India. Dalit discourses was thus rendered as cultural, particularistic and therefore the other of 'universalistic' knowledge. (Rege, 2008: 328)

What is especially significant to note is how by perceiving and terming any lower caste assertion as emanating from the British policy of divide and rule, it is immediately seen as antagonistic to national interest. As mentioned earlier scholars such as Srinivas (British granting of privileges to lower castes as promoting "modern casteism"), and Ghurye too fell into the same trap, often conceiving of lower caste assertion as going against the interests of the anti-colonial movement¹¹. This was an

¹¹ Dirks claims in his work *Castes of the Mind* for instance that, "...only in the case of the scheduled castes did Ghurye approve of reservations and positive discrimination, *though he disapproved of*

issue that the scheduled castes in the assembly especially had to deal with, especially in terms of demanding representation. Given the history of the communal award granted by Ramsay McDonald and the ensuing Poona Pact, this had always been a contentious issue. In one of the sessions of the Assembly, a spokesperson from the Scheduled Castes demanded representation for the scheduled castes in a committee that was to be formed to decide on the representation of the Princely States in the assembly. The demand was voiced (by P.R.Thakur) on the grounds that States comprised of a large number of members of the “depressed class” and that the Negotiating Committee of the Assembly must therefore include scheduled caste members who could take into account the interests of these castes in the States and to negotiate a better representation for them. While some objected claiming that the Committee’s decisions would be validated by the assembly before being implemented and hence it did away with the need for direct representation on the Committee, largely objections were raised on the ground that there was no need for communal representation at all. Claims were also made that if it was granted to them, it would raise demands from other minority groups as well. This, in spite of the interjection from Muniswami Pillai, who claimed that the condition of the ‘Depressed Classes’ was the worst amongst the princely states. Giving the example of Cochin State, he claimed that the *Nayadi* community was discriminated against to the extent that not only were they deemed untouchable but also “unseeable”.

The trouble was that every time a demand for reservations was made it was almost always seen in the context of the demand for separate electorates that had come earlier. Constant efforts were made in the Assembly to reiterate the position of the Scheduled Castes as lying within the Hindu community. For most nationalists the entire saga of the separate electorates was borne out of the British ‘Divide and Rule policy’ and the vested interests of the minority community seen here as largely the Muslims. As Vallabhai Patel (1947) claimed once in the Assembly,

Since the introduction of separate electorates in this land there were two parties amongst the Muslims. One was the Nationalist

Ambedkar’s attempts to politicise caste around the untouchable movement and strongly supported Gandhi’s non-confrontational and assimilationist ideals.” (emphasis mine) Pg 279

Muslims or the Congress Muslims and the other the Muslim League members, or the representatives of the Muslim League.

The assumption of the Congress that they alone represented national interests meant that seldom were efforts made towards locating such demands in the political and social inequality that such groups might have faced. The demand for separate scheduled caste electorates too were seen as stemming from this British policy, and such was the vehemence against it that when there was a resolution moved in the Assembly claiming scheduled caste candidates must poll a certain percentage of votes (35%) from their own community i.e. scheduled castes it was immediately deemed as an attempt to get separate electorates introduced once again. The resolution was moved with the stated intention that it ensures that elected representatives from reserved seats enjoy the confidence of their community members and are not stooges put up by the majority community. Not only was this resolution dismissed it was actually ridiculed. But perhaps the most succinct and telling response against it was one which claimed that such a move was meaningless because scheduled caste voters could be easily bought and influenced and will not be able to resist such temptations to trade their vote because of their economically weak position (Velayudan, 1947). It is an interesting contention to make because in many ways it rings very similar to earlier demands that were made in European nations for restricting the right to vote to the propertied alone, not only because they had real stakes in the nation but also because the poor would be subject to easy manipulation to win their vote (Bendix, 1968). Nominally the Indian nation state was extending equal political rights to all but guided to a large extent by an understanding that saw the political position of the scheduled castes as compromised not just because of how it grew from British policies but also because of how their weak socio-economic position would limit their interests to themselves and not the nation. Seen as their interests tied into the community forever, the scheduled castes were thus seen as never fully partaking in the modern nation.

What is also interesting to note is that in the constitution of this committee (mentioned earlier) the members were largely upper class, upper caste Hindus¹² and Congress members. There was nothing to say, that such a committee could not have been made up of those representing different groups of the assembly. In fact B.G. Kher in response to the demand for such representation claimed that those who could think of the interest of British India and Indian India were represented on the Committee, and terming the demand for a scheduled caste member to be put on the committee as a communal demand. The point is that as opposed to recognising such claims as one for making up for inadequate representation, it was treated as a demand for special reservation, wherein a member would have to be added to the existing committee. Why such committees could not address themselves to the question of adequate equal representation of all was a question that did not seem to emerge.

This inadequacy of representation is one that was felt constantly by the scheduled castes. There is wide feeling amongst the dalit community that the Poona Act was in many ways an agreement that was forced out of them owing to Gandhi's fast. Ghanshyam Shah (2004: 111) citing Trilok Nath and Zelliott claims that the scheduled castes felt "politically cheated" and even staged demonstrations demanding their right to separate electorates especially in Maharashtra. Even the reservation they got within the Hindu electorate did not amount to much. Even those who saw the scheduled castes as part of the Hindu mainstream claimed that they got shorthanded with the Poona Pact, citing that the Muslim minority was given more seats in proportion to the population than them (Khandekar, 1947), the claim being that accommodation for Muslim interests were made at the expense of Harijan seats within the Hindu electorate. But what is interesting to note is that the contention is not so much that these seats were given at the expense of the reserved seats for scheduled castes within the Hindu electorate but rather that they were given to Muslims. The speaker in fact claimed that the census data which showed the "Harijan" population as about forty million is wrong and that in fact they constitute close to 90 million people and that

¹² The members were (1)Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. (2)The Hon'ble Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, (3)The Hon'ble Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, (4)Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, (5)Mr. Shankarrao Deo, and (6)The Hon'ble Sir N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar. With the exception of Maulana Azad all were Hindus and Shankarrao Deo all were upper castes.

their reservation should be in proportion to their population strength. He also claimed that it was not enough to merely nominate a single member to a seat if no 'harijan' was elected. But he claimed a single seat is rendered incapable of usefully representing the interest of a large population and hence demanded adequate representation¹³.

This representative's speech (H.J. Khandekar) makes for an interesting read on several counts. First it provides an interesting alternative version of the problems of the Poona Pact. Although seemingly agreeing in principle with the position of not having separate electorates, he not only claims that the Poona Pact went against the interests of the scheduled castes, but does so while positing the scheduled castes as Hindus and while locating the problem with the Muslim minority interests. As mentioned before, the problem is not seen as one where Muslim reserved seats are ensured by handing out the seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes, but rather the problem is that Muslims are given more seats. For scholars who see Hindutva ideology's absorption of lower castes into its frame as a recent development, this speech proves to be an interesting development.

Citing the instance of the nomination of a single person even in provinces where they constitute "fifty percent population", he claims "It shows that the attention of the people has not yet been drawn towards us. Therefore whenever occasion arises attempts should be made to secure us representation according to our numerical strength. And then alone we can feel that you are doing something for us. If you want to satisfy us, by giving one or two seats that will not do." (ibid) This is a reflection of strong lower caste assertion, highlighting the blindness of insight that informs people's view on the subject of reserved seats by pointing to not only the lack of seats within the joint electorate, the appropriation of scheduled caste seats, the inadequacy of single seat nominations in the event of not winning an election, but most importantly points out the significance of numerical strength and asks for seats in

¹³ Interestingly the representative of the 'adivasis' - Jaipal Singh - never relied on an argument of numeric strength to demand reservation but instead claimed the social and economic backwardness of the tribals to pitch an argument for reservation for them.

proportion to the population¹⁴. But does so, while seeing its principle political rival as the Muslims, and allies itself with the majority Hindu community. To a large extent because of caste and here lower caste problems get articulated, the problem of caste is seen as being one of the issue of untouchability alone. And it is precisely because of this, that one finds national leaders such as Govind Ballabh Pant (1947) claiming in their address to the Assembly-

We find that in our own country we have to take particular care of the Depressed Classes, the Scheduled Castes and the - Backward classes. *We have to atone for our omissions--I won't use the word commissions.* We must do all we can to bring them up to the general level and it is a real necessity as much in our interest as in theirs that the gap should be bridged. The strength of the chain if, measured by the weakest link of it and so until every link is fully revitalised, we will not have a healthy body politic. (emphasis mine).

Caste constantly came to be seen as not posing a problem in its inherent formation and structure but only in the condition that had *befallen* (as opposed to being seen as meted out) to the lower castes. In many ways then what actually occurred was that the “public critique of caste was transformed into a public critique of the ‘depressed’ and their place in the modern Hindu nation” (Bayly, 1999). Any public discourse on caste therefore at this point, with the exception of Ambedkar and certain other leaders (Ranadive, Lohia, Periyar etc) came to revolve around the subject of uplifting the ‘depressed classes’ (ibid: 181). While there were some within the dominant political groups who alluded to this problem, such as Promatha Ranjan Thakur from the

¹⁴ Significantly, Susan Bayly points out that the campaign to improve the conditions of the lower castes began at a time when Census data revealed that there was a decline in the Hindu population relative to the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. This was also relied on by lower caste representatives (S. Nagappa) in the Assembly to claim that adequate representation must be given to the scheduled castes whose numbers were seen as dropping after the 1931 census. Claiming the Census to be a product of “government machinery” that could not be tampered with, he claimed that it the population of the scheduled caste which was rising and that therefore it is the 1931 census data which should be utilized for determining the population and therefore the corresponding representation they would receive.

Congress, it rarely amounted to much. For instance, Thakur (1947) declared in the Assembly in response to the declaration of the abolishment of untouchability-

I do not understand how you can abolish untouchability without abolishing the very caste system. Untouchability is nothing but the symptom of the disease, namely, the caste system. It exists as a matter of caste system. I do not understand how this, in its present form, can be allowed to stand in the list of fundamental rights. I think the House should consider this point seriously.

However instead of contending that perhaps the law could be amended to abolish the caste system and its related practices, the suggestion made was-

Unless we can do away with the caste system altogether there is no use tinkering with the problem of untouchability superficially. I have nothing more to say. I hope the House will consider my suggestion seriously.

Furthermore, Thakur did not move this as an Amendment to the Interim Report on Fundamental Rights which sought the abolishment of the practise of untouchability. Interestingly, even though debate on the subject raged, especially on the grounds of whether the word 'untouchability' should be defined or not; given the wide meaning of both the word and practise in different regional contexts, it did not ultimately lead to a change.

It is therefore not surprising that this continues to the present within dominant ways of understanding caste. The mention of caste today in a political environment that masquerades as being a level playing field for all, is seen as being parochial and non-modern. Caste is only of those who are lower in the hierarchy and who constantly harp on it and who now draw it in democratic politics. As mentioned in the previous Chapter, Deshpande and John have pointed out how upper castes having secured their wealth, education etc drawing on their historically advantageous caste position, now sanitise themselves as 'modern classes'. In India today, it is believed there are only the upper *classes* and the lower *castes*.

CASTE AND DEMOCRATIC POLITICS AND THE CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO CASTE

This belief of their being upper classes and lower castes in India has translated into a acute discomfort with the notion that caste operates today quite actively in the sphere of democratic politics. Caste assertion in politics is not a new phenomenon. In South India the anti-caste movement started out much earlier compared to the North and was extremely strong. It translated into the establishment of a party with similar aims; the Justice party, its transformation into the Dravida Munetra Kazigham etc was all a result of this. In the North the rise of such parties representing the lower castes took place relatively late compared to the South but from the 1950's onwards the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party marked a significant change in the political terrain of Uttar Pradesh. But caste in politics has not always been about its manifestation through such parties that explicitly base themselves on representing lower castes alone. Caste has been a significant factor that has informed politics because of its being embedded in the social structure. It always has been a political institution and as such carried on its role into the ambit of democratic politics. The difference that comes with parties such as the DMK, BSP etc is their explicit association with caste. For a nation that convinced itself that it had rid itself of the practices of the institution of caste with the abolishment of untouchability and the creation of the modern nation state, the 'appearance' of caste in politics seemed to highlight plague those who saw this as being new and non-modern.

In light of this it is also important to take note of an emerging contemporary approach to studying caste, especially lower caste assertion through democratic politics. Scholars such as Jafferlot, Pai, Kumar and Rege are just some of those whose work has been informed by a marked shift in how they come to see caste. Making a decisive move away from the view of caste as being restricted to its ritual aspect alone, these works look at the rise and operation of caste through regional parties that specifically represent lower caste interests but do so while locating caste as being a decidedly political institution. Furthermore, as opposed to earlier views such approaches to the study of caste make a break with the structural-functionalist approach which rarely interrogated the caste system as one marked by conflict, power and oppression. In fact Carol Upadhyia (2007) makes an interesting argument when

she claims that it was the structural functionalists explaining the logic of caste in terms of its earlier functionality, who came to be obsessed with the idea of the breakdown of caste with the coming of modernity. In marking out a different political and therefore theoretical position from the structural functionalists the contemporary work on caste does not seem preoccupied with this idea of the 'resurgence' of caste under the modern state. Rather, seeing it as a relation of power it can examine the conditions that marked the change in how caste now operates. This section uses such contemporary approaches to study the operation of caste in electoral politics today.

The 'problem' of caste in democratic politics is articulated in many ways in a similar manner to the critique on enumerating caste. As mentioned before, it is believed that acknowledging its presence within processes and institutions that are part of the modern democratic state is tantamount to perpetuating casteism. Part of this problem is that as mentioned before, history lends itself in favour to those who have enjoyed a socio-politically advantageous position of being from the upper castes and therefore do not have to overtly express caste. Therefore the domination of upper castes within the leadership of major national and at times regional level parties never raises questions or eyebrows but a demand for equal representation or the emergence of parties based on lower caste representation is immediately read as a 'harping on caste'. But what is critical to understand and necessary to point out is that when claims are made that either enumeration of caste or demanding entitlements based on caste raise caste consciousness instead of diminishing it (as part of being modern) and lead to heightened caste patriotism it is important to make the claim that caste mobilisation of the kind we are being warned against is precisely what has led to some sort of lower caste representation in politics, especially in North India, which did not see any sustained anti caste movement during the colonial period. Here it was only when parties such as CSP (Congress Socialist Party), SSP (Samyukta Socialist Party) and later the SD (Soshit Dal) emerged that the Congress which had otherwise dominated the political scene was forced to acknowledge the presence of such lower caste groups (even if it was to eventually co-opt them) ensuring at least some amount of lower caste representation.

In the first few decades or so after independence, what was noted was the rise of parties such as the BSP which drew support from a small percentage of the lower

castes who had reaped the benefits of reservations, as well as drew support from the trade unions of government companies, in many ways the lower middle class of Uttar Pradesh. Such parties positioned themselves exclusively as political parties not as grass root movements seeking a radical transformation of the system (Pai, 2005). Further, as Jafferlot points out, as Jafferlot (2003) points out in Uttar Pradesh there also came to emerge a *kisan* politics around the caste of *Jats*. The point to note here is that while politics centered around parties and those especially that seek to represent certain caste groups was seemingly prevalent it would also be critical to take note of the fact that such politics was not based on caste representation alone. The *Jats* for instance, seen as one of the most dominant caste groups in North India, constitutes only around 1.2% of the population in Uttar Pradesh. If such parties were to function in democratic politics they necessarily had to follow its logic of establishing numeric majorities. Representing a single caste group seldom affords such an advantage especially given a situation where every caste bifurcates into a multitude of sub castes. And thus much of this politics is based on striking alliances with other groups in society. The need thus even for parties such as the BSP to strike alliances with the 'brahmins' thus is an instance of how such representation of caste in politics is an extremely complex issue. To this extent, scholars such as Kothari (1965) have seen this acting out of caste and its process of forming alliances as part of the process of the 'secularisation of caste'.

As mentioned before, this process of caste playing an overt role in electoral calculations is one that is seen as being problematic, the assumption being that there should be no place for primordial formations like caste in modern politics. What guides such an assumption is that with the coming of modernity it is ideologies such as nationalism that must take root. And as a result the assumption is also made that the nationalist movement in India made attempts to establish such an ideology that was free from any mooring in such pre-modern structures such as caste. But as mentioned before, this development did not take place in India. The nationalist movement, for which the Congress assumed itself a place of leadership, did not make any break with caste. Not only was its own leadership made up of high caste members but also that in their politics they did not seek a break with the system.

A prime example of this is the anti *begari* struggle that occurred in the United Provinces. Here lower castes successfully mobilised to protest against *begari* and combined with other peasant agitations, but the Congress instead of extending support in fact prioritised the Non Cooperation Movement over it and asked for restraint on the part of agitators (Pai, 2002). Unable to secure the support of the Congress the movement eventually subsided. On the one hand this can be read as an instance of the Congress prioritising the national over issues of caste interest, a project of modernity so to speak. But this would be an incomplete understanding because it does not take into consideration the socio-political context of the nationalist movement. As mentioned in the previous chapter as well, given that the nation did not experience a bourgeois revolution, the bourgeoisie continued to remain weak in the face of the continuing strength of groups such as landlords. For the nationalist movement which drew support from and was composed of this bourgeoisie it was important to maintain alliances with the landed groups in society. Here what is significant to note is that alliances were not struck with the feudal order because of caste i.e. in that those who made up the feudal order and the bourgeoisie came from the same caste, but rather that the bourgeoisie could not give support to such assertions from the lower castes because it would upset the interests of the feudal order (Ranadive, 1979).

It is in light of this that Javed Alam (1994) claims that “Without reference and close attention to the content of socio-economic transformation, modernisation becomes an empty concept.” Alam claims that as opposed to seeing modernisation as process that seemed to enliven primordial formations such as caste in India and instead of seeing its operation in democratic politics as a stage in its ultimate democratisation it is important to note that modern processes of nationalism never sought to overcome such formations. In a similar vein to Ranadive he claims that the nationalist movement tried to “build coalitions of mass support upon them (institutions of caste)”. This was not always successful as he notes with the anti-caste movement in Madras, Maharashtra and the *Namasudra* movement in Bengal but it did work for the most part. The thrust of his argument is that retarded capitalism, as it took place in India, did not have the strength to either demolish pre-capitalist formations such as caste or even form new ones of its own. And therefore it became imperative to the survival of such capitalism to rely on and make use of such formations for its own

sustenance and to maintain its domination. Caste in such a scheme was bound to continue and assume new forms but not change fundamentally in its character.

CASTE AND GENDER

This chapter has sought to focus on the articulation of caste in India, especially given that for a large part this understanding of caste came mediated through the colonial experience and discourse on the subject. The previous sections of this chapter have elaborated on the manner in which caste came to be conceived of and expressed within different spheres. While this expression took place at times in extremely problematic idioms, the point is that ultimately it did find some space for articulation. However there has been one sphere which has not seen much articulation and has suffered from this silence; that is of gender. Here a study of the way in which gender relations both effect and are affected by caste have come to be acutely sidelined. The implications of this silence on the subject of caste and gender have been serious not only in terms of the practice of academics but also politics. But perhaps most significantly those who have suffered from this limited articulation on the subject have been those who find themselves as lying on the crossroads of both.

Caste and gender have often shared a troubled relationship with the result that often caste movements have tended to ignore the women's question and women's movements have disregarded the question of caste. Further this disregard for one another comes often with a tacit acknowledgement of recognising a 'possible' link between the two. For those who lie at the cross-section of these two kinds of related forms of oppression, this ignorance has proved dangerous. It has in turn, lead to a spurt of activism and academics on the subject that either reduces the question of gender within caste to the domain of the caste as community, or gives greater weight to the question of gender over caste, arguing that caste similar to any other community may relegate the women's question. Thus between the tussle that ensues over dalit studies/movement and the women's movement/studies, this particular location of the lower caste woman, who lies at the centre of two systems of oppression that borrow heavily from one another and are not just linked to one another but are fundamentally interrelated, comes to be severely neglected. Citing Pradnya Daya Pawar, Rege points out to this dangerous trend, where what has often

happened especially in Maharashtra is that both the Ambedkarite and feminist movement come to treat the position of the dalit feminist with much suspicion. For many in the Ambedkarite movement drawing attention to patriarchy within the community is seen as an act of being inspired by Western individualism. For those in the mainstream feminist movement, a claim by dalit women as being *dalit*, is treated as an act of prioritizing the community over “their own issues” and thus they come to see them (dalit women) as the “‘other’ of modern and feminist” (emphasis mine) (Rege, 2008). Here the dalit feminist may find that either movement which may in principle seek to address their question cannot or does not do so. What is especially significant is once again this relation to modernity that is betrayed; at one end lies a view that sees such as women as borrowing from western modernity too uncritically, while the other sees them as being antagonistic to modernity.

The ignorance of this subject of gender and caste and within it not looking at dalit feminist movements and writings has meant that it has dulled our engagement with the subject of caste and modernity. Especially in the context of Maharashtra which comes with a heavily laden history of both anti-caste movements and colonial modernity, it would prove fruitful to look at those who have engaged with both.

In recent times, the upsurge of Dalit women’s autobiographies has carved out a space that avoids the traps of either position- pitting gender over caste or caste over gender. Moreover they have remained steadfastly modern, while moving against the position of the assumed ‘I’ that owes its beginnings in many ways to bourgeois individualism (ibid). Thus while continuing with the first person narrative, such autobiographies negotiate the border that demarcates the individual from the community, to place the dalit woman as squarely in the middle of both. Further such works are seen as generating “... the potential to create a space for dialogue and debate on the dynamics of intersectionality of axes of oppression and thus makes clear the pitfalls of either a hasty opposition or fusion between dalit studies and women’s studies” (ibid: 325). But as Rege notes one of the most significant advantages of understanding the interrelation between gender and caste and locating such an understanding from a dalit feminist perspective is that it affords us the advantage of moving away from the “dominant disciplinary understanding of caste”- (as mentioned earlier) the ideological system of varna divisions, guided by the principle of purity-pollution. For Rege,

testimonios of the kind of 'Weave of My Life' provide one with a clear basis of understanding how the power that underscores caste informs the material exclusion that forms the structure of caste and is part of the very practice of caste.

But perhaps most significantly the interrelation between caste and gender helps to interrogate what it is that we see as constituting the modern. The relation that particular movements have drawn to modernity (especially the women's movement) and their subsequent view of treating any claim to 'community' as parochial and non-modern is especially problematic in the context of caste. In a situation where lower caste women have had to face oppressions that were driven by the systems of caste and patriarchy, so that even the right to wear clothes was a hard won struggle¹⁵, it is absurd to assume that they would not locate, not just experiences of oppression, but also their identity out of which is borne such oppression in the context of caste. Given this history, to understand patriarchy as a system of power that was merely superimposed over caste is completely fallacious and leads to assumptions such as those mentioned above- where contextualising oppression is seen as harking to the idea of community and therefore non-modern in its privileging the community over the individual. It is no wonder that such women always felt excluded from the larger mainstream women's movement which seemed to have no place for any articulation of caste within it. This ignorance of caste in the movement in some ways also reflects on the composition of such movements.

While some attempt had been in the other direction, i.e. dalit movements to look at the women's question, there too it did not yield much. The Dalit Panthers for instance in their definition of Dalit, claimed that all women were Dalits since they had come to be oppressed by the system in some way or another. While this was huge shift in thought, marking the beginning of theoretically opening up the notion of oppression, to see the relatedness of different kinds of oppression, it did not actually move beyond the mere stating of it. Not only was there limited activism and politics practices on the

¹⁵ Lower caste women especially in South India were denied the right to cover their upper bodies. The Nadars for instance took their Nair landlords to court over the issue and despite the court ruling in their favour had to wage a long struggle before that right could actually be enjoyed by them.

question of patriarchy and caste but also theoretically little attempt was made in this direction. Perhaps the most telling example of this would be to look at what happened with the literary movement that emerged from the movement. While dalit literature was being hailed for the radical departure it was making from earlier forms of writing, female writers found that their only way for them to be heard was to organise *separate* dalit literary conferences for female writers. There has also been a tendency thus within the dalit movement to put the women's question on a backburner seeing it as more vital and crucial to tackle with the question of caste and in this caste the dalit community first. Thus in many ways they made the same mistake as several academicians and activists alike, of not treating the two as related questions that can only be resolved together but by prioritising one over the other.

Further in their collective misunderstanding about the relation between caste and patriarchy, modernity has come to play a curious role. What is especially interesting to note is how (as Rege points out) lower castes are not seen as producers of modernity, but merely as recipients or consumers of it. And it is this idea of modernity, as she argues that comes together with the notion of the nation to dispel caste from the political sphere and where any claim to caste is seen as "casteism".

CONCLUSION

The main argument of this chapter has been to look at the articulation of caste across certain terrains- academics, the conception of the nation-state and democratic politics. Through all of this an attempt was made to understand how caste has been conceived of and understood and to what end this served. Through such a study it was sought to highlight that caste and its relation to modernity continued to remain a misunderstood one. Specifically the relation of lower castes to modernity was seen as one where they remained, as Rege claims, as consumers of modernity. If the nationalist movement and the making of the nation state were seen as exercises of modernity then the lower castes were seen to have played a limited role in it and were seen as largely recipients of dole outs that the modern state now deemed them fit to receive because of their retarded socio-economic position in society. And it is based on such an understanding that the assertion of parties representing the interests of lower castes is seen as

promoting casteism in politics. Caste in politics is not always caste politics although sometimes it can be so.

The point to note however is that this particular understanding of caste and politics makes the two fundamental mistakes of seeing the nationalist movement, the nation state and present day national parties as being modern in that they rose above caste concerns and consequently see any assertion of caste as being casteist. This chapter not only highlights an argument against such an assumption but also tries to show that lower caste groups have often had a very interesting relation with modernity, one that they often gained access through colonial sources of it, and as such not only 'consumed' modernity but also actively produced it. The next chapter which details the understanding of modernity within academics in India shows how flawed assumptions led to flawed conclusions and how alternatives to, and kinds of modernity always existed.

CHAPTER IV

THE OTHER SIDE OF INDIAN MODERNITY

The last two chapters broadly mapped the terrain of studies on caste in India. Further, it also engaged with the notion of the articulation of caste across spheres such as that of academics, the making of the nation-state etc. It has been attempted through the tracing of such a historical trajectory of how caste was understood to pin point what it was about caste and the larger understanding pertaining to it that led to a rather widespread belief that caste would disappear with the coming of modernity, or to its polar opposite viewpoint that caste was enlivened through the forces of modernity.

This chapter will seek to tie in the arguments of the last two, by arguing that modernity in India has had the misfortune of being incorrectly accessed and understood. As a result of this, an entire section of people who modernized and whose process of modernisation had a tremendous political impact came to be erroneously neglected in the course of academic investigation on the subject. Furthermore, political leanings of the scholarship have often come to determine for long who came to be seen at the forefront of modernity and who was not.

For far too long much of academic interest on the subject of modernity has either been restricted to Gandhi's view on the subject or been caught up in debating either for or against Srinivas's conceptual notion of Westernisation that described the process of modernisation for the upper castes of India. This chapter will instead seek to lay out an argument now emerging strongly from Dalit scholars, that what has often come to be ignored is the impact of such modernity on the lower castes of the country and how this modernity contributed to the emergence of an anti-caste movement. Further through this chapter, I will also seek to locate theorists of modernity; some of whom have been acknowledged before (such as Ambedkar) as well as several others who have been given only little attention in terms of their contribution to the development of an Indian modernity. Of these B.T. Ranadive and Ram Manohar Lohia seem especially significant because of their astute judgment on how the politics of caste will play out as well as on an assessment of what was happening to caste under the

impact of modernity. This chapter will thus seek to lay out the field for observing a side to Indian modernity that has been largely neglected until recently.

‘TRADITIONAL’ SOURCES OF INDIAN MODERNITY

This section will elaborate on the sources of Indian modernity that are invoked whenever modernity in India is discussed. These two concepts (and sources) are that of Westernisation and Sanskritisation. Coined and developed by M.N.Srinivas, these two concepts have found wide currency in academics and have been considered as fundamental concepts to the understanding of changing caste behaviour and social mobility.

SANSKRITISATION

The inclusion of the concept of Sanskritisation within the sources of modernity however requires some explanation, as it has largely been understood as an attempt of lower castes to imitate the lifestyle of the upper castes in terms of what is constituted as traditional behaviour. A change in a caste group’s lifestyle pattern as understood through Sanskritisation is usually one articulated through a change in practices such as the consumption of meat, alcohol etc. Its idiom has therefore always been one of tradition and thus its inclusion within modernity can seem perplexing. The argument however for including it within the gambit of modernity is two fold. If modernity can be defined as a way of rationally and scientifically looking at the world and explaining it, then Sanskritisation can be understood as an attempt of lower castes to rationally understand their position within a caste hierarchy and seek to make changes that would allow for mobility within such a hierarchy. Sanskritisation to that extent can be understood thus as a move towards modernity. This is not merely a notional change; claims to sanskritisation are only possible and built on a change in the material position of a caste. This is an argument made by Srinivas as well when he says that it is when a caste begins to improve its economic position that it seeks to bolster its claims for a better social status through the means of the process of sanskritisation.

Economic betterment, the acquisition of political power, education, leadership, and a desire to move up in the hierarchy, are all relevant factors in Sanskritisation, and each case of Sanskritisation may show all or some of these factors mixed up in different measures. (Srinivas, 1962: 57)

Yogendra Singh however makes an interesting point when he claims that as a process of structural change, Sanskritization can be seen as a way of modernising, albeit in a disguised way. He claims that in many ways the direction of change that the motive force of sankritization nudges lower castes into is one of modernisation.

...Sanskritization is in fact a disguised form of modernisation; its foundations lie in the same structural soil which given proper conditions would lead to not merely emulation of the customs of the upper castes but also the adaptation of their other practices in the spheres of political initiative, economic enterprise and quest for modern education and developmental innovations. (Singh, 1994: 57-58)

According to Singh then the only reason that such lower castes do not directly modernise is due to the presence of “structural bottlenecks”, because of which certain sources of mobility lie closer to them than others.

Such a view though is similar to Srinivas’s who saw primarily the upper castes as being able to westernise due to their structural position which afforded them the possibility of doing so. This completely fails to look at how missionary schools, the army etc also granted opportunities to the lower castes to modernise and establish new patterns of modernity for themselves.

Second, what is being argued here is that the fact of a caste changing its behaviour can be understood in terms of a rejection of the norms of the caste system and its prescribed code of behaviour. Thus, such a change in a caste’s behaviour can be read not as emulation but alternatively as a rejection of the behaviour the caste system imposes on them. Thus a caste improving its position through a practice of giving up

meat can also be seen as a move away from the caste practice of being forced through circumstances to consume the meat of dead animals of the village owing to the fact that under the caste system it is the lowest castes, the untouchables who are seen as having to dispose off dead animals¹⁶.

Harold Gould alludes to this when he claims that one of the main reasons behind Sanskritisation is the factor of “repressed hostility” (Gould, 1988: 146). However what Gould argues is that this rejection is not of the caste system per se but is one where this rejection is manifested through victims trying to take control of the same terrain on which their discrimination has been played out. While Gould and Srinivas both make significant points in noting these changes, the problem lies in the fact that any change even when it is read as protest or dissent comes to be read within the framework of the caste system. It leaves little space for acknowledging the process of marking out changes in caste behaviour which were to be registered as a form of protest against the system, not within it. Significant in this regard is Ambedkar who implored the lower castes to give up the practice of meat eating since it ultimately confined them to their caste occupation of disposing of the carcasses. Especially with respect to the anti caste movement then it is imperative to look at the process of changes in caste behaviour differently.

The point being made is that it requires a more nuanced study before such a change is recorded as sanskritisation. It is also likely that a caste with no history of political participation in the anti-caste movement made attempts to improve their socio-economic position by giving up forced practices that were unhealthy for them (consuming carcasses, for instance, especially when the cause of death of the animal was not known). In this regard, it can be considered that an improvement in their

¹⁶ This is notwithstanding the fact that often for several lower castes meat was the only source of protein they had access to and could afford. But reaching a better economic position also meant that they could now afford nutritious food without the social stigma of eating a dead animal. What is to be noted here is that the meat the lower castes consumed was one of an animal that died in the village and not one that is killed for the explicit purpose of consuming it. Thus being non vegetarian within a rigid caste system that operates in a hierarchical village economy is very different from that of a different locale where caste gets articulated differently such as a small town or city.

economic position afforded to these castes the ability to use resources previously denied. They could purchase better food, gain access to water, all of which would have a direct bearing on their lifestyle since much of caste specific behaviour is based on a denial of these resources to the lower castes. Associations of purity and pollution are often rooted in very specific material conditions which force lower castes to remain in conditions that are then deemed polluting. Of course this necessitates if not a renaming of the concept to acknowledge such differences, then at least the creation of a separate term for it.

Yogendra Singh in this regard put forward the idea of de-sanskritisation, where lower castes reject the notion of sanskritization and hence the cultural symbols of the upper castes. He claims that such attempts at de-sanskritisation usually occur when the caste has gained economic strength but is also mobilizing itself politically. In such a scenario, emphasizing on the caste identity according to Singh becomes of prime importance and this is often done by highlighting the difference with the upper castes. The point is that this notion of de-sanskritisation must not be confused with the argument being made above. The two modes of protest are explicitly different. Further, the argument made above even makes a difference from Gould's claim on protest occurring within the caste system. To reiterate, de-sanskritisation refers to move by a caste group to explicitly mark out their difference from upper castes by highlighting their lower caste identity, Gould's conception of sanskritization is one where lower castes attempt to emulate the upper castes in order to show their hostility to a system that has previously denied them the lifestyle of the upper castes. The argument made by the author, however, is that it is possible to read a move towards a change in lifestyle otherwise restricted to the upper castes as a mode of protest without seeing it as located within the caste system. To see it as one either emulative of the upper castes in protest or merely as emulative in nature, has the fallout that it fails to understand the caste system as being also driven and informed by a control over strategic material resources. To this extent then a lot of what has been sociologically defined as sanskritisation could in fact be a move in the direction of modernity.

But the point also remains that to the extent that Srinivas and even scholars such as Gould conceived of it- as a way of changing status *within* the caste system - it still

can be seen as a modern process in that it identifies and modifies exactly those practices that contribute to its lowly position; thus it can be seen as a modern process whose language is one ensconced in tradition.

WESTERNIZATION

Along with Sanskritisation one of the most widely accepted concepts in sociology has been that of the process of westernization. Developed by Srinivas it highlights the process through which the upper castes were able to exploit the resources made available to them through the coming of colonial modernity. An English education, possession of the social and economic capital which enabled relocation to cities where the modern economy was centered meant that they were able to gain employment with the administrative services, as clerks in companies etc.

But perhaps one of the most neglected facts with respect to the whole process of westernization has been that of the relation of dalits to it. In many ways this captures what has happened within the sphere of an academic engagement on the subject of dalits and their relation to modernity. This misunderstood relation that the lower castes have shared with modernity has meant that for the most part their contribution to the creation of modern institutions or towards participation in a modern India remains undermined. As elaborated in this previous chapter, in terms of political activism as well as electoral participation, the fact that caste is used as an operative category and has been read as an instance of emphasizing on the community over the individual has meant that any claims made on the basis of caste have come to be treated as being the other of modern.

In this regard, much of the debate so far has been framed in a limited manner. As Rege claims,

Dominant articulations of the Indian-modern emerged from using older resources of power and privilege and newer ideas of politics and society. Modernity and nation were often mobilized not on to delegitimize caste from the domain of the political, but also to propose programmes for its amelioration under 'modern' brahmin leadership. Since caste has been rendered as the 'other' of modern,

dalits have often been understood only as consumers (often poor consumers) and rarely if ever as producers of modernity. (Rege, 2008: 342-43)

Thus for the most part (as will be elaborated later in this section), lower castes owing to their specific position in the caste hierarchy were seen as not in possession of resources which they could put to use in order to modernize, i.e. it was assumed that they didn't have the necessary social and economic capital to do so.

In Mysore State, for instance, the Brahmins led the other castes in Westernization. This was only natural as the Brahmins possessed a literary tradition, and, in addition, many of them stood at the top of the rural economic hierarchy as landowners... They were the first to sense the arrival of new economic opportunities following the establishment of British rule, and left their natal village for cities such as Bangalore and Mysore in order to obtain the benefit of English education, an indispensable passport to employment under the new dispensation. (Srinivas, 1962: 51)

Similar to this is Singh's contention that for several lower castes sanskritization was a disguised form of modernization, since the social structure didn't allow for a process of direct modernisation for them. Such a view contributed to the idea that the relation of lower castes to modernity always came mediated through the upper castes. It was thus only in the course of emulation that they took to modernising. But even when they did, the relation of dalits to modernity always seemed or at least was always treated as being compromised. In the course of the nationalist movement when the creation of an independent nation seemed of prime importance, dalits were criticized for their political stance. It was claimed that they prioritized the question of caste over that of the nation's interest. The entire separate electorate issue has been a thorn in the bush for both the dalits as well as the 'nationalist'. Later when the post-colonial state came into being, they were seen as beneficiaries of the state's policy towards them, owing to the policy of reservation that came to be followed. Dalits in this regard were seen as never really participating in the most definitive modern institution there was- the nation-state. Initially seen as a threat to the project of the

nation-state, later they were seen as busying themselves with dole-outs. It is in this context that Rege points out that Dalits have always been seen as consumers of modernity, in spite of the fact that the very sources of modernity that scholars such as Srinivas, Singh etc point out to are those that were also in some way available to the lower castes.

To Srinivas one of the prime factors involved in the Westernization of the Brahmins was their ability early on to gain access to an English education. This in turn allowed them to gain access to the new jobs that became available with the coming of colonial modernity. But a significant factor that has been ignored in this context is that this English education was also available to the lower castes. The presence of a larger number of missionary schools set up during this period meant that for a large number of children going to missionary schools they were subject to the same content and language of education that was available to the upper castes. In some sense this meant a certain democratisation of education. But the argument here is not to suggest that the upper and lower castes owing to a certain similarity in their education patterns lay in a similar position. It is true that the social capital that the upper castes possessed put them in a position to corner benefits arising out of this education. It is important to note that this source of westernization was available to the lower castes. Several of them did receive such an education, but there has been little work to look at what was the impact of such an education on them.

Furthermore, the army which had begun recruiting along the lines of castes early on (identifying them as martial races) allowed the lower castes to see a lifestyle very different from one they had seen in the villages- they saw a performance of colonial modernity in all its fanfare. Moreover, being in the army granted them a great deal of geographical and social mobility. This not only had an impact upon new recruits but also on subsequent generations and the caste as a whole given that such recruitment took place along lines of caste. M.S.A Rao argues that in some way the lower castes held a special relationship with the army. He claims not only was access to resources such as education and better jobs claimed through recruitment in the army but also asserts that in some cases it helped in pushing forward claims for a higher caste status as well, since being termed as a 'martial race' could be seen as equivalent to the status of a *kshatriya*. This is a contentious claim, since several lower castes that had

been termed as martial races and recruited in the Army rarely found a consequent improvement in their position within the caste hierarchy. However, this did not mean that there was no improvement in terms of their social position. Richard White (retrieved 2011) discussing the Mahars who served in the Indian Army from the 1750's onwards cites Eleanor Zelliot to claim how the influx of Mahars into the army helped the Mahars immensely – **“...benefits include "pay and pensions, access to education and/or specialized training, preferential access to employment, enhanced social status, and personal satisfaction."**

In fact this was a claim put forward by Ambedkar as well,

In the army of the East India Company there prevailed the system of compulsory education for Indian Soldiers and their children both male and female. The education received by the Untouchables in the army while it was open to them gave them one advantage which they never had before. It gave them a new vision and a new value. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their personality by the conning contrivances of the priest. They felt the shame of it as they had never done before and were determined to get rid of it. (Ambedkar, 1991: 189)

Furthermore, according to both Ambedkar and later Zelliot, this brush with the army laid the foundation for the political movement that was to take place within the Mahars. Ambedkar already alludes to this when he says that the lower castes realised that there was nothing inherently inferior about them after joining the army. But the point to note is also that along with the rise of such consciousness, being part of the army meant that the Mahars acquired skills and resources that were especially useful when it came to organizing themselves politically. White claims significantly that for being part of the army for Mahar soldiers meant that they had access to the British government and that retired military officers often lobbied for Mahar rights. It is therefore that scholars such as Zelliot claim that the history of the Mahars within the army may have been one of the prime factors for the emergence of the Mahar movement. She claims

...it was their entry into the British army which proved significant for the subsequent history of the Mahar movement. It is important to gauge this significance. It consists not in any automatic elevation in the social hierarchy through military service, which indeed is ruled out in a hierarchical system governed by considerations of ascriptive status and ritual purity. It rather consists in the fact that military service at such an early date exposed them to British institutions much before the dissemination of western culture took place on a large scale. Such an exposure socialized them sufficiently early to the new political order so that when new opportunities and alternatives became available, they were found prepared to use them more effectively than those groups which did not have this opportunity. (Zelliot, 1970: 31)

The quote above is almost startling in its similarity to Srinivas's conception of Westernization. Both Zelliot and Srinivas regard exposure to western institutions and a familiarity with the resources being made available through such institutions as being critical to the process of modernization. And yet it has been Srinivas's definition with his emphasis on the upper castes paving the way for modernization for the masses that has become almost hegemonic in academic understanding on the subject. Even when Srinivas acknowledges that lower castes may have had an early brush with modern institutions he does not see this as a significant enough factor to produce a change in the direction of Westernization .

Only a tiny fraction of the Indian population came into direct, fact-to-face contact with the British or other Europeans, and those who came into such contact did not always become a force for change. Indian servants of the British, for instance, probably wielded some influence among their kin groups and local caste groups but not among others. They generally came from the low castes, their westernisation was of a superficial kind, and the upper castes made fun of their Pidgin English, their absurd admiration for their employers, and the airs they gave themselves. Similarly, converts to

Christianity from Hinduism did not exercise much influence as a whole because first, these also came from the low castes, and second, the act of conversion often only changed the faith but not the customs, the general culture, or the standing of the converts in society. (Srinivas, 1966: 62)

As Pandian claims, Srinivas's argument appears almost teleological. It is driven by the notion that upper castes westernize and lower castes sanskritize. And based on this teleology comes the understanding, according to Pandian, that castes become "the 'other' of modern" (Pandian, 2002). Thus even in their attempts to modernize the lower castes never do quite succeed. Pandian extends his argument to say that by virtue of marking caste as the other of modern, any attempt at political organization on the grounds of caste came to be deemed as being as anti-national and arising out of the British policy of divide and rule. It is in light of this that he invokes Partha Chatterjee's argument on the tension between modernity and tradition by delegating modernity to the sphere of the material and tradition to that of culture. Pandian claims that while Chatterjee makes a significant point it is also important to note that what got constituted as the cultural-national in opposition to the colonial-modern led to the subjugation of a whole range of voices within the space of the national. He claims that instead of seeing it as an opposition between the colonial and the national, if we were to focus our attention on the space of the national alone and the myriad conflicts therein, we would be presented with a very different picture- one of exclusion, domination and discrimination. Not only does reclaiming of a past based on Vedic civilization push those who cannot participate in it, such as the lower castes, women, non-Hindus etc, to the periphery, but also the divide so crudely drawn between what constitutes material life and the cultural life of citizens, means that any articulation of caste in public is hastily termed as belonging to the cultural and therefore private sphere.

In fact Pandian claims that the only way in which caste finds any mention is in veiled references within a modern discourse on hygiene and sanitation. Here, the practice of untouchability comes to be justified through a sermon on the values of cleanliness, and the threat of diseases that arises out of interaction with the unclean. This modern discourse later changes its contours to condemn the practice of untouchability. But as

mentioned in the previous chapter, the entire debate on caste comes to rest on the question of untouchability alone. The entire system of hierarchy that lies at the foundation of it comes to be ignored. This is of course not an innocent mistake written into how the nationalist struggle proceeded. The question of caste was steadily ignored owing to political considerations. However with anti-caste movements on the rise and with it becoming increasingly difficult to ignore this question, the battle came to be waged against untouchability alone. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the caste system was never identified as the problem, the only issue with it came to be one of the condition some of its members found themselves in- that of untouchability and therefore as Bayly claimed, the **“public critique of caste was transformed into a public critique of the ‘depressed’ and their place in the modern Hindu nation”** (Bayly, 1999: 181).

Pandian in an extension of his argument of caste finding veiled references and justifications within a modern discourse claims that for the most part this was also done through a discourse on the division of labour in society. In fact this view point was one that gained much currency as a way to explain the caste system. Gandhi, who while being one of the most vocal opponents of untouchability continued to be someone who endorsed the *varnvyavastha*, claimed

Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. *Varna* and *Ashrama* are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of *Varna* teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. The callings of a Brahmin— spiritual teacher—and a scavenger are equal, and their due performance carries equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man. Both were entitled to

their livelihood and no more. Indeed one traces even now in the villages the faint lines of this healthy operation of the law...It would be wrong and improper to judge the law of *Varna* by its caricature in the lives of men who profess to belong to a *Varna*, whilst they openly commit a breach of its only operative rule. Arrogation of a superior status by and of the *Varna* over another is a denial of the law. And there is nothing in the law of *Varna* to warrant a belief in untouchability. (Gandhi cited in Ambedkar, retrieved 2011)

It is precisely because of this, the neat divide that was posited between the caste system and its *aberration*- untouchability- that generating any sort of political debate on the subject became very hard indeed. When the question of caste was raised, it came to be reduced to that on untouchability and the quick claim of a consensus on it seemed to leave very little space for creating a political engagement on caste as a system that needed to be obliterated.

The delegitimization of caste in politics is thus not a new phenomenon. The modern secular nation-state built on a notion of universal values as it was developed in the course of the nationalist struggle has never really allowed for the articulation of any kind of difference. It is perhaps therefore that when difference came to be stated, especially along the lines of communities (caste, religion etc), the nationalist movement and the post-colonial state had a very hard time grappling with it. It found that it had to straddle on one side a commitment to modern values of universality, individualism etc but at the same time acknowledge a difference between citizens and claims made by communities. Dealing with questions of universal citizenship, while acknowledging that marking out differences (and with it to take cognizance of a history of oppression) was imperative if it was to treat its citizens as equal was not something that had entered nationalist imagination in the course of the struggle for independence. A constant effort to reflect on these as issues not of immediate importance in the course of the movement meant that what occurred post independence was not a regeneration of sorts of such structures and identities but rather such differences got built into the nationalist movement, so that what

eventually comes into play with the coming of the post colonial state was not its regeneration but the continued existence of such structures.

In light of this it would be critical to ask whether we can identify theorists of an Indian modernity. The next section seeks to identify some of those who have critically analysed the context to locate and posit what can constitute such modernity and what it would look like. Of course the move to locate theorists of Indian modernity means that we have jumped ahead and assumed that there exists an Indian modernity. There has been wide amount of debate on the subject and there are those who continue to hold that the presence of caste in India is a definitive way of claiming that modernity has not penetrated beyond the surface here.

The thematic concern of this work and the thrust of the argument here has been to show that while there exists an Indian modernity and while such a modernity works along with structures of caste, it is imperative to understand the nature of the relationship between caste and modernity before we announce the demise of either one in India. In this regard it has been highlighted how such structures continue because they never witnessed an effort towards their demolition which was a process that occurred in Europe for instance with the coming of modernity. Thus this sense of shock, dismay over what people term as the persistence of caste, its play in politics etc in many ways comes from a borrowed imagination on what modernity is.

Rajni Kothari thus claims

Everyone recognises that the traditional social system in India was organized caste structures and caste identities. In dealing with the relationship between caste and politics, however, the doctrinaire moderniser suffers from a serious xenophobia... Those in India who complain of 'casteism in politics' are really looking for a sort of politics which has no basis in society. They also probably lack any clear conception of either the nature of politics or the nature of the caste system. (Many of them would want to throw out both politics and the caste system.) (Kothari, 1970: 4)

In fact what is interesting to note is how this sense of disappointment about caste by the doctrinaire modernist is articulated almost exclusively with reference to the overt presence of caste in politics today. Almost no one mentions dismay over the continuance of caste in the cultural life of people, except perhaps those who are at the receiving end of it, but then again they are never really seen as modern! The divide thus that Pandian refers to and which was drawn from the period of the nationalist struggle thus continues to date.

THEORISTS OF AN INDIAN MODERNITY

Having recognised the difficulty with which one works in precisely identifying the nature of the relationship between caste and modernity, it would be fruitful to look at some of those who have made some effort in this direction. These are people who were able to articulate through their politics and writing the nature of Indian society and identify reasons not for the *persistence* of caste, but rather for the reason that caste never came to be targeted as a structure in need of destruction and therefore its coeval existence with modernity.

Some of these theorists even if they aren't explicitly identified as so are recognised for their contribution to the subject. Amongst these are Ambedkar and Periyar whose life, works and politics has always been driven by such a nuanced and astute understanding of this relation between caste and modernity. While in no way belittling the efforts of these two stalwarts, this work will seek to focus on the work of other leaders of the nationalist movement who through their works have elaborated on the structure of caste, the working of modernity and through it have analysed the liaisons between the two.

This work will focus on two such scholars: B.T. Ranadive and Lohia. While both represented the left, one was a communist and the other a socialist. It could be claimed that identifying two theorists of modernity from the Left is a rather narrow view to take. But the reason for doing so is, for one, to reaffirm what has been highlighted through the last two chapters – that there is a need to bring caste outside of the domain of only the cultural, and therefore its ritual aspect and to recognise its

potency as a political, material structure. Second, the reason to do so is to look broadly at how it was that the Left dealt with the issue of caste. For long, it was claimed that the Left operating with categories of class did not adequately look into the question of caste in India. They were either seen as brushing aside the significance of it or were seen as claiming that with a class revolution these structures would also come to be dissolved. That caste may require a different lens to study it and that its role in the Indian scenario may complicate any argument on class was a viewpoint not attributed to them for a large part. And while this may have been true to an extent for the communist movement, it is also too easy a generalization to make. There were and are several scholars within the Left, who have constantly reinforced the idea that caste must be studied and that political action on class alone has little meaning in India. It is in light of this then, that it perhaps becomes necessary to look at scholars such as Lohia and Ranadive.

It is perhaps fruitful to begin with a brief biographical note on both Lohia and Ranadive to locate the context they came from as well as to establish the patterns of their political life. While both remained on the Left, as a member of the Congress Socialist party initially Lohia remained much closer to Gandhi in terms of their political agreement rather than Ranadive. However this is not to say that Lohia did not have his differences with the Congress; it culminated in him eventually leaving the fold of the Congress and writing against Nehru and his policies at several points of time. As a member of the Communist Party Ranadive opposed the Congress through several important political moments in the course of the nationalist struggle, the most significant of which was perhaps his and the party's opposition to the Quit India movement (Lohia on the other hand supported the movement).

But the point being is that it is not the case that in the course of making an argument for Lohia and Ranadive being theorists of modernity they must also necessarily be thought of in the same breath. Rather, what must be noted is that how in spite of their differences on a number of issues, their analysis of caste and modernity in India is of especial significance at a time when recent debates show us that both academic and political engagement on the subject hasn't been able to quite hit the nail on the head.

B.T. RANADIVE

Bhalchandra Trimbak Ranadive was born on 19th December 1904 in Mumbai. His father was a member of the Prarthana Samaj in Mumbai and had sympathies for the Congress and was supporter of Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

While neither of his parents were involved in active politics, the family retained a keen interest in politics and gradually Ranadive gained access to some Marxist literature (at that time banned in India) through a cousin who had gone abroad to study. Gaining a keen interest in the ideology he later sought out whatever literature he could find in Mumbai which in those days was hard to come by. Eventually he joined the Communist Party in 1928. In the course of the same year he met leaders of the textile workers and started working among them. In the same year he also began work on editing *Kranti*, a Marathi weekly (see Pandhe, retrieved 2011).

It was from here that Ranadive's early association with the trade union movement also began. In 1929 he was part of the textile strike called in Mumbai and was arrested while addressing workers. Subsequently upon his release he also came into contact with the railway workers movement. As a member of the Communist Party, Ranadive maintained a strong link with the trade union movement in the country. In some ways this allowed him to reflect on the problems of caste which he saw as seeping into the trade union movement as well.

But perhaps one of his most significant contributions besides his political work has been in the way he has theorised the relation between caste and class in India while establishing its historical context. As a participant of the nationalist struggle, he was a keen observer of the manner in which caste came into play and was sidelined during such politics.

His writings are of interest thus because of how he is able to combine his observation with a sense of history to use it to understand not only the problem of caste but of how anti-caste struggles and agitations must acknowledge the workings of economic systems that sustain caste in India. Much like Lohia then, his work, while calling for a need to pay attention to caste, also takes note of the fact that while a politics based on this is of absolute importance it also imperative that it be recognised as a step in

the direction of an eventual democratisation of society that would see the collapse of such identities.

RAM MANOHAR LOHIA

Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, was born on 23 March 1910 in Faizabad district in Uttar Pradesh. His father, Hira Lal was a Congress worker, and thus Lohia was exposed to the politics of the nationalist movement at an early age. In 1924, while still in school, he attended the Congress session as a delegate. From the time he was in college, he began to be involved in political activity the first of which was the students' procession he led against the visit of Simon Commission in 1928. In 1934 the Congress Socialist Party was formed within the Indian National Congress. He was soon elected a member of its national executive committee and edited '*The Congress Socialist*'. He left the Socialist Congress in March 1948. In the following year he became the first President of Hind Kisan Panchayat. As a part of this he developed a thirteen-point programme for the welfare of exploited people. Amongst this the suggestion to balance the prices of agricultural and industrial goods and imposition of land ceilings were critical.

In 1952 the Socialist Party merged with Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party to form Praja Socialist Party. Lohia remained its general secretary till 1959. In 1956, he began editing a journal called *Mankind* that included work on socio-political issues. In the 1962 general elections Lohia contested against Jawaharlal Nehru but lost the election.

Similar to Ranadive, Lohia's political work brought him in close association with the peasants and working class. Caste came to play a significant role in how he came to understand the problems of the peasantry and working class. Furthermore, along with Ambedkar and Periyar he was one of the few scholars to write on the subject of caste and patriarchy and the need for any struggle on caste and class to simultaneously attack the basis of patriarchy.

UNDERSTANDING CASTE, COMPREHENDING MODERNITY

In the first chapter, we briefly examined the debate that had emerged around the subject of the enumeration of caste in India after a period of roughly eighty years. The reason for doing so was to see how reactions against the caste enumeration exercise most often stem from a sense of anxiety about the presence of a primordial identity of caste in a modern nation state. In the following chapters an attempt has been made to elucidate on why the relation between caste and modernity is one wrought with such anxiety. As has been mentioned much of this is based on a two fold assumption, first, that caste served a purpose and function in society at a particular point of time (read as either the division of labour, resources, maintenance of social order etc) and second, that with the coming of modernity, such identities will be destroyed owing to the incompatibility of such pre-modern structures with those of modernism.

It is in light of this that we look to Ranadive and Lohia as theorists of modernity in India because of how they have been able to move beyond such simplistic and politically potent ideas such as those elaborated above. As a result of which, they were able to locate caste as a structural problem which required the destruction of the structure as a solution, as opposed to the increasing tendency within the period of the nationalist movement to see it as one of identity alone and to therefore target it through a call for the removal of the practise of untouchability. In fact it was because caste came to be seen as devoid of an underlying structure that anti-caste movements came to be seen as anti-national for prioritizing the caste identity over that of the national.

As Ranadive points out then political encounters with the caste system took the form of “revivalism and compromise”. The anti-imperialist struggle and the rising bourgeoisie (which also overlapped with each other to a large extent) in their efforts to deal with caste, slipped either into a complete rejection of any change or harked back to the idea of an earlier conception of caste- one which was better, based

implicitly on the idea that it served some purpose¹⁷. He cites Gandhi as an example of someone who in spite of his attack on untouchability remained a believer in this revivalist outlook. To Ranadive what was critical was that as a mass leader of a struggle against imperialism, this political position that Gandhi took had a great impact. He claims,

...it was clear that with this revivalist outlook, with this delinking of the anti-caste struggle from the anti-imperialist struggle, caste distinctions would continue to survive. (Ranadive, 1979: 338)

He further goes on to assert that the growth of such an ideology of revivalism and compromise is one that is not borne only out of a sense of caste affiliation. He claims instead that it should be seen as the “**surrender of the modern intelligentsia before the indigenous feudal land relations...**” (ibid: 338) and it was this according to him that sustained the caste system in India. This was a pointed observation to make since it helped explain why the policies and politics of the nationalist movement dominated by the Congress to a large extent operated in almost a schizophrenic manner professing support to the feudal land order and the peasantry while retaining its support from the industrial bourgeoisie. In a scenario where industrial growth in India was retarded because of the economic policies of the colonial state, the industrial bourgeoisie of the country were still very weak. The Congress thus found itself relying increasingly for support on the propertied feudal class of the country. The fact that feudalism incorporates within it the caste system, so that the landless labourers and the poor peasantry come from the lower castes while the landlords form the upper castes, meant that it became increasingly hard for the Congress to take on the caste system in a direct attack. At the same time, especially by the time of Gandhi’s advent within the Congress it was realised that they required to build a mass movement, none of which could be done unless they roped in the peasantry, workers etc. From here stemmed the policy of walking on the line, so that while they

¹⁷ It is critical to take note of Ranadive’s point especially since the previous chapters and sections of this chapter have been an exercise in noting how this point of view continues to dominate even an academic understanding on caste.

extended support to peasant movements against the state, any move that directly hit upon the *zamindar*'s or the capitalists found condemnation. Ranadive cites a Congress Committee resolution in 1922 which came at a time of a large number of peasant struggles in the United Provinces which declares,

The Working Committee advises Congress workers and organisations to inform the ryots that withholding of rent payments to zamindars is contrary to the Congress resolutions and injurious to the best interests of the country. The Working Committee assures the zamindars that the Congress movement is in no way interested to attack their legal rights, and that even when the ryots have grievances, the Committee decides that redress be sought by mutual consultation and arbitration.(ibid: 338)

There was thus limited political commitment to the agrarian issue in India. Further, the Congress buckling under the pressure of capitalists such as Birla and others, also took an extremely anti-labour stand with the introduction of the Bombay Trade Disputes Act (Sarkar, 1983: 362) that imposed tough penalties on striking workers¹⁸.

Part of this hardened stand towards the poor peasantry and workers also stemmed from the belief that the caste system in India had little to do with any production-relation system at work. Seen as it was as part of a religion alone, restricted to a ritual role it played in the lives of the people, as Ranadive claims, to many social reformers simply disapproving of the system seemed enough. And it was because of this that no attempt was made to locate its basis, its structure, in a pre-modern society or one that was now increasingly coming under the force of capitalism.

However as mentioned before in order to build a wide based mass movement it became imperative for the Congress to take note of the question of caste in a more engaging manner. Ranadive thus claims that in order to make their policy to caste more in tune with the democratic values they professed for the nation, they made some changes, although they remained largely superficial. Thus as opposed to earlier,

¹⁸ Significantly, Sarkar notes that Nehru except for his criticism of the registration clause of the act, otherwise thought the Act to be a good one.

they spoke now of the equality of castes. The cry for the abolition of caste however still came from limited quarters, but not theirs.

In spite of this, the fact remains that for a large part the Congress was able to draw support from and mobilize the masses to a large extent, and this naturally included those from the peasantry and the industrial working class. How was it then that despite riding over the interests of these groups, they were able to garner their support? The answer lies in how exactly the context of the politics of the time came to be laid out. The root of the problems for these groups was thus never identified in the social structure that preceded British rule in India. Rather, colonial rule was identified as the ultimate source of oppression and exploitation, and while this was not entirely wrong it did exaggerate the picture. What occurs then is,

The appeal of nationalism and anti-imperialism attracted the peasant who found no difficulty in identifying his misery with foreign rule. This was the new class reality - the unity forged by imperialist exploitation - which the Congress fully utilised, and those who pitted themselves against it were inevitably routed. (Ranadive, 1999: 341)

In this context of a stringent critique of colonial rule which was held responsible for all ills (including the later attribution of several scholars that it led to the *rise* of the caste system) combined with an attack on the practise of untouchability meant that the Congress could build and sustain a mass movement. However it therefore also meant that an actual attack on the caste system could come only from outside and thus the anti-caste movements lay outside the Congress.

The strength of these anti-caste movements yet somehow remained curtailed owing to the hegemony of the Congress. While Ranadive claims that the anti-caste movements remained problematic because they too did not draw the relation between the end of the caste system and the change in land relations, this would seem a narrow view to take of the anti-caste movement. At least with the Ambedkarite movement one can argue that it is not as though caste was understood only as a problem of identity. If much of the Ambedkarite movement came to be based on the notion of gaining

political representation it was because it became necessary for them to gain such representation in order to have any political voice, especially since they lay at conflict with the congress for the most part. Furthermore it was in the Constituent Assembly proceedings, in response to Nehru's resolution- Aims and Objectives, that Ambedkar declared,

I find that this part of the Resolution, although it enunciates certain rights, does not speak of remedies. All of us are aware of the fact that rights are nothing unless remedies are provided whereby people can seek to obtain redress when rights are invaded. I find a complete absence of remedies... Sir, there are here certain provisions which speak of justice, economical, social and political. If this Resolution has a reality behind it and a sincerity, of which I have not the least doubt, coming as it does from the Mover of the Resolution, I should have expected some provision whereby it would have been possible for the State to make economic, social and political justice a reality and I should have from that point of view expected the

Resolution to state in most explicit terms that in order that there may be social and economic justice in the country, that there would be nationalisation of industry and nationalisation of land, I do not understand how it could be possible for any future Government which believes in doing justice socially, economically and politically, unless its economy is a socialistic economy. Therefore, personally, although I have no objection to the enunciation of these propositions, the Resolution is, to my mind, somewhat disappointing. (Ambedkar, 1946)

Thus it was not as though anti-caste movements lacked an understanding of how caste operated a structure, driven by a system of productive relations. In fact this was also one of the reasons why in spite of acknowledging the limited benefit colonial rule had provided to the lower castes through an access to resources such as educations, reservations etc, Ambedkar continued to be an ardent criticiser of colonial rule, claiming that once attention shifted to the plight of the poor, to those subjected to

“forcible extraction of profit by big capitalists and landlords” one understood how implicated the British were in the project of sustaining caste.

In this regard both Ranadive and Ambedkar were able to recognise the real nature of British imperialism. As opposed to the Congress who merely associated colonial rule with general exploitation, both Ambedkar and Ranadive point out to how specific colonial state policies helped sustain caste through a promotion of particular kind of agrarian system. Thus, for the dalits, workers of the land, a switch from *the jajmani-balutedari* system meant little if it only effected a transition to a system of zamindari. Under the jajmani system, dalits and other lower castes often worked in conditions that were often in effect bonded labour; a shift to a zamindari system where they paid exorbitant rents may have seemingly led to a move away from the earlier system but it meant little. Further the particular consequence of changes that the colonial state had introduced- the monetisation of rural economy meant that several scholars read it as a leading to a move away from the hold of caste on land relations in a village. Thus Srinivas read this as a sign of moving from a system based on status to one based on contract, where as he says monetisation and market forces would free economic relations in the village from the social relations they have traditionally borne. Ranadive claims this was a development that the Communists were acutely aware of, claiming that they realised that capitalism in the context of colonialism did not lead to proletarianisation but rather the pauperisation of the peasants. Citing from the Congress of the Communist International he says,

Capitalism, which has included that colonial village into its system of taxation and trade apparatus and which has converted pre-capitalist relations (for instance the destruction of the village common- ness) does not thereby liberate the peasants from the yoke of pre- capitalist forces of bondage and exploitation, but only gives the latter motenary expression ... to the 'assistance' of the peasants in their miserable positions (e g, in some localities of India and China) even creating a hereditary slavery based on their indebtedness. (Ranadive, 1979: 339)

Such a link drawn between caste as a social means of oppression and its roots in an economic sphere meant that those serious about annihilating caste had to launch an attack on colonial rule that brought to the fore issues such as these. This was especially so since the dominant voice in the nationalist movement failed to acknowledge how such policies introduced by the colonial state affected the marginalised lower castes the most.

There was thus a quick realisation amongst those in the anti-caste movement and the communist movement (the two camps unfortunately did not always overlap with each other) that even when there the colonial state implemented policies that in some ways did benefit the lower castes, such as reservations, they were not entirely serious in their intentions to do away with caste since they did little in order to change the land relations that existed and perpetuated caste. It is therefore that we find Ambedkar making the claim for the nationalisation of land to be undertaken by the post independent nation state.

While the land reforms implemented post independence were supposed to be a step in this direction, at least in terms of handing over land to the actual tillers of the soil, it has remained restricted in its achievement. While an exposition on the problems of the reforms is beyond the scope of this work, it is crucial to remember that while much of its limitations stemmed from the lack of political will to implement it, it also came from the fact that besides doing away with large scale landlordism, the Act did not in effect alter the structure of land relations. As a result of this the real beneficiaries of the act was not really the dalits but the labouring castes who although came low on the caste hierarchy were not 'untouchables'. Furthermore, later developments with the agrarian scenario such as the Green revolution was also seen as benefiting middle and lower order castes. Dalits however continue to bear the burden of a socially and economically oppressive position. In fact the best evidence of this can be seen in one of the more recent acts of violence on dalits – the Khairlanji massacre, where the perpetrators of the crime were not upper castes as is largely believed but rather OBC's, who owned and controlled land in the village. The reason attention must be paid to details like this is because it highlights the precise nature of the caste system and a system of land relations where the surplus is not only appropriated by the landlords but also with such a class enjoying the tacit support of

the state. Operating as a graded hierarchy the caste system also acts in a manner so that such division is maintained at every level of the order and where land relations have not really been altered but have only replaced larger landlords with smaller ones.

This changing nature of rural India, with the rise of middle and lower castes, is one that Lohia had foreseen. Understanding the problem he claimed,

I do not know if my party, the Socialist Party, would be able to get out of the traditional rut of what might be called 'grand politics'...Against exploitation by big capital there is at least clamour though not much action. But there is little clamour or organisation against the massive exploitation in local communities, against oppressive tyrannies of local order arising out of mutual relationships among the local powerful and the locally depressed. Such relationships as exists between the rack renter and the shopkeeper, the moneylender and the artisan, the land owner and the agricultural labourer, the consumer and the government together with the stockists, the police and the people must be fully and publicly exposed...*More often than not, the exploiter and the exploited in such relationships constitute the depressed part of humanity...* (emphasis mine) (Lohia, 1964: 24-25)

Moving away then from the position of scholars such as Srinivas or even those articulated by some among the anti-caste movements where they saw changes in the rural economy and the rise of the lower castes as the end of the caste system, both Lohia and Ranadive are able to identify that this would only lead to the sustenance of the caste system in India.

In this regard Lohia is especially useful to turn to, to understand the workings of the post colonial state and politics. He was one of the first to not just elucidate on the above- the rise of new oppressive relations between those low in the caste hierarchy and the dalits but was also able to see how targeted methods of uplifting the lower

castes would only serve to benefit some. Lohia's views are especially fruitful to look at in the context of politics in Maharashtra which today is dominated by those from the Maratha caste. He claims how early on the Marathas took the position of being pro-British since the Brahmins (the Congress being represented largely by the Brahmins) were against colonial rule, but later once they were co-opted within the Congress, they seemed to take it over completely¹⁹. Furthermore, this nexus between the state and the rural economy continues to be maintained since much of land ownership in Maharashtra is concentrated in the hands of the Marathas. As a result of this prosperous sugar cooperatives in Maharashtra come to be the domain of the Marathas. The Marathas thus are a good example of not only how caste got inscribed into the working of the nationalist movement but also of how 'fluid' the caste system can be, in that it allowed for the rise of a middle order caste such as the Marathas, the usual claim being that colonial rule froze the caste hierarchy. Lohia had thus pointed out to the rise of the Marathas as a worrisome sign of how caste was not being eliminated but only led to the improvement of condition of some. This he saw as being especially problematic since it led to an illusion of progress where there was none or very little at best.

Analysing the situation critically, he also went on to examine the nature of the ruling class in India. Identifying that not all high castes were part of the ruling classes in India, he also claimed that the mere absence of high castes from a seat of political power did not translate into them not wielding control over economic and social resources. Furthermore, he also claimed that when previously backward and lower castes came into positions of authority they tended to take to "modes of distinction" aggressively to set themselves as apart from the rest. He further added,

All political parties of India are led by the ruling castes. No matter how much they might strife with one and another and whatever irreconcilably conflicting principles they might display, they present one solid phalanx of distinguished people against

¹⁹ This is an interesting observation because it continues to hold true for the Congress in Maharashtra, where the Marathas dominate the Congress party with successive chief ministers of the state being drawn from the Marathas.

the mass and are tied to one another through these hundreds of webs of distinction into a single fraternity. I do not think that these political parties can renew the country. *They will fight to the last ditch to justify their distinctions as achievements of modernity and would also generally succeed in drugging the people.* (ibid: 109-110) (emphasis mine)

What is important to note is that Lohia points out to the phenomenon of masking mobility achieved through a control over socio-economic resources as an achievement of modernity. As mentioned in the first chapter, it is this phenomenon, of well-off castes sanitising themselves as modern classes, that leads to an acute discomfort with the concept of enumerating and naming caste. It was also in this regard that Lohia constantly reiterated that 'merit' cannot be used as an argument against the policy of reservations. He claimed that it was essential to take note of the difference between castes, some of whom had had the benefit of literary tradition for several hundred years and others who would be the first to be exposed to an education. He thus saw reservations as a necessary step in the process of destroying the caste privileges enjoyed by some caste groups. Both Ranadive and Lohia crucially identify reservations as a method of destroying *caste privileges*, but not the caste system. In this regard they both saw it as a necessary step but not the only one in order to tackle with the problem of caste. Lohia thus also declared that the people would inevitable feel the need for a concrete programmes undertaken for their welfare, and such programmes would have to based on socialist principles in the economic sphere and on the destruction of the caste system in the social sphere.

To Lohia, such concrete programmes had to be the foundation on which any effort on the destruction of caste must be based. In this regard he seemed at times extremely critical of the efforts of the Nehru government. In his critique of the Hindu Code Bill, he claimed that while it was a progressive step to be taken it was limited in that it restricted itself to benefiting a very small group of women in the country. The government in his opinion had done little to forward the claims of the larger population of women whose concerns were very different. According to him then, the

problem of close to 80% women was the lack of water and toilets. Indian women he said were,

...condemned to the drudgery of drawing water often dirty or muddy from distant wells or ponds and carry it home every morning and evening. She must also save her modesty by easing herself in the open fields either before sunrise or after sunset. The modern Vashishtha probably does not know this hell of modern water or lavatory. (ibid: 59)

This is a significant argument to make since it highlights how it is not enough to push forward a larger agenda of modernism without undertaking any step to effect structural changes in order for it to have any effect. Further, in making the case of lower caste women being primarily concerned over issues such as water and sanitation, he draws attention to how caste as a system operates through a control over resources. Thus, as mentioned earlier, the caste system driven by notions of purity and pollution can substantiate such claims by manipulating control over resources such as land, water etc and thus it is not surprising to find that the lowest caste, whose duty it is to dispose carcasses or perform manual scavenging is denied water from the village well to clean themselves and thus notions of 'pollution' find a material basis.

To Lohia then any attempt at modernisation meant it must be suited to the particular context of India. In this regard he believed that the use of modern technology must be adapted to the needs of India. Owing to the displacement of labour it would lead to in a country like India, he believed that there should be a move towards technology that could be used at the local level, which would not be capital intensive and could thus be used effectively in the villages. He specified that he was not asking for a move to technology of a pre-modern era but rather that the particular technology developed as part of modernism must lead towards decentralisation. In this making technology and the state analogous he claimed that what he sought was a move away from heavy machinery and its counterpart in the Leviathan state (Lohia, 1976); for democracy to work he believed it must diffuse power through the system down to its lowest level.

To Lohia politics if it had to live up to the spirit of modernism and if it had to promote democracy had to be based on such decentralisation to effect changes at every level. In light of this Lohia also came to look upon critically on the role that parties professing to represent various castes played. In spite of the fact that they proclaimed themselves as progressive and radical, Lohia claimed one must be wary of them since they had a potential to disintegrate the people. What Lohia saw as problematic was that such parties did not posture themselves with an aim to destroy the caste system but merely inverse the flow of power. As mentioned before, he saw the Marathas in Maharashtra as an instance of a middle/lower order caste rising in power, only to usurp power for them alone. Although arguing strongly that it was not the British who built caste divisions in society, he did claim that they acted on these already existing divisions. The rise of the Maratha Party and the Justice Party both of whom argued their oppression by blaming it on the Brahmins and not the ideology of caste, were according to him parties that arose out of the British policy of divide and rule. What is important to note is that Lohia does not term them as divisive, owing to the fact that they articulate caste ahead of the nation, but because he did not see their politics as being transformative, in the sense that it only sought to represent the interest of one caste, in order to garner privileges previously denied, but not to end the system completely.

Lohia further highlighted how a politics that did not make as its motive the end of the caste system but confined itself to a mere reversal of power could never achieve social equality. He remains significant in this regard, since many scholars as well have focused their attention on the attack of upper castes and not so much the ideology they may espouse²⁰. To Lohia, this remained a short coming of the policy of

²⁰ Iliah for instance claims, “ I have also been subject to ‘friendly’ upper caste suggestions that in the process of highlighting Dalitbahujan strength, there is no need to attack the other (in their language, ‘abuse the other’). They say ‘make out your case strongly, name the exclusion and claim the space you need but do not abuse the others’. In other words we are being asked to submit a statement of our sorrows and seek remedies. It also means that we should not abuse the abuser. The Dalitbahujan experience- a long experience of 3,000 years at that- tells us that no abuser stops abusing unless there is retaliation. An atmosphere of calm, an atmosphere of respect for one another in which contradictions may be democratically resolved is never possible unless the abuser is abused as a mater of shock

improving the conditions of castes in a targeted manner and of much electoral politics of castes both from the middle and lower end of the order. He also recognised that democratic politics that in many ways afforded an advantage to the numerically preponderant would still remain out of the hold of the lowest on the caste order since they would not always be able to mobilise themselves. In this regard Ranadive points out that in some ways the government policy of handing out reservations like dole-outs has meant that it has fractured the unity of an anti-caste movement, since it pits castes against one another as well as restricts their struggle to the domain of the state, wherein their petition for benefits but do not always engage with the idea of the transformation of the system.

To both Ranadive and Lohia then the only transformative politics that existed was that of socialism. Acknowledging the limited efforts of their respective parties in tackling the problem of caste, they also pointed out to how it would require sustained struggle to end the problem of caste in India. And in this regard the only viable alternative for doing this would be a system that tackled caste at both the social level and the economic level which helped build and maintain the practise of caste in India.

CONCLUSION

The essence of this chapter has been to elucidate on a theory of modernity that has largely been accepted within the social sciences and to show the almost glaring absence of dalits from it. In an extension from the argument of the last chapter, it was shown how dalits have rarely if ever been seen as producers of modernity. In this regard it was highlighted here how this relationship that dalits hold with modernity is under-theorised especially in light of the fact that many of the sources of modernity identified for the upper castes in India, were also accessible in parts to the lower castes. The history of the impact that an English education, jobs in the army etc may have had on the dalits seems limited in the context of the impact that it might have had on the beginnings of the dalit movement in India. In this context, the concept of

treatment. *Indeed, there is no other way to break the culture of silence of the 'historical object of abuse'.* (emphasis mine) (Illiah, 1996:169)

sanskritisation was also analysed, in order to locate how it could have alternate readings.

Drawing from this and the argument developed in the course of the last two chapters, it was emphasized that to understand the workings of modernity in India it was essential to develop an understanding on caste that did not come built in with certain logically fallacious assumptions. Thus to assume that modernity would destroy caste not only fails to look at the historical context for the development of a particular kind of modernity in India but also is driven by the understanding that caste served some purpose in the past which would be laid to rest with the coming of modernity.

It was in relation to this that Ranadive and Lohia were examined as scholars who put forward a theory of modernity in India, who sought to develop an argument based on the historical conditions that contributed to the caste problem and who argued for a theory of modernity based on certain political principles that would seek to break the foundation of the caste system in India, namely a change in land relations. What is also significant is that they recognised that this would not be the only way of chipping away at the foundation of caste. Political representation and the policy of reservation was seen by them as necessary steps towards the end of the caste system. However, pragmatically they also realised that a political agenda against caste that did not seek to annihilate caste but rather only 'uplift' the lower castes would never succeed and would only give way to a politics that would ultimately only continue with a system of exploitation, by only replacing one set of exploiters with another.

Lohia and Ranadive thus emerge in addition to scholars such as Ambedkar and Periyar as scholars who were able to move away from a history of flawed assumptions and conclusions about the relation between caste and modernity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This work has thus attempted to highlight the precise nature of the relation that caste and modernity hold to one another. In light of a situation where academicians and the general populace voice a concern over the question of enumerating caste by claiming that a modern nation-state must not grant caste legitimacy by documenting it, it is especially important to look at why it is that caste and modernity have been seen as antagonistic to one another. This in turn leads us to the question of how it is that in spite of the recognition of the problem of caste and the apparent attack on the system through the efforts of the nationalist movement and the post-colonial state, the caste system was not obliterated.

Much scholarship on the subject has thus usually followed two main strands of thinking. One, where it is asserted that caste cannot survive under the force of modernisation and will eventually crumble away. The second claims that caste has in fact been given a new lease of life under the policies of the colonial state and its policies. In this regard the argument made in this work sought to systematically take apart the two assertions made above on grounds of logical fallacies they are informed by. First, the fact that caste existed in India, prior to the rule of the British is well established and documented. The primary grounds however to make the claim that caste began thriving under British rule was the fact that the colonial state's practice of listing caste as part of the census exercise was met with the formation of caste *sabhas* where castes sought to now record their status afresh. While this does point to a certain caste consciousness emerging, it also highlights how castes were aware of the benefits to be accrued under the policies of the new state. As mentioned in the second chapter, Bayly highlights how Brahmin and Vellala landowners found their landholding rights were retained if they mentioned their ritual connection to the land through their caste status, over questions of legal documentation of land rights. This however does not mean that their ownership of the land through the fact that they were high castes was a fact unknown to them prior to British rule it is merely that they found new way of bolstering their claims with the coming of the documentation of caste through the census.

The more critical part of the argument of this work is however concerned with the first part i.e. that caste and modernity are antagonistic to each other. Through the three chapters by detailing the history of the study of caste and modernity in India it has been highlighted how this relation has been a misunderstood one. Within academics, such an assumption was based on the notion that caste performed a function integral to society which would be rendered meaningless in a modern society. Evidence for this, rather fallaciously was sought on the grounds that pre-modern identities did not tend to survive under modernity as was seen in Europe for instance. A historical analysis allows us to recognise however that both these assumptions are based on a rather limited and biased view of history. Caste served a function for those in the social order who lay at a premium position, to the lower castes, who lived in conditions of abject poverty and extreme discrimination it was merely a system that determined control over resources in a society. S. M. Michael (1999) cites Joan Mencher to claim that the lower castes have a more materialistic view of the caste system and their place in the hierarchy and recognise it thus for what it is – a system of oppression.

Furthermore, the assumption that pre-modern structures would be destroyed with the coming of modernity presumes that India would have to follow a course of history similar to other countries, especially those of the West. It ignores the fact that in India such modernity came mediated through the process of colonialism. It therefore did not witness a bourgeoisie revolution and a crush of the feudal order. Rather we had the emergence of bourgeoisie who remained weak in the face of a strong feudal order. And it was the presence of this strong feudal order that ensured that the caste system could never be attacked overtly by the nationalist movement. Consequently as has been elaborated in the chapters an attack on caste took the form of a critique of the practice of untouchability. Through a focus on untouchability which was treated as an aberration of the caste system, attention was taken away from the system as a whole which continued unabated.

It was in such a scenario that the anti-caste movements arose which marking a difference from the nationalist movement, sought to draw attention to the far deeper problem of caste. The hegemonic character of the nationalist movement meant that

any opposition to it was immediately characterized as being anti-national. In this regard the politics of the anti-caste movement and measures they sought such as reservation all came to be marked as being against the spirit of nationalism since it was seen as fracturing the unity of the nation in the face of colonial rule. There could be no privileging of caste over the nation. Such a political position was reflected within the mainstream in the social sciences as well. Scholars such as Ghurye for instance explicitly took a position against the anti-caste movements terming them as working against the national spirit.

The articulation of caste therefore in the sphere of academics, politics etc is of great significance if one is to understand the relation between caste and modernity. In this regard, it is also critical to take note of how caste was conceived of in the course of the making of the nation-state. Chapter two thus details on the constituent assembly debates and looks specifically at how caste came to be understood and spoken of, much of this in turn came to inform the workings of the nation-state especially in relation to its policy on caste. In this regard the section on caste and gender seeks to highlight how although caste may have found grounds for articulation (no matter how problematic the idioms of that articulation might be), the link between caste and gender has been almost completely neglected both within academics and politics. In this regard, dalit feminists have often had to face the problem of being seen as not modern for their concern over the significance of the community or have been termed 'too modern' in the anti-caste movement.

Thus in the course of arguing why caste and modernity can have a coeval existence, this work draws on concepts of gender, the nation-state etc in order to interrogate what it is that we see as constituting the modern. In this regard, the final chapters seek to put forward a theory of modernity articulated through the political thoughts of two scholars- Ranadive and Lohia.

Ranadive and Lohia are highlighted as theorists of an Indian modernity since they not only posit arguments on why Indian modernity operates differently as a colonial modernity but also because they are able to identify the specificities of the Indian case. In locating caste as a grave matter of concern, they point to how caste has been inscribed into the workings of the nationalist movement and the post-colonial state.

As opposed to a position of bafflement over the 'persistence' of caste both Lohia and Ranadive highlight how caste which being inextricably linked with the agrarian land relation system can only be destroyed if the system of land relations is over-hauled. However while doing so they also claim that the policy of reservations would be a necessary step undertaken in order to destroy the system of privileges which the upper castes have been beneficiaries of for centuries.

As political activists from the Left, both Ranadive and Lohia also point to the neglect of the question of caste by their own parties. It is possibly owing to this, that the anti-caste movement and the communists came together very briefly in the course of their struggle against imperialism²¹. While those in the anti-caste movement believed that the communists privileged the concept of class over caste, those on the left believed that the anti-caste movement did not pay heed to the question of agrarian land relations as a means of undoing caste. There is sufficient evidence to claim however that both those in the anti-caste and communist movement painted an incorrect picture of each other. For instance, Guru claims that many of the anti-caste movements in Maharashtra had declared as their aim a radical redistribution of land, further, the writings and work of scholars such as Lohia and Ranadive point to how they were acutely aware of the problem of caste and did not see it as a super structural entity but rather one part of the system of land relations. It is therefore been tragic that the two movements could not come together in their struggle against caste, as for the reasons for that it is beyond the scope of this work.

In conclusion, it can be asserted that scholars such as Lohia and Ranadive continue to remain significant for us. This is highlighted through the claims that are made during the debate on the recent caste enumeration exercise. A fear that such an exercise would freeze the caste identity of citizens or that welfare exercises can be universalized without taking into account caste, ignores significant historical facts.

This tension between claims of modernity and one of the community is one which according to Nigam (2000) comes to define the context in which we can seek to locate a dalit modernity. Nigam (Ibid) claims that the universalizing claims and the notion of

²¹ For instance in 1930 the Independent labour party which was largely dalit based came together with the communists in the struggle against the Khoti landlord system in the Konkan region. (Omvedt, 1999)

an unmarked citizen that lies central to modernity can be limiting to a dalit understanding which would see such modernist claims as detracting from the issue of caste. Nigam makes a significant point, especially when he argues of the strength of the belief that not articulating caste for the sake of modernist ideals would lead to the erasure of caste. However, it is also crucial to point out that desisting from modernism and taking refuge instead in alternative modernities where it is suggested that a negotiation with tradition (here of the dalits) would occur is a problematic one. As Meera Nanda (2001) claims in response to Nigam, such a position does not allow for an interrogation of such traditions merely because they come from marginalised groups in society. Further, Nigam's assertion that the anti-caste movement and leaders such as Ambedkar and Periyar in particular sought to move away from these ideals of modernism appears to arise from a limited reading of them. While leaders such as Ambedkar realised the problem of the lack of articulation of caste and *therefore* prioritised it over questions of the nation (universal, unmarked) it is not as though they did not believe in the concept of it. As Nanda (Ibid: 1482) points out Ambedkar bemoans the fact that in India, especially with the practice of caste in the Hindu religion, leaves little grounds for the formation of a nation which must arise from people having things in common. It is thus not as though Ambedkar and other anti-caste leaders did not seek a nation where there could exist universal and unmarked citizenship, it was merely that in the course of forming that nation, history and the history in particular of caste oppression must not be erased.

Lohia and Ranadive through their writings seeks to point out thus how caste and modernity are coevals in India today because of the manner in which the caste system has been allowed to perpetuate rather than a view which sees it as perpetuating in spite of efforts being made to counter it. Their theory then allows for us to not just understand the historical conditions that led to such a state but also allows us to envision a programme for the future under which specific tasks must be undertaken in order to truly annihilate the caste system in India.

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