The Structure of Indian Society
then and now

A. M. Shah
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Then and Now

A. M. Shah
To the memory of

Purushottam kaka

scholar, educator, reformer
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Glossary

ächārya  Chief of a religious sect or school
adīkār  Authority
ādimítā  Aboriginal tribe
ādivāsi  Aborigine
āṇyā  Command
ārati  A kind of ritual performed in worshipping a deity
āśram  Hermitage
āśraya  Refuge
ātman  Soul
Ayurveda  A Hindu science of health
āśā  Revered ascetic
Bābā ki langotī  An ascetic’s loin cloth
bāhen  Sister
bāpu  Revered ascetic
bāril  Groom’s party
bēti vyavahār  Connubial relations
Bhāgavat Purāṇa  A purana devoted to god Krishna
bhāi  Brother
bhandāro  Feast for all Brahmans
bhāne khapti  Acceptable with regard to commensal relations
bhuvā  Practitioner of magic and witchcraft
chāndāla  Untouchable in ancient India
chorāsī  Feast for 40 Brahman subcastes
Dēvi Mahātmya  A text in praise of the mother goddess
dharmashāstra  A Hindu treatise on law
dhātā  Small endogamous unit within a caste
dhāt  Platform on a river bank
girās  Feudal estate
Gītā  ‘The Celestial Poem’ by god Krishna
gol  Small endogamous unit within a caste
gosālā  Enclosure for cows
ishtā devatā  A person’s favourite deity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jāgir</td>
<td>Feudal estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jajmāni</td>
<td>Patron–client relations between specialized artisans, craftsmen and servants in an Indian village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jān</td>
<td>Groom’s party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>janajāti</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jāti</td>
<td>A variant of the word jati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jāti</td>
<td>Endogamous caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jnāti</td>
<td>Common word for caste in Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kacchā</td>
<td>Impure food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kathā</td>
<td>Necklace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kārkhanā</td>
<td>Workshop, factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karmakānd</td>
<td>A corpus of Hindu scriptural rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kathākār</td>
<td>Narrator of sacred lore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khadki</td>
<td>Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khāncho</td>
<td>Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kirtankār</td>
<td>Leader of a group of singers in praise of god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mā</td>
<td>Mother, holy mother, mother goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahābhārata</td>
<td>An epic narrating the struggle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mahajān</td>
<td>Trade guild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mahāraja</td>
<td>King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mahāyagya</td>
<td>Grand ritual sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mātī</td>
<td>Mother, holy mother, mother goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mālā</td>
<td>Garland of flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mārg</td>
<td>Sect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maryādā</td>
<td>Propriety of conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mātā</td>
<td>Mother, holy mother, mother goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>māth</td>
<td>Monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mēlā</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāmam</td>
<td>Distinctive mark, usually on the forehead, of a follower of Shri Vaisnava sect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāt</td>
<td>Common word for caste in Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāti</td>
<td>Common word for caste in Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nātyashāstra</td>
<td>Science of dramatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paēkā</td>
<td>Pure food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panch</td>
<td>Council of elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panchāyat</td>
<td>Council of elders</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Glossary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pandit</td>
<td>Erudite scholar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paramparā</td>
<td>Administrative unit of villages during the Mughal, Maratha and early British times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parayanā</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parāgana</td>
<td>Administrative unit of villages during the Mughal, Maratha and early British times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parikrama</td>
<td>Circumambulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patēl</td>
<td>Headman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pāthshālā</td>
<td>School for studying Hindu religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>páthi</td>
<td>Family business firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pol</td>
<td>Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prasād</td>
<td>Food consecrated by being offered to a deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puja</td>
<td>Worship with rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purāṇa</td>
<td>Sacred text narrating the life of a deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purāṇi</td>
<td>Narrator of puranas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmāyaṇa</td>
<td>An epic devoted to god Rama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roti vyavahār</td>
<td>Commensal relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sādhu</td>
<td>Mendicant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>samāj śeśa</td>
<td>Social service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>samāj sudhāro</td>
<td>Social reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sāmkhya</td>
<td>One of the six systems of Hindu philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sampradāya</td>
<td>Sect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>samsār</td>
<td>World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>samskāra</td>
<td>Hindu rite of passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sanstha</td>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sanāt</td>
<td>Renunciation of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sanātika</td>
<td>Renouncer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śāstra</td>
<td>Scripture, school of philosophy, science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śāstrārtha</td>
<td>Experts' debate on religious texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śāstri</td>
<td>Person learned in scriptures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śēri</td>
<td>Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śiva Purana</td>
<td>A purana devoted to Shiva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sūdhaśvāta</td>
<td>Doctrine of pure non-dualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swādhyāya</td>
<td>A recent religious movement founded in western India by Pandurang Athavale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swāmi</td>
<td>Master, spiritual preceptor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tad</td>
<td>‘Split’ within an endogamous group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tālukā</td>
<td>Subdivision of a district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thakarāt</td>
<td>Feudal estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thākāna</td>
<td>Feudal estate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
vād  Street
vādi  Orchard
vāna  One of the traditional four divisions of Hindu society
Vāstu Shāstra A Hindu science of architecture
vishishtādvaita Doctrine of distinctive non-dualism
wāntā  Feudal estate
Acknowledgements

After the articles reprinted in this book were published, a number of friends and colleagues commented on them in various ways. I thank all of them for responding so generously. I am especially grateful to B.S. Baviskar, Simon Charsley, Lancy Lobo, Owen Lynch, McKim Marriott, P.J. Patel, Tulsi Patel and N.R. Sheth. I would especially like to thank Professor I.P. Desai whose dialogue with me on the article, ‘Division and Hierarchy: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat’ (1982, Chapter 8 in this book) was invaluable. The dialogue was published jointly as a book under the same title, with a Foreword by Professor M.N. Srinivas (1988). The book attracted, apart from a number of reviews, a review article, ‘The Future of Caste in India: A Dialogue’ by D.L. Sheth in Contributions to Indian Sociology (1991). Both the 1982 article and the book were translated into Gujarati, which in turn attracted further comments.

The original publication details of every article reprinted here are provided at its beginning in an unnumbered footnote. I thank the editors of the following journals and books for permission to reprint the articles: Economic & Political Weekly; Contributions to Indian Sociology; Sociological Bulletin; South Asia: Journal of the South Asia Studies Association of Australia; and Dimensions of Social Life: Essays in Honor of David G. Mandelbaum (ed. Paul Hockings).

The references for all the articles are put together at the end of the book. Otherwise the articles are reprinted as they were in the original, including the place names, dates, and demographic data, except making minor editorial changes.

Vadodara

A. M. Shah

May 2010
In this book I have presented 10 of my essays published in various journals and symposia during 1982–2007 on several of the structural features of Indian society, those groups, institutions and processes which have endured for a long time. There are five essays on caste (including Dalit caste) and one each on tribe, sect, sanskritization, the cultural complex of purity, impurity and untouchability, and rural–urban relations. Although each essay is concerned with a particular theme, certain threads run through the essays.

While the last three essays deal specifically with Gujarat, I have used my knowledge of Gujarat also in the rest of the essays dealing with India in general. I carried out fieldwork in its Panchmahals district for about six months during 1953–1954, and in Kheda district for three years during 1955–1958. The Panchmahals, located mostly in the highlands of eastern Gujarat, is less developed, with a large tribal population, while Kheda, located in the lowlands bordering the sea coast in central Gujarat, is well developed with a mainly Hindu caste population. A small but significant population of Muslim, Christian and other minority religions is also found in both the districts. The two districts are contiguous, the plains merge gradually into the highlands. I would like to add here that since my parental family had a dual base, in a small town in Kheda on the one hand, and in a village in the Panchmahals on the other, I spent the first two decades of my life (1931–1950) in both districts, moving from one to the other from time to time. I had my primary education partly in a non-governmental, Montessori school in the former, and partly in a mud-wall, government school, in the latter. Most of my schoolmates in the Panchmahals were poor, and a few so poor that the only garment they could afford to wear was a langoti (loin cloth). All in all, I have had an opportunity to observe, both as a child and as a researcher, almost the entire spectrum of society in Gujarat, from its tribal end in the highlands, to the upper caste, upper class rural, as well as the urban end in the plains.

1 For my study of two other structural features, namely, the family and the village community, see my books (1973, 1998, 2002).
2 Recently the Panchmahal district is bifurcated into Panchmahal and Dohad, and the Kheda district into Kheda and Anand.
Although this book is basically a work in sociology and social anthropology—the two are indistinguishable in India— the reader will notice my frequent excursions into history in all the essays. I developed a keen sense of history during my education at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. In my Master’s, I studied sociology as well as archaeology and ancient Indian history. For my doctoral work in sociology I collected archival material on a village in central Gujarat beginning with the late 18th century and on a caste of genealogists and mythographers, and used these materials in many of my publications. I am convinced the sociology of India would be poorer without its integration with history. My main endeavour is not only to relate the past and the present of every structural element but, more importantly, also to show how often our understanding of almost every structural element in the present is distorted by false historical assumptions.

**The Rural and the Urban**

When I began my study of sociology in 1951, a new sociology had just been launched in India. It was inspired by four main ideas: (a) an aggressively empirical approach, in reaction against the biblio-centric approach of the preceding five decades or so; (b) application of the theory of structural-functionalism, in reaction against evolutionism and diffusionism of the 19th and early 20th century; (c) the Indian nationalist movement which had generated among its predominantly urban leadership an urge to know the problems of the masses, many of whom were rural people. This development in the political arena influenced sociologists, consciously or unconsciously. (d) The new generation of sociologists—IIndian as well as those coming from the west—thought that the best way to know Indian society and culture was through field studies of village communities. This was a method social anthropologists had used successfully in the study of primitive societies elsewhere in the world. The convergence of these four ideas led a large number of sociologists to carry out field studies of villages in different parts of India. It would not be an exaggeration to state that almost all the leading sociologists studying India in the 1950s...
and the 1960s, happened to have carried out village studies. I was also attracted to this trend, and have studied village communities in two different districts of Gujarat.

Village studies provided a new view of Indian society, correcting earlier conceptions of many structures and institutions, such as family, kinship, marriage, caste, religion, economy, polity, and so on. This has indeed been a great achievement. Nevertheless, as I have argued in several essays, relative neglect of the study of towns and cities remains a major lacuna — a lacuna that is widening and deepening with the rapid urbanization of the country. I am not saying that there are no urban studies at all. There are, but most of them are geographic, demographic, statistical, and have focused only on the problems of a few metropolitan cities. Intensive field studies of villages of the kind so well known to students of Indian society have been rarely carried out in towns and cities. The high level of conceptual and theoretical sophistication reached in the case of the former is also rare in the case of the latter. We do find a few leads here and there but they are not followed up systematically.

In several essays, I have argued for recognizing the importance of indigenous urban society that has existed in India for centuries. While its study is mainly the historian’s job, the sociologist of urban society in modern India will miss an important dimension to his work if he ignores the continuities of traditional urban structures and institutions. The problem is that he tends to mistake them as essentially rural — as has happened with regard to caste and joint family — simply because they do not conform to his image of ‘true’ urban groups and institutions derived from the west or from some ‘established’ sociological theory. This implies that the sociologist also will have to formulate a correct conception of rural–urban relations in pre-modern India, which is missing at present.

As I have already pointed out in Chapter 1, the proportion of the urban population in some parts of India has already exceeded 40 per cent, and is likely to reach the same, if not a higher level, in the country as a whole in the coming decades. This is a fundamental shift, which is likely to have major repercussions on many other aspects of the society, including the rural society and its relation with the urban. Even unequal rates of urbanization in different regions are likely to have serious repercussions.

While this demographic shift should alert sociologists to move swiftly to studying the contemporary urban situation, its fuller
understanding will require us to grasp the pre-modern urban situation as well. In the main, we have to recognize the fact that, however small the percentage of urban population might have been in the past — it was around 10 per cent throughout the colonial period — its impact on the society as a whole was far more than this proportion might suggest. We have then to figure out the nature of this impact, which in turn requires us to understand the specific characteristics of pre-modern urban society.

The city was the centre of handicraft industry, trade and commerce, of wealth and power, of ‘higher’ religion and culture, of scholarship and education, and of administration and governance. Usually, it was larger than a village in population, and heterogeneous in social composition. Heterogeneity was of three main kinds: (a) religious heterogeneity, which increased in the course of history. The Hindus lived with Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews. (b) Linguistic heterogeneity, particularly in the border zones between two linguistic regions. (c) Caste heterogeneity among the Hindus. Even a small town included many more castes than did a village.

Since the sociology of India has for a long time focused solely on Hindus, it is understandable that it has not yet produced adequate literature on the relations between all the religious groups in the urban context. However, I would like to submit that there has also been a failure to study intensively the nature of caste and several other structures and institutions among the Hindus in the urban context. Such studies would require us to see not only the relations between the castes themselves but also locate these relations in the entire urban context. In other words, we will have to see how inter-caste relations were affected by the fact that these castes lived in the midst of non-Hindu groups. This is a formidable job, requiring both sociological and historical research.

I have analyzed urban caste in Gujarat in several essays and in my book co-written with I.P. Desai (1988). The general features emerging from that analysis would by and large apply to other regions as well. There were three categories of castes in every region: (a) Castes found exclusively in the town, so much so that they could be considered as forming the hereditarily urban population. They migrated easily from one town to another, not only within the region but also often long distances from one region to another. This is a feature of Indian society for centuries but so far has received very little scholarly attention.
It has been a great unifying feature of Indian society and culture, contrary to the beliefs of regional chauvinists today. (b) Castes found in both towns and villages. The rural and the urban sections of such castes differed economically, socially and politically, and there was considerable two-way movement of their populations as well as of their items of culture. Closer study of many seemingly rural castes would reveal a small though substantial urban component both at the elite and the proletariat levels. (c) Castes found exclusively in villages. A very small proportion of castes belonged to this last category.

Inter-caste relations in the town differed from those in the village in many respects. The paradigmatic characterization of the latter by such terms as cooperation rather than competition, and status rather than contract, would not be applicable to the former. The *jajmāni* relations considered typical of the village were not absent in the town but not typical of it. Even if they existed, the payment for goods and services exchanged between castes and between the Hindus and non-Hindus was usually in cash rather than in kind. Surely, the distribution of grains to artisans and servants from the heap of grains on the thrashing floor at harvest, which characterized the village, did not prevail in the town. The economic transactions in the town were dominated by contract and market, in both of which the non-Hindus also participated.

While social relations in the village were largely face-to-face, overlapping and multiplex, in the town they were largely uniplex. Usually the members of a caste lived in close proximity of each other, and those of a higher caste who were wealthier, often lived on a single street sometimes bounded by walls, with a gate on one side and a dead end on the other. What is called the community aspect of caste was more visible in the town than in the village.

The problem of caste hierarchy was far more complicated in the town than in the village. It is impossible to work out the hierarchy of a large number of castes in the town. As far as I can see, the ambiguity of status of castes in the middle between the Brahman at the top and the Scavenger at the bottom — about which scholars have written for a long time — prevailed to a greater extent in the town. And the *varṇa* hierarchy could go haywire there for two reasons. Firstly, often the political authority in the town lay with non-Hindus, making the Kshatriyas powerless, if not irrelevant altogether. And secondly, the trading castes, Hindu and Jain, wielded a great deal of economic power, translated covertly, if not overtly, into political assertion.
Not only that, but in certain parts of the country, the Vaishyas considered themselves superior to the Kshatriyas in ritual status also, i.e., in matters of purity and pollution.

In the town, the individual was exposed to other individuals of much more diverse social and cultural background than in the village. This encouraged innovation and change in ideas and behaviour. It is remarkable that most of the leaders of change in India since the ancient times, from Gautam Buddha to Mahatma Gandhi, grew up in urban centres. To appreciate this point, I invite the reader’s attention to the graphic description of social environment of Porbandar and Rajkot towns in Saurashtra where the Mahatma grew up during the latter part of the 19th century, in his recent biography by Rajmohan Gandhi (2007).

**The Horizontal Dimension of Caste**

Situated in the study of caste mainly in the village community has constrained a fuller understanding of one more dimension of caste, namely, the horizontal, which is characterized by spread of population of a caste over a number of villages and towns in an area. Often the area of spread of a caste was as large as an entire linguistic and cultural region, and sometimes even more than one region. The discussion of caste in this book is focussed on this dimension, compared with the hierarchical one.

First of all, the rule of endogamy — the usual defining characteristic of a caste unit — was clearly observable in a village or a small town, in the sense that hardly any marriage took place across the boundaries of caste groups residing there. However, no caste group in a village or a small town was self-sufficient for marriage, even in areas where preference for close kin marriage prevailed. Only in a large city a few castes, with large populations, could be self-sufficient in this respect. Thus, since most marriages in a caste took place across villages and towns, the castes should be observed over a large area. However, very few systematic efforts have been made to do this. Consequently, the notion of caste with clear cut boundaries remains an assumption rather than a proven fact.

Even if we presume that every caste had rigid boundaries, we have rarely examined how this unit functioned. It is easier to observe small endogamous units, which generally prevailed among artisans, craftsmen, servants and trading castes, but extremely difficult to
observe large caste complexes which generally prevailed among peasant castes spread over large areas.

All available evidence shows that hardly any caste was an undifferentiated and unified unit. As discussed at length in Chapter 8, a number of castes, including the Dalit ones, were each sub-divided into what I have called ‘orders of divisions’, i.e., sub-caste, sub-sub-caste, and so on. Even the smallest division was riven by tensions and conflicts. We have rarely examined them, and if unity existed, how was it achieved? As is well known, every caste had symbols to identify it: its name, its origin myth, its customs, rituals and ceremonies, and other diacritical marks. However, these were often contested by individuals and groups within it, and then changed. The traditional caste panchayat, the protector of caste unity, was also subject to conflicts. That every caste has cultural uniformity is a myth, on the basis of which are created other myths.

Every caste’s unity and identity was sustained by networks of relationships of kinship and marriage — patrilineal and matrilineal, patrilateral and matrilateral, and affinal. They were a consequence of the fundamental rules of endogamy and exogamy. The rule of lineage exogamy made it virtually impossible to marry within most villages, and the rule of village exogamy added to this complexity in many parts of north India. Even in south India, where preference for cross-cousin and uncle-niece marriages prevailed, no village was self-sufficient in marital relationships. These networks of kinship and marriage, spread over villages and towns, were inter-locked, one with another, over a large area. They influenced their members, provided them leaders, and sustained their caste. To get an idea of these networks, a sociologist has to travel long distance from one village to another and to town, inquiring about relationships between members of a caste. Not many sociologists have done this exercise.

Besides the networks of kinship and marriage, many members of a caste were tied with one another by patron-client relationships due to inequality of wealth and power within the caste. The family and lineage groups were often sustained by ownership of land and other property, and a family’s wealth and power played an important role in arranging marriages of its members. The range of inequality within a caste might vary from one caste to another. In the past, this range in some castes, such as Rajputs, Marathas and Jats, to name just a few, was very wide, such that there were one or more royal families at the top and paupers at the bottom. I do not know any caste, high or low,
which did not have internal inequality. A great deal of mobilization was required to maintain a caste’s unity and identity, it can not be considered as exiting in perpetual reality.

The policy of protective discrimination for ‘backward’ castes pursued for more than fifty years has assumed that every caste included in the lists of these castes was not differentiated. In other words, every individual in that caste was assumed to be endowed equally in comparison with every other individual in the caste to take advantage of the benefits made available to the caste by the government policy. In reality however, inequality prevailed in every caste, and therefore, the individuals enjoying a higher position in the internal hierarchy were better placed than others in taking advantage of the benefits. Consequently, the really disadvantaged in the caste continue to be disadvantaged. The recent denial of these benefits to the so called ‘creamy layer’ in backward castes has made only a marginal difference.

The unity and identity of the horizontal unit of caste was often affected by movements for mobility in the hierarchy of castes. An entire caste or a section of it might seek inclusion in a higher caste, while the latter might exclude it. Such movements might also lead to fission of the unit. Stability of a horizontal unit is an illusion.

The internal networks of a caste were, for every individual, her/his most proximate and manifest representation of her/his caste. Nevertheless, the general depictions of caste in sociological literature miss a consideration of these networks. Not only journalists and demagogues but also many social scientists write and talk about castes as if a caste is a machine functioning automatically, without internal organization.

In several essays, I have discussed the institution of hypergamy, which could prevail between a lower and a higher caste, between a tribe and a caste, between sub-castes in a caste, or between rural and urban sections in a caste. Intra-caste hypergamy often merges imperceptibly into inter-caste and tribe-caste hypergamy. Although the practice of hypergamy was reported in ethnographic literature first as early as in 1872, it remains one of the least explored institutions in sociology. Scholars do mention it but usually as a one-couple, one-time event; they do not go further to work out its consequences. I may mention a few here. In a hypergamous marriage, the husband gets a number of lower status relatives on his wife’s side, and for his children the same relatives become their matrilateral relatives.
Of the latter, a few like the mother’s mother, mother’s father, mother’s brother, and mother’s sister play an important emotional role in the children’s life. The wife, on the other hand, gets a number of higher status relatives on husband’s side, such as husband’s father, mother, brother and sister. I have observed wedding, mortuary and other ceremonies where relatives belonging to four or five different generations linked by hypergamy, therefore to as many different strata, are found together.

If the number of hypergamous marriages between two strata increase and reach a high level, the boundary between the strata would get blurred, and this may pave the way for inclusion of the lower stratum into the upper one. If the latter resists the former’s inclusion — it usually tries to exclude the lower stratum — then the latter might secede and form a sub-caste, or a new caste altogether. I have known of a few such cases in Gujarat. Sometimes attempts are made to prohibit hypergamous marriages in order to maintain endogamous boundaries, they however meet with varying success.

Hypergamy has important implications for marriage payments (bride-price and bridegroom-price), marriage rituals, many other marriage customs, and female infanticide and foeticide. In my assessment, hypergamy is practiced far more widely than is generally believed, and has been significant for division as well as cohesion in Indian society, linking a number of castes and tribes: at the level of princely families from Nepal in the north, to Kanyakumari in the south, from Manipur in the east, to Saurashtra in the west, and at the lower level between lower castes and tribes on the one hand, and higher castes on the other.

Ever since the colonial rulers began to count the population of each caste at the Census of India in 1872, they were overwhelmed by the uncertainties of castes as horizontal units, which they narrated in every census report. Although in 1951 the Census of India excluded caste, except Scheduled Caste, from the census, the same old uncertainties haunt the nation every time the decennial census is planned (see Chapter 7 in this regard). Unfortunately, they were ignored by the Mandal Commission and subsequently by the successive governments both at the centre and in the states in using the caste figures of the 1931 census while preparing the lists of the Other Backward Classes (castes). Also ignored was the fact that every caste was internally differentiated. It is astonishing that many social scientists advocate the adventure to conduct the caste census,
and when the government does not oblige them they advocate collection of caste data through sample surveys. This latter method has even more complications than the census. As I have argued in Chapters 1 and 7 and in a recent article in a newspaper (2009) there is no way of conducting a reliable national census or survey of castes. And yet, as the 1911 census is approaching, pressures to include the caste variable in it continue to be exercised on the government, the parliament and the judiciary.

**Caste Hierarchy**

That caste units in an area form a hierarchical order is known to be a fundamental feature of the caste system. Sociological as well as historical research since the 1950s has shown that this hierarchy was not immutable even in the pre-modern times and that its mutability has increased in the modern times. By and large, while the Brahmans were accepted as occupying the highest status and the Scavengers the lowest, there was considerable flexibility about the status of castes between these two ends. This flexibility has two dimensions: firstly, the status of a caste might change over a period of time, and the status of different sections of the same caste as a horizontal unit might differ in different territorial contexts. Secondly, as discussed at length in several essays, there could be a juxtaposition rather than hierarchy, i.e., a concern for being different rather than being unequal, between sub-divisions within a horizontal unit. Such juxtapositions were a significant feature of caste in urban centres. This concern for juxtaposition has spread gradually in modern times, affecting even the larger castes and rural areas.

There is a great deal of debate about the nature of caste hierarchy. For a long time, it was considered to be mainly ritual, i.e., governed by ideas of purity and pollution, while the influence of the secular factor, constituted of wealth and power, was neglected. Now, however, it is widely recognized that the secular factor influenced caste hierarchy even in the past. Nevertheless, it could never substitute the ritual considerations altogether because, as shown in Chapter 2, the ideas of purity and pollution permeated all spheres of life, and their influence on caste hierarchy was a part of the whole. In the modern times these ideas have been losing their strength in many spheres of life due to the impact of the forces of industrialization, westernization, rationalism, science and technology, and the mere exigences of
modern life. This has weakened caste hierarchy and made it more secular. This process is delineated mainly in Chapter 2 and briefly in several other chapters. Let it be noted, however, that the traditional caste hierarchy guided by ideas of purity and pollution is practised even now in certain spheres such as temples, life cycle rituals, and the disposal of garbage and human waste.

Any discussion of caste hierarchy must involve special attention to the Untouchable castes, also called Scheduled Castes (hereafter SCs) and Dalits, who occupy the lowest rungs of the ladder. It is well known that this category includes a multiplicity of endogamous units, essentially the same kind of horizontal units we discussed earlier. More than a thousand major castes are listed officially as SCs for India as a whole, based on the criterion of untouchability, and every time a member of a SC wants to avail of any benefit of protective discrimination attached to it, s/he has to produce a certificate of its bonafide membership. Studies of these horizontal units are even rarer than those of the other such units.

Usually five or six SCs are found living in any local area, and arranged in a hierarchy in the same way as the rest of the castes are arranged (see Chapters 2, 6 and 9). I have questioned the long established assumption that there is always and everywhere a clear, fixed and inviolable line of separation between the Untouchable and the rest of the castes. We need to examine with the help of intensive field studies how this line is changing. In other words, we should examine how one caste after another of this category is getting integrated, slowly but steadily, into the wider structure. As the line of separation is flexible in social reality, there is hope for its eventual decline and extinction. The main requirement is that the entire phenomenon of untouchability should be viewed as part of the general phenomenon of purity and impurity in Hindu society, and consequently the decline of untouchability in the modern times should be viewed as part of the general decline of ideas of purity and impurity.

There is of course another view, among Dalit ideologues as well as among some social scientists. They believe in maintaining the line of separation, thus empowering the entire Dalit bloc in the game of electoral politics. This view does not take into consideration the fact that it may be perpetuating the division and hierarchy of the numerous castes within the Dalit bloc, along with poverty, deprivation and marginality of the less well off among them, and thus ensuring that
this bloc in its entirety will become a divisive force in Indian society. At present there is a taboo on talking or writing about heterogeneity of the Dalit category in public, but at least the social scientists should break this taboo.

In Chapter 1, I have discussed, following M.N. Srinivas’s suggestion, how a very important feature of the traditional caste system, namely, interdependence of castes, has gradually disintegrated, and every caste now is functioning more or less as a separate unit. We are now witnessing a gradual decline, if not disintegration, of another important feature, namely the ritual hierarchy of castes. Simultaneously, however, every caste unit is becoming stronger at every level of the hierarchy — within the upper caste as well as within the OBC and SC categories. Its most obvious manifestations are the statutory lists of castes as OBCs and SCs, and their use as ‘votebanks’. Many social scientists believe that this empowerment of the OBCs and SCs will eventually lead to death of the last remnant of caste. However, this amounts to saying, ‘Use caste to kill it’, which is a highly questionable dialectic. It might perpetuate rather than kill caste.

If individual castes continue to be the units with even greater strength than in the past in the secular hierarchy, and if these units are maintained by the rule of endogamy, as of course they continue to do in a variety of old as well as new ways, then to what extent is the new hierarchy secular? The secularists, rarely, if ever, ask this question. Once it is asked, is it possible to decide whether endogamy — therefore, marriage, family and kinship — is a secular phenomenon? If many sociologists have lost touch with the sociology of marriage, family and kinship, how does one expect other social scientists advocating the secularist theory of caste to be conversant with the complications of marriage and kinship? A distinguished secularist social scientist once told a seminar on caste, ‘Marriage is messy! We do not understand it.’ The ritual/secular dichotomy thus does not take us far in understanding social reality.

It is necessary to realize that there is conflict between the fact that the constitutional provisions for reservations for SCs and OBCs are applicable to each of the two blocs in its entirety and the fact

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5 A caste is always defined as a hereditary group, and an individual becomes its member by birth. However, since birth depends on parenthood, marriage is crucial for caste membership. This observation may appear trivial, but is often overlooked.
that every one of the castes — which, to be sure, are endogamous units — comprising each bloc, is involved in competition for higher status with every other caste in it. (The same is true of Scheduled Tribes, but more of this later.) Since the castes comprising each bloc have been unequal, those of them with better social capital have received the larger share of the benefits of reservations. This has sharpened conflicts between castes within each bloc, resulting in demands for different quotas for different castes in many states. (Leave aside the demands for inclusion of more castes into a bloc and the opposition they invite from the castes already in the bloc.) These disputes have already reached the Supreme Court. It is necessary to realize that this inequality between castes within each bloc is of a different kind than inequality between individuals within every caste discussed earlier. Therefore, the issue is not likely to be resolved by application of the concept of ‘creamy layer’, which addresses inequality within a caste. It will require, rethinking the original constitutional provisions, which will in turn require recognition of fundamental changes that have taken place in the caste system at least since the Constitution was enacted.

While sociological research during the last 50 or 60 years has led to rejection of the notions about caste that prevailed during the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, many of the legal and judicial notions about it have remained unchanged. Basically, while sociologists now view the caste system as relatively open and flexible, not only in the present but also in the past, lawyers and jurists continue to view it as closed and rigid. When, for example, the Supreme Court or some other judicial body directs the government to supply statistical data about castes, it does so with the assumption that clearly bounded caste units exist out there to be observed and counted. This view is inherited from the British colonial jurists who had arrived at it in consultation with Brahmanical scholars (śāstrīs, pandits). The latter, however, provided only the scriptural view of caste. Hence, the modern judiciary is still applying the scriptural view in dealing with the matters of caste although it does not reflect facts on the ground. The other

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6 Inequality prevailed between castes as well as within each caste in the SC and the OBC blocs even while the Constitution was being drafted. Why the Constitution makers did not foresee the possibility of distortions arising out of reservations for such differentiated groups, is an issue requiring careful research.
two arms of the state, namely the executive and the legislature, follow it. It is high time serious thought is given to bring about harmony between the sociological and the juridical views.

**The Tribes — So-called**

Several essays in this book include a discussion, though brief, on the place of the so-called tribes in Indian society. The term ‘tribe’ began to be used with the beginning of the British rule towards the end of the 18th century. Initially, this and two other terms, ‘caste’ and ‘race’, were used indiscriminately. During my work on archives for Gujarat in the late 18th and early 19th century, I found a tendency to describe one and the same ethnic group as race, caste and tribe at that time. By the middle of the 20th century, the concept of race was thoroughly discredited due to scientific research in the biological as well as the social sciences, and the term ‘tribe’ remained to be used in contradistinction to ‘caste’. In 1950, when the Constitution of independent India designated three categories of ‘backward classes’, namely, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, the term ‘tribe’ acquired a new significance. Since the judiciary interpreted the word ‘class’ in the category ‘Other Backward Classes’ as caste (for a discussion of this interpretation, see my paper 1988), the Constitution divided most of Indian society virtually into castes and tribes, making the sociological analysis of both further complicated. According to the Census of India 2001, there are more than 700 tribes with a population of over 84 million, forming around 7.5 per cent of the total population of the country.

The general image of the tribals during the colonial times was that they were primitive people living in hilly and forested areas. The colonial rulers therefore thought that the tribals required special welfare programmes and legal protection. The leaders of the nationalist movement also took up the cause of their welfare and, after Independence, decided to provide them under the Constitution a number of special privileges, such as reservations in legislative bodies, in government jobs, and in educational institutions. There are so many stakeholders in these special provisions that it has become difficult for social scientists to critically examine various aspects of the tribal situation without being branded as ‘for’ or ‘against’ some stakeholder or other. They have therefore to be extremely cautious in examining the situation.
The colonial rulers and their ideologues added one more complication to the tribal problem when they considered the tribals as the aboriginal people of India, implying thereby that the rest of the people were aliens. We face here the basic problem of sources of information. We have to recognize, first of all, that we begin to get tribal ethnographies, written mainly by British administrators, Christian missionaries, and European travellers roughly with the beginning of the 19th century. They introduced the terms ‘tribe’ and ‘aborigine’, and the current Indian words janajāti and ādivāsi are their translations respectively. There is no specific pre-colonial Indian word for ‘tribe’ comparable to the words varna and jāti for caste used in popular as well as theological, philosophical and legal discourse continuously since the ancient times. Apparently, the Hindu ideologues did not feel the need for such a word. A satisfactory explanation of their attitude in this regard will remain a matter of speculation in the absence of adequate historical information. Secondly, the ethnographies of the 19th and early 20th century were deeply influenced by conjectural or pseudo-historical anthropology of the time, which distorted social reality. And thirdly, as far as history itself is concerned, there is very little information about the tribals in ancient and early medieval times. The sources for these periods include only a few words here and there, suggesting that such groups existed, but saying hardly anything substantial about their social life. All available evidence, however, indicates that the tribal groups existed within the overall ambience of Indian civilization (in some cases, Chinese civilization) for centuries. There is no way of deciding that they were the aborigines of India. G.S. Ghurye, one of the founders of Indian sociology — and also a trained Indologist — was correct in using the phrase ‘the aborigines, so called’ in the title of his well-known book on the subject in 1943. Sociological as well as historical scholarship by and large endorsed this view, and the makers of the Constitution of independent India fixed their stamp of approval on it by rejecting the term ‘aborigine’ though accepting the term ‘tribe’. Feeling happy about this decision, Ghurye changed the title of the second edition of his book to The Scheduled Tribes (1959: vii–xi).

The Constitution itself does not define Scheduled Tribes (hereafter ST). The work of recognizing an ethnic group as ST is left to the President and the Parliament, who in turn lay down elaborate procedures involving a number of governmental agencies. This is a complex process. As far as I understand it, preparation of the first list
of STs soon after the Constitution came into operation in 1950, did not follow any rigorous procedure. For the former British territories the task was relatively easy: the groups treated as tribes by the British administration, particularly under the Constitution of 1935, were included in the new list without much difficulty. The former princely states, however, posed problems because most of them, except to some extent a few large ones like Mysore and Hyderabad, did not have a similar record of dealing with tribal groups, and some did not have any groups with even a semblance of so-called tribal characteristics.

I have narrated in Chapter 10 how in Saurashtra, a Class-B state in 1950 (formed by integrating more than a hundred small principalities) the government prepared the list of STs arbitrarily almost overnight. It is also well known that the parliament has been including new groups into the list of STs — hardly any group is removed — from time to time. The violent agitation by the Gurjjars in Rajasthan in 2007–2008 for the ST status, and its opposition by the Meenas, already enjoying this status, has thoroughly exposed how the list of STs has been subject to political manipulation.

As of today, a social group is a tribe because it is included in the list of STs by the President of India. B.D. Sharma, a distinguished administrator and lifelong friend and philosopher of the tribals, in his discussion of the formal classification of a social group as ST under the Constitution, states that it is ‘a tautological proposition’ (2001: 55). Another distinguished administrator and scholar, K.S. Singh states in his massive work on STs, ‘Any discussion of tribes in India has to proceed from the assumption that a tribe is an administrative and political concept in India.’ (1994: 1). B.K. Roy Burman, an anthropologist with a lifelong association with tribal studies holds the same view (1993: 175). Social scientists therefore need to examine thoroughly how this concept originated and developed, particularly since the first attempts were made to classify and enumerate castes and tribes by the census officials in 1872. We need to know in particular how the prevailing concepts and theories about man and society among anthropologists, sociologists and other scholars influenced the administrators.

The colonial government prepared the first official list of what were called ‘backward tribes’ under the Constitution of 1935, based on the 1931 census data on what were called ‘primitive tribes’. And, the government of independent India prepared the list of STs in 1950 by making additions to the 1935 list. In other words, ‘primitiveness’ and ‘backwardness’ were the criteria used in 1950. This list was
criticized frequently both within and outside of the parliament. The government therefore appointed in 1965 an advisory committee with B.N. Lokur as chairman and A.N. Pande and N. Sundaram as members — all three civil servants — to revise the list. This committee’s report states, ‘In revising the list of STs, we have looked for indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness’ (GOI 1967: 7). These criteria remind us of ideas about primitive society, including romanticism, which had driven a number of colonial and even post-colonial writers on tribal life, of whom Verrier Elwin was an outstanding representative.7

The Lokur committee noted that these criteria had already become irrelevant because of changes in the society, that the status of a group as ST had become a vested interest, and there were pressures from these interests not to remove any tribe from the list (ibid.: 7–11). The committee therefore took pragmatic decisions — some may say political decisions — in revising the list of STs. The government and the parliament must also have done the same. Nevertheless, the committee’s criteria about tribes have survived for a long time. On 21 July, 2006 the Ministry of Tribal Affairs of the Government of India released the draft of ‘The National Tribal Policy’ (GOI 2006; for critical examination of the draft, see Roy Burman 2006, Srivastava 2009). According to this document, the Lokur committee’s criteria have been used ‘for the last few decades to identify and declare a particular community as a ST’ (GOI 2006, p. 2). More recently, at the time of the Gurjjar agitation for ST status, P.S. Krishnan, a senior civil servant long associated with administration of Backward Classes, in his interview published in *The Indian Express* of 4 June, 2008, stated that the same criteria prevailed. The tribal policy document, however, states that these criteria ‘are not applicable to STs today’. (ibid.).

Politicians and bureaucrats are known for such contradictions. But, where do the social scientists stand? How have they dealt with tribes in India as a social category? What is the state of their knowledge about it?

Let us take the present list of STs as the starting point of our analysis. Immediately, we are struck by a wide range in the population size of tribes. A few tribes, such as those in the Andaman and Nicobar

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7 For a critical discussion of romanticism about tribes, see Prasad (2003).
Islands, have each a population of even less than a hundred and face the extraordinary problem of extinction. On the mainland also there are many small tribes each with a population of one to two thousand, like the well-known Toda and Kota in the Nilgiri Hills. At the other end, there are very large tribes, such as the Gond and Bhil with a population of around 50 and 80 lakhs respectively, spread over more than one geographical, linguistic and cultural region. Linked with size and spread of population of a tribe is its unity and identity; a small tribe would be able to maintain it more easily than a large one. Despite these obvious complications, many social scientists and other intellectuals make sweeping generalizations about tribal society as if it is an undifferentiated single category.

Since most of the literature on tribal society is concerned with the larger tribes, and whatever little experience I have about tribal society is also confined to them, I will hereafter consider mainly these tribes. Today, none of these tribes is primitive. Surely, a majority of the tribal population suffers from poverty, deprivation and exploitation, but the level of none of these warrants us to brand the entire tribal population as primitive. To take just one example, in the Panchmahals I do not now see any langoti-clad child I used to see in the 1930s; every child is now adequately dressed. It would be unrealistic not to recognize fundamental economic, political and social changes that have taken place in tribal society during the modern times, particularly after Independence. Very few tribals are now dependent exclusively on hunting and food gathering for livelihood. Shifting cultivation is replaced by settled agriculture. Surplus labour in tribal areas migrates to cities and to villages in other areas for employment, and migrants from the latter are settled in the former. A proportionately small but in absolute numbers a fairly large section of tribal population is affluent and powerful: governors, ministers in the central and state governments, members of parliament and legislative assemblies, high court judges, high officials, university professors, doctors, engineers, and so on. And there is a large middle section composed of medium farmers, artisans and craftsmen, industrial workers, school teachers, small shopkeepers, lower government servants, and so on. The tribals are now politicized as part of the modern Indian state. Many tribes, except in the North-East, claim to belong to some caste or another, more commonly, Rajput and Kshatriya, though retaining their constitutional status as ST.

All in all, the so-called tribal social formation is now a matter of history. However, our conception of the tribal situation today is
deeply influenced by our images of the past which is very well reflected in the criteria for ST status mentioned above. We should inquire: were these criteria applicable even in the past? How far are our images of the past correct?

The colonial administrators and ideologues not only viewed the tribals as isolated from Indian civilization but most of them also advocated a policy of isolation for them. The literature on tribals, particularly after the acrimonious debate between Verrier Elwin and G.S. Ghurye on the issue in the 1940s, is replete with discussions on isolation versus assimilation. We have to inquire whether any tribe was really isolated during the British rule, and if so what was the nature of isolation. We may also give some thought to the general belief that every tribe during the pre-colonial times was a discrete unit.

Actually, no large tribe like the Bhil or Gond had fixed territorial boundaries. Their population was widely spread, and on all of their margins they lived in proximity to other castes. They might be living in hills and forests at a long distance from the centre of a plains area, but they were not isolated from the margins of that area. Let me narrate my personal experience. From the 1930s to the 1940s, I often lived in one of the multi-caste villages located on the border between the British territory in the Panchmahals and the princely state of Devgadh Baria in Gujarat. Here, there were considerable differences in prices of commodities between the two areas. I saw the Bhils from Baria walking a long distance carrying heavy loads on their heads to shops in the British villages to sell their forest and farm products. This they did to take advantage of the higher prices. (There were shops in Baria but they offered lower prices). Dried flowers of the mahua (bassia latifolia) tree, widely used for making alcoholic drinks, were the main forest produce. Since the Baria state had imposed punitive restrictions on its sale, the Bhils carried them for sale during the night to escape the attention of the border police. They purchased in exchange such goods as salt, jaggery, sugar and tobacco at lower prices. The Bhils also came, finely dressed, to fairs held in a British village not only to buy such ‘fancy’ things as bangles and scarfs from the little shops there but also to enjoy the festive atmosphere and to worship at a small Shiva shrine. In the reverse direction, potters from the caste villages went with pots and pans loaded on donkeys to sell their wares in the tribal villages.

I am sure such interactions between the Bhils and multi-caste villages prevailed elsewhere in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra also, and the same must be true of most of the other larger tribes.
Some of the tribal population lived in the plains villages and interacted closely with the caste population there, but were rarely if ever included in anthropologists' theorization. Small towns, usually capitals of little kingdoms or chiefdoms, or headquarters of administrative units of large kingdoms, existed in the midst of tribal areas, and these towns included a number of castes and other non-tribal groups interacting with the surrounding tribal population. For example, the life of the huge tribal population along the long border between Gujarat on one side and Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra on the other, cannot be understood without viewing them in the context of the large number of small princely states and their little towns all along the border. There were roads cutting through tribal areas, and armies, traders and pilgrims passed along them. Many temples and monasteries were located on hills and in forests in the midst of tribal areas. People of two or more tribes, and even of some castes, might be living side by side in a single area, sometimes even in a single village, but this rarely attracted the close attention of anthropologists. Most of their monographs dealt, rather artificially, with individual tribes, thus perpetuating the image of tribes as isolated units. All perceptive anthropological accounts, however, showed that there was a wide range with regard to integration of the population of a tribe with the rest of society — from a high to a low degree of integration. An isolated Indian tribe is an imaginary romantic idea. What the historian Sumit Guha has said about the Khandesh Bhils in his study of their relation with the peasants and the Peshwa rulers in Maharashtra during the pre-colonial times is true of most if not all of the larger tribes.

(They) were not isolated remnant populations savagely defending themselves against an inexorably encroaching civilization — rather they were determined to share in the goods that civilization could yield and to establish their dominance over the peasantry who toiled to produce the harvests that fed Bhil and Brahman alike. (1996: 153)

Most of the literature on the tribals until recently dealt with their ecology, economy, arts and crafts, magic, witchcraft, religion, and culture (narrowly defined to include dress, music, dance, drama, festivals,

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* Reddy (1973) reported how in villages in the large hilly tract in Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh seven ‘tribes’ lived practically as castes.
Introduction

The study of the political dimension was missing. Only after Surajit Sinha’s essay (1962) on state formation among the tribals in central India did some excellent historical probings on this dimension, by anthropologists as well as historians become available (Thusu 1980, Kulke 1985, Sinha 1987, Hardiman 1994, Guha 1996, Kulke 1997, Sundar 1997, Prasad 2003). All of them refer to tribal chieftains operating as part of some larger kingdom, sometimes an imperial one. Most of them, except in the North-East, claimed to be Rajputs and Kshatriyas. They had either come to the tribal areas as invaders from other Rajput kingdoms, or had emerged from among the tribal chieftains gradually making their way up into the Rajput fold by various stratagems. Elaborate genealogies and myths justifying these claims were concocted by professional genealogists and mythographers (see Shah and Shroff’s essay 1958).

Whether a king belonged to an immigrant Kshatriya lineage or to a tribal one, is not easy to decide in the absence of definite historical evidence.

One of the reasons why early ethnographies rarely, if ever, referred to political institutions among the tribals is that most of them were based on observations made in areas under direct British administration from where tribal chieftains were eliminated. We have very few studies of tribes in the setting of Indian princely states even during the colonial times, and whatever evidence we have about them shows the importance of tribal chieftains. Even otherwise studies of archives of princely states are rare.

The above mentioned historical probings into the tribal political institutions however miss two important aspects. First, they do not tell how exactly the local chieftains were related to the superior king. They do narrate certain symbolic practices, such as the tribal chieftain applying on the king’s forehead at his coronation a tilak of blood taken out of his finger, signifying a symbiotic relationship, but they rarely enlighten us on the more substantive matters.9 Second, these studies do not enlighten us on the political functions of kinship and marriage in the tribe in general and vis-à-vis the kingly overlord.

9 I may mention another symbolic expression. At the entry gate of an old palace in the large Rajput kingdom of Udaipur in Rajasthan, maintaining its pristine glory up until the colonial times, the king’s logo depicts a Rajput soldier with a spear in his hand on one side and a tribal with a bow and an arrow in his hands on the other.
The Structure of Indian Society

in particular. On the whole, although the study of kinship and marriage is the core of anthropology worldwide, it has remained weak in Indian tribal studies.

Let me elaborate. Every study on tribes refers to lineages and clans, including those of the king and the tribal chieftains, but rarely tries to show how lineages and clans were related. The term ‘dynasty’ is rarely distinguished from ‘lineage’, and ‘lineage’ from ‘lineage group’. (For a discussion of these terms, see my essay [1974]). And hardly any effort is made to inquire how lineage groups functioned in the context of time — what has come to be known as developmental cycle — and what political implications did this developmental context have. A particularly significant institution was the rule of primogeniture in succession to kingship. One of its major implications was that the new king had to give something satisfying to his junior brothers. Often he made them governors of some parts of the kingdom, but the ambitious ones among them might turn their areas into independent kingdoms of their own. I suspect that some of the kingdoms in tribal areas came into existence in this manner. Such new kings also created problems for the unity and integrity of the original lineage group.

The ethnographic accounts of many tribal chiefly families in western, central, northern and eastern India refer to their marital relations with the established Rajput families in western India, but do not tell whether the relationship was reciprocal. As far as we know, the relationship was hypergamous, i.e., daughters of the tribal chieftains were married into the Rajput families but not vice versa, and this hypergamy legitimized the former’s claim to being Rajputs and Kshatriyas. We do not know, however, whether the members of the ruling lineages in the tribal chiefdoms accepted brides from the higher status tribal families within their own chiefdom.

Hypergamy was the thin end of the wedge. As narrated earlier, every hypergamous marriage created a number of new relationships on all sides not only for the married couple but also for their children. Therefore, if practiced widely and for long, hypergamy could lead to the secession of a section of the tribe to get included in a caste or to form a new caste or a new tribe.

Hypergamy in any large tribe, however, would affect only a small section of it, while the tribe by and large remained an endogamous unit. Just as every caste tried to maintain its social boundaries and identity by practicing endogamy, so did every tribe vis-à-vis other tribes as well as castes. Thus, as the defining characteristic of both
caste and tribe was endogamy, there was no fundamental difference between the two as horizontal units. Yet, anthropologists have rarely recognized this tribe–caste homology. Just as networks of relationships by kinship and marriage performed a cohesive function for a caste, so did such networks for a tribe. There is hardly any study of these networks — just like the absence of such studies for castes as horizontal units. It is no wonder that journalists as well as many social scientists write and talk about tribes, just as they do about castes, as if they function like automatic machines.

The question of the tribals' relation with Hinduism looms large in anthropological literature. Under the influence of pseudo-historical anthropology of the late 19th and early 20th century, ethnographers thought that originally the tribal people had only magic, not religion, and if they had any religion it was animism, naturism or totemism, and that at later stages they borrowed elements of Hinduism gradually. However, there is no evidence of tribes practicing exclusively the original pure tribal religion. In all early ethnographies we find every tribe practising composite religion, with the Hindu elements in it varying from one tribe to another and from its one section to another, except perhaps in the North-East and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Even if we take into account the fact that services of a few artisan and craftsman castes, resident or itinerant, were available in tribal villages, and that many castes lived in small towns in tribal areas, it would still be true to say that tribes were not part of a full-fledged Hindu caste order. However, in terms of prevalence of worship of Hindu deities, rituals of worship, theological ideas, and many other characteristics of religion, all tribes, except those in the North-East, were part of Hinduism (see N.K. Bose’s classic essay 1941, Ghurye 1943, Fuchs 1965). Many ethnographic accounts refer also to the practice of Hindu ideas of purity and pollution among the tribals. While Ghurye’s description of the tribals as ‘backward Hindus’ may not be felicitous, Srinivas’s description of them as practising Hinduism composed of Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic elements would be apposite. I have pointed out in several essays how all tribes, except perhaps those in the North-East, have been undergoing sanskritization and even sects representing the higher

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10 The influence of Chinese civilization on the tribes in the north-east should not be ignored, however.
levels of Hinduism have influenced the tribals. In addition, kings and chiefs in tribal areas claiming to be Rajputs and Kshatriyas, were also powerful agents for sanskritization.

While discussing the relationship of the tribals with Hinduism, it is assumed almost invariably that a tribe must transform itself into a caste in order to be considered as Hindu. There is a fundamental flaw in this argument, arising out of ignorance of the character of Hinduism. Many elements of Hinduism have nothing to do with caste. Many Hindu sects recruit members from many different castes. Historically, many people around the world, in Sri Lanka, South East Asia, and Central Asia, accepted Hindu practices without taking on caste. Recently, many individuals from the west have also accepted Hinduism as their personal religion. A tribe can, therefore, very well accept elements of Hinduism without becoming a caste. Many tribes have done it, and continue to do so. Even a casual observer of tribal life today would find that it is not free from Hinduism.

A widely held assumption, that a tribe was an undifferentiated and egalitarian group, has been a major obstacle in understanding the tribal situation in India. Surely, the majority of the population of almost every tribe was poor, involved in simple shifting and plough cultivation and in gathering forest produce, with meagre exchange of goods and services with other groups. Many of them were underprivileged and exploited. I have had a glimpse of the life of such a population in the Panchmahals since the 1930s. Many children and even adults clad in langot, thatch huts, meagre household equipment, and so on. However, it would be simplistic to believe that tribal society was undifferentiated and egalitarian, or that there were no groups and individuals wielding wealth and power among them. This romantic view of tribal life has prevented these intellectuals from recognizing that the tribal people have always had political ambitions, manifesting in various movements, including, if I may venture to suggest, Maoism and Naxalism.

11 It is well known that the tribal folk participate in festivals of Hindu deities. I mentioned earlier how the Bhils visited the small Shiva shrine in a Panchmahals village during a fair. Similarly, at the great Vaishnava temple of Shrinathji in Nathdwara in the former princely state of Udaipur in Rajasthan, the tribals were invited to ‘loot’ prasāda from a ‘mountain’ of cooked rice offered to the deity during the New Year festival.
Earlier we saw that there was a huge range in the size and spread of population of tribes. We now see how every large tribe was internally differentiated, with inequality in distribution of wealth and power. While there is growing recognition of prevalence of inter- and intra-tribal differentiation at the present time in discussions of the tribal situation, it is hardly realized that such differentiation prevailed in the past and has had a deep impact on the present. If I may use the language of the current discourse on reservations, a ‘creamy layer’ prevailed in almost every tribe in the past and has grown at present. Not only politicians, policy makers, and ideologues but also many social scientists have faltered in assessing the tribal situation because of the blinkered view of the tribals’ past.

When we review tribal studies in India, we find a serious imbalance between their attention on culture and society: greater coverage of ecological environment, modes of livelihood, magic, witchcraft, religion, ceremonies, festivals, music, dance, drama, etc., and lesser coverage of political structures, social stratification, leadership, network of relationships by kinship and marriage, the patron-client relationships, and so on. We constantly read and hear fervent pleas to preserve ‘tribal cultures’, giving freedom to every tribe to preserve its cultural identity, but one wonders whether any tribal culture can be preserved without also preserving its social structure and organization which is becoming increasingly differentiated and inegalitarian. Such a plea tends to become inadvertently or advertently a plea to preserve the dominance of the ‘creamy layer’ within the tribe.

**Hinduism: Sects, Sanskritization and Secularization**

Since the 1970s, particularly since the word ‘secular’ was added into the preamble to the Constitution of India in 1976, the sociology of religion in India is focused increasingly on the problem of secularism, which is seen largely in the context of relations between different religions. Consequently, the study of internal features of every religion, which was the focus of earlier studies, is now sidelined. Many intellectuals — secularist or otherwise — seem to close their eyes when confronted by the problems of any particular religion. This book, on the contrary, tries to delve into the internal structure of Hinduism.

Chapter 3 shows how sects are an important structural feature of Hindu society and not merely an aspect of Hindu religion and
philosophy as they were viewed for a long time. It takes an integrated view of both leaders and lay followers of sects, based on field as well as textual materials. It proposes a distinction between sectarian and non-sectarian configurations, and shows how the former has grown over the centuries and is expanding rapidly at present. The essay also pleads for conceptual distinction between caste and sect, and discusses the relation between the two. It rejects the long held view that Hindu sects are led always by renouncers rather than householders.

In comparison with other world religions, Hinduism is generally described as a religion that does not have a definite founder, a definite deity, a definite sacred text, and an organized church. Every Hindu sect, however, has a definite founder, a definite deity or a set of deities, a set of definite sacred texts, and a social organization. Sects thus represent organized Hinduism, which is spreading rapidly all over India. While the older sects are expanding their membership, new ones are being formed. Every one of the bābā, bāpū, guru, māṭā, mā and such other godmen and women mushrooming in modern India is working out long term strategies to form a sect. The process of expansion of a sect, as shown in the essay, draws members mainly from the mass of non-sect Hindus rather than from other sects, and the former include increasingly the lower castes, the Untouchables, and the tribals. There is a vast mass waiting to be inducted into sectarian Hinduism. Three factors seem to underlie this trend: (a) growing disenchantment with the worship of a multitude of deities, and preference for exclusive devotion to a chosen deity, helped usually by a guru; (b) easier access for members of diverse castes and tribes to join a sect and participate in it as equals, driven by the increasing disillusionment with caste hierarchy. (c) A sect is also a community for mutual help and cooperation, especially for whom the village, the urban neighbourhood, and caste have become weak communities.

Sects compete with one another to recruit members. They might clash, sometimes violently, and a few might develop into separate religions, as in the case of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. In recent years, the Lingayat sect in south India has claimed to be a separate religion, though mainly in the context of protective discrimination and the politics associated with it. Unity of Hindu society is thus a problem, not an undisputed fact, and this problem worries the Hindu fundamentalists. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal, and such other fundamentalist...
Hindu organizations are desperately trying to bring about unity among sects. Some Hindu ideologues are talking about forming an all India federation of sects. But, they are not succeeding. This is an extremely difficult task. The sādhus of various sects often clash, sometimes violently, at kumbh melās and such other gatherings, and members of many sects refuse to participate in these gatherings. Sects are also amassing enormous wealth and playing an important role in modern politics, though in their characteristic differential ways. Some sects are drawn more easily than others into politics, and some refuse to be drawn into it.

Organized Hinduism is growing, and demands greater attention from social scientists and other intellectuals. The essay on sects shows how the founders of all pre-modern sects were intellectuals, every one of whom took an innovative intellectual position on prevailing philosophical and theological issues. This appears to be the logic of sects, and should lead us to question the commonly assumed unity of Hindu thought derived from the Vedic and other ancient texts. I would agree with T.N. Madan, the most prolific writer after M.N. Srinivas on the sociology of religion, that sociologists of religion should study not only actions but also ideas. However, this is not an easy task in view of the enormous diversity of ideas generated by sects. Madan’s own writings on Hinduism (1994, 1997, 2004, 2006) do not give much attention to sectarian diversity of both ideas and institutions. We should also inquire if sects, old as well as new, are engaged in developing new ideas about religion and its relation with society. To put it differently, are modern sects a source of religious creativity as most sects were for centuries in the past? This inquiry will itself demand a greater attention to the study of religion as such, which is missing in our academic institutions.

The concept of sanskritization enunciated by Srinivas in 1952 has been extremely influential in the study of Indian society and culture, present and past. Chapter 2 traces its long and chequered career (see also Charsley 2001). It has been used mainly in the sense of

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12 While I have begun my account of the concept with Srinivas’s 1952 book on Coorg, Charsley (2001) has done well to go further back in time to trace its origin in Srinivas’s 1945 book on marriage and family in Mysore, though the concept is not named there. I have provided some further thoughts on the concept in my response (2006) to Nirmal Singh’s rejoinder (2006) to my essay (2005, Chapter 3 in this book).
the process of emulation of the upper caste Sanskritic culture by lower castes for social mobility. However, I have argued that this is only an application, in a specific context, of a concept that is in fact far more general. Srinivas clarified repeatedly that sanskritization is not confined to the caste system. It is a profound and many sided cultural process, which operates not only among all castes, including the Untouchables, but also among tribes (except perhaps the tribes in the North-East), and has traveled far and wide all over the world. The upper castes are not the only source from which Sanskritic culture is derived. There are sanskritized castes even among the Untouchables, who disseminate Sanskritic culture among other Untouchable castes. And there are many non-caste sources, such as sects, temples, religious literature and discourses, and the print and electronic media.

Sanskritization is a slow and incremental process, passing silently, day by day, from one family to another, often even from one member to another in the same family, and from one section of society to another. Its pace has been increasing in modern times among all sections of society. The Hinduism that is migrating to the rapidly expanding Indian diaspora — and also influencing many individuals in the west — is all Sanskritic, and the members of the diaspora support its spread back home. Sanskritization is growing rapidly in urban centres with their phenomenal growth in recent decades — as I have pointed out, the city has been for a long time the prime locale of Sanskritic culture. In villages, it is spreading fast among the middle and lower castes, the Dalits, and the tribals. In my assessment, a massive transformation is taking place in Hinduism, the full implications of which the country's intellectuals have yet to grasp. The most important implication is the emergence of cultural uniformity among a vast mass of population. Whether such uniformity leads to social unity among social groups is a moot question.

Sanskritization has provided a convenient ground to fundamentalist Hindu organizations such as the RSS and VHP for spreading their activities. Many secularist thinkers tend to attribute recent spread of sanskritization to the activities of these fundamentalist Hindu organizations. Surely, these organizations have played a part. However, it would be a mistake to ignore the enormous strength of sanskritization as a centuries old social and cultural process prevailing at the ground level in society.
The essay on purity, impurity and untouchability poses some significant questions for the debate on secularism. As Srinivas pointed out long ago (1965) and Beteille followed him (2001) to emphasize that the declining concern for ideas of purity and pollution contributes to making social life more secular, in the sense that it frees the individual Hindu to interact more freely not only with members of other castes but also of other religions. However, it does not necessarily make the individual less religious. The reason is that most Hindus are increasingly considering the ideas of purity and pollution as a needless, irrational accretion to the core of Hinduism, which is constituted of worship of certain deities and practice of certain theological and philosophical ideas. This kind of reformed Hinduism is spreading along with the spread of science and technology.

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In this Introduction I have suggested to the reader as to what s/he should expect to read in the various essays in the book. However, here I have also tried to go beyond the essays and taken at least a few steps forward to present new ideas and arguments. For example, the long section on ‘The Tribes — So-Called’ is a result of considerable reflection after the little I have written in the essays. I invite the reader to return to the Introduction to check.
Caste in the 21st Century:
From System to Elements*

In 1955, M.N. Srinivas presented a paper on ‘Castes: Can They Exist in the India of Tomorrow?’ at a national seminar on ‘Casteism and Removal of Untouchability’ in Delhi, attended, among others, by such distinguished persons as S. Radhakrishnan, Jagjivan Ram, Govind Ballabh Pant, V.K.R.V. Rao, Kaka Kalelkar and Irawati Karve. The paper was published in the seminar report as well as in the Economic Weekly (1955). After a lifetime of scholarship on caste, in 1999, the last year of his life, he gave a lecture under different titles in Bengaluru, Delhi and Kolkata, on the passing away of caste as a system. It was published posthumously in 2003 in Economic and Political Weekly under the title, ‘An Obituary on Caste as a System.’ Srinivas expanded this title into a sentence, ‘While caste as a system is dead, individual castes are flourishing’ (ibid.: 459). He made this statement almost at the end of the 20th century, after publication of his book, Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar (1996). It is time now to think of the 21st century.

Caste as a System and Individual Castes

Let me first present briefly Srinivas’s thoughts on death of caste as a system, using mainly his language.

The localized system of production of food grains and other necessities based on a caste-wise division of labour, which has endured for over two thousand years, is fast breaking down all over rural India, and is likely to disappear in the near future. Production will become freed from jati division of labour, economic relations will become autonomous.

*This essay is a revised and enlarged text of my Diamond Jubilee Lecture at the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, Lucknow on 24 February 2007. I thank the members of the Society, particularly its general secretary Sukant Chaudhuri, for invitation and hospitality, and B.S. Baviskar, P.C. Joshi, G.K. Karanth, Lancy Lobo, P.J. Patel, Tulsi Patel and N.R. Sheth for comments on the draft of the article. Published in Economic & Political Weekly, 2007, 42(44): 109–116.
and grain payments will be replaced by cash. Indian rural society is moving from status to contract. An essential characteristic of the system was hierarchy, which expressed itself in the idiom of ritual purity and impurity. This hierarchy is breaking down under the impact of new ideas of democracy, equality, and individual self-respect. While caste as a system is dead or dying, individual castes are thriving (Srinivas 2003: 459; emphasis in the original).

G.S. Churye, one of the founders of sociology in India, had observed long ago in his classic work on caste (1932: 26–28) that the community aspect of caste and caste patriotism were increasing at the expense of harmony of parts — of course, parts which were subordinated to one another. Srinivas made similar observations in his 1955 paper: ‘The horizontal solidarity of a caste gained at the expense of the vertical solidarity of castes in a region. … In general, it may be confidently said that the last hundred years have seen a great increase in caste solidarity, and the concomitant decrease of a sense of interdependence between different castes living in a region’ (p. 136). Subsequently, a number of scholars formulated their understanding of changes in caste in substantially the same way though in different words: from cooperation to competition; from hierarchy to difference, division, separation, repulsion; from whole to parts; from system to elements, units; from structure to substance.

**Rural versus Urban Caste**

While I agree with the main thrust of the above formulation, I have one major disagreement: the idea of caste as a system is that of caste in the rural community, and ignores caste in the traditional, pre-modern urban community. After all, India has had urban communities since the time of the Indus Valley Civilization centuries before Christ. They have grown in number and size over the centuries, and caste has existed in them for as long as we have knowledge about their social systems. I have argued at some length elsewhere (1982, 1988, Chapters 5 and 8 in this book), and I.P. Desai joined me in arguing in our book (Shah and Desai 1988), that it would be false to assume that the nature of caste in cities was the same as in villages in the past, and therefore our understanding of changes in caste would

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1 For my other disagreements with this formulation, see my book (2002) on a village in Gujarat in the early 19th century.
be unreal if it was based entirely on our understanding of rural caste. In fact, urban caste has acquired increasing salience with the steady march of urbanization during the second half of the 20th century and its rapid march projected by demographers for the 21st century. Already, practically one out of every three Indians now lives in an urban area, and the figure is likely to be one out of every two during this century. Some parts of India, such as Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, are likely to reach this figure sooner than other parts. Along with this demographic possibility, we should keep in view two social facts. One, since the population of most castes is spread both in villages and in towns, the culture of the urban section in such a caste spreads easily to its rural section. And two, the urban centres wield disproportionately greater influence in society as a whole in comparison with the size of their population. It would not be an exaggeration to predict that urban caste will overwhelm rural caste during the 21st century.

An understanding of urban caste, both in the past and the present, is therefore imperative for a comprehensive understanding of caste. Unfortunately, however, most sociologists and social anthropologists during the second half of the 20th century, i.e., during the first phase of modern Indian sociology and social anthropology, focused their attention on rural rather than urban caste, and their general formulations about both structure and change in Indian society were based largely on observation of rural society. One often encountered the statement, ‘India is a land of villages.’ Many stated that although people lived in towns, their social institutions were rural in character. Many considered caste as essentially rural, or as having its origin in rural society, and therefore rural even if it occurred in cities. For example, Andre Beteille wrote in one essay, ‘Caste merely represents a systematization and elaboration of ideas and values which are present as important ingredients in most agrarian societies’ (1974: 39). In another essay, he wrote, ‘One cannot help being struck by the remarkable association between caste or caste-like organizations and the agrarian way of life’ (ibid.: 60). He then quoted with approval

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2 According to the 2001 Census the urban population of India formed 27.8 per cent, and according to the projections made by an expert committee appointed by the Census organization it will be 33.5 per cent in 2026. In 2001 the urban percentage for Goa was 49.8, Gujarat 37.4, Maharashtra 42.4, and Tamil Nadu 44.0 (Registrar General and Census Commissioner 2006).
Michael Young’s statement, “The soil grows caste, the machine makes classes” (*ibid.*: 64). Apart from such statements involving the view that the Indian village consisted of mainly, if not only, agricultural castes, they assumed that castes were rural in origin wherever they existed. I do not belittle the significance of village studies — I myself carried out two such studies — but I would submit that Indian sociology has suffered from a certain imbalance on account of its relative neglect of intensive studies of towns and cities.

Due to this approach, the dominant view of the caste system has remained rural. For my present purpose, it is not necessary to dwell at length on the nature of pre-modern urban caste. I have dwelt on it at some length elsewhere (1982, 1988, *Chapters 5 and 8 in this book*, 2002) and in my book with I.P. Desai (1988). I will mention here only briefly how urban caste was in general different from rural caste roughly at the beginning of the 19th century.

The village was a small community divided into a relatively small number of castes, the population of each caste was also small, sometimes only one or two households, with little possibility of existence of sub-castes. Inter-caste relations operated in a face-to-face community and overlapped with relations of a number of different types; in brief, they were multiplex. In the city, on the other hand, the population was divided into a large number of castes, and most of them had each a large population, often subdivided up to what I have called divisions of the second, third and even fourth order, i.e., sub-caste, sub-sub-caste, and sub-sub-sub-caste (1982, *Chapter 8 in this book*). Sometimes a division could even be a self-contained endogamous unit. The members of one caste would interact with members of only some of the other castes and that too with different degrees of intensity. There were many different spheres of interaction, with partial or minimal overlap between them.

In most, if not all, urban centres Hindu castes lived along with one or more non-Hindu groups, such as Christians, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Parsis and Sikhs. Many also included Europeans, the most common being the British. This fact, along with the fact of multiplicity of castes and sub-castes among the Hindus, restricted the *jajmani* type of inter-caste relations to only a few castes and made the economic relations between most castes contractual and market-oriented.

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3 The Jews had spread not only all along the west coast but also in the interior as far north as at least Ahmedabad and Baroda. Two small old synagogues have survived in these cities.
The relations of a Hindu merchant with other merchants and craftsmen, both Hindu and non-Hindu, provided a model in respect of economic and social relations in the town. Even the service castes could be a part of contractual and market relations. Let me give just one example. In a small town in Gujarat I know well, there were both Hindu and Muslim barbers, and many Hindus used the services of either, paying in cash per piece of work. The Hindus required a Hindu barber's services only in the context of certain rituals, and here also he was paid per piece of work.

On the whole, as I have argued elsewhere (1982, 1988, Chapters 5 and 8 in this book, and in Shah and Desai 1988), the principle of difference, division or separation competed with the principle of hierarchy in urban caste. In other words, the relations between castes were marked more by juxtaposition than by hierarchy, and more by a sense of being different than by a sense of being higher and lower. This does not mean that the principle of hierarchy did not operate in the city, but the principle of separation imposed limitations on it.

We should go a step further. The social and cultural heterogeneity of the city provided a congenial ground for innovation and change, including ideas and movements against caste hierarchy. Romila Thapar is perhaps right in attributing the rise of heterodox sects such as Buddhism and Jainism in ancient India to the growth of urban centres (1984: 109, 153–54). A large number of social thinkers who later propagated against the hierarchical features of caste came from urban centres.

Even Louis Dumont, the most ardent advocate of hierarchy as the overarching principle of caste, did not rule out the possibility of separation existing as an independent principle. He wrote in his book, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 'It is not claimed that separation, or even 'repulsion', may not be present somewhere as an independent factor.' He did not give importance to this possibility because, as he stated, 'What is sought here is a universal formula, a rule without exceptions' (1972: 346, n. 55b). At least one of these exceptions was, I think, urban caste. Dumont himself clarified that he neglected urban caste (ibid.: 172). In my view, this neglect was due to the city being the prime site for the principle of difference, division, separation, or repulsion.

The main point is that an emphasis on individual caste was already a feature of pre-modern urban caste to a certain extent. The new

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4 See also Mattison Mines' paper (1982) on a caste of artisan-merchants in Tamil Nadu for a similar argument on models of rural versus urban caste.
economic, political, social and ideological forces of the 19th and 20th centuries affected first the urban centres, and strengthened the emphasis on individual caste in them. Gradually, the rural economy and society also came under the impact of these forces, and caste as a system lost its strength, giving way to emphasis on individual caste.

**Boundaries of Individual Caste**

With the growing emphasis on individual caste, its identity emerged as the prime characteristic of caste during the 20th century. What shape it takes during the 21st century should be considered a prime sociological problem. I discuss some aspects of it here.

Every caste, in its quest for maintaining its identity and unity, faces the problem of maintaining its boundaries. As long as a caste unit is small, with its population spread over a small number of villages and towns in an area, it is able to maintain its boundaries more or less successfully. A large caste, with its population spread continuously in village after village and in towns over a large area, often in two or more districts in a state and sometimes even in two or more states, faces enormous problems of maintaining its identity. Two major developments during the 20th century have complicated the problems: one, a tendency to break the boundaries of sub-castes and amalgamate them into the larger caste; and two, dispersal of the population of almost every caste over a larger area due to migrations, not only within but also outside India. A few castes became huge conglomerates, each with its population spread over two or more states within India and substantial population in other countries of the world. We now live in an era of mega-castes. Castes too are globalized.

Four traditional mechanisms for maintaining caste boundaries became weak and more or less broke down during the 20th century. (a) The prohibition on exchange of water and food (called *roti vyavahār* in northern and western India) between castes, even between the former Untouchables and the others, has practically disappeared in urban areas and is on the way to becoming so in rural areas. This development is part of the general decline in ideas of purity and pollution throughout Hindu society. (b) The distinctive customs and institutions — the diacritical marks — of every caste are gradually disappearing, and a certain cultural uniformity is emerging in the society. In the

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5 I have developed this point in my paper (2008, Chapter 2 in this book).
past one could identify a person’s caste by looking at his/her dress, listening to his/her speech, and watching his/her general bearing. Gone are those days not only in towns but also even in many villages. Similarly, the rites of passage and other rituals are also becoming uniform. The uniformity is emerging because of increasing spread of both sanskritization and westernization.\(^6\) To take just one example regarding sanskritization, the wedding rituals in a section of the Dalits in Gujarat I observed recently are as Sanskritic as those of the upper castes.\(^7\) And to take just one example regarding westernization, even village girls have begun to wear jeans. (c) The traditional close, though not invariable, relation between caste and occupation has more or less disappeared, and almost every caste is now multi-occupational. (d) The caste **panchayat** as the custodian of rules and regulations of caste, an important boundary maintenance mechanism, has practically disappeared not only in towns and cities but also in most villages. There are very few castes now with a mechanism for imposing punitive action against violation of its rules by its members. On the whole, the defenders of caste boundaries have a hard time.

**Caste Endogamy versus Inter-Caste Hypergamy**

It is widely believed that, among the traditional boundary maintenance mechanisms of individual castes, the most powerful has been the rule of caste endogamy. It is the hardest nut to crack, as is often said. It is considered the defining characteristic of caste, because it alone decides the hereditary nature of caste membership. It has also acquired legal sanction since protective discrimination was provided on the basis of caste and tribe in the Indian Constitution in 1950. Every caste or tribe included in the three categories of backward classes (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes) is assumed to have discrete boundaries due to the assumption of endogamy. Nevertheless, the rule of caste endogamy requires critical examination.

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\(^6\) For an elaboration of this point, see Srinivas (1966) and A.M. Shah (2005, 2006a).

\(^7\) The demand for Dalit priests performing Sanskritic rituals is so high that the Gujarat government’s department of scheduled castes welfare has been organizing from 2000 onwards a programme to train them in **Karmakāṇḍ** (performance of rituals according to Hindu scriptures).
Although the scriptures enjoined upon all Hindus to observe the rule of caste endogamy, they also provided for anuloma (hypergamous) and pratiloma (hypogamous) marriages, both of which violated the rule. The Dharmashastra sanctioned anuloma marriage (see Kane 1941: 50–66). In hypergamy, a woman of a lower caste married a man of an upper caste, but the latter did not reciprocate. In hypogamy it was the reverse. Almost every large caste used to have internal hypergamy related to its internal hierarchy. Internal hypergamy created surplus of marriageable women at the upper rungs and their shortage at the lower rungs. The latter usually led men to marry women from acceptable lower castes and caste-like groups such as tribes. Intra-caste hypergamy was thus intimately linked with inter-caste hypergamy.

While hypogamy was rare, hypergamy was widespread. The historical as well as ethnographic literature mentions innumerable castes arising out of hypergamous marriages, with appropriate myths of origin concocted by bards and by authors of puranas to legitimate them. Such myth-makers, Brahman as well as non-Brahman, have existed since ancient times (see Shah and Shroff 1958, Das 1968, Thapar 1984, Shah, A.M. 1986).

In early ethnography, Denzil Ibbetson, superintendent of the 1881 census of Panjab, was perhaps the first to report on hypergamy (1883: 356). Not only that, Herbert Risley, the commissioner of the 1901 Census of India, in his monumental work, The People of India, even credited Ibbetson with ‘inventing’ the term (1915: 163, fn). Risley provided a general account of the custom, putting together evidence from different parts of India (ibid.: 163–71, 178–81, 184–85). He thought ‘[the custom] to be of great antiquity, and to prevail in India over a wide area at the present day’ (ibid.: 165). The later census and other ethnographic reports during the colonial times are replete with
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references to hypergamy. J.H. Hutton, the commissioner of the 1931 census of India,\(^{10}\) the last caste-based census with published results, stated in his well-known book on caste, ‘(Hypergamy) is a widespread feature of the caste system’ (1946: 53).

McKim Marriott, in a recent paper on *varna* and *jati* (2004: 358) based on an extensive study of historical materials since the ancient times as well as modern ethnographic literature, states, ‘Since the 19th century, *jatis* have been widely but mistakenly equated with theoretical “castes” — entities imagined from fragmentary, mostly priestly, information to be uniform, strictly hereditary isolates … The ‘rigid caste system’ made up of a collection of such entities is not likely ever to have existed.’

If violation of caste endogamy was thus widespread in pre-modern India, then why is caste endogamy considered as the defining criterion of caste in modern India? It seems to me that the British bureaucracy and judiciary, looking for certainty in Hindu custom in their efforts to codify customary law, played an important if not decisive role in defining caste as a strictly endogamous group. They were helped in coming to this conclusion by the orthodox *pandits* and *shastris* whom they consulted for expert opinion. This conclusion was more or less accepted in scholarship on caste. It also led to vigorous attempts to show castes as racial groups, supported by anthropometric measurements. This enterprise failed, though the idea continues to raise its head among vested interests around the world from time to time. All in all, the faith in endogamy as the defining characteristic of caste was so strong that it led to relative neglect of intensive study of hypergamy in modern sociology and social anthropology. We have only a few good studies, but not sufficient to give a wider and deeper view.

Another factor contributing to this neglect was the dominant concern for studying hierarchy or vertical unity of castes, and lesser concern for studying the horizontal unity of individual castes. The hierarchy was studied usually in a village or a few neighbouring villages. The study of horizontal unity, on the other hand, required observation of the population of a caste spread over a large area. Only such observation can help observe hypergamy adequately. Let me narrate briefly my field experience in this respect. When I first went

\(^{10}\) Hutton later became professor of social anthropology at the University of Cambridge.
to my field village in Kheda district in Gujarat in 1955, I went with the assumption of caste endogamy. And indeed every caste in the village appeared discrete. For example, the dominant caste of Rajputs always claimed that their marriages were confined to their caste. There was no way of checking this in the village, because no Rajput marriage took place in the village or even in the neighbouring villages. However, once I accompanied a Rajput groom's party (jān in Gujarati, ārāt in Hindi) going to the bride's village located at long distance in another district. I discovered that the bride belonged to the lower caste of Koli. This experience put me on the trail of a number of other such marriages, which helped me understand the hypergamy between Kolis and Rajputs, and the Kolis' claim to being Rajputs and Kshatriyas. Later I observed, and read literature on, hypergamy among other castes and tribes in Gujarat as well as in the neighbouring regions, and wrote about it in a paper (1982, Chapter 8 in this book), in Shah and Desai (1988), and in Shah, A.M. (2002).11

In pre-modern India, most Hindus of course practised endogamy, but there were also hypergamous relationships between many lower and upper castes as an accepted norm. Hypergamy was far more prevalent than we might like to believe.12 The most well-known case is that of hypergamous relations between the Rajputs or Kshatriyas on the one hand, and many peasant castes, as also tribes, on the other, all over western, central, northern and eastern India. Other well-known cases are those of relations between the Marathas and Kunbis in Maharashtra (see Orenstein 1963, Carter 1972, Deshpande 2004), between Patidars and Kunbis in Gujarat (see Pocock 1954, 1957, 1972, and Shah, A.M. 1982, 2002), and the unique case of hypergamy between the matrilineal Nairs and the patrilineal Namboodiri Brahmins in Kerala.

11 Two significant works reporting on hypergamy in Gujarat appeared soon thereafter: Virbhadra Singhji (1994) and Lobo (1995). The former, focused on the Rajputs of Saurashtra, has an added significance as its author was a Rajput maharaja, besides being a trained sociologist. He refers to several lower castes and tribes from whom the Rajputs received brides. Lobo’s book is focused on the Kolis, claiming to be Kshatriyas, in north Gujarat. I have cited as much ethnographic evidence as I could collect in support of this observation in Shah 1982 (Chapter 8 in this book) and in Shah and Desai (1988: 11–18, 37–38 n. 8–16).

12 It seems inter-caste hypergamy prevailed to a lesser extent in south India, possibly because of close kin marriage there. This is a problem of inquiry.
Hypergamy provides a rope to a lower caste to help it rise in social status, to claim equality with the higher caste, and eventually to adopt its name. Usually the upper caste opposes this claim. There is at play here a complex process of inclusion and exclusion — the lower caste trying to get included in the higher one, and the latter trying to exclude it (for a pioneering analysis of this process, see Pocock 1957). Hypergamy thus implies loose and fluid caste boundaries. Significantly, this boundary affects not only the relationship between the hypergamously married husband and wife but also their children and other relatives, patrilateral, matrilateral and affinal.

Many of the numerous cases of lower castes claiming to be higher ones reported in the reports of the Census of India from various British provinces and princely states from 1872 to 1931, arose out of hypergamy. These claims were made to seek legitimacy from the government for higher ritual and social status. The census officials declared their verdict on what they considered was the actual status. After the reservations for backward classes became operational in independent India, a lower caste in a hypergamous relation with a higher caste usually claims to be included in the backward class category with a view to getting the advantages of reservation. However, it continues to practise hypergamy, and claims simultaneously to be a higher caste for ritual and social purposes. Such a caste is thus both ‘forward’ and ‘backward’. This is a contradiction, but Indian society seems to have chosen to live with it.

Like lower castes, many tribal groups all over the country, except perhaps the North-East, have hypergamous relations with certain castes in their vicinity. We have known through the pioneering work of Surajit Sinha (1962, 1965) how a number of tribes in central India have used hypergamy to claim to be Rajputs and Kshatriyas (see also Dube 1977: passim). Similarly, Deliege’s book shows how the Bhils, a large and widely spread tribe in western India, practised hypergamy with the Rajputs (1985: 8, 42, 96–97, 118, 152, 156). Many families in these tribes were rich and powerful, usually tribal chieftains claiming to be rajás, and they were able to get their women married into established though lower status Rajput families, and then claim Rajput and Kshatriya status. Hypergamy enables tribal groups to claim equal status with the castes receiving their women as wives, thus making the boundary between tribe and caste elusive. Many tribal groups seem to have become castes by this process in history.
It is well known that female infanticide prevailed in a number of castes during the 19th century and continued perhaps for a few decades during the 20th century. Risley saw its relation with hypergamy (1915: 173–78), and recent research has confirmed it (Vishwanath 1990). The two together created, as mentioned earlier, shortage of marriageable women at the lower rungs of internal hierarchy of a caste, which in turn led to marriages of its men with women in other, usually lower, castes and tribes. In recent times, the increasing incidence of female foeticide has resulted in a similar situation, perhaps on a larger scale, in several parts of India. It is reported, for example, that many men in Haryana and Punjab are bringing women for marriage from as far as Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu. We do not know the consequences of such hypergamy for the affected castes at both ends.

If one gets tempted to think that the rule of caste endogamy was violated only at the lower ends of the caste hierarchy, it would be a mistake. It could be violated even at the highest level. To understand this, we should keep in view the fact that every raja or maharaja belonged to a caste (jati) in a region and stood at the apex of its internal hierarchy. If we take all the Hindu royal families from Nepal to Kanyakumari and from Manipur to Saurashtra, they belonged to a large number of different jatis. Even the claim that all of them belonged to the same varna, namely, Kshatriya, was not always sustained; there were subtle arguments against it. If marriage alliances of the members of these royal families are examined closely,\textsuperscript{13} they would show how the rule of caste endogamy was violated at the highest level of Hindu society. Hypergamy operated in this context also, with the Rajput royal families of Rajasthan occupying the highest position, and receiving brides from royal families in the rest of India but not giving brides to them in return.

\textit{Modern Inter-Caste Marriage}

In addition to the traditional hypergamous inter-caste marriages discussed above, there are inter-caste marriages under the influence of westernization and modernization. That such marriages are increasing rapidly in urban areas is well known, but they are also

\textsuperscript{13} For a discussion of such marriages, see Plunkett (1973) and Shah (1982, chapter 2 in this book).
increasing slowly in rural areas. Opposition to them has weakened to such an extent that the defenders of caste boundaries are finding it extremely difficult if not impossible to punish such newly wed spouses by throwing them out of their respective castes. As mentioned earlier, hardly any caste panchayat is now left in urban areas, and the few left in rural areas are hardly able to take such punitive action. In any case, such punishment is no longer a real threat. Modern law does not support it.

Since inter-caste marriages have been taking place for more than a century, there is now not only a second and third but even fourth generation population that does not have any caste. After an inter-caste marriage in one generation, usually the marriages of children of such a couple would be marriages between caste-less individuals. The argument that a child born out of an inter-caste marriage inherits the father’s caste, will no longer work in view of increasing gender equality. The child may not like to inherit the mother’s caste either. S/he might choose not to have any caste at all.

Inter-caste marriages appear to be an inevitable change in view of changes taking place in a number of fields in culture and society, the most important being the rising age at marriage, the ideology of freedom of choice in marriage, the increasing freedom in gender relations in educational institutions, in the work place, in the performing arts, and in entertainment activities, and the powerful role of both the print and electronic media in spreading the idea of freedom of choice in marriage.

To understand inter-caste marriage adequately, we have to take into account the structural distance between the castes of the spouses. I have discussed this issue at some length in my paper (1982, Chapter 8 in this book) as well as in Shah and Desai (1988) on caste in Gujarat. I have shown how a caste (jati) of the first order is divided often into divisions of up to the third order, in other words, into sub-sub-sub-castes. When the movement for inter-caste marriage began in the beginning of the 20th century, if not earlier, inter-caste marriages took place between divisions of the lowest order, i.e., the third order. The connubial field then widened gradually during the century. Nowadays, marriages are taking place between the major castes, i.e., divisions of the first order, for example, between Brahmans and Banias or between Kayasthas and Jats. In addition, marriages are taking place, particularly in large cities, between castes of one region and another, for example, between a Punjabi and a Tamil
Hindu, or between a Gujarati and a Bengali Hindu. There are also marriages between tribes and castes, which are virtually like inter-caste marriages. Finally, add to all these marriages among Hindus, the marriages between Hindus and members of other religions. The advocates of caste-based census will have to provide in their questionnaire a box, ‘No Caste’, for respondents to tick-mark, and I am sure they will find the total number of caste-less people in the country quite substantial.

The caste ideologues all over the country are alarmed by the changing marriage scenario. They are devising a variety of stratagems to counter the trend, mainly through caste associations. As mentioned earlier, the punitive measures are more or less ruled out. Therefore, the leaders in every caste focus on creating a number of opportunities for young boys and girls of the caste to meet and engage in such activities as would facilitate them to know one another intimately and then decide to marry. The elders tell the youth, ‘You have the freedom to marry according to your choice, but confine your choice to your caste.’ To put it in popular language, it is ‘love marriage’ within the caste. The latest stratagem is to organize large gatherings (called swayamvara and melā) of boys and girls of a caste, along with their relatives and friends, to meet each other and fix engagements. Of all the stratagems, structurally the most significant is the stratagem to widen the field for choice by organizing activities for the larger caste, because it has also political implications. It is not surprising that politicians often attend these gatherings. However, it appears at present that the defenders of caste boundaries are unlikely to succeed in halting the march of inter-caste marriages, which is basically the march of the individual’s freedom of choice in marriage. Social analysts will have to watch this march carefully during the 21st century.

Caste and the Network of Relatives

Due to caste endogamy, every individual’s network of relatives by kinship and marriage was confined to his/her caste. This network included (a) patrilineal kin descended from a common ancestor by several, usually seven, generations,14 and (b) a number of relatives on the side of mother, sister, wife, father’s mother, father’s sister, mother’s mother, mother’s sister, wife’s father, mother and brother, and so on.

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14 I am ignoring the matrilineal system here.
Sometimes an individual was related with another individual with two or more such relationships. That such overlapping relationships prevailed in south India, mainly due to close-kin marriage, is well known. They prevailed in north India also, but unfortunately we do not have adequate research on them.

The network of relatives occupied the social space between the individual and his/her caste, and mediated between them. Any caste could be visualized as composed of a series of interlocking networks of relatives. The number of such networks would be small in a small caste, so much so that an entire caste could be one large network. I have known endogamous units in Gujarat composed of just two or three hundred households each, so much so that almost all of them can be placed on one genealogical chart. On the other hand, a large caste like Koli, Maratha, Okkaliga, Jat, or Yadav had a widely spread series of networks of relatives. For an individual in a large caste the network of relatives was the most immediate representation of his/her caste. Some networks could be so tightly knit that they would look like sub-castes. A large widely spread caste was in fact a congeries of castes rather than a single cohesive caste entity. The networks of relatives thus worked as the foundation of a caste.

Even when caste panchayats were active and powerful, they had to operate through networks of relatives. The main reason was that most of the panchayat members used to be leaders of these networks. While a small caste would have only one panchayat, a large one had a series of panchayats, with possibility of cooperation as well as conflict between them.

These networks are now shrinking in urban centres in size as well as in intensity of relationship. Large lineage groups with deep genealogies are difficult to find in one place, because of migrations of members in many different directions both within and outside India. Even joint families with genealogical depth of three-or-four generations have been losing spatial cohesion. The same is true of relationships by marriage. An individual interacts with just a few close relatives on the side of mother, sister, wife, father’s sister, mother’s sister, etc., and has very few, if any, overlapping relationships, because increasing numbers of marriages are now taking place outside the erstwhile caste unit, and even within such a caste they tend to be with previously unrelated members. All in all, the networks of relatives are gradually weakening as the foundation for unity of individual caste.
Caste Associations

Caste associations have emerged as an important new institution supporting individual castes since at least the beginning of the 20th century. Initially, they were small units set up in large cities to promote welfare of the members of the caste in the city. Gradually they diversified their welfare activities as well as spread their membership to include small towns and villages. There are now caste, sub-caste and even sub-sub-caste associations in every city and at the local, regional, national and even international levels. Usually they have written constitutions, with membership fees, rules, regulations, offices, elections and so on. Many are registered under the Societies Registration Act or the Public Trusts Act, and some claim to be NGOs. While a few associations with manifest political aims came into existence quite early in the 20th century, most such associations were formed after independence with a view to represent the caste in electoral politics and to advance its claims for the benefits of reservation.

Although a caste association might claim to represent the caste as a whole, membership of no caste association, as far as I know, is coterminous with membership of the entire caste. The main reason is that every member of the caste is not always interested in becoming a member of the association, and even though s/he might be a member s/he might not participate actively in its activities. Some associations are only caucuses, with false claims to represent the entire caste. Every caste is internally differentiated in wealth, prestige and power, and therefore no caste association represents the interests of the entire caste.

Every caste has internal politics, often with rival associations. There can be conflict even about vital issues. Let me illustrate. I.P. Desai, as a member of the Second Socially and Educationally Backward Class Commission of Gujarat (popularly known as Rane Commission), had received petitions from a large number of caste associations. He gave me a huge pile of them for perusal. I found that, from a number of castes, more than one association in each had submitted petitions, one demanding the OBC status and the other opposing it. Desai himself reported two such cases in our book (1988: 87, 122). Let us hope some members of the numerous caste/tribe commissions will tell us — provided they are not bound by an oath of secrecy — how they went about deciding the inclusion or exclusion of castes/tribes.
in the relevant schedule. This information will throw a lot of light on
the nature of individual castes.

One may be tempted to think that the modern caste association
is only another form of the traditional caste panchayat. This is far from
reality. The fundamental difference is that while the panchayat had
disciplinary authority, the association does not have it. Of course,
the associations have taken upon themselves the role of facilitating
endogamous marriage, and thus maintain caste boundaries, but how
far they will succeed in this role has to be seen.

Some Implications of the Analysis

The above analysis should have indicated that every individual caste
has had complex internal structure and organization. There was con-
siderable economic, social and political differentiation in every caste.
No caste should be viewed as a monolith, with its members having
egalitarian relationships, in the past. Except a few castes of highly
skilled craftsmen and scribes residing in the city, the population
of every caste was divided into rural and urban sections. The caste
leaders usually lived in the town, and the rural–urban inequality
expressed itself in rural–urban hypergamy. Every peasant caste, for
example, had large landlords holding land under feudal tenures,
usually residing in the town, and playing part in regional politics.
Every merchant caste had big businessmen and financiers residing
in the town and petty shopkeepers in villages. Even the Untouchable
castes were differentiated. In my study of Gujarat villages in the early
19th century I found that among the untouchable weavers a few rich
went round villages on horseback to sell their cloth, and among the
leatherworkers a few families made money by selling leather and gave
loans to poor families among the upper castes. Even the Scavenger
caste had some differentiation. If I may use the language of current
discourse on protective discrimination, a ‘creamy layer’ of some sort
or other existed in every caste, and is by no means a modern phe-
nomenon. The internal differentiation in every caste has increased
during the 20th century and is likely to increase further during the 21st
century. Therefore, the identity of any caste should not to be assumed
to be an unambiguous reality, it has to be cultivated continuously by a
variety of means. This is true much more now when all caste identities
are threatened by modern social, cultural and ideological forces.
That caste plays an important role in politics is well known. However, we do not have as yet even an outline of the precise nature of relation between the internal structure and organization of individual caste and its role in wider politics. The main reason is a general failure to grasp the nature of individual caste. It is reified, and seen as a monolith, ignoring its internal structure and organization. Let us take as an illustration the studies of electoral politics where caste figures so prominently. On the whole, we are led to believe that caste plays a dominant, if not decisive, role in this arena. That this is a facile assessment is shown in a recent collection of essays based on field studies of elections in small communities, both rural and urban, in different parts of India (Shah, A.M. 2007). Dipankar Gupta (2000: 148–76) has also shown how there is no correlation between the caste composition of voters in a constituency and the election results. The main reason is that every caste is highly differentiated, such that its members even in a village do not always vote en bloc. The frequent assumption that an individual always votes for a candidate belonging to his caste, is also not true. Often there are two or more candidates belonging to the same caste, and the entire caste gets divided in its voting behaviour. Actually, caste is only one of the many factors influencing voting behaviour. The political parties and candidates always try to mobilize voters on caste basis, but their success depends a great deal on the matrix of various factors in a locality.

The arena in which caste plays the most crucial political role is that of reservations for the backward classes. Here also there are significant differences between its role in the three categories of backward classes, i.e., SCs, STs, and OBCs. All the same, the schedule for each category includes individual castes and tribes, the boundaries of each of which are assumed to be discrete. Since the statutory benefits have to be given only to the bonafide members of a caste or tribe in the schedule, its boundaries have to be clearly defined. After all, when an individual wants to get benefits of reservation, s/he has to produce a certificate of being a member of the caste or tribe included in the schedule. Since the Census of India has been conducting the census of SCs and STs every ten years since 1951, it is generally assumed that all is well with the data about them. However, how far the Census of India takes care of the changing ground realities regarding the boundaries of every caste and tribe included in the schedule should be examined.
As regards the OBCs, there is no reliable data about them since 1931. During the last three quarters of a century, the boundaries of almost every one of them have changed and become quite fuzzy. Even the names of many of them have changed. Therefore, the data about their population, education, employment, income, and so on, are bound to be dubious. It is no wonder we read contradictory proportions and percentages about them in the newspapers, and the law courts demand accurate data from the government.

Since the boundaries of many castes are loose and fluid, at the present time it would be impossible for the Census of India, the National Sample Survey, or any other investigating agency to collect reliable information about boundaries of castes and tribes and then about their population. These agencies would face several problems in their investigations. Should their field investigator at the ground level record only what the respondent says, or should he investigate the truth — status in the context of societal relationships or in the context of getting the benefits of reservation? How does he ensure that the respondent does not answer under pressure from the local politicians? Is the investigator properly trained to be able to capture the social reality on the ground? If he fails to get the correct information, should his boss in the state capital decide the way the census officials during the colonial times decided? How will the boss decide? Does he have the requisite expertise? In the case of the caste whose population is spread over vast areas — not only over many districts in a state but often also over two or more states — how will he reconcile the varied responses? Are there competent anthropologists and sociologists in sufficient number in the Anthropological Survey of India, or in the office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, or in any other government agency, to give reliable opinion? Finally, a basic question: does the Constitution empower the state to force a citizen to declare the name of her/his ‘real’ caste if s/he chooses not to declare it?

During 1872–1931, the Census of India was not always successful in identifying caste and tribe boundaries. Now, in the first decade of the 21st century, when these boundaries — even those of SCs and STs — are known to be fuzzy, should the state take upon itself the job of identifying them, a job, in any case cannot perform successfully? It is also likely that the efforts to fix caste and tribe boundaries might
lead to violent conflicts. In this situation, should the government become an agency to impose rigidity on caste and tribe boundaries, and should the judiciary endorse it by considering castes and tribes as discrete units? That is, should the state take a retrograde step towards caste and tribe-bound society? If not, then should the state indulge in providing reservations based on caste and tribe?

It is rarely realized that to support caste-based reservations is also to support caste endogamy, in other words, to support the restriction on freedom of choice in marriage. In this context, it is noteworthy that many of the politicians championing the cause of caste-based reservations are themselves violators of the rule of caste endogamy as well as of many other customs of their caste. If they have themselves not married outside their caste, their children and grandchildren would have. The main reason is that once a politician climbs high by using the caste ladder, s/he and her/his family move to a city, may be to a mega city such as Delhi or Mumbai, and then become part of its metropolitan culture — its numerous non-caste social networks and institutions. One of the dominant features of this culture is individual freedom, including freedom from the bonds of caste, which contradicts the emphasis on caste boundaries implied in caste-based reservations.

The supporters of caste-based reservations include many caste-less intellectuals. Even though they would announce loudly that they do not believe in caste and would have actually broken caste boundaries in marriage and otherwise in personal life, they nevertheless support caste-based reservations. They think that reservations are ‘progressive’ and would lead to empowerment of the backward classes, which in turn would lead to a caste-less society. In effect, however, these intellectuals become covert, if not overt, supporters of caste endogamy and thus opponents of freedom of choice in marriage. This is a contradiction, but India seems to have chosen to live with it. Social analysts will have to watch how long it will continue in the midst of changes taking place in the nature of individual caste during the 21st century.

I hope I have given some idea of how the dynamics of individual caste is likely to be the dominant feature of caste during the 21st century. Therefore, the study of this dynamics should become a prime concern of sociological and social anthropological research in the coming decades. This does not mean that we abandon the study
of hierarchy, but we have to identify its changing nature, and place individual castes in the changing social and cultural environment. All this will require us to devise new strategies of research, particularly in urban areas. The method of intensive fieldwork will have to occupy an important place in these strategies, but it will have to be used with innovation.
Purity, Impurity, Untouchability: Then and Now*

Although the phenomenon of purity and impurity, including the related one of untouchability, was studied in Indian sociology and social anthropology since the beginning of the discipline around 1920, its modern systematic analysis may be said to have begun with M.N. Srinivas’s work on religion among the Coorgs of south India (1952; see also Dumont and Pocock’s 1959 review article on it). Since then, a large body of work has grown, and we have now a fair understanding of the phenomenon. I propose to discuss in this essay some aspects of it, focussing on changes taking place in the modern times. I am aware of the enormous complexity of the phenomenon and its regional diversities, and of the necessity to be extremely careful in making general statements about it. The issue of untouchability in particular is highly emotive and politically explosive. However, the phenomenon poses important problems for both social theory and policy, and social scientists would be failing in their duty if they do not deal with them in a cool and calm manner.

The Culture of Purity and Pollution

Ideas of purity/impurity were present all over Hindu society for centuries: in domestic as well as public life, in exchange of food and water, in practising occupations, in kinship and marriage, in religious action and belief, in temples and monasteries, and in a myriad different contexts and situations. These ideas played a crucial role in separating one caste from another, and in arranging them in a hierarchy, that is to say, in ordering the basic structure of the society. We have by now considerable literature presenting elaborate analysis

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of the ritual hierarchy of castes based on ideas of purity/impurity. A Hindu man or woman’s life was permeated with ideas of purity/impurity from the moment of birth to the moment of death, and every day from the moment s/he got up from bed till s/he went to bed. Even if one manages to read the entire literature on purity/impurity, I doubt if one would be able to grasp all its ramifications. A complete list of pure/impure actions, ideas and materials would occupy a whole book, perhaps as large as an encyclopedia. Hindu civilization is sometimes called a civilization of purity and pollution, and the Hindu psyche is believed to be pathologically obsessed with them. One has only to conjure up an image of the orthodox Hindu taking different kinds of purificatory baths and their frequency. I will give just one illustration. The main character in a Gujarati novel written towards the end of the 19th century (Nilkanth 1900), a Brahman named Bhadrambhadra was travelling on a train for the first time from Ahmedabad to Bombay. He considered his co-passengers polluting, and therefore took a purificatory bath on the platform of every station the train halted at.

Gods and goddesses and their abodes, the temples, were attributed the highest degree of purity, and therefore protected from every conceivable source of impurity. In the same manner, temple priests were considered the purest men who had to observe the rules of purity/impurity meticulously. Although the Brahmans were considered the purest caste, a Brahman priest was purer than an ordinary Brahman. The Brahman sub-castes were also ranked, and the Brahmans performing mortuary rituals were considered the lowest. Similarly, many non-Brahman members of certain highly Sanskritic sects observed the rules of purity/impurity so meticulously, particularly while worshipping their deities, that they considered the ordinary Brahmans less pure, if not polluting. Many holy men among lower castes and tribes, such as bhagats and bhuvas, also observed the rules of purity/impurity strictly.

Every caste, as a collectivity, was ranked relatively pure or impure vis-à-vis another caste on the basis of mainly its observance of rules of purity/impurity. The concern for purity/impurity decreased as one went down the ladder of hierarchy. However, there was a continuous process of every caste trying to improve its status by adopting higher levels of purity, as part of the process Srinivas called ‘sanskritization’ (1956). As he pointed out and as I have discussed elsewhere (2005, Chapter 3 in this book; 2006), the Brahmans were not the only source
of Sanskritic influence. Some other higher castes as well as certain non-caste institutions, such as sects, temples, monasteries, religious literature, and religious discourses, could also be its source.

The fact that certain castes were considered impure, polluting and untouchable, and occupied the lowest rungs of the hierarchy, has been a major problem of study in social sciences as well as a major concern for social reformers and statesmen in modern India. It is a multi-dimensional problem, and I will discuss mainly the dimension of untouchability qua untouchability. I submit we would be ignoring social reality if we do not consider untouchability an integral part of the entire complex of purity/impurity in Hindu society and culture.

Just as men and women belonging to certain castes were considered untouchable, men and women belonging to non-untouchable castes were also considered untouchable in certain contexts, mainly in the domestic domain. In its general sense, untouchability prevailed in every Hindu home. For example, in orthodox Hindu homes, the woman or man cooking food in the kitchen was pure compared to other members, such that s/he did not allow them to enter the kitchen, served food outside it, and took care not to touch them and their plates while serving them food. A woman during her menstrual period was considered polluting, and therefore segregated in her home. Even her sight and shadow were considered polluting and inauspicious on certain occasions. Similarly, a woman after childbirth was considered polluting and was isolated in the home for as long as a month or so. Maximum impurity was attached to a dead body, and therefore every one connected with it, even a relative residing far away from it, was considered highly impure and polluting, and was isolated. The rules about sutaka, pollution arising from death, were so many and so complicated that only a few persons in a village or an urban neighbourhood knew them thoroughly.

The word asprishya, the Sanskrit equivalent of ‘untouchable’, was used even for contexts of highest purity. In Pushti Marg, a Vaishnava sect founded by Vallabhacharya in the 16th century, a member had to worship his/her deity in a state of intense purity. This state, in the temple or the home, was called asprishya (aparash in Gujarati and Hindi) and all other persons were prohibited from touching the worshipper. This shows the concept of untouchability could be applied to the most impure as well as the most pure. Its use to mark out entire castes as untouchable was a special application of the concept.
The Untouchable Jatis: Division and Hierarchy

While the Dharmaśastras and other ancient Hindu texts described the society as divided into four varnas, they also mentioned a category of people outside the varna order, usually called avarna (without varna) as contrasted with savarna (with varna). They were on the margin of the social order, and are generally considered to be the precursors of the category of people called ‘Untouchables’ in modern times. A clear understanding of untouchability, however, requires us to recognize the fact that the Untouchables were never a homogeneous group; they were divided into a number of endogamous castes (jatis) which were arranged in a hierarchy, in the same way as castes in the rest of the society were divided and arranged. The ancient texts, however, do not mention the numerous jatis of the Untouchables; we now have more than a thousand of them. We begin to get references to some of them in the literature of the regional languages which began to develop in the medieval period. However, this literature would not help us compile a comprehensive list of Untouchable jatis in any region. Such lists began to be compiled only when the British administrators launched the Census of India, the Gazetteers, and the castes-and-tribes volumes in the second half of the 19th century. These lists became more or less a bench mark. However, we have to inquire: How were these lists prepared? On what basis were the various jatis considered untouchable? And, how far were these lists objective and reliable?

Simon Charsley, in a well documented essay (1996) on the career of the concept ‘Untouchable’, shows how Herbert Risley, the Census Commissioner of India for 1901, was the first to propose, as part of his scheme to classify castes of the Shudra varna into five categories, a category called ‘Asprishya Shudra’ (Untouchable Shudra). He gave instructions to the census officials in different parts of India as to how to place various castes in this category. Charsley narrates the complicated problems these officials, and ultimately Risley, faced in their task. No coherent or consistent list of Untouchable castes for any region, leave alone for India as a whole, emerged. Charsley remarks, ‘From this unpropitious start, representing as it did more of a rebuff than a successful initiative, the career of a key term was launched’ (ibid. 3). In the social and political movements to uplift the Untouchables, which began more or less simultaneously with Risley’s census, the social reformers, statesmen, bureaucrats and
others also got involved in identifying specific Untouchable castes for their purpose.

Charsley goes on to narrate the career of the terms related to the Untouchable, such as Depressed Class, Excluded Caste, Scheduled Castes (henceforth SC), Harijan, and Dalit. It is clear that in preparing a list or schedule for every one of these categories the census officials, other bureaucrats, social reformers, and politicians always agreed about including the lowest caste, namely the Scavengers, but disagreed about others. The main reason was the differences of opinion about what constituted ‘untouchability’, the defining criterion for each category. Charsley remarks, ‘As a concept, ‘untouchability’ suppressed diversity and variation’ (ibid.: 12). He does not say how these compromises were made and the differences accommodated to finalise any list — this should be a problem of research. The basic point, however, remains that all lists of Untouchable castes, past and present, do not have the objective reality or finality claimed for them.

Secondly, an idea that the Untouchable castes were separated from the rest of the castes by a fixed and inviolable line got established in all discourse, including the anthropological and sociological one, on Indian society and culture. We shall soon examine this line of thought.

Whatever the line dividing the Untouchable castes from the rest of the castes, separation of one Untouchable caste from another and their arrangement in a hierarchy were based on essentially the same ideas of purity/impurity that guided the separation and hierarchy of the rest of the castes. We have some intensive studies elaborating this point (for a good illustration, see Moffatt’s 1979 study of five Untouchable castes in a village in Tamil Nadu).

Often the Untouchable castes in a region included a few castes similar to certain castes in the rest of the society. For example, as in most other regions, a caste of priests occupying a status similar to that of the Brahmans existed among the Untouchables in Gujarat. Called Garo (or Goroda; derived from Sanskrit guru) they claimed to be Brahman, put on the sacred thread, and adopted Brahmanical surnames such as Joshi, Trivedi, Vyas and so on (for detailed accounts, see Stevenson 1930, Shah, A.M. 1987, Chapter 9 in this book; Randeria 1989).

1 For further elaboration of the career of these terms, see Charsley and Karanth (1998, especially Chapters 1–2).
The Structure of Indian Society

This caste formed part of a hierarchy of several priestly groups related to the hierarchy of castes in the region. (a) The highest were of course the Brahmans. However, only a minority of them worked as priests, while the majority practised other occupations such as agriculture, teaching, clerical work, government service, money lending, etc. The rites of passage and some other rituals among the Brahmans themselves were performed by certain superior priests forming a grade within the caste. (b) The members of high Brahman sub-castes worked as priests for high non-Brahman castes. (c) The members of a few low Brahman sub-castes worked as priests for lower-middle non-Brahman castes. (d) The Barber sub-castes provided the priestly service to the lower, though not Untouchable, castes. (e) The Garos provided the priestly service to the other Untouchable castes, except the Scavengers. (f) A few Garos forming a grade within their caste provided the priestly service to other Garos. Thus, existence of a Brahman-like priestly caste among the Untouchables was not mere ‘replication’ of existence of Brahmans among the upper castes, as Moffatt (1979) would have called it. In fact, it was one more example of a common characteristic of the caste order, namely, that when a caste providing its service to a higher caste denied the same service to a lower one, some other caste provided it to the latter, or a few members within the latter learnt to perform the service. If the number of such members within a caste increased, a new caste or sub-caste might develop in the course of time.

While the Untouchable Brahmans occupied the highest ritual status among the Untouchables, the Scavengers were considered the most impure and polluting. They occupied the lowest status, and were therefore segregated by the other Untouchable castes. There were many other castes between the two ends, all arranged in a hierarchy according to the norms of purity and pollution. As is often said, there was untouchability amongst the Untouchables. In this situation, it is highly problematic to apply the statements of ancient texts about the avarnas uniformly to the entire range of a thousand or more Untouchable castes of today.

2 The Turi, a small caste of bards among the Untouchables in Gujarat, is another example. It is part of several Bardic castes in Gujarat and Rajasthan (see Shah and Shroff 1958).
Ambiguity of the Touchable/Untouchable Dividing Line

Let us return to the assumption that the line dividing the Untouchable from the non-Untouchable was fixed and inviolable. If we follow the category prescribed by the state, such as Scheduled Castes, it was fixed. But, was it so in social reality? We have to consider three kinds of inter-caste relations in this regard in a local area, comprised of, say, a town and the villages around it, and populated by members of some twenty to twenty-five castes, including a few Untouchable ones: (a) relations between the castes just above and just below this line, i.e., between the highest of the so-called Untouchable castes and the lowest of the so-called non-Untouchable ones; (b) relation between a few middle non-Untouchable castes and a few middle Untouchable ones; and (c) whether the Brahmans and a few other high castes considered the low non-Untouchable castes as Untouchable or not. Our main problem is that usually we observe the two ends of the hierarchy, the Brahman and the Scavenger, and their relationship. Consequently, the general view of the Untouchables tends to be either the Brahman’s view of the Scavenger from the top, or the Scavenger’s view of the Brahman from the bottom, and therefore partial either way. This view needs to be corrected.

If the above mentioned three kinds of inter-caste relations are viewed together, we would not find a fixed and inviolable line dividing the Untouchable castes from the non-Untouchable ones. The status of many castes was ambiguous. For example, in a village in Gujarat where I did fieldwork in 1955–1958, a few households each of two low castes, namely Senwa and Vaghri, the former an SC and the latter a non-SC, lived side by side on the edge of the village. The Vaghris did not treat the Senwas as untouchable, while the upper castes treated both as untouchable. Similar ambiguity prevailed regarding castes.

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3 Strictly speaking, the government list of SCs is not fixed. The government does consider from time to time proposals to include or exclude castes in it. However, it has remained more or less stable since 1952.

4 In our general thinking on untouchability we rarely take cognizance of urban Untouchables. However, we should realise that almost all the Untouchable castes living in rural areas used to have urban counterparts even in the past, and the latter’s life was different in many respects. Their population is now increasing rapidly. Secondly, there were castes of certain specialised urban artisans and craftsmen who did not have rural counterparts.
of specialized urban craftsmen making articles of leather, such as footwear, bags, straps, belts, seats, drums, saddles, shields, and so on. While the highest castes considered them untouchable, the middle ones did not mind touching them. For example, in a small town near my field village in Gujarat, the mochis (shoemakers) had their homes as well as shops on the edge of the town. When a high caste man went to a shoemaker’s shop to get shoes made, he did not allow the shoemaker to measure his feet. Instead, he stood at the entrance of the shop, put his foot on a piece of paper, drew a line with a pencil or pen around it, and gave the paper to the shoemaker without touching him. Moreover, in these high castes, a few persons deeply conscious of purity did not wear leather shoes at all; they wore sandals made of wood or thick jute cloth. The middle and lower castes, however, did not mind touching the shoemaker. Intensive research is required on the so-called line of separation between the Untouchable and the non-Untouchable in different parts of India, so that we get a more realistic view of the entire caste order.

The Culture of Purity/Impurity among the Untouchables

What kind of purity/impurity was practised among the Untouchables in their homes and in their personal life? That there was untouchability in every Hindu home was stated earlier. Can the same be said about the Untouchable’s home? Unfortunately, there is very little ethnographic literature on this issue. I have only bits and pieces of information. All of them indicate that although the Untouchables were impure vis-à-vis other castes, and some of them performed such highly impure work as that of skinning dead animals, and removing garbage in baskets kept on their head, they were all concerned about purity/impurity in their own life. It seems every Untouchable caste had its norms in this

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Note that skinning of a dead animal and tanning the skin was highly polluting, and so were therefore the skinners and tanners. However, leather resulting from skinning and tanning was less polluting, and so were the craftsmen working with leather. Upper caste treatment of the skinners-and-tanners and the leather craftsmen was therefore variable.

For some more ethnographic data from Gujarat on this issue, see A.M. Shah (1987), Chapter 9 in this book.
As mentioned earlier, the process of sanskritization operated as much among the Untouchable castes as among the rest of the castes, and that there was a continuous striving among them to achieve higher levels of purity. The fundamental point is that, despite the line separating the Untouchables from the rest of Hindu society, all Hindus shared the culture of purity/impurity, and untouchability was an integral part of this culture.

As mentioned earlier, there were castes of priests among the Untouchables. Where there was no such caste, a few families of some higher Untouchable caste performed priestly functions. At least some of these priests had acquired a high level of literacy and could read Hindu scriptures, mostly in a regional language but sometimes also in Sanskrit. Similarly, a few individuals in every Untouchable caste had become members of certain Sanskritic sects, which placed them in a relationship of some equality with higher caste members of the same sect (see Shah, A.M. 2006b, Chapter 3 in this book). In this context, the recent book on Untouchable Saints edited by Zelliot and Mokashi-Punekar (2005) is revealing. It shows that, since about the 10th century, there were Untouchable saints who composed exquisite poetry in worship of gods and goddesses: Tiruppan and Nandnar in Tamil Nadu, Chokhamela in Maharashtra, and Ravidas in north India. Their poetry showed a high level of religiosity as well as literary quality, and high castes accepted it and made it an integral part of their temple and domestic worship. Tiruppan was given the high status of an Alvar, and Nandnar, that of a Nayanar. Similarly, Chandrawadia (2007) narrates, rather briefly, the life of seventeen ‘Harijan saint poets’ (15 men and two women) during the 15th to the 18th century in Saurashtra and Kutch sub-regions of Gujarat (see also my note 2007a). Their poems reveal their knowledge of philosophical and theological ideas of Hinduism, and their affiliation with Hindu sects. Efforts must be made to inquire about such saints in the rest of Gujarat and in other regions of India. They belie the assumption of a chasm between the Untouchables and the rest of society in the past.

Changes in the Culture of Purity and Pollution

Radical changes have been taking place in the entire culture of purity/impurity due to the processes of industrialization, urbanization,
westernization, modernization, secularization, rationalism, humanitarianism, and mere exigencies of modern life, roughly with the beginning of the British rule in the early 19th century (for a pioneering analysis of these processes, see Srinivas 1966). The upper castes who were the first to adopt western education were also the first to change their purity/pollution behaviour, in the domestic as well as the public sphere. This change occurred first in urban areas, and gradually affected rural areas. Its pace increased with the pace of urbanisation during the second half of the 20th century, and is likely to be faster during the 21st century (for a discussion of urban caste, see Shah, A.M. 2007b, Chapter 1 in this book).

A few examples may suffice. The taboo on cooking and eating food without taking a bath has more or less disappeared in most urban homes. Women in menstrual period are no longer prevented from cooking and serving food, except in orthodox homes. They move freely in all parts of the home, except the corner for worship. The prohibition on eating food with footwear on has disappeared, not only outside but even inside the home. There is no difference between kacchā and pakka food as regards their relative purity. Many people now do not take a purificatory bath on returning home from a funeral, let alone after receiving news of a relative’s death. Even when a bath is taken, it is much less elaborate than in the past. The period of pollution arising from childbirth is reduced or is not observed at all in many homes. Many people do not mind touching a woman who has given birth to a child. In fact, the father, grandparents, other relatives and friends are expected to visit the mother in the hospital and take the newborn baby in their hands, without bothering to take a purificatory bath afterwards. Hardly any one now takes a purificatory bath on returning home from a train or bus journey or from visiting a hospital.

Most men after a haircut and shave by a barber are no longer required to take a purificatory bath to remove pollution and resume normal life. There is hardly any concern now for avoiding the use of articles of leather and for avoiding contact with craftsmen working with leather, except in the sanctum sanctorum in temples and in the corner for worship in the home. Many of those ‘petty’ pure/impure behaviours connected with cooked foods and their ingredients in the kitchen, with the lavatory and the urinal, and with a myriad other contexts and situations, are becoming less and less common.

Just as the concern for purity/pollution has declined in the domestic and personal domain, it has also declined in relations between
castes. The prohibition on exchange of food and water between castes is hardly visible in urban areas. People of all castes eat food at restaurants and hotels without bothering to inquire about the caste of the cook, the waiter, and the person sitting on the adjoining seat. Similarly, at meals served during weddings and such other occasions, members of different castes are not seated any longer in separate rows (pangats), nor are they bothered about who cooks and serves food. Members of higher castes, including Brahmans, now eat in lower caste homes. This freedom of food transactions is spreading in rural areas, and will spread faster with the increasing pace of urbanization.

The concern for purity/pollution continues to be strongest in the field of religion. For example, even highly westernized and modernized men and women do not worship their deities without taking a bath. Women do not perform the puja in the home or the temple, or fix the dates of weddings and other important rituals and ceremonies, during their menstrual period. They even time this period with the help of medicines to suit the dates of important rituals and ceremonies.

Temples however continue to have rituals of purity. Temple rituals, particularly in the great temples of Hinduism, are far more complex than most devotees assume them to be. In fact, most devotees have very little knowledge of what goes on in a large temple, particularly in the sanctum sanctorum. Ideas of purity/impurity permeate it in more complex ways than they do the life outside it. Nevertheless, even here some relaxations in the concern for purity/pollution have taken place, particularly in the smaller and local temples.

At the other end of the spectrum, the most visible expression of untouchability, even in urban areas, continues to be the job of cleaning streets and collecting garbage exclusively by the members of the Scavenger caste, and they are also segregated usually in their own streets. In practically all other spheres of urban life, overt untouchability has disappeared. Not only is there no concern among upper castes for avoiding physical contact with the Untouchables, but the Untouchables too have no difficulty in eating with other castes in public places such as restaurants and hotels. There are still some subtle forms of avoidance, but they are on their way out. Upper caste children in urban areas now grow up without any experience and even knowledge of untouchability in schools, buses, trains, restaurants, etc. When they go to college, they come under the impact of modern ideas of eradication of untouchability. To such children, if
untouchability seems irrational, the reservations for the Untouchables qua untouchables in educational institutions also seems irrational. This attitude can no longer be called an ancient prejudice against the Untouchables.

As mentioned earlier, with the increasing pace of urbanization the trend towards decline in untouchability will intensify. It is also likely to spread to villages. For example, a villager travelling to a city on bus or train does not know the caste of the passenger sitting next to him, of the person taking tea with him in a tea-shop, of the clerk dealing with him in an office, or of the shopkeeper from whom he buys goods. He will also not take a purificatory bath on returning home from the journey.

Positive changes are taking place in village society also. In his study of untouchability in Gujarat (1978), I.P. Desai has observed that, in all matters in what he calls the public sphere (i.e., where the government is involved), untouchability is no longer a problem: in such matters as the seating arrangement for Untouchable children in schools, the delivering of letters by a higher caste postman to an Untouchable, and the handing over of postal stamps by a post office clerk to an Untouchable. There is considerable decline in untouchability even in what Desai calls the private sphere: in such matters as an upper caste man touching an Untouchable labourer while involved in agricultural work, and an upper caste shopkeeper giving goods to and receiving money from an Untouchable customer. The most important general change is that while an upper caste person may avoid touching an Untouchable, if he happens to touch him he does not take a purificatory bath as in the past. The punctiliousness with which untouchability was observed in the past has declined considerably even in villages.

In pre-modern India the concern for purity/pollution decreased as one went down the ladder of caste hierarchy. In modern India, however, there is a two-way change. While among the upper castes this concern is decreasing due to westernization and modernization, it is increasing among the lower castes, including the Untouchables, due to sanskritization. Let me give one example. In a section of the Untouchables in Gujarat I have observed recently, the wedding and other rituals are as Sanskritic as among the higher castes. Consequently, there is an increasing demand for the services of Garo priests mentioned earlier. The demand has grown so much that the government department for social welfare has been organizing.
2000 onwards, a training programme in Karmakand (corpus of Sanskritic rituals) for them. This two-way change has brought about a certain cultural uniformity, which has contributed to freer interaction between the upper castes and the Untouchables. Another factor is, of course, westernization and modernization of the new middle class among the Untouchables.

Conclusion

In modern India, a number of social reform movements have worked for the eradication of untouchability, and after independence the government has enacted laws and devised programmes to do the same. All these efforts have of course had their positive impact. However, the pervasive decline in the concern for purity and pollution among the upper and middle castes has also been a potent factor in the decline of untouchability. For present day children in these castes in urban areas, it is a silent and largely unconscious change, so much so that I wonder if the idea of untouchability exists in their cognitive map.

Let me hasten to clarify that I do not maintain that untouchability has disappeared completely in Indian society. I am aware of the terrible atrocities committed on the Untouchables from time to time in different parts of India, of the many disabilities and indignities suffered by them, of the discrimination practised against them in various walks of life, and so on. At the same time, it would be a mistake to think that no positive change has taken place. All available information indicates that at least some of the higher castes among the Untouchables have been able to get out of the trap of untouchability.

As social scientists, we have a duty to assess the nature and extent of social change. In this assessment, we would not be able to go very far if we use the category Untouchable, Depressed Class, SC, Harijan, or Dalit as an undifferentiated one. We should investigate whether all the castes included in any of these categories are affected by change uniformly, as also whether all the castes included in the category 'upper caste' or 'non-untouchable caste' behave in the same manner. We should try to know which of the Untouchable castes are the normal

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7 For a more detailed discussion of differentiation of the Dalit category, see my article (2002a, Chapter 7 in this book).
victims of discrimination, and investigate their social profile, rural or urban, upper class or lower class, educated or uneducated, and so on. On the other hand, we should investigate the social background of the perpetrators of discrimination. Such information is rarely collected, and if collected, not published. In this process the problems of the lowest among the Untouchables, the worst sufferers, get ignored.

I understand the politicians have reasons to go on using the category Untouchable or Dalit without differentiation. The mediapersons too seem to have their disabilities. They could be unaware of the complexity of the problem, or are afraid of the law prohibiting the use of caste names, or are in such a great hurry to flash stories about the Dalits that they rarely investigate the details of the Dalit castes involved in an incident. They go on using the word Dalit without any differentiation, and thus create false images of the situation in the public mind. Consequently, social scientists do not get the kind of help they would expect from the media in getting information towards the goal of understanding the changing social reality.

Be that as it may, I do not understand why social scientists should ignore reality. Are they also in a hurry? Have they come to the conclusion that the original decision of the government according to the Constitution, which identified a number of different Untouchable castes and placed them in a schedule, calling them SCs, has become irrelevant? If so, then why have the schedule at all? Also, why should

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Take, for example, the recent book on untouchability in rural India written jointly by five authors (one political scientist, one economist, two sociologists, and one activist), based on an extensive all-India survey (G. Shah et al. 2006). They clarify that their work is confined to castes included by the government in the list of SCs (ibid.: 37). They are also aware that 'All SCs do not experience untouchability to the same degree.' However, they go on to state, 'We did not specifically inquire into the question of who among the Dalits experience more untouchability and in which sphere' (ibid.: 171). Consequently, the book gives the impression that there is no differentiation among the Dalits regarding the various aspects of their life the authors have surveyed.

R.S. Khare’s otherwise sophisticated work on the Chamars of Lucknow (1984) does not include even a passing reference to the multiplicity and hierarchy of the Untouchable castes, neither in Uttar Pradesh nor in India as a whole. The non-Untouchable castes are also conceived narrowly — mainly Brahmans. Many of the general theories about the Untouchables are therefore based on a weak empirical foundation.
there be a statutory requirement for an Untouchable to obtain the
certificate of his/her membership of a specific SC for getting the
benefits to which s/he may be entitled? Have the Dalits become an
undifferentiated mass? Have separation and hierarchy among the
Dalit castes disappeared? Have the different Dalit castes given up the
rule of caste endogamy? Have inter-caste marriages become common
among them? It has become taboo to talk or write about all this in
public. Ignoring social facts and throwing them under the carpet in this
manner, however, is neither in the interest of social science nor in
the interest of bringing about desirable social change.
Sanskritization Revisited*

It is well known that one of the basic contributions of M.N. Srinivas to the study of Indian society and culture is his concept and analysis of sanskritization. He used the concept first in his doctoral dissertation on Coorg religion submitted to Oxford University in 1947 and published in 1952. As Srinivas himself noted later (1967, reprinted in Srinivas 2002: 221), the eminent linguist and historian Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (1950) also used the term almost at the same time as Srinivas used it, but without the two scholars knowing about one another's work. This was similar to the well-known phenomenon in the physical sciences of a simultaneous discovery made by two or more scientists without knowing one another's work.

Srinivas's concept has had a long career, culminating in its inclusion in the Oxford English Dictionary (1971). This has happened because not only Srinivas but also many other scholars have written extensively about it. These scholars belong to a variety of disciplines: anthropology, sociology, history, political science, linguistics, Sanskrit, Indology, and others. One may agree or disagree with the concept, one may misunderstand it, or one may interpret it differently, but one uses it all the same. The frequently used term 'de-sanskritization' also presumes 'sanskritization'. The concept continues to be used extensively even now, and will, I am sure, continue to be used as long as scholars are interested in understanding Indian culture and society in space and time.

The Word ‘Sanskritization’

As soon as we use the term sanskritization, Sanskrit comes to mind. Indeed several linguists such as Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, V. Raghavan

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and J.F. Staal have commented on this aspect of the concept. Sanskritization and de-sanskritization of languages have taken place throughout Indian history. In modern India, however, there has been widespread sanskritization of all regional languages, including tribal languages, except perhaps Tamil. Use of standardized language in education, administration, print and electronic media, and other sectors of society, along with migrations from rural, including tribal, areas to urban centres, have played a major role in sanskritization of regional languages. Rural, tribal and caste dialects have been on the way to extinction, if they have already not become so. Hindi, after its recognition as an official language of India, has become highly Sanskritic. There are now innumerable Sanskrit tongue-twisters, often obscure, in bureaucratic parlance. Sanskrit words are also being used increasingly as personal names in modern times all over India, including tribal areas, except again perhaps in Tamil Nadu.

Sanskritization is much more than a matter of language, however. Since it is based on Srinivas’s concept of Sanskritic Hinduism, it is, of course, concerned in a major way with religion. However, it is also concerned with many other aspects of society and culture. Srinivas has described its features in great detail in many of his writings. I will not, therefore, repeat them here. Basically, these features are part of what is called great traditional, classical, or higher Hinduism elaborated in classical Sanskrit texts.

’Sanskritization’ is a hybrid word. Srinivas himself stated that it was ‘an ugly term’ (1956a: 73, 1956b, 2002: 202) and ‘I myself do not like that word. It is extremely awkward’ (1956a: 90). A question is often asked, particularly in discussions of the concept in regional languages: is this word based on Sanskrit (name of the language) or sanskriti (meaning culture, civilization). Both Srinivas and Chatterjee based it on the former rather than the latter. For both of them, the concept was inextricably linked to the religious and cultural complex found in classical Sanskrit literature. In any case, however, in scientific discourse the substantive content of a term is far more important than its etymology.

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1While citing Srinivas’s papers and Fuller’s interview with him, reprinted in Srinivas’s Collected Essays (2002), I have mentioned, for the reader’s convenience, the original date of publication as well as the date of publication and pages in the collection.
Evolution of the Concept

To understand the basic nature of sanskritization it is necessary to keep in mind Srinivas’s original description and analysis of Sanskrit versus non-Sanskritic culture in his Coorg book. Its foundation is laid in the initial two chapters on *The Ritual Idiom of Coorgs*. We find here a detailed analysis of items of culture concerning time, space, directions, shaving, bath, dress, lamp, stove, rice, milk, coins, salutation, music, food, ritual purity and impurity, mourning, funeral, betel leaves, areca nut, and so on. Srinivas uses three rules formulated by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, his teacher at Oxford, to decipher ritual idiom and thus understand the language of Coorg rituals. He then uses this understanding in the rest of the book to describe and analyze the nature of Hindu gods, goddesses, and other sacred objects and personages, the rituals of their worship, the myths concerning them, the rites of passage, the festivals, social customs, and so on. It is in this context that he puts forward his concepts of Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic Hinduism, and of sanskritization.

Although Srinivas made a considerable number of general observations on Indian society and culture in the Coorg book, the main focus of the book remained on Coorg society. In the years following its writing, he carried out intensive fieldwork in the village of Rampura and its neighbourhood in the former Mysore state (now in Karnataka) and also read modern anthropological and sociological literature that was beginning to appear. Armed with this new knowledge, he presented his thoughts on sanskritization more comprehensively for the first time in ‘A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization’ he wrote for a seminar organized by Milton Singer at Pune in July 1954. Srinivas could not attend the seminar, but sent the paper for publication in *Far Eastern Quarterly*.

In the meantime, he presented the same paper at the all India conference of anthropologists and sociologists held at Madras in November 1955. While presenting the paper he spoke at some length to introduce it. The paper, the speech and the discussion

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2 These three rules are quoted in Srinivas (1952: 72). Milton Singer (1998) has shown how these rules were essentially structuralist, and antedated Claude Levi-Strauss’s structuralism, and how Srinivas was a pioneer in applying them in analyzing rituals and that too in a complex civilization such as India and not in a simple primitive society.
were published in the report of the conference in October 1956 (see Srinivas 1956a). In the paper he expressed his awareness of ‘the complexity of the concept and its looseness’ (ibid.: 75; 1956b; 2002: 202) and in the speech he expressed his dissatisfaction with the word ‘sanskritization’ (1956a: 90). Several leading participants in the conference, such as V. Raghavan, Irawati Karve, N. K. Bose, P. N. Prabhu and N. Dutta-Majumder, criticized the paper sharply. Srinivas’s replies were equally sharp:

I am afraid that in spite of the criticisms against the term sanskritization, I shall continue to use it because there is nothing in anything that has been said by anyone, including the president [Irawati Karve], that has convinced me that I should discard it (ibid.: 113).

Taking advantage of the discussion at the conference, Srinivas added a long note at the end of the paper on the eve of its publication in Far Eastern Quarterly (1956b, reprinted in Srinivas 2002: 200–220). He stated here that the concept was not ‘perfect’ (2002: 219). However, he continued to use it, re-examining it continuously in view of new data and new ideas because, as he stated, ‘Perfectionism is often a camouflage for sterility’ (2002: 219). In all of his work, he believed, like E. E. Evans-Pritchard, his other teacher and later colleague at Oxford, in the heuristic value of an idea rather than in its truth-value (see Fuller 1998, reprinted in Srinivas 2002: 702).

It is often said that the term sanskritization is only another word for ‘Brahmanization’. However, Srinivas clarified in all his writings on the subject, beginning with the Coorg book, that the Brahmans are not always the source or agency of sanskritization. Often the non-Brahman castes play this role. In fact, the source of sanskritization for a low non-Brahman caste can be another non-Brahman caste just above it in hierarchy. It is also significant that many sanyāsīs and sadhus are highly sanskritized in their behaviour without being Brahmans, and they are an important agent of sanskritization. Even an Untouchable can be highly sanskritized. The reason is that the source of sanskritization may not be any caste at all; it can even be impersonal.

**Sanskritization and Caste: Culture and Structure**

Incomplete reading of Srinivas’s writings has often led to an impression that sanskritization is essentially a process of emulation of the culture of upper castes by lower castes for upward mobility in
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the ritual hierarchy of castes. Many textbooks of sociology and social anthropology describe it this way. Surely, this process of emulation exists and is very important. Srinivas himself has analyzed it at great length, to such an extent that some of his statements have contributed to this limited interpretation of the concept. However, it would be a mistake to view it as confined to and limited by the caste order. In fact, it is much wider and quite profound in application. Even in his Coorg book, he often states that sanskritization of tribal and other outlying groups leads to their inclusion in Hindu society. In a subsequent paper he states:

Sanskritization is not confined to any single part of the country, but is wide-spread in the subcontinent, including remote and forested regions. It affected a wide variety of groups, both within the Hindu fold and others outside it. It was even carried to neighbouring countries such as Ceylon, Indonesia, and Tibet (1967, reprinted in 2002: 221).

In this context, it is necessary to keep in view what I said earlier about Srinivas’s analysis of the ritual idiom of Coorgs, how he used this analysis in understanding their pantheon, rituals, myths, theological ideas and values, festivals, customs and ceremonies, all leading to postulation of the concepts of Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic Hinduism. In other words, we have to think of the general nature of Hinduism, only a part of which is linked with the caste order. That is why Srinivas clarified, ‘To describe the social changes occurring in modern India in terms of sanskritization and westernization is to describe it primarily in cultural, not structural, terms’ (1956a: 90; 1956b, reprinted in 2002: 212, emphasis added). Furthermore, ‘Sanskritization is a profound and many-sided cultural process, only a part of which has structural relevance’ (1967, reprinted in 2002: 222; emphasis added). In other words, its link with the caste order is only a part of the whole. Srinivas stated, ‘Sanskritization ... means also the spread of certain values which are not directly connected with the caste system’ (1956a: 93).

One of the major changes in the caste system in modern India is a gradual decline in concern for the ritual hierarchy of castes. This change is accompanied by a gradual disassociation of sanskritization from caste. It does not mean, however, that this disassociation is

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3 The concern for secular hierarchy, however, continues to be strong, if it has not become stronger. Moreover, there is an increasing emphasis on the principle variously called division, difference, segmentation and
complete, or that the process of sanskritization itself is on the decline. On the contrary, it is becoming increasingly important though in different ways.

New Agents of Sanskritization

For quite some time, non-caste and even anti-caste Sanskritic structures and institutions have been multiplying, and each of them has been diversifying its activities and promoting itself in many novel ways. Sects are one such structure, and that too representing a higher level of Sanskritic culture. Older sects such as those founded by Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Vallabhacharya, Chaitanya, Basavanna, and Ramananda, and relatively recent sects such as Swaminarayana, have been growing in terms of followers, wealth, temples, monasteries, and diversification of activities. Simultaneously, there is growing evidence from various parts of the country that many new sects, usually small and localised, have been emerging all over the country. A view prevalent for a long time that sects are castes in the making, if they have already not become so, has come in the way of recognising them as one of the important non-caste structures, and of understanding their role not just in religion but also in economy, polity, and society at large. Intensive investigations in every part of the country are required to get a comprehensive view of the sectarian situation.

Another sanskritizing agency is a large number of god-men (babas, bapus, gurus, swāmis, āchāryas, mahārajs) and god-women (mas, māis, matas) that have emerged in recent times. Some of them operate almost all over the country and in many countries abroad, such as Satya Sai Baba, Asharam Bapu, Morari Bapu, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and Mata Amritanandmayi, to name only a few. Every one of them has one or more āśrams and a large number of followers, including the rich, the high and the mighty. Each gives discourses to large congregations and on television. There are also many lesser god-men and god-women whose operations are confined to small and local groups. It is difficult to say how many of these god-men and women will become founders of repulsion, which competes with the principle of hierarchy. It is becoming increasingly clear that the overriding emphasis that some scholars placed on ritual hierarchy as the defining principle of caste was not applicable even in traditional Indian society (see Shah, A.M. 1982, Chapter 8 in this book; Shah and Desai 1988).
new sects. When such men and women pass away, their followers try to perpetuate their legacy by forming new sectarian organizations, with varying success. The Śvādhyaśa movement founded by Pandurang Athavale Shastri in western India a few decades ago is an interesting example. After his death, it is facing serious problems of perpetuating its original aims. Tensions and conflicts have emerged between vested interests, and many followers have deserted it.

Temples have always been a powerful agent of sanskritization. In modern India, on the one hand, there is a phenomenal increase in pilgrim traffic to large temples such as those in Tirupati, Madurai, Mathura, Kashi, Jagannath Puri, Nathdwara, Badrinath, Kedarnath and Vaishnodevi. Consequently these temples have a lot of wealth. On the other hand, new temples, small and large, are multiplying in every village, town and metropolis. It is remarkable how a little sacred spot made of a rough hewn stone, sometimes just a heap of such stones, grows into a full-fledged temple in a short time everywhere in the country, not just in villages but even in large cities, and every stage in its growth is marked by a higher level of sanskritization. All sects, temples and monasteries have important social, economic and political ramifications which need to be probed. There should be a national survey of temples, and sociologists and social anthropologists should work out the density of temples and of the temple going population in every part of the country.

Religious books, periodicals and newspapers have become powerful agents of sanskritization among all castes, including the Dalits and Adivasis. Every regional language newspaper issues a supplement on religion at least once a week. The religious periodicals are so popular that the print-run of some of them is in tens of thousands, and their subscription rates are very low. Similarly, religious books, again very cheap, sell in large numbers. Religious films, exclusively religious channels and religious programmes of other channels on radio and television, and religious videos and audios also spread sanskritization in a big way.

Migration of Sanskrit culture, not only among Indians but also among non-Indians in many countries abroad, is becoming increasingly important. Leaders of sects and other god-men and women regularly go abroad to preach Hinduism, organize groups of followers, and build temples. There is also an increasing interest worldwide in Ayurveda, Yoga, Jyotish Shāstra, Vāstu Shāstra, and classical music, dance and drama, all of which promote sanskritization in one way.
Sanskritization Revisited

The kind of Hinduism that is spreading abroad is highly Sanskritic, usually packaged in attractive capsules. This demand for Hinduism abroad has implications and complications for Hinduism at home.

One may wonder how sanskritization can grow in modern India when it is also getting increasingly westernized — some may prefer to say de-sanskritized. Srinivas has discussed this issue at length in many of his writings, and I would not like to cover the same ground here. I may state only briefly that there is a dialectical relation between the two processes, involving a selective attitude towards the past. While some elements of the past are renewed, some others are rejected. This selective attitude does not reduce the importance of sanskritization. I may mention here one typical illustration of the power of Sanskritic ideas. Nowadays modernized women do not observe during the period of menstruation the traditional rules of purity and pollution. Nevertheless, they are highly conscious of the same rules while worshipping gods in temples and homes, and while performing crucial rites of passage. They control the menstrual period with the help of certain drugs made available by modern science and technology.

Sanskritization among the Dalits and Adivasis

I will now discuss the complicated issue of sanskritization among the Dalits and the Adivasis. As regards the Dalits, first of all I would like to reiterate two well-known points. One, though the Dalits are not included in the traditional four *varna* model, they have always been an integral part of the Hindu social order. And two, in every region of the country, the Dalits are divided into castes (*jatis*) with considerable specialization of occupation, and arranged in a hierarchy of their own. This hierarchy replicates to a large extent the hierarchy of the non-Dalit castes. For example, in Gujarat the Dalits have a caste called Garoda (*guru*) which claims to be Brahman. Its members wear the sacred thread, bear such Brahmanic surnames as Trivedi and Vyas, and work as priests to other Dalit castes. They used to learn to read the Hindu sacred texts even in the past, and are well educated now. There is also a caste of bards called Turis, who enjoy like other bardic castes a certain sacred status among the Dalits. The caste of Bhangis (Scavengers) is the lowest. The middle rungs are occupied by Vankars (weavers), Chamars (leatherworkers) and Senwas
(menial workers, rope makers, messengers). In traditional society, the process of sanskritization operated among the Dalits through this caste order, that is, a lower Dalit caste emulated the culture of the higher Dalit castes. This happened, of course, in addition to emulation of the culture of non-Dalit castes (see Shah, A.M. 1987, 2002a, Chapters 2 and 9 in this book).

In modern times, certain new developments are pushing this traditional process further. First, the anti-untouchability laws have enabled, at least legally, the Dalits to enter temples. This has facilitated their participation in the Sanskrit culture of temples. Second, many older sects are now admitting the Dalits as lay members, and new sects, like the Satnami sect in Chhattisgarh, are also emerging among the Dalits. Third, in several parts of the country, the Dalits are claiming descent from ancient figures like Valmiki and Ekalavya and are emulating the Sanskrit way of life. Fourth, with education, new occupations, and migration to urban centres, the Dalits are increasingly being influenced by Sanskritic Hinduism spread by the modern media. All in all, these sanskritizing forces are enabling at least the upper castes among the Dalits to get integrated into the wider social system, thus opening further avenues of sanskritization for them. The lower Dalit castes, particularly the Scavengers, will take more time to get integrated.

As regards sanskritization among the so-called tribal groups, I would like to tread cautiously, because of my limited field experience among them as well as inadequate reading of the literature on them. To begin with, I would like to make a few general points. First, we need to change the general approach that has reigned supreme for long in studying the tribals. The use of the word 'tribe' in the Indian context is itself problematic (see Shah, A.M. 2003, Chapter 10 in this book). It is well known that the terms 'tribe' and 'aborigine' are of western origin, introduced by the colonial rulers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The present Indian terms janajati and adivasi are translations of English words. In early times, there was no indigenous generic term for all these groups. Usually each such group was referred to by its individual name. It is ironic that the very scholars who accept these facts consider these groups as discrete, different and isolated from the rest of Hindu society. Most of the ethnographic information about them becomes available only with the establishment of colonial rule, and ever since we get it, we find them already infused with Hinduism in various degrees.
This was a result of centuries of sanskritization, however slow it might have been. Those sections of tribals who lived in close proximity of Hindus — as indeed many of them did — achieved a higher degree of sanskritization, and the others lesser degrees of it. Even those of them who lived in so-called inaccessible areas in hills and forests were influenced by some degree of sanskritization at least. It is hardly necessary to point out that inaccessibility is a relative matter, and we have to ask: inaccessible for whom? It is unfortunate that even in recent times a few scholars are valorising an anthropologist like Verrier Elwin who advocated an isolationist policy for the tribals.

Another major obstacle in a proper understanding of the tribal situation is the monographic approach in studying the tribals. All perceptive students of tribes have pointed out the interrelations between two or more tribes, and between them and the castes living in an area. However, the general image of tribal society portrayed in anthropological literature shows every tribe as isolated, not only from the Hindu society but also from other tribes. As far as my knowledge goes, in every region, even in the North-East, there is considerable intermingling among several tribal groups, and the interrelations between them exhibit many of the features of inter-caste relations. However, this aspect of their life is rarely projected in the general literature on the tribals. The artificial distinction between sociology and social anthropology has also contributed in no small measure to this approach.

A third problem is the lack of recognition, let alone appreciation, of a kind of symbiosis that existed between the tribes and Hindu castes in the past. Such symbiosis existed especially between tribal chiefs and many Hindu kings, and between tribal people and many popular Hindu temples. This symbiosis often led to hypergamous relations between the tribal chiefs and the ruling castes, eventually leading the tribes to claim Rajput or Kshatriya status. All in all, there is under-reporting of the impact of forces of sanskritization among the tribal people in the past.

During the period of British rule and after independence, the process of sanskritization has advanced further among the tribal groups due to a variety of forces: education, modern communications, new occupations, migration to towns as well as to high caste villages, and, above all, the influence of such religious personages as bhagats and of their movements for religious change. In recent years, two significant developments have taken place in tribal areas. First, a number
of sadhus and sants are now giving discourses on Sanskrit themes and in sanskritized language in these areas. Second, while mainstream Hindu sects are spreading in these areas, new sects are emerging among the tribal groups themselves. We may recall here Surajit Sinha’s (1966) paper on the influence of the Chaitanya sect among the Bhumij of Jharkhand, and even more important, his reference to S.C. Roy’s (1921) brief mention earlier of the same sect among the neighbouring Mundas of Ranchi. In an exploratory study, R.B. Lal (1977) reported the presence of seven sectarian movements among the tribals of south Gujarat. Recently, in another exploratory study, Lancy Lobo (1992) has reported the presence of nine sectarian groups among practically the same tribals. Historian David Hardiman (2003) has written on the emergence of a sect among the Bhils on the Gujarat-Rajasthan border during the early 20th century. Similarly, R.K. Sinha and William Ekka (2003) have shown how the Pranami sect with its main centre at Jamnagar in Saurashtra has spread among the Patelia on the border between Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Sects have thus become an increasingly significant influence on the tribals and, as I stated earlier, sects represent a higher level of Sanskritic culture. It is, therefore, necessary to study carefully the increasing pace of sanskritization among the so-called tribals, and its implications for Indian society as a whole.

Conclusion

In recent years, a few scholars, particularly historians of the subaltern school, have argued that sanskritization is a kind of conversion. It is true that certain politically motivated fundamentalist Hindu organizations in recent times have been organizing certain activities among the Dalits and the Adivasis which could be construed as attempts at conversion. However, to call traditional sanskritization as conversion would be a misunderstanding of its nature. To understand its nature one has to observe the process of adoption of the items of Sanskritic culture by a group in minute detail. The general impression that an entire caste or tribe as a collectivity gets sanskritized all at one go, is false. In reality, it is a long-drawn process in which the individual members of a caste or tribe adopt one item of culture after another from a respectable source or agent — a neighbour, a relative, a guru, a temple, a monastery, a religious discourse, a book, and so on. When this incremental process reaches a critical stage, the caste,
or tribe, or a section of it claims a higher status as a collectivity. The sanskritized section might even form a new caste or sub-caste. This stage is usually marked by a dramatic event announcing the ‘arrival’. Even for a sadhu or sant to give a discourse on a Sanskritic theme, or for a fundamentalist organization to attempt conversion, in a tribe or caste, would require a certain level of sanskritization already achieved by that group after a long process of sanskritization.

In the changing social scenario, the process of sanskritization is thus getting increasingly delinked from castes, including the so-called untouchable castes, and from the so-called tribes. The upper castes are no longer the sole, or even the main, agents of sanskritization for the lower castes, and a number of non-caste structures and institutions, many of them impersonal, have become powerful agents of this process, so much so that there is greater sanskritization of society as a whole. Sociologists and social anthropologists need to study the process in diverse changing contexts and think of its implications for the future of Indian society and culture.
Sects and Hindu Social Structure*

I have been observing the religious behaviour of individuals, groups and institutions from a sociological perspective since I became a student of sociology at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in 1951. I have observed it in several different parts of the country, but more intensively in Gujarat and Delhi, in a variety of settings: villages (including so-called tribal villages), towns and cities, small as well as large temples, and domestic as well as public rituals. I used these empirical observations in a systematic analysis for the first time when M.N. Srinivas and I jointly wrote an article on Hinduism for an encyclopaedia in 1968. The present essay is an attempt to carry forward some of the ideas expressed in that piece as well as to examine the literature on sects. While I am fully aware of the limitations of my experience and of my reading of the literature, I have a few general arguments to offer.

‘Sect’ and ‘Non-Sect’

A clear understanding of Hinduism requires us to distinguish between two different but related configurations. One is characterised by ‘sect’, a word long used for any of the following three Sanskrit words: mārg (literally, path), pānth (path) and sampradāya (tradition transmitted

* This essay has benefited from comments by B.S. Baviskar, Lancy Lobo, Owen Lynch, McKim Marriott, P.J. Patel, D.L. Sheth and N.R. Sheth, and participants in seminars at Vidyadeep, Vadodara, the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi; and the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. I thank them all. Thanks are also due to the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi for publishing the penultimate draft of the article as Occasional Paper (New Series), 2005, No. 1. Published in Contributions to Indian Sociology, 2006, 40(2): 210–48.

1 I would consider my article on the Hijadas (1961) as my first attempt to analyze the phenomenon of sect. Although I did not call their community a sect then, I now consider it to have all the basic attributes of a sect.
from a teacher to a pupil). These three words are used widely as synonyms, both in literature and in popular parlance. Since the word ‘sect’ is of Western origin, McLeod (1978: 293) has stated in a terminological essay that ‘this word is too deeply dyed with western connotations to let us transpose it to an Indian context.’ He therefore rejects its use. Of the three Indian words, he does not mention marg at all, and also rules out the use of sampradaya because he thinks, first, that non-Indians will be unable to pronounce it, and second, that its definition is too vague. The first argument is flimsy, and as regards the second, McLeod probably ignores the fact that the word has long been used in the sense of ‘sect’. He prefers to use only panth. The main problem with his arguments is that he discusses these terms only in the context of Sikhism, and ignores the vast literature, with the exception of Louis Dumont’s writings, on Hindu sects. While it is true that the word ‘sect’ as used in the study of Western religions is not the precise equivalent of marg, panth or sampradaya, its usage has been established in Indian studies for more than 200 years. After all, so many other English words have acquired an Indian connotation and are not rejected on that account. We should, therefore, have no problem in using the word ‘sect’.

For the second configuration in Hinduism I use the word ‘non-sect’, since I have not yet been able to find in English, or in any Indian language, a suitable positive word for it. It should be obvious, however, that I have not viewed sect essentially in opposition to caste, as has long been the practice in many writings on both caste and sect, although I will discuss the distinction and the relation between them. I will focus on common people, unlike most of the literature on sects which is largely focused on religious leaders (variously called acharya, baba, guru, mahant, maharaj, sadhu, sant, sanyasi, and swami). I provide first an introductory description of the non-sectarian configuration, and then deal with the sectarian one.

**The Non-Sectarian Configuration**

When we enter the front room of the home of a Hindu who does not belong to any sect, we usually find pictures of a variety of deities of the Hindu pantheon hanging or pasted on the walls. We may not
find such pictures in the front room of the home of a modernized person — s/he may not like to display her/his religiosity so openly — but we might find them in the bedroom, kitchen, or some other interior room. The most common deities are Ram, Krishna, Shiva, Vishnu, Devi (or Mata), Ganesh and Hanuman. There may also be pictures of a few saints such as Sai Baba and Satya Sai Baba. The non-sectarian’s inclusive attitude might also extend to Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, and Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. During a recent trip to Bengaluru and Mysore, I found an icon of Jesus Christ alongside the icons of Hindu deities on the dashboards of taxis. Usually, a non-sectarian’s home has a special corner for worship. In a poor person’s home this is just a niche in a wall or a small shelf, while a rich man has a specially designed wooden cabinet called *mandir* (shrine). Here, members of the household worship the icons, in print or sculpture, of almost the same set of deities mentioned above. We find the same icons outside the home as well: in shops, offices and factories, in doctors’ clinics, on the dashboards of cars, taxis, buses, trucks and three-wheeler scooters, and in many other places.

The members of a non-sectarian household, in a village or an urban neighbourhood, visit the temples of several different gods and goddesses. In the mornings, in villages as well as cities, I have watched men and women, each carrying a plate containing the various materials required in worship (such as flowers, *kumkum* powder, milk, and ‘pure’ water), going on a round of temples of different gods and goddesses to offer worship. Although a temple is usually dedicated to one deity, after whom it is named, it often includes within its precincts, the images of several other deities, and the devotee offers worship to all or most of them. For example, in many of the numerous ‘cooperative group housing societies’ (groups of apartments) in the metropolis of Delhi we find a temple housing a number of deities worshipped by the members of the society. More or less the same situation prevails in the housing colonies constructed by the Delhi Development Authority, a government body.

The members of a non-sectarian household celebrate festivals in honour of all the major gods and goddesses, such as Ram Navami, Krishna Janmashtami, Shiva Ratri, Nava Ratri and Durga Ashtami.

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3 The exceptions are societies whose members are both Hindus and non-Hindus, or exclusively non-Hindus.
They read or listen to discourses on a variety of scriptures, such as the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavat Purāṇa, Bhāgavat Gītā, Śiva Purāṇa, and Devī Mahātmya. They also read non-sectarian religious periodicals, available in every language. They sing hymns and songs in praise of a variety of gods and goddesses. I have observed bhajan and satsang groups in many villages and towns doing this. The so called ‘chartered buses’ in Delhi, carrying commuters from suburbs to business centres in the morning, offer an interesting example. Many buses have a group of passengers who sing hymns, bhajans and āratis in honour of several different gods and goddesses, and then distribute prasad (food consecrated by being offered to a deity), usually in the form of little cubes of sugar (mishri), to all the passengers. The same thing happens in suburban trains in Mumbai. Non-sectarians also go on pilgrimages to centres around the country associated with a number of gods and goddesses.

I have mentioned so far only the great gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Their worship often coexists with the worship of a number of local and even so-called tribal deities, particularly in villages, small towns, and the slums of large cities. The modes of worship vary, depending on the character of the deity and the nature of the occasion. Normally the offerings are vegetarian and non-alcoholic. However, if the deity and the occasion demand, the offerings can include meat and alcohol.

**The Sectarian Configuration**

Most accounts of a Hindu sect begin with a narration of how it was founded and what the ideas of its founder and his disciples were. To the contrary, I begin my account with a description of the behaviour of the laity. When we enter the home of a member of a sect, we usually find in the front room pictures of only one principal deity and a few minor ones associated with it. For example, in the home of a follower of Pushti Marg, a Vaishnava sect founded by Vallabhacharya (1479–1532), we find pictures only of Krishna, of other sacred personages associated with him such as Radha, Yamuna and the Gopis, and of Vallabhacharya, the founder of the sect. Even in the case of Krishna, we may find a preference for one of his forms, particularly the child Krishna. In some Vaishnava sects, Radha precedes Krishna, while in others the order is reversed. Similarly, in the home of a member of Swaminarayan Sampradaya, a sect founded
by Sahajanand Swami (1781–1830) in Gujarat, we find pictures only of Lakshmi Narayana or Nara Narayana, forms of Vishnu, of a few other deities associated with them, and of Sahajananda. In the corner for worship in a sectarian’s home, we find the members of the household worshipping only one deity and its associates, and they go exclusively to the temples belonging to their own sect. They display the icons only of sectarian deities in their shops and offices, on car dashboards, and so on. A staunch member of a sect might attend a ritual or ceremony in the home of a relative, friend or neighbour belonging to another sect, or in the home of a non-sectarian, but s/he is more likely to be an onlooker rather than a participant. S/he might accept prasad in her/his hand at the end of the ritual, but will not eat it; giving it away rather to another person, usually a child or a servant, or to a cow. The leaders of almost every sect instruct its members to show respect to gods and goddesses of other sects, but never to seek refuge (aśraya, sharana) in any of them.

The members of a sect celebrate only the festivals in honour of their chosen deity and of the founder of the sect. For example, the members of the Pushti sect celebrate only Krishna Janmashtami and Vallabhacharya’s birthday. They give some respect to Rama and other incarnations of Vishnu, but a staunch follower will not visit a Ram temple or celebrate Ram Navami with the same gusto as he would Krishna Janmashtami. Similarly, the members of the Pushti sect do not visit the Swaminarayan temples, despite the fact that the latter’s principal deity Lakshminarayana is, like Krishna, a form of Vishnu. They extend even less courtesy to Shiva, Devi and Hanuman.

4 While referring to the distinction between Shaivism and Vaishnavism in his Coorg book, Srinivas (1952: 184, n1) notes that the orthodox followers of the one do not generally go to the temples of the other. Similarly, Beteille (1965) reports how, in the Tamil village of his study, the orthodox Shri Vaishnava Brahmans worship Vishnu alone, and do not associate themselves with the worship of Shiva and Kali. However, they seem to show some courtesy to the latter. Singer (1972: 48) reports how his Brahman friend’s mother in Madras did not allow a ‘non-dualist’ Brahman into her kitchen, since her own family belonged to a ‘qualified dualist’ sect. Dube and Dube (2003: 238) report at some length the case of Nirmalprabha, daughter of a family belonging to the Mahima sect in Orissa: when she refused to accept the prasad brought by her mother-in-law from the Jagannath temple in Puri, she faced serious consequences.
Apart from the fact that there can be several sects centred on a single deity, each with its own conception of the deity, there can also be non-sectarian conceptions of the same deity. Let me give an example. There is an old, large and popular temple of Ranchhodji, a local form of Krishna, at Dakor in central Gujarat (for a brief account, see Pocock 1973). The modes of worship here follow closely, though not exactly, those of Krishna in the temples of the Pushti sect. Nevertheless, Ranchhodji is not strictly a sectarian deity. The followers of the Pushti sect view him as a *māryādā purushottam* form of Krishna, one who follows the traditional path of conformity to Vedic rules and regulations, as distinguished from his *pushti* form, in which he bestows grace irrespective of such rules. The attitude of the Pushti sect is more or less the same even toward the great temple of Krishna in Dwarka.

The members of every sect greet one another with a sacred phrase, for example, *Jai Shri Krishna* (Victory to Lord Krishna) in the Pushti sect, *Jai Swaminarayan* (Victory to Swaminarayan) in the Swaminarayan sect, *Jai Ramji ki* (Victory to Ram) in the Ramanandi sect, and *Jai Mata ki* (Victory to the Mother Goddess) in the Shakti sect. When the members of a household get up in the morning, they first exchange such a phrase, and they do the same before going to bed. The same phrase is exchanged when the members of a sect meet each other out of doors, or enter or leave one another’s homes, begin talking on the telephone, or begin exchanging messages by e-mail. The behaviour between the members of two different sects is variable. One may greet the other by uttering the latter’s phrase to demonstrate cordiality. Or, one may utter her/his own phrase and the other may respond by uttering the same phrase as an expression of cordiality. Or, one may utter one’s own phrase and the other may respond by uttering her/his own, or remain silent, thus emphasizing her/his orthodoxy. Normally, such awkward problems do not arise between a sectarian and a non-sectarian, because a non-sectarian does not mind responding to a sectarian’s greetings by uttering the latter’s phrase. Conversely, a sectarian would not mind if a non-sectarian does not greet her/him by uttering the sectarian phrase, though s/he would be pleased if the latter were to do so.

Every sect has countless diacritical marks. I mention only a few here. A staunch follower of a sect may paint on his forehead the distinguishing mark of the sect. The Vaishnava sects, for example, are characterised by vertical stripes (*tilāk, nāmam*): a single stripe,
or two stripes in the shape of letter ‘U’ or ‘V’, or one stripe or dot in the centre of the ‘U’ or ‘V’. The length and breadth of the stripe and the dot also vary. The Shaiva sects, on the other hand, are characterised by horizontal stripes (usually three) of white ash (vibhuti). A long-time resident of Bengaluru tells me that one often encounters in this metropolis the question, ‘Do you belong to vertical stripes or horizontal stripes?’ In other words, ‘Are you a Vaishnava or a Shaiva?’ The Shakti sect, celebrating the female principle in the creation of the universe, is characterised by a round dot or arc, as opposed to the straight lines of the vertical and horizontal stripes of the sects devoted to the two male deities. There are also differences in the material used and the colour of these marks. The followers of a sect are expected to wear a necklace (kantā, mālā) of a distinctive type. The material, shape, colour and number of its beads, the number of its strands, and the manner of wearing it (tight or loose around the neck) vary from sect to sect. Every sect also prescribes the garments to be worn by its members, particularly at the time of worship. Significantly, most of these diacritical marks are meant for the male members of the sect, and female members have fewer marks. I have not inquired into the logic of this differentiation, though it seems to be in line with the practice of giving fewer familial samskāras to female children.

Every sect has a sacred literature of its own. The corpus of literature of older sects, such as those founded by Shankara (c. 788–820), Ramanuja (c. 1075–1157), Basava (12th century), Madhva (1238–1317), Vallabha (1479–1532) and Chaitanya (1486–1533) is large and varied, in Sanskrit as well as in regional languages. The followers of a sect will, of course, read or listen to discourses on the texts produced by the sectarian authors; they are also selective in regard to the great ancient texts. For example, the members of the Pushti sect will read the Bhagavat Purana, which focuses on Krishna, rather than the Ramayana. They might even select from an ancient text a certain chapter for special reading. Every sect also publishes periodicals. Some have scholarly journals.

Among the numerous preachers giving public religious discourses and appearing on television programmes, some are sectarian and

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5 For a detailed account of sectarian marks among Vaishnavas, see Entwistle (1982). For a description of marks used by the Ramanuja sect, see Rangarajan (1996) (plates at the end), and for those within the Madhva sect, see Rao (2002: 54–55).
some non-sectarian. Some TV channels favour certain sects. Some sects, particularly the older ones, have developed distinctive styles of music, dance, painting, sculpture, and temple architecture.

The followers of a sect go on pilgrimage mainly to those places considered sacred by the sect. Even when members of several different sects go to a common place, there are significant differences in their behaviour. For example, the followers of several different Vaishnava sects visit Vraj, the region around Mathura associated with Krishna, but the behaviour of each sect is distinctive. In the parikrama (circumambulation) of this region performed by the followers of some sects, the members of one sect might walk clockwise, as in the Pushti sect’s parikrama described by Lynch (1988), and those of another, anti-clockwise. They halt on the way and offer worship only at places and temples considered sacred by their own sect.

Historians usually tell us that sects emerged in India as a reaction against the ritualism of what is called Vedic or Brahmanic Hinduism. This may well be true at the doctrinal level. However, when we see the lifestyle of lay members of any sect today, it is highly ritualistic. These may be rituals of a different kind, but they are rituals nonetheless.

The members of a sect differ in their attitude toward the rituals of their own sect. The lay members in every sect form a wide spectrum. At one end are extremely orthodox members, punctilious in their observance of all the sectarian rituals, while at the other are members observing a minimum of the rituals. Within every sect there are debates about the rigour with which members should observe its rules.

Sects are usually differentiated on the basis of their philosophical and theological positions, particularly regarding the nature of brahman (universal soul) and its relation with ātman (individual soul), such as dvaita (dualism), advaita (non-dualism, monism), vishishtādvaita (qualified monism) and suddha ādvaita (pure monism). Although most lay members are not much concerned with philosophical issues, it is not that these ideas are unimportant. Often the meaning of a ritual is explained with reference to philosophical ideas. Most lay members are not aware of the links between the two. That is why sectarian preachers devote a major portion of their discourses to explaining the meaning of rituals and symbols with reference to philosophical ideas. Children in sectarian families learn ritual behaviour first. Only when they grow up might they learn the meaning attached to these rituals.
Every sect has an elaborate social organization. We have to take into account the organization of leaders as well as of followers, and of links between the two. The sociological literature on sects is focused mainly on the organization of leaders. The leadership in some sects is composed entirely of ascetics, in some others entirely of householders, and in yet others of a combination of ascetics and householders. Moreover, every sectarian temple or monastary, particularly a large one, has a complex organization. The sects have movable and immovable properties, income and expenditure, religious and secular functionaries with an elaborate division of labour and hierarchy, disputes and dispute settlement processes, politics, and even violent conflicts.

At the neighbourhood level the lay members form groups such as satsang, bhajan or kirtan mandal. They often organize festivals and pilgrimages. Frequent interactions among followers lead to the formation of strong friendships. In arranged marriages, preference is given to members of the sect, and it has become common to mention this preference in matrimonial advertisements. Members of every sect now form associations at local, regional, national and international levels. There are also special associations of their women, youth, and senior citizens.

The lay members of a sect are linked with its presiding gurus in complex ways. In the past these links were informal, but ever since temples, monasteries, pāṭhshālās, goshālās and such other institutions have come under government regulation there are formal links also. Among the laity in every town and village we find leaders who are eager to seek proximity to the gurus; the gurus in turn need these leaders to collect funds, organize ceremonial events, and manage institutions.

Sectarian Hinduism is thus defined by exclusive social boundaries. Non-sectarian Hinduism, on the other hand, has loose boundaries; some may even say it has no boundaries. It is high time that social scientists recognise sects as a structural principle of Indian society, like caste, joint family, and lineage group, and not dismiss them as merely religious formations consisting of ascetics living on the peripheries of society.

A non-sectarian might develop special attachment to one among the several deities he worships — to what is called ishta dévātā (favourite deity) — but this does not mean that he is a member of the sect in which that deity occupies the central place. A non-sectarian
may also go to a sectarian temple and listen to religious discourses, since the principal deity of that sect is, after all, a part of the Hindu pantheon. However, his mode of worship and his understanding of the discourses would be different from those of a member of that sect. Many large pilgrim centres like Tirupati, Nathdwara, Mathura, Varanasi and Jagannath Puri attract sectarian as well as non-sectarian pilgrims, but there are marked differences in the behaviour of the two categories of pilgrims. Usually, a sectarian will have visited his sect’s centre more than once, and will therefore be familiar with its sacred geography, modes of worship, and specialist priests and other functionaries, and behave in the way his sect has trained him to behave. A non-sectarian, on the other hand, is often at a loss in the sacred complex and requires the help of specialist priests. It is important to note that the sectarian and non-sectarian configurations are not isolated from one another. As we shall see, the interrelations between the two provide the basis for the non-sectarian’s slow movement towards the threshold for entering a sect.

**Sects in Indian Ethnography**

We may recall here the general description of Hinduism, compared with other world religions, as a religion that does not have one definite founder, one definite deity, one definite sacred text, or an organized church. Therefore, Hinduism is often described as acephalous. Not only that, it is often described not as a religion but rather as a way of life. Our problem is to place sects in the context of such a religion and its social organization, because normally a sect has a definite founder, a definite deity or set of deities, a set of definite sacred texts, a set of rituals, and a social organization.

Unfortunately, the absence of adequate ethnography on sects handicaps us in this endeavour. During the colonial period, the ethnography of sects did not receive as much attention as that of castes and tribes. The Census, the Gazetteers and the Castes-and-Tribes literature paid very little attention to sects, and the situation has not improved much after independence. Therefore, we are unable to get even elementary information about the spread of sects and their population in the country. We need to know whether a sect is entirely composed of monks, mystics and priests, or whether it also has lay members. In either case, we need to know the numbers. The problem is that, besides the large, widespread and well-known sects,
there are many small and local ones. Some are so small that they each have only one or two temples or monasteries, and their lay members are found only in a few villages and towns.

Due to the absence of adequate ethnography, we have false notions about the geographical spread and social composition of sects, particularly of the larger and older ones. For example, it is widely believed that the Pushti sect is confined to western India (see even the recent general essay on sects by Babb 2003: 228). In fact, however, it also has followers all over Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Before Partition, there were small clusters of them in Sind and Punjab — a guru was sent to spread the sect in these regions in the 16th century (Bennett 1989: 55, 64, n20; Mishra 1999: 75). After Partition, some of them settled in Delhi and nearby cities, and some in cities in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Similarly, as regards the Madhva sect, Babb (2003: 228) tells us that it has ‘very few ascetics now, although there is a monastery at Udupi’, and he does not say a word about its lay followers. He also includes this sect among the four south Indian sects that ‘had only a limited direct impact on north India, and even in the south, only one of them (the Sri Sampradaya) remains a strong presence’. However, Vidyarthi reported in 1961 (pp. 66–70) that there was a powerful Madhva math in Gaya (Bihar), and that the entire Gayawal Brahman caste followed Madhva. Vasudev Rao’s recent monograph on the Udupi math (2002: 35) mentions several other maths, and includes a map of India showing the Madhva centres regularly visited by the Udupi pontiffs. While there is a high concentration of these centres in south India, there is considerable distribution in almost all other parts of India. As regards the Shri Vaishnava sect, there is a tendency in the literature on sect as well as on caste to identify it with the Shri Vaishnava or Iyengar Brahmans (as differentiated from the Shaiva or Iyer Brahmans). It may well be that all the members of the Iyengar caste are Shri Vaishnavas. However, as Parthasarathy (1970) has shown, the Shri Vaishnava sect includes many non-Brahman castes, including Untouchables. The Iyengar caste may be, as it is often called, a sectarian caste, but the Shri Vaishnava sect is not identical with it. Rangarajan’s (1996) study of this sect in Gujarat has shown how it began to spread in the 18th century and now has about fifteen temples and small clusters of lay members (drawn from Brahmans as well as a variety of non-Brahman castes) in various parts of Gujarat.
A remarkable feature of sects is the spread of the ideas of their founders often well beyond the region where they were born. Shankaracharya was born in Kerala but worked in many parts of India. Vallabhacharya was an Andhra Brahman but his Pushti sect flourished in western and northern India. Sahajanand was born in a village near Ayodhya but established his sect in Gujarat. Dayanand was born in Saurashtra but his Arya Samaj flourished in Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh. Ramanuja and Madhva did not travel outside south India but their ideas spread across the country, because persons from other regions became their disciples, and their disciples from the south went to other parts of India. Nimbarka, a Vaishnava acharya, belonged to south India but worked for a long time in the north. Kunj Bihari Singh (1963) has reported how a follower of Nimbarka preached Vaishnavism in faraway Manipur in 1704. Chakradhara, the founder of the Mahanubhava sect, was born in Gujarat but established his sect in Maharashtra, and his followers carried it to Punjab (Raeside 1976). We should work out the implications of the pan-Indian spread of many sects for other structures and institutions in Hindu society.

**Sociological and Social Anthropological Scholarship on Sects**

Besides the inadequacy of the ethnography on sects, modern sociological and anthropological scholarship on Hinduism since the 1950s has also been problematic. The initial literature dealt mainly with so-called ‘popular’ Hinduism, rather than on the great traditions of Hinduism. Popular Hinduism is mostly rural Hinduism, which was mainly non-sectarian in most parts of the country until recently. And since rural studies dominated the earlier phase of modern sociology and social anthropology, we have practically no study of sectarian Hinduism during this phase. References to sects appeared here and

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6 Modern sociological and social anthropological scholarship on Hindu sects was virtually nonexistent until recently. When Surajit Sinha wrote a paper in 1967 suggesting that the Anthropological Survey of India could undertake research programmes on sects (published in Sinha 1970), his bibliography included only two anthropological items: his own paper on the Chaitanya sect among the Bhumij (1966), and the draft of the joint article by Srinivas and myself on Hinduism (1968). The anthology on religion in India
there, but they were not a subject of serious empirical inquiry and theoretical discussion. Srinivas’s classic book on Coorg religion (1952) offers an interesting example. In the introductory chapter he refers to the affiliation of the Coorg rajas to the Lingayat sect, and to as many as fifty-seven Lingayat monasteries in north Coorg alone during the 1870s (p. 18). In the rest of the book, however, his references to this sect are restricted to its role in spreading sanskritization and Shaiva modes of worship, but he says nothing about the monasteries or any other aspect of the sect as such.7

When we turn to studies of sects, we find that the emphasis, if not the exclusive attention, is on ascetics, monks and mystics, with very little attention given to lay members. It is of course possible that some sects are composed exclusively of ascetics, monks and mystics. However, this does not mean that all sects are so composed. The degree of attention devoted to ascetics, monks and mystics in sociological writings is largely due to the influence of historical and Indological literature, the latter of which could not have much information on lay followers due to the nature of its sources. It is not surprising that when Ghurye, one of the founders of sociology in India, wrote about sects in 1953 (published in 1965), he wrote mainly about sects among sadhus, and mainly on the basis of Indological materials. Field data collected for him by L.N. Chapekar were also mostly concerned with the sadhus and not with their followers, and Ghurye used this data mainly within the Indological framework. We may recall that Ghurye came to sociology via Indology. His colleague Thoothi’s early book, The Vaisnavas of Gujarat (1935), appears from its title to be concerned with the Vaishnava sects, but the portion on sects is thin. The book deals mainly with sectarian leaders and their doctrines, and is flawed in both description and analysis.

7 This does not mean that Srinivas was unaware of sectarian Hinduism. In the Coorg book itself he refers, though briefly, to the distinction between Shaivism and Vaishnavism (1952: 184, n1) and indeed he wrote extensively about sects in his later writings, including our joint article on Hinduism (1968).
Sects were an important part of Louis Dumont’s overall view of Hinduism. In his influential essay, ‘World Renunciation in Indian Religions’ (1960), Dumont did refer to ‘worldly adherents’ of sects, but he always returned to emphasizing the primacy of the renouncer, the sanyasi. Later, in his book Homo Hierarchicus (1972), he does the same. He first states, ‘Indian religious groupings which are readily characterised in terms of renunciation are conveniently called sects’. He then defines sect as ‘a religious grouping constituted primarily by renouncers, initiates of the same discipline of salvation, and secondarily by their lay sympathisers any of whom may have one of the renouncers as a spiritual guru or master’ (p. 233, emphases added). Dumont thus postulated a necessary relation between sects and renouncers, and considered lay members of a sect as sympathizers and therefore secondary. He also dealt with sects almost exclusively at the doctrinal level and, as he himself stated (1960: 37), used mainly Indological materials. Babb’s recent (2003) description of sects as similar to clans and lineages emphasises the line of succession of gurus in a sect and bypasses other crucial components, particularly the lay members and the paraphernalia of specialized functionaries.

A growing view among sociologists and social anthropologists is that they should not confine their studies to popular Hinduism but should also study institutions of higher or great-tradition Hinduism, along with the influence of Dumont’s idea that renunciation is the basis of sects. This has led to an emphasis on studying sects in the context of sadhus, sanyasis and swamis. The interest in sadhus is so great that we have now at least two more books on them (Gross 1992; Tripathi 1978) in addition to Ghurye’s 1953 book mentioned earlier. (All three books have almost identical titles.) We also have many excellent studies on monasteries, temples and pilgrim centres: Vidyarthi’s on the pilgrim town of Gaya (1961), Appadurai’s on the large temple of Parthasarathi Swami in Chennai (1981), Fuller’s on the large Minakshi temple in Madurai (1984), van der Veer’s on the pilgrim centre of Ayodhya (1989), Toomey’s on the pilgrim centre of Govardhan near Mathura (1994), and Rao’s on the Madhva monastery in Udupi (2002). These studies throw valuable light on sects in these contexts and situations. However, they tell us very little about the social organization of sects and their relation with common people.

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8 There is one more book on sadhus (Miller and Wertz 1976), but I regret I have not been able to lay my hands on it.
sectarian or non-sectarian. We have only a few full-length studies covering leaders as well as lay members of sects: Singer’s study of sects as part of his work on Sanskritic Hinduism in Madras city (1972), Williams’ book on the Swaminarayan sect in Gujarat (1984), Bennett’s on the Pushti sect in Ujjain (1989), Dube’s on the Satnami sect in Chhattisgarh (1998), and Parthasarathy’s dissertation on the mendicant sect of Dasayyas in Karnataka (1970). Even these studies are rather inadequate in their treatment of the laity.

J.P.S. Uberoi has based his recent study of Sikhism (1996) on what he calls the elementary structure of medieval Hinduism and Islam. In his construction of the former, sect is an important element, and it is linked with renunciation of the world of caste. For him, Sikhism embodies the idea of ‘renunciation of renunciation’ (ibid.: 17). He uses two sources to arrive at this view: (i) the description of the sanyasi orders or sects such as Jogi and Dadupanthi in the 19th century ethnography of Punjab, the immediate environment of Sikhism; and (ii) the description of sanyaṅs in Gonda’s work on ancient and medieval Sanskrit texts (ibid.: 6–16). He then restructures Dumont’s argument and evidence on renunciation, and finds it consistent with his own argument, namely, that caste and sect were the warp and woof of the fabric of Hinduism (ibid.: 25–26). This argument, however, has limited applicability, since both Dumont and Uberoi argue that sect is based on the ideology of renunciation. Now, it may well be that repudiation of the Hindu idea of renunciation played an important role in the origin of Sikhism during the medieval period in Punjab, and also that many Hindu sects were based on renunciation. In fact, however, many Hindu sects across India repudiated the idea. The literature on sadhus and sanyasis indicates how problematic the concept of world-renunciation is. The main problem is that, after a sadhu or sanyasi leaves his family and caste, he gets involved in his sect — its social organization, finances and politics. Ghurye made insightful observations in this regard on the first page of his 1953 book on sadhus:

Asceticism as an individual practice gets modified to some extent when it brings together more individuals than one. Two or three ascetics living together or moving together demonstrate that the ascetic ideal of complete withdrawal is already partially defeated.

9 Practically the whole of Uberoi’s 1994 paper on the elementary structure of medievalism is reproduced in his 1996 book.
They begin to find some kind of habitation a necessity. This habitation forms a monastic centre. There emerge rules to regulate life at the centre. Monastic life leads to the endeavour of creating social organization peculiarly fitted for the ascetic life. Thus, asceticism leading in its growth to monastic life creates the paradoxical phenomenon of social organization for those who not only negatived but also re-nounced social connections and individual wants.

Similarly, a folk tale, Bābā ki Langotī (The Ascetic’s Loincloth), which I have heard in more than one part of India, demonstrates a popular perception of ascetics, that even a seemingly insignificant acquisition by an ascetic leads to complications of worldly existence:

A naked ascetic lived alone in a hut in a forest. One day he decided he should wear a strip of cloth to cover his genitals. Whenever he cleaned the strip and kept it for drying, a rat took it away. He decided to keep a cat to drive the rat away. But he had to feed the cat with milk. Therefore, he decided to keep a cow. To feed the cow he had to cultivate a piece of land. He also found the work of milking the cow distasteful. Therefore, he decided to get married and thus re-enter samsār [world].

Both scholarship and folklore thus make two important points. First, renunciation of family and caste should not be equated with renunciation of the world as a whole. An ascetic leaves one kind of world only to enter another. Second, a sect composed entirely of ascetics can survive only with support from the world outside it. Such a sect may not have a well-defined body of lay members, but it would surely have a loose assemblage of sympathisers, to use Dumont’s word.

**Sects in Indian History**

If, as mentioned earlier, we have no knowledge of the proportion of sectarian versus non-sectarian population in the country today, surely we have no knowledge about it in the past. However, it appears from the historical literature that the number of sects as well as of their lay followers has been increasing since ancient times. The sects in ancient India were most probably composed entirely of monks, mystics and scholars living in hermitages and monasteries located in forests and on mountains, or of wandering ascetics, without lay followers. The only two sects that acquired large numbers of lay followers in that period were Buddhism and Jainism, but both were so heterodox that they could not be accommodated within Hinduism.
Buddhism eventually spread largely outside India, and Jainism claimed to be a separate religion within India. Another sect, much later in history, which became popular and eventually claimed to be a separate religion, is Sikhism. Both Jainism and Sikhism even now have many features derived from Hinduism.

It seems that sects of the kind we now know began to grow after the rise of new ideas — not only philosophical and theological ideas but also ideas about the social organization of religion — in south India during what Romila Thapar (2003) has called ‘threshold times’ (c. 300–700) in the history of early India. It appears that the earliest sect of this kind was founded by Shankara in the 10th century, followed by Ramanuja’s sect in the 11th century — the former Shaiva and the latter Vaishnava. A number of others then developed gradually, first in the south and then in the north. Several new sects have developed fairly recently, for example, the Swaminarayan sect at the beginning and the Arya Samaj in the middle of the 19th century. Some others have developed even more recently, and some are possibly in the process of being established. For example, the three recent movements of Radhasoami, Brahmakumari and Sathya Sai Baba studied by Babb (1987) appear to have become sects. The Swadhyaya movement founded by Pandurang Shastri Athawale in western India recently is struggling to become a sect after his death. While the number of sects are increasing, the population of almost every established sect seems to be growing too.

We shall never be able to know exactly how the founder of a sect recruited lay followers. This is not possible even in the case of more recently established sects. There are two main reasons. First, in some cases a person is recognized as the ‘founder’ after his lifetime. Second, even if he is recognized as the founder during his lifetime, his life, and most probably the life of his immediate successors also, is shrouded in myths and legends. I wonder how much ‘truth’ the historians are, or will be, able to discover.

**Recruitment to Sects**

We should be able to say something significant about recruitment to sects in the past on the basis of what we know about the way sects recruit members at present. In this respect, we have to recognize the fundamental principle of recruitment to a sect: that is, through initiation by a guru belonging to the sect. Even in the case of families that
are already members, a child has to be formally initiated. As regards others, that is, members of other sects or non-sectarians, the process is complex. As far as my observations go, Hindu sects recruit most of their new members from the vast mass of non-sectarians. Rarely does a member of a sect cross over or, one may say, get converted to another sect. On the one hand, s/he is so ensconced in the sect both religiously and socially that s/he has hardly any reason to change her/his affiliation. On the other hand, for the leaders of a sect the problems of drawing members from other sects would be so complicated that they hardly ever try this path of recruitment. I have not come across, for example, any sectarian preacher calling in his public discourses for the members of other sects to leave their sects and join his. It is of course possible that a duly initiated member of a sect might in the course of time move away from it and become part of the mass of non-sectarians, and then move toward another sect.

There is a pattern in the way that non-sectarians join sects. A crucial requirement for a non-sectarian is that s/he has to reach a certain threshold of belief and behaviour before the guru of a sect decides to initiate her/him as a member. To explain this point, I will narrate here two of the many cases I know, as examples. The first is that of a non-sectarian Gujarati in Delhi who married a Pushti woman from Saurashtra, of course within their caste. Marriages between sectarians and non-sectarians are common in every caste in Gujarat. She was intensely involved in the exclusive worship of Krishna while he was deeply involved in the worship of several different deities, including Krishna. There was considerable tension between the two. She approached her guru for advice, who advised her to exercise great patience. (The husband did not have a guru.) Gradually, over a period of several years, he moved toward the Pushti sect. He changed his style of life, including his diet, and dropped worship of one deity after another, except Krishna. He increasingly involved himself in his wife’s modes of worship in the home, in visiting Pushti temples, and in attending discourses by Pushti gurus. He thus reached the threshold for initiation into the sect and consequently was initiated ritually.

The second case is from Radhvanaj village in central Gujarat where I did fieldwork during 1955–58. When I began my fieldwork there was

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10 Lancy Lobo, a student of Christianity in India, tells me that most of the Hindus who converted to Christianity were non-sectarian. I wonder if most of the Hindus who converted to Islam and Sikhism were also non-sectarian.
not a single person belonging to any sect in the village, except one household of the Vairagi priest of the Rama temple and one household of the Gosai priest of the Shiva temple — both non-Brahman. In 1958, however, an ascetic (bhagat) belonging to the Swaminarayan sect came to the village to give discourses for a few days. His visit was organized by a few Kanbi-Patidar peasants. They had been going on pilgrimages to the major Swaminarayan temple in the area from time to time, just as they went to the temples of several other deities. They had met this holy man during one of their pilgrimages and he had expressed a wish to visit their village. At the village, he not only gave formal discourses and engaged the villagers in informal discussions on religious issues, but also gave advice to individuals to help them solve personal problems. He captivated the minds of the villagers and subsequently visited the village several times. The villagers also met him when they visited his temple. During this period almost the entire group of about a dozen households of Patidars gradually changed their style of life and gravitated toward intense worship of Swaminarayan. They thus reached the required threshold and were duly initiated into the sect. When I visited the village a few years later, I found that the leader of the new recruits had built a small shrine of Swaminarayan adjoining his house. It is noteworthy that in this second case not just one individual but a group of individuals belonging to a certain caste were recruited to the sect after they achieved a certain level of religiosity. The same can happen on a larger scale.

**Sect and Caste: The Pushti Sect**

If the criterion for recruitment to a sect is initiation of the individual by a guru, and if initiation depends on the individual reaching a certain threshold of religiosity, does this mean that her/his caste membership does not matter? This is the vexed problem of the relation between sect and caste, so prominent in the literature on sect and on caste. It is also a problem that originated due to the close association of the idea of bhakti with sects since at least the founding of Ramanuja's sect in the 11th century — although this idea does not seem to be essential for formation of a sect. The idea of bhakti made it possible for an individual of any caste, even an untouchable, to seek salvation by intense devotion to a chosen deity. While most sects preached this doctrine, hardly any of them put it into practice. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, we do not have good ethnography of sects,
and this comes in the way of our dealing with the problem adequately. Therefore, I propose to deal with it mainly with reference to whatever information I have about two sects I know, namely, the Pushti and Swaminarayan sects.

With regard to the Pushti sect, as mentioned earlier, it is necessary to be free from the general impression that it is confined to western India. While it appears that a majority of its followers are to be found in Gujarat and in Mumbai, Pune and a few other cities in Maharashtra, it also has a large following in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. As mentioned earlier, its followers in pre-Partition Sind and Punjab are now settled in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Delhi. Its most important temple, one of the richest in India, is located at Nathdwara north of Udaipur in Rajasthan (see Jindel 1976 for an account of this temple). Kankroli (near Nathdwara) and Kota are two other major centres in Rajasthan. Indore and Ujjain are among the towns well known as Pushti centres in Madhya Pradesh (for Ujjain, see Bennett's 1989 monograph). The Vraj area in western Uttar Pradesh is of course most sacred for the sect — it was founded in this area, and much of its early literature is in Braj (Vraj) Bhasha, a dialect of Hindi — but there is also an important Pushti temple in Varanasi in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The place called Champaran near Raipur in Chhattisgarh, where Vallabhacharya was born, is another pilgrim centre.

In addition to the important temples mentioned so far, there are many small temples, and their number is increasing. For example, when Vadodara was a small town (till about 1950) it had four Pushti temples; now (in 2006) there are eleven. Delhi had two until recently; now there are three. In general, as soon as a substantial Pushti following develops in any place the community tends to establish a temple.

When a sect is as widely spread as this, the castes of many different regions are involved. Another complication is that in certain contexts, particularly in large cities and in pilgrim centres, members belonging to many castes from many regions come together and interact with one another. In this situation, we have to deal with the question of caste and sect in the context of several different regions. This is an extremely difficult task. I will deal with it only in the context of Gujarat.

Vallabhacharya (1481–1533) was a Telugu Brahman of the Velanadu sub-caste. His patrilineal descendants are the gurus of the sect,
spread over all the regions in north and west India mentioned above. The gurus marry within their sub-caste, into its families living in north as well as south India. I have no space here to describe their complex marriage alliances — a fascinating subject. I would make only two observations: (i) this lineage is exogamous and enters into alliances with other lineages, with a preference for cross-cousin marriage; and (ii) while the gurus’ wives enjoy high status, the gurus have to devise stratagems to accord respectable status to their daughters vis-à-vis their husbands.

The sect has only a small number of Gujarati Brahman followers, most of whom are scholars (shastris) specialized in the study of sectarian texts, in giving discourses on them, and in performing certain specialized rituals. They come from several different sub-castes. The priests (called Mukhiyaji) in the sectarian temples are also Brahmans, but most of them come from one or two sub-castes in Rajasthan. There are also Brahman cooks, water-carriers and other such servants in the temples as well as in the gurus’ households. They are all members of the sect, coming from several different sub-castes, mainly from Rajasthan.

The majority of followers of the sect are non-Brahman. Among them, the Vanias (Banias, a caste composed mainly of traders in the past) form the largest proportion. It should be noted, however, that they are divided into about forty sub-castes, which are the effective endogamous units (for a general account of castes in Gujarat, see Shah, A.M. 1982, Chapter 8 in this book; Shah and Desai 1988). The other trading castes represented in the sect in large numbers are Bhatia and Lohana.

The Kanbi-Patidars, traditionally peasants, are also represented in the sect in fairly large numbers. They had become members of the sect quite early in its history. Remarkably, the manager of the first temple established by Vallabhacharya in Vraj in 1520 was a Kanbi-Patidar named Krishnadas, and he played a significant role in the early history of the sect (Barz 1992a: 28, 53; 1992b: 239–40).

11 There is no Pushti guru, nor are there many Pushti followers in south India where Vallabha belonged originally, and where the sects founded by his predecessors Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva and Basava flourished. Vallabha appears to have tried to attract followers there, but obviously he did not succeed. Why this was so is an intriguing question.
It is puzzling that the spread of the Pushti sect among the Kanbi-Patidars is not reported in the ethnographic literature on Gujarat. Even Pocock (1961, 1973), who has written so much on the Patidars, has not reported it. The main reason seems to be that he did most of his fieldwork in a small village with low-status Patidars, while most of the Pushti Patidars belonged to high-status, affluent villages, the so-called Chha Gam (literally, Six Villages). He failed to see the sectarian dimension of their high status in the elaborate hierarchy in the caste.

The sect also includes followers from a few high-status craftsmen and professional castes in towns, such as Soni (goldsmith), Kansara (bronze-smith) and Kayasth (scribe).

The entire population of the castes mentioned above does not belong to this sect. The population of every caste is divided into more than one sect and into non-sectarians, and the members of every sect are divided among more than one caste. A few castes have both Hindu as well as Jain members (see Cort 2001: 57–8, 2004; Shah, A.M. 1982, Chapter 8 in this book). The proportion of Pushti followers differs from caste to caste. Out of the entire spectrum of castes in Gujarat, it is the trading castes, the elite section of the peasant caste, and the higher craftsmen castes which are represented in large numbers in the sect, while Brahmans are represented in small number. Almost all of these followers are urban residents. A large part of the urban population belonging to many other castes and the vast mass of the rural population belonging to a number of castes and tribes are not represented at all. The members of the trading castes and the elite families of the peasant caste appear to have been the earliest recruits in the sect.

When we consider the varna affiliation of jatis (castes) mentioned above we face some intriguing questions: (a) Even though the founder and the gurus have been Brahmans, why have they not been able to attract Brahmans in large numbers to the sect? (b) Although the Rajputs, that is, Kshatriyas, are next in the varna hierarchy, why are they not represented in significant numbers in the sect? (c) Although the Vanias, Bhatias and Lohanas belong to the Vaishya varna, the third in the varna hierarchy, why are they the largest

12 I visited this village when Pocock was doing fieldwork there. The chapter on the Pushti sect in his 1973 book is not based on fieldwork in this or any other village.
constituent of the sect? (d) Although the Kanbi-Patidars and the craftsmen castes would be considered as *shudra* according to classical texts, they claim to belong to the Vaishya *varna*, and this claim has been generally accepted for quite some time (see Shah and Shroff 1958 for a discussion of the claim). Why are they represented in fairly large numbers in the sect? It is not easy to answer these questions. All the same, the answers seem to lie in the ritual hierarchy of *jatis* that has developed in Gujarat, based mainly on the level of sanskritization. The Pushti sect occupies the higher rungs of this hierarchy, while the middle and lower rungs are not represented in the sect at all — for example, the Kolis, the largest single *jati*, the Untouchables and the tribals belong to this category.

We may discuss at this point a general belief regarding the Pushti sect prevalent in the literature on Hinduism at least since Max Weber wrote about it in his book on Hinduism and Buddhism (published originally in German in 1916, and translated into English in 1958). Babb’s recent review article on sects (2003: 228) also repeats the same belief. Weber stated that the dominant ideas of the sect were favourable to the development and extension of business relations, and that this explains why the sect attracted the Vanias and other trading castes in large numbers (1958: 314–16). This is a facile correlation. First of all, it does not explain why members of so many non-trading castes, particularly the peasant caste of Kanbi-Patidars, were attracted to the sect. Second, why are the Brahman gurus, *shastris*, and priests and some other functionaries in temples of the sect not traders? Third, why does every caste, including the Vania, have members belonging to more than one sect, as also non-sectarians? Fourth, even during pre-British times all Vanias were not traders. Many of them were employed in the bureaucracies of Hindu as well as Muslim kings at every level from minister down to village accountant, and some were teachers, scholars and practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine.

With the establishment of British rule in the beginning of the 19th century in western India, the Vanias took to Western education and joined the new bureaucracy and new professions in a big way. That is to say, this change had begun to occur at least a century before Weber wrote about the sect. He used information from literature available to him, which was long out of date. Moreover, this literature was based on rather superficial observations, of just a few gurus and their followers, and only in the city of Bombay. Some of it was biased, mainly the writings of a westernized journalist and social
reformer determined to malign the sect, and the proceedings of a libel case against him before a British judge in the 1860s in Bombay (anon. 1862; Jordens 1992; Mehta 1968–69; Mulji 1865). This information passed on from one uncritical scholar to another and reached Weber at the beginning of the 20th century. Weber found a fit between this information and his thesis of ‘the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism’, and then made it a part of his grand theory about religion and society in the non-Christian world. Many modern social scientists have perpetuated his ideas without critical examination.13

The existence of many castes in the Pushti sect in Gujarat alone — each differentiated internally and from others — makes the question of the relation between sect and caste complicated. If we consider the castes represented in the sect in all the regions of India, the question becomes even more complicated. The very idea that an entire caste has a uniform economic as well as religious ethic is misplaced, and therefore, the attempt to consider the former as the cause of the latter is based on a false premise.14

Sect and Caste: The Swaminarayan Sect

The Swaminarayan sect is a relatively young but rapidly expanding sect in Gujarat. Its founder, first named Ghanashyam and then Sahajanand, was born in 1781 in Chhapia, a village near Ayodhya in modern Uttar Pradesh, into the Sarvariya Brahman caste. After a long period of wandering as an ascetic in different parts of India, he was initiated as a disciple of Ramanand Swami, a guru of the Ramanuja sect in Saurashtra around 1800.15 (Ramanand was originally a Brahman

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13 Reliance on doubtful sources also led Weber to describe the Pushti sect as ‘orgiastic’ and ‘hedonistic’ (see 1958: 314–16). Even the account of the sect given by a modern social anthropologist such as Pocock is coloured by this view (see Chapters 5 and 6 in his 1973 book). His account also suffers from many ethnographic errors. For more realistic accounts, see Bennett (1989), Jordens (1992), and Williams (1984).

14 The widely held assumption in the literature on caste that every caste was homogeneous in the past is false. The assumption is derived from ethnographic accounts written by colonial ethnographers and administrators and based on superficial observation. Few social scientists have examined it with reference to hard historical data.

15 As mentioned earlier, the Ramanuja sect has prevailed in Gujarat since at least the 18th century.
from north India, probably from Bihar). In about 1802 the guru ap-
pointed Sahajanand as his successor. Shortly thereafter the guru
died, leaving Sahajanand as the effective head of the group of his
disciples. Sahajanand then assumed the name Swaminarayan, and
his disciples began to consider him a manifestation of god, Bhagwan.
He died in 1830.

During these 28 or so years as leader, Swaminarayan inducted a
large number of ascetic as well as householder followers in Gujarat
(including Saurashtra and Kutch), and established six large temples.
An elaborate hierarchical organization of ascetics developed, bringing
in its wake tensions and conflicts. In the last few years of his life,
Swaminarayan decided to introduce the householder element — in
other words, the patrilineal principle — in the organization of the
sect. He revived the relationship with his family in Chhapia that he
had snapped at a young age. He formally adopted a son from each
of his two brothers and installed them as Acharyas of the two major
temples, at Ahmedabad and Vadital respectively, declared their
position as hereditary, and carved out for them two territorial juris-
dictions (say, dioceses). The Acharyas married within their caste in
Uttar Pradesh and perpetuated the line of succession. The Acharya’s
position existed alongside that of the Mahant, the head of the hier-
archy of ascetics. A complicated relationship, with the potential for
conflict, developed between the two.

The literature on the sect often describes the division of functions
between the Acharya and the Mahant as secular and spiritual
respectively. The latter is often described as Dev Paksha (divine
party, gods’ party) in modern political parlance. However, this is an
oversimplification of reality. Apart from the fact that the Acharya has
the authority to appoint the Mahant, to install the images of deities in
new temples, and to perform several other important religious func-
tions, the laity look upon him as the inheritor of Swaminarayan’s
divinity. On the whole, therefore, the Acharya has superiority over
the Mahant. However, this has not prevented crisis situations from
emerging from time to time.

Perpetual tension between the Acharyas and the ascetics provoked
the ascetics to organize dissident movements at the beginning of
the 20th century. In 1906 Swami Yagnapurushdas led a major schism
under the name of Bochasanvasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha
(sanstha means institution). He claimed succession from Gunatitanand
Swami, who was senior to Sahajanand among the disciples of
Ramanand but who had accepted Sahajanand’s leadership after Ramanand’s death. The ascetics and the laity of this new institution accept Swaminarayan’s divinity but revere Gunatitanand as well. The major differences between the parent and the new institution are organizational rather than theological. First of all, the new institution is managed entirely by ascetics. Second, although Gunatitanand was a Brahman, all the successive gurus have been non-Brahman. The present guru, Pramukh Swami, who has presided over the sect since 1951, is a Kanbi-Patidar. On the whole, the new institution is ‘liberal’ and ‘progressive’ in coming to terms with the forces of modernization.

The older sect needed some Brahmans as priests in its larger temples and as teachers in its patishalas. Otherwise, the sect attracted very few Brahmans as ascetics or as lay members. Kavi Narmad (1833–86), an eminent observer and critic of the social life of his time, stated that Swaminarayan tried hard to recruit Brahmans into his sect but did not succeed (Kavi 1888: 63). Similarly, the sect attracted very few Vanias. It attracted the Kanbi-Patidars in large numbers (except their elite, Pushti section), along with Rajputs, Kathis, Thakkars (a ritually lower trading caste) and several artisans, craftsmen and servant castes of lower ritual status such as bards, barbers, carpenters and tailors. Only very recently have a small number of Brahmans and Vanias entered the sect. Even now, however, for the vast majority of Gujarat’s lower-caste, Untouchable and tribal population, the sect is out of bounds. On the whole, the caste base of the sect has been lower than that of the Pushti sect. This seems to be related to the level of sanskritization of the two sects. While the foundational literature of the Pushti sect is in Sanskrit, that of the Swaminarayan sect is in Gujarati, except for one Sanskrit text written by Sahajanand. Similarly, while the rituals in Pushti temples are elaborate, and follow the ancient traditions, the rituals in Swaminarayan temples are simple. The Swaminarayan sect, therefore, has greater appeal among the middle and lower castes with lower degrees of sanskritization.

16 Williams (1984: 46, Table III) identifies the varna of the first successor of Gunatitanand Swami as Sat-Shudra, and his jati as tailor, and the varna of the next two successors as Vaishya, but does not mention their jati. He first identifies the fourth successor also as Vaishya, but later (p. 51) as Patel (that is, Kanbi-Patidar). Members of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha are ambivalent about the importance of the tailor Mahant.
The caste base of the new institution of the Swaminarayan sect does not seem to be different, except that it has recently recruited some Untouchables on the condition that they use their own separate temples (see Williams 1984: 148). It is different, however, from the older sect in attracting large numbers of ascetics as well as lay members from the educated, modernised, professional class in India as well as abroad. This has made the new institution one of the richest among the sects in a short time. It has established more than 200 temples, some of which are large and impressive, particularly the ones in Gandhinagar, London, Chicago, Houston, and the most recent in New Delhi.

Reflections on Sect and Caste

Let us now put together the threads of information regarding the relation between sect and caste. India is so vast and diverse and our knowledge of its religion and society so meagre that we have to be cautious in making sweeping generalizations in this matter. We should not therefore rule out the possibility of the existence of a few sects composed of members belonging to only one caste. However, as far as we know at present, all sects are composed of members belonging to more than one caste, and all of the members follow caste regulations. It seems to be true, as Dumont has stated, that ‘a sect cannot survive on Indian soil if it denies caste’ (1960: 37); and also, as Pocock has stated, ‘that the sect which opposes caste regulations becomes, finally, itself a caste’ (1973: 151). The Lingayats of south India are the only case, frequently cited in the literature, of a sect which denied caste but ended by itself becoming a caste. This case, however, needs to be examined with more careful research, both historical and ethnographic. The denial of caste by the scriptures of a

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17 Suresh Patil’s recent paper (2003) shows that the Lingayats are really a sect composed of members drawn from a number of different castes, and that each of the castes retains its identity and status after inclusion in the sect. He states: ‘All the castes that are found in northern Karnataka have a Lingayat subgroup amongst them’ (p. 185). This suggests that every caste is divided into sectarians (probably of more than one sect) and non-sectarians. It is a different matter, however, that in the modern political arena the Lingayat elite has begun to claim that the Lingayats are not Hindu but a separate religion altogether.
Sects and Hindu Social Structure

sect (the cryptic statements by Dumont and Pocock appear to refer to only scriptural denials) should not be construed as indicating the empirical non-existence of caste in the sect. While the founder would have preached against caste, he as well as his successors would not have ignored the caste principle in recruiting followers, nor would the members have ignored it after recruitment. For example, as Lorenzen has shown, although Kabir has been widely hailed as an apostle preaching against religious and caste distinctions, "the monks of the Kabir Panth have Hinduised and Sanskritised the path so that (today) it is flatly a Vaishnava Hindu sect" with caste distinctions (1987a, 1987b). I have also observed that Kabir's pictures today show the usual U-shaped Vaishnava mark on his forehead.

The significant issue, however, is not whether a sect denies caste, but it is that of which castes in the hierarchy of castes are recruited to membership of which sect. To put it differently, we have to see which rungs of the caste ladder are occupied by a sect. In no case does the membership of a sect cover the entire caste hierarchy. As we have seen in the case of the Pushti and Swaminarayan sects, each sect covers only a certain portion of the hierarchy, and the portion covered by one sect is not identical with the portion covered by another. Significantly, even the 'subaltern' Satnami sect, studied by the historian Saurabh Dube (1993: 2, 45; 1998: 41, 43, 63), includes mainly the higher-status Untouchable caste of Chamar (leather-workers) and small sections of two other castes of almost equal status, namely, Telī (oil pressers) and Rawat (graziers). But it excludes the lower Untouchable castes of Mehtar (sweepers), Ghasia (horse cleaners) and Dhobi (washermen). The Satnami sect also includes only one of the several sections of the Chamar caste.18

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18 Although Dube mentions a few other castes, particularly Telis and Rawats, as included in the Satnami sect (1993: 2; 1998: 41, 43), he does not discuss their relation with the Chamars, and goes on to consider the sect as constituted exclusively of Chamars. Similarly, although he mentions that the Kanaujia Chamars, a major division among the Chamars in the region, have not joined the sect (1998: 40), his book gives the impression that the entire Chamar caste has joined the sect. All in all, his assertion that the Satnamis combine the features of both caste and sect remains unsupported by his own data. In fact, his work illustrates the argument that every sect is composed of members drawn from more than one caste, and every caste is divided among non-sectarians and members of more than one sect.
Another major issue is the nature of relations between members of different castes included in a sect. In this respect, we have to compare the nature of interaction between the members of different castes within a sect and that between the members of the same castes outside of it, that is, between their non-sectarian members. As far as my limited observation goes, the sectarian fellowship tends to break caste barriers to a significant extent, and in many respects — except the hard core of caste endogamy. The fellowship is often expressed in fictional kinship terms such as guru–bhai (guru–brother) and guru–bahen (guru–sister) between the followers of a common guru.

The Origin and Development of Sects

The question of why the caste base of every sect is different seems to be related to the way the sect originated and grew. It is an extremely difficult question to handle in the absence of sound historical research on the subject. We may only suggest a few ideas. There may be considerable truth in Dumont’s observation (1960: 47) that the renouncers have contributed creative ideas in Hinduism. However, his statement that ‘not only the founding of sects and their maintenance, but the major ideas, the “inventions” are due to the renouncer’, is questionable. We should recognize that throughout Indian history, along with scholars of religion there were also scholars in other fields such as language, literature, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine and other sciences, and they influenced one another. If an intellectual wished to write down his ideas on religion, he required at least some competence in language, literature, philosophy and logic, if not also in some other fields of learning. But, not all the intellectuals, not even those in the field of religion, were renouncers.

We should also place these intellectuals in the context of certain social institutions. We have to consider not only the renouncers’ monasteries but also the pathshalas, royal courts, and urban communities such as Varanasi, Mathura, Puri, Srirangam and Tanjore.

19 The various fields of traditional learning, despite their diversity, seem to share certain basic categories. I am thankful to McKim Marriott for sharing with me the draft of his paper, ‘Some Basic Categories of Indic Science’, wherein he tries to deduce the basic categories used in sāṃkhya, ayurveda, dharmashāstra, nāyikasāstra and jyotisha.

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where intellectuals from different parts of the country congregated in large numbers. A common theme in the biographies of founders of sects is how every one of them was victorious — in reality or in myth — in *shāstrārtha* (debates) between scholars in many intellectual centres and royal courts. With the decline of Sanskrit as the vehicle of intellectual discourse, the rise of regional languages, the slow but steady spread of Arabic and Persian and the spread of Islamic power, new centres of intellectual life developed. Even the Mughal court became a centre for religious debate. (For a succinct account of these and other changes in intellectual life during the 17th century, see Pollock 2001.) Almost all the older sects, beginning with Shankaracharya’s, seem to have originated in intellectual debates in the institutions mentioned above. A new religious message often reflected a sharp difference of opinion with established views.

It is noteworthy that many of the debates that led to the establishment of sects were concerned with oppositions, such as those of *dvaita* and *advaita*, Shiva and Vishnu, male and female deities, renouncer and house-holder, Brahman and non-Brahman, vertical and horizontal marks, linear and circular marks, and so on. There was a continuous play, if I may say so, of oppositions: rejecting an existing opposition and postulating a new one, reversing it, adding a middle term, and so on. A new sect would reject at least some of the existing oppositions and postulate new ones. And the process would go on. An innovative thinker, with a distinctively new message and a sizeable number of disciples, became the founder of a sect.

We should not rule out the role of inspiration and revelation in the origin of a religious leader. Even miracles, as the leader himself and his followers perceived them, might play a role. However, intellectual concerns seem to have played a major role in the origin of many sects. It is hardly necessary to point out that the founders of all the older sects were intellectuals and wrote the foundational literature of their sects. If the founder of a sect himself did not write the foundational literature, other intellectuals were persuaded to do it. It is well known that Chaitanya, the founder of the Gaudiya Vaishnava sect, did not write more than a few verses. However, he deputed six of his learned followers to go to Vrindavan, a centre of Vaishnava scholarship, so that they could interact with the intellectuals there and produce sectarian literature (see Dimock 1966: 43–4). I mentioned earlier that Sahajanand, the founder of the Swaminarayan sect, wrote only one text in Sanskrit. However, according to historian
Makrand Mehta (1986), Sahajanand had several texts written in Sanskrit by Brahman scholars, at least some of whom were not followers of the sect. Lorenzen (1987b) shows how the initially anti-intellectual Kabir Panth came under the influence of higher-caste Sanskrit intellectuals and transformed itself into a Vaishnava sect. Even the Satnami sect among the Untouchables in Chhattisgarh had its sectarian literature written by a Brahman, albeit one who had lost his caste because of his marriage to a Chamar (see Dube 1998: 115–143).

We should inquire how many of the traditional institutions of learning continue to be active, and how many modern academic institutions such as universities, research institutes and learned societies have become centres of creative thinking on religion. It is a striking fact that most universities in India, unlike those in the West, do not have a department of religious studies. Their departments of sociology and social anthropology, and the social science research institutes, also do little research on religion. While modern academic institutions are not engaged in creative thinking on religion, we may wonder how much creative thinking has remained among older sects, and how much is to be found in the new sects that have emerged.

The path of propagation of the founder’s new message was usually strewn with obstacles, but the strength of his ideas and his organizational skill led to the growth of the sect. Often he or his successors had to compromise and adapt the message to overcome the obstacles. The real challenge for the founder and his disciples was the identification of groups and categories of people who could be won over as lay members of the sect. Every new sect faced a set of established sects in every region. As I suggested earlier, it was not easy for a sect to draw members from other sects, but it could easily attract persons from the vast mass of non-sectarians. I would now suggest that the threshold of religiosity required of a caste, or a section of it, for entry into a sect depended by and large on the level of sanskritization reached by the individual or the group.

20 On the whole, there are few regular bases for scholarly thinking about religion and its relation with other aspects of society in modern India. A false notion of secularism prevalent among the intelligentsia, including many academics, has prevented a realistic understanding of a society that is deeply religious.
A brief intervention regarding the concept of sanskritization is necessary here because there is considerable misunderstanding about it. I have discussed this problem elsewhere and at some length (2005, Chapter 3 in this book, 2006), and will therefore deal with it here briefly. Usually, sanskritization is understood to be a process of emulation of the religion and culture of the upper castes by the lower castes, enabling the latter’s upward mobility in the caste hierarchy. This, however, is an application in a specific context of a more general concept. Srinivas enunciated the concept first in his book on the Coorgs (1952), basing it on his distinction between Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic Hinduism. He elaborated upon it further in his later writings.

Sanskritization ... means also the spread of certain values which are not directly connected with the caste system (1956: 93).

Sanskritization is not confined to any single part of the country, but is widespread in the subcontinent, including remote and forested areas. It affected a wide variety of groups, both those within the Hindu fold and others outside it. It was even carried to neighbouring countries such as Ceylon, Indonesia, and Tibet. ... Sanskritization is a profound and many-sided cultural process, only a part of which has structural relevance (1967: 68).

There has been a continuous process of sanskritization throughout India for centuries, at all levels of the caste order, among all so-called tribes, and in families and lineage groups within every caste and tribe.

We should not rule out the possibility of some social or political organization, like the present-day Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, trying to spread Sanskritic Hinduism in an organized manner (if not by force) among less sanskritized groups such as the lower castes, Dalits and tribals. However, sanskritization has traditionally been a very slow and incremental process at the ground level in villages and towns, in the absence of organized effort by such agents. Sanskritic Hinduism consists of countless little items of behaviour. Individuals and small groups emulate these items of behaviour, one after another, imitating those of their immediate neighbours (not necessarily Brahmans) whom they consider to be higher in status. For a member of a caste on a lower rung of the ladder, the object of emulation might be the caste immediately above it, or a non-caste institution such as a temple, religious discourse or book.
Aggregation of such items of behaviour in a group might lead it to announce its achievement at some dramatic event. A religious leader might come to a village or town to preach Sanskritic behaviour, but his visit usually follows, not precedes, the achievement of a certain level of sanskritization. In any case, this sort of preaching has been going on for centuries, and is different from the kind of efforts made to spread Sanskrit Hinduism by modern organizations of the type mentioned above.

Let us return to the question of the level of sanskritization required of an individual or a group for recruitment to a sect. The main reason for this requirement is that all earlier sects operated generally at the Sanskrit level. The founder of almost every sect began his career at this level. As mentioned, often his message arose out of intellectual debates in centres of learning. These debates took place in Sanskrit, and in the context of classical texts and of the religion enshrined in them. The founder of the sect and his disciples also laid out his ideas in Sanskrit. Even after intellectual debates began to take place in regional languages and the founder laid out his ideas in a regional language, the debates and the new ideas carried on the legacy of Sanskrit Hinduism. Almost all the key words used in these debates were of Sanskrit origin. Therefore, propagation of new ideas of a sect required a certain level of sanskritization in a population for it to receive and absorb these ideas. Since urban centres, particularly the higher castes and classes in them, had reached higher levels of sanskritization, sectarian Hinduism was for long a prominent feature of urban communities, particularly of the upper castes and classes in them. The extent to which it had spread in rural communities seems to have varied in different parts of the country. It appears to have spread to a greater extent in villages in south India, because sectarian movements emerged there much earlier and because the Brahmans enjoyed higher secular status on account of their substantial land grants. Sectarian Hinduism had certainly not spread to rural areas to any significant extent until recently in the parts of western and north India that I know.21

21 On the issue of rural–urban differences, see my 1988 paper (Chapter 5 in this book). See also Singer (1972) for a discussion of the relation between Sanskrit Hinduism and urbanism.
Sects among the Dalits and Adivasis

The problem of the relation between sects on the one hand and Dalits (ex-Untouchables) and Adivasis (or tribals) on the other requires special attention. Unfortunately, we have very little information, historical or ethnographic, about either category, and the available information does not enable us to answer crucial questions. I will therefore deal with only a few questions in a preliminary way.

As regards the Untouchables, we have to keep in mind the fact that this is a highly differentiated category. In every region the Untouchables are divided into several castes (jatis), which are arranged in a hierarchy. In Gujarat, for example, the highest caste is Garoda (derived from guru). They claim to be Brahmans, wear the sacred thread like other Brahmans, and carry such Brahmanic surnames as Joshi, Pandya, Trivedi and Vyas. They were quite literate and could read Hindu scriptures even in the past. They performed priestly functions for other Untouchable castes. The lowest caste is Bhangi (scavenger and menial servant). In between these two castes are Vankar (weaver), Chamar (leather-worker), Senwa (rope maker, menial servant) and a few others. The internal hierarchy is based on ritual criteria, mainly of purity and pollution, for which reason it is often said that there is untouchability among the Untouchables. The bits and pieces of information that I have indicate that the process of sanskritization operates among all these castes, the higher ones being more sanskritized than the lower.

All interpreters of the idea of bhakti, sectarian as well as non-sectarian, insist that an Untouchable has the same freedom to follow the path of bhakti as the Brahman. Founders of sects since the time of Ramanuja have gone out of their way to stress this idea, and a few sects are said to have admitted Untouchables into their fold. These are, however, general statements, and do not specify which of the Untouchable castes are admitted into a sect. Since normally all the members of a caste would not be recruited, we do not know the criteria on which individuals are admitted. We also do not know the kind of status they are accorded within the sect, and the kind of relations they are able to develop with members of higher castes within the sect — for example, whether the fictional kinship terms guru-bhai and guru-bahen are extended to them.
We do not know if there are other sects, like the Satnamis, which are confined to the Untouchables. As mentioned earlier, however, the Satnami sect is composed of members of only three castes which occupy a certain position in the hierarchy of Untouchable castes, and it has not admitted certain other lower castes. Moreover, all members of the dominant Chamar caste are not members of the sect. The sect is also influenced by Sanskritic Hinduism, as indicated by the existence of sectarian literature written for it by a Brahman. Sectarian Hinduism has thus penetrated the Untouchable section of society. The extent of penetration and its preconditions and consequences are a crucial field of inquiry.

As regards the spread of sects among the Adivasi tribes, significant developments seem to have taken place in recent times. We may recall here Surajit Sinha’s paper (1966) which analyzes at some length the influence of the Vaishnavism of the Chaitanya sect among the Bhumij of Manbhum district in Jharkhand. Sinha also notes S.C. Roy’s earlier (1912) brief mention of the influence of the same sect among the neighbouring Mundas of Ranchi. Lorenzen (1987a) traces the influence of the Kabir Panth among several tribes in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh since the 19th century. Nandini Sundar (1997: 242) reports that the Gayatri and Brahmakumari sects have made notable headway in south Bastar. Lal’s exploratory study (1977) reported the presence of seven sectarian movements among the tribals of south Gujarat. Another exploratory study (Lobo 1992) has reported the presence of as many as nine sectarian groups among the tribals in more or less the same area. Sinha and Ekka (2003) have shown how the Pranami sect, with its main centre at Jamnagar in Saurashtra, has spread among the Patelia on the border between Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Hardiman (2003) has narrated the formation of a new sect among the Bhils on the Gujarat-Rajasthan border.

These reports suggest that sectarian Hinduism is possibly much more prevalent among tribal people than is generally believed to be the case. In order to locate its presence and to understand it we have to change the reigning approaches in the study of tribal people in sociology and social anthropology. It is well known that the terms ‘tribe’ and ‘aborigine’ are of Western origin, introduced by the colonial rulers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The present Indian terms, janajati and adivasi, are translations of these English terms. Every so-called tribal group in earlier times was referred to by its individual
name, there was no generic term. It is ironic that the very scholars who accept these facts consider these groups as discrete, different, and isolated from the rest of Hindu society. Most of the information about them becomes available only with the establishment of colonial rule, by which time we find them already infused by Hinduism in various degrees. Those sections of the tribes who lived in close proximity to Hindus — as indeed many of them did — achieved a higher degree of sanskritization. Even those tribals who lived in so-called inaccessible areas in hills and forests experienced some degree of sanskritization. In my view, tribals were all part of the vast mass of non-sectarian Hindus. Over the last two centuries the process of sanskritization has intensified among all of them. If Hindu sects recruit them into their fold, or if new sects emerge among them, they will be building on a foundation already laid by a long process of sanskritization. To call this 'conversion', as some scholars have done recently, is to misunderstand the reality, to say the least.

**Sects, Social Structure and Social Change**

I hope the above discussion is adequate to support my main argument that, at least since the 12th century, sects have been a crucial component of Hindu religion and society. I would not maintain, like Emile Durkheim, that religion is an apotheosis of society. Religious ideas and symbols have a certain autonomy. However, society does intervene and influence them. Hence sects need to be considered an important component of social structure — a component in its own right and not just another form of some other structure such as caste. Any disregard of this fact would obstruct the clear understanding both of religion and society, and of sect and caste.

Hopefully, the above discussion has also shown that, while knowledge of the way a sect was founded and developed is important, sociologists and social anthropologists must focus on the present situation, leaving the former to historians or to anthropologists and sociologists who can do competent historical research. The present situation poses many problems of inquiry, a few of which I mention here.

In every sect, changes have taken place from time to time in domestic as well as temple worship. We should study these changes and the manner in which they were brought about. Let me give just
one illustration. In the Pushti sect in the past, water lifted from wells in a pot tied to a rope was considered ‘pure’, and used in worshipping the deity: in bathing him, in offering it to him for drinking, and in cooking various items of food for him. When tap water began to be used in the country, it was considered ‘impure’ for use in worship. The problem was solved for some time by using tap water only for human consumption and bringing a small quantity of well water for use in worship. Gradually, however, the water table in wells went down and most wells dried up. Therefore, the members of the sect approached the gurus for an āgnyā (command) to allow them to use tap water in worship, since only the gurus had the adhikār (authority) to change liturgical practices. Eventually they got the command. Problems also arose with regard to the fuel used for cooking food for the deity: it was changed from firewood to coal, from coal to kerosene, and from kerosene to liquefied petroleum gas. Similar problems have arisen with regard to many other matters, and been resolved only by the gurus’ commands. Changes in rituals among non-sectarians do not seem to require such sanction.

With the beginning of British rule in the 19th century, one of the challenges faced by every sect was that it had to operate within the confines of law and jurisprudence of Western origin. This legal change often required the formation of trusts, committees, associations, foundations and similar modern institutions with such offices as president, chairman, secretary, treasurer, and so on. These institutions in turn brought about subtle changes in the relationship between the religious leaders and the laity, between the sect and the various organs of the state, and in the internal functioning of the sect. This is a major area of research.

We have noted how the founder of almost every sect made institutional arrangements during his lifetime to perpetuate his ideas and work. The differences in institutional arrangements of different sects require comparative study before any general statements are made about them. However, these differences seem to revolve around two main principles in the recruitment of heads of sects: the guru–śishya paramparā (teacher–pupil tradition) and vamsa paramparā (lineage tradition). Some sects follow one or the other tradition exclusively, and others a combination of the two. The sects composed exclusively of ascetics follow only the teacher–pupil tradition, as for example, most sects found at the kumbh melas. The sect founded
Sects and Hindu Social Structure

by Vallabhacharya, on the other hand, follows the lineage tradition exclusively, and was perhaps the first to do so. The gurus in the Satnami sect are also patrilineal descendants of its founder Ghasiram (Dube 1993: 2, 1998: 2, 58). The Shri Vaishnava sect has both ascetic and householder gurus, and its Dasayya sub-sect includes mendicants belonging to the non-Brahman touchable as well as Untouchable castes (see Parthasarathy 1970). As mentioned earlier, Sahajanand, the founder of the Swaminarayan sect, was an ascetic but decided towards the end of his life to create two dioceses each headed by an Acharya who would be a member of his family. Initially he adopted two sons of his two brothers. He also created the position of Mahant to be occupied by the head of the hierarchy of ascetics. However, the dissident sect, Bochasanvasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha, decided to follow the ascetic tradition exclusively.

The institutional arrangements have played an extremely important role in the growth of every sect. Since they were made by the founder himself, they acquire a certain sacred and therefore immutable character, and become a vested interest of some group or other within the sect. Nevertheless, they change over time because they have to meet the challenges of the changing social environment. The dynamics of these changes require intensive study.

A significant recent change is the involvement of sects in modern, secular, developmental activities: setting up hospitals, schools, colleges, universities, and homes for senior citizens, and organising relief work after earthquakes, fires and floods. These activities bring not only the leaders and the laity but also the sect as a whole and the state into closer relationship. They also seem to give a new meaning to religion.

Are sects generating new philosophical and theological ideas in modern times? To put it in Dumont’s words, are sects playing a creative role in Indian society and culture in modern times? This is a most challenging question and requires most careful inquiry. Only a few sects undergo such radical transformation as the Kabir Panth. from a syncretic Hindu Muslim sect to a sanskritized Hindu Vaishnava one. Every other sect appears, on the surface, to be engaged in preserving its old ideas and practices. Under the surface, however, changes are taking place in every sect. These changes seem to be taking three main directions: (i) a sect might borrow ideas from one or more other sects and integrate them into its inherited ideas;
(ii) a sect might change its emphasis from one to another of its inherited ideas, or (iii) a sect might absorb some modern ideas, such as that of social equality. For example, a sect traditionally dominated by upper castes might recruit members from lower castes. In any case the understanding of modern Indian society and culture does not seem possible without understanding the role of sects.
The Rural–Urban Networks in India

With the urban population in India constituting 23.7 per cent of the total population in 1981, and with the projected growth rising to 27.5 per cent in 1991 (Registrar General of India 1986), India can no longer be described as a ‘land of villages.’ (Not that there was much justification for such a description in the past, but I shall say more about that later.) The urban centres are playing an increasingly important role in Indian society as a whole, including rural society. The importance of understanding rural–urban relations, therefore, can hardly be overemphasized. This essay is a modest attempt to contribute to an understanding of these relations.

My competence to write about urban society in India is limited. I have not carried out any empirical investigation in urban centres. I have done fieldwork mainly in villages. However, as the villages in which I worked had several towns in their vicinity since at least the 18th century, I could not help observing relations between villages and towns, and this led me to read and think about these relations. My work on castes as horizontal units (1982, Chapter 8 in this book, Shah and Desai 1988) also involved study of castes in the urban...
context. All this work does not amount to much, but I hope this little intrusion into the urban field will be tolerated by those who have specialized in it.

**Approaches to the Study of Urban India**

Anyone who surveys the literature on urban India will be struck by the fact that it is dominated by demographers, geographers and town planners (see the two surveys of literature by D’Souza 1974, 1987). Also, it is well known that the sociology and social anthropology of urban India is not as developed as that of rural India. First of all, the volume of empirical research done on the former is much less than that on the latter. Secondly, the approaches to the study of urban society and its relations with rural society, and the consequent views of structure and change in Indian society as a whole, leave much to be desired. That a general theoretical understanding of a social structure or institution improves with the growth of volume of good research on it is well known, but frequently a lack of proper approach also leads to a lack of proper direction in research. One of the aims of this essay is to plead for a reorientation of approach to the study of urban society and its relation with rural society in India.

In many sociological and social anthropological writings on urbanization, industrialization, modernization, development and change in India — all involving notions of past and present — certain processes are assumed to be new although they may really be continuations of old and established processes. Until recently many writings on Indian society assumed that urbanization in India was itself a new process. According to them, India was a land of villages, which came under the impact of urbanization only since British rule. Some have stated that Indian cities and towns — particularly small towns — are extensions of villages, or that they are overgrown villages. Terms such as ‘rural town’, ‘rururban’, ‘rural urbanite’, and ‘urban ruralite’ have been used to describe people and society in small towns. Many have stated that although people live in towns their social structure and institutions are rural in character. Many have considered such basic institutions as caste and joint family as essentially rural in character, or as having their origin in rural society and therefore rural even if they occur in cities. For example, Beteille writes in one essay, ‘Caste merely represents a systematization and elaboration of ideas and values which are present as important ingredients in most agrarian societies’ (1974: 39). In another essay he writes, ‘One
cannot help being struck by the remarkable association between caste or caste-like organizations and the agrarian way of life’ (1974: 60). He then quotes with approval Michael Young’s statement, ‘The soil grows castes, the machine makes classes’ (1974: 64). Apart from such statements involving the view that the Indian village consists of only agricultural castes, they assume that castes are rural in origin and therefore rural wherever they occur.

Fortunately there is now an increasing realization among sociologists of the fact that India has had urban centres since the time of the Indus Valley Civilization several centuries before Christ, and that towns and cities — small and large — existed in all parts of India throughout its recorded history. But welcome as such awareness is it has not changed the formulations of the nature of social structure and change in India. Frequently the importance of urban centres is either minimized or altogether ignored on account of the small proportion of population living in them. Frequently the formulations of the nature of social change posit change from the rural past to the urban present, ignoring the urban past.

In recent years, however, there has been a tendency to promote urban studies. This is indeed welcome, but it has led to mainly a juxtaposition of rural and urban studies. Just as village studies have tended to deal with intra-village structures and institutions, urban studies have tended to deal with intra-town structures and institutions. It is necessary to go beyond such juxtaposition, and to study structures and institutions which link the two — which are supra-village and supra-town, or which are networks linking villages and towns.

Let us take an example. That members of a caste live in many villages and towns, forming what Srinivas has called a horizontal unit (1952: 31f; 1966: 9, 44, 92, 98–100, 114–17), is well known. Certain important questions arise from this fact. What was the nature of the network formed by a large number of such horizontal units linking a large number of villages and towns in a region? What changes have taken place in the local and the regional structures, and what is their significance for understanding social change in general? It is not sufficient to say that the village has castes and the town has castes. What is necessary is to understand the total matrix of castes as horizontal units cutting across villages and towns.

Pocock has rightly pointed out that ‘city and village are elements of the same civilization’ (1960: 81) and that the same institutions — caste, kinship, religion, and so on — exist in both villages and towns (ibid.: 65). He argues, on this basis, not only against the idea of
rural–urban dichotomy and the division of the sociology of India into rural and urban sociologies, but also against the idea of rural–urban continuum since it assumes rural–urban dichotomy. If his emphasis on the sameness of institutions in villages and towns means that there cannot be any institution whatsoever distinctive of towns, then the words village and town cannot be used as social categories. He, however, seems to recognize some difference between village and town when he states: ‘the city stood for the most complete and abiding expression of the essential social values. At the ideal level, the city was the centre of caste ... the place where castes both in number and in hierarchical order most nearly corresponded to a Brahman’s ideal’ (ibid.: 66–69). This formulation shows that Pocock subsumes the entire urban society under caste. Not many would agree prima facie with this formulation, even if they disregard the assumption of the equation of urban society with Hindu society throughout history. It may be considered at best a hypothesis, in view of meagre research on urban society.

M.S.A. Rao tried to meet the inadequacy of Pocock’s formulation by trying ‘to posit that although there were certain structural continuities between village and town in traditional India, there were significant organizational differences’ (1974: 16). This amounts to hardly any disagreement with Pocock, because organizational differences can always exist within structural similarities. Nevertheless, Rao made a good case for studying traditional urbanism. Lynch tends to confirm Pocock’s hypothesis that it is false to presuppose a dichotomy of rural and urban sociologies, but adds the qualification that ‘this seems true of some castes, in some cities, and at certain historical periods’ (1967: 156–157).

One of the aims of this essay is to show that an understanding of the rural–urban networks in the past is essential for an understanding of the rural–urban networks, urbanization, and social change in recent times. I must add here, however, that I am not a professional historian but I have been working on some historical records about villages in Gujarat in which I have done fieldwork, and this work has led me to the study of some records about towns in the area. I am using this limited experience to say something in general about Gujarat and, by extension, about India. This exercise has involved considerable historical speculation, but I believe that sometimes speculation is essential for academic advancement. I shall deal mainly with the
question: what was the nature of urban society in the past and what was its relation with rural society? I shall refer mainly to the situation obtaining at the beginning of the 19th century when the British began to rule over India and initiate a number of changes.1

Demographers and geographers have done a considerable amount of work on urban centres in India, and sociologists should of course use this work, but they should also keep in mind the special meaning demographers and geographers, and many others following them, attach to the concepts of ‘urban growth’ and ‘urbanization’ (for a discussion of these concepts, see Asish Bose 1965). The former indicates absolute increase in urban population, and the latter, increase in the proportion of urban to total population in a given country or a part of it. Theoretically, there can be urban growth without urbanization. If both the rural and the urban populations grow at the same rate — for example, there is no rural–urban migration at all and the natural increase in population is the same both in the rural and the urban areas — there is growth of urban population but not of urbanization, in as much as the proportion of urban to total population remains constant in spite of growth in urban population. This distinction between ‘urban growth’ and ‘urbanization’ is useful. But it takes care of only aggregates for a whole country or a region in it and ignores increase or decrease in population of individual towns and cities. We shall come back to this issue later.

Sociologists and social anthropologists use the concept of urbanization in a more general sense. It would of course include the growth of urban population both absolutely and relatively to rural population, but it would also include, as Srinivas (1956c) has done, the diffusion of urban institutions and ways of life in rural areas, resulting in some cases in transformation of villages into towns, or as Redfield and Singer (1954) have done, the role of cities in the formation, maintenance, spread, decline, and transformation of civilization.2

1 The historical portion is based on a variety of sources: gazetteers of British districts and princely states, recent historical works, early 19th century local records for central Gujarat, family and caste histories, ethnographic data, etc. Since this paper involves mainly interpretation of well-known facts, I shall not cite sources except where required by the context.

2 I am aware of the problem of definition of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ involved here but have left it untouched.
The degree and character of urban growth varied from one part of India to another. The coastal areas — from Karachi to Kanyakumari and from there to Chittagong — were dotted about with a number of trading towns, and here also some areas such as Gujarat, Konkan, Malabar and Coromandel, had many more towns than did the other areas. Within the inland areas too, the plains areas with developed agriculture and arts and crafts — which meant numerous Hindu castes with specialized occupations — had many more urban centres than did the hilly and jungle tracts inhabited by the primitive tribes. Similarly, desert areas provided a poor base for urban growth.

The distribution of urban population in an area is an important factor in the pattern of rural–urban relations. This population could be concentrated in one large city and only a small proportion of the urban population could be found in smaller towns, so that there would be a lot of distance between village and town, as well as a lot of contrast. On the other hand, the urban population could be dispersed over a large number of medium and small size towns, so that every village would have several towns in its vicinity in different directions, and there would be an absence of sharp contrast between village and town. Gujarat has been largely an area of the latter kind.

It is well known that three basic factors played varying roles in the making of an urban centre in pre-industrial India: economic (trade, commerce and manufacture), political (court and administration), and religious (pilgrimage). The economic factor was, however, much more important than the other two in the case of Gujarat. Gujarat has a long coastline, which had as many as 27 ports for big ships and 45 for small boats from the 16th to the 18th century (Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982: 352). Secondly, ports in Gujarat served as a vast hinterland in central and north India. Thirdly, the coastline has in its immediate vicinity a rich plain land. Due to all these favourable

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1. To define the pre-modern city entirely on the basis of “the manner in which material wealth is generated,” as Kumar has done in his essay on urban history (1983), would be to take a narrow view of the city. As I have argued elsewhere (Shah and Desai 1988: 107–9), although there could be one dominant factor — economic, political, administrative, or religious—in the making of a town, the other factors coexisted with it in a dynamic relationship. Any attempt to define the city or to trace its origin in terms of a single factor cannot take us far, if it is not totally futile.
factors, Gujarat was involved in various kinds of trade: international trade with other parts of the world; coastal trade with other parts of Indian coast; trade among towns on Gujarat coast itself; trade with inland towns in other regions of India; trade between one inland town and another within Gujarat; trade between town and village; and trade between villages.

Economic historians have given much attention to the study of Gujarat’s international and inter-regional trade, but hardly any to that of its intra-regional trade. This is partly due to the paucity of historical sources, but partly also due to the unstated assumption of intra-regional uniformity. As a matter of fact, there was a great deal of geographical diversity within Gujarat, not only between the plains and the highlands but also within each of them. The plains land was divided traditionally into a number of tracts, such as Bhal, Charotar, Chorasi, Chumval, Daskosi, Kanam, Mal and Vakal, to name only a few (for an account of these tracts, see Bhatt 1982). There was considerable specialization of agricultural production between these tracts: they produced not only different commercial crops such as indigo, cotton, tobacco, sugarcane, spices, and oil seeds, but also food crops such as rice and wheat, and dairy products such as ghee. Such specialization in agricultural production encouraged trade between one agricultural tract and another. Frequently the villagers of one tract themselves carried their produce on head, on pack animals or in carts to sell directly to villagers in another, usually an adjoining, tract. However, they also sold a great deal of their produce to traders in a nearby town, in a weekly market, or in a fair, who in turn marketed it to other towns and villages. This point needs to be emphasized because although the old theory of the self-sufficiency of each individual Indian village has virtually died, it has been substituted by the theory that the rural sector as a whole was self-sufficient (see Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982: 83, 247–48, 327). We shall return to this point in another context later.

A noteworthy feature of urbanization in Gujarat was the development of a considerable number of villages into towns since the beginning of the Commercial Revolution in the 16th century. Certain villages became rich due to the cultivation of commercial crops such as indigo, cotton, tobacco, sugarcane, spices, and oil seeds.

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4 There are at least five full-length works: Nightingale (1970); Gopal (1975); Pearson (1979); Dasgupta (1983); and Gokhale (1978).
The increasing wealth and power of the principal peasant caste, namely, Patidar, in these villages attracted a large number of traders, artisans, craftsmen and servants, thus adding an urban component to these villages and converting them into towns. In central Gujarat, Nadiad was perhaps the first such town to develop, and quite a number of others such as Sojitra, Mahudha, Savli and Vaso followed later. The political history of Gujarat from the 16th to the 18th century was marked by a gradual increase in the number of small Rajput as well as Muslim princedoms, each with a small capital town. This was a feature particularly of Saurashtra, Kachchh and the highlands (see A.M. Shah 1964b). It was one more factor behind the existence of a large number of small towns in Gujarat during this period.

Although higher or ‘great traditional’ religion characterized every town and city, it was a primary characteristic of a few small towns: Dwarka and Somnath in Saurashtra, Siddhpur in north Gujarat, and Dakor in central Gujarat.

Gujarat was divided into two major geographical and socio-cultural regions: one, the fertile plain adjoining the coast line, inhabited by many Hindu castes, and people of other religions, i.e., Jains, Muslims, Parsis, Jews and Christians; and two, the bordering hilly and jungle tracts, inhabited mainly by tribal groups such as Bhil, Naikda, Chodhra, Dubla, Dhodia, Gamit and others. There were very few urban centres in the hilly tracts, and as we shall see, the rural–urban relations here were also of a different kind. In the plains, on the other hand, there were a large number of urban centres and they were evenly distributed so that a village would have several towns in its vicinity. For example, at the beginning of the 19th century, the village which was the subject of my study in central Gujarat, had two towns within a radius of five miles and two more within a radius of ten miles, and so on. This situation was not at all atypical of the plains of Gujarat.

While agricultural, pastoral and such other pursuits were the basis of the village economy, non-agricultural pursuits were the basis of the

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5 For historical and ethnographic accounts of villages and towns in central Gujarat, see C.F. Shah and P.C. Shah (1960).
6 Apart from several gazetteers and such other works for information on these tribal areas, there are two useful recent studies of towns in the adjoining tribal areas in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh by Chauhan 1970 and Aurora 1972 respectively. I also did fieldwork in the merger zone between the plains and the highlands and made a few brief field trips to the latter in 1953.
urban economy. Village society had a great deal of division of labour. Besides the agricultural castes, there were the priestly Brahmans and a number of artisan and servant castes. Although every tract used to have one caste considered as the peasant caste par excellence, agriculture was an open occupation, so that several castes could have agriculture as their main occupation.

There was a greater diversity of occupations in urban centres. The population of the town included, first of all, the families of the king, chief or governor, and of his nobles, courtiers, officials, clerks, retainers, soldiers and policemen. The second major category of urban population was comprised of cultural specialists, such as priests, scholars, musicians, dancers, artists, genealogists and so on. There were not only ordinary priests for ordinary people but also learned priests for the elite. The third major category of urban population was comprised of shopkeepers, traders, moneylenders and bankers. The fourth category was composed of a variety of specialized artisans and craftsmen. A large quantity of textiles was produced in towns. Cotton textiles involved cotton-cleaners, carders, spinners, weavers, dyers, printers and others. Silk textiles involved even more specialized artisans. Moreover, there were goldsmiths, diamond-cutters, jewellers, braziers, carpenters, blacksmiths, cutlers, brick-makers, masons, lime-workers, tailors, bangle-makers, cobblers, saddlery makers, potters, oil-pressers, and so on and so forth. The fifth important category of urban population was composed of specialized servants, such as barbers, washermen, drummers, grain-parchers, rice-pounders, florists, vegetable sellers, betel-leaf sellers, leather-workers, scavengers, and so on. The special lifestyle of the urban rich required servants and workers of special types.

Every town had, besides the preponderant Hindu population, at least some population of other religious groups. Although there were Muslim peasants in villages, most of the Muslim population used to live in towns, practising a variety of occupations. There were Muslims belonging to almost all the major occupational categories mentioned above. The Jains, mainly traders, generally lived in urban centres. Moreover, there were Parsis, Christians and Jews, though the latter two were represented in very small numbers. Each of these religious groups, except the Parsis, was further divided into sects and castes. A high degree of religious, ethnic and caste heterogeneity was one of the basic characteristics of the social structure of the town. Such marginal groups as Hijadas (eunuchs),

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Khavas (progeny of Rajput kings and their concubines) and prostitutes added to the heterogeneity of the town.7

Three Categories of Castes

As I have explained elsewhere at some length (1982, Chapter 8 in this book; Shah and Desai 1988), an understanding of relation between villages and towns, and inter alia of the social structure of both, requires us to distinguish three categories of Hindu castes: (i) castes found almost entirely in towns, (ii) castes found almost entirely in villages, and (iii) castes found both in towns and villages.

Some castes were to be found only in towns: (a) several castes engaged in occupations requiring high literacy, if not learning, lived only in towns. Kayasthas and Brahmakshatriyas, two such castes, were employed mainly in the bureaucracy at different levels. Barots (bards, genealogists and mythographers) were another such caste. (b) Vanias (traders) were primarily an urban caste, and so also were the smaller trading castes of Bhatia, Lohana and Bhansali. Although a small proportion of Vanias kept shops in villages, they rarely struck social roots there — unless there were prospects of a village developing into a town, as mentioned earlier. In the case of many of these village shopkeepers the man would stay in the village but keep his wife and children in the town where his caste fellows lived in large number. Vanias began to strike roots in villages in a big way in the early 19th century when the British began to enforce their law that when a landowner who had mortgaged his land to a moneylender did not repay the loan, the title of ownership of land should be transferred to the moneylender. While the Vania acquired land, frequently through British law courts, he rarely cultivated it himself. The modern land reform legislation against absentee and non-cultivating landowners has uprooted many Vanias from villages and they are back again in the town where they originally belonged. Many Vanias also worked as bureaucrats at various levels, from the king’s minister downward to petty clerk, and a few in commercial firms (pēdis) and in Jain and Vaishnavite sectarian organizations. (c) A number of specialized artisan and craftsmen castes lived almost entirely in towns, as for example, Soni (goldsmith), Kansara (brazier),

7 For an account of the Hijadas, see A.M. Shah (1961). On Khavas, see Spodek (1976), and on a similar group in Rajasthan, see Chauhan (1970).
Chudgar (bangle-maker, ivory-worker), Chhipa (dyer, printer), Bhavsar (weaver, dyer, printer), Khatri (cotton weaver), Salvi (silk weaver), Kadiya (brick-layer), Salat (mason), Chunara (clay-maker, brick-layer), Kandoi or Sukhadia (sweets maker), Kharadi (skilled carpenter and wood-carver), Dabgar (maker of drums, saddles and such other goods of leather), Ghanchi (oil presser), and Darji (tailor). The towns had their distinctive specialized servant castes, as for example, Gola (rice-pounder, domestic servant), Kachhia (vegetable seller), Tamboli (betel leaf and areca nut seller), Mali (florist), Dhobi (washerman), and Mochi (cobbler).8

In some cases, as far as the major caste division was concerned, its population would be divided between towns and villages, but at the level of the caste subdivision — the most effective unit for endogamy — some caste subdivisions could be entirely urban in character. We shall return to this issue later.

The castes whose population was divided between towns and villages were highly differentiated internally. Brahmins were found in both towns and villages. The urban Brahmins were involved in occupations requiring a high degree of literacy, and many of them learned Sanskrit. They were domestic and temple priests, teachers, astrologers, practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine, and bureaucrats at various levels. A considerable number of Brahmins had also taken to banking, money lending, and trading. The village Brahmins, on the other hand, practised priesthood with very little knowledge of Sanskrit, and many of them were involved in agriculture, frequently as owner-cultivators.

The caste of Rajputs included at one end the royals and chiefly families and the families of their nobles, courtiers and soldiers, all of whom lived in towns, and it had at the other end cultivators (even tenants and labourers) living in villages. The caste practised hypergamy, i.e., girls were married upward from the lower to the higher status families. The royal, chiefly and noblemen's families living in towns were of course the highest.

Another caste of the same kind was Kanbi (now called Patidar), traditionally the caste of cultivators. Their richest and most powerful landlord families lived in towns and the rest of the population in villages. This caste was also hypergamous, with the rich urban families

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8 For a similar classification of castes in towns in Saurashtra on the eve of British rule, though based mainly on their political role, see Spodeck 1976.
enjoying the highest status. Their so-called 'Six Villages' enjoying the highest status, were really towns.

The population of certain lower castes, such as Chamar (leather worker), Bhangi (scavenger), and other untouchable castes, was also divided between towns and villages, and they too practised hypergamy. When an artisan caste, like that of carpenters or of blacksmiths, was divided between rural and urban sections, the two sections usually did different kinds of work though in the same broad field.

There were a few but populous castes almost all of whose population was found in villages. The most important of these was Koli, the largest single caste in Gujarat, constituting about 25 per cent of the total population. They were mainly small landholders, tenants and labourers, and occupied a rather low position in the ritual hierarchy of castes.

The large tribal population living in the highland areas was even more predominantly rural than were the Kolis, they were rarely, if ever, found in towns. In terms of ethnic composition, therefore, there was a clear contrast in rural–urban relations between the plains and the highlands. In the former there were caste links between the town and the village. In the latter the urban population (which was mainly caste population) had hardly any ‘ethnic’ links with the tribal population. The caste population in towns in both the areas was of course inter-linked.

Viewing the totality of the caste pattern, there was a proportionately greater population of higher and more sanskritized castes in towns than in villages. The town was the locus of higher forms of Hindu religion and culture — a centre of ‘great tradition’, to use Redfield and Singer’s term. This was reflected in the lifestyle, including many customs and institutions, practised by the urban population.

We have so far considered large caste divisions, what I have elsewhere (1982, Chapter 8 in this book; Shah and Desai 1988) called ‘caste divisions of the first order’. I have discussed there at some length the complexity of the internal organization of these divisions. Briefly, on the one hand there were some divisions with a great deal of internal hierarchy and a strong emphasis on hypergamy. They had either weak internal subdivisions (called ikādā, gol, or bandho), each claiming to be endogamous but never really achieving the ideal of endogamy, or they had no such subdivisions at all. On the other hand, there were caste divisions of the first order each of which was divided into divisions of the second order, and each of the latter could
be further divided into divisions of the third order, and so on. The divisions of the smaller order were the most effective endogamous units. For example, the Vanias, a first-order division, were divided into 30 to 40 second-order divisions, such as Khadayata, Lad, Modh, Nagar, Nima, Porwad, Shrimali, Vayada, and Zarola. Each of these was further divided into third-order divisions called ekdas or gols, some of which were each divided into tads (lit., splits). The ekdas and tads, the most effective endogamous units, were usually small in size, some as small as composed of about 200 households.

Let us now return to the distinction between the primarily rural, the primarily urban, and the rural-cum-urban castes. As far as the first-order divisions were concerned, the population of a division could be distributed between towns and villages, but some of its second-order divisions could be almost entirely urban. For example, while Brahmins were a rural-cum-urban first-order division, the Bhargav and Khadayata Brahmins were entirely urban second-order divisions. Similarly, some of the third-order divisions of a second-order division could be entirely urban (as for example, Nadiad-Petlad ekda among Modh Vanias in central Gujarat), and so also some of the fourth-order divisions of a third-order division (as for example, Motu tad within Nadiad ekda within Khadayata Vania division). Usually the population of each of such small urban divisions was found distributed in a few nearby towns. But in the case of a large town such as Ahmedabad, Baroda or Surat, the entire population of a small division could be confined to just one town.

Such a division was a highly integrated unit, because almost all the kinship and affinal relationships were confined within the town, and most of the members practised more or less the same occupation, resided on a single street (sometimes a fortified one), possessed corporate property, regulated the corporate affairs through a panchayat, and worshipped a tutelary deity. There was considerable elaboration in urban centres of what is called the community aspect of caste.

All the urban castes and most of the rural-cum-urban castes permitted intra-town (also, of course, intra-caste) marriage. Marriages even between households living on the same street were not uncommon. This was in sharp contrast to the rule of village exogamy which prevailed in Gujarat as in the rest of north India. We need not discuss here the issue as to whether this was really a rule or only a pseudo-rule, a shorthand statement of some more basic
facts of kinship in villages in north India. Nor need we discuss the complications of the rule for the rural-cum-urban castes. But certainly it did not make sense in the urban context. Intra-town marriages contributed a great deal to the cohesiveness of each such urban caste division.

A large town could have living in it two or more of the fourth-order divisions of a single third-order division, and similarly two or more of the third-order divisions of a single second-order division, and two or more of the second-order divisions of a single first-order division. For example, in a medium size town such as Nadiad in central Gujarat in the 19th century the Vanias were divided into at least three second-order divisions, Khadayata, Modh and Porwad; the Khadayatas of this town formed a third-order division (ekda) as opposed to other Khadayata ekdas in other towns; and this ekda was further divided into two fourth-order divisions (tads).

The Hindu population of any large town was thus divided into a large number of small endogamous units. James Campbell, who compiled the Bombay Gazetteers in the latter half of the 19th century, states about Gujarat: ‘In no part of India are the subdivisions so minute, one of them the Rayakval Vania, numbering only 47 persons in 1891. When Mr. H. Borradaile in A.D. 1827 collected information regarding the customs of the Hindus, no less than 207 castes which did not intermarry were found in the city of Surat alone’ (1901: xii). This was at a time when Surat’s population was declining. The number of castes was probably higher during the earlier period.

There was a clear contrast between the pattern of caste groups in the village and in the town. Usually the village had a small population, divided into a small number of first-order divisions. The population of each such division was also small, some divisions having just one or two households each. Even the largest divisions could not be as large as to constitute separate endogamous units. Usually the population of a caste was homogeneous, belonging to only one of the various second-order divisions. In other words, the population of two or more subdivisions of a caste was rarely found living together in a single village, while such coexistence was a common feature of the town. Social interaction between persons belonging to two or more lower-order divisions in a higher-order one commonly found in the town was rarely found in the village. The former makes the whole notion of inter-caste relations more complex.
A great deal has been written about the principle of hierarchy governing the relations between castes. Some scholars hold the view that this is an all-encompassing principle, governing not only inter-caste but also intra-caste relations. I have, however, shown elsewhere (1982, Chapter 8 in this book; Shah and Desai 1988) at some length how this view has limited applicability. While there were certainly a number of castes, i.e., first-order horizontal units, with strong intra-caste hierarchy, there were also a number of others within which the relations between subdivisions were marked more by juxtaposition than by hierarchy and a sense of being different and separate rather than being higher and lower. This was particularly true in urban centres since co-residence of lower-order divisions within a higher-order one was a prominent feature of the urban community. As regards inter-caste hierarchy in the village, there is by now a lengthy bibliography of works, indicating a great deal of sophistication achieved in observation and analysis of this hierarchy. As regards inter-caste hierarchy in the town, however, there is not even an exploratory work available. Nevertheless, a few broad observations may be made here about differences between the two.

Inter-caste relations in the village operated in a small face-to-face community and overlapped with relations of a number of different kinds; in brief, they were multiplex. A town, on the other hand, was a large community with a large number of castes and their subdivisions. It would be impossible to work out a rank order of all the castes in the town — even of the first-order divisions, let alone the smaller-order ones — the kind of which is worked out by sociologists and anthropologists for village communities. This does not mean that the principle of hierarchy did not operate among castes in the town, but only that the operation of the principle there needs to be studied systematically. The members of one caste would interact there with members of only some of the other castes and that too with different degrees of intensity. There were many different spheres of interaction, with partial or minimal overlap between them.

**Hereditarily Urban Population**

The above discussion of caste in rural and urban areas indicates that Indian society always included a section of population that was hereditarily urban — groups which lived from generation to generation in urban centres. These groups were the carriers of an urban culture,
with a distinctive style of life, customs, institutions, and possibly also modes of thought and perceptions. Urban society included many people who were born and brought up in urban centres, spent all their life there, and were involved in such occupations that they had hardly anything to do with rural people — who were, one might even say, alienated from the rural people. The modern alienation of a large section of the urban population from the rural masses has deep roots in the past. Moreover, the traditional urban population covered a wide economic spectrum: the rich, the poor, the not so rich, and the not so poor. To think, as is frequently done, that the urban poor of today are entirely a creation of modern industrialization and urbanization would be incorrect.

The hereditarily urban population used to migrate from one town to another whenever necessary. In this context, it would be worth knowing if during pre-industrial times there was urbanization in the demographers' sense of the term, i.e., whether there were periods of rural-to-urban migration. We know for certain that individual towns and cities grew and declined, some even completely disintegrated (like Vijayanagara in Karnataka and Champaner in Gujarat), but I wonder if historians can tell whether there was net addition to urban population in the country as a whole at different periods of time by migration from rural areas. Asish Bose (1965) shows, on the basis of a detailed study of census data from 1881 onwards, how the rate of urbanization was more or less constant up until 1911. This suggests that individual towns and cities grew and declined mainly due to inter-urban rather than rural–urban migration up until 1911. Frequently population from foreign lands came to settle in urban centres in India, as when Muslim traders from West Asia and then European traders settled in towns all along the West coast, including Gujarat. Similarly, the urban population from one region of India migrated to another region of India. For example, Gujarati traders, artisans and craftsmen migrated to towns in other parts of India. Many Gujarati silk-weavers migrated to towns in Tamil Nadu, most probably via Maharashtra and Karnataka (see Ramaswamy 1985). The Kayasthas of north India went to several parts of India, including Hyderabad (see Leonard 1978). There was also a great deal of inter-urban migration within Gujarat. The ancient port of Broach declined and Cambay grew, then Cambay declined and Surat grew, then Surat declined and Mumbai grew. Similarly in the inland area, the capital
city of Patan declined and Ahmedabad grew, and when Champaner disintegrated its population migrated to several nearby towns such as Baroda and Godhra.

The point is that inter-urban migration meant migration of the hereditarily urban population. Their migration remained the pronounced feature of urban centres not only throughout the 19th century but also during the first few decades of the 20th century. Thus, the growth of Gujarati population in the neighbouring metropolis of Mumbai during this period was mainly due to migration of traditionally urban population from a number of towns in Gujarat.

Historians frequently refer to hordes of peasants flocking to cities during periods of rural distress such as famines. But this can hardly be considered as genuine urbanization. The same peasants would return to their villages as soon as the period of distress was over. Whenever genuine urbanization took place, i.e., rural people migrated for long-term settlement in urban centres, it must have been a slow process. Since most occupations were hereditary — even menial occupations were hereditary — it was not easy for most villagers to change over to urban occupations. Migration was easiest in the case of castes whose population was distributed in both rural and urban areas. For example, if there was a greater demand for barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths, scavengers or such other artisans and servants in a town, the rural members of their respective caste could move easily to the town. Also, if there was greater demand for more skilled artisans or craftsmen of a certain category, it was easier for the less skilled village artisans or craftsmen of the same caste to take advantage of the opportunity.

Inter-Caste Relations in Towns

How were the large number of caste groups in the town interrelated? What was the nature of interaction among the people of different castes? In what way was it different from the nature of interaction in the village? It is impossible to answer these questions in the present state of research on the subject. We can only think of some parameters of discussion.

The nature of relations among the Hindu castes cannot be understood fully without taking into account the non-Hindu groups in the town. There was hardly any town in Gujarat without Jains and Muslims; many towns in south Gujarat included Parsis; a few large towns
included Jews; and every town began to have Christians particularly after the establishment of British rule in the early 19th century. A large number of occupations in the town were not only caste-free but also religion-free. Although the hereditary element in occupational specialization was important, there were very few economic activities which could be considered as the exclusive preserve of a particular caste. Apart from the fact that more than one Hindu caste would be involved in a single economic activity, non-Hindu groups would also be involved in it. Trade and commerce were open to a wide variety of religious and caste groups. The increasing opportunities for trade and commerce had brought members of a number of traditionally non-trading castes such as Brahmans, Kanbis and Khatris into this field. It was quite common for some members of an artisan or craftsman caste, such as goldsmith, brazier, blacksmith or weaver to develop into traders in goods and services connected with their traditional art or craft, and might even become moneylenders and financiers. A number of arts and crafts were practised by Hindu as well as non-Hindu groups. For example, there were both Hindu and Muslim weavers, oil-pressers, tailors, musicians, washermen, barbers, and so on. There was even a caste of Jain weavers: the general impression that Jains in Gujarat were only Varnas is not correct.

The *jajmani* type of relationships between members of different castes found typically in the village — about which anthropologists have written so much — were also found in the town but only between a small number of castes in certain narrowly defined fields. It was observed most commonly in the field of ritual services performed by the Brahman priest and the barber and to some extent in the supply of goods and services by the potter, the washerman, the florist and the scavenger. There were also patron-client ties between members of different castes and religious groups. Otherwise the economic relations in the town were far more contractual, commercial and monetized, than those in the village. Every small town had a market place (bazaar), and every large town, such as Ahmedabad or Surat, a number of general as well as specialized market places. Even more important was the fact that there also existed markets as impersonal institutions permitting competition.

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The number of castes was much larger in a town than in a village. They did not interact with one another in the same intensive way as in a village. In the case of some castes, the contact between their members and those of other castes was casual or confined to a simple economic transaction. Often, the castes concerned lived in streets far removed from each other, so that they could not have intensive interaction.

We have little information on production relations in the urban centres. Most of the arts and crafts were of course practised in the family. However, there were the so-called kārkhaṇās (workshops), about whose internal organization we have little information. Moreover, we do not know how the various specialized workers in the field of cotton and other textiles coordinated their activities before the product reached the consumer.

It is well known that mahājans (guilds) prevailed in all towns, but there is hardly any research done on them. By and large scholars have dismissed them as nothing but castes in another form. However, the situation was more complex and closer examination is necessary. First of all, we should distinguish between guilds in small towns and in large cities. While each small town had one multi-occupational guild, a large city like Ahmedabad or Surat had a number of guilds for different occupations as well as a general one for the city as a whole. We have to examine these guilds in the context of certain general features of urban society mentioned earlier: (i) participation of members of several different religions and castes in a single occupation, (ii) occupational diversification within a caste, and (iii) existence of subdivisions within a caste division of the first order. For example, in a town in central Gujarat I know well, the guild included all trading castes — Vania as well as Lohana, Hindu as well as Jain, and all the subdivisions within them. In addition, it included several skilled craftsmen castes such as Soni (goldsmith), Kansara (brazier), one subdivision of Suthar (carpenter), and Bhavsar (weaver and dyer). The guild performed important functions and owned corporate property, and was presided over by the Nagar-Sheth who was a Jain Vania. Significantly, in the 1940s it admitted one member from the Kachhia (vegetable seller) caste because he had established himself as a leading trader in a variety of goods. He was the only one from his caste to achieve this position. The guild thus was not just another form of caste.
The Structure of Indian Society

Kinship and Affinal Relations in Rural-cum-Urban Castes

Every caste was a multi-faceted group, binding its members by various kinds of links. In the case of primarily urban castes, it linked members living in different towns, and in the case of rural-cum-urban castes it linked members living in both villages and towns. The most important intra-caste link was that of kinship and marriage. In almost every rural-cum-urban caste there used to be hypergamy between the urban and the rural section, the rural section trying to get daughters married into towns and the urban section rarely reciprocating. Such hypergamy meant various relationships flowing from marriage between rural and urban people: mother’s brother and sister’s son/daughter; father’s sister and her brother’s son/daughter; cross-cousins; son-in-law and parents-in-law; wife-givers and wife-takers; and so on. The network of relationships would become wider and stronger if a number of village girls related with one another were married in several different towns. That there was, in addition, hierarchy between small towns and large cities may also be mentioned.

Although dispersal of male members of the family (i.e., father and son, and brothers) between village and town was not common in the past as it is today, it was not altogether absent. For example, a rich landlord living in a town might own a lot of land in a number of neighbouring villages — this, called absentee landlordism today, was in fact quite common in the past — and consequent upon partition of his estate one of his sons might settle down in the village in which he inherited land, with a view to cultivate that land himself or to get it cultivated under his direct supervision. I found a number of such cases in the late 18th and early 19th century in central Gujarat. On the other hand, a village priest’s, artisan’s, craftsman’s or servant’s son might venture to go to a town to pursue his occupation there. Anyway, genealogical records show many cases in which the members of a single partrilineage were dispersed in towns and villages. This in turn meant that the members of a lineage group would maintain social relations with one another at least for a few generations after dispersal.

For an account of dispersal of members of lineages and clans between towns and villages in Uttar Pradesh, see Fox (1970).
The rural–urban networks in India

The rural–urban kinship and affinal relationships meant coming and going of relatives between village and town; exchange of money, of other forms of wealth, and of goods and services between relatives by way of, for example, inheritance of property, giving of dowry and bride price and gifts; and most important, exchange of information and ideas. In addition to such individual relationships among members of a rural-cum-urban caste, there were also meetings of the members of the caste as a collectivity and of its panchayat and such other representative bodies. Frequently, such meetings were held in ‘neutral’ places like pilgrim centres. All in all, the rural-cum-urban castes provided an important strand, a live wire, so to say, in the network of rural–urban relations.

Rural–Urban Relations in Religion and Economy

The links between villages and towns were not confined to caste, kinship and marriage only. There were other links as well. Towns were centres of great traditions of Hindu religion and culture. A number of religious and cultural specialists lived there and provided their specialized services to villages. This is the burden of the many writings of Robert Redfield, Milton Singer, M.N. Srinivas, McKim Marriott, and others on great and little traditions, universalization and parochialization, sanskritization, and so on. While most village Brahmans performed all ‘ordinary’ rituals, learned Brahmans had to be called from the town to perform any special ritual in a ‘truly’ scriptural manner in the village. For example, a rich peasant might like to raise his status by getting the wedding rituals performed by a learned Brahman from the town. Performance of a grand sacrifice (mahāyajya) in propitiation of Visnu, Siva or Devi, or installation of a deity’s image in a new temple would require a team of learned urban Brahmans. The village Brahmans had to send their sons to learn not only Sanskrit but even the local language in pathshalas or with individual gurus in towns. Frequently, a trip to a pilgrim centre meant a trip to a town, since many pilgrim centres were also towns. Many urban temples had lands donated to them in villages, management of which entailed regular village-town contacts. Narrators of tales from sacred literature (kirtanākār, kathākār, purāṇi), bards (Bhats and Charans), genealogists and mythographers (Vahivanchas), eunuchs (Hijadas), drama troupes, and a number of other religious and cultural
specialists living in towns visited villages from time to time. Some of them had hereditary or some other form of long term relationship with villagers.

As regards rural–urban economic relations, historians have written extensively about the extraction of agricultural surplus from villagers by way of taxation by the ruling elite living in urban centres. Moreover, the urban population had to subsist on food grains supplied by the rural population, and the urban artisans and craftsmen had to use raw materials supplied by the rural population. These are incontrovertible facts, but they have generated a view that there was one-way traffic of goods and services from the rural to the urban communities. The villages, as it were, did not receive anything in return. This view fits well into the theory of self-sufficiency of the Indian village community propounded by such influential figures as Thomas Munro, Charles Metcalfe, Henry Maine, Karl Marx, and their many modern followers, including Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and Jayprakash Narain. This view, however, needs to be examined carefully.

Writings by historians as well as sociologists during the last thirty years or so have led to the rejection of the idea of every village being self-sufficient. However, as mentioned earlier, the theory still persists in the idea that the rural sector as a whole was more or less self-sufficient. This idea needs critical examination. First of all, it assumes that the rural sector was undifferentiated. As a matter of fact, however, it was highly differentiated. Every village was divided into a number of castes. The specialized occupations of a number of castes required tools and raw materials, and we should ask from where did they get their tools and raw materials? For example, from where did the carpenter, the blacksmith, the oil presser, the musician, and the barber get his tools? From where did the village priest get the various sacred books required in performing his function? From where did the village Vania get his account books? Anyone with an eye for detail who has observed village artisans, craftsmen and servants performing their functions would know that they would have got many of their tools and raw materials from the town. It is remarkable how social scientists and historians have neglected the study of non-agricultural

11 For an account of Vahivancha Barots, see Shah and Shroff (1958).
12 There is by now extensive debate on this issue. For an earlier statement from sociologists, see Srinivas and Shah (1957). For recent statements from historians, see Stokes (1976) and Kumar (1983).
groups in village society in India, and how the whole of it is branded simplistically as agricultural, agrarian, or peasant. ‘Agrarian social structure’ and ‘peasant society’ are much abused though fashionable terms in the study of village society today.

That there was inequality of property and income in agricultural groups is well known, but its full implications need to be worked out. The richer agricultural families must have exhibited their wealth in diet, clothing, housing, pots and pans, vehicles, gold and silver jewellery, and so on, and all of these must have involved goods purchased in the town. Besides the differentiation of caste and class, there was a differentiation of yet another kind. Whether rich or poor, every villager’s life was marked by rites of passage and other special occasions, such as birth, initiation, wedding, death, festival, religious ceremony, and so on. Such special occasions required special foodstuffs, special garments, and many other special things. Many of these things had to be purchased in the town.

Finally, there were the needs of the village community, caste group, and lineage group as collectivities: village, caste and lineage temples, the festivals of village gods and goddesses, the village council house, and the charitable institutions of the village. All of these involved purchase of goods and services available in the town.

The economic implications of various social institutions in the village should thus be kept in view while considering economic relations between village and town. In the case of food, for example, while most of the daily items were available in the village, the villagers had to depend on the town for special food stuffs (for example, spices and dry fruits) required on special occasions. While the poor villagers might make do with whatever was available in the village, the richer villagers would obtain special food stuffs from the town. And so also would the village, caste or lineage as a collectivity.

The demand and supply of textiles should be looked into carefully. Cotton was cultivated only in a few tracts where suitable soil was available. Even in a tract growing cotton, every village did not grow it. This led to considerable intra-regional specialization of cotton textile manufacturing. There was also considerable specialization in the various processes of textile manufacture. Weavers were not found in many villages. They were concentrated in towns and large villages. We have very little knowledge about the organization of the processes preliminary to weaving, i.e., cotton cleaning, carding, spinning, etc. Did every household cultivate cotton for its needs?
How far is it true to say that every household produced its own cotton cloth? Did every household clean and card cotton and then spin as much yarn as it needed for its normal requirement of cloth? If not, who were professional cleaners, carders and spinners? What was the relation between the spinner and the weaver? Even if it is assumed that the normal requirement of ordinary cloth was met in the village itself, there was always some import of even ordinary cloth from the town. And special cloth for special occasions (such as a good sari or dhoti for bride and groom, and for a god or goddess in temples, respectively) had to be obtained from the town. The richer villagers obtained cloth even for their daily requirements from the town. All superior varieties of cotton textiles and all silk textiles were made by urban craftsmen.

The villagers had to obtain certain specialized services from the town. For example, if a villager wanted to construct a pukka house or well with brick, mortar, etc., he had to bring bricklayers, masons, mortar-makers, and other specialized workers from the town. Construction of such collective buildings as temples, dharmadālās, and council houses also required these specialized workers. Pots and pans made of metal, jewellery made of gold, silver and ivory, even simple bangles made of wood and laquer, saddlery, cutlery, musical instruments, gods’ images, and a myriad of other things were made by urban artisans and craftsmen. Every one of them had something to offer to the villager for his use. The villagers either went to a town, a weekly market or a fair to purchase these things, or the peripatetic trader from the town went to villages to sell them at the villager’s doorstep. Rural society in general was certainly not as self-sufficient as it is assumed to be by many scholars.

It was stated earlier that the town was the centre of the higher level of Hindu religion and culture — of Sanskritic Hinduism, of the great tradition of Hinduism — and this level entailed a number of religious and cultural specialists and the literati who lived in the town and operated from this base. Their role both in the town and in the countryside was important.

Sectarianism was another structural feature associated with the higher level of Hinduism in the town. In our article on ‘Hinduism’, Srinivas and I (1968) tried to work out, rather briefly, the relation between sectarianism and Sanskritic Hinduism (see the sections on ‘Sectarianism’ and ‘Non-Sectarian Hinduism’) and I repeat it even more briefly here. The vast majority of Hindus were non-sectarian.
both in villages and in towns. The sectarian Hindus, belonging exclusively to one sect (sampradaya, marga, panti) or other, had a relatively small number and were concentrated in towns. The Vaishnavites belonging to Vallabha's Pushtimarga, for example, lived almost exclusively in towns in Gujarat. The Iains were also predominantly urban. Not only that, on account of the necessity of every sect to elaborate its exclusiveness with reference to the sacred texts of Hinduism, the sectarian Hindus were also usually highly Sanskritized. Pushtimarga Vaishnavism drew its followers only from the upper sanskritized castes. The small number of Pushtimarga Patidars also belonged to the highly sanskritized urban section of the caste. The non-sectarian Hindus were found in both villages and towns, but those in towns tended to be more Sanskrit than those in villages. Thus both the sectarian and the non-sectarian population in towns was highly Sanskrit, making the town the centre of Sanskrit Hinduism. The rural population was predominantly both non-sectarian and less Sanskrit.

Normally, membership in a sect, unlike that in a caste, was not hereditary but came through initiation. Even though frequently — though, certainly, not always — children remained members of the same sect as their parents', they had to be formally initiated into it, unlike their acquiring membership of their caste by birth. And every sect was composed of members drawn from more than one caste. Sectarianism, which was prominent in towns, therefore, provided strong social links cutting across castes in towns. Similarly, wherever sectarianism had penetrated villages, like the Swaminarayan sect, it provided links between the members of the sect living in villages and in towns.

The sociology and anthropology of India have for long been dominated by the view that caste, village, and joint family were the fundamental structures of traditional Indian society. Since the joint family operated within caste and village, and since the village was dominated by caste, caste is considered to be the all-encompassing fundamental structure. In other words, there is presumed to be a totalitarian regime of caste. When we consider the urban situation we realize the serious limitations of this view.

Frequently, it is said that Hindu society did not provide scope for individualism. A close study of the urban situation — the special characteristics of caste in towns and the several structures cutting across caste — would, I believe, show that it provided sufficient scope for exercise of individual initiative and freedom.
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Continuity and Change in Rural–Urban Relations

We have so far dealt with rural–urban relations in the traditional or pre-modern set-up. So many changes have taken place in this set-up during the modern times that we cannot deal with them here. I shall only try to illustrate how some of the ideas developed above could be used to analyze these changes.

Important changes have taken place in the demography of rural and urban areas since 1911: the ratio of urban to total population has increased; rural–urban migration has increased; the existing urban centres have grown in size; a small number of new planned cities, like Gandhinagar in Gujarat and Chandigarh in Punjab, have come up, and a large number of large villages have become small towns. The earlier rural–urban network has played an important role in these changes.

No understanding of changes in, and the present condition of, urban life in India is possible without studying social life in the old sector of the present urban settlements. While people have moved in and out of this sector in every town, there is still a large population which was born and brought up in it, retaining a great deal of the older lifestyle. It would be a mistake to consider this population and its social organization and culture as rural.

When a new planned town comes up or a large village becomes a small town, it involves migration of the population of existing urban centres to these towns. When an existing urban centre grows in size, it involves, besides natural increase in population, migration of population from other urban centres. A large part of inter-urban migration is ‘step migration’ of people from a small town to a large town, and finally, from the latter to a metropolis. There is always some distress migration of rural population to cities (due to, for example, drought in villages) and also some adventurous migration, but usually such migration results in what is called floating population (people living on pavements and in slums and in uni-member households). Normally very few rural people migrate straightaway to large cities, and if they do they follow the existing rural–urban links.

As Asish Bose (1965) has shown, the rate of urbanization, which implies the rate of rural–urban migration, was practically nil up until 1911, and then it was slow till 1951. These figures, however, disguise the fact of inter-urban migration that was going on throughout the period of British rule. This migration was a continuation of the propensity of the traditional urban groups to migrate wherever opportunities took them. These groups took advantage of the opportunities
created by British rule in the fields of industry, trade, administration, professions and education. The traditional network of caste, kinship and marriage played an important role in this process. The urban and the rural-cum-urban castes were the first to take advantage of the new opportunities. From the rural areas, the rural component of the rural-cum-urban castes was able to take advantage on account of its links with the urban component. The rural castes with the least urban component were the least and the last in taking advantage. They therefore continue to have the least urban component today. The tribal folk have even less of such component.

D’Souza (1987: 151) reports:

The information about the over-representation of the higher castes and the under-representation of the lower castes, especially the scheduled castes, in the urban areas has been well documented by the National Sample Survey’s 14th round of inquiry and several urban studies which have looked into this problem.

This is indeed a continuation of the old established pattern, mentioned earlier, wherein the higher castes formed a larger proportion of the population in urban than in rural areas.

Along with this continuity, however, there is an important change. Even though the lower castes are under-represented in the urban areas, the little representation they have now is definitely higher than what it was in the past. Almost entirely rural lower castes like the Koli and the tribal groups like the Bhil in Gujarat have now recognizable representation in towns, and this has far reaching consequences for the future trends of change in these castes and tribes and in the villages in which they live. On the other hand, my impression is that the representation of higher castes such as Brahmans and Vanias in villages has declined, making them even more alienated than they were from rural society and culture.

Since the old established links between towns and villages played an important role in the process of migration from villages to towns, the migrant villager was not a total stranger to the town. He came through the pre-existing links and got absorbed into the world of caste and kinship in the town. A Gujarati migrating to even a large city like Mumbai took no time in getting absorbed in the world of his caste and kinship in the city.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Conlon (1977) first shows how several trends in thought and research over the last more than one hundred years led to the hypothesis that 'the city would be inhospitable to the continued operation of traditional social
While rural–urban migration is important, urbanization should not be looked upon, as noted earlier, as a process only of migration of people from rural to urban areas. Its other dimension is the diffusion of customs, institutions and ideas from urban to rural areas by various means of communication, including social links such as those of caste and kinship. Since urban areas had already had their own traditional modes of thought and action — not to be equated with the Western modes of thought and action — a great deal of traditional modes of thought and action would diffuse to the villages. It is also important to realize that the Western and modern modes of thought and action got transformed, modified and refracted through the traditional urban society before they reached the villages.

The thinking on the effects of urbanization on the Hindu family has been affected by false assumptions about the nature of the Hindu family in villages as well as in towns in the past. It has been assumed for long that urbanization leads to disintegration of the joint family. This assumption is based on another, that there was a stronger emphasis on the joint family in villages than in towns — if not, that the joint family did not at all exist in towns because towns as such did not exist or because the joint family was a product of agrarian society. The gradually increasing evidence shows that the towns rather than villages were the stronghold of the joint family system (see A.M. Shah 1973). This is related to the fact that the higher and more sanskritized castes formed a greater proportion of the population in towns than in villages. Therefore, when the villagers migrated from village to town, they were not going into an environment hostile to the institutions such as caste and family. He then cites evidence from several recent studies, particularly of the Nadars of Tamil Nadu by Robert Hardgrave, and the Jatavs of Agra by Owen Lynch, and of the Saraswats of Konkan by Conlon himself, to show how urban India is ‘at least not incongenial’ to caste. While this conclusion is useful, what is more important is Conlon’s rather incidental statement: ‘To speak of caste associations, reform movements and/or efforts at status mobility as strictly urban phenomena is to miss the linkages which existed between cities and countryside. Caste was itself one such linkage.’

The role of caste in Bombay during the earlier phase of its growth is well documented in Dobbin (1972), Masselos (1974), and Rowe (1973). Masselos mentions, significantly, that several Gujarati caste associations in Bombay sent delegates to the fourth session of the Indian National Congress held at Allahabad in 1888 (1974: 244).
The use of pre-existing links in the process of migration re-affirmed, if not strengthened, caste groups in towns. It is no wonder towns are strongholds of caste in modern India. It is here that caste links are reinforced by the formation of caste associations with their manifold activities. The caste associations provide a new kind of leadership to the caste, not only to its population living in the town but also to that living in villages. They are endowed with huge funds and use them to provide various services to the members of the caste in both towns and villages (for an elaborate discussion of caste associations, see Shah and Desai 1988.)

Since the late 1950s there has been considerable debate on the view that caste is changing from whole to parts, from system to elements, from structure to substance, from cooperation to competition. A fundamental problem with this view is that it is based on a partial conception of the whole — partial because it does not take into account caste in urban centres in the past. Even those who take account of it tend to presume that its nature was the same as in villages (see, for example, the chapter on 'Caste in the City' in Kolenda 1978, and Conlon 1977). A comprehensive understanding of changes in caste is possible only by comparison of caste in past and present in both rural and urban areas (including rural–urban linkages).

As I have argued above and elsewhere (1982, Chapter 8 in this book; Shah and Desai 1988), the principle of division (or separation, difference, repulsion) competed with the principle of hierarchy in caste in urban areas in Gujarat in the past. There are many indications of the growing significance of the principle of division and of gradual decline in the strength of the principle of hierarchy in the modern times. This change is becoming increasingly significant in the society

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14 For detailed accounts of persistence of the joint family in towns and cities, see Desai (1964), Singer (1968), and Vatuk (1972).
as a whole in view of the growth of urban population in absolute numbers and in relation to the total population.

I would suggest that the emphasis on the principle of division in urban caste, the existence of many cross-cutting social groups in urban centres, and the well-known general tendency of urban culture to encourage innovation, provided the ground — however diffuse that ground might be — for a favourable response to the anti-hierarchical and individualistic ideas coming from the West. Significantly, a large number of social thinkers and workers who propagated against the hierarchical features of caste and in favour of individual freedom came from urban centres.15

15 It is noteworthy that Romila Thapar (1984: 109, 153–54) explains the rise of heterodox sects in ancient India with reference to the growth of urban centres.
The ‘Dalit’ Category and Its Differentiation*

‘Dalit’ is now a widely used category in social science as well as in popular discourse. There were in particular a spate of writings and speeches on the Dalits during the past one year (2001) on account of the UN Conference on Race. A field sociologist like me, however, found many of the statements on Dalits at variance from ground realities. One would ask: Is ‘Dalit’ an undifferentiated category? Are the Dalits a unified and integrated community? Are there no divisions among them? Is there no inequality within them? One can understand if politicians use the category in an undifferentiated manner on account of their vested interests. One can also understand if journalists use it in a facile manner on account of their superficial knowledge of the society at the ground level. But it is difficult to understand how social scientists also use it in an undifferentiated manner and make grandiloquent statements about the Dalits.

The ethnographic literature since the middle of the 19th century provides descriptions of divisions among what were then called Untouchables, Depressed Classes, and Harijans. After their being called Scheduled Castes (hereafter SCs) during the past 50 years or so, the Constitution provides lists of such castes for various states. These lists should make one pause before making general statements. Even a comparatively small state like Gujarat has a schedule of around 30 castes. There is sub-regional distribution of these castes, such that any one local area includes only about half a dozen of them, and anyone village includes hardly two or three, sometimes even one, of them.

Every Dalit caste, called jnāti, nāti, nāt, jāti, or jāt in Gujarati, is an endogamous unit. Manubhai Makwana, a sociologist occupant of the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Chair at Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, has recently published in Gujarati a book (2000) and a paper (2001) on SCs in Gujarat, in which he has described what are called parganā divisions in three major Dalit castes. The Vankars (weavers) are divided into 31 parganas, and the Chamars (leatherworkers) and Bhangis

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(scavengers) into 13 each. Lancy Lobo has also described such parganas in an unpublished report (1991) on his research project on the Vankars of central Gujarat. Each pargana is an endogamous group of members of the respective jati living in a specific number of villages and towns in an area. In many cases the pargana has a written constitution. Makwana has reproduced a few constitutions in his book (2001). The constitution lays down rules and regulations for the members of the pargana, particularly on marriage, bride price, wedding expenses, divorce, mortuary rituals, punishment for violation of rules, among others. Each pargana also has a panch (council of leaders).

Use of the word pargana for these caste sub-divisions is significant. It meant an administrative unit consisting of 50–100 villages during the Mughal, Maratha, and early British rule. (Pargana began to be called taluka later.) This indicates that the parganas have existed among the three Dalit castes for a long time, and that they have a territorial jurisdictional connotation.

The process of division of a jati does not stop at parganas. Makwana reports that a considerable number of parganas are each further divided into sub-parganas. This entire structure of division, sub-division and sub-sub-division of jatis among the Dalits is similar to the ekda, gol and bandho divisions and their sub-divisions among upper caste jatis I have analyzed at length first in my paper (1982, Chapter 8 in this book) and then in my and Desai’s book (1988). Most castes in Gujarat, whether Dalit or non-Dalit, follow the same principle of internal division. Only the words for divisions are different. A sub-division and, where sub-sub-divisions exist, a sub-sub-division is the most effective unit for endogamy.

Neither Makwana nor Lobo informs us if there are movements to encourage inter-pargana marriages in the various Dalit jatis similar to movements to encourage inter-ekda, inter-gol and inter-bandho marriages in upper castes in modern times. And, of course, one would like to know if marriages take place between the various Dalit jatis, violating the stringent rule of jati endogamy, and how such violations are dealt with by the concerned jatis. Lobo, however, says there is a hierarchy between the three major parganas among the Vankars of central Gujarat, namely, Charotar, Bhal and Choryasi, in a descending order, and that hypergamy prevails between them. For example, while Bhal girls are given in marriage to Charotar boys, Charotar girls are not given in marriage to Bhal boys. Hypergamy is perhaps as widespread among the Dalits as among higher castes in Gujarat.
The above discussion of marriage has a theoretical significance. Frequently, caste, whether Dalit or non-Dalit, is described as based on descent — and therefore it is considered abominable. But there is no descent without marriage, except in the case of fictional descent, which is rare. One does not require knowledge of complicated discussions of the alliance versus descent theories in anthropology to understand this point. Once the primacy of marriage over descent is recognized, the rule of endogamy becomes critical in defining caste, which in turn confers critical significance to defining differentiation among the Dalits, or for that matter among all Hindus, on the basis of endogamous divisions and sub-divisions. Endogamy is a strong mechanism for boundary maintenance.

We have very little information on the nature of interaction between the various Dalit castes. It is possible that there is greater interaction between the leaders of various Dalit castes, but the same is not always discernible between ordinary Dalits. During my fieldwork in a village in central Gujarat, I found that there was much less interaction between the two Dalit castes, Chamar and Senwa, than between each of them and their upper caste patrons. The Senwas kept hardly any cattle and therefore did not need the Chamars’ service of skinning dead cattle. And the Chamars required very few ropes and strings the Senwas made. On the other hand, both the Chamars and Senwas worked as agricultural labourers for and provided their respective specialized services to upper caste landlords. Moreover, the two castes lived in separate neighbourhoods at two ends of the village site, with two separate wells for drawing water for domestic consumption.

Besides the question of frequency and intensity of interaction between Dalit castes, there is the important question of hierarchy among them. Many observers have commented that there is untouchability among the Untouchables. In the same vein, we may say there are dalits among the Dalits. It was for a long time almost taboo to talk about this subject in public. But it is wide open now, and political leaders are busy providing for reservation quotas within the quota for Dalits.

I have described at some length elsewhere (1987, Chapter 9 in this book) the hierarchy among the Dalits in Gujarat on the basis of available data. Briefly, the Dalits have reproduced among themselves a hierarchy on the model of the caste hierarchy in general. There is at the top a small caste of Garodas (derived from the Sanskrit word guru), who are priests for other Dalit castes. They have been claiming for quite some time to be Gaud Brahmans and have adopted Brahmanical
surnames such as Vyas, Joshi, Pandya and Shukla. Similarly, just as there are castes of bards for the upper castes, there is a bardic caste of Turi Barot for the Dalits. There is also a caste of Dalit mendicants called Dhed Bava or Sadhu. The Garodas, Turi Barots, and Dhed Sadhus are accorded certain sacredness.

The Bhangis (scavengers) are at the bottom of the hierarchy and the most under-privileged. Between the Garodas and Bhangis there is a large caste, the higher stratum of which is traditionally Vankar (weavers) and the lower stratum Dhed (menial servants). In modern times, many Vankars have become workers in textile mills and other industries, and employees in government and other establishments. Makwana has written a monograph on small-scale industrial and commercial entrepreneurs among Vankars (1990). The Dheds, on the other hand, are mostly leather-workers and scavengers. There is no research on how such diverse strata coexist as part of a single endogamous caste unit. Is there hypergamy between them?

The Chamars (leatherworkers) and Senwas (rope-makers) occupy positions immediately between the Vankar-cum-Dheds and Bhangis. The Bhangis are the most oppressed. I witnessed a dramatic expression of their resentment against the Vankars a few years ago. At the inaugural function of a seminar on removal of untouchability I was attending at a university in Gujarat, a Vankar leader was seated on the dais while a Bhangi leader was seated among the audience on the floor. As soon as the function started, the Bhangi leader got up and made an angry speech against the seating of the Vankar leader on the dais. In the process he spoke about how the Vankars discriminated against the Bhangis.

It can be seen from the above discussion that among the Dalits of Gujarat there is differentiation of divisional as well as hierarchical type. It is well known that there is similar differentiation among the Dalits in other parts of India too, and survives the Dalits’ conversion to Christianity and Buddhism. It may be noted that I have hardly touched upon the kind of differentiation that has come about within every Dalit jati and between the jatis due to the policies and programmes of positive discrimination during the past 50 years or so. There are several success stories of Garodas and Vankars, and of Mahyavamshis of south Gujarat about whom Y.A. Parmar has written a lot. With so much differentiation among the Dalits, considerable caution should be exercised at least by social scientists, if not by intellectuals in general, while making general statements about
discrimination against and oppression of the Dalits. It is important to recognize that usually discrimination against the Dalits by upper castes is not indiscriminate but *jati* specific. Atrocities against them are also selective, not indiscriminate. There are various degrees of discrimination and oppression by upper castes against the Dalit castes, and there is discrimination and oppression among castes within the Dalit category. Vague general statements not only violate against reality and provide a false picture, but also harm the welfare of the most deprived and marginalized among the Dalits, such as the Bhangis.
Can the Caste Census be Reliable?

Throughout the colonial period the Census of India used to identify castes and enumerate their members. This practice was given up after independence, except in the case of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Census of India is now (i.e., 1998) considering a proposal to identify castes and enumerate their members at the Census of 2001.

There are constitutional as well as ideological arguments regarding whether the modern Indian state should ask the caste question to its citizens, the kind of arguments which were not made during the colonial regime. I leave these arguments aside and ask whether the census organization would be able to collect reliable information on caste.

Not only the nature of the state but also the nature of scholarship on caste has changed after independence. Sociologists, social anthropologists, political scientists, historians and others today have much more knowledge about caste than did their predecessors before 1947. Although we have respect for the work of census commissioners like J.H. Hutton during the colonial period, their work is superseded in many ways by the work of modern scholars. This fact should be kept in view while discussing caste in the Census of India.

We have to consider: to whom in a village or a town would the census enumerator ask the caste question? Would it be the individual or the household? Do we assume that all members of a household belong to the same caste? I will return to this problem in the end. Let us assume in the meanwhile that all members of a household belong to the same caste and that the caste question would be asked to the head of the household, whichever way that term is defined. Incidentally, the Census of India has not faced squarely the complexities of the term ‘head of the household’.

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*This essay is a revised version of my presentation at the symposium on “Caste and the Census” held at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, on 17 July 1998. Published in Economic & Political Weekly, 1998, 33(39): 2498–99.*
The next problem is: in which language would the caste question be asked? Surely, not in English, except to those whose mother tongue is English. Their number is very small. In Indian languages the English word ‘caste’ has more than one equivalent. In Gujarati, for example, there are five words for caste: jat, jati, jnati, nat, varna, kaum. Each of them has its complications. Each has more than one meaning. Let us choose the word jati which is more common. It means sex (i.e., male/female), religion, sect within a religion, caste, tribe, race, and lineage (kula, khandan). ‘Jati’ may also get confused with ‘jat’ which has different nuances. In the context of caste, we should realise that there are several orders of division, i.e., caste, sub-caste, sub-sub-caste, etc, as I have discussed at length elsewhere (1982, Chapter 8 in this book; Shah and Desai 1988). The word ‘jati’ is used for divisions of all the orders and only a close inquiry would reveal the order to which the respondent refers in a particular context.

We do not know how the Census of India proposes to frame the caste question. Let us assume it is framed as follows: ‘What is the jati of your household?’ The respondent is likely to give a name keeping in mind any one of the meanings of jati mentioned above. Surely, therefore, there would be confusion in collating responses.

Let us presume that the head of the household gives only his or her caste name. But caste names are not as simple as they appear. They are part of the dynamics of caste. It is well known that frequently members of a caste claim to belong to a caste higher than their own, and therefore different members of a caste use different names for themselves. The less ambitious give their traditional name, while the more ambitious give a new high-status name. Caste names are used contextually. One name may be used in the context of marriage, another in the context of religious rituals, and a third in the context of demanding a privilege from the state. There is rarely a straight answer to the question: ‘What is your caste?’

Usually members of a caste are spread over a wide area, sometimes covering more than one state. So many migrations have taken place, particularly during the last 50 years or so, that almost every caste is much more dispersed now than before. So much so that members of a single endogamous unit may use different names in different places. The task of aggregating caste data is much more difficult now than it was at the censuses during the colonial time.

The definition of caste as an endogamous unit is also questionable. Anthropologists and sociologists have known widespread practice of
inter-caste hypergamy, i.e., a lower caste gets its girls married into a higher caste but the latter does not give its girls in return. A caste which appears to be strictly endogamous at the top of its internal hierarchy may be loose at its bottom. Anthropologists have also known tribe–caste hypergamy in many parts of India. Where hypergamous marriages take place, many members of the bride-giver caste or tribe use for themselves the bride-taker caste’s name as a mark of higher status. Hypergamy has been a long established negation of caste/tribe endogamy. I wonder how the census enumerators would arrive at caste boundaries in such a situation.

Caste endogamy is also being negated increasingly by inter-caste, inter-religious, inter-regional and international marriages. Such marriages began to take place during the colonial period and have increased rapidly after independence. In this context, can we assume, as we did earlier, that all members of a household belong to the same caste? In an inter-caste marriage the husband and wife belong to different castes, except where one spouse has accepted the other’s caste. But to which caste do their children belong? Over a period of time a child of one inter-caste marriage may marry a child of another such marriage. Since such marriages have been taking place for the last several generations a whole new social class has emerged all over India which I have elsewhere called ‘cosmopolitan’ (1998). It is a caste-less class, which is now sizeable and growing. What will be its fate in the census?

The problem of collecting information on caste membership is so complicated that, it seems to me, the census organization will not be able to collect reliable information. How do we expect the census enumerators in villages and towns — usually, ill-paid primary school teachers and lower government servants — to grasp all the complications and collect reliable information in a short time at their disposal? I doubt if the census superintendents in various states also have the necessary expertise.

Many members of the intelligentsia and even some academics seem to think that caste is like sex and age about which the census organization can collect information easily. But caste does not really have the kind of certainty and rigidity frequently attributed to it. This is, in fact, the burden of much of sociological and anthropological research that has developed during the last 50 years or so.
In this situation, if the Census of India decides to count castes and their members, it will not be collecting facts as such but will be intervening in social processes at various levels. Some of the consequences of such intervention may be foreseen, but many more could be unforeseen.
Horizontal versus Vertical Dimension of Caste

Hindu society is usually described as divided into a number of castes the boundaries of which are maintained by the rule of caste endogamy. There is enormous literature on these caste divisions from about the middle of the 19th century: census reports, gazetteers, castes-and-tribes volumes, ethnographic notes and monographs, and scholarly treatises such as those by Baines, Blunt, Ghurye, Hocart, Hutton, Ibbetson, O’Malley, Risley, Senart, and others. The census operations in particular, spread as they were over large areas, gave a great impetus to writings on what Srinivas has called the horizontal dimension of caste (1952: 31f.; 1966: 9, 44, 92, 98–100, 114–17). What may be called the census approach influenced a great deal of scholarly work. Census officials-turned-scholars, from Risley to Hutton, wrote many of the earlier general works on caste.

With the exclusion of caste (except Scheduled Caste) from the census since 1951 (practically since 1941, because the census of that year did not result in much reporting), writings on castes as horizontal units greatly declined. On the other hand, there was an almost simultaneous spurt in village studies. Typically, a village consists of the sections of various castes, ranging from those with just one household to those with over a hundred. Village studies, as far as caste is a part of them, have been, therefore, concerned with the interrelations between sections of various castes in the local context. Srinivas has called the unity of the village manifested in these

interrelations the vertical unity of the village (1952: 31f), as contrasted with the horizontal unity of the caste. Indeed, a major achievement of Indian sociology during the last 30 years or so has been deeper understanding of caste in the village context in particular and of its hierarchical dimension in general.

No sooner had the village studies begun than their limitations and the need for studying caste in its horizontal dimension were realized. There are thus a few excellent studies of castes as horizontal units. In spite of them, however, sociologists and social anthropologists have not filled the void left by the disappearance of caste from the census and the gazetteer. The advance made in recent years is limited and much more needs to be done. Data need to be collected over large areas by methods other than those used in village studies, castes need to be compared in the regional setting, and a new general approach, analytical framework, and conceptual apparatus needs to be developed. The main aim of this essay is to discuss, on the basis of data derived mainly from Gujarat, these and other problems connected with the horizontal dimension of caste. The purpose is not to condemn village studies, as is often done nowadays, but to see the horizontal dimension of caste in a better perspective after deriving insights from village studies.

Division and hierarchy have always been stressed as the two basic principles of the caste system. In recent years, however, there has been a tendency to emphasize hierarchy as the primary principle, encompassing the principle of division. This tendency reaches its culmination in the work of Louis Dumont. He stresses repeatedly the primacy of the principle of hierarchy over the principle of separation or division (1972: 30, 66, 68f, 81, 98, 151, 162, 166, 173). He goes further to delineate Indian civilization and even Indian personality in terms of hierarchy — epitomized in the title of his book, *Homo Hierarchicus*. I should hasten to add, however, that the open minded scholar that he is, he does not rule out completely the possibility of separation existing as an independent principle. He writes, ‘It is not claimed that separation, or even “repulsion”, may not be present somewhere as an independent factor’ (1972: 346, n 55b). He does not give importance to this possibility probably because, as he goes on to state, ‘what is sought here is a universal formula, a rule without exceptions’ (ibid.). I hope to show in this paper how the principle of division is also

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1 ‘Repulsion’ was the third of the three basic principles of caste enunciated by Bouglé (1927).
a primary principle, competing with the principle of hierarchy and having important implications for Indian society and culture.

That the sociological study of urban areas has not received as much attention as that of rural areas is well known, and the studies made so far have paid little attention to caste in urban areas. I hope to show that the integration of the study of caste in urban areas with that of rural is essential to a comprehensive understanding of caste and its implications for Indian society and culture. One of the reasons behind underplaying of the principle of division, by Dumont as well as by others, seems to be the neglect of the study of caste in urban areas (see Dumont’s remarks in 1972: 150).

I do not propose to review the literature on caste here; my aim is to point out the direction towards which a few facts from Gujarat lead us. Nor do I claim to know the whole of Gujarat. I have done fieldwork in two contiguous parts of Gujarat: central Gujarat (Kheda district and parts of Ahmedabad and Baroda districts) and eastern Gujarat (Panchmahals district). Together they provide a slice of Gujarati society from the sea coast to the bordering highlands. Roughly, while in the plains area villages are nucleated settlements, populated by numerous castes, in the highland area villages are dispersed settlements, populated by tribes and by castes of tribal origin. The urban centres in both the areas, it is hardly necessary to mention, are nucleated settlements populated by numerous caste and religious groups. The two areas merge gradually, and my fieldwork covered most of the spectrum. As regards the rest of Gujarat, I have used various sources: my work on the caste of genealogists and mythographers and on the early 19th century village records; the available ethnographic, historical and other literature; and observations made while living in Gujarat. Although my knowledge is fragmentary, I thought it was worthwhile to put together the bits and pieces for the region as a whole. For the sake of brevity and simplicity of presentation, I have not provided detailed documentation.

Ideally, castes as horizontal units should be discussed with the help of population figures. Unfortunately, such figures are not available for the last 50 years or so. The census reports provide

2 Social science research on Gujarat is unevenly distributed. Very little research has been done on north Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kacch, compared to that on central, south and eastern Gujarat.

3 Today the politician rather than the social scientist is the expert in the arithmetic of caste. Since caste has remained a powerful force, there is
such figures until 1931, but it is well known that these pose many problems for sociological analysis, most of which arise out of the nature of castes as horizontal units. Nevertheless, a breakdown of the population of Gujarat into major religious, caste and tribal groups according to the census of 1931 is presented in Table 8.1 to give a rough idea of the size of at least some castes. As for the size of other castes, I shall make mainly relative statements.

Table 8.1: Population of Gujarat by Religion, Caste and Tribe in 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher Caste</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahman</td>
<td>289,796</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vania</td>
<td>208,739</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajput</td>
<td>345,727</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>80,721</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle Caste</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bharwad</td>
<td>143,477</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhat, Barot</td>
<td>23,549</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhoi</td>
<td>26,992</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharva</td>
<td>13,792</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koli</td>
<td>1,729,039</td>
<td>24.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machhi</td>
<td>39,382</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanbi, Patidar</td>
<td>868,030</td>
<td>12.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>8,669</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisan castes</td>
<td>437,762</td>
<td>6.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>309,670</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Caste</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressed and Untouchables</td>
<td>511,866</td>
<td>7.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other backward castes</td>
<td>161,381</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>1,260,374</td>
<td>17.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>609,304</td>
<td>8.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>52,940</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsi</td>
<td>15,086</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3,283</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7,139,179</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Reproduced from Ghanshyam Shah (1975: 9). He compiled this table taking figures from reports on the census of several politico-administrative units into which Gujarat was divided in 1931.

no sound academic reason why the social scientist should not study the demography of caste. The instrument of the national census may now be denied to him, but surely he can use others.
I shall first provide an analysis of caste in the past, roughly during the middle of the 19th century, and then deal with changes in the modern times.

The Orders of Caste Divisions

The Hindu population of Gujarat was divided first of all into what I have called ‘caste divisions of the first order’ (see Chart 8.1 for a schematic illustration of various orders of caste divisions). A few examples are: Brahman (priest), Vania (trader), Rajput (warrior and ruler), Kanbi (peasant), Koli (peasant), Kathi (peasant), Soni (goldsmith), Suthar (carpenter), Valand (barber), Chamar (leatherworker), Dhed (weaver) and Bhangi (scavenger). There were about 300 divisions of this order in the region as a whole. Usually these divisions were distinguished from one another by prohibition of what people called *roti vyavahar* (‘bread’, i.e., food transactions) as well as *bêti vyavahar* (‘daughter’, i.e., marital transactions). The account of the divisions is based on various sources, but mainly on Kavi (1958) and Bombay Gazetteer 1901).

A first-order division could be further divided into two or more second order divisions. Usually, the latter were distinguished from one another by prohibition of marital, but freedom of food, transactions. For example, the Brahmans were divided into such divisions as Audich, Bhargav, Disawal, Khadayata, Khedawal, Mewada, Modh, Nagar, Shrigaud, Shrimali, Valam, Vayada, and Zarola. In all there were about 80 such divisions. It is noteworthy that many of their names were based on names of places (region, town, or villages): for example, Shrimali and Mewada on Shrimal and Mewar regions in Rajasthan, Modh on Modhera town in north Gujarat, and Khedawal on Kheda town in central Gujarat. Similarly, the Vanias were divided into such divisions as Disawal, Kapol, Khadayata, Lad, Modh, Nagar, Nima, Porwad, Shrimali, Vayada, and Zarola. In all there were 30 to 40 such divisions. Many of these names were also based on place names. Although the name of a Brahman or Vania division might be based on a place name, the division was not territorial in nature.

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4 Ghurye considered ‘segmental division of society’ as the first of the six features of caste (1932: 2) and devoted a whole chapter in his book to a description of the nature of caste divisions. Later, Dumont (1957: 1; 1972: 79, 100–103) and Beteille (1964) considered caste groups as forming a segmentary system, resembling in some ways the segmentary lineage systems in Africa. I have preferred to use the less specialized term ‘division’.
Chart 8.1: Orders of Caste Divisions in Gujarat

About 300 divisions, a few of which are:

- **RAJPUT**
  - No subdivisions.
  - Hierarchy merging into Koli, Bhil, etc.

- **KOLI**
  - Hierarchy with weak bandhas

- **ANAVID**
  - "Local" "Immigrant"

- **KANBI**
  - Lava, Hierarchy with weak golis
  - Kadva, etc.

- **BRAHMAN**
  - About 80 divisions:
  - Nagar, Modh, Shrimali, Khadayata, etc.

- **VANIA**
  - About 30 divisions:
  - Nagar, Modh, Shrimali, Khadayata, etc.

- **FIRST ORDER**
- **SECOND ORDER**
- **THIRD ORDER**
- **FOURTH ORDER**

Ekda, gol, bandho = small endogamous unit.
Frequently a division among Vanias corresponded to a division among Brahmans. For example, just as there were Modh Vanias, there were Modh Brahmans; and similarly Khadayata Vanias and Khadayata Brahmans, Shrimali Vanias and Shrimali Brahmans, Nagar Vanias and Nagar Brahmans, and so on. Sometimes a division corresponding to a division among Brahmans and Vanias was found in a third first-order division also. For example, just as there was a Shrimali division among Brahmans and among Vanias, there was a Shrimali division among Sonis (goldsmiths).\(^5\) Traditionally, the Brahman division was supposed to be the priests for the corresponding divisions. For example, the Khadayata Brahmans worked as priests at important rituals among Khadayata Vanias. Each Brahman division did not, however, have a corresponding Vania division. For example, there were Khedawal Brahmans but no Khedawal Vanias, and Lad Vanias but not Lad Brahmans. And even when a Brahman name corresponded with a Vania name, the former did not necessarily work as priests of the latter.

The total number of second-order divisions in a first-order division differed from one first-order division to another. One important first-order division, namely, Rajput, does not seem to have had any second-order divisions at all. The Kolis seem to have had only two divisions in every part of Gujarat: for example, Talapada (indigenous) and Pardeshi (foreign) in central Gujarat, and Palia and Baria in eastern Gujarat (significantly, one considered indigenous and the other outsider). Usually a single Koli division had different local names in different parts of Gujarat, but more about this later. The Kanbis (now called Patidars) had five divisions, Leva, Kadva, Anjana, Bhakta, and Matia. The Brahman and Vanias seem to have had the largest number of divisions: as mentioned earlier, about 80 in the former and about 40 in the latter.

Many second-order divisions were further divided into two or three status categories. For example, among almost every Vania division there was a dual division into Visa and Dasa: Visa Nagar and Dasa Nagar, Visa Modh and Dasa Modh, Visa Khadayata and Dasa

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\(^5\) Divisions of the same names were also found among the Jain Vanias, as for example, Mewada, Nima, Porwad, and Shrimali. There was also a further complexity: a Vania division could have both Hindu and Jain members, without restriction on inter-marriage between them, so that frequently husband and wife had different religious affiliations.
Khadayata, Visa Lad and Dasa Lad, and so on. These names, Visa and Dasa, were generally understood to be derived from the words for the numbers 20 (vis) and 10 (das), which suggested a descending order of status, but there is no definite evidence of such hierarchy in action. No one knows when and how they came into existence and what they meant socially. There was also a third category called Pancha, derived from the word pānch (meaning five) and denoting extremely low Vania. Similarly, the Khedawal Brahmans were divided into Baj and Bhitra, the Nagar Brahmans into Grihastha and Bhikshuk, the Anavils into Desai and Bhathela, and the Kanbis into Kanbi and Patidar. Since these were all status categories rather than clear-cut divisions, I have not considered them as constituting third-order divisions.

Most of the second-order divisions were each further divided into third-order divisions. For example, all Vania divisions were each divided into a number of ekdas or gols. The Khadayatas were divided into about 30 ekdas. Literally, ekda meant ‘unit’, and gol ‘circle’, and both signified an endogamous unit. Each ekda or gol was composed of a definite number of families living in certain villages and/or towns. The existence of ekdas or gols, however, does not mean that the divisiveness of caste ended there or that the ekdas and gols were always the definitive units of endogamy. Frequently, the ekdas or gols were each divided into groups called tads (split). The number of tads in an ekda or gol might be two or more, and each of them might be an endogamous unit. For example, there were six tads in the Umreth ekda of Dasa Khadayata Vania, and all of them were separate endogamous units. The tad thus represented the fourth and last order of caste divisions.

It has already been mentioned that every first-order division was not divided into second-order divisions, and that every second-order division was not divided into third-order divisions, and so on. Thus, at one end there were first-order divisions each of which was subdivided up to the fourth order, and at the other end there were first-order divisions which were not further divided at all. How many subdivisions existed in the various divisions of the various orders is a matter of empirical investigation. I am dealing here only with certain typical situations.

If the varna divisions are taken into account, then this would add one more order to the four orders of caste divisions considered above. These divisions have, however, been kept out of the present analysis for reasons which have become well known to students of Hindu
society since the 1950s. Briefly, while the varna model was significant in the total dynamics of the caste system, to fit the numerous first-order divisions into the four-fold varna model in any part of India is impossible, and, therefore, to consider varnas as caste divisions as such is meaningless.

A recent tendency in sociological literature is to consider jatis as castes. This does not, however, help describe caste divisions adequately. When divisions are found within a jati, the word sub-jati or sub-caste is used. This does not solve the problem if there are four orders of divisions of the kind found in Gujarat. If the first-order divisions are called jatis and castes, the second-order divisions would be called sub-jatis and sub-castes. For describing the divisions of the remaining two orders, it would be necessary to go on adding the prefix ‘sub’, but this would make the description extremely clumsy, if not meaningless. The same problems would arise in the reverse direction if, as many scholars have done, the term ‘caste cluster’, ‘caste complex’, or ‘caste category’ is used for divisions of a higher order and the term ‘caste’ or jati is used for divisions of a lower order.

To have a meaningful understanding of the system of caste divisions there is no alternative but to understand the significance of each order of division and particularly the nature of their boundaries and maintenance mechanisms. The boundaries of caste divisions were fairly clear in the village community. Here, usually, what mattered was the first-order division, as for example, Brahman, Vania, Rajput, Kanbi, Koli, Carpenter, Barber, Leatherworker, and so on. In the village, strict prohibition of interdivision marriage as well as the rules of purity and pollution and other mechanisms, of which the students of Indian village communities are well aware since the 1950s, maintained the boundaries of these divisions.

While the word jati (rather its variant, jat) occurs in Gujarati and is used in the context of caste, jnati (or one of its variants, nyati, nyat, nat) is the most commonly used word in this context. It is used for caste divisions of all the orders described above, and context decides to which order of division the speaker refers. I do not know if there is any relation between the pattern of caste divisions in Gujarat on the one hand and common use of jnati rather than jati on the other. The two words are etymologically different (see Apte’s and Monnier-Williams’s Sanskrit-English dictionaries). In Bengal, at the other end of the sub-continent, the word jnati is used in the sense of ‘kinsmen’ (see Inden and Nicholas 1977: 8–15).
In many villages in Gujarat — particularly in larger villages — one or two first-order divisions would be represented by more than one second-order division. For example, a good number of villages in central Gujarat used to have both Talapada and Pardeshi Kolis, and Brahmans belonging to two or three of their many second-order divisions. Co-residence of people belonging to two or more divisions of a lower order within a higher order was, however, a prominent feature of towns and cities rather than of villages. We shall return later to a consideration of this problem.

To whichever of the four orders a caste division belonged, its horizontal spread rarely, if ever, coincided with that of another. Also, the horizontal spread of a caste rarely coincided with the territorial boundaries of a political authority. This was because political authorities were hierarchized from little kingdom to empire and the boundaries of political authorities kept changing. In any case, the population of any large caste was found in many kingdoms. Moreover, the king himself belonged to some caste (not just to the Kshatriya varna), and frequently a number of kings belonged to the same caste (e.g., Rajput). The members of a king’s caste were thus found not only in his own kingdom but in other kingdoms as well. A great deal of discussion of the role of the king in the caste system, based mainly on Indological literature, does not take these facts into account and therefore tends to be unrealistic.

Inclusion of a lower-order division in a higher-order one and distinction between various divisions in a certain order was not as unambiguous as our chart may indicate. For example, there was considerable ambiguity about the status of Anavils. Many of them claimed that they were Brahmans, but this claim was not accepted by most established Brahmans. The main reason was that the Anavils did not practice priesthood as a traditional occupation, nor were they involved in traditional Sanskrit learning. They were involved in agriculture in one way or another. Their origin myth enshrined in their caste purana also showed them to be originally non-Brahman. Moreover, some leading Anavils did not wish to be bothered about Brahman status, saying that they were just Anavil. I have therefore considered them a first order division and not a second-order one among Brahmans. (For a fuller discussion of the status of Anavils, see Joshi 1966; Van der Veen 1972; A.M. Shah 1979.) There was another kind of ambiguity about the Brahman status of two other divisions, the Kayatia and Tapodhan. Both were recognized as Brahman but as degraded ones. The Kayatias’ main occupation was
to perform a ritual on the eleventh day after death, during which they took away offerings made to ghosts: this was the main cause of their extremely low status among Brahmans. Tapodhans were priests in Shiva temples. They took away offerings made to Shiva, which was considered extremely degrading. Kayatias and Tapodhans were considered such low Brahmans that even some non-Brahman castes did not accept food and water from them. They were thus not of the same status as most other second-order divisions among Brahmans. There were similar problems about the status of a number of other divisions. We shall return to this issue later.

The Rajputs as a Division of First Order

That Rajputs were one of the divisions, if not the only division of the first-order, not having further divisions, has already been mentioned. It was also an extreme example of a division having a highly differentiated internal hierarchy and practicing hypergamy as an accepted norm. Since Rajput as a caste name occurred all over northern, central and western India (literally, it means ruler’s son, ruling son), the discussion of Rajputs in Gujarat will inevitably draw us into their relationship with Rajputs in other regions. I do not, however, have sufficient knowledge of the latter and shall, therefore, confine myself mainly to Rajputs in Gujarat.

According to the Rajputs I know in central Gujarat, the highest stratum among them consisted of the royal families of large and powerful kingdoms in Gujarat and neighbouring Rajasthan, such as those of Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, Kacch, Porbandar, Bikaner, Idar, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Udaipur, and so on. Apparently this upper boundary of the division was sharp and clear, especially when we remember that many of these royal families practised polygyny and female infanticide until the middle of the 19th century (see Plunkett 1973; Vishwanath 1969, 1976). However, it is well known that there were subtle arguments regarding the status of certain royal families being Rajput. The marital alliances of the royal families forming part of the Maratha confederacy, and of the royal families of Mysore in south India and of Kashmir and Nepal in the north with the royal families of Gujarat and Rajasthan7 show, among other things, how there was

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7 Plunkett (1973) mentions that more than half of the royal marriages in Rajasthan during the British period were arranged with spouses (mainly brides) outside of Rajasthan. One should examine how many of these
room for flexibility and how the rule of caste endogamy could be violated in an acceptable manner at the highest level.

The Rajput hierarchy had many levels below the level of the royal families of the large and powerful kingdoms: ruling lineages of the smaller and less powerful kingdoms; lineages of owners of large and small ‘fiefs’ variously called jāgir, girās, thakarāt, thikāṇā, taluka, and wāntā, lineages of substantial landowners under various land tenures having special rights and privileges; and lineages of small landowners. In 1931 the Rajputs of all strata in Gujarat had together a population of about three and a half lakhs, forming nearly 5 per cent of the total population of Gujarat. Most of them were, true to their name, rulers at various levels of the political hierarchy, from the kingly level to the level of dominant caste in many villages. But there were also others who did not wield any power. Hence, as we go down the hierarchy, we encounter more and more the debates regarding the claims of particular lineages to being Rajput, so much so that we lose sight of any boundary and the Rajput division merges imperceptibly into some other division. In most parts of Gujarat it merged into the various second-order divisions of the Koli division and possibly also into the widespread tribe of Bhils.

Let me illustrate briefly. The Rajputs in Radhvanaj, the village I have studied in central Gujarat, had no great difficulty in establishing their claim to being Rajputs: they owned substantial amounts of land under a traditional Rajput tenure, dominated village politics, and possessed certain other traditional Rajput symbols. They married their daughters into higher Rajput lineages in the local area, who in turn married their daughters into still-higher, nearly-royal Rajput lineages in Saurashtra and Kacch. Radhvanaj Rajputs were clearly distinguished from, and ranked much above, local Kolis. But many Rajput men of Radhvanaj got wives from people in distant villages who were recognized there as Kolis — those Kolis who had more land and power than the generality of Kolis, had tried to acquire some of the traditional Rajput symbols in dress, manners and customs, and had been claiming to be Rajputs.

marriages were arranged with royal families the ordinary members of whose caste in the local society did not have a clearly acknowledged Rajput status. See also n. 13 and 14 below.

8 For accounts of taluka and wānta villages, see Steed (1955) and A.M. Shah (1964).
We shall return to the Rajput-Koli relationship when we consider the Kolis in detail. In the meanwhile, it is important to note that there does not seem to have been any attempt to form small endogamous units (ekdas, gols) at any level among the Rajputs, unlike attempts made, as we shall see, among some other hypergamous castes in Gujarat.

The Koli Divisions

Kolis were the largest first-order division in Gujarat. In 1931, their total population was more than 17 lakh, nearly one-fourth of the total population of Gujarat. In some parts of Gujarat they formed 30 to 35 per cent of the population. They were found in almost every village in plains Gujarat and in many villages in Saurashtra and Kacch. They co-existed in the highlands with tribes such as the Bhils, so much so that today frequently many high caste Gujaratis confuse them with Bhils, as did the earlier ethnographers. Unfortunately, although the Kolis are an important element in Gujarat’s population, their earlier ethnography is confusing, and there is hardly any modern, systematic, anthropological, sociological or historical study, so that the confusion continues to persist.¹

To obtain a clear understanding of the second-order divisions within the Koli division, it is necessary first of all to find a way through the maze of their divisional names. In central Gujarat, for example, one and the same division, freely arranging marriages within it, was known by several names such as Baraiya, Dharala, Khant, Kotwal, Pagi, Patelia, Talapada, Thakarada, and Thakor. The name Talapada, meaning ‘indigenous’, commonly used in the 19th century, is most clear, since it is clearly distinguished from the other division called Pardeshi, meaning ‘foreign’, who during the last one or two centuries immigrated here from the area around Patan in north Gujarat and were, therefore, also called Patanwadias. Similarly, in Saurashtra the

¹ Silverberg’s two papers (1959, 1977) are concerned with Kolis almost entirely in the context of one village in Ahmedabad district and have little to say about the horizontal dimension of the caste. The same is the problem with Steed’s paper (1955) on the same village. Portions on Kolis in Pocock’s writings (1957, 1972, 1973) also do not add much to our understanding of this dimension. Koli population extends from south Gujarat far into Maharashtra, but there is no modern study of Kolis in Maharashtra also, except Ghurye’s monograph on the Mahadev Kolis (1963).
Talapadas were distinguished from the Chumvalias, immigrants from the Chumval tract in north Gujarat. The Chumwalias and Patanwadias migrated possibly from the same tract and continued to belong to the same horizontal unit after migration. The indigenous Kolis in the highland area of Pal in eastern Gujarat were called Palia, but there was another smaller population of Kolis, who were locally called Baria but were actually Talapada immigrants from central Gujarat (see my paper, 1955).

The migration of the Kolis of north Gujarat into central Gujarat and those of the latter into eastern Gujarat was a process of slow drift from one village to another over a period of time. In other words, it did not involve a big jump from one place to another distant place. Thus, the result was the spread of the population of a caste division towards its fringes. For example, the Patanwadia population was spread continuously from the Patan area to central Gujarat, and the Talapada population from central Gujarat to Pal.

Today, there are two kinds of Koli areas. In an area of the first kind there are no immigrant Kolis from elsewhere, and therefore, there is no question of their having second-order divisions. The Kolis in such an area may not even be concerned about a second-order divisional name and may be known simply as Kolis. In the second kind of area, indigenous Kolis live side-by-side with immigrant Kolis from an adjoining area. I have not yet come across an area where Kolis from three or more different areas live together, excepting modern, large towns and cities.

**Hypergamy between Kolis/Bhils and Rajputs**

From the 15th century onwards we find historical references to political activities of Koli chieftains. They are described by the ruling elite as robbers, dacoits, marauders, predators and the like. By the beginning of British rule in the early 19th century, a considerable number of these chieftains had succeeded in establishing petty chieftdoms, each composed of one, and occasionally more than one, village, in all parts of Gujarat. They adopted Rajput customs and traditions, claimed Rajput status, and gave daughters in marriage to Rajputs in the lower rungs of Rajput hierarchy. They also continued to have marital relations with their own folk. Thus, finding any boundary between Rajputs and Kolis in the horizontal context was impossible, although there were sharp boundaries between the two in the narrow local context.
The Rajputs’ relationship with the Kolis penetrated every second-order division among them, i.e., Talapada, Pardeshi, Chumvalia, Palia, and so on. Thus, while each second-order Koli division maintained its boundaries vis-à-vis other such divisions, each was linked with the Rajputs. The Rajput links entailed the spread of Rajput culture in each Koli division and provided a certain cultural homogeneity to all the divisions.

The chiefly families constituted a tiny proportion of the total population of any second-order division among the Kolis. The bulk of the population was spread all over the villages as small landholders, tenants and labourers. This bulk also was characterized by hierarchy, with the relatively advanced population living in the plains at one end and the backward population living along with the tribal population in the highlands at the other end. Hypergamy tended to be associated with this hierarchy. The hierarchy, however, was very gradual and lacked sharpness.10 Marriages were usually confined to neighbouring villages, so that marriage links were spread in a continuous manner from one end of the region to another. These marriage links do not seem to have allowed among the Kolis, formation of well organized, small endogamous units (ekdas, gols) which were found among some other castes. Usually, the affairs of the caste were discussed in large congregations of some 50 to 100 or even more villages from time to time. Although I have not come across during my limited fieldwork, hypergamous marriages between Rajputs and Bhils, ethnographic reports and other literature frequently refer to such marriages (see, for example, Naik 1956: 18f; Nath 1960: 11–15, 57–75). It seems the highland Bhils (and possibly also other tribes) provided brides to lower Rajputs in Gujarat. The point is that the Rajput hierarchy, with the princely families at the top, merged at the lower level imperceptibly into the vast sea of tribal and semi-tribal people like Bhils and Kolis.11

10 The data on marriage networks of Kolis in three villages in central Gujarat presented recently by Clark (1979: 396–404) confirm the general points made here.

11 I had mainly the Rajput-Koli and Rajput-Bhil continuum in mind when in my review of Dumont (1957) (1966: 340) I commented that his monograph did not go far enough in emphasizing hierarchy. He agreed with my comments (see Dumont 1966: 343, and also later 1975: 144). However, I do not go as far as Dumont in holding hierarchy as always encompassing separation (or division), as the following discussion will show.
The highland Bhils seem to have provided brides to lower Rajputs on the other side of the highlands also, i.e., to those in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (see, for example, Doshi, S.L. 1971: 7f, 33–15; Aurora 1972: 16, 320). Rajput hypergamy seems to have provided an important mechanism for integration of the lower caste and tribal population into the Hindu society over the entire length and breadth of northern, western, central and even eastern India. Hypergamy was accompanied by sanskritization of at least a section of the tribal population, their claim to the Kshatriya varna, and their economic and political symbiosis with the caste population.\textsuperscript{12} The two together formed a single complex of continental dimension.\textsuperscript{13} The complex was provided a certain coherence and integrity — in the pre-industrial time of slow communication — by a number of oral and literate traditions cultivated by cultural specialists such as priests, bards, genealogists and mythographers (see in this connection Shah and Shroff 1958).

That there was room for flexibility and that the rule of caste endogamy could be violated at the highest level among the Rajputs was pointed out earlier. And how flexibility was normal at the lowest level has just been shown. The existence of flexibility at both the levels was made possible by the flexibility of the category ‘Rajput’. The essential idea in the category was power, and anybody who wielded power — either as king or as a dominant group in a rural (even tribal) area — could claim to be Rajput.\textsuperscript{14} Once the claim was accepted at either level, hypergamous marriage was possible.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} The political symbiosis was enabled by the Rajput political institutions. For a brief account of them, see Shah and Shroff (1958), and A M. Shah (1964). For similar accounts of these institutions in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, see Fox (1971) and Stern (1977).

\textsuperscript{13} There is extensive evidence of this complex in ethnographic literature, though there is not much modern sociological work on it. Sinha (1962) provides a brief account of the complex among tribes in central India. Several sociologists who have worked in Bengal have informed me through personal communication that the complex spreads as far as Cooch Behar in Bengal. As for Orissa, see Kulke (1976), for Uttar Pradesh, Minturn and Hitchcock (1966: 16), and for a detailed account of the spread in Kangra in the far north, Parry (1979). A fuller understanding of the complex would require a lot of cooperative work by social scientists and historians of various kinds in various parts of India.

\textsuperscript{14} For an account of the category ‘Rajput’ and its impact on personality formation in a Gujarat village, see Steed (1955).

\textsuperscript{15} In view of the basic nature of Rajput hypergamy delineated here, the general saying that among the Rajputs brides go from East to West should be
Endogamy–Hypergamy Dynamics: Three Cases

The Rajputs, in association with the Kolis, were probably the only horizontal unit which had continuous internal hierarchy, i.e., hypergamy unbroken by any endogamous subdivisions, and which did not have discernible boundaries at the lowest level. In contrast, there were horizontal units, the internal hierarchy and hypergamy of which were restricted to some extent by the formation of small endogamous units and which had discernible boundaries at the lowest level. I describe here three prominent units of the latter type, namely, Anavil, Leva Kanbi, and Khedawal Brahman.

Leva Kanbis, numbering 4,00,000 to 5,00,000 in 1931, were the traditional agricultural caste of central Gujarat. Almost every village in this area included at least some Leva population, and in many villages they formed a large, if not the largest, proportion of the population. The division had an elaborate internal hierarchy, with wealthy and powerful landlords and tax-farmers at the top and small landholders, tenants and labourers at the bottom. The Anavil, numbering 30,000 to 40,000 in 1931, were found mainly in south Gujarat. As mentioned earlier, although they claimed to be Brahman they were closely associated with agriculture. They had an internal hierarchy similar to that of the Leva Kanbis, with tax-farmers and
big landlords at the top and small landowners at the bottom. The Khedawals, numbering 15,000 to 20,000 in 1931, were basically priests but many of them were also landowners, government officials, and traders.

In each of these three divisions the top stratum was clear. Usually it consisted of wealthy and powerful lineages, distinguishing themselves by some appellation, such as Patidar among the Leva Kanbi, Desai among the Anavil, and Baj among the Khedawal. The highest stratum among the Leva Kanbi tried to maintain its position by practicing polygyny and female infanticide, among other customs and institutions, as did the highest stratum among the Rajputs.

Within each of these three divisions, small endogamous units (ekdas, gols, bandhos) were organized from time to time to get relief from the difficulties inherent in hypergamy. But the hypergamous tendency was so powerful that each such endogamous unit could not be perfectly endogamous even at the height of its integration. Each unit was ranked in relation to others, and many members of the lower units married their daughters into the higher units, so that almost every unit became loose in the course of time. There was a continuous process of formation and disintegration of such units. This was unlike the Rajputs not making any attempt to form small endogamous units.

The lowest stratum in all the three divisions had to face the problem of scarcity of brides. The stratum among the Kanbis coped with the problem mainly by practicing remarriage of widows and divorced women. There was also a tendency among bachelors past marriageable age to establish liaisons with lower-caste women, which usually led the couple to flee and settle down in a distant village. The lowest stratum among the Khedawals tried to cope with the problem of scarcity of brides mainly by practicing ignominious ‘exchange marriage’ and by restricting marriage of sons in a family to the younger sons, if not to only the youngest. The incidence of exchange marriages and of bachelors in the lowest stratum among the Anavils also was high.17 The main point is that we do not completely lose sight of the lowest boundary among these three hypergamous divisions as we do among the Rajputs.

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17 See Joshi (1966: 22), Van der Veen (1972: 143), and my review (1979) of Van der Veen’s book.
Rural–Urban Caste Structure

We have analyzed the internal structure of two first-order divisions, Rajput and Anavil, which did not have any second-order divisions, and of several second-order divisions, Talapada and Pardeshi Koli, Khedawal Brahman, and Leva Kanbi, which did not have any third-order divisions. We will now analyze the internal structure of a few first-order divisions each of which was split into divisions going down to the fourth order. A large proportion, if not the whole, of the population of many of such divisions lived in towns. And, as mentioned earlier, the co-residence of people belonging to two or more divisions of the lower orders within a division of a higher order has been a prominent feature of caste in towns and cities. A comment on the sociology of urban India would, therefore, be in order before we go ahead with the discussion of caste divisions.

It will readily be agreed that the sociological study of Indian towns and cities has not made as much progress as has the study of Indian villages. Until recently sociologists and anthropologists described Indian society as though it had no urban component in the past. They wrote about the traditional Indian village, but not about the traditional Indian town. Fortunately they have now started writing about it (see Rao 1974). But this is not enough. We need to formulate some idea of the nature of the Indian urban society and its relation with the rural society in the past, at least at the beginning of the 19th century. While almost all the social structures and institutions which existed in villages — religion, caste, family, and so on — also existed in towns, we should not assume that their character was the same. Even if we assume, for a moment, that the basic nature of a structure or institution was the same, we need to know its urban form or variant.

After the commercial revolution of the 16th and the 17th centuries, Gujarat had a large number of trading towns on its long sea coast.18 Broach, Cambay and Surat were the largest, but there were also a number of smaller ones. These coastal towns were involved in trade among themselves, with other towns on the rest of the Indian sea coast, and with many foreign lands. In addition, they carried on

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18 There is now sizeable literature on the commercial history of Gujarat. Two important recent works are Pearson (1976) and Gopal (1975).
over-land trade with many towns in central and north India. All this trade encouraged development of trading and commercial towns in the rest of Gujarat, even in the highland area.

Another major factor in the growth of urban centres in Gujarat was political. The Hindu and Muslim kingdoms in Gujarat during the medieval period had, of course, their capital towns, at first Patan and then Ahmedabad. The latter continued to be the provincial capital during the Mughal empire. But during the 18th century, when the Mughal empire was disintegrating, a large number of small kingdoms came into existence, and each had a small capital town of its own.

Because of these two major factors, one economic and the other political, Gujarat at the beginning of the 19th century had a large urban population, distributed over a large number of small towns. More of them were located in the plains than in the bordering highlands. In the plains, therefore, every village had one or more towns in its vicinity.

Although caste was found in both village and town, did it possess any special characteristics in the latter? Caste divisions of the first order can be classified broadly into three categories. Firstly, there were divisions whose population was found almost entirely in towns. The three trading castes of Vania, Lohana and Bhatia were mainly urban. Although some of them set up shops in villages, they rarely became full-fledged members of the village community. The Kayasthas and Brahmakshatriyas, the so-called ‘writer’ castes, were employed mainly in the bureaucracy, and the Vahivancha Barots, genealogists and mythographers, were almost exclusively urban castes. Then there were a number of urban divisions of specialized artisans, craftsmen and servants, as for example, Sonis (gold and silver smiths), Kansaras (copper and bronze smiths), Salvis (silk weavers), Bhavsars (weavers, dyers and printers), Malis (florists), Kharadis (skilled carpenters and wood carvers), Kachhias (vegetable sellers), Darjis (tailors), Dabgars (makers of drums, saddles and such other goods involving leather), Ghanchis (oil pressers), Golas (grain and spice pounders and domestic servants), Dhobis (washermen), Chudgars (bangle makers), and Tambolis (sellers of betel nuts, leaves, etc.). These and many other artisans, craftsmen and servants reflected the special life-style of the town.

While certain first-order divisions were found mainly in towns, the population of certain other first-order divisions was dispersed in villages as well as in towns, the population of the rural and the
urban sections differing from one division to another. For example, in a Rajput kingdom, the families of the Rajput king and his nobles resided in the capital town, while the Rajput landlords and cultivators resided in villages. In central Gujarat, at least from about the middle of the 18th century, the population of the wealthy and powerful Patidar section of the Kanbirs also lived in towns — an extremely interesting development of rich villages into towns, which I will not describe here. A large number of priestly, artisan and service castes also lived in both villages and towns: Brahmans, barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, leatherworkers, scavengers, water-carriers, palanquin-bearers, and so on. Frequently, the urban population of such a division performed more specialized functions than did the rural one. It is important to note that the more literate and learned Brahmans lived in towns, more particularly in capital and pilgrim towns, which were, indeed, the centres of higher Hindu culture and civilization. They worked not only as high priests but also as bureaucrats.

The population of certain first-order divisions lived mainly in villages. The most important of them was the Koli division, which was, as mentioned earlier, the largest division and mainly included small landholders, tenants and labourers. Some of the other such divisions were Kathi, Dubla, Rabari, Bharwad, Mer (see Trivedi 1961), Vaghri, Machhi, Senwa, Vanzara, and Kharwa. The tribal groups in the highland area, such as the Bhils and Naikdas, also did not have any urban component.

The castes of the three categories — primarily urban, primarily rural, and rural-cum-urban — formed an intricate network spread over the rural and urban communities in the region. The primarily urban castes linked one town with another; the primarily rural linked one village with another; and the rural-cum-urban linked towns with villages in addition to linking both among themselves. These linkages played an important role in the traditional social structure as well as in the processes of change in modern India. Of particular importance seems to be the fact that a section of the urban population was more or less isolated — some may say, alienated — from the rural masses from generation to generation.¹⁹

¹⁹ For a somewhat extended discussion of rural–urban relations in Gujarat, see my paper ‘Rural–Urban Networks in India’ (Chapter 6 in this book).
Let us now return to a consideration of the first-order divisions with subdivisions going down to the third or the fourth order. As stated earlier, co-residence of people belonging to two or more divisions of a lower order within a division of a higher order has been a prominent feature of caste in towns and cities. For example, among Vanias in a large town like Ahmedabad many of the 30 or 40 second-order divisions (such as Khadayata, Modh, Porwad, Shrimali, and so on) were represented. Not only that, there were also third-order divisions (i.e., ekdas) in one or more second-order divisions, and finally, one or more fourth-order divisions (i.e., tads) in one or more third-order divisions. In effect, the Vania population in a large town like Ahmedabad could have a considerable number of small endogamous units of the third or the fourth order, each with its entire population living and marrying within the town itself. Usually it was a small population. I know of some ekdas and tads composed of only about 150 to 200 households. As could be expected, there were marriages between fairly close kin, resulting in many overlapping relationships in such an endogamous unit. It used to have a panch (council of leaders) and sometimes also a headman (patel). It owned corporate property, usually in the form of vaals (large buildings used for holding feasts and festivals, accommodating wedding guests, and holding meetings), huge utensils for cooking feasts, and money received as fees and fines. Frequently, each such unit had a patron deity, housed in a large shrine, with elaborate arrangements for its ownership and maintenance. The unit might possess some other corporate characteristics also.

The small ekda or tad with its entire population residing in a single town was, of course, not a widespread phenomenon. Nor were ekdas and tads entirely an urban phenomenon. More common was an ekda or tad having its population residing either in a few neighbouring villages, or in a few neighbouring towns, or in both. In the past the dispersal over a wide area of population of an ekda or tad was uncommon, only modern communications have made residential dispersal as well as functional integration possible.

Although the ekda or tad was the most effective unit for endogamy, each unit of the higher order was also significant for endogamy. For example, among the Vanias the most general rule was that a marriage of a boy could be arranged with any girl who was bhan ekapati.
i.e., with whom he was permitted to have commensal relations (roti vyavahar). This meant that he could marry a girl of any subdivision within the Vania division. If this rule was violated, i.e., if he married a girl with whom the Vanias did not have commensal relations, the maximum punishment, namely, excommunication, was imposed. If the marriage took place within the Vania fold but outside the tad or ekda, as the case may be, the punishment varied according to the social distance between the tads or ekdas of the bride and the groom. For example, if they belonged to two different second-order divisions, such as Shrimali and Modh, the punishment would be greater than if they belonged to two different ekdas within the Shrimali or the Modh division. Frequently, marriages were arranged in contravention of a particular rule after obtaining the permission of the council of leaders and paying a penalty in advance. The point is that there was nothing like the endogamous unit but only several units of various orders with defined roles in endogamy.

Since the beginning of the modern 'reform' movement to encourage 'inter-caste' marriages — most of which are in fact inter-tad or inter-ekda marriages — the old process of fission into ekdas and tads has come to a halt, and it is, therefore, difficult to understand this process without making a systematic historical enquiry. However, on the basis of the meagre information I have, I am able to make a few points. First, since the tads were formed relatively recently, it is easier to get information about their formation than about the formation of ekdas. Second, there used to be intense intra-ekda politics, and tads were formed as a result of some continuing conflict among ekda leaders, mainly over the management of corporate property of the ekda and over the trial of violation of ekda rules. Third, although two or more new endogamous units came into existence and marriage between them was forbidden thereafter, a number of pre-existing kinship and affinal relationships continued to be operative between them.

It is not easy to find out if the tads became ekdas in course of time and if the process of formation of ekdas was the same as that of the formation of tads. Some ekdas did come into existence in almost the same way as did the tads, that is to say, by a process of fission of one ekda into two or more ekdas. But there was also another process. For example, there were two ekdas, each with a large section resident in a large town and small sections resident in two or three neighbouring small towns. All the small town sections in each of the ekdas represented that while the large town section accepted brides from small towns...
they did not reciprocate. The small town sections therefore separated themselves from the respective large town sections and formed a new ekda. The two former ekdas continued to exist with diminished strength.

While we can find historical information about the formation of ekdas and tads, there are only myths about the formation of the numerous second-order divisions. Almost all the myths about the latter are enshrined in the puranas (for an analysis of a few of them, see Das 1968 and 1977). If, as mentioned earlier, there were Brahman and Vania divisions of the same name, the myths about both of them were covered by a single text. Besides the myths, the members of a second-order division, belonging to all ekdas, shared certain customs and institutions, including worship of a tutelary deity.

While we do get evidence of fission of caste divisions of a higher order into two or more divisions of a lower order, the mere existence of divisions of a lower order should not be taken as evidence of fission in a division of a higher order. While fission did occur, fusion could also occur. While some of the divisions of a lower order might be the result of fission, some others might be a result of fusion.

**Being Different rather than Unequal**

We had seen earlier that in the first-order division, such as that of the Rajputs, there were no second-order divisions, and no attempt was made to form small endogamous units: hypergamy had free play, as it were. In the second-order divisions of the Leva Kanbis, the Anavils and the Khedawals, while the hypergamous tendency was strong, attempts were continually made to form small endogamous units: although the strength of the hypergamous tendency did not allow these units to function effectively, they nevertheless checked its free play to some extent. In the second-order divisions of the Vanias the small endogamous units functioned more effectively and lasted longer: although the hypergamous tendency did exist, particularly between the rural and the urban sections in a unit, it had restricted play.

The hypergamous tendency was never as sharp, pervasive and regular among the Vania divisions as among the Rajputs, Leva Kanbis, Anavils and Khedawals. Although the people of one tad would talk about their superiority over those of another tad in an ekda, and the people of one ekda over those of another in a higher-order division, particularly in large towns where two or more tads and ekdas would be
found living together, there was no articulate ranking and hypergamy among them. There was not only not any pyramid type of arrangement among the many ekdas in a second-order Vania division — the type of arrangement found in the Rajput, Leva Kanbi, Anavil and Khedawal divisions — but frequently there was no significant sign of hierarchical relation, except boastful talk, between two neighbouring ekdas. There was an emphasis on being different and separate than on being higher and lower.

While some hypergamous and hierarchical tendency, however weak, did exist between tads within an ekda and between ekdas within a second-order division, it was practically non-existent among the 40 or so second-order divisions, such as Modh, Porwad, Shrimali, Khadayata and so on, among the Vanias. The prohibition of inter-division marriage was much more important than the rules of purity and pollution in the maintenance of boundaries between the lower-order divisions. The emphasis on being different and separate rather than on being higher and lower was even more marked in the relationship among the 40 or so second-order divisions. This was dramatized in many towns at the mahajan (guild) feasts when all the members of the guild of traders would eat together.

We have seen how one second-order division among Brahmans, namely Khedawal, was marked by continuous internal hierarchy and strong emphasis on hypergamy on the one hand and by absence of effective small endogamous units on the other. Most of the other 80 or so second-order divisions among Brahmans, however, seem to be subdivided the way the Vania second-order divisions were subdivided into third- and fourth-order divisions. Whatever the internal organization of a second-order division, the relationship between most of the Brahman second-order divisions was marked by greater emphasis on being different and separate than on being higher and lower. This was dramatized at huge feasts called chorāsi (literally, 84) when Brahmans belonging to all the traditional 84 second-order divisions sat together to eat food cooked at the same kitchen. There was also another kind of feast, called bhandāra, where Brahmans belonging to a lesser number of divisions (say, all the few in a small town) were invited. The very low Brahmans such as Kayatias and Tapodhans were invited but made to eat separately from the rest of the Brahmans.
Among the Kanbis, while there was hypergamy within the Leva division and, possibly, similar hypergamy within the Kadva division, there was no hierarchy or hypergamy between the two second-order divisions. The two considered themselves different and separate — of course, within the Kanbi fold — where they happened to live together in the villages in the merger zone between north and central Gujarat and in towns.

I have bits and pieces of information about relations between a considerable number of other lower-order divisions in their respective higher-order divisions. All of this information supports the point emerging from the above analysis, that frequently there was relatively little concern for ritual status between the second-order divisions within a first-order division than between the first-order divisions.

So far we have considered first-order divisions with large and widely spread populations. There were also a number of first-order divisions, mainly of artisans, craftsmen and specialized servants, with small populations. In the case of some of them the small population was so dispersed that a division such as that of barbers, blacksmiths, or carpenters, would be represented by only one or two households in every village and by a significant number of households in towns. In some other cases, mainly of urban artisans, craftsmen and specialized servants, such as Kansaras (copper and bronze smiths), Salvis (silk weavers), Kharadis (skilled carpenters and wood carvers), Chudgars (bangle-makers) and Vahivanchas (genealogists and mythographers), the small populations were so small and confined to so few towns that they had few subdivisions and the boundaries of their horizontal units were fairly easy to define. It is possible that there were a few divisions each confined to just one large city and, therefore, not having the horizontal dimension at all. James Campbell, the compiler of gazetteers for the former Bombay Presidency comprising several linguistic regions, wrote about Gujarat: ‘In no part of India are the subdivisions so minute, one of them, the Rayakval Vanias, numbering only 47 persons in 1891. When Mr. H. Borradaile in A.D. 1827 collected information regarding the customs of Hindus, no less than 207 castes which did not intermarry, were found in the city of

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20 While Levas have received considerable scholarly attention, Kadvas, an equally large and important peasant caste, have received no attention. This is part of the general neglect of north Gujarat by scholars.
Surat alone (1901: xii). Both Borradaile and Campbell were probably mixing up small endogamous units of various kinds. The significant point, however, is that there were small endogamous units which were not, like ekdas and tads, part of any higher-order division.

Systematic study of small caste divisions in villages as well as in towns still awaits the attention of sociologists and anthropologists. Any one small caste may look insignificant in itself but all small castes put together become a large social block and a significant social phenomenon.

**Correlates of Division and Hierarchy**

Our analysis of internal organization of caste divisions has shown considerable variation in the relative role of the principles of division and hierarchy. At one end there were castes in which the principle of hierarchy had free play and the role of the principle of division was limited. The Rajputs, in association with Kolis, Bhils, and such other castes and tribes, provide an extreme example of such castes. At the other end were castes in which the principle of division had free play and the role of the principle of hierarchy was limited. The Vanias provide an example of such castes. The Levas, Anavils and Khedawals provide examples of castes whose internal organization had a strong emphasis on the principle of hierarchy and a weak emphasis on that of division. That the role of the two principles could vary at different levels within a first-order division has also been seen.

There was apparently a close relation between a caste’s internal organization and the size and spatial distribution of its population. The castes pervaded by hierarchy and hypergamy had large populations

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21 A good beginning has been made in Beck (1979) on the boundaries of a subcaste of about 3,000 people living in about 105 villages in the Kongu region in Tamil Nadu. Beck found the subcaste boundaries ‘mappable and firmly defined’, contrary to her hope, arising out of the prevailing theory, ‘to find an unbounded community, fading from one named group to another, and perhaps even stretching across regional boundaries in a disguised form.’ She concludes: some subcastes, at least, are ‘concrete, enumerable entities’ and ‘empirically bounded units.’ She refers to another subcaste of about 600 families living in only four villages in the same region (p. 96). Montegomery (1977) reports on a census of a bounded subcaste of 4,522 persons (829 households) living in about 36 villages and nine towns in Andhra Pradesh.
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spread evenly from village to village and frequently also from village to town over a large area. Castes pervaded by divisive tendencies had small populations confined to small areas separated from each other by considerable gaps.

There was also another important correlation. The institutions of both bride and bridegroom price (the latter also called dowry) were rampant in castes with continuous internal hierarchy — dowry mainly at the upper levels, bride price mainly at the lower levels, and both dowry and bride price among status-seeking middle level families. The small endogamous units, on the other hand, did not practice either. While the Rajputs, Leva Patidars, Anavils and Khedawals have been notorious for high dowries, and the Kolis have been looked down upon for their practice of bride price, the Vanias have been paying neither. The two categories of castes have been deeply conscious of these differences between them and have been talking freely about them.

Our analysis of caste in towns has shown how it differed significantly from that in villages. The village was a small community divided into a relatively small number of castes; the population of each caste was also small, sometimes only one or two households, with little possibility of existence of subdivisions; and there were intensive relationships of various kinds between the castes. In the city, on the other hand, the population was divided into a large number of castes and most of them had each a large population, frequently subdivided up to the third or the fourth order. Sometimes a division could even be a self-contained endogamous unit. The larger castes and even larger subdivisions among them used to have their houses segregated on their own streets (called pol, shéri, khadči, vāl, khānčo). Frequently, social divisions were neatly expressed in street names. To give just one example, one large street in Baroda, of immigrant Kanbis from the Ahmedabad area, named Ahmedabadi Pol, was divided into two small parallel streets, Leva Sheri and Kadva Sheri, named after the two major second-order divisions among the Kanbis.

The social relations between and within a large number of such segregated castes should be seen in the context of the overall

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22 For a detailed account of this feature of neighbourhoods in Gujarat in general and in Ahmedabad in particular, see H. Doshi (1974); Gillion (1968: 25, 26, 107, 108, 124, 127–28, 145, 150, 170); and Karve (1957). Karve’s paper provides a few maps of urban neighbourhoods in Gujarat, including that of Ahmedabadi Pol.
urban environment, characterized as it was by co-existence of local Hindu castes with immigrant Hindu castes and with the non-Hindu groups such as Jains, Muslims, Parsis and Christians, a higher degree of monetization, a higher degree of contractual and market relations (conversely, a lesser degree of jajmani type relations), existence of trade guilds, and so on. The urban community included a large number of caste groups as well as social groups of other kinds which tended to be like communities with a great deal of internal cohesion. There was considerable elaboration in urban areas of what Ghurye long ago called the community aspect of caste (1932: 179) and frequently this led to juxtaposition rather than hierarchy between caste divisions of the same order.23

I am not suggesting that the principle of hierarchy was insignificant in the inter- or intra-caste relations in urban centres. Far from it. 24 I am only suggesting that its role had certain limitations and that the principle of division was also an important and competing principle. Secondly, it is necessary to study intensively the pattern of inter-caste relations in urban centres as something different — at least hypothetically — from the pattern in villages. Asking different questions and using different methods is necessary. Limitations of the holistic view of caste, based as it is mainly on the study of the village, should be realized in the light of urban experience. A new view of the whole, comprising the rural and the urban and the various orders of caste divisions, should be evolved. In particular, the implications of co-existence of lower-order divisions within a higher-order division in the same town or city should be worked out.

In a paper on caste among Gujaratis in East Africa, Pocock (1952) raised pointedly the issue of relative importance of the principles of division (he called it ‘difference’) and hierarchy. He stated: ‘... hereditary specialization together with hierarchical organization sinks into the background in East Africa’ (ibid.: 293). Further:

23 The applicability, to the village society, of the view of caste as a system without competition among its components has been widely questioned. Its applicability to the urban society is even more questionable. For some useful suggestions on the nature of caste in urban areas, see the symposium on social mobility in the caste system edited by Silverberg (1968: passim, but particularly pp. 103–7 of Marriott’s contribution).

24 See n. 12 above.
the castes there are unable to take cognizance of each other in terms of hierarchy or of occupation, and it is in this situation that they can be said to exist by virtue of their difference which is most apparent. Systematic because castes exist and are like each other in being different (ibid.: 298).

Pocock goes on to observe that diminution of emphasis upon hierarchy and increasing emphasis upon difference are features of caste in modern, particularly urban, India: ‘... there is a shift from the caste system to individual castes and this reflects the change that is taking place in India today’ (ibid.: 290).

The main thrust of Pocock’s paper is that greater emphasis on difference rather than on hierarchy is a feature of caste among overseas Indians and in modern urban India. There would be a wide measure of agreement with him on both these counts. What I am trying to point out, however, is that greater emphasis on division (Pocock’s ‘difference’, Dumont’s ‘separation’, Bougle’s ‘repulsion’) rather than on hierarchy was a feature of caste in certain contexts and situations in traditional India, and increasing emphasis on division in urban India in modern times is an accentuation of what existed in the past.

**Social Change and Caste**

I have discussed above caste divisions in Gujarat mainly in the past, roughly in the middle of the 19th century. I will not discuss the present situation in detail but indicate briefly how the above discussion could be useful for understanding a few important changes in modern times.

The primarily urban castes and the urban sections of the rural-cum-urban castes were the first to take advantage of the new opportunities that developed in industry, commerce, administration, professions and education in urban centres. Early industrial labour was also drawn mainly from the urban artisan and servant castes. When the rural population began to be drawn towards the new opportunities, the first to take advantage of them were the rural sections of the rural-cum-urban castes. Many primarily rural castes, such as Kolis, the largest caste, have remained predominantly rural even today. Gujarati migrations to the nearby metropolis of Bombay, the first new centre of administration, industry, commerce, education, and Western culture, followed the same links. The migrants, many of whom came from...
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heterogeneous urban centres of Gujarat, became part of an even more heterogeneous environment in Mumbai. Many of them became the norm-setting elite for Gujaratis in the homeland.

One of the clearly visible changes in caste in Gujarat is the increasing number of inter-divisional or so called inter-caste marriages, particularly in urban areas, in contravention of the rule of caste endogamy. The degree of contravention involved in an inter-divisional marriage, however, depends upon the order (i.e., first order, second order, etc.) to which the divisions of the marrying couple belong. The degree of contravention is less if the couple belong, let us say, to two different fourth-order divisions within a third-order division than if they belong to two different third-order divisions within a second-order division, and so on. The degree of contravention is highest if the couple belong to two different first-order divisions. Most inter-divisional marriages take place between boys and girls belonging to the lowest order in the structure of divisions.

To illustrate, among the Khadayata or Modh Vanias, an increasing number of marriages take place between two or more tads within an ekda. In fact, inter-tad marriages have increased so much that the tads have more or less lost their identity and such marriages are no longer considered as violating the rule of tad endogamy. The ekdas have not yet lost their identities. Although the number of inter-ekda marriages has been increasing, even now the majority of marriages take place within an ekda. Similarly, although the number of marriages between the second-order divisions in the Vania division, i.e., between Khadayata, Modh, Shrimali, Lad, Vayada, etc., has been increasing, the majority of marriages take place within the respective second-order divisions. Finally, while an increasing number of marriages are taking place even across the boundaries of first-order divisions, as for example, between Brahmans and Vanias, and between Vanias and Patidars, such marriages even now form an extremely small proportion of the total number of marriages.

It is easy to understand that the pattern of change would be different in those first-order divisions (such as Rajput) or second-order divisions (such as Leva Kanbi) which did not have within them subdivisions of lower orders and which practiced hypergamy extensively. In these divisions an increasing number of marriages are taking place against the grain of traditional hierarchy, i.e., girls of traditionally higher strata marry boys of traditionally lower strata. One may say that there are now more hypogamous marriages, although another and perhaps a more realistic way of looking at the
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Change would be that a new hierarchy is replacing the traditional one. Dowry not only continues to be a symbol of status in the new hierarchy but is gradually replacing bride price wherever it existed, and dowry amounts are now reaching astronomical heights. As regards the specific case of Rajput-Koli relationship, my impression is that after the suppression of female infanticide in the first half of the 19th century, the later prohibition of polygyny, and the recent removal of princely states and feudal land tenures among the Rajputs on one hand, and the increasing sanskritization as well as Rajputization among the Kolis on the other hand, marriage ties between these divisions have become more extensive than before.

The pattern of inter-divisional marriages shows how the idea of free marriage, which guides most of the ‘inter-caste’ marriages, is restricted, modified, and graded according to the traditional structure of caste divisions. There is a patterned widening of the connubial field along an area chalked out historically. The idea of inter-caste marriage is, moreover, linked with the ideal of creating a casteless society. But the method advocated for creating such a society involves a compromise with, if not subtle negation of, the ideal. The method is to remove first the barriers of the divisions of the lowest order and then gradually those of one higher order after another. As Ghurye pointed out long ago, slow consolidation of the smaller castes into larger ones ‘would lead to three or four large groups being solidly organized for pushing the interests of each even at the cost of the others . . . Further, during this lengthy process of slow amalgamation those who will marry in defiance of the barriers of sub-caste, will still be imbued with caste mentality’ (1932: 184). The subtle manner in which the ideas of free marriage and casteless society are used by both the old and the young in modern India and how a number of new customs and institutions have evolved to cope with these new ideas is a fascinating subject of study.

Another clearly visible change in caste in Gujarat is the emergence of caste associations. Gujarat (along with Mumbai) has perhaps the largest number of caste associations and they are also more active and wealthy compared to those in other regions. This reflects the high degree of divisiveness in castes in Gujarat.

The earliest caste associations were formed in Bombay in the middle of the 19th century among migrants belonging to the primarily urban and upper castes from Gujarat, such as Vanias, Bhatias and Lohanas (see Dobbin 1972: 74–76, 121–30, 227f, 259–61). They then spread to towns in the homeland and among all castes. The primarily
rural and lower castes were the last to form associations and that too mainly after Independence (1947). All associations originated in large towns, are more active in towns than in villages, and are led by prominent members in towns.

Caste associations have been formed on the lines of caste divisions. Among the first-order divisions with subdivisions going down to the fourth order, there are associations for divisions of all the orders. For example, among the Khadayata Vanias there are all-Khadayata associations as well as associations for the various ekdas and sometimes even for their tads (see Shah, Ragini 1978). Moreover, a single division belonging to anyone of the orders may have more than one association, and an association may be uni-purpose or multi-purpose. Castes having continuous internal hierarchy and lacking effective small endogamous units, such as Rajputs, Leva Kanbis, Anavils and Khedawals, do not have active associations for lower-order divisions.

Up until the establishment of democratic polity in 1947, hardly any caste association in Gujarat had manifest political functions. Gujarat did not have anything like the Non-Brahmin Movement of South India and Maharashtra before 1947. Caste associations in Gujarat were formed mainly among upper castes to provide welfare (including recreation), to promote modern education, and to bring about reforms in caste customs. The guiding ideas were *sama¯j sudha¯ro* (social reform) and *sama¯j s¯v¯il* (social service). Most associations continue to retain their non-political character.

The most important example of primarily political caste-associations is the Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha. It reflects on the one hand the political aspirations of Kolis guided by the importance of their numerical strength in electoral politics and on the other hand the Rajputs’ attempt to regain power after the loss of their princely states and estates. It is a coalescence of Kolis and Rajputs on the modern political plane based on the foundation of the traditional social and cultural symbiosis under the rubric of Kshatriya. Although it has been experiencing stresses and strains and has had ups and downs on account of the enormous diversity between the royal and the tribal ends, it has shown remarkable solidarity in recent years.25

An important idea behind the activities of caste associations is: service to one’s caste is service to the nation. It is argued that

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25 The Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha has received considerable attention from political scientists (Shah, G. 1975; Kothari and Maru 1965, 1970; Weiner 1967).
the various welfare programmes of every caste association, such as medical facilities, scholarships and jobs for caste members, contribute, in however small a way, to the solution of the nation’s problems. The associations’ activities in the field of marriage, such as reform of customs, rituals and ceremonies and encouragement of inter-divisional marriages, are also seen by the members as a service to the nation – as the caste’s method of creating a casteless modern society!

The patterns of change in marriage and in caste associations are two of the many indications of the growing significance of the principle of division (or separation or difference) in caste in urban areas in Gujarat. Simultaneously, there is gradual decline in the strength of the principle of hierarchy, particularly of ritual hierarchy expressed in purity and pollution. To take one sensitive area of purity/pollution behaviour, the concern for observance of rules of commensality has greatly declined not only in urban but also in rural areas. Castes which did not sit together at public feasts, let alone at meals in homes, only 15 or 20 years ago, now freely sit together even at meals in homes. Nowadays, in urban areas in particular, very few people think of making separate seating arrangements for members of different castes at weddings and such other feasts. The change from emphasis on hierarchy to emphasis on division is becoming increasingly significant in view of the growth of urban population both in absolute number and in relation to the total population.

It has been pointed out earlier that an emphasis on the principle of division existed in the caste system in urban centres in traditional India. I would suggest that this feature of urban caste, along with the well-known general tendency of urban culture to encourage innovation, provided the ground — however diffuse that ground might have been — for a favourable response to the anti-hierarchical ideas coming from the West. Significantly, a large number of social thinkers and workers who propagated against the hierarchical features of caste came from urban centres. The fact that Mahatma Gandhi came from a small third-order division in the Modh Vania division in a town in Saurashtra does not seem to be an accident.

Some Reflections

The above brief analysis of change in caste in modern Gujarat has, I hope, indicated that an overall view of changes in caste in modern India should include a careful study of changes in rural as well as in
urban areas in relation to their past. Far too many studies of changes in caste in modern India start with a general model of caste in traditional India which is in fact a model of caste in traditional rural India. (Frequently, such models are constructed \textit{a priori} rather than based on historical evidence, but that is another story.) The error is further compounded when — although this is less common — the partial, rural model of traditional caste is compared with the present urban situation, and conclusions are drawn about overall change. What is really required for a comprehensive understanding is comparison of traditional with modern caste in both rural and urban areas (including, to be sure, the rural-urban linkages).

Frequently the shift from emphasis on cooperation and hierarchy in the caste system to emphasis on division (or difference or separation) is described as shift from whole to parts, from system to elements, from structure to substance. A fundamental difficulty with these paradigms of change, as indicated by the above analysis, is that they are based on a partial conception of the systemic or structural whole in the past — partial because it does not cover the urban situation and the complexity of horizontal units. As a consequence, the continuities of social institutions and the potentiality of endogenous elements for bringing about change are overlooked. (For a discussion of some other difficulties with these paradigms, see Lynch 1977.)

Sometimes castes are described as becoming ethnic groups in modern India, particularly in urban India. Such a description not only overlooks the diversity and complexity of caste divisions and the rural–urban linkages in them but also leads to placing them in the same category as Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Jains, Buddhists, and so on. The understanding of changes in caste is not likely to be advanced by clubbing such diverse groups together under the rubric of ethnic group. In any case, castes are not likely to cease to be castes in the consciousness of people in the foreseeable future. No analytical gains are therefore likely to occur by calling them by any other name.
This essay discusses, with particular reference to Gujarat, the changes that have taken place in the phenomenon of untouchability and in the status of the Untouchables in modern India. The discussions of this problem not only in Gujarat but all over the country have been focussed in recent years on the legal, political, economic and educational aspects and are concerned only marginally with the social, cultural and religious aspects. The main aim of the essay is to point out the importance of understanding the latter aspects in a more comprehensive view of the problem. It tries to show, for example, the implications of the fact that untouchability is part of the entire complex of purity/impurity in Hindu society, and of the linked fact that untouchability exists among the Untouchables themselves. It pleads for studying intensively the internal social organization of the Untouchables and the relations between them and the lower ‘touchable’ castes. In so doing, it examines whether the line dividing the Untouchables from the rest of the castes is as rigid as it is generally assumed to be, and how valid is the equation between the term Untouchable on the one hand and the terms Depressed Class, Scheduled Caste (hereafter SC) and Harijan on the other. In the end

* This essay is a revised and enlarged version of a paper, “The Changing Religious Context of Untouchability in Gujarat,” that I presented at the seminar on “Effective Implementation of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and Removal of Untouchability” held at the Department of Sociology, South Gujarat University, Surat on the 4–5 of October, 1981. (It was one in a series of seminars on the same problem held every few years since 1973 in various universities in Gujarat.) The seminar theme dictated to a large extent the format of my paper. I am thankful to the participants at the seminar and B.S. Baviskar, Owen Lynch, M.N. Panini, Ramesh Shroff and M.N. Srinivas for their comments on an earlier draft of the paper. Reprinted with permission from Paul Hockings (ed.), *Dimensions of Social Life: Essays in Honor of David G. Mandelbaum* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987), while its translation appeared in the Gujarati journal *Arthat*, 1986, 5(2): 1–12.
the essay tries to show the significance of the religious and cultural specialists among the Untouchables.

All of what I say about Gujarat is possibly not applicable to all other parts of the country. The untouchability situation in Gujarat differs from that in several other parts in three major respects. First, the Untouchables form a much smaller proportion of the total population in Gujarat than in several other parts. According to the Census of 1971, they form 6.84 per cent of the total population compared to the national percentage of 14.10 (Patel 1983: 7). Secondly, a fairly large part (27.25 per cent) of the Untouchable population in Gujarat lives in urban centers. And even among those who live in villages, not as many as in several other parts of the country are agricultural labourers (Patel 1983: 7,365). Thirdly, the anti-untouchability campaign of Mahatma Gandhi and his numerous followers seems to have had greater impact in Gujarat than elsewhere. Despite these differences, however, the phenomenon of untouchability in Gujarat is in essence the same as in the rest of the country, and therefore I hope this essay will help towards understanding better the phenomenon in general.

Untouchability: Past and Present

Traditionally, in Gujarat as in the rest of India, the upper caste Hindus avoided all contact with members of the Untouchable castes. Occasions for contact between them were very limited. The Untouchables were segregated in streets on the outskirts of the village or town. They entered the streets of the upper castes only for specific purposes, such as scavenging the streets, begging for leftover food, or dragging a dead animal away. When they visited the upper caste streets all care was taken to see that they did not pollute the upper caste people by their contact. Similarly in places of work, such as farms in villages and artisans’ and craftsman’s sheds in towns where many Untouchables worked as manual labourers, their upper caste masters and co-workers avoided contact with them. They were prohibited from entering places of worship.

When modern changes began to take place in the middle of the 19th century, they provided more and more occasions for contact between the two categories of castes — in factories, offices, shops, railways, buses, hospitals, schools and so on. Attempts were made by the upper castes to segregate the Untouchables in these new places
of contact, but these attempts did not succeed for two main reasons. First, many of these new places were controlled by non-Hindus, namely, Europeans, Indian Christians, Muslims and Parsis, who did not usually approve of such segregation. Secondly, the westernized elite (called by various names) began to be formed among the Hindus, first in Mumbai and Surat and later in other towns, who also overtly or covertly opposed segregation. Makrand Mehta has documented (1981: 39–41) how the orthodox Hindus’ behaviour towards Untouchables on railway trains in Gujarat in the initial period was similar to that of the whites towards the blacks in South Africa or the southern U.S.A., how a considerable number of newspapers advocated segregation of the Untouchables on trains, and how this was not accepted by the railway management.

When contact with the Untouchables became unavoidable, upper caste Hindus resorted to the traditional methods of purification. For example, it was common for upper caste persons to take a purificatory bath after coming home from a train or bus journey, presuming that there had always been some Untouchable passenger on the train or bus. This widespread practice is portrayed eloquently in an early satiric novel (Nilkanth 1900): its hero, an orthodox Brahman named Bhadrabhadra, during his travel from Ahmedabad to Bombay took a purificatory bath at every railway station where the train halted for a while. Similarly, upper caste people used to take a bath after coming home from a visit to a hospital since all hospitals used to employ Untouchables as sweepers, nurses, attendants and peons. When Untouchable children began to attend schools, upper caste parents made their children take a purificatory bath on their return home from school.

Untouchability in many of the above-mentioned and other contexts has declined considerably and is gradually disappearing in Gujarat. In urban areas, few people now take a purificatory bath after coming home from a train or bus journey or after a visit to a hospital. A child is now rarely made to take a purificatory bath when he or she returns home after attending school with Untouchable children. Concern for avoiding contact with the Untouchables in offices, shops, factories and so on is minimal. In very few towns the Untouchables now carry night-soil in a tin or basket on their head. Formerly in towns and cities the Bhangi scavenger or his wife or both used to go round the streets on their beat late in the evening to collect leftover food from upper caste homes. Today many Bhangis have discontinued the collection of such food.
Untouchability has declined in rural areas also, although it may not be to the same extent and as striking as in urban areas. I.P. Desai has documented and analyzed many of the items of untouchability behaviour in his recent books (1973, 1978). He concludes that in almost all matters in what he calls the public sphere (i.e., where the government is involved), untouchability is no longer a problem — in such matters as the seating arrangement for Untouchable children in schools, the delivering of letters by a higher caste postman to an Untouchable, and the handing over of postal stamps and stationery by a post office clerk to an Untouchable. There is considerable decline of untouchability even in what he calls the private sphere — in such matters as an upper caste Hindu touching an Untouchable labourer while involved in agricultural work, and an upper caste shopkeeper giving goods to and receiving goods from an Untouchable customer in the shop. The most important general change is that while an upper caste person would avoid touching an Untouchable, if he happens to touch him he does not usually take a purificatory bath as in the past. The punctiliousness with which untouchability was observed in the past has declined considerably.

Purity/Pollution and Untouchability

The above-mentioned changes have come about for several reasons. The most important is a general change in the purity/pollution aspect of Hindu society and culture. Discussions of untouchability frequently overlook the fact that all Hindus, including the Untouchables, share the culture of purity and pollution. The untouchability of the Untouchables forms part of this cultural complex which envelopes temples, domestic worship, religious festivals, birth, marriage, death, water, food, clothing, lavatory, urinal, menstruation, and so forth. Ideas of purity and pollution permeate an ordinary Hindu’s life. In a sense, untouchability prevails in every Hindu home. This point has been well established in Indian anthropology and sociology since the publication of field studies on Hinduism in the 1950s. The life of Untouchables is also permeated by ideas of purity and pollution. A British missionary ethnographer Margaret Stevenson, in her book on the Dheds (1932), provides an excellent description of purity/pollution behaviour in this Untouchable caste in Gujarat.

There has been a marked decline throughout Hindu society during the last hundred years or so in the rigidity with which purity/pollution
notions were practised. A few examples may suffice. Many people now
do not take a purificatory bath after attending a funeral, let alone after
receiving news from a long distance of a relative's death. Even when a
bath is taken it is much less elaborate than in the past. The period
of pollution arising from childbirth is reduced or is not observed at
all in many homes, and many people do not mind touching a woman
who has given birth to a child. There is a great deal of relaxation
with regard to menstrual taboos. And many of those 'petty' items of
purity/pollution behaviour — about cleaning hands and feet after
coming out of the lavatory, about handling cooked foods and their
ingredients in the kitchen, about wearing shoes in the home, and
about a myriad other things and contexts — are becoming less and
less common.

The decline in purity/pollution behaviour is due to the impact
of several modern forces such as westernization, secularization,
liberalism, science and technology, industrialization, education,
and the mere exigencies of modern life. Several sociologists and
anthropologists have described and analyzed these forces (see in
particular Srinivas 1966). This general and fundamental change in
Hindu life is to a large extent responsible for the decline in un-
touchability. I.P. Desai has shown, as mentioned earlier, how
untouchability in Gujarat has weakened in several spheres, particu-
larly in what he calls the public sphere, but has remained strong in
some other spheres. He stated, 'The upshot of the inquiry is that
untouchability is strong in the religious and the domestic spheres'
(1978: 262). Ideas of purity and pollution continue to be strong in the
life of the generality of Hindus precisely in these two spheres.

The net effect of the changes is that in large towns and cities
increasing numbers of upper and middle caste children now grow
up without imbibing many of the behavioural habits associated
with purity and pollution in their own homes, neighbourhoods and
castes, as well as without seeing untouchability in operation in
schools, colleges, buses, trains, restaurants, etc. To such children, if
untouchability seems irrational, the reservations for the Untouchables
qua Untouchables in educational institutions, government offices and
legislative bodies also seem irrational. To consider their opposition to
such reservations as traditional prejudice against the Untouchables
as such would be incorrect. Anti-untouchability measures made
sense when untouchability was strong, but when overt untouchability
has become very weak anti-untouchability measures do not make
sense.
That untouchability continues to be strong in the religious sphere has just been mentioned. This issue has several dimensions. There is, first of all, the well-known problem of the entry of Untouchables into temples. This problem poses itself in one way in village temples where the Untouchables are known face-to-face by other Hindus, and in another way in large towns and pilgrim centers where Untouchables merge into the larger congregation without identification. Even if entry into temples is permitted the hard problems of recruitment to priesthood, of the nature of priestly functions, and of the nature of worship in temples remain. Would the Untouchables be allowed to enter the sanctum sanctorum, to perform the various pujas, and to touch the deity? This raises a number of problems in Hindu theology. Temple worship, particularly in the great temples of Hinduism, is far more complex than most devotees assume it to be. In fact, most devotees have very little knowledge of what goes on in a large temple. Ideas of purity and pollution permeate it in more complex ways than they do the life outside the temple. The temple and its deity (usually a multiplicity of deities) are the locus of highest and massive purity and therefore are protected from all conceivable impurities. Men’s greatest hopes and fears are tied to them.

The rigidity of purity/pollution behaviour has therefore declined little in the context of worship among all Hindus. Let me give just one example. It is well known that many westernized or modernized Hindu women do not observe the old rules of purity/pollution during the menstrual period. None of them, however, would perform the puja of their domestic deity or of a deity in a temple, or fix weddings and other important rituals and ceremonies, during this period. Many ‘modern’ women even time their menstrual period with the help of modern drugs to suit the dates of important ritual occasions.

The slight decline in the rigidity of purity/pollution behaviour in the context of worship among the generality of Hindus (including the Untouchables) explains to a large extent the opposition of the upper castes to allowing the Untouchables into the inner line of religion. Nevertheless there are signs of change. For example, upper caste people now remove their shoes within the temple compound rather than outside it. In the same way, Untouchables are now allowed to enter the temple compound in many places. Also, when the Untouchables change their life style (including occupation) and sanskritize their custom and ritual, they are admitted to sects such as Kabirpanth, Ramanandi and Swaminarayan where they have a great deal of freedom of contact with upper caste Hindus.
Division and Hierarchy among the Untouchables

We have so far considered the Untouchables as if they are internally undifferentiated. As a matter of fact however they are divided into castes in the same way as are other Hindus. And just as ideas of purity and pollution are important in the separation of the Untouchables from the other Hindus, they are also important in the separation of one Untouchable caste from another and in the arrangement of these castes in a hierarchy.

In the state of Gujarat there are about 25 SCs, i.e., Untouchable castes recognized as such by the Indian Constitution. About 18 of them, all represented by small number, are parts of castes belonging to other states but included in the list for Gujarat mainly because they reside on the borders of the state or because they are immigrants there. The remaining seven, which may be regarded as indigenous, are sharply divided and form a ritual hierarchy. These castes are Bhangi (traditionally scavengers), Chamar (leather-workers), Dhed or Vankar (menial workers, weavers), Senva (menial workers, rope makers), Garoda (priests), Turi (bards), and Dhed Bawa or Sadhu (mendicants). 1

While these castes are considered untouchable by the other Hindu castes, they practice untouchability among themselves. This is amply described in the earlier ethnographic accounts, such as gazetteers (in particular, Bombay Gazetteer 1901), castes-and-tribes volumes (Entoven 1920, Desai, G.H. 1912), and Stevenson’s book on the Dheds (1932), as well as in recent sociological writings (Desai, I.P. 1973, 1978, Parmar 1978, 1981, Patel, Tara 1973; Patel, Urmila 1983).

1 The list of SCs for Gujarat is complicated. First, several groups have been listed as separate castes even though they are actually subcastes or only status categories within a single endogamous caste. Secondly, when the present Gujarat State was formed in 1960 to integrate three formerly separate units, namely, the Gujarat part of Bombay State and the States of Saurashtra and Kutch, the lists of SCs for the three units were not consolidated into one list. Consequently, in a few cases, while the section of a caste living in one area is listed as a SC, the section of the same caste living in another area is not so listed. Thirdly, a few numbered entries are each made up of a bunch of disparate castes. To eliminate all of these complications and arrive at an ethnographically correct list of SCs is not possible, because hardly any research has been done on the horizontal dimension of these castes. I have tried to order the available data as best I could on the basis of ideas I have discussed in my paper (1982, Chapter 8 in this book).
The chapter on ‘Untouchability among the Untouchables Themselves’ in I.P. Desai’s book (1978) provides a very good account of the phenomenon in a large sample of villages in different parts of Gujarat. The Bhangis (also called Olganas) are the lowest of the Untouchable castes. Their traditional occupation is scavenging, including removal of night soil from lavatories and of carcasses of ‘low status’ animals such as cats, dogs and donkeys. (The Chamars remove carcasses only of the ‘high status’ animals such as cows, bullocks and buffaloes.) All other Untouchable castes (including the Chamars) treat the Bhangis as untouchable. The former avoid contact with them, do not allow them to draw water from the same well (and in the modern period, from the same tap), do not accept water or food from them, and do not allow them to enter their homes. A somewhat lesser degree of untouchability is practised towards the Senvas also in many villages. It is possible that the concern for purity/pollution (including untouchability) among Untouchable castes has also declined as in the rest of the society, but this should be investigated.

A remarkable feature of social organization among the Untouchables in Gujarat is the existence among them of certain castes of religious and cultural specialists, on the model of such castes in the rest of Hindu society. The Untouchables have their priestly caste, called Garoda Brahman, their caste of bards called Turi Barot, and their caste of mendicants called Dhed Bava or Sadhu. A closer study may reveal a few more such specialized castes among the Untouchables. Significantly, these castes are traditionally literate and occupy high ritual status. The Garoda Brahmans have the highest ritual status, and men conversant with Hindu religious literature were known among them. They have predictably a high incidence of literacy and education today.

2 Barot is a general name for bardic castes (see Shah and Shroff 1958). Bawa and Sadhu are general names for mendicants.

3 The Bombay Gazetteer, compiled in the 1870s, informs us about Garodas: ‘Most of them can read, and a few understand Sanskrit, reciting and explaining hymns and passages from the Purans. They teach their boys privately . . . they draw up and use horoscopes. As among Brahmans, a few men called Skakals act as their priests’ (1901: 345). In 1961 the literacy rate among Garoda males was 59.99 per cent and among Turi males 48.76 per cent, higher than the rate (45.33 per cent) for males in the non-SC/ST population (see Shah, V.P. 1979: 58). B.V. Shah and J.D. Thaker report that in their sample of SC college students, the educational aspirations were the highest among the Garoda students (1978: 82–85).
There is a widespread notion that the line dividing the Untouchable castes from the 'touchable' ones is clear, sharp and inviolable, and the creation of a special place for SCs in the Constitution has strengthened this notion. But the notion needs to be examined closely. We should examine, in the first place, the status of the very low among the so-called touchable castes vis-à-vis the so-called untouchable ones. Many of the castes identified as backward by the Socially and Educationally Backward Class Commission of the Government of Gujarat (1976: 59–106, the so-called Bakshi Commission) and more recently by the Backward Classes Commission of the Government of India (1980: 180–81, the so-called Mandal Commission) are very low touchable castes: Bavcha (wood-cutters), Bavri (nomads, a former 'criminal tribe'), Bhoi (water-carriers, palanquin-bearers, fishers), Chhara (a former ‘criminal tribe’), Chunara (lime-workers), Dabgar (makers of drums, saddles, jars and other such articles of leather), Dhobi (washermen), Gadi Luharia (nomadic blacksmiths), Kangasia (comb-makers), Kharwa (sailors, fishers), Labana (carriers), Lodha (grass-cutters), Machhi (fishers), Madari (snake-charmers), Mochi (shoe-makers), Nat (acrobats), Od (earth-diggers), Padhar (fishers), Ravalia (drummers), Salat (stone-workers), Sarania (knife-grinders), Tankar (thread-makers), Vadi (snake-charmers), Vansfoda (bamboo-workers), Vanzara (carriers), Vaghri (vegetable, fruit and tooth-brushing twig sellers, scrap dealers), Wandhara (knife-grinders). The status of these castes in relation to Untouchable castes, particularly the higher ones among them, needs to be studied carefully.

Let me examine briefly one fairly well-known case, namely, the Mochis (shoe-makers). They were considered higher than the Chamars (leather-workers) in ritual status, mainly because while the latter as part of their hereditary occupation actually handled dead bodies of animals, the former only handled leather supplied by the latter. One may ask, were the Mochis untouchables? There is no unambiguous answer: it depends upon whose view is taken into account. For the orthodox members of high castes, such as Brahmans and Vanias (Banias), the Mochis were untouchable, but not for the middle- level castes such as Kolis. Usually the Mochis lived on the outskirts of a village or town. When a high-caste man wanted to get shoes or sandals made he gave a measurement of his feet on a piece of paper while standing outside the Mochi’s shop. Some high-caste men did not wear leather shoes or sandals but substituted wooden or jute-cloth slippers. Orthodox high caste Hindus took a purificatory bath after touching a Mochi. Nowadays, however, the Mochis are a touchable
caste even for these high-caste Hindus, mainly because the attitude towards leather in the society in general has changed radically. Nowadays many Hindus wear shoes and sandals in every part of their home, including the kitchen, but excluding the *pujā* room. They eat at tables, which often means they are wearing sandals or shoes. To wear sandals in homes is even an elite fashion. In the old days the use of belts, straps, seats, purses, bags and a number of other articles of leather was resisted. Today shoes are forbidden only in temples. Even in this regard I have noticed a change. In the old days, shoes had to be removed outside the entrance to the temple compound, but nowadays shoes are removed inside the temple but outside the sanctum sanctorum.

As the polluting quality of leather declined, the life of the Mochis simultaneously changed. Shoes and sandals are now also made of synthetic materials. Many Mochis do not cobble shoes, they only sell them, wholesale or retail, in shops. This is a big business. The Mochis have also sanskritized their life and ritual, and a good number of them have been admitted as regular members to sects like Ramanandi and Swaminarayan. The Mochis now claim to be Kshatriyas and have adopted Rajput surnames such as Gohil, Parmar, Rathod and Vaghela. Since they have moved upward they look down upon the other Untouchable castes including the Chamars, and the latter greatly resent this. The upward mobility of the Mochis shows how the boundary between the Untouchables and the touchable castes is not as rigid as is generally believed.

Two other very low touchable castes about whom I have some information are Vaghris and Ravalias. The orthodox members of the high castes such as Brahmans and Vanias treat Vaghris and Ravalias in many villages and towns as practically untouchable. Usually Ravalia houses are located very near the houses of the Untouchables and away from the upper-caste streets. Most Vaghris and Ravalias are not easily distinguishable from most of the Untouchables in their poverty, life style, customs and rituals. When at the end of caste and other feasts the upper caste men distribute the leftover food, the Vaghris and Ravalias are lined up with the Senvas and Bhangis as recipients of such food. Food is literally thrown from some height into the latter's pots and baskets. Among themselves, the Vaghris and Ravalias observe little ritual distance from the Untouchables. A Vaghri or Ravalia would hardly ever take a purificatory bath after touching a so-called Untouchable.
There is thus flexibility about the boundary between the so-called touchable and the Untouchable castes. The various upper castes — even different sections of the same upper caste — draw the boundary at different places. The main reason why social science literature has not recognized this flexibility is that hardly any study has been made of the very low touchable castes and of their relation with the untouchable ones.

Since the boundary between the touchable and the untouchable castes is not rigid, since there are many castes among the Untouchables, and since there are indeed untouchables among the Untouchables, the category ‘untouchable caste’ and its equation with the categories Depressed Class, Scheduled Caste, and Harijan should be a matter of social scientific examination, not uncritical acceptance. We should examine when and how certain castes began to be included in the categories Untouchable, Depressed Class, Scheduled Caste, and Harijan. The ancient categories Antyaja and Chandala do not seem to have rigid boundaries laid down between the touchable and the untouchable castes (see for the history of these categories, Ghurye 1952: 44–118). It seems a rigid boundary began to be drawn only by administrators and politicians during the British rule.

**The Untouchables and the State**

The British rulers lumped together the lowest castes in Hindu society for special treatment under the label of Depressed Classes for the first time in the second half of the nineteenth century. Official censuses and gazetteers used the same label. The Bombay Gazetteer’s volume on Gujarat Population: Hindus (compiled in the 1870s, published in 1901) dealt with the ‘fallen…unraised…unclean’ castes under the section entitled ‘Depressed Classes’, one of the thirteen categories into which it classified the Hindu castes. Not once in this section of 17 pages (331–347) do the words ‘untouchable’ or ‘untouchability’ occur. Marc Galanter (1983: 25, n. 21) indicates that the term ‘untouchable’ was first used by the Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad of Baroda in his remarks to the Depressed Classes Mission of Bombay on 18 October 1909, and that the abstract form ‘untouchability’ was first used by S.V. Ketkar, a protégé of the Maharaja’s, in his well-known book on the history of caste (1909). The term became widely used in public life as well as in scholarly writings, in English as well as in Indian languages, in a short time. In this way only those castes which
were first considered ‘Depressed Classes’ began to be considered ‘Untouchable castes.’ The same were later considered Harijans and SCs. The basic point is that while the phenomenon of untouchability, in the sense of a complex of behaviour arising out of attribution of the polluting or defiling quality to certain castes, is ancient, and the Untouchables in this general sense have existed in Hindu society for centuries, the restriction of the term to certain castes specified by the state is recent.

I am not suggesting that the governmental categories Depressed Class and SC are unreal. They have certainly their own social reality — rather, social dynamics — but they are also an obstacle to understanding when used as analytical categories in investigations where they are totally inappropriate. A lot of discussion, even social science research, on SCs does not take cognizance of the fact that the lists of SCs (earlier, of Depressed Castes) were drawn up after a great deal of administrative, political and legislative disputation. (For an excellent recent account of these disputations, see Galanter 1983.)¹ These disputations arose because whether a caste is untouchable or not is also a matter of discussion and dispute.

**Untouchability, Religion and Social Change**

Since the Untouchables are divided into castes of varying status, the decline in untouchability we discussed earlier affects the different Untouchable castes differently. In other words, the different untouchable castes are at different stages on their way to shedding the stigma of untouchability. The two or three higher of the Untouchable castes have gone quite far along this way and have tried to legitimize their mobility by claiming high positions in the varna hierarchy. The Garodas are claiming to be Gaud Brahmans, one of the eighty or more subcastes among the Brahmans, and carry well-known Brahmanical surnames such as Bhatt, Dave, Joshi, Shukla, Trivedi, and so on. A number of Dheds/Vankars claim to be Rajputs and Kshatriyas and carry well-known Rajput surnames such as Chavda, Gohil, Makwana, Parmar, Rathod, and so on. A large subcaste of

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¹ Galanter (1983: 121–31) has shown how the concept of Depressed Class prevailed originally in south and west India and was later applied in north and east India and how the lists of Depressed Classes were drawn up in the latter. It would be important to find out the process by which various castes came to be included in the category Depressed Class in the former.
Dheds/Vankars in South Gujarat, whose story of upward mobility begins with some of them working as butlers with Europeans belonging to the various East India Companies in Surat probably as early as the 17th century, now call themselves Mahyavanshi Rajput. They have an elaborate mythology, caste journals, and written ‘laws’ to regulate the affairs of the caste (Parmar 1978, 1981). There is very little evidence of such mobility among the lowest of the Untouchable castes, namely Bhangis and Senvas. Untouchability towards them continues in the highest degree and will probably be the last to go.

The equation between the Untouchable caste and the SC seems to be an obstacle in the way of integration into Hindu society of at least some of the Untouchables. Ramesh Shroff, who has been studying the Vankars in Ahmedabad, informs me that many Vankars feel that the constitutional category SC has halted the natural process of their integration, which had been going on since well before Independence. Many of them had given up their old polluting occupation of scavenging and became labourers in textile mills, changed their lifestyles, and reformed their customs and institutions. As a result, they were acceptable to other Hindus. To a certain extent this was due to the impact of Mahatma Gandhi and his numerous followers in Ahmedabad. But after Independence the label of SC became an obstacle to shedding their traditional status as an Untouchable caste.

I have already referred to castes of religious and cultural specialists among the Untouchables. There are also specialists who form part of certain sects and cults. Remarkably, some of these specialists are literati, to use Max Weber’s term. We should inquire if they, like all literati, perform the important function of systematizing (or rationalizing, in Weber’s sense) religion and culture among the Untouchables. What role do they play in the various aspects of life of Untouchables, particularly in their temples, festivals, and life cycle rituals? What sort of religious ideas and practices do they propagate and support? Do they perform the role of legitimizing social mobility and change? Do they impart fixity of form to social institutions and organization? Do they also contribute to making the boundary between the touchables and the Untouchables rigid or flexible? Do they rationalize untouchability among Untouchable castes and thus help to perpetuate it?

Until we grasp the religious situation among the Untouchables, we will not be able to grasp fully their relationship with other Hindu castes.
or for that matter with other religious groups. If the Untouchables have their own strong religious sects and cults, these might impede their integration into the larger Hindu society as well as their conversion to other religions. An idea of the internal organization of the religion of Untouchables is essential to understanding the complex problem of conversion of Untouchables to non-Hindu religions. One would like to know, for example, why neo-Buddhism has spread very little among the Untouchables in Gujarat (just as it has remained confined mainly to the Mahars in Maharashtra), and why Christianity has spread mainly in one of their castes, namely Dhed/Vankar.
The Tribes — So-called — of Gujarat: 
In the Perspective of Time*

There is a widespread feeling of surprise among the intelligentsia, including social scientists, about the spread of recent (2002) communal violence in Gujarat to its so-called tribal areas and the subsequent victory of many candidates of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the assembly election in the same areas, both signifying victory of forces of so-called Hindutva among the tribal people. This feeling of surprise may be attributed partly at least to the failure of social scientists to carry out intensive field studies of social change in tribal society in modern times and therefore lack of information about this change among the intelligentsia. It seems to me, however, that the feeling of surprise is also due to the false images of tribal society created by social scientists, and their spread among the intelligentsia for more than a century. In other words, it is a problem not merely of non-availability of facts, but also of perspective of known facts. I wish to discuss the latter in this article.

Division of the people of Gujarat, as in the rest of India, into Hindus consisting of many castes on the one hand and aborigines or tribals on the other is a creation of the British colonial administration, influenced by the evolutionist and diffusionist theories of 18th to the 19th century anthropology in Britain. The British thought the tribes in India were similar to primitive tribes they had known in Africa, Australia, the Pacific islands, and many other parts of the world.

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*This essay is based on a variety of sources: fieldwork for about six months in the Panchmahals during 1952–53, longer fieldwork in central Gujarat later, the study of the caste of genealogists and mythographers, travel all over Gujarat from time to time, reading of historical works, and conversation with fellow social scientists. The main ideas have, however, come from the Panchmahals work, a part of the data from which was used to write two papers (1955a and 1955b). Since a lot of data of various kinds have been condensed in this article, I have not provided citations. I thank B.S. Baviskar, Vidyut Joshi and Lancy Lobo for comments on the draft of the essay. Published in Economic & Political Weekly, 2003, 38(2): 95–97.
The colonial view was also articulated by certain anthropologists in India, the most well known among whom was Verrier Elwin. The British prepared lists of tribes in the territories under their jurisdiction and took special administrative measures to deal with their problems. The nomenclature ‘tribe’ was later built into the constitution of independent India under the denomination of Scheduled Tribe (hereafter ST), and the lists of tribes prepared by the British were more or less accepted by the new government. Some Indian intellectuals had reacted against this division of Indian people during the time of British rule itself. The foremost among them was the doyen of Indian sociology, G. S. Ghurye, who wrote a well-known book with a telling title, *The Aborigines — So Called — and Their Future* (1943). He argued at length with a wealth of evidence to show that the so-called aborigines were backward Hindus and not a separate category of people in India. Most of them lived in hilly and forest areas and their technology and economy were poor, but they were basically Hindu in religion, he thought. The British view, however, prevailed throughout their regime.

The terms *adivasi*, *ādimjāti* and *janjati* now used in Indian languages are not originally Indian. They are translations of English terms introduced by the British, and we may continue to use them since they have now been in use for nearly 200 years. Let us, however, leave aside this legacy of British thought for a while and look at the situation before the beginning of British rule. First of all, it is noteworthy that neither at the elite nor at the popular level, any generic social category was used in the earlier times to refer to the groups we now call tribal. This was in sharp contrast to the generic categories such as *antyaja*, *āchhut*, *asprushya* and *chañḍāla* used for the Untouchable castes (*jatis*) put together, and the elaborate treatment they received in classical literature such as the *Dharmashastras*. The people in the plains referred to the tribal groups in Gujarat individually by their specific names, such as Bhil, Naikda, Kokna, etc.

The general image that the tribal people in the hills were isolated from the plains Hindus in Gujarat was false on several counts. The hills were not very high. Even the higher hills among them, such as Mt. Abu and Pavagadh, were not inaccessible. In fact, there were forts, temples and monasteries on them. The forests were also not very thick. Numerous rivers flowing from the hills to the plains not only provided easy routes for travel across the hills, but also patches of fertile land for peasants from the plains to settle. There were pilgrim
centres along most of the rivers. Armies and caravans of traders from seaports and inland towns could move fairly easily across the hills towards the whole of northern and central India. All in all, there were no insurmountable physical barriers between the people of the hills and the plains.

There was considerable economic exchange between the two areas. The hilly areas supplied mainly (i) forest produce such as timber, firewood, certain kinds of roots, fruits and leaves, and honey, and (ii) minerals such as stone slabs required in constructing temples, palaces, forts, and ghāls along rivers and tanks, grinding stones, and certain precious stones required by craftsmen in towns such as Cambay and Surat. The plains supplied certain essential commodities like salt. The hilly region did not have specialized artisans and craftsmen characteristic of the caste system in the plains. Which of them supplied their goods and services to the people of the hills is a matter of research. Surely, the plains weavers supplied whatever cloth the tribal people used — their daily wear might be scanty but their ceremonial dress must have been elaborate. When ploughs with iron share began to be used in tribal agriculture, the plains blacksmiths must have supplied the shares. (Incidentally, it would be worthwhile to find out how the various forms of agriculture — slash-and-burn cultivation, hoe cultivation, pick-axe cultivation, plough cultivation with hard wooden share and then iron share — evolved in these areas.) Similarly, the plains blacksmiths must have supplied iron tips for arrows so commonly used by the tribal people. The plains potters must have also supplied earthen pots and pans to them — I saw in the 1930s and the 1940s groups of potters from the plains carrying pots on their donkeys’ backs to sell in the tribal areas in the Panchmahals.

When the British began to rule over Gujarat in the beginning of the 19th century a large number of Rajput princely states existed all over the hill region, from Danta in the north to Vansda and Dharampur in the south. I do not know if the tribal chiefs in Dang further southeast claimed to be Rajputs but they did style themselves as rajas. These kingdoms seem to have owed their origin to three historical processes. (i) In the Rajput political system established in Gujarat and Rajasthan around the 10th century AD, on account of the rule of primogeniture governing succession to kingship, some of the junior members of the royal brotherhood received in patrimony feudal estates in the hills which in the course of time became independent. Some other
members might also have ventured to establish independent little kingdoms after subjugating the hill chiefs. (ii) When the Muslim sultans established their rule in Gujarat in the 13th century AD they removed not only the Rajput sovereign, but also a number of Rajput feudal lords in the plains. Some of the latter fled to the hills and established their small kingdoms there, possibly by subjugating the tribal people. (iii) Some of the tribal chiefs transformed themselves into Rajput kings by a long process of emulation of the Rajput ways of life.

Whatever be the origin of the Rajput kingdoms in the hills, they developed symbiotic relationship with the tribal chiefs and their followers. A symbolic expression of this relationship was the tribal chiefs’ participation in the coronation ceremony of the Rajput king. According to folklore, at least in some kingdoms the tribal chiefs applied a tilak of blood taken out of their finger on the king’s forehead at this ceremony — a symbol of solidarity with as well as acceptance of superiority of the king. In the course of time the tribal chiefs emulated the Rajputs and began to claim to be Rajputs. They also got their daughters married into low status Rajput families. The hypergamous system of marriage among the Rajputs encouraged the lower rungs of their hierarchy to accept the tribal chiefs’ daughters — an important dimension of symbiotic relationship between the two. The Rajput kings also established capital towns in the hills, bringing into them from the plains the entire paraphernalia of Hindu social order comprising a number of castes. The chain of historical developments described above thus became a major source of sanskritization of tribal people in Gujarat. This was a process of spread of what the late M.N. Srinivas called Sanskritic Hinduism, first discussed in his classic work, Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India (1952) and later elaborated in an essay in 1956.

A major component of the population in the capital towns set up by the Rajput kings were Vania (Bania) traders from the plains. When and how the Vanias began to set up shops in tribal villages is a matter of research. It seems to have depended on the pace of development of tribal economy, particularly their agriculture (the main stages of which I indicated above). The tribal economy in villages in the zone of merger between the hills and the plains seems to have developed earlier than in the interior on account of the closer contact of the former with peasants in the plains. The Vanias therefore set up shops in the former villages earlier than in the latter. In any case, a kind
of symbiosis developed between the Vanias and the tribal people not only in the economic, but also in cultural and religious spheres. I saw in the 1940s and the 1950s in the Panchmahals how the Vanias participated in the propitiation of tribal deities on the one hand, and the tribal people in the worship of gods and goddesses of Sanskrit Hinduism on the other. The Vanias also thus became a source of sanskritization of the tribal people. Many historians and social scientists have referred to exploitation of the tribal people by the Vanias. That there was an element of exploitation in the relationship between the two cannot be denied. However, the fact that the Vanias played the important role of integrating the tribal economy and society into the wider economy and society should not be ignored.

The Kolis have been the largest caste category in Gujarat, comprising nearly one-fourth of its population, spread almost all over Gujarat. They have been economically backward and ranked lower than the middle castes in sanskritization. The large bulk of them lived in the plains villages as an integral part of the multi-caste social order. A small section lived in the merger zone between the plains and the hills, the kind I studied in the Panchmahals (see my papers 1955a, 1955b). Although they had become here a caste after considerable sanskritization, they did not have the entire paraphernalia of the caste order in their villages, namely, castes of Brahmins, scavengers, artisans and craftsmen. Their wedding rituals were performed by a caste of barbers or by low status Brahmans from the plains, and individual Kolis had learnt carpentry and blacksmithy from the plains craftsmen. A smaller section of Kolis also lived in the hills as neighbours of tribal groups. Only a close inquiry could help distinguish the former from the latter. The Kolis of the three zones merged continuously and imperceptibly from the plains to the hills. It is no wonder the Kolis were frequently confused with the Bhils in the minds of upper castes in the plains. This confusion was also reflected in the literary sources of the past. I also suspect that wherever the tribal people lived in the proximity of the Kolis the former emulated the latter in religion and culture, contributing thus to their sanskritization.

There is a general image that every tribal group lived in isolation from other tribal groups, let alone from the caste Hindus. There could be some pockets where a particular tribal group was confined, but usually the dwellings of each tribal group were interspersed with those of one or two or more of other groups. A comment on village
settlements would help understand the situation. In the plains every village was a nucleated settlement, where the dwellings belonging to the village were huddled together on a site while cultivable land lay all around it. In the hills, on the other hand, a village was a dispersed settlement, where each dwelling or a small cluster of dwellings was located on its own farm at considerable distance from another dwelling or cluster of dwellings. Only a close inquiry would reveal which houses constituted a village community — usually a small community, a hamlet (for a description of a dispersed hamlet, see my paper 1955a). In this pattern of settlement the dwellings of diverse ethnic groups could be easily interspersed without getting involved in intensive social interaction as in the nucleated villages in the plains.

There is a notion about the tribal people that they were free from ideas of purity and pollution found generally among the caste Hindus. This notion needs critical examination with intensive field research. First of all, ideas of purity and pollution existed in the personal life of tribal people. For example, women in the menstrual cycle observed at least some rules of pollution. They would not approach their sacred spots in this state. Similarly, men would approach their deities only after purifying themselves by a bath. Secondly, wherever members of one tribe lived with members of another tribe — as I mentioned above, this was not uncommon — their interaction in some spheres was affected by ideas of purity and pollution. A caste-like situation seems to have prevailed in the relations between various tribal groups. I do not know how the tribal people behaved with the so-called Untouchables whenever and wherever they lived with them. I hope radical or utopian thought will not prevent social scientists from studying systematically and reporting on this rather sensitive aspect of social reality.

I hope the above discussion has shown that the tribal people in Gujarat were not as isolated, as they are generally thought to be, before the coming of the British. Their integration with the plains people increased greatly with the construction of railways and roads through the tribal areas, establishment of new administration, expansion of trade and commerce, and general economic development during the British times. It is also necessary to examine what we mean by isolation of the tribal people. We should ask: isolation from whom? They were not isolated from the caste Hindus living in the merger zone between the hills and the plains and from those in the towns in
the hills. We should also note that the tribal people in Gujarat were subject to influences from the plains across the border in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

All in all, the tribal people were under the impact of Sanskritic Hinduism through various channels before the beginning of British rule. With the expansion of their exposure to the wider world — which was the world dominated by higher castes — during the British times, through activities of the British government as well as of the princely states, the pace of sanskritization among them increased considerably. A number of religious movements with high Sanskritic content — the Bhagat movements, for example — emerged all over the tribal areas. The activities of voluntary social work organizations in these areas, particularly the ashrams set up by Gandhian workers like Thakkar Bapa, had also a Sanskritic content, latent if not manifest.

By the time India became independent every tribal group was internally highly differentiated on every count — technology, economy, polity, culture and religion — so much so that the group as a whole could not really be considered as ‘tribal’. Some groups like the Dublas of south Gujarat had even become castes, living in multi-caste villages in the plains. Nevertheless, the British legacy continued and the groups labelled as STs continued to be so labelled under the constitution of independent India. There was no critical examination of the changed state of economic and social life of these groups while preparing the lists of STs. The entire decision-making process was arbitrary.

I may give here an example of extreme arbitrariness. At independence the numerous princely states of Saurashtra were grouped together into the category ‘B’ state of Saurashtra. There were no social groups in this entire region which could be considered tribal or aboriginal by any stretch of imagination, and no princely state had labelled any group as ‘tribal’. However, when the central government was preparing lists of STs for various states under the constitution, it asked the government of Saurashtra to send it a list of tribes in the state. U.N. Dhebar was the chief minister at that time. The late Professor I.P. Desai used to narrate a story about what happened then. Dhebar wrote to the central government that there were no tribes in Saurashtra. Jaisukhlal Hathi, a Gujarati, was a minister in the central cabinet at that time. When he came to know what Dhebar had written to the centre, he told him on telephone, “You are foolish. You are losing an opportunity to give benefits of reservation to at least
some of your people. Prepare at least some list and send it." Dhebar promptly did so. In this way there are a few STs in Saurashtra since then. Incidentally, social scientists in Uttar Pradesh have told me that one reason why UP has a relatively small population of STs is that Gobind Ballabh Pant, the chief minister at the time of drawing up the list of STs for the state, thought that there were no primitive people in UP.

To return to the so-called tribal people in Gujarat, the process of sanskritization has gone on among them after independence to such an extent that the Hindu sants like Morari Bapu and Pandurang Shastri Athavale have been able to go to the tribal areas frequently to give religious discourses, drawing large congregations. This is the foundation — I believe a strong foundation — on which the members of the Sangh Parivar have been trying to build their edifice for the last ten years or more. It is necessary to distinguish clearly between sanskritization and Hindutva. The process of sanskritization is slow. While its manifestations are clear and it has been going for centuries, its progress cannot be observed easily in a short period of time. The activities of the Sangh Parivar for propagating Hindutva, however, are recent in origin and politically motivated and planned. Usually, the latter cannot succeed without the former, while the former can go on without the latter and is likely to go on for long. I wonder if it has come to a halt even in those areas, like Jharkhand, where attempts have been made to go back to the supposedly original tribal culture.

The process of differentiation among the tribal groups has also accelerated after independence on every count, economic, political, social and religious. As Lancy Lobo has pointed out in a recent article (2002), modern elites have emerged among them and they are trying to disown their past and get merged into the high caste Hindu society. This is another process which helps the activities of the Sangh Parivar.

Another important change is that a large number of the Vania shopkeepers' families, not only from tribal villages but also from small towns in tribal areas, have left or are in the process of leaving for availing of greater opportunities in cities in Gujarat and the rest of India and in other countries. A large part of the space vacated by this exodus is filled by Muslim shopkeepers. I have often heard the argument that the tribal people attacked these Muslims and their properties in recent riots because the latter exploited the former. This argument requires examination. (In fact, all theories about
exploitation have serious complications). Is it possible, for example, to establish that the Vania shopkeepers who preceded the Muslim shopkeepers and those of them who were still left in the tribal areas were less exploitative than the Muslim shopkeepers? And if not, why were they not attacked?

If social scientists are surprised or puzzled by the participation of tribal people in the communal riots and in voting for the Bharatiya Janata Party in Gujarat, they have to blame themselves. They have carried in their mind stereotypes about tribal society and also failed to conduct intensive and fundamental field research in it for a long time. Some of them have not even read relevant available literature. A great deal of the recent spurt in writings about Gujarat is full of stereotypes about it. It looks as though the less a writer knows about Gujarati society and culture the more flamboyant he becomes in theorizing about it.
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