

EMERGENCE OF NEW CASTES IN INDIA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Paul Irvin Dyck
June 1970



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express his gratitude to his thesis committee: Professor T. Correll (advisor and chairman) of the Anthropology Department, University of Manitoba, Dr. Joan F. de Pena of the same department, and Dr. M. Holsteen of the University of Winnipeg. Their encouragement and helpful suggestions have made this time of thesis writing not only bearable, but enjoyable.

I also wish to acknowledge the debt I personally owe to the people of India. It has been through intimate contact with them that I have come to appreciate the fact that cultures are dynamic responses to particular circumstances. A desire to understand Indian cultural responses better has led me to return to a study of anthropology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vi
I. NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM	1
The Problem	1
Scope of this Study	5
Definitions	7
II. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS	13
Evolution of Societies	13
Various Approaches to Caste	16
Lenski's Theory: Privilege based on Power	18
High Castes Control Resources	20
III. TRIBES BECOMING CASTES	26
Tribal Integration in Hindu Society	26
Tribal Subsistence: Slash and Burn	29
Tribes Lose Control of Land	32
Tribes Retain Control of Land	36
Tribes in Transition	39
Tribes Suffer Rank Concession	61
IV. LOW CASTES BECOMING HIGHER CASTES	66
Self Improvement Through Sanskritization	66
Change of Religion	80
Survey of a Community which Converted	90
V. CONCLUSIONS	103
BIBLIOGRAPHY	109

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. CASTE BACKGROUND FOR CHAMPA CHRISTIANS . . .	90
II. OCCUPATIONS FOLLOWED BY CHAMPA CHRISTIANS .	91
III. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF CHAMPA CHRISTIANS.	91
IV. LAND OWNED BY CHAMPA CHRISTIANS	92

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
I.. MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING POLITICAL BOUNDARIES	vii
II. OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING EAST-CENTRAL REGION	viii
III. OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING LOCATION OF BAIGA TRIBES	38
IV. OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING LOCATION OF GOND TRIBES	43
V. OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING LOCATION OF THE KAMAR TRIBE	50
VI. OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING LOCATION OF THE SANTAL TRIBE	55

FIGURE I
MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

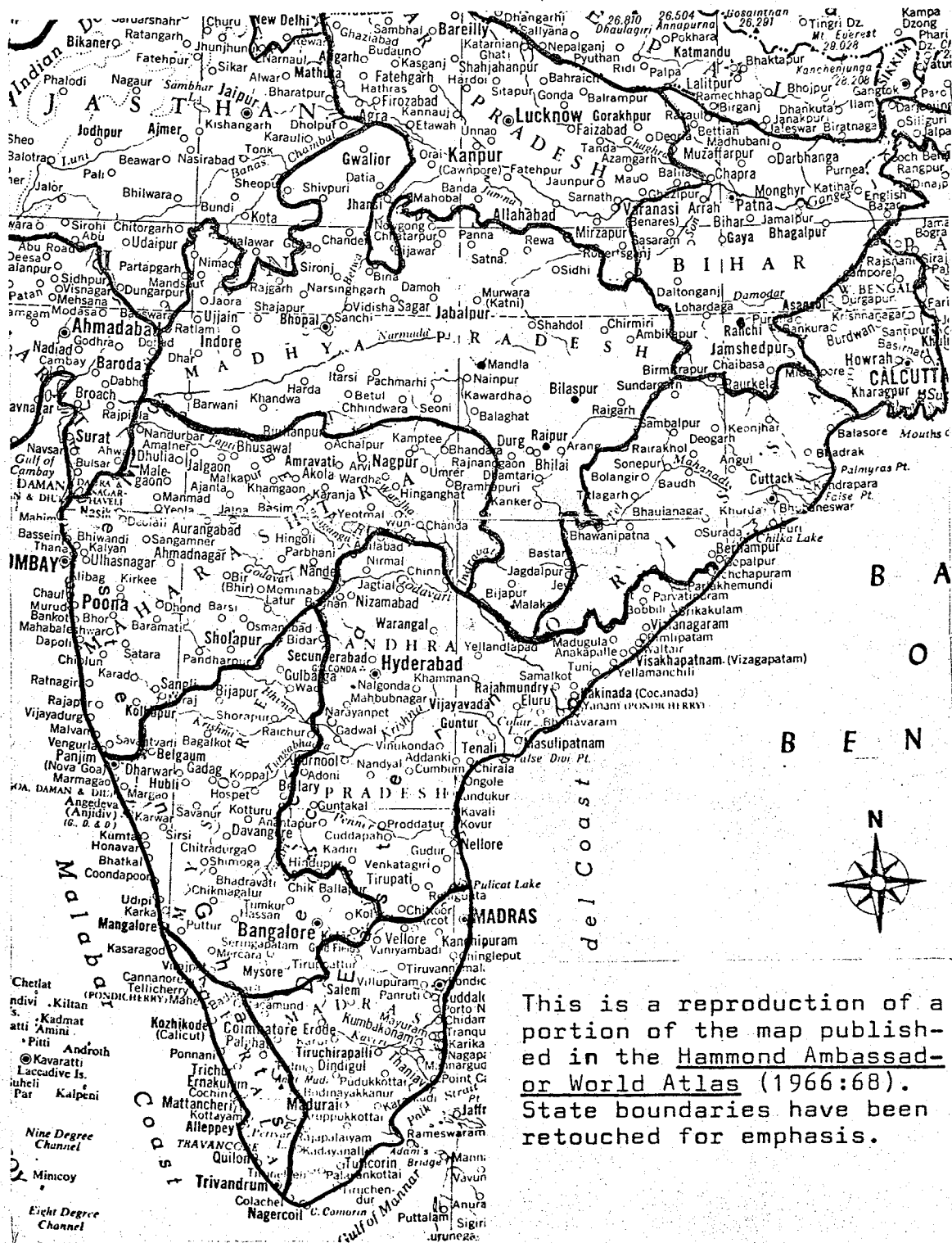
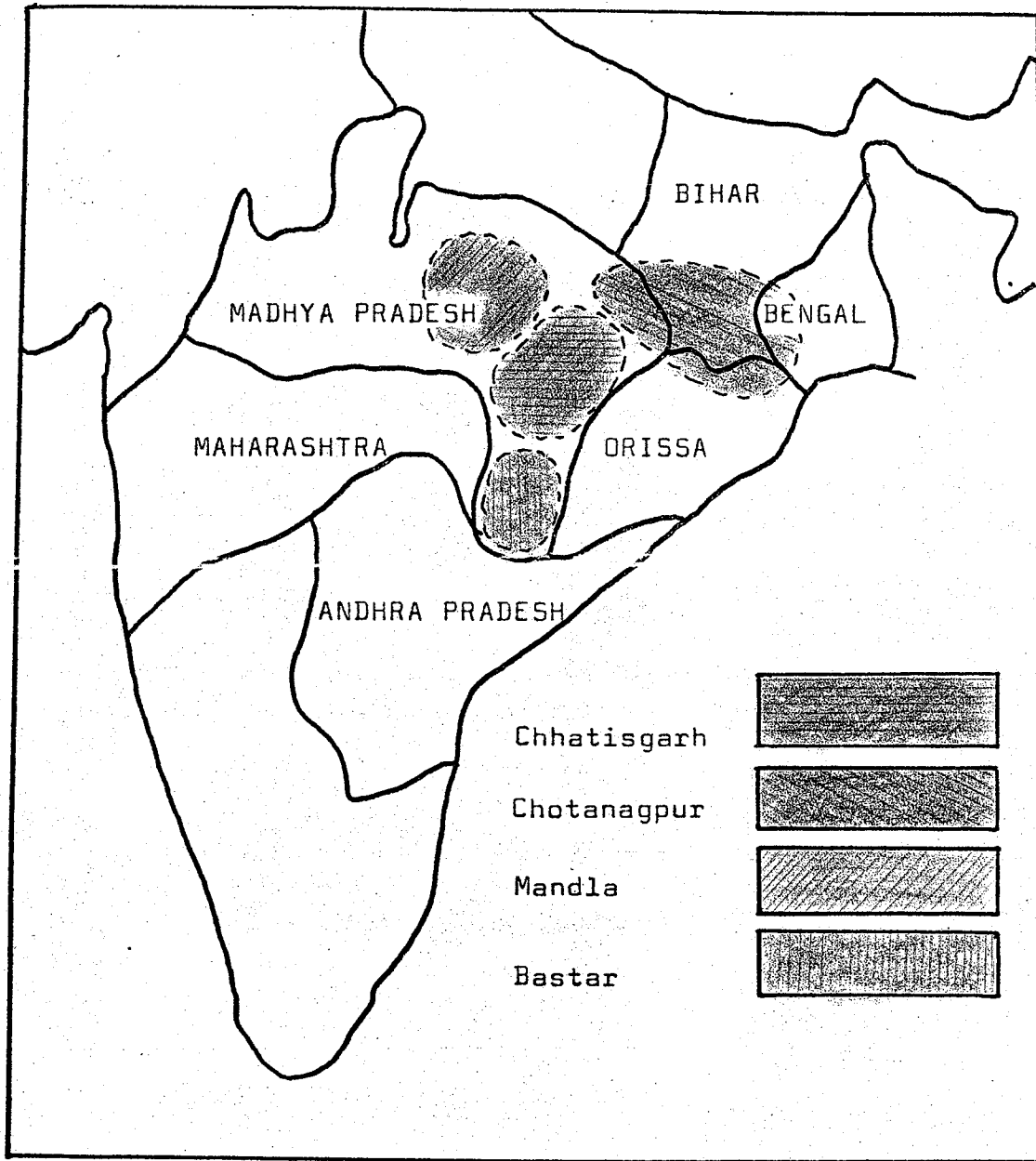


FIGURE II
 OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING
 EAST-CENTRAL REGION



The colored sections represent older political and sub-cultural areas. These area names are freely used by both local residents and by authors writing about the region or its people. Boundaries are not precise.

CHAPTER I

NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

The Problem

The Indian caste system has intrigued students of society for many years, since it represents one of the most highly elaborated systems of social stratification in the world. A large volume of literature already exists on this subject, but two considerations led me to undertake the present study: a) no one, to my knowledge, has yet attempted to document the conditions which prevail at the time when new groups emerge as recognized castes; and b) there is not yet a consensus of opinion as to the dynamics of caste, hence further study is warranted.

A brief survey of some of the literature will indicate the many contradictory views scholars have held. Early writers like John Nesfield (1885) and H. Risley (1915) were primarily concerned with history and race. They tried to link the caste system to specific historical events like the Aryan invasions of 1500 - 500 B.C. They assumed that the fair-skinned invaders were better fighters who subjugated the darker-skinned original inhabitants. Some inter-

marriages were assumed to have taken place as the warrior men took local women. The result was that within a few generations skin color ranged from fair to dark, depending upon the degree of Aryan or Dravidian blood. After the initial period of intermarrying, the fairer-skinned classes began to insist upon endogamy to protect their social privileges. Thus the insistence upon endogamy assured the superiority of the Aryans in perpetuity. The early division of society based upon skin color is deemed to have been the 4-fold Varna division. Subsequent fissioning of society due to accidents like quarrels, migrations, etc., has caused the number of castes to increase greatly, so that today there are over 3,000 named groups and many more endogamous units.

Blunt (1931) took issue with this racial origin theory, claiming that it was fabricated upon pure speculation. He looked for the origin of caste at a much later date - probably about the 7th century A.D. He suggested that caste is really based upon specialization of labor. Specialists in any occupation would tend to marry mates from their own trade guilds in order to maintain a monopoly on the skills and knowledge which they possessed. Guild endogamy developed into caste endogamy.

Cox (1959) argued that the emphasis upon purity/

pollution as the basis for caste ranking is evidence for the theory that caste developed out of a struggle for power between the Kshatriyas (soldier-rulers) and the Brahmans (priests). He did not explain why the struggle for supremacy between rulers and priests in other parts of the world, like medieval Europe, failed to produce a caste system.

Francis Hsu (1963) saw wide differences between Chinese and Hindu society, in spite of similar size and subsistence base. He despaired of finding any sociological or economic explanation for the differences between these two societies, so he opted for an explanation based on ideology. He thought that the Chinese have had a "this-worldly" view, and have paid but scant attention to things religious. What religion there was in China, was really an extension of kinship in that they worshipped ancestors. Hindus, according to Hsu, have held an "other-worldly" view. They have been obsessed with religion, and this has produced a tendency to fissioning because it places religious obligations ahead of social obligations. Fissioning in turn has produced the caste system with its extreme emphasis upon social distance between segments of society.

Leach (1960) believed that the caste system is based upon consensus: each caste gladly accepts its position within the hierarchy. Berreman on the other hand emphasized conflict as being inherent in any stratified

society. He held that castes are not characterized by consensus "but by conformity. They are maintained not by agreement but by sanctions." (in Reuck, 1957:47).

Karve (1959) argued that the castes of India are culturally dissimilar, hence Hindu society is an "agglomeration" of dissimilar groups which were forced to enter into economic relationships with each other in order to survive physically. They retain their old cultural identity to the extent that they retain their own traditional traits. They retain a sense of social identity by insisting on endogamy. Fox (1969) disagreed sharply with Karve, saying that the castes and tribes which display unique cultural traits have developed these traits after leaving main-line Hindu culture to occupy a vacant ecological niche.

Another point of conflict in the literature on the Indian caste system is the argument over whether or not it is unique. Those who argue that it is unique focus their attention on cultural content rather than structure-function. Thus Hsu talks about Hindu religious "Weltanschauung". Other scholars like Orans and Berreman insist that one must first of all focus on those things which permit comparison with other social systems. They believe that an understanding of similarities is a prerequisite to understanding differences. I agree with this point of view

so will focus on social-political-economic factors which I believe cause new castes to emerge, rather than on Hindu theology or philosophy.

Scope of this Study

In this study I do not intend to search for particular historical events that might be interpreted as being associated with the origins of the caste system. Nor do I intend to examine under a microscope, as it were, a caste system in microcosm as has been so ably done in the intense village studies by men like Bailey (1957), Lewis (1958), Mayer (1960), and Berreman (1963), et al.

My intention is to study the processes by which new castes emerge. New castes have been emerging out of tribal and out of Outcaste groups. Together, these categories comprise 100,000,000 people or 1/5 of India's total population. Space and purpose forbid a comprehensive discussion of this enormous segment of India's population, but I believe the examples selected provide reasonable support for the conclusions reached.

In speaking about tribal peoples, I have deliberately excluded the whole of Assam which contains a large tribal population. Other tribals living in north-west India, in eastern and in extreme southern India have also been omitted for the sake of brevity. I have concentrated on those

living in southern Bihar, north-western Madhya Pradesh, western Orissa, the southern tip of Madhya Pradesh, and the surrounding area of northern Andhra Pradesh. These tribes live in a huge crescent around the northern, eastern, and southern sides of the Chhatisgarh region of eastern Madhya Pradesh.

While I cannot present a detailed diachronic account of any one tribe or caste undergoing transformation, the events alluded to in this paper will cover roughly one century of time from mid 1800s to mid 1900s. By looking at the changes which have occurred during this century, I hope to be able to show the direction that culture change is taking in India.

This study is based upon library research, plus material gathered from a questionnaire which was administered in a particular community in India. The questionnaire was designed to gather information which will test the conclusions reached referent to the effects of conversion to Christianity of an Outcaste group. I have also included some personal observations made during the time I lived in the Chhatisgarh region as hospital administrator from 1962 to 1968.

Definitions

Caste

The word "caste" was first applied to the units of Indian society by the Portugese. It derives from the Portugese word "casta" meaning simply a human group. Most European languages ever since have used the word "caste". The most commonly used word in the Sanskritic languages of India is "jat" or "jati". This word has a more general usage than its English equivalent. It means species or breed, and is used for humans, animals or plants. A wild "jat" of orange tree will produce sour fruit. A good "jat" of cow will produce more milk than a mediocre "jat".

At the human societal level, "jat" is used for:

- a) the territorially limited, endogamous group, and
- b) the larger aggregate of groups bearing a common name.

Thus any Brahman is said to belong to the Brahman jat, but the endogamous unit to which he belongs is a particular sort of Brahman. Some jats are found all over India, others in only one locality (these are commonly called "local jats"). In order to distinguish these two levels, most writers on the subject resort to the caste vs. subcaste distinction. For these writers, caste refers to the wider grouping, and subcaste to the territorially limited endogamous unit.

Using "subcaste" to designate the endogamous unit appears very unsatisfactory to me, because of the implications of that word. It implies that the smaller unit has separated or broken away from the larger original whole. It assumes that every jat having a common name is descended from one parent stem and that they are all biologically related. These assumptions must be questioned. A further difficulty inherent in using "subcaste" to designate the endogamous unit lies in the fact that it leads to awkward and confusing usage in the literature on caste. An example of this is Cox who says that he will use "subcaste" for the endogamous unit, but for convenience sake "when we speak of 'the caste' we shall be referring to the subcaste" (Cox 1959:28). In other words, he has proposed a definition with which he cannot live comfortably, so he intentionally uses the word imprecisely.

I am more impressed with the solution to this problem proposed by Irawati Karve in her 1959 Berkley, California, anthropology colloquium address. She proposes using "caste" for the endogamous unit, and "caste complex" or "caste cluster" for the larger grouping bearing a common name. I think that she is on the right track, but would suggest an even more specific word for the larger grouping, namely "caste-type". I make this suggestion because the caste-type is in reality a social slot, not

just an an accidental or fortuitous choosing of the same name; and because I do not believe that all Brahmans (or other caste-types) are biologically related.

In this paper "caste" will refer to endogamous units. Larger than the caste is the "caste-type" within which there is no social organization, but rather a common name and a shared or similar social status in separated localities. Smaller than the caste is the "gotra" or clan, which is normally exogamous. These smaller units are outside the concern of this paper, since I am interested only in inter-caste relationships.

Having specified the unit of study, I shall now operationalize a definition of caste in terms of its essential features:

(1) The first is birth-ascribed membership. All children born of the union of two members of a caste are automatically members of that caste. Birth-ascribed membership is made simple and clear-cut by insistence on endogamy. Even casual sexual contact between castes is considered to be in very bad form. Choosing to marry someone from another caste will lead to ostracism by both castes at worst, and by the higher caste at best. Marrying someone from another caste but within the same caste-type may be tolerated, but is seldom done due to geographical distance.

(2) The second is caste specialization of labor. One

must be careful at this point, for not all occupations are restricted to one caste, nor do all castes practice their traditional occupation. Any member of a low caste may be a farm laborer. There are Fishermen who do not fish, and Potters who do not make pots. Tasks which are regarded to be polluting will not be done by anyone who considers himself to be above the particular task in the ritual hierarchy. No one but a Chamar will skin a dead animal and remove the carcass. No one but a Sweeper will clean up feces or filth.

Operationally, however, I consider specialization of labor on the basis of caste an essential feature since one is not free to follow any profession he chooses. Traditional occupations are filled by members of requisite castes. All of the castes within a village live in well established ritual and economic relationships with each other. A person born in a village have very little choice as to occupation; either he follows his particular caste vocation, or he may become a farm laborer or other menial worker.

(3) The third is stratification. Caste members do not conceptualize their standing vis-a-vis other castes as being horizontal. Each one is ranked either above or below the others. There may not be agreement as to who occupies the higher position, but social distance is conceptualized as being vertical. Social distance is

perceived to be based upon intrinsic worth. Those born into a caste having great worth are thought to be ritually pure. Those born in a low caste have little intrinsic worth and are thought to be polluted. Purity/pollution are inherent qualities which determine privileges and duties in society.

These three features which I have called essential are features which a person within the system would accept, and may thus be termed "emic" features.

Tribe

The word "tribe" is used in India to designate those segments of the Indian nation, numbering roughly 30,000,000 people, which are not yet fully integrated into the dominant Hindu society in terms of economic or social relationships, are not fully Hindu in religion, and still practice or can remember practicing hunting-gathering and hoe horticulture. Tribals live in villages or hamlets separate from multi-caste villages. They are found primarily on the plateau of India, in the dense forests, or on the steep hillsides and mountains. They are usually referred to as Adivasi or Adi Dravida, meaning the original inhabitants of the land.

The words "caste" and "tribe" are not always used exclusively. Stephen Fuchs uses "tribe" to describe the

larger unit called "Gond", yet he denotes the smaller endogamous units of the Gond grouping as "castes". Gonds are tribals. Bailey says that the only solution to this problem of identifying a tribe is to postulate a continuum, at one end of which is a society whose political system is entirely segmentary and of egalitarian type, with no dependent sections. At the other end is the society which gives political and economic control to a relatively small segment, and the rest of that society functions as dependent. He believes that one can identify a tribe if it has direct control over resources and if it makes up a relatively large portion of the total population of an area (Bailey 1960:264, 265).

An operational definition of tribe will thus have to portray the tribal end of the continuum. Tribes are not part of an integrated Hindu society. They have some trading relationships with Hindus, but prefer to live in isolated settlements containing only their own members. They are egalitarian in outlook and do not practice specialization of labor. Their normal subsistence pattern is a mixture of hunting-gathering, hoe horticulture and pig raising. Either they do not possess animals for traction, or have acquired these within recent times. Land is conceived as being the property of the tribe, to be used by all members of the tribe according to need.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The underlying questions which I am addressing are: Is the caste system perpetuating itself? Are new castes still emerging in the present? If so, what factors cause a new caste to emerge from tribal groups? What factors cause an Outcaste group to become a new and different caste? I believe that answers to these questions will indicate how the Indian caste system copes with problems of conflict and social integration. These answers may also indicate a possible origin for the system, since one would expect similar responses to similar pressures in earlier days.

Evolution of Societies

In an evolutionary classification of societies, the simplest in organization and the smallest in numbers of people, is the hunting-gathering band. In a hunting band, power and privilege are the function of personal skill. Offices must be continuously validated by the incumbent. Specialization is on a part-time basis: the shaman performs his ritual duties only as occasion demands. He is a hunter along with his peers the rest of the time. Hunting bands are egalitarian in outlook, lacking hereditary leadership.

In simple horticultural societies religious and magical powers are in greater demand. Wielders of this sort of power are crucial to the society, since upon their knowledge depends the success of the crop and the social control necessary to coordinate the activities of the group in their use of fields and planting of crops. In these societies ritual offices tend to become hereditary, since the knowledge of rituals regarding plant fertility and rain making are taught by the shamans to their own children, thus establishing a hereditary special status.

The next step in social development comes about when the next level of technological improvement is reached. V. Gordon Childe has described this stage in Man Makes Himself (1951:114ff). He says that during the two millenia from about 4,000 BC to 2,000 BC this new level was achieved in Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in India and in Indo-China. Men learned to plant crops, to dig irrigation canals, to harness oxen to the plow, and to develop metallurgical techniques. This technological breakthrough brought with it a social revolution. Greatly increased food production brought about a denser population; which in turn brought about specialization of labor and mechanisms for social control which had not been necessary before. Populations became greatly concentrated along the river

valleys with irrigated fields and settled villages. Increased population density led to conflict and warfare, hence settlements had to be fortified. The demands of warfare led to the domestication of the horse and the invention of the wheeled chariot. Armies became more or less professional. Those segments of society which controlled enough man-power to raise the necessary food to feed the artisans and soldiers and other non-food-producers, to build the necessary fortifications, and to field armies, thus emerged as a ruler class at this period of world history.

Not only did professional rulers emerge at this time but also professional priests. The priests had a monopoly of ritual and magical knowledge. They developed writing systems to keep record of the surpluses of food and military hardware which the society produced. Thus they became the natural allies of the rulers. Together the rulers and the priests monopolized control of economic and political affairs in society. Monopoly of control of economic affairs does not mean that only they get food to eat. Exploitation must be kept in check, lest it destroy the labor pool which produces the goods and services. When the factors of exploitation and restraints upon exploitation are brought into balance, an agrarian

social system may achieve a stability which causes it to survive for centuries, as did the Indian caste system, in spite of grossly unequal distribution of goods and rewards.

Various Approaches to Caste

The question we must now consider is whether the Indian caste system which developed in an agrarian society, fits the general theory of the development of societies. As already indicated in the opening statement, a common explanation for caste is the racial-origin theory. Even a casual observer can readily see that there are in fact many races represented in India, from large-framed fair-skinned Kashmiris and Panjabis, to mongoloid Assamese, to the shorter-statured, dark-skinned peoples of south India. The racial-origin theory breaks down, however, when one realizes that the high and the low castes in any one area or region, resemble each other much more, morphologically, than they do their counterparts in other regions. Racial differences are recognizable by region, not by caste (see Majumdar, 1961:48-85).

Another popular theory has centered attention on the fact of hereditary division of labor. Caste is seen as the logical outgrowth of trade guilds. Edmund Leach is so impressed with the economic security inherent in the caste

system, that he paints a utopian picture of peace and tranquility for the caste system:

"In a class system social status and economic security go together in contrast, in a caste society status and security are polarized In a class society the people at the bottom are those who have been forced there by ruthless processes of economic competition; their counterparts in a caste society are members in a closely organized kinship group who regard it as their privileged right to carry out a task from which all other members of the society are rigorously excluded." (Leach, 1960:6)

He even insists that members of the high castes must compete for the services of the members of the low castes since there are more people belonging to the clean castes than to the Harijans.

In direct opposition to this sort of idealistic view is the understanding which has gained ground during the past decade - that all systems of stratification, including India's, are in fact based upon control of productive resources. Such stratified systems develop when improvements in technology permit a much denser concentration of population in a given area. Technological advances demand specialization of labor, since no one person is able to cope adequately with the many new skills required. Those segments of society which control the resources of land and labor become the high class or caste. This view says that privilege results from power - not power from privilege as Leach would have us believe.

Lenski's Theory: Privilege Based on Power

Gerald Lenski has contributed significantly to the development of theory referent to social stratification. His book has the suggestive title: Power and Privilege: a Theory of Social Stratification (1966). He follows a developmental model very similar to the one proposed by V. Gordon Childe. Lenski specifically applies the model to India:

"The more closely one examines the realities of the distributive system in traditional India, instead of Hindu religious theory, the more one is impressed by its similarities to the systems of other agrarian societies and less by its differences." (Lenski 1966:287).

Lenski links the factor of expanding populations to stratification:

"Mankind, unfortunately, is able to produce more offspring than there are positions to be filled therefore surplus manpower is usually driven downward in a class system in the direction of an expendable class." (1966:290).

It seems that this is equally true of the Indian caste system. At least three classes of people fit the expendable category, and do not reproduce their own numbers:

- 1) beggars - who may come from any caste, but actually come mostly from the Outcaste grouping;
- 2) Sadhus - who are also beggars, but who wear sacred robes and claim to be following the mendicant life to gain merit for their souls, and

3) the so-called "criminal tribes" and thugs who maintain themselves at the expense of society by taking what they need from members of society without their consent.

In primitive societies, goods and services are distributed on the basis of need. With technological and demographic advance in agrarian societies, an increasing proportion of goods and services are distributed on the basis of power. Then a further shift comes about with emphasis upon rule of right rather than rule of might.

Lenski comments:

"Force is replaced by institutionalized forms of power as the most useful resource in the struggle between individuals and groups for prestige and privilege, though force still remains in the picture as the ultimate guarantee of these more genteel forms." (1966:56)

The highest castes have used the Karma concept to justify their unequal distribution of privilege. For the Out-castes this rationalization probably helped preserve their sanity (certainly it preserved the peace) since a person who believes that he is getting a raw deal will become discontented or rebellious. Those who have power control the distribution of virtually all the surpluses produced, while those without power receive only as much as they must have in order to keep them producing. This state of affairs is justified as being the will of the gods.

Since the essence of privilege is control of the

distribution of the surpluses produced by a society, "then it follows that privilege is largely a function of power.... this means that to explain most of the distribution of privilege in a society, we have but to determine the distribution of power," according to Lenski (1966:45). Leach says that in a caste society such as India's, there is no correlation at all between power and status (1960:6). Lenski is saying that there is a direct and positive correlation between these two variables. Leach and Lenski cannot both be right.

In traditional India, there were only two productive resources over which one could have control: land and the labor of men or animals. If Leach is correct, then there will be no significant correlation between rank-privilege and control over land and people. If Lenski is correct, then there will be strong evidence that in traditional India the Brahmans and Kshatriyas, the two highest caste-types, did in fact control the largest percentage of the land mass of India and through this control, they also controlled the people who lived on the products of that land.

High Castes Control Resources

There is rather widespread consensus among scholars that the Brahmans and Kshatriyas controlled most of the land in traditional India. In an agrarian society, this is the

prime productive resource.

Tilman (in Braibanti 1963:210) says: "Caste status over long periods of time tends to seek the level of the economic and power position of the group."

Brown (1951:133 ff) says that traditionally ownership of the land was vested in the state. The ruler gave tracts of land to his henchmen, relatives and priests to administer. For both ruler and bureaucrat, this meant the right to levy tribute. Those who ruled were or became Kshatriyas. The Brahmans dominated the bureaucracy.

Beteille (1965:91) informs us that at one time the Brahmans enjoyed a decisive dominance over land, even though this is no longer as true as it was: "This means that ownership and non-ownership of land and relations within the system of production were to a much greater extent associated with caste than is the case today."

The Gazeteer of India (1965), a government of India publication says: "Economic stratification strengthened ritual stratification and vice versa; this enabled the landowners to exploit the peasants." (1965:512).

Sinha (in de Reuck 1967:97) asserts: "There has always been a fairly close correlation between caste hierarchy and the distribution of land-holding and power."

Bailey notes that in the state of Orissa "Ritual rank continued to be validated by differential control

over productive resources." (Bailey 1957:271).

In a book entitled Land and Caste in South India, Dharma Kumar has written: "It is difficult to separate caste from economic status" (Kumar 1965:48).

Kathleen Gough, who also did her study in south India, notes:

"the high caste controlled all the land, the most important economic relationship consisted of rendering of goods and services by the lower caste households upwards to one or more Brahman households in return for food, clothing and shelter direct exchange of goods and services for subsistence and lack of markets and cash transactions within the village depend upon the fact that the village was an almost self-sufficient productive unit." (1960:27).

She says further that Brahmans form only about 1/15 of Tanjore's population, but own the bulk of the land in 900 out of 2,400 villages. In this area some villages are not controlled by Brahmans, but the aristocrats who do control them "occupy a position of authority comparable to that of Brahmans in Brahman villages." (1960:19). Thus it is clear that the caste-type "Brahman" or its equivalent controls all the land in Tanjore district.

Marriott reports a very similar situation from north India, (1955:19):

"Landholding provides one accessible index of the relative wealth and power of castes. The three highest rank by criteria of ritual interaction in public opinion are Brahman, Farmer and Merchant in that order. These have for more than a century held as landlords over 80% of all land in the revenue subdivision in which Kishan Garhi (lies)".

It is my contention that the foregoing citations present very strong evidence that the high castes have traditionally controlled a very large portion of the land in India. Leach would have to say that this is fortuitous. I hold that Lenski is correct - that this positive correlation is the result of the status variable being dependent upon the power variable. How long it may take for a low caste group to gain status after acquiring wealth, or for a high caste group to lose status after losing wealth, needs further study. For this study, I am now taking the Lenskian model as being applicable to India's caste system.

The Lenskian formulation speaks to the question of who in Hindu society occupies the favored positions. This model could still leave us with the option of interpreting the spread of caste by racial conquest, or by the spread of a culture type. I have already indicated that I do not believe that one can identify the high castes of south India as Aryans. What has happened is the spread of a culture type according to the Law of Cultural Dominance as it was formulated by Sahlins and Service (1960:75): "That cultural system which more effectively exploits the energy resources of a given environment will tend to spread in the environment at the expense of less effective systems." Since there are still some "less effective"

remnants of societies left in India at various stages of disintegration and of adapting to the dominant Hindu pattern, I therefore conclude that the Law of Cultural Dominance is valid and at work in Indian society.

It seems that India was settled by many isolated and separate cultural groups which practiced hunting-gathering hoe horticulture or pastoral nomadism at the time of the rise of Hindu caste culture. Caste culture was at a higher level of technology and social integration than tribal culture - and has been in the process of displacing the latter right up to the present. Caste culture achieved dominance and spread over the entire subcontinent because it possessed:

- 1) a superior military technology, metal tools, etc.;
- 2) superior knowledge, including a writing system; and
- 3) a vastly superior agricultural technology of plows and animal traction.

Tribes in isolated areas have maintained their old cultures. Those in close contact with Hindu culture become integrated into Hindu society and culture. This process of tribal absorption into Hindu society results in their emergence as new castes. The process may be termed integration or fusion.

Another process is also at work in Hindu society

namely fission. Old castes sometimes break up and reform. This fissioning process may be the result of either accidents like war or migration, or may be the result of a deliberate attempt on the part of the disadvantaged and depressed segments of society to reconstitute themselves into a high caste image. I am primarily concerned about the deliberate attempts to achieve a new caste identity through emulation of high caste ritual or through a change of religion.

CHAPTER III

TRIBES BECOMING CASTES

The presence of tribes in India raises the question of their relationship to Hindu caste society. Are the tribes but another variation of caste-types? Did they separate from Hindu society, or have they never belonged to it? Do they have a distinctive subsistence pattern? What happens when their forest economy and isolation is destroyed? What happens to a tribe which lives in close contact with castes scattered throughout their region? What is the effect of Hindu dominance on tribals? These questions will be answered in this chapter with the aid of four sample tribes undergoing transformation into castes or caste-types.

Tribal Integration in Hindu Society

Tribes in India are those groups of people living in the forests, on the plateau or hill ranges. They are animists in religion, practice slash and burn hoe horticulture, raise pigs for food and hunt in the forests for at least part of their food supply. A few groups still practice a pure hunting-gathering technique. The Gazeteer of India mentions some of these primitive groups:

"The Birhor, Mallar, and Kharia of Bihar and Orissa, the Kadar and Cencus of Andhra Pradesh live in small nomadic or semi nomadic bands. They gather wild leaves, roots and fruits, manufacture ropes from wild creepers, and collect bees wax the total number of forest dwellers does not exceed a few thousand." (1965:316)

There are very few tribesmen living in the Indus valley and on the Gangetic plain of north India. They are more numerous in Assam, in central India and parts of the Deccan (southern) area.

I have already stated my belief that tribes are in the process of becoming castes. Most tribes have tried to preserve their old way of life, but only with varying degrees of success. Some have become so Hinduized that to all intents and purposes, they are now castes, even though they can remember being something else.

There are two ways of viewing these primitive¹ tribes living on the Indian continent surrounded by an old highly elaborated culture. Richard Fox argues one view: that these people are "professional primitives" who have moved out from mainline Hindu culture to occupy a vacant ecological niche, (in Man in India, vol. 49, No.2, p. 139). I reject this view for several reasons. One is linguistic: the tribals in central India are surrounded

¹The word "primitive" is not a value judgment. It means that those who are more primitive have a less efficient technology. They control less energy since they rely entirely upon human labor.

by speakers of Sanskritic languages, yet use non-Sanskritic languages like Gondi (a Dravidian tongue), or Santali (a Munda language). A second reason for rejecting the "professional primitive" explanation is the presence of culture traits which are totally foreign to the Hindu tradition. Tribal religions are animistic. The use of pork is a dominant trait among the tribals of India. Some still maintain a youth dormitory. These features place them in a cultural tradition having affinity with the cultures of New Guinea rather than Hindu culture (see Rappaport 1968).

Kosambi expresses the opposite view. He calls the tribes which survive to this day examples of "living pre-history" (in *Scientific American* 1967, vol. 216:105). He maintains that these are examples of neolithic culture which has survived because the forests of India provide such a rich amount of vegetable matter. The tribals living in the forests were under no ecological pressure to develop any other cultural pattern. Plow agriculture is even more efficient and produces far more food per square mile than does the best hoe horticulture, and permits a correspondingly denser population. Plow agriculture seems to have developed first in the Indus valley, then spread along the Gangetic plain, and only then penetrated the southern parts of India. Wherever the plow culture spread, forests were

destroyed, and with the destruction of the forests, the tribal culture was also destroyed. The hills and heavy forests of central India and the far north-eastern areas have been the last to come under plow agriculture, and the areas where those tribals live who are still identifiable as tribals. Kosambi says that during the transitional stage, the two forms continued to exist side by side, with a gradual elimination of the forest and the forest technology and the eventual dominance of plow agriculture and Hindu culture.

Increases in population were more rapid in the areas under plow cultivation. As these pressures mounted, the expansion of agriculturists into tribal areas also increased. As they felled the trees and established permanent villages, the tribals either had to flee or become integrated into Hindu society. Thus the transformation comes about: from isolated, independent, economically self-sufficient tribal units new inter-dependent caste units emerge.

Tribal Subsistence: Slash and Burn

The predominant form of subsistence of the tribal of India is slash and burn hoe horticulture. Other words used for this form of raising food are: "swidden", "axe-cultivation", "shifting", etc. Several commonly used

Indian words are "bewar", "jhum", or "podu". This form of raising food consists of cutting the forest with its high ceiling of leaves, and then burning the fallen trees and brush. After that, the digging stick is used to stir up the soil and wood ash, and the seeds are planted. The fertilizer in the ash is quickly used up, and so after a year or two the plot of ground must be abandoned. New brush and trees grow, so that after a period of some years, it may be cultivated again. Thus, at most 1/6 of the available land is under cultivation in any one year.

D. S. Nag has presented a detailed analysis of the intimate connection between shifting cultivation and tribal culture in Tribal Economy (1958). He notes that this form of subsistence has been practiced by tribal peoples all over India:

"Shifting cultivation is practiced all over the tribal tracts of Assam Shifting cultivation was carried on over wide areas of the Central Provinces until it was stopped by a government order in 1867 Shifting cultivation provides food to millions of primitive people in the tribal tracts of Hyderabad. The Reddis have been traditionally practicing 'podu' since times immemorial the Juangs of Orissa practiced axe-cultivation till very recently the tribesmen do not know digging out, daming or terracing the fields very few of them own plows." (Nag, 1958:415-417)

In 1893 the government tried to force the Baiga of central India to give up their bewar cultivation. Those who did were soon reduced to destitution. The administration

then sent Gonds to settle among the Baiga and to teach them plow agriculture. As many Baiga as could fled to near-by Rewa state where they were still free to practice their old form of cultivation and preserve their old way of life.

Nag is convinced that this reluctance on the part of the Baiga to adopt a superior technique does not result from Baiga stupidity, but is a defense of his independent way of life. As soon as the Baiga takes on plow agriculture he comes under the normal pressures to produce more than he himself can consume. He must gain extra goods to exchange for the services of craftsmen who now become necessary for his farming operation: carpenters, iron smiths, cattlemen, etc. In other words, he cannot make the shift in agricultural techniques without adapting to the Hindu market economy and caste social structure.

There are at least two good reasons for the difficulty the tribal has in preserving his isolated, self-sufficient way of life. The first is simply the pressure of numbers. The population density of the tribal areas is considerably lower than that of the Hindu plow men. Only an exceptionally powerful and warlike tribe can hope to preserve a territory for itself. The second is the factor of shifting cultivation producing shifting settlements. Shifting settlements are not easily defended against settlers.

Tribals lose Control of Land

The destruction of tribal culture comes about through the loss of control over lands and forests. I will first present evidence that this is so from a wide variety of sources, then look more closely at several tribal groups who are in the midst of this process.

Jyoti Sen, writing under the title "Problems in Tribal Transformation" says of the tribals living in the Chotanagpur area of south Bihar in the early 19th century:

"As time went on, suitable farming land became scarce in the adjacent districts. The Hindu farming castes of the latter districts migrated into the tribal area and the pressure on land went on increasing. This brought the tribals into close contact with the technologically more efficient Brahmanical society. The latter were divided into a hierarchy of castes based on traditional service relations.... About 1822 Hindu, Muslim and Sikh traders flocked around the court of the king of Chotanagpur. As payment for costly goods were lacking the king granted zamindari rights on land in payment of their merchandise. The comparative affluence of Brahmanical society attracted the tribes. Gradually they adopted the arts and crafts of the former but along with it they also accepted the hierarchy based on occupation Ideas governing caste thus began to permeate tribal society." (Man in India, 1966, vol. 46, No.4: 319 - 344).

Professor Govind Ghurye is one of the foremost Indian authorities on the tribals of India. He realizes that tribal culture is disappearing, but feels that becoming Hindus is the best thing that can happen to the tribals.

Ghurye recognizes quite clearly that tribal life is upset at the point in time when the tribe loses its land. He talks about the expropriation of land in the Narmada valley in Madhya Pradesh:

"The role of the Hindus appears to have been that of expropriator For some generations before the Maratha conquest of the Central Provinces in the middle of the 18th century Hindu colonists had been steadily ousting Gond villagers from the more fertile tracts It is true that the people of the soil, those Gonds who have preferred to stay and serve a Hindu master to a retreat to the hills are poorly clad and housed, living like outcastes beyond the limits of the Hindu quarter."
(Ghurye, 1959:24).

Ghurye talks about the Hindus as being hungry for land and of coveting the soil. They used all sorts of stratagems to gain control of tribal lands with the result being "turning the peasant proprietors into tenants."
(Ghurye, 1959:45).

Gough reports similar transformation of tribals into low caste men in south India, due to economic pressures. She says: "Adi Dravidas (Original Dravidians, a modern census classification) comprise the three lowest castes of the district, now classified as Harijans by the central government." (Gough, 1960:17). The Konans of the Tanjore district were former independent nomadic sheep and cattle herders. In the delta where grazing grounds tend to be confined within village establishments, some entered

serf-like relationships with landlords of higher caste. Gough conjectures that the pastoralists were independent before the village was fully irrigated and granted to the Brahmans. She says they appear to have accepted serfdom from choice as an assurance of livelihood (Gough, 1960:22). I fail to see what choice is left but the choice to become a serf or starve, since all available land came under Brahman control.

In the Khondmal hills of Orissa, the plains Hindus moved up into Khond territory and settled in the broadest valleys. In the course of time at least one group of Khonds settled in the Hindu village taking up the trade of basket making. They were soon absorbed into the caste structure as the Basket Maker caste (Bailey, 1957:36).

Aurora also speaks of the loss of land and the resultant emergence of new low castes:

Throughout India Brahmans and Kshatriyas or those who were modelled in their image, eg. Rajputs, tended to acquire control over land and political institutions.... The concentration of the tribal population in economically backward areas is an important sociological fact. There are historical as well as modern ramifications of this fact. Historically the presence of tribal communities in the marginally productive lands is proof of their retreat economic and political, before the advances of plains society." (Aurora 1968:298-300).

One would expect tribal peoples to rebel against loss of their land to foreigners. How often armed rebellion may have occurred, we have no way of knowing.

Several rebellions are on record of tribals fighting the incoming tide of Hindus. Ghurye reports one rebellion in Kalahandi area of Orissa. One of the feudatory chiefs encouraged a fairly high caste of Hindu agriculturists, called Koltas, to settle in his chiefdom since they would produce more revenue for the chief than the tribals could. The Koltas soon brought the tribal Khonds into their economic grip and began taking over the lands which the Khonds had farmed until then. "In 1882 they rose up in arms and murdered a number of Koltas. The rising was put down and the Khonds were pacified." (Ghurye 1959:48). It is clear that pacification does not mean that they were given their lands again.

An even more famous rebellion was the 1855 uprising by the Santals. This battle has been reported by a number of authors including Ghurye (1959) and Orans (1965:30-35). The circumstances were very similar to the Khond rebellion of 1882. The Santals had been moving about in search of a place from which they would not be expelled by the encroaching Hindus. The Santals settled in the very fertile, but heavily forested tract of land in western Bengal in the early 1800s in what has come to be known as Santal Paragana. Hindus had not been willing to live in this tract of land due to fear of carnivorous animals and preference for open land. The Santals began clearing forest patches and raising

good crops. This attracted the Hindus - soon Hindu traders and money lenders arrived, with the normal results of alienation of Santal lands. The Santal were reduced to economic ruin. Many became bound to Hindu landlords as agrestic serfs. In 1855 resentment rose to such a pitch that they began killing, burning, and pillaging. They killed not only the hated Hindus, but also a few Englishmen who happened to be in the area. British troops were called out to pacify the Santals.

Tribals who lose control over their lands may retreat to unoccupied territories. If none are available, they are forced to integrate into the dominant social structure which happens to be a caste structure; in fact, to become castemen.

Tribals Retain Control of Land

Not all tribal people have suffered defeat at the hands of the Hindus. Some managed to retain control of land. The Nayars and Coorgs of south India retained control not by fighting the Hindus, but by cooperating with them. Srinivas describes the adjustment of the Coorgs to the encroaching Hindus. Since they had a tradition of being good fighters, they entered the service of the Lingyat Raja as palace guards. Being the king's soldiers, they

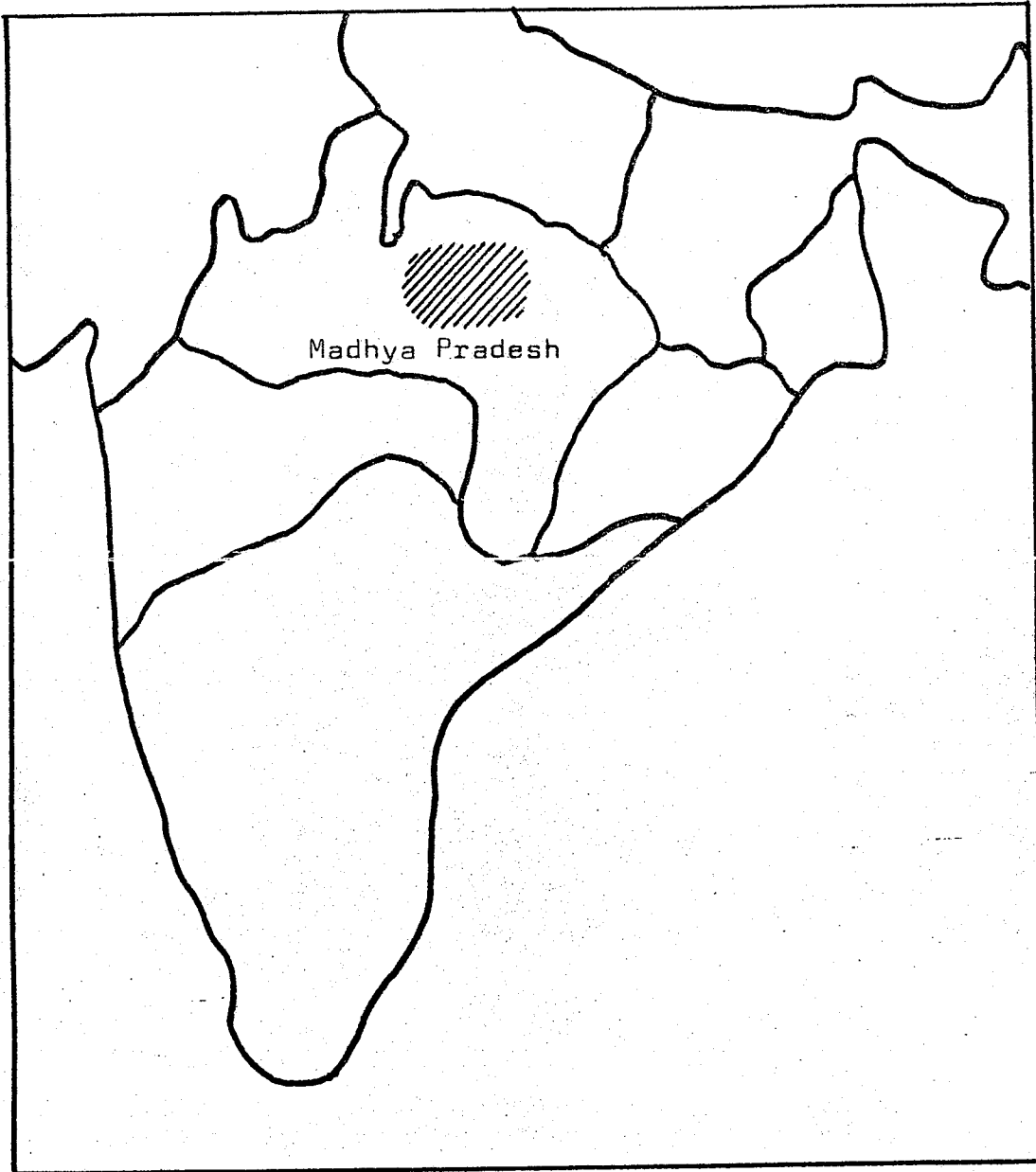
were granted tracts of land from which they could collect revenue. They began to adopt many of the customs and beliefs of Kshatriyas since they were now filling a Kshatriya role in Hindu society. In 1834 they began wearing the sacred thread of the "twice born". At this time they also began claiming Kshatriya (Indo-Aryan) origin. They did retain one trait which is dear to a tribal heart: the consumption of pork. Srinivas comments upon the acquisition of Kshatriya status:

"they exemplify a tendency which has always been present in the caste system: a small group of people break off from a larger whole of which they are a part, Sanskritize their customs and rituals, and achieve a higher status than their parent body in the course of a few decades." (1952:35)

The Coorgs have emerged as a new caste having Kshatriya status. It came about by the abandonment of independent tribal organization and the acceptance of interdependence with caste Hindus. Because they filled a Kshatriya social slot, they brought their ritual, belief system and myths into line with their newly-acquired caste-type.

Some Gonds have also attained high caste status. A number of the rajas in central India were Gonds, including the one at Sarangarh in Raipur district. Elwin visited him, and reports that he lives in a palace "which is equipped with every modern comfort; his well stocked library includes the works of Aldous Huxley, Bernard Shaw

FIGURE III
OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING
LOCATION OF BAIGA TRIBES



and Malinowski." (Elwin, 1943:11). This former raja is now an active politician serving as an elected representative in the state legislature. Being a former raja and a successful politician, he certainly has very high esteem in the community even though he maintains a "Gond" identity. He lives like any other high caste Hindu, but calls himself a Gond (personal observation).

Tribes in Transition

The Baiga

Information on the Baiga comes from three main sources: Verrier Elwin (1939), Stephen Fuchs (1960), and D. S. Nag (1958). Fuchs is writing about the Gonds and Bhumia of Mandla district, but it should be noted that the Bhumia are a branch of the Baiga tribe. One should perhaps use the plural "tribes", since there are numerous divisions of both Gond and Baiga which are becoming more and more socially separated. Baigas are found chiefly in four districts of Madhya Pradesh: Mandla, Bilaspur, Drug and Balaghat. In describing the area in which they live, Nag gives the impression that the area is so infested by large carnivorous animals that the investigator is in constant danger of being eaten by panthers or tigers! The Baigas are virtually illiterate. Literacy amounted to 3% out of 350 surveyed (Nag; 1958:33). They are forest

dwellers practicing hunting-gathering and hoe horticulture.

They were so shy (afraid of outsiders) that as late as 1897 many starved during a time of famine, even though relief food was available in the district. Gonds and Hindus accepted the relief food, but "it was no uncommon thing for the whole male population of a (Baiga) village to flee into the jungles on the approach of a relief officer." (Nag, 1958:78). The British administration became convinced that these wild people must be civilized. They were ordered to stop all slash and burn horticulture and to come down from their hillsides to take up residence in regular Hindu villages. The Baigas refused. Then they were given bullocks and told to plow up their own plots of ground. They soon ate the bullocks and reverted again to their old form of slash and burn horticulture. Then "a new policy began of settling Gonds in Baiga villages to teach plow cultivation to the latter." (Nag 1958:82). This resulted in a whole new set of problems. Some fled to Rewa state¹, an area outside British control. Others tried to eke out a living by cutting "bewar" by stealth in the more inaccessible places. The Gonds, being already agriculturists, tended to take over all cultivated land

¹Rewa state was a princely state; hence outside of British control in domestic affairs.

and to make serfs of the Baiga in typical Hindu fashion.

An area west of Bilaspur was then set aside for slash and burn horticulturists, and became known as Baiga Chak. Here too, the Baigas were hampered because of forestry officials whose duty it was to protect the forest from indiscriminate felling of trees. Here too, the plow agriculturists followed the Baigas, and gained control of the best land. The Baigas simply could not compete with the Hindus or Hinduized Gonds, since they had neither the traditional skills, nor the capital to purchase bullocks on the open market. Many have taken on menial jobs as road construction workers or as agrestic serfs on the farms of landowners.

Nag observes the effects of this change upon the attitudes of the Baiga:

"For several decades Baigas were faced with economic chaos - the officials forcing the forest tribes to take to the plough, while the latter resisting this imposition through migrations and secret forest fellings. The new situation had disastrous effects upon the tribe. The Baiga lost self-confidence and enterprising spirit in their traditional economic pursuits; nor could they carve a place for themselves in the farm economy. The tribe has consequently developed a fatalistic outlook and defeatist tendencies in its social life." (Nag 1958:340)

With the loss of their traditional means of livelihood, the Baiga have lost interest in their bewar rituals and ceremonies. The religious practitioners (Gunia)

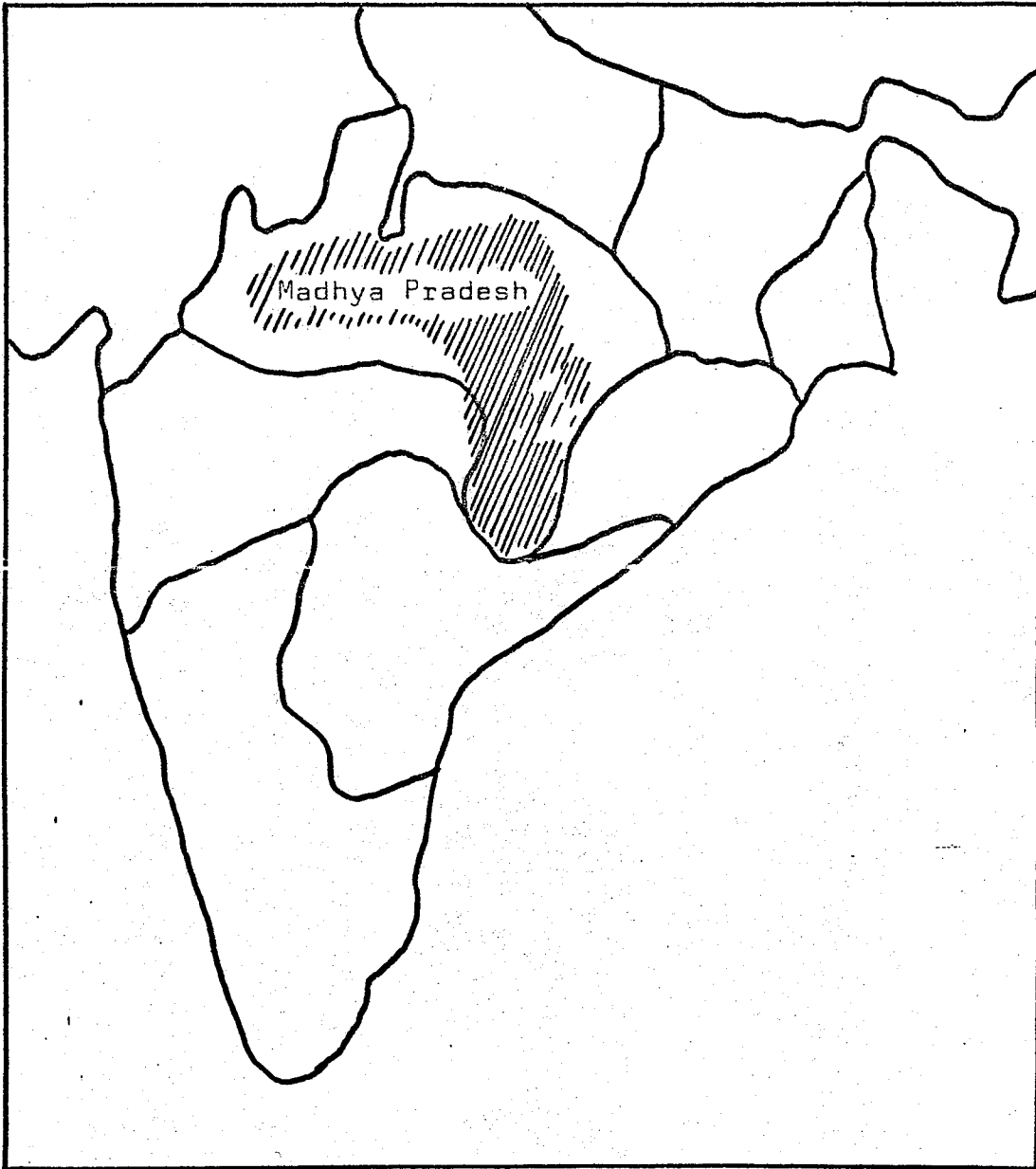
whose advice in selection of bewar sites and the performance of the ritual essential for protecting the tribe from misfortune, have lost their position of social leadership. Mutual assistance in clearing forest plots for bewar has ceased. The solidarity of the community has suffered greatly. Nag even suggests that they have suffered physical deterioration because restrictions on hunting in the forests has reduced the amount of protein they get in their diet.

An additional hardship for the Baiga tribals is the levy of taxes on land. This forces them to produce for the market in order to get the cash needed for the payment of taxes. If he cannot produce the cash, the tribal must borrow money from the money lender at extremely high rates of interest, and so the control of land is again shifted into the hands of the Hindus.

There are also numerous social indications of the deterioration of Baiga culture. Gonds live in many of the same villages as the Baigas. Gonds are recognized as being socially superior. Gonds stopped interdining with the Bhumia branch of the Baiga tribe in 1940. The Bhumias now resent being called Baiga. Bhumia permit intermarriage with the Binjhar Baiga, because these have successfully established their claim to higher status (Fuchs 1960:193). The Bhumia may accept food and water from a Brahman, a

FIGURE IV

OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING
LOCATION OF GOND TRIBES



Gond and a Gawal Ahir (Cowherd). He may also accept a clay pipe from a Gond, but "nowadays a Gond must refuse to take it from a Bhumia" (Fuchs 1960:197). The social distances being established between various Baiga sub-groups and between the Baiga and Gond peoples is another indication that these tribal groups are in the process of emerging as castes within the social structure of India.

The Gonds

Russel and Hiralal (1916), as well as Stephen Fuchs (1960), assume that the Gond tribe(s) migrated into central India some time between the 9th century and the 13th century A.D. Some Gonds still speak Gondi, a Dravidian language. In central India they came into contact with Baigas, forest dwellers like themselves, and with Hindu Rajput rulers. Nag believes that the Hindus arrived on the plains of Chhatisgarh around the 9th century, establishing a Rajput dynasty at Ratanpur near Bilaspur. At this time the Baigas were driven back into the hills around Chhatisgarh (Nag 1958:39). It appears that the Rajputs were not strong enough to prevent the Gonds from becoming the dominant political force in the whole of central India, which became known as Gondwana.

Some Gonds took on plow cultivation. Others remained forest dwellers. Still others became rajas, collecting

revenue from forest and plains dwellers alike. The first great Gond king of the Raj Gond dynasty in Garh Mandla (Fort Mandla), even issued gold coins in the early 16th century bearing Telegu inscriptions (Fuchs 1960:12). Gond men did not hesitate to take Baiga wives. This freedom to intermarry has persisted until very recently. It should be noted that these marriages were hypergamous: Gonds took wives from the Baigas, but refused to give their daughters to Baiga men. Gonds have not been at liberty to intermarry with caste Hindus, however, since Hindu taboo forbids it. Chiefs among the Gonds were exceptions, being permitted to marry Rajput (Kshatriya status) girls.

Gond chieftains began to imitate the high caste Hindus. They imported Brahman priests from Benares to become their mentors and poets. "The result was that the religious, social, and material culture of the Gond now forms a curious blend of many different and sometimes widely divergent culture traits." (Fuchs 1960:14).

Gonds are considered to be better farmers than Bhumia, but both are inferior to agricultural non-tribal castes, according to Fuchs. Both remember with nostalgia the time when they practiced bewar in the forests. Cattle have only come to be kept by the Gonds and Bhumia since they took up plow cultivation. The cow is a Hindu animal, revered as Gaumata (literally Cowmother, but perhaps more

accurately translated as Mother-Goddess-Who-Has-The-Form-Of-A-Cow). The Gonds, too, now revere her as a goddess. They follow the normal Hindu practice of tabooing the harnessing of a cow to a plow. Only bullocks (castrated males) may be used for traction.

Another animal which appears to be an integral part of Gond and Baiga culture is the pig. No self-respecting Hindu will eat pork; yet tribals do, as well as outcastes living in all Hindu villages. In settled villages, the pigs roam freely, living on offal and garbage. In the forests the pigs root among the plants and bushes. Hindu reformers have put severe pressure on the tribals to give up pork eating, but with little success. Both Nag and Fuchs (1960: 427 ff) describe the special pig festival called "Laru Kaj" or Wedding of the Pig. At this festival a pig is ritually slaughtered amid drinking and dancing and the worship of Narayan Deo.

Because of strong Hindu influence, the Gonds of M. P. formed a union in 1940 to promote ritual purity. They laid down a number of laws to achieve this end:

1. Social contacts with castes lower than themselves must be prohibited, including the Baiga and Panka.
2. Liquor and pork are prohibited.
3. Beef eating is a major crime.
4. Dress must resemble high caste dress.
5. Tribal songs and dances are discouraged. (Fuchs 1960:

188). In villages where non-tribal influence was strong, the new regulations were strictly enforced. In more remote jungle villages, conservatism proved too strong and the movement failed to convert the Gonds into Hindus.

The sub section of the Gond tribe living in Mandla district now avoids other tribals for fear of ritual pollution. To this extent it has become a Hindu caste. The highest of the Gond castes are the Deo Gonds. They are fully Hinduized and abstain from eating any meat or drinking any liquor. The second highest section are the Suryabansi Raj Gonds (Sun-born ruling Gonds). This name is obviously borrowed from the Rajput Suryavansi clan. The Suryabansi Raj Gonds claim the rank of Kshatriya. They are ashamed of their Gond tribes-mates who still eat beef and pork. Some Gonds have adopted the sacred thread of the "twice born", call on Brahman priests to perform rituals and to teach them Hindu customs. Along the Narbada River in western Madhya Pradesh, a favorite pilgrimage area for Hindus, almost every Gond village has resident Brahman priests. The Raj Gonds do not permit members of low castes to draw water from their wells, and even beef-eating Gonds are included in the prohibition. In Raj Gond villages a beef eating Gond is treated as an Outcaste, yet in more remote Gond villages beef is still used for food. Beef eating has been stopped in Rewa state

where Hindu influence has been strong, even though it persisted for some years in neighboring Mandla district.

In Bastar state area (extreme south-eastern section of Madhya Pradesh) live two more sections of the Gond tribe. These are known as Muria and Maria Gonds. The older name for these groups is Koi or Koiter (Grigson 1949:377). This area has remained much more isolated from Hindu culture than the Gond areas farther north. In this region the tribals form a majority of the total population. Here Hinduization has not progressed nearly as far as it has in the rest of M. P. Yet even here land-hungry Hindus have begun to penetrate.

The Murias living near the city of Jagdalpur are the most detribalized. They have adopted plow agriculture and have even become fairly skillful cultivators. In matters of food, however, they still eat anything except the flesh of the cow. Pigs are numerous in these villages. Thus the retention of pork eating is an example of an old trait persisting even though the new trait of reverence for the cow has been accepted from Hindu culture.

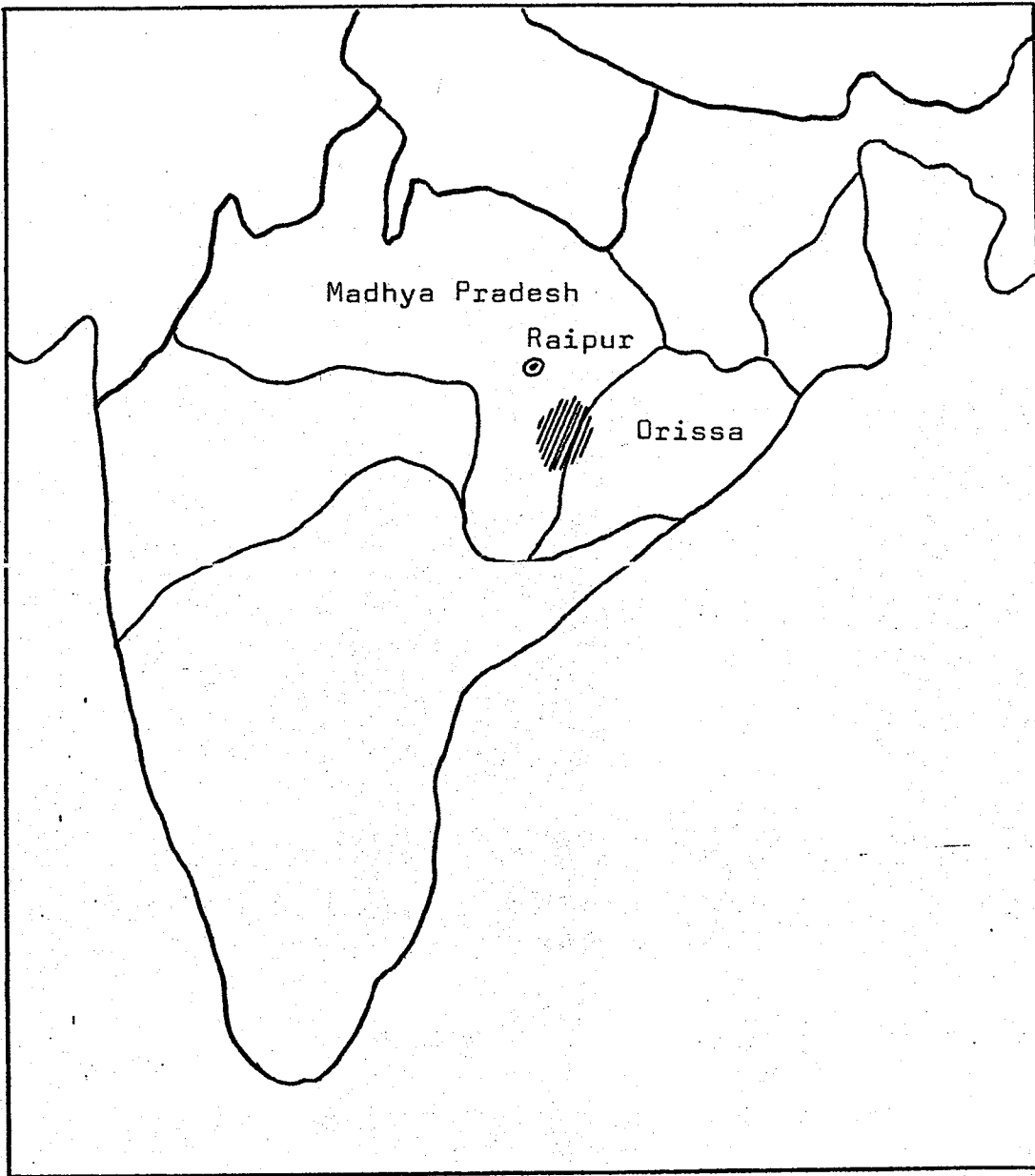
The Marias, on the other hand, have resisted Hindu influence more successfully. They have maintained a much higher dependence upon hunting and gathering in the forest. They eat the flesh of any animal caught, including cows or calves stolen from Murias or Hindus! (Grigson 1949:44).

The Murias of Bastar have begun to look upon their beef-eating Maria cousins as inferior, and now refuse to intermarry with them.

Another indication of the loss of their old tribal culture is the dying out of the youth dormitory, called "Ghotul". Verrier Elwin looks upon the Ghotul as being one of the key traits of tribal culture and laments its decline. He devoted an entire book to this trait, called The Hill Muria and Their Ghotul (1947). Adolescent boys and girls sleep in this dormitory, enjoying a great degree of freedom in their sexual contacts. Such an institution and such behavior is totally foreign to orthodox Hinduism.

In the Chhatisgarh region just north of Bastar, one finds Gond rajas of princely states like Sakti, Raigarh, and Sarangarh. Other Gonds are still living as forest dwellers. Still others are agrestic serfs on the estates of Hindu landowners. This wide variation becomes intelligible when seen as the result of some centuries of culture change. The old Gond culture has largely crumbled before the dominant Hindu culture. As recently as the late 1800s Chhatisgarh Gonds still sacrificed and ate bullocks. By the middle of the 20th century they have become indistinguishable in dress, speech, etc., from other caste Hindus, according to Ghurye (1959:219). Gond groups still differ from normal Hindu castes, however, in that groups calling

FIGURE V
OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING
LOCATION OF KAMAR TRIBE



themselves "Gond" vary all the way from rajas to agrestic serfs, from high status to low. "Gond" is not yet a clear-cut caste-type since there is no particular status attached to the name.

That they are emerging as Hindu castes was already obvious to J. Forsythe in 1889: "The Gonds have gone further in the adoption of these Hindu sentiments than other tribes Some have already succeeded in attaining the status of Rajputs." (Forsythe 1889:146).

The Kamar

In S. C. Dube's The Kamar (1951), we have an ethnographic account of yet another previously unknown primitive tribe living in central India. They live in the southern section of Raipur District on the border between Bastar and Chhatisgarh areas. They depend even more upon the forest and forest products than their Muria Gond neighbors farther south. Fuerer-Heimendorf conjectures (in the forward to The Kamar) that the oldest stratum of culture in India survives in purely hunting-gathering bands like the Chenchus of Hyderabad and the Birhors of Bihar. The next stage of social and technological development takes place when slash and burn horticulture is introduced to supplement hunting-gathering. The keeping of pigs and fowl also greatly stabilizes the food supply. This second stage is represented in India by the Reddis, the Kamar and the Baiga.

The people of this second stage use wooden digging sticks to till the ground. The next higher stage is represented by tribes like the Gonds, Santals, Mundas, Nagas etc., who tip their digging sticks with metal. This third group relies less upon the forest than do groups one and two.

The Kamar represent stage two. Dube thinks that they have lived in simple territorial bands until fairly recent times and have taken on something of totemic clan structure including Gond totemic names, as a result of contacts with the Gonds of Bastar. They are learning the Chhatisgarhi dialect as a result of greater contact with Hindus of the plains (Dube 1951:175).

Since the government has put a stop to the cutting of bewar, the self-sufficient settlements in the dense forests have become very precarious. Now the Kamar have begun settling on the fringes of Hindu villages on the edges of the forest tracts. Here they enter into service relationships with Hindu land owners. Some Kamar still practice slash and burn cultivation in the seclusion of the Mainpur hills bordering on the former Khariar Zamin-dari on the border of Orissa (Dube 1951:17). A few Kamar have already learned to cultivate rice and keep cattle, but the majority still move about in the forest and out onto the cultivated fields on the forest edge. They work occasionally for road gangs or for forest

contractors. Private contractors who get permission to cut timber or to gather Tendu leaves for the manufacture of cigarettes hire Kamar workers. The contractors bribe the police officials, and thus gain the right to control completely the wages they pay and the actions of the workers. The Kamar are helpless in the face of this kind of exploitation.

Government officials also pose a threat to the Kamar. In the first place they forbid the cutting of the forest for bevar. Violators are prosecuted. In the second place they demand free services, articles of food and baskets, as well as pelts of animals taken in the hunt. Frequently fees are also demanded of the hunters, even though this is not a legally demanded fee. The Kamar are excellent hunters, but this sort of interference has greatly discouraged the practice of hunting. Their annual ritual hunt is disappearing. The irritation caused by corrupt and incompetent officials is compounded by the unfortunate practice of the Indian government of punishing offending officials by sending them to administer remote tribal areas. In these remote areas they can practice their nefarious schemes in seclusion (Dube 1951:180-186).

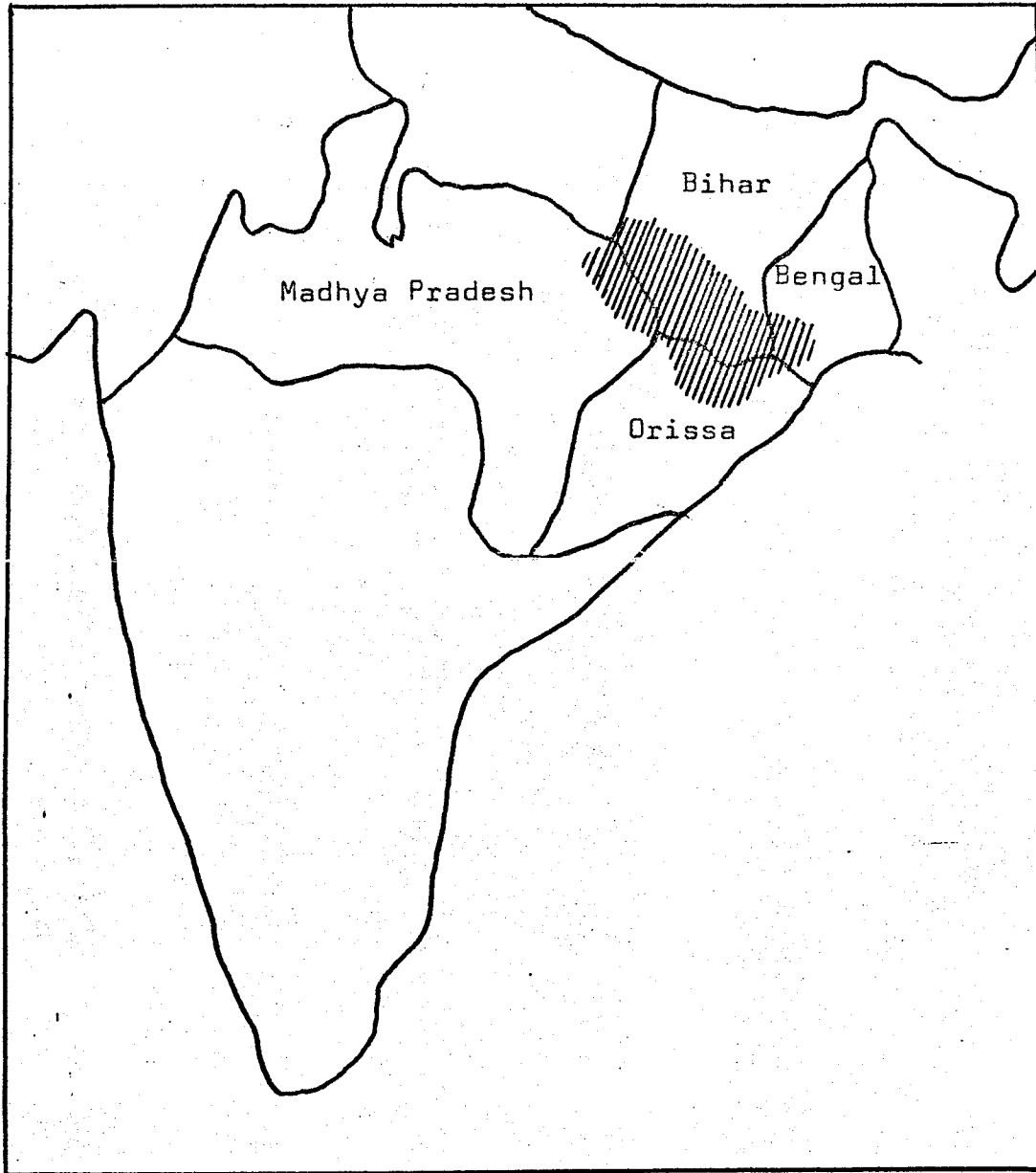
Another serious threat to the Kamar way of life is the establishment of schools and the new law requiring attendance at school for all children of school age. As

soon as Kamar children begin to go to school, they begin to lose their Kamar identity due to the influence of Hindu teachers and Hindu fellow students who despise the tribal way of life. At the time Dube did his study, there were still no schools in Kamar country. Since then thousands of schools have been established all over central India. (personal observation).

One other indication of Hindu influence upon the Kamar is the extremely serious view they take of cow slaughter. They are hunters who normally eat anything they kill - for this offense they demand that the culprit make a pilgrimage to Narsinghnath, a famous Hindu holy place for offenders against the sacred-cow taboo (Dube 1951:175).

The prospects for the retention of Kamar culture are dim indeed; one should perhaps say they are nil. Government authorities cannot permit widespread cutting of the forest for slash and burn horticulture. The demands for timber by society at large are too severe to permit the luxury of setting aside major forests for the use of the tribals. With their old subsistence base gone, they have no choice but to become integrated into Hindu society, at the level of menial workers. They have one skill, namely basket making, and some will doubtless become a Basket Maker caste as they are integrated into Hindu society.

FIGURE VI
OUTLINE MAP OF INDIA, SHOWING
LOCATION OF SANTAL TRIBE



The Santal

The Santal form one of the largest of the tribal groupings in central India, numbering over 3,000,000 people. They live in the Chotanagpur area of southern Bihar, western Bengal and northern Orissa. The Santal have been the subject of a number of studies, notably by S. C. Roy (1912), Paul Boddling (1942), W. Culshaw (1949), N. Datta-Majumder (1955), and most recently by Martin Orans (1965). K. Datta (1940) has written an account of the Santal rebellion of 1855.

The Santal are closely related to other Mundari tribes in this same geographical region. Some of the Mundari tribes have been so completely absorbed into the surrounding Hindu culture, as to be indistinguishable from caste Hindus except for name. The Bhumij are an example of a tribe having passed into Hinduism. A Bhumij land owner was listed in a census as belonging to a "wild tribe", the normal designation for non-Hindus; he took serious objection to this classification (Orans 1965:29). A Munda chieftain in Ranchi managed to establish himself as the local raja; then he invited Brahman priests to his court to Sanskritize his rituals and to manufacture a Kshatriya geneology for him (Orans 1965:30). He sought a high caste Hindu identity.

It is clear that Hindu-tribal contacts have been

intense and of long standing. Many have been heavily

influenced by Hindu culture, and some have been partially and others wholly absorbed in the Hindu social order and no doubt many Hindu castes have been so recruited in instances where the historical record is unknown." (Orans 1965:30)

The Santal speak a language known as Santali, which is a Munda group language along with Bhumij, Ho, Korwa, Korku, Juang, Sevara, and Gadba. P. W. Schmidt (quoted by Datta-Majumder 1956:33), includes this family of languages among the Austric, and hence among the oldest tongues in India. Datta-Majumder (1956:73) believes that it is impossible to determine the place of origin of the Santal. Their legends mention numerous place names, but one cannot be sure to which area these belong. Without a doubt, however, they have been forced to migrate due to population pressures more than once. It seems reasonable to suppose that they lived in the forests of the Gangetic plain until expansion of Hindu culture and Hindu people drove them farther east and somewhat south into the forests of Chotanagpur.

The Santal have a name for all foreigners, including Hindus: "Diku" or "Deko", which appears to derive from "dik dik karna" or "to trouble." The conception of foreign people as those who trouble the Santal is eloquent evidence regarding the relationships which have obtained between the

the Santal and the Hindus for many centuries.

At the end of the 18th century the Santal were living on the Chotanagpur plateau near Ranchi. Then population pressure forced many of them to migrate down into the dense forests of Singbhum in Bengal. They began clearing the land and settling down to regular plow cultivation. Datta-Majumder (1956:25 ff) describes the events that led up to the rebellion of 1855 from the beginning of Santal occupation of the forest lands around Singbhum. As the Santal cleared the land and began felling trees, it became obvious that the land was very productive. Hindu traders and money lenders saw the rich harvests of the Santal fields, and moved in to set up shop among them. Since the Santal had traditionally paid great attention to dancing and feasting, they frequently ran out of supplies before the next harvest arrived. They would then take loans and advances from the Hindu "Mahajans" (literally Great Ones), at interest rates up to 100%. The normal contract stipulated that the Santal borrower would work for the money lender for a daily ration of food until the debt was repaid. Since the Santal had to serve the Hindu, he could not work on his own land and was thus prevented from acquiring the money to repay his debt. One case was reported of a loan of \$10.00 which had caused three generations of men to work their whole lives without getting

out of debt. The Santals lost their freedom, their right to hunt and cultivate their own land, and their opportunity to observe Santal festivals and ritual. By 1855 they were so desperate that they began killing and pillaging the hated "Diku". Needless to say, the British army soon arrived to pacify the Santals.

Santal mythology is replete with stories of former days of independence and glory. They picture themselves as having been constituted as a powerful kingdom, with the various clans constituted on the Hindu caste model. It is clear that they seek a Hindu form of greatness. A favorite expression of theirs points to this same conclusion: they say "the Diku are great and knowing people." (Orans 1965:126). The implication is clear; the Santal can only become great and knowledgeable if they emulate the Hindus. The path to greater control over their own actions and over resources does not lie through rebellion against the Hindus, but must be sought by adapting to the dominant culture.

Hinduization has greatly increased since 1855. Some Santals have taken on the sacred thread and consider themselves superior to those who do not wear the thread. Many practices which they formerly followed, but which are despised by the Hindus, have been stopped. Some have begun calling themselves "Sat Santal" (True Santal), and

refuse to accept food even from Brahmans! Thus the Santal are caught in a struggle for their own identity. Some seek to become Hindus, while others resist Hinduization. The same individual may do both on different occasions; in either case, the frame of reference is Hindu.

Many Hindu traits have been taken on by the Santal according to Datta-Majumder (1956:109-122). Cow sacrifice and beef eating which played a very important part in their ritual have been abandoned. Low caste women are now called to attend at child-birth. Even such an integral item as their pleasure complex is no longer pure Santal; the drums they use are now purchased from Hindus. With the coming of widespread public education, the process of Hinduization will be speeded up. The Santal were formerly barred from Hindu schools, and Christian mission schools were available at only a few places, so that most Santals remained illiterate. Now they are required to attend school. In public schools minority values, ways of speech, dress, etc., are ridiculed, so that minority children come to be ashamed of their culture. Modernization in the form of the huge Tata Steel mill at Rourkela in the midst of Santal country will also speed up the destruction of Santal culture.

Orans thinks (1965:97) that Hinduization would have gone much farther and faster had not a counter trend set

in during the 1930s. The government of India began to prepare the country for popular elections, so began wooing the tribal groups for their votes. This produced a renewed sense of tribal solidarity and resulted in a political movement. This movement gave birth to the Jharkand Party which was dedicated to achieving a separate state in which tribals would have a majority. Even though this goal has not been achieved, yet the movement has greatly enhanced the self-image of the Santal. They are no longer completely at the mercy of the caste-Hindus; they have a voice in New Delhi.

Tribes Suffer Rank Concession

Anthropologists have begun to debate about culture and poverty (or culture of poverty, according to Oscar Lewis). They are asking: "What happens to people who are deprived of their normal means of earning a livelihood? What happens to people who are systematically denied the same rights and privileges accorded others in society? Verrier Elwin, the anthropologist who spent his life studying and defending the tribals of India, says they suffer from "loss of nerve" (Elwin 1943:12). He applied this phrase to the Baiga who have suffered domination by both Gonds and Hindus.

Orans talks about the Santal suffering from "rank

concession syndrome" (1965:123-146). He applies this term to any encysted society which is surrounded by a dominant culture against which it cannot fight and with which it cannot compete. Rank concession means acceptance of inferiority. Accepting one's inferiority results in judging oneself by the dominant society's standards. Because the dominant society has the standards by which to judge achievement and worth, conscious efforts at emulating the dominant society result. Counter forces which seek to maintain solidarity may outweigh factors making for emulation and slow down the attempts to bring life's rituals into line with the dominant culture.

The common Santal reference to Hindus as "great and knowing people" is powerful evidence that the Santal have conceded rank to the Hindus. Since the great and knowing people abhor cow slaughter, therefore cow slaughter has been stopped in the villages where Hindus reside, but it is still practiced in the remote jungle villages where only Santal eyes behold the ritual. Since the great and knowing people call in mid-wives to attend the birth of children, the Santal also call in Outcaste midwives. Since the great and knowing people celebrate a particular festival, the Santal must also celebrate the festival, even though they do not understand its significance. Since the great and knowing people frown upon

dancing and drinking liquor, therefore these traditional forms of pleasure are being suppressed.

Srinivas (1966:1-45) has popularized a concept which he calls "sanskritization". This is the process of bringing belief and ritual practice into line with Brahmanical tradition. Srinivas believes that this form of emulation of the high castes by the low, can lead to greater status. Orans is arguing cogently that emulation alone is a "destructive rank path", that it does harm rather than good unless it is accompanied by an increase in control over resources.

Another factor to be remembered in such a shift of culture, of bringing one's culture into line with a dominant culture, is the solidarity needs of the minority group. Emulation of others and solidarity needs are in conflict. If any movement, like the Jharkand Party among the Santals, can serve both emulation and solidarity needs, that movement will spread rapidly and gain strong support. In the case of the tribes which have completed the transformation into castes, they must satisfy their solidarity needs through intense caste (kinship) loyalty.

As tribes are transformed into castes, they do not automatically give up all of their culture traits. Karve (1959) believes that they retain a great many. A good example of the retention of older traits is the Hindu

pantheon containing many thousands of deities. These have been brought along by tribes as they became absorbed into Hinduism. In the Vedas, the worshippers of the god Shiva whose symbol is a phallus (male penis and scrotum), were despised as being barbarian and uncouth. Today Shiva is one of the most widely revered Hindu gods: his phallic symbol is found on the banks of every village pond. Spirit worship is a regular feature of animistic religion; yet there are still countless "bhuts" (spirits) living in the rocks and trees around Hindu villages causing terror to those who must go near the abode of the spirit for some reason or other, particularly at night.

Another evidence of rank concession among the tribals of India is the census report which appears every ten years. In 1931 40% of those claiming to be Santal by jat, listed themselves as Hindus by religion. 77% of the Bhil community claimed to be Hindu (Ghurye 1959:42). This same census lists 75,000 Kol tribals in U. P. as low caste Hindus. In M. P., it has been noticed that the tribals living near the Hindu settlements report their religion as being Hindu, while those of the same tribe living farther back in the forest, still refuse to be identified as Hindu. The forest tribes of Sarangarh were all listed as animists in the 1921 census, yet without exception they declared themselves Hindus in 1931 (Nag 1958:19).

Tribes can no longer exist as tribes in India. With population pressures continuing to mount, all available land is being brought under the plow. Forests are rapidly disappearing. The process that began in the Indus valley and spread down the Gangetic plain some 3,000 years ago is rapidly coming to a conclusion. All of the tribes, including the most primitive ones, now live in close contact and under the restraints of a central government. They can no longer practice their self-sufficient economy, so they are being forced to adapt in some way or other to the dominant Hindu society.

To use evolutionary terminology, the change from tribe to caste (or caste-type) is an adaptation to the cultural ecology which no longer leaves the tribal structures intact. Social survival for the tribes in India depends upon assuming a new caste identity, while maintaining the solidarity of a kinship grouping. In this manner they are integrated into the culture system that surrounds them.

CHAPTER IV

LOW CASTES BECOMING HIGHER CASTES

There is no sharp line of demarcation between tribal groups emerging as low castes, and low castes themselves, except the memory factor. Tribals have a living memory of an independent existence apart from caste society. Those groups within the caste structure commonly called Untouchable, Outcastes, Harijans or Scheduled Castes,¹ have no memory of having lived in any other way than as servants of the high castes. In matters of religious belief, food habits, marriage and family practices, they are an extremely heterogeneous grouping. They share one thing in common with each other: they stand in economic and ritual relationships with the high castes as servants to masters.

Self Improvement Through Sanskritization

The disabilities suffered by Harijans have been severe in traditional India. In some rural areas things

¹For purposes of this essay, these terms are deemed to be equivalent. "Outcaste" has been largely dropped due to the Anti-Untouchability law; hence "Harijan" has become the preferred term. "Harijan" may best be viewed as a caste-type, even though they are not all known by a common name. In fact, no caste has the name "Harijan". This grouping includes many caste-types like Washerman, Sweeper, Chamar, etc. To be strictly logical, one would have to call the Harijan grouping a "super caste-type". It is a cover term which lumps together those caste-types and castes sharing a similar social slot vis-a-vis high castes.

have changed very little to the present day. In other areas old ideas and taboos are being successfully broken. A traditional taboo against Harijan ownership of land has been set aside within the past century. Now it is merely economic disability which prevents Harijans from buying more land. The taboo against Harijans acquiring an education has also been broken. In fact, since independence in 1947, the government of India has offered special concessions to children of Harijan parents to induce them to go to school. The taboo against Harijans entering a high caste temple has been outlawed, even though the law is hardly enforceable. The practice of landowners forcing Harijans to work for them for periods of time without pay (called "begar"), has been stopped. The practice of lending money at exorbitant rates of interest is still a common occurrence, and since most Harijans are illiterate, falsification of accounts to the advantage of the lender is also common.

Social distance is still maintained in countless subtle and not so subtle ways. The very fact that Harijans are considered not only polluted, but as polluting, is powerful evidence of social distance maintained by the high castes. If a Harijan touches the cooking pot of a high caste person, the pot must be destroyed, or at least ritually cleansed if made of brass and thus too valuable

to discard. A Harijan must sit on the ground while in the presence of a high caste man sitting on a chair. On the path, Harijans must make way for high caste men.

Stephen Fuchs tells of two incidents which clearly illustrate the fear of pollution by the touch of someone lower in the caste hierarchy. In the first incident some Balahis (Harijans) met a dying woman lying helpless on the road-side. When asked if they had helped her, they replied: "How could we offer her even a cup of water? She was not of our caste, and would have refused any help from us." (Fuchs 1951:59). In the second incident, an Outcaste aboriginal Korku, who had been doing the work of a Sweeper, died. Since he was the only member of his caste in the village, no one would touch the corpse except his wife. The Balahis considered themselves to be purer than the Korku, and they too refused help beyond driving a cart up to the door of the hut. The widow had to use a beam to raise the corpse onto the cart, then had to drive the cart out to the burial ground, drag her husband's body off the cart and to the edge of the hole, roll it into the grave and cover it with mud and rocks. "Tears were streaming down her face and heavy sobs heaved her chest during this sad performance, while the Balahis looked without lifting a hand. They would have been outcasted, had they even touched the body." (Fuchs 1951:59).

Further evidence for the fact of social disability is so widely available that I deem it sufficient to draw attention to this fact rather than proceed with documentation.¹

Economic disability cannot be separated from social disability. Cohn (in McKim Marriott 1955:70-75) tells of the methods used by the high castes to break the spirit of rebellion which the local Chamars exhibited. In 1938 a quarrel had developed between the Thakurs and Noniyas. The Chamar group, for reasons of self-interest, sided with the Noniyas against their employers, the land-owning Thakurs. The Thakurs were the most powerful group in the village. They were upset by this show of defiance by their Chamars. To punish them for insubordination, a gang of Thakurs went to the fields of the Chamars, drove off their cattle and beat the Chamar men. Then they went to the Chamar hamlet on the outskirts of the village, ripped down the thatch from the roofs of a number of houses. The Chamars lodged a complaint in the district courts; but did not have the economic strength to hire proper lawyers nor to bribe the court officials. The Thakurs did both. They managed to have the case postponed until further

¹For a discussion of Harijan-high caste relationships see: Fuchs (1951), Isaacs (1964), Mohinder Singh (1947), Cohn, in McKim Marriott (1960), and M. Srinivas and A. Beteille in Scientific American (Dec. 1965, Vol.213).

investigation could be conducted. This investigation was deliberately delayed and had not been completed six months later. In the meantime, the Chamars were forbidden the use of the plots of land under dispute, and so they lost an entire crop. By this time they were in such dire straits since they had neither crops nor work, that they sued for peace by dropping the complaint against the Thakurs. Only then could they return to their old servant relationships.

Even Cox, who argues that the cement holding caste society together is consensus, admits that "breaches of caste etiquette are liable to be followed by terrible punishment." (1959:24). Srinivas and Beteille also make the point that Harijans are economically depressed:

"In times gone by the Harijans were literally serfs of the dominant castes and rulers of the villages to this day very few Harijans own any land, and those who do farm their own land have holdings so small that their condition is hardly better than that of agricultural laborers." (1965:13).

Having indicated some of the economic and social disabilities Harijans have to endure, we return to the question of consensus versus conflict. Leach, Cox, et al. believe that even those castes at the bottom of the ranking scale are content to stay there, if not actually jealous of their rights and prerogatives. I am arguing that Berreman and Orans have a far stronger case when they point to the tension and conflict between castes.

Harijans do not enjoy their outcaste status. They want to rise in the ranking system, but the means of doing so are very limited. If Harijans traditionally faced discrimination and disability with a docile attitude, then one can only assume that this mind-set has been produced by centuries of suppression. Orans says that as tribals lose control of their land they undergo psychological trauma which he calls "rank concession syndrome". I am suggesting that this same condition, when perpetuated for some centuries, produces the apathetic, fatalistic attitude which the Harijans display. They have learned that any show of defiance against the high castes brings swift and terrible retribution (the myth of Hindu tolerance notwithstanding). They have learned the futility of open conflict, hence docility must be seen as an adaptive response to their particular situation.

Ritual Reformation

Evidence for a deep-seated dissatisfaction with their position in society lies in their efforts at self-improvement, in claims to higher status and efforts to bolster those claims, and in renunciation of old caste identity by adopting new names.

The most common method employed by the Harijans to try to raise themselves in the esteem of their high caste neighbors is emulation of high caste names and rituals.

Efforts to bring rituals into line with Brahmanical tradition are called "sanskritization". These efforts are both encouraged and discouraged by the high castes. High castes do not object to an outcaste group giving up abhorrent traits like carrion eating, since this accords with Brahmanical faith and does not affect economic or social relationships. Many polluting practices are not easily given up, however, since many Harijans depend upon such defiling occupations for a livelihood. A Washerman is defiled every time he washes the village laundry. A Chamar is defiled every time he skins a dead cow. If he gives up beef eating, he will be commended. If he tries to don the sacred thread of the "twice born" he will be beaten; to permit a cleaner-up-of-filth to adopt the symbol of ritual purity would create all kinds of confusion and mischief in the society and can not be tolerated. Confusion about roles and statuses is carefully avoided by assigning particular tasks to particular castes, and by assigning appropriate rank to these castes.

One of the easiest items on the list of traits to sanskritize, is a Harijan's name. Hutton remarks upon the frequency with which this occurs:

"Each census used to produce a decennial crop of 'Vishvakarma Brahmans' (artisans), 'Gahlot Rajputs' (Chamars), 'Nai Brahmans' (barbers), and so forth a number of such castes claimed to some special sort of Kshatriya or Vaishya at the the 1921 census claimed to be somepeculiar sort of Brahman in 1931." (Hutton 1946:112).

In the Chhatisgarh region alone live some 500,000 former Chamars who have changed their caste name to "Satnami", and another 30,000 who have become "Ramramiya". Traditional Chamar traits are being suppressed. The sacrifice of a pig at a Chamar wedding has virtually disappeared. Widow remarriage is on the wane.

Ritual reformation and name change make very little difference in the status accorded a person or group making the attempt, since these changes do not readily convert into economic gains. Without economic gains to reinforce ritual change and claim to higher status, little of lasting value can be achieved. This is well illustrated in the rather humorous story told by Andre Beteille of a mason who migrated to a village some distance from his home. He claimed higher caste membership than his true caste, and carefully observed all of the ritual of his assumed caste. He was accepted for what he claimed to be, until an acquaintance from his home village revealed the secret. "Needless to say, he was beaten by the non-Brahmans and had to flee the village leaving most of his belongings." (Beteille 1965:81).

Numerous reform movements have attempted to attack the inequalities and disadvantages of outcaste status. Most of these reform movements seek to impart a religious and philosophical sophistication to the Harijans. Cohn

tells of the Siva Narayan sect, a religious reform movement among the Chamars in U. P. At one of their meetings a Chamar student from Benares Hindu University "urged the Chamars to give up all connection with working in leather because it was this degrading occupation that was responsible for their low status." (Cohn 1959:214). It is one thing to advocate giving up a defiling occupation, but quite another to find another option in the rural sections of India which still operate in a pre-industrial economy. Sanskritization is an attempt to rise within the caste system - it does not question the rightness of the system. It declares that one's own caste (or caste-type) has not been given the status it deserves.

A group which is intent upon sanskritization demands rights which have been denied, but does not necessarily want to share these benefits with other low caste groups. Stephen Fuchs reports such a case, in which Balahis fought to gain the right to use a certain well in the village. When the court ordered the village to permit all Harijan groups to use the well, the Balahis were aghast, since this meant that Mehatars would now be free to use the well. Since Balahis consider themselves above the Mehatars, they could not consent to have them use the same well as they did (Fuchs 1951:60).

Economic Power and its Effects

Ritual reformation alone does little to enhance status. Political or economic gain, when accompanied by ritual reformation may lead to success. In Marriott's Kishan Garhi village, the former Outcastes who had achieved a measure of economic success, were actively striving to translate this into ritual gain. Another Harijan group which has been very successful in translating economic power into ritual gain is the Boad Distiller caste of Bisipara in Orissa. Bailey (1957:211-227) describes how this group gained windfall profits from distilling liquor in the late 19th century due to a change in administration policy. The wealth they gained was then used to buy land in the village, where formerly only Kshatriyas owned land. Having become men of property, their advice and cooperation was actively sought in village affairs. Thus political power accompanied economic power, and soon they began to translate these forms of power into ritual gain. They followed the normal route of sanskritization, including avoidance of other Distiller castes with whom they had been on intimate relationships before. The next step in the process was the "discovery" of a long-lost high caste ancestor who had been cheated out of his rightful status by certain unscrupulous persons. The Boad Distillers were polluted Harijans, now they are accorded clean caste

status. The process has taken several generations to complete, but it shows clearly that a caste can cross the pollution barrier and emerge as a new, clean caste.

Bailey indicates that the doors to new economic opportunity were opened by the coming of the administration (the British) in 1855. (At least this is the date for the village of Bisipara). The British produced some profound changes on the subcontinent. Before the coming of the British, land was conceived as being the property of the raja (ie. the state). The raja had the right to grant tracts of land for revenue purposes to his henchmen, his relatives and his priests. India has traditionally been subject to more fighting and military fortunes rising and falling than is normally thought. The Western conception of the Hindu people being so non-violent that they would not hurt a flea has led many to think that battles and bloodshed were unknown until the British introduced these violent forms of social control. Before the coming of the British, rise and fall in status depended very much upon the military fortunes of one's friends and relatives.

The British also introduced the concept of land being a marketable commodity. Marketability of land very effectively broke the monopoly on land ownership by the high castes. From 1855 onward, if a Harijan could accum-

ulate enough resources, he could buy land as it came on the market.

The British also began the process which Marion Levy calls "modernization" (Levy 1966, vol I). They created a greatly increased demand for clerks and account keepers. Even Harijans were eligible for these non-traditional occupations, provided they could compete on the level of education. This meant for the educated Harijan that he was no longer dependent upon the land owner for a source of livelihood. He could now accumulate surpluses over which the land owners had no control, and which had not been possible while working as an agrestic serf.

Education and its Effects

If the statement by Srinivas (1965:13) is accurate, that very few Harijans own enough land to be classed as land owners earning a livelihood from the land they own and till, then it becomes fairly obvious that the path to higher control of resources and of status must lie through education. Only by becoming educated can the Harijans earn enough capital to acquire land or to compete for lucrative, highly esteemed positions within a modernizing state. Since relatively few such posts exist in the rural areas, it is to be expected that most people from the rural areas who acquire an education will migrate to the

cities where job opportunities are greater.

Several writers, including Srinivas (1962:18) and Isaacs (1964:163), have emphasized the importance of education in the efforts at improving the lot of the Harijans. Isaacs reported in 1964 that only 10% of the Harijans had been touched by education (1964:163). This figure will doubtless be higher by now, but the magnitude of the problem is clear. Srinivas and Beteille (1965:17) say that in 1963, of the 12.5% Class I government posts allotted to Harijans, only 1.3% could be filled by qualified candidates. They also fell short in Class II and Class III posts, but predominated in the sweeping and cleaning categories. These writers also list 10% as the literacy rate for Harijans, while the other castes had a combined figure of 22%. Because high castes had a tradition of literacy, they became the officers, lawyers, teachers and administrators in business and in government at the time of the withdrawal of the British in 1947. A few Harijans have achieved national prominence: Dr. B. Ambedkar, who is now dead, and Dr. Jagjiwan Ram, presently food minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. These men, and others like them, have achieved economic and political power through education, and in spite of caste background rather than because of it.

Summary

Sanskritization by itself does not achieve higher status. Economic/political power accompanied by sanskritization does offer hope for improved status. For most Harijans, the route to improved economic and ritual status lies through education and better positions which education provides.

If a segment of a caste gains greater economic power than the others of that social level, then one can expect social disorganization within that grouping, since the wealthier ones will sanskritize their ritual and sever social ties with their poorer cousins.

The achievement of higher status may be almost instantaneous for an individual who achieves an honored occupation in an area where he personally is not known. For a group to achieve a recognized higher status tends to take several generations.

Change of Religion

Sanskritization has been described as an effort to emulate high caste Hindu ritual; in other words to become more Hindu. Another option which exists for the suppressed group of castes is to reject the whole hierarchical frame of reference. This amounts to a refusal to compete for status in terms of Hindu ritual. This option says: "Since I have not received a fair share of the privileges, and can not expect to gain any, under the Hindu system, I therefore will no longer try to compete on those terms. The Hindus have stacked the cards against me, so I will no longer play the Hindu game."

Those who reject the competition for status, however, must still continue to live in a society dominated by Hindu religion and by caste organization. They must establish social relationships, political loyalties, and economic ties. They must find their place in that society. Those who try to opt out of the caste system cannot really succeed: in the end they will become another new sort of caste.

Since it is Hindu religion which has given sanction to the grossly unequal statuses and opportunities for acquisition of wealth and power, it appears that there is no way of rejecting the competition for status other than by changing one's religion. This is so because having or

not having a religion is not an option. Every man belongs to some group or other, and every group has its religion. Being a Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or Christian is an option, since a man can change his group membership if he chooses, and if the new group is willing to accept him. Several major groups have converted to another religion, beginning with the Sikh reform movement that began some 4 centuries ago. Since then there have been changes of religion for new Buddhists and for Christians. Many Muslims converted even earlier, but whether they did so under compulsion of the Islamic sword or by choice I do not know. One man who converted to Islam within this generation has left us a moving account of his struggles as an Outcaste in India before and during World War II (Hazari 1969).

Although I have not studied the Sikh community, it is my impression that it was primarily a movement among the lowest castes in the Panjab region at the time of its origin.¹ Now the Sikhs form one of the most progressive elements in Indian society. They have high literacy rates, are economically well-off, and have developed entrepreneurial skills. In terms of industry, and progressive agri-

¹That Sikhism is a reform movement is clear, for it rejected several major items of Hindu faith like polytheism and caste organization of society. I cannot conceive of such a movement taking root among high castes which had much to lose and little to gain from reform.

culture, the Panjab area where the highest concentration of Sikhs live, is noted throughout India. Wherever Sikhs travel or settle in India, they demand deference and are accorded deference by the rest of the population. They refuse to admit that they are a caste within the caste system; yet they have achieved and are accorded Kshatriya status. The process of Sikh emergence as a new sort of high caste has covered several centuries of time.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, one of the most famous converts to Buddhism, grew up an untouchable Mahar. When Gandhi began leading the political movement for "swaraj" (self-government for India), Ambedkar refused to join the crusade. He wanted freedom from oppression for the Untouchables before he was willing to make common cause with the high castes against the British. As early as 1936 Dr. Ambedkar was publically urging his followers to convert to another religion. He said: "The religion that compels the ignorant to be ignorant and the poor to be poor is not religion but a visitation." (Isaacs 1964:169). It was nearly 20 years later that Ambedkar led many (estimates range up to 2½ million) to renounce Hinduism and to embrace Buddhism. Those who converted insist upon being called Buddhists, not Mahars. They refuse to acknowledge their old low caste status and worth. This helps to bring about a reversal of rank concession syndrome. One Buddhist stated: "When

I became a Buddhist in 1957 it changed my whole way of thinking, It made me feel I must go out and compete, that my children must get the best kind of education and enter into competition with all the general classes of the society." (Isaacs 1964:173). This sentiment indicates a keen desire to compete in terms of economic activity and a refusal to compete in terms of Hindu ritual. Those who Sanskritize their ritual do the opposite.

A group of Chamars (some 30,000) in Raipur district became Ramramiyas about one generation ago. The name means those who are identified as "Ram Rams". Ram is one of the major Hindu deities. The Ramramiyas use the name "Ram" in greeting one another instead of the more common "salam" or "namaste". They print the word "Ram" all over their clothing and tattoo it all over their bodies. Chamars are traditionally rather lax in their Hindu devotional practices but the Ramramiyas are trying to out-Hindu the Hindus. Their conversion to a new form of Hinduism has not resulted in any marked increase in status, but it has made a sharp break with their old caste fellows from whom they separated.

The pressure for conversion to another religion lies in the desire of the Harijans to escape the stigma of untouchability. This can only be accomplished by becoming something different - a change of religion is one of the most efficient ways to achieve a new identity.

Christianity

In order to assess the effects of conversion to another religion, I will first present a general picture of Christianity in India, then proceed to document the effects of conversion in terms of education and occupation of a particular Christian community.

Christianity came to India very early. The Christians of south India, known as Mar Thoma or Syrian Christians, insist that the apostle Thomas himself came to India in the first century AD. The converts of those early years soon became a caste group, and multiplied by biological reproduction from that time on. After Vasco da Gama sailed around the southern tip of Africa to India in the late 15th century, European missionaries began arriving in India, though in very limited numbers. Christian missionaries began arriving in larger numbers by the middle of the 19th century. Their numbers have never exceeded much beyond 10,000 at any one time, and are considerably less at the present time. Christians in India number slightly above 3% of the total population. The majority of the converts of the past century have come from untouchable groups or from tribal groups which were disintegrating socially. Even Verrier Elwin, that great champion of the tribal cause, concedes: "It is a curious fact that it is Hinduization that has generally proved a preparation for the Gospel,

for it is mainly those tribes that have lost their tribal solidarity in face of Hindu infiltration that have become Christian in any large numbers." (Elwin 1943:14). The bulk of those who embraced Christianity did so, not on individual decision, but as groups. The Swedish church historian, Bengt Sundkler estimates that between 80 and 90% of the converts to Christianity came in groups out of Dravidian stock in south India, or out of hill peoples in the north (Sundkler 1963:242).

Christianity has clearly had a strong appeal to Harijans and to tribals whose solidarity had already been broken, which it did not have for high caste Hindus. The first appeal is doubtless the matter of intrinsic worth. High castes have always held the untouchable groups to be defiled and have despised them for it. They have taught the untouchables that the gods are angry with them and are punishing them for despicable acts they have committed in a previous existence. Harijan unworthiness has been demonstrated from times immemorial in the daily interactions in the village by the rules of social distance. Then Christian missionaries came preaching a God who loves people, including Harijans. The missionary demonstrated his acceptance of the Harijan as a social equal by entering his home, by touching him, and by eating with him. Missionaries taught that a man's worth is not determined