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CASTE AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

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CHAPTER-1

THEORIES OF CASTE IN INDIA

European Perception of Caste.

It is not that other British commentators were entirely unimpressed by the salience of caste or its significance for a whole series of civilizational diagnoses. Late 18th and early 19th century British writings on India, however, tended to say relatively little about caste and to be formulaic at best, long after Alexander Dow. Most British writing on India in the 18th century concerned military matters, and reflected a painstaking and painful history of conquest, negotiation, alliance, deception, and warfare. The great hero of the century was Clive, whose military successes in Bengal and Madras had established the basis for Company control over vast sections of India’s most fertile lands. But even after the successes of Plassey and Arcot, the history of colonial conquest was highly fraught. The Mysore rulers Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan had to be engaged four times before their final defeat in 1799, before which many commentators noted the possibility of a very different political future for the subcontinent. And the Marathas were a potent force until the military and diplomatic successes of the British in 1818. In writings about warfare and military and political intrigue, and in basic concerns about conquest and control, caste figured as of little significance. The belief that the British, like the Mughals and the Sultanates before them had merely walked into India, facing only minimal resistance because of caste divisions, could hardly have been generated, let alone sustained, at times of open and regular military engagement.

Even when they were no longer explicitly engaged with matters of conquest, the British were concerned about land revenue and the growing need to provide regular income from agriculture to supplement the mercantile profits of international trade; this also mitigated a preoccupation with caste in favor of the village. Thomas Munro, Mark Wilks, and Charles Metcalfe all wrote eloquently about the importance of the village community. Metcalfe’s words are perhaps the most quoted: “The village communities are little republics, having nearly every thing they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations....Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution; .... But the village community remains the same”. Thomas Munro, the architect of the Madras ryotwari settlement (which, unlike Cornwallis’s zamindari settlement in Bengal, was made with individual cultivators), wrote in a report from Anantapur of 15th May, 1806, that “Every village, with its twelve Ayangadees as they are called, is a kind of little republic, with the Potail at the head of it; and India is a mass of such republics. The inhabitants, during war, look chiefly to their own Potail. They give themselves
no trouble about the breaking up and division of kingdoms, while the village
remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred; wherever it goes
the internal management remains unaltered; the Potail is still the collector and
magistrate, and head farmer. From the age of Menu until this day the
settlements have been made with or through the Potaile”. The 5th Report of
1812 quoted Munro liberally in an endorsement of the view that village
government had been in place “from time immemorial”, though it also reflects
the debate over land tenure in Madras as to whether individual cultivators or
the headman of the village should be the agent of revenue settlement, about
which much more in a later chapter. Charles Metcalfe and Mountstuart
Elphinstone elaborated the idea in relation to the abiding belief in the
evanescent but extractive presence of Oriental despotisms. Elphinstone wrote
that “These communities contain in miniature all the materials of a State
within themselves, and are almost sufficient to protect their members, if all
governments are withdrawn”, and Metcalfe elaborated his comment quoted
above by nothing that the village communities have “nearly everything that
they want within themselves, and [are] almost independent of any foreign
relations”.

The focus on the village was part of the early colonial preoccupation
with questions of property, landholding, and revenue collection. In late
eighteenth century Bengal, the views of John Shore, Philip Francis, and
Charles Cornwallis had all led, after extensive debate, to a permanent
settlement with zamindars, or landlords. This led to a massive reorganization of
local power meant simultaneously to coopt the chiefs and magnates of late
Mughal rule and install a loyal and landed aristocracy to serve a physiocratic
vision for a new India. But as the immediate concerns of conquest gave way to
the need for more revenue, Thomas Munro and others made their political
careers by arguing for a completely different organization of revenue collection
in the countryside. The colonial concern to know India began with the desire
to understand local forms of landholding and agrarian management, and
voluminous statistics and narratives both reflected this concern and fueled
continuous arguments about the best ways to rule India and collect
revenue. Suspicion of local magnates turned into a paternalist romanticism
around the figure of the rural yeoman, and thus the colonial interest in local
history and social organization crystallized first around images of gentry
landlords, village republics, and sturdy yeomen. There were many different
views, but virtually all colonial commentators were impressed by the integrity,
and relative autonomy, of the village.

Although by far the greatest number of early colonial records
concerned questions of revenue and property, the Company, and numerous
Company servants, were interested in discovering a more broadly based
context in which to situate polemical debates over property, rent, and agrarian
structure. Colin Mackenzie, who played a particularly important role in the
rescuing of south India’s precolonial history (and he will play an important role
in the story ahead), tried to distance himself from revenue debates, and committed himself to the collection of local texts while he engaged in his cartographic and surveying activities in the subcontinent between 1784 and his death in 1821. Significantly for our story here, he encountered very little concerning “caste” in his vast collection of local texts, traditions, and histories, nor did he comment frequently about it. In Mackenzie’s initial project of collecting representative texts, histories of places (particularly temples) and political families (and lineages) predominated. The south Indian landscape that he traversed was dotted with temples that served as convenient reference points for trigonometrical surveying and general route maps, due to the tall gopuram towers built over the gateways into temple structures that often served as centers for marketing and defense in addition to worship. Every temple had a history that inscribed the significance of its deity and the ground of the deities’ worship with a special past of miracle and power. The south Indian landscape had also been controlled by myriad little kingdoms, ranging widely in size, each with a family history for the chief or king. Thus the set of local tracts collected by Mackenzie contain literally hundreds of accounts of one lineage headman after another who managed to become a little king through a combination of strategies and successes. Frequently, of course, these stories were told as bids to become recognized as zamindars, if not as arguments per se for a zamindari-like settlement in the south.

Mackenzie’s preoccupation with local chiefs and kings was in part the result of his clear recognition of the political landscape of late precolonial peninsular India; it was also in part a reflection of the more general recognition – both military and economic – of the need to understand the native aristocracy, its immediate past, and its claims to local authority. When Mackenzie began his survey of Mysore after the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799, the general assumption among most East India Company officials was that a revenue settlement with the local lords or zamindars, along the lines of the 1793 Permanent Settlement in Bengal, would be the most suitable form of local governance and revenue collection for Madras presidency. Thus Mackenzie’s archival concern with the political history of the Deccan made a great deal of sense for early colonial administration because of its emphasis on the pasts and pedigrees of the potential landlords of a zamindari revenue settlement. As the consensus around the need for a ryotwari settlement grew, interest among many of Mackenzie’s old friends in the results of his labors diminished.

There were some general texts about castes, as also some curious lists of caste groups that resembled Borges’s Chinese encyclopedia more than later ethnographic surveys. But there were only a few specific caste histories. Those that did exist seemed to uncertain textual genre, hastily put together from the chance concerns and remarks of local subcaste headmen. Although Mackenzie occasionally mentioned the need to collect texts with information about caste, we found systematic material about caste only in his statistical and cartographic collections, as also in some of his drawings.
the statistical tables called caneeshamari, “the population of the districts by castes, families, and villages” was carefully counted and presented by local public officials. Some of these tables were transcribed on his actual maps of Mysore and the Ceded Districts. Here, the compilations of population data under caste headings seemed to have the same indexical function for the map as the delineations of field types and irrigation sources. These lists were highly particularistic and idiosyncratic. Though Brahmans were usually at the head, the lists were neither highly formalized nor easy to compare across districts or regions.

Only when we turned to Mackenzie’s drawings did it seem that we had finally found caste. One of Mackenzie’s largest portfolios has eighty-two drawings depicting different groups in the northern Deccan drawn during the early years of the 19th century, labeled as drawings of “costume”. Costume was the key sign and objective focus of ethnographic difference. This emphasis on costume was in part a reflection of the fact that clothes in India (as in England) were important markers of hierarchy and difference. It was surely also because of the lack of any clear sense of what a pictorial survey of the castes and tribes would be like, as well as, perhaps, because of the influence of the cult of the picturesque, which was preoccupied with the colorful and exotic aspects of the Indian social order. The castes and groups that found their way into Mackenzie’s portfolio reveal a very particular ethnographic sensibility. There were portraits of the ancient kings of Vijayanagara, royal Darbar scenes, court servants and soldiers, and of court officials. Both in the absence of any kind of systematic and autonomous sense of a “caste system” and in the concentration of attention on characters who reflected the political landscape of the 18th century Deccan – the same characters who figured in most of Mackenzie’s local texts – we can see major differences between Mackenzie’s vision of India’s ethnography and the ethnography that became canonized in the late 19th century.

Despite Mackenzie’s years of collecting historical materials, he never prepared a historical synthesis of his own, let a catalogue of his collection. And the great Orientalists – Sir William Jones, Nathaniel Halhed, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, and so on – never actually wrote histories or systematic accounts of India, either. The first such history was written instead by James Mill, a Benthamite journalist who secured lifetime employment with the East India Company soon after publishing his magisterial, and voluminous, history of British India in 1817. In the House of Commons, Thomas Macaulay declared it to be the greatest work to appear in English since Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Mill’s text, unsurpassed as a general British history and as a canonic text for the training of East India Company servants – for the rest of the century, was in part an argument for Utilitarian principles, in part a challenge to Orientalists such as Sir William Jones. As suggested by Javed Majeed, it “shaped a theoretical basis for the liberal programme to emancipate India from its own culture.” An attack on Orientalist knowledge in several
senses, it held praise of India’s civilizational greatness, even if lodged firmly in
the past, accountable for blocking serious attention to the need for progress
and modernization. Mill had written earlier about the problems of “Oriental
rhetoric on the riches of India”, criticizing Sir William Jones’s susceptibility to
the “idea of Eastern wonders”, by which he meant wonders both cultural and
economic. Throughout his history, Mill systematically debunked the claims of
Orientalist scholars that there was anything of merit in India’s past: “Rude
nations seem to derive a peculiar gratification from pretensions to a remote
antiquity. As a boastful and turgid vanity distinguishes remarkably the oriental
nations they have in most instances carried their claims extravagantly high”. Mill cautioned his reader that “the legendary tales of the Hindus have
hitherto, among European inquirers, been regarded with particular respect”,
but “because, without a knowledge of them, much of what has been written in
Europe concerning the people of India cannot be understood”, he proceeds
reluctantly to relate the mythological origins of Indian civilization. He made
clear, however, his contempt for India’s early cultural heritage, and for its
government and law in particular. As a further claim for his own authority
against that of the Orientalists, he argued in his preface that his lack of
knowledge of any Indian language was no disadvantage in his quest, and that
his lack of firsthand experience of India – he never journeyed there – rendered
his capacity to evaluate the myriad writings on and testimonies of India with
the dispassionate objectivity necessary for an adequate historical account.

Mill argued his case polemically, for he was concerned that if the
British nation, and government, “conceived the Hindus to be a people of high
civilization, while they have in reality made but a few of the earliest steps in the
progress to civilization, it is impossible that in many of the measures pursued
for the government of that people, the mark aimed at should not have been
wrong”. And he was clear who the culprit for this misconception had been: “It
was unfortunate that a mind so pure, so warm in the pursuit of truth, and so
devoted to oriental learning, as that of Sir William Jones, should have adopted
the hypothesis of a high state of civilization in the principal countries of
Asia”. The claim of civilization had weighty consequence, then as now. Had this
been mere scholasticism, Mill’s alarm would have been less severe, but as “Sir
William was actuated by the virtuous design of exalting the Hindus in the eyes
of their European masters; and thence ameliorating the temper of the
government”, Mill was clear that he was attacking both a general cast of mind
and a set of governmental policies. In particular, as a good Utilitarian, Mill was
concerned about Jones’s influence on legal policy, for the Company had sought
to disrupt legal precedent as little as possible in the matter of personal law. But
Mill was also concerned about the Company’s general commitment to the
maintenance of the status quo wherever possible, whether in matters of local
government, or social policy: “We have already seen, in reviewing the Hindu
form of government, that despotism, in one of the simplest and least artificial
shapes, was established in Hinduism, and confirmed by laws of Divine
authority. We have seen likewise, that by the division of the people into castes,
and the prejudices which the detestable views of the Brahmans raised to separate them, a degrading and pernicious system of subordination was established among the Hindus, and that the vices of such a system were there carried to a more destructive height than among any other people. In keeping with this general position, the “Anglicists” – of whom Thomas B. Macaulay, who had authored condemnations of Indian literature and learning in defense of his advocacy of the expansion of English education, was the other prime example – would have the Company overturn as much as possible of the weight of the past in order to prepare the way for new modernizing policies and institutions.

Mill’s (and Macaulay’s) critiques of Indian society were very like, in tone and content, those of the missionary Charles Grant, despite the marked political differences between the two camps of Utilitarians and Evangelicals. As early as 1796, Grant had written his “Observations on the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain”, to make his case against prevailing Orientalist policies of respect for Indian custom, religion, and law that had been promulgated by Warren Hastings. He began his diatribe by asking, “Are we bound for ever to preserve all the enormities in the Hindoo system? Have we become the guardians of every monstrous principle and practice which it contains?” Like Mill, Grant believed that “the true cure of darkness is the introduction of light. The Hindoos err because they are ignorant; and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them, would prove the best remedy for their disorders”. Although Grant’s conviction was that Anglicization and Christianization would bring in this light, Mill was concerned with a more general notion of modernization, one that critiqued even some aspects of English institutions. Both held, however, that the religion of the Hindu was an abomination, and believed Brahmans and Brahmanism to be responsible for social depravity. Mill wrote that “by a system of priestcraft, built upon the most enormous and tormenting superstition that ever harassed and degraded any portion of mankind, their minds were enchained more intolerably than their bodies; in short that, despotism and priestcraft taken together, the Hindus, in mind and body, were the most enslaved portion of the human race”. Mill’s view of caste followed, accordingly, as a prime example of an Indian institution predicated on priestcraft and adapted to despotism.

Mill’s idea of caste, however, was entirely textualist. Despite his virulent critique of the Orientalists, on the subject of caste he completely conceded their authority, though he maintained a missionary-like disdain for the institution. Like most colonial commentators in the early 19th century, Mill’s view of caste derived from Jones’s 1794 published translation of The Laws of Manu (Manu Dharma Sastras). Jones achieved his early reputation from his prodigious accomplishments in Oriental literatures and languages, and eventually proposed, on the basis of his linguistic studies, the historical kinship of Sanskrit and European languages. Jones went to India as a jurist, and among his many other achievements played a critical role in the
translation, explication, and advocacy of classical canons of Indian law. His translation of Manu was the last of his legal contributions, as he died shortly after its publication, but the text became important for reasons well beyond its place in the delineation of personal law. Manu concerned such topics as the social obligations and duties of the various castes (varna) as well as of individuals at different stages of life (asrama), the proper forms of kingship, the nature of social and sexual relations between men and women of different castes, ritual practices of many kinds but mostly those connected with life-cycle transitions and domestic affairs, as well as procedures for the adjudication of different kinds of everyday quarrels and disputes. The text is about dharma, which means duty as well as law, religion as well as practice. According to Wendy Doniger and Bardwell Smith, “By the early centuries of the Common Era, Manu had become, and remained, the standard source of authority in the orthodox tradition for that centrepiece of Hinduism, varnasrama-dharma (social and religious duties tied to class and stage of life).” The text was the subject of nine separate commentaries, which suggests its importance over the years. Sanskritists have debated the significance of the text for actual legal practice, and it reads more like a synthetic compilation that a code of law. Whatever its historical status, however, most scholars today agree that it took on unprecedented status as an “applied” legal document only under early British rule. We would argue further that the canonic importance of this text for understanding the foundational nature of Indian society was an even more significant break with the past; it encapsulated British attempts to codify not just law but also social relations in a single, orthodox “Hindu” – and therefore necessarily “Brahmanic” – register. From Jones and Mill to Dumont and Marriott, Manu has taken on a general anthropological significance it could never have had before, with enormous consequences for the refashioning of basic assumptions about both religion and society.

The Manu text was self-evidently the compilation of Brahman scholars; it could hardly have been otherwise. But the canonization of the text in colonial thought has both rendered caste by definition Brahmanic and opened the “Hindu” social world to charges of the kind made by both Grant and Mill, namely, that caste society was under the exclusive domination of Brahmans who reserved for themselves not only pride of place in the caste hierarchy but such perquisites as the right to receive rather than give gifts and general exemptions from corporal punishment even if found guilty of serious crimes. Along with a text from the Rg Veda that gives a canonical origin story for the caste system (the Brahman being born from the head of Purusa, the Kshatriya from the arm, the Vaisya from the thigh, and the Sudra from the feet), the Manu text has been trotted out for the last 200 years as the classical statement of the caste system. It provides both an originary account of the four varnas, and an explanation, through the process of intermarriage and miscegenation, for the generation of the myriad actual caste groups, or jatis, reported by every ethnographer of Indian society. Thus the text has been seen as both prescriptive and descriptive, and the two functions have frequently
collapsed into one. Given the history of colonial and anthropological textualization, the text has had a life far outside its own textual confines, and certainly beyond a narrow group of scholastic Brahman jurists. For Mill, who eschewed as much as possible reference to the very texts canonized by Orientalist scholarship, the Manu text seemed unavoidably central in his account of caste. Ironically, he relied on the work of Sir William Jones to mount his own devastating critique of Jones.

Mill wrote that “On the division of the people, and the privileges or disadvantages annexed to the several castes, the whole frame of Hindu society so much depends, that it is an object of primary importance”. Interspersed with disparaging functionalist asides about the requirements and susceptibilities of “rude” societies, the chapter on caste reiterated a fairly standard account of the four varnas, with the law of Manu as the primary authority. Although Mill conceded that the division of society into four classes or castes represented the first step in civilization – a step taken by the Egyptians but not by the Arabs – he was contemptuous of the relative primitiveness of the system, as also its reliance on the superstitious power of the priestly caste. He wrote: “As the greater part of life among the Hindus is engrossed by the performance of an infinite and burdensome ritual, which extends to almost every hour of the day, and every function of nature and society, the Brahmans, who are the sold judges and directors in these complicated and endless duties, are rendered the uncontrollable masters of human life. Thus elevated in power and privileges, the ceremonial of society is no less remarkably in their favour. They are so much superior to the king, that the meanest Brahman would account himself polluted by eating with him, and death itself would appear to him less dreadful than the degradation of permitting his daughter to unite herself in marriage with his sovereign”.

Arul yet, with no trace of contradiction, Mill’s next chapter is on government, which he opened by noting that “After the division of the people into ranks and occupations, the great circumstance by which their condition, character, and operations are determined, is the political establishment, the system of actions by which the social order is preserved. Among the Hindus, according to the Asiatic model, the government was monarchical, and, with the usual exception of religion and its ministers, absolute”. Here Mill proposed the well-worn theory of Oriental despotism, quoting Manu to suggest the divinity of the king. By his acceptance of this account, and his use of it to describe Indian society in its entirety, Mill provided his readers with a view of caste that confused commensal and conjugal regulation with the total social order, and denigrated the role of the king, and the status of political life, in a way perfectly consonant with British interest in justifying their rule. Mill’s Utilitarian critique of colonial misrule shared far more with those he attacked than with any who would assert either the ideological or institutional importance of political rule in the period before British conquest. In the end, the chapter merely rehearsed his view of the rudeness of Hindu society and polity rather than the limits of the textual version of the position of Brahmans in society.
When Mountstuart Elphinstone published his two-volume history of India in 1842, he felt the need to explain why he would write a history so soon after Mill’s had seemed to set the standard for any such work and make all subsequent efforts seem redundant. Elphinstone justified his work principally on the grounds of his Indian experience, which might, he believed, “sometimes lead to different conclusions”. Elphinstone had been appointed to the Bengal Civil Service as early as 1796, had later been a resident in Poona before playing a prominent part in the final Maratha war, and was appointed the first governor of Bombay, a position he held from 1819 to 1827. But despite all his time in India, his anthropology was also based predominantly on the Manu Dharma Sastra. In his opening sections, entitled “State of the Hindus at the Time of Menu’s Code” and “Changes since Menu, and State of the Hindus in Later Times”, he reproduced a textual view of caste and early Indian society, writing for pages about the four varnas, the complex rules and formulations about the separation and mixing of castes, and the consequent proliferation of the myriad jatis that would later become the recognizable caste units of contemporary ethnography. Nevertheless, Elphinstone also wrote about changes in caste, suggesting that many Brahmans had taken a worldly turn – a view not surprising for one who was the resident to the Peshwas in the last days of Maratha rule. Elphinstone also noted, more charitably than either Grant or Mill that the institution of caste, “though it exercises a most pernicious influence on the progress of the nation, has by no means so great an effect in obstructing the enterprise of individuals as European writers are apt to suppose. There is, indeed, scarcely any part of the world where changes of condition are so sudden and so striking as in India”. And Elphinstone granted India the status of a major world civilization, although some of the qualifications in his admiration had to do with caste, or rather with a system in which, as he noted, the “priests, as they rose into consequence, began to combine and act in concert: that they invented the genealogy of casts, and other fables, to support the existing institutions”. Elphinstone’s history differed markedly from Mill’s, and he wrote with the detail and passion of one directly involved in Indian affairs. And yet it is striking how little changed was the ethnographic account, it only because, as he wrote like Bentinck before him, of the limits imposed on Englishmen, who “have less opportunity than might be expected of forming opinions of native character”. Once again, the sacred text was held to be reliable and important because of both the extreme variability of the Indian situation and the limited knowledge of the English about the social lives of Indians.

Elphinstone’s account was far more nuanced than Mill’s, at least in part because he sought to use his understanding of Indian history and society as the justification for the fashioning of new systems of rule and revenue collection, whereas Mill was content with nothing less than a complete break with the past. Although as a practical matter Elphinstone did not always disagree with the reformist recommendations of the Utilitarians, he was opposed to the Utilitarian spirit, and argued repeatedly, in broad agreement
with Thomas Munro, Charles Metcalfe, and John Malcolm, for the importance of establishing governmental policy in harmony with Indian social, if not political, institutions. Thus for Elphinstone the break with Orientalist knowledge was never complete, though the preoccupations often differed markedly. But Elphinstone’s history never took on the importance of Mill’s text, and it is significant that H.H. Wilson, an accomplished Orientalist and the first Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, decided to edit Mill’s History, using this as the pretext to make myriad editorial emendations for the publication of Mill’s fifth edition, as late as 1858. Even after the Great Rebellion, Mill’s history was canonic.

Wilson, who made his initial reputation preparing a catalogue of the Mackenzie collection, soon took on the task of translating and editing classical Sanskritic texts, but he never lost his interest in history or in adapting Orientalist scholarship to questions of concern to colonial rule. His reedition (and “continuation”) of Mill’s text was a grudging acknowledgement of the extraordinary influence of Mill and his views. Nevertheless, Wilson was scathing about Mill’s ignorance of India, and his preface made it clear that the reedition was less an endorsement of Mill than an attempt to use Mill’s own status to disturb official opinion. He wrote: “Considered merely in a literary capacity, the description of the Hindus in the History of British India, is open to censure for its obvious unfairness and injustice; but in the effects which it is likely to exercise upon the connexion between the people of England and the people of India, it is chargeable with more than literary demerit: its tendency is evil; it is calculated to destroy all sympathy between the rulers and the ruled; to preoccupy the minds of those who issue annually from Great Britain, to monopolize the posts of honour and power in Hindustan, with an unfounded aversion toward those over whom they exercise that power……There is reason to fear that these consequences are not imaginary, and that a harsh and illiberal spirit has of late years prevailed in the conduct and councils of the rising service in India, which owes its origin to impressions imbibed in early life from the History of Mr. Mill”.

And yet, despite these obvious differences between Wilson the Orientalist and Mill the Anglicist, it is extraordinary how similar their views were about caste. Wilson corrected Mill’s notion that Brahmans were primarily priests, or that their high status depended upon a relationship to the priesthood, and made numerous other corrections and revisions to Mill’s early chapters on the Hindus. And yet he relied on the very same textual source, the Manu Dharma Sastra, to provide the corrected evidence for an understanding of caste and Hindu society.
Caste and the Orientalists.

The Orientalists lost the force of their influence soon after the opening decades of the 19th century, battered by the combined attacks of the Evangelicals and the Anglicists, not to mention the development of new administrative knowledge that began to develop an empirical density of its own from as early as the 1790s. They nevertheless left an important mark, not least in the canonization of certain texts as the basis on which empirical observations and Anglicist judgments about Indian society would be made. The last major Orientalist contribution to fundamental debates concerning the character of Indian civilization and the nature of Indian society can be seen in the writings of Maximum Muller, whose general popularity is in retrospect perhaps less important than the fact that he strongly influenced certain Indian social reformers and nationalists, most significantly Gandhi. Muller wrote an essay on caste in 1858, just after the Great Rebellion, or in colonial reference, the “Sepoy Mutiny”. Muller’s essay on caste sought specifically to clarify the terms of the discussion around caste that had been vastly exacerbated by the rebellion; as he put it, “Among the causes assigned for the Sepoy mutiny, caste has been made the most prominent”. The rebellion led to passionate debate about caste, a debate that licensed missionary denunciation of the Company’s toleration of it, on the one hand, and prompted severe criticisms of missionaries for their role in alarming Indian subjects about British intentions to make them lost caste altogether, on the other.

The debate over caste was joined by Muller with his characteristic belief that textual authority should have pride of place in official knowledge about India. He carefully distinguished himself from those missionaries who advocated an attack on caste as retribution for the revolt, while he also asserted in different ways his Christian convictions and credentials. He was clear that neither India nor regard for Indian civilization should suffer from the effects of the revolt: “Whatever the truth may be about the diabolical atrocities which are said to have been committed against women and children, a grievous wrong has been done to the people of India by making them responsible for crimes committed or said to have been committed by a few escaped convicts and raving fanatics; and …..it will be long before the impression once created can be effaced, and before the inhabitants of India are treated again as men, and not as monsters”. Muller asked the fundamental question about the religious or social status of caste, and noted that there was no easy answer: “Now, if we ask the Hindus whether their laws of caste are part of their religion, some will answer that they are, others that they are not”. In characteristic Orientalist fashion, he advised resort to the texts themselves: “We are able to consult the very authorities to which the Hindus appeal, and we can form an opinion with greater impartiality than the Brahmans themselves”. Muller made clear his concern that religious beliefs – determined by textual standards – be respected in all events. But he also made clear that his study of the texts suggested that the caste of the Vedas and of later – degraded – periods were altogether different.
Despite his manifest approval of Vedic civilization and his increasing contempt for later developments, Muller recommended against major governmental intervention, arguing instead for a gradualist approach. His recommendation seems somewhat contradictory, though it was motivated in large part by a general sense of political caution: “It is now perceived that it will never answer to keep India mainly by military force, and that the eloquent but irritating speeches of Indian reformers must prove very expensive to the tax-paying public of England. India can never be held or governed profitably without the good-will of the natives, and in any new measures that are to be adopted it will be necessary to listen to what they have to say, and to reason with them as we should reason with men quite capable of appreciating the force of an argument. There ought to be no idea of converting the Hindus by force or of doing violence to their religious feelings”. Muller revealed a combination of administration and sensitivity, while at the same time he held the view that Indian problems were the result of degradation and corruption from Vedic ideal, rather than related to colonial rule. Although few British administrators were compelled by such understandings, even when they accepted Muller’s advice to respect, or at least attempt not to outrage, Indian opinion, Muller's views became influential among many Indian subjects. Most notably, his general views about Indian civilization had great significance for the development of Gandhi’s thought. Gandhi followed Muller in identifying the soul of Indian civilization as that of the Vedic age, and the distortions of later history as beginning in the time of Manu. But Gandhi could never agree with Muller, as did most other social reformers, that the social and the religious could be separated.

Despite the bitter reaction in Britain to the rebellion, and the outcry against caste among missionaries and the general public, the British government, which assumed direct rule in 1858, was obviously concerned to do nothing further to threaten the continuation of its rule over the subcontinent. In the queen-empress’s proclamation of the establishment of direct British authority over India, it was said that “We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on our subjects. We declare it to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in anywise favoured, none molested or disquieted, by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and we do strictly charge and enjoin that all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of all of our subjects, on pain of our highest displeasure”. Although Orientalist opinion ceased from this point on to have major influence on British policy makers, a pragmatic desire to avoid further complications from such intervention, or perceptions thereof, overrode missionary wishes to use the moment to strike a fatal blow against both caste and Hinduism. And since there was general agreement among missionaries and officials alike that caste was simultaneously religious and social – given among other things the shared assumption about the perverse character of Hinduism as a religion – this also meant that the government would seek to disturb caste
sensitivities, whatever they were and however they were sanctioned, as little as possible. Ironically, the most difficult challenges to the policy of nonintervention came from Indian social reformers, who throughout the nineteenth century sought to mobilize support from government and private citizens alike for major assaults on caste, in relation to issues that emerged from the treatment of women in upper castes to treatment of lower castes and in particular “untouchable” groups. In this endeavor, missionaries clearly played an important role, though what began as a concern with the impediments to conversion soon became used by others to resist both conversion and the embarrassment that accrued from missionary criticism.

If caste never succumbed to an analytical dualism that allowed the easy separation of the social and the religious, it was in part because the ideological underpinnings of separate religious and social (or political) domains had only developed – however uncertainly – in Europe from the middle of the 18th century, and were still imposed in ways that made little sense in Indian society, let alone in the colonial contexts that such deliberations inherently took place. England’s own secularist self-representations were irrevocably tied to Christian assumptions and ideology. In India, colonial rulers saw caste as the quintessential form of civil society, simultaneously responsible for India’s political weakness and a symptom of the overdevelopment of its religious preoccupations. Missionaries and officials both viewed caste, and Hinduism, from a position in which Christianity was heralded not just as the true religion but as one that allowed for genuine separations between the political and social on the side and the religious on the other. It is true that there was both disagreement about and confusion over what caste really was – whether it was a convenient or at the very least necessary institution for empire or an impediment not just to conversion but to the moral justifications of empire, whether it should be attacked or ignored until the nationalist cause would allow it to be taken care of outside of the imperial glare, and whether it referred primarily to the textual varna scale of four orders or the empirical muddle of myriad jati groups. By 1858 there was nevertheless general recognition that caste was the foundational fact of Indian society, fundamental both to Hinduism (as Hinduism was to it) and to the Indian subcontinent as a civilizational region. Caste emerged, stronger than ever, from the legacy of Orientalist forms of knowledge.

As the Orientalists faded away, and as missionaries lost out to the imperatives of empire, British officials increasingly felt the need to find other means to answer the disturbing questions raised by their rule and the revolt against it. If questions of conquest and then revenue collection dominated the formation of official knowledge in the years between Plassey and the rebellion, questions of order and the maintenance of rule took pride of place for the next century. The last half of the 19th century witnessed the development of a new kind of curiosity about and knowledge of the Indian social world, exhibited first in the manuals and gazetteers that began to encode official local knowledge,
then in the materials that developed around the census, which led to Risley’s great ambition for an ethnographic survey of all of India. During this same period, missionaries continued to play a role, contesting official policies of nonintervention and continuing their critique of caste and religion. But the critique of caste that was heard loudest now came from a very different place, mobilized by Indian critics and activists as varied as Rammohun Roy and Dayananda Saraswati, M.G. Ranade and G.K. Gokhale, J.G. Phule and Rabindranath Tagore, and, into the next century, M.K. Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker. The importance of caste in the census led to increasing focus on the recognition of caste categories by the official apparatuses of government, but the critique of caste began, like the not unrelated questions around the position of women, either to disappear or be seen as a domestic issue that should be addressed only after self-rule had been instituted. Caste itself did not disappear. Instead, it seemed stronger than ever, and the massive proliferation of vernacular texts concerning caste (especially for “backward” castes) in the first two decades of the twentieth century confirmed the transformation even as they provided a principal mechanism for the mobilization of new political identities and strategies. As a result, caste continued to embarrass and to enliven debates over tradition and modernity, the relationship of civil society to religion, and the place of politics in Indian culture and the development of nationalist ideology. In moments of civilizational assertion, caste could be seen as something that had united India as a nation many years before the arrival of the British, and in moments of civilizational embarrassment caste could be held accountable for the ease of the British conquest of India itself. It was in this context that both the rise of official fascination with the centrality of caste, on the one hand, and reformist critiques of caste, on the other, would unfold.

**LOUIS DUMONT AND HOMO HIERARCHICUS**

Louis Dumont, a French scholar, is an expert in the domains of sociology, social anthropology and indology. He has written on Hinduism, caste, kinship, kinship in ancient India, and social and political movements in modern India. Dumont’s writings are rooted into French tradition, and he has written his magnum opus – Homo Hierarchicus for the French-speaking people. Homo Hierarchicus is a study of the caste system and its implications for Hindu society and allied groups. Its French edition was published in 1966, and the English edition appeared in 1970. Homo Hierarchicus is, literally speaking, opposite of Homo Acqualis, in other words, ‘homo hierarchicus’ is opposite of ‘equality’. A commentator observes: “By taking this approach, Dumont rejects the ethnocentrism of western sociology, which has usually viewed caste as the ultimate form of social distinctions found in egalitarian societies. He insists instead on viewing India on her own terms, as a society based on different principles for which new sociological concepts are needed”. Dumont has been praised for making most profound and important contributions to the study of Indian society. He has the clarity of thought, erudity of scholarship and lucidity in writing. Leach states that Dumont is possibly one of the most important sociological thinkers of his generation. Dumont’s book is the most important theoretical treatise.
on caste. A discussion on hierarchy, ideology and observation, problem of comparison, change, ideology of caste, pure and impure, division of labour and egalitarian society, etc. is given in a highly scholastic manner. Madan writes: “Homo Hierarchicus is an unusual work in its conception, design and execution”.

**Defining Caste.**

The first question that Madan asks is: How does Dumont define caste? Dumont observes that the western scholar’s definition of caste as a type of social stratification is socio-centric. He makes it clear that caste cannot be interpreted and understood from the point of western ideas of egalitarianism, individualism, and pre-eminence of politics and economics in society. Dumont is an Indianist at the core. Caste stands for inequality in theory and practice both, but it is not simply an opposite of ‘equality’. The inequality of the caste system is a special type of inequality. Dumont admits that the idealist or intellectualist orientation of the French tradition is dominant in his understanding of sociology, hence the study of ideas and values. Dumont writes: “The ideas which they (the people) express are related to each other by more fundamental ideas even though these are unexpressed.... The caste system, for example, appears as a perfectly coherent theory once one adds the necessary but implicit links to the principles that the people themselves give”. Thus, Dumont adopts the methodology of structuralism in his analysis of the caste system.

One finds stress on the role of ideology in moulding human behaviour, hence a close tie between sociology and indology in Dumont’s works. The notion of the fundamental opposition between the pure and the impure like Bougle is the hallmark of Dumont’s analysis of the caste system. Bougle defined caste system much before Dumont in terms of hierarchically arranged hereditary groups, segregation, and interdependence. Dumont recognizes significance of these three mutually entailed ‘principles’, but they are based on the fundamental principle of the opposition between the pure and the impure. Dumont calls it ‘a single true principle’. This opposition underlies hierarchy, which is the superiority of the pure to the impure, underlies separation because the pure and the impure must be kept separate, and underlies the division of labour because pure and impure occupations must likewise be kept separate. The whole is founded on the necessary and hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites.

Thus, hierarchy, as defined by Dumont in terms of the superiority of the pure over the impure, is the most important notion in Dumont’s approach to the caste system. As such hierarchy is independent of other biological inequalities and the distribution of power. Hierarchy is, in fact, the principle by which the elements of a whole (society) are ranked in relation to the whole. Here Dumont becomes a sort of ‘functionalist’ like Talcott Parsons and Kingsley Davis. Since religion provides a view of the whole, caste hierarchy tends to become religious in essence. According to Dumont, hierarchy is the relationship between “that which encompasses and that which is encompassed”. Madan remarks that “such a perspective helps us to obtain a holistic view of the system and to overcome the dualism of opposition”.

Caste and Social Stratification in Medieval India
Method of Study.

Dumont analyzes “the traditional social organization of India from the point of view of theoretical comparison”. Dumont’s approach seems to be the construction of a model of the traditional caste system in an ideal form. He does not concern himself much with the social formation of present-day India. Dumont does not provide a history of the caste system. However, he uses historical data and indological sources in the formulation of his model for the understanding of the caste system. According to Madan, Dumont’s method is of a theorist. His analysis is both deductive and dialectical. He calls his method as an ‘experiment’. Use of ethnographic materials is found in abundance in Dumont’s method. He uses it in two ways or at two levels. Firstly; his major concern is undoubtedly with ideology, that is, with a system of ‘values and ideas’, but Dumont realizes that ideology is not everything. Ideology encompasses the whole of social reality, but cannot explain everything. Likewise, observation of actual behaviour can reveal everything. To understand this ‘residue’, ethnographic materials have been used to confirm nexus between ideology and observation. Secondly, Dumont uses ethnographic materials to elucidate or qualify various aspects of the main thrust of the book.

Hierarchy.

Dumont writes that the castes teach us a fundamental social principle, namely, hierarchy. The opposite of equality is hierarchy and not inequality. According to Dumont, hierarchy is an indispensable element of social life everywhere, but it is more so in case of India as it is very well affirmed. The caste system is a system of ideas and values, a formal, comprehensive rational system, a system in the intellectual sense of the term. The foremost aim is to understand this intellectual system, this ideology. Castes are related through a system of oppositions, a structure, in terms of the opposition between the pure and the impure. Thus, Dumont introduces the notions of ‘system’ and ‘structure’ in terms of ideology of and relations between the pure and impure castes. Dumont discusses these points in the first two chapters. Chapter Three deals with hierarchy – the theory of Varna. Upholding his view about primacy of ‘values and ideas’, Dumont focuses on the differentiation between status and power, and the subordination of the king to the priest, in Hindu society. Hierarchy involves gradation, but it is distinct from both power and authority. Dumont states that hierarchy refers to ‘religious ranking’ and classifies ‘things’ and ‘beings’ based on their dignity. Therefore, hierarchy is an all-embracing, comprehensive concept. Hierarchy and Varna are found to be in consonance like Varna and jati. Hierarchy, in fact, encompasses both Varna divisions and caste system. However, the connection between hierarchy and power remains problematic. Hierarchy cannot give a place to power without contradicting its own principle. Realizing the tie between purity and power in ‘actual situations’, Dumont gives a place to power without compromising with his main argument. Both ‘interaction’ and ‘attribution’ are present in a situation where ideology and power coexist. Based on his main plank of thought, Dumont analyzes jajmani system and regulation of marriage, and commensality, untouchability and vegetarianism, etc. in Chapters Four, Five and Six, respectively.
ideology and observation.

Chapters 7 and 8 are very significant as they deal with power and territory, and justice and authority, respectively. Dumont discusses the confrontation of ideology and observation as most important aspects of his method of study. In regard to actuality of caste, Dumont analyzes territory, power, village dominance, and ownership of wealth, and their mutual relationship. These are referents of fact and not of theory or ideology. Realizing the ontological basis of caste, Dumont discusses dominant caste, factions and economics. He concluded that just as religion encompasses politics, so politics encompasses economics within itself. However, Dumont clearly states that religion is supreme and politico-economic domain is subordinate, and further economics remains undifferentiated within politics. This clearly shows Dumont’s preference for culturological determinism.

The essences of Dumont’s approach to the caste system. The following points are important.

1. In the caste system we have to do pre-eminently with religious ideas connected with purity.

2. The caste system can be understood when we realize that it is permeated by essentially religious conceptions and further that these religious conceptions are based upon a social apprehension of the pure and the impure.

3. In order to understand the distribution of occupations in India we have to go to beliefs of a religious nature.

4. It is above all religious ideas rather than economic values which establish the rank of each group.

5. These religious values commingle with elements of power and form a composite system of social stratification, which Dumont calls 'kingly model'. The Kingly model, according to Dumont, rests upon the mutuality and interdomination between the principles of Kshtra or power and Brahman or the priestly normative order. Both are, however, rooted in the religico-ritualistic order of the caste system.

6. However, this does not mean that Dumont is immune to empiricism. He discusses ethnographic data on caste from U.P in Chapter 8. The source of authority such as the village panchayat, caste panchayat, caste jurisdiction, and example-communication are discussed in this chapter. Clearly Dumont gives premium to ethnographical evidence as against ideology. But the basic principle is that of hierarchy to understand authority and dominance. Dumont is not able to resolve the dilemma whether caste encompasses power or power encompasses caste. If the latter is right, dharma (ideology) becomes subordinate to artha (power), and if the former is upheld as superordinate, the ruler becomes subservient to priestly order. However, in the final analysis, Dumont upholds ritual or religious power (hierarchy) superordinate to politico-economic power.
Problem of Comparison.

Dumont considers Indian and western societies as logically opposite cultural types. But this does not mean that in the western society there was nothing but the individual, and in the Indian society nothing but the collective man (caste). More important is to see whether the caste system could have existed and survived independent of its contradictions. In fact, both collectivity and man were operative in Individual society in a particular way, and hence adaptability of the cast system. Dumont discusses these points in Chapter 9. However, Dumont is unable to come out of his ideological leanings. He says in Chapter 10 that caste should be deemed to be present only where the disjunction between status and power is present and where castes exhaust the entire society.

Dynamics.

Dumont poses the question: What is the caste system becoming nowadays. Dumont answers that contemporary literature on caste overestimates and exaggerates changes. The overall frame of society has not changed. There has been change in the society and not of the society. The only significant change, according to Dumont, is in the organic (traditional) interdependence between castes; now different castes have become segmentary competitive groups. Dumont calls this process ‘the substantialization of caste’. Most noticeable changes in the caste system are juridical and political, socio-religious reform, westernization, growth of modern professions, urbanization, spatial mobility, and the growth of market economy. Dumont admits that change does not mean replacement, it means a ‘mixture’ or a ‘combination’ of traditional and modern features.

Why Homo Hierarchicus.

Madan holds the view that Homo Hierarchicus is a most impressive achievement and shall long remain a basic work for Indianists. Dumont, unlike Maine, does not consider caste as “the most dangerous and blighting of all human institutions”. Dumont also does not defend caste like Bougle, Hocart, Senart, Hutton etc., but his treatment of caste amounts to its defence and perpetuation. Dumont considers caste as worthy of serious study. Homo Hierarchicus is neither a historical work nor a stock of available ethnographical information. Madan writes: “His is essentially an essay in methodology. He seeks to construct a model to help us understand the caste system”. Further, Madan praisingly writes: “What I find most valuable in Dumont’s approach to the understanding of caste is his attempt to seize its specificity: he preserves it by ‘typifying’ it and does not dissolve it by ‘classifying’ it”. To us it seems that nothing is more important to Dumont than the ideology of caste itself. Nothing can be studied without ideas and values. All aspects of caste and even of entire gamut of social relations can be studied only from the ideational point of
view. Therefore; Madan’s view that Homo Hierarchicus is an essay in methodology is not quite tenable. His (Dumont’s) method of study follows from the ideology of caste itself, and so is in the case of ethnographic data he pours into Homo Hierarchicus.

**Some Criticisms.**

A sociology of knowledge perspective would ask clearly for (i) the ‘fit’ between theory, method and data; (ii) the ideologizing influences on the understanding of Indian society; (iii) the construction of reality in Indian context; and (iv) the specificity of Indian sociology different from that of the western countries. These questions have not been clearly formulated by Dumont as he has been overwhelmed by the nostalgia of French tradition in sociology, and the uniqueness of Indian society. Dumont thus equates indology or culturology ‘for a sociology of India’. Two questions follow from this position of Dumont: (1) Is it not an attempt toward academic indoctrination of scholars interested in the study of Indian society?, (2) Is it not Dumont brings in the ideas which would reinforce and re legitimise India’s caste system?

While commenting on Iravati Karve’s book – Kinship Organization in India, Dumont and Pocock have suggested that Karve should choose between sociology and culturology. Why Dumont ignores this suggestion in his own case? He projects his eclectic indology and part-ethnography as sociology proper in India’s case. Bailey rightly observes that Dumont and Pocock’s is a “very odd kind of inverted ethnocentrism”. Their view is more of an assertion than an evidence. Saran’s view is no less culturological than that of Dumont, but Dumont calls Saran’s view as ‘cultural solipsism’, a Hindu sociology. Dumont is also disdainful of the Marxist approach. While commenting on Desai’s book– Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Dumont writes: “More than university thesis, it is an overgrown political pamphlet clad in a university gown”. Thus, Dumont is critical of both culturological and Marxist approaches except his own approach which he considers very specific and unique one. Dumont can blame Saran for wrong ‘hypothetical deductive reasoning’, ‘irrelevant quotations’, and for his ‘Neolithic-Hindu creed’, to Desai for his ‘doctrinaire dogmatic Marxism’, but why he (Dumont) gives such an enormous premium to culturology and caste system and its allied institutions – remains an open secret. Why India’s caste system becomes a datum for Dumont to developed a global sociology? Dumont is too naïve a scholar if he thinks that India does not have differences, differential interests, conflicts, exploitations, etc. He lacks in elementary education about India. To think that they are prevalent but do not become the data for sociological enquiry compounds Dumont’s scholastic ignorance. Dumont’s polemics would not really provide a clear frame of reference, a method of study, and relevant data for understanding the fast changing character of India’s caste system.
Even Madan, an ardent admirer of Dumont, raises a few questions about Dumont’s model of traditional Hindu society. For example, it is not clear at what point of time the caste system as portrayed by Dumont crystallized. His (Dumont’s) manner of citing literature is not very helpful in this respect. It seems after the crystallization of the caste system, all further change was ruled out. Madan pointedly asks: (1) Is it not Dumont’s method, then which makes him play down the element of change? (2) Is he (Dumont) not setting up too narrow a definition of change? Dumont writes: “A form of organization does not change, it is replaced by another; a structure is present or absent, it does not change”. Most of the changes in India take place in politico-economic domain and since this occupies a secondary place in Dumont’s scheme, they remain generally unnoticed to Dumont.

Now a few more criticisms of Homo Hierarchicus. Berreman accuses Dumont of presenting a ‘distorted image’ of the caste system based upon limited, biased, albeit scholarly, sources of evidence. Dumont, in fact, puts forth his model independent of the body of indological and ethnographic literature. Leach points out that to assess the value of a model in view of ‘facts’ is wholly erroneous. No model is a replica of reality. Dumont’s model has explanatory power through its principle of hierarchy. Other commentators have Sufism instead of the dichotomy of pure-impure the more inclusive dichotomy of the sacred and the non-sacred. Along with the notion of hierarchy, the notions of reciprocity and equality, and contradiction can be useful in understanding of the caste system. Dumont’s use of the structuralist approach, his emphasis upon the specificity of the caste system, and ‘typification’ has come under severe attack.

The value of Homo Hierarchicus remains immense in spite of the criticisms we have listed above. The wide acclaim it has received and the controversy it has created speak volumes for Dumont’s scholarship and involvement in understanding of the caste system. Madan writes: “Homo Hierarchicus is a work complete in itself and must be judged as such”. What distinguishes this work from the usual social anthropological discussions of caste is that it does not proceed from field-work to a model of how the system works. Instead it begins with a cardinal explanatory principle – hierarchy – and boldly sets out to build a model thereon, throughout maintaining the position that theory or ideology overrides and encompasses ethnography. A conscious and single-minded preoccupation with the ideology of complementarity and separation leads Dumont to ask fundamental questions about Hindu society and about the structuralist method.”
ENDOGAMY AND MARRIAGE CIRCLES

Sometimes restrictions are imposed that the other partner is to be selected from the caste or class to which the first partner belongs. Marriage within the class is known as endogamy. Therefore marriages with out-group members are prohibited. Even today inter-caste marriages are not encouraged. Hitler had declared an Aryan-Jewish marriage a criminal act. In India a Brahman can marry only a Brahman and not only that he can marry only a Brahman of his own sub-caste. A marriage of a Vaishya with a Brahman is not socially approved. In the old Polynesian society marriages between nobles and commoners were severely deprecated. Even today a labourer cannot marry the daughter of a big industrialist. In India endogamy is mostly obligatory. However, today endogamous attitudes have somewhat relaxed and softened and we sometimes hear of an intercaste marriage but that is not common as yet. It may also be remembered that endogamy and exogamy are antithetical processes, but where both exist, they supplement each other. Thus a Vaishya caste is an endogamous group but its sub-caste, i.e., gotra is an exogamous group.

Forms of Endogamy: In India, we find the following forms of endogamy:

(i) Tribal Endogamy: In this type of endogamy no one can marry outside his own tribe.

(ii) Caste Endogamy: In this type marriage should take place within the caste.

(iii) Class Endogamy: In this form of endogamy marriage is contracted between people of one class or of a particular status.

(iv) Sub-caste Endogamy: In this type of endogamy choice for marriage is restricted to the sub-caste.

(v) Race Endogamy: In this form people can marry within the race. By preventing marriage outside the group, endogamy

(i) Preserves the group’s homogeneity;

(ii) Protects its prestige and status;

(iii) Maintains the numerical force of its group;

(iv) Preserves the purity in the group;

(v) Keeps women happier;

(vi) Fosters the sense of unity within the group.

(vii) Keeps property within the group.
However, endogamy has some disadvantages. It

(i) limits the sphere of materialism-selection;
(ii) lays emphasis on group feeling which creates communalism and checks the growth of national unity;
(iii) encourages casteism,
(iv) encourages hatred and jealousy among different groups,
(v) encourages dowry and bride-price.

SUVIRA JAISWAL

At present India is witnessing massive social engineering. A case is being made out for caste-based enumeration in the first Census of the 21st century, and the question of gender-based reservation in the political apparatus has generated caste-based passions. In times such as these, the publication of Professor Suvira Jaiswal’s anthology is timely. Suvira Jaiswal belongs to that rare breed of historians who have contributed to our understanding of the dialectics of change in Indian society through millenniums. For the last quarter of a century she has pursued her enquiries into the origin, functions and vicissitudes of caste, through a multi-pronged analysis. Four chapters (2-5) of the book ‘Caste: Origin, Functions and Dimensions of change’ deal with the following topics: Historiographic landmarks; paradigms of the stratification in Rig Vedic society (1500 –1000 B.C.); social stratification in early Buddhism and the changing concept of gahapati (600 B.C. –A.D. 200); and caste and Hinduism: the changing paradigms of brahmanical integration (A.D. 500 onwards). The texts of all these chapters are available in print, in one form or another. However, these have been updated for this volume.

Discussing the society delineated in the Rigveda Veda, Prof. Jaiswal characterizes it as a “simple”, as opposed to a “complex”, hierarchically stratified one. She also underlines the transitional character of Rigveda Vedic society and the changing pattern of the family therein. Such a reconstruction is particularly noticeable for its critical analysis of the “avant-garde concepts” of “lineage society” and “lineage mode of production”. Contesting the validity of this model, jaiswal argues that it blurs the “qualitative distinction between exploitation of biologically determined age and sex groups by the elders of the same lineage and the exploitation of junior lineages based on fictive or real genealogical connections by senior lineages of a stratified society where kinship is little more than a metaphor for class”. We are, however, not sure if caste too was a metaphor for class in the ancient and early medieval periods.
The chapter also discusses the question of ethnicity of the Aryans. The suggestion that the use of the term “Aarya” to denote a branch of the Indo-Europeans in the ethnic sense required a more extensive discussion than what one reads in the present volume. It would be relevant to recall in this contest Enric Aguilar I Matas’ study Rigvedic Society which seems to have escaped the notice of Jaiswal. It questions many stereotypes prevailing in the analyses of the Rigveda Vedic tradition and rejects “ethnic denominative Aarya”. Following the lead given by the renowned historian D.D. Kosambi more than four decades ago, some important studies have been made on the social changes reflected in the early Buddhist texts in Pali. One important aspect that affected social stratification in the half millennium that preceded the advent of the Christian era and focussed on the changing role of grihapati (in Sanskrit sources)/gahapati (in Pali works). Jaiswal shows (in Chapter IV) that the early Vedic grihapati was not an ordinary householder but a “leader of the extended kin-group which constituted a unit of production as well as consumption”. In addition, it is stressed that the shift from nomadic pastoralism to sedentary agriculture led to the grihapati’s transformation as the head of a complex household structured on patriarchal principles.

The nuance implied in the conjuncture/disjuncture in grihapati/gahapati does not comprise a mere shift in the meaning from “denoting a householder to denoting an agriculturist” as Kosambi suggested long ago. Instead, grihapati-gahapati signified heads of production units albeit of different types. Jaiswal rightly feels the necessity to distinguish “household system” from “household economy”. The last chapter, focussing on the changing paradigms of brahmanical integration, covers a much wider chronological phase (nearly 1,500 years starting in A.D. 500) and comes down to the present-day vocation of ‘Rama-Bhakti’ by the votaries of Hindutva. Jaiswal’s hypothesis tends to highlight the brahmanical paradigm of social integration where “caste continues to be its constitutive element and its identification mark” (page xi). Attempts to homogenise the social reality of multiple-fragmented identities in the garb of religious-cultural symbols failed miserably as, for instance, in the case of the Arya Šamaj. With such a historical insight, Jaiswal is able to remind us that the symbol chosen by the champions of Hindutva for social integration, namely, Rama, was an upholder of the patriarchal norms and the varna system and had no qualms in ordering the beheading of a shudra (Shambook) for practising austerities which led to the premature death of a Brahmin’s son.

Suvira Jaiswal rightly rejects “legitimising reference to the authority of the Veda” in defining the parameters of Hinduism. She is also justified in asserting that the “confrontation with Islam....introduced a cultural and religious dimension into the term Hindu, which originally had a geographic connotation”. We can also go along with her in seeing the role of the ruling authority in protecting the Varna system (going back to the early medieval period) becoming extremely conventional and stereotyped. However, there is oversimplification in Jaiswal’s formulation that “religious pluralism evinced by
Hinduism is a consequence of the brahmanical integrative process”. It is too cryptic and needs considerable amplification – more so because both the component and the content of the term “brahmanical” are questionable. These probably need to be explicated in time and space, for Jaiswal is not unaware of the “divergent structural categories of caste”.

The introduction seeks to provide the connecting link for all these contributions. Jaiswal not only reiterates her critique of Dumont’s “brahmanical view of caste” delineated in his Homo Hierarchicus but also ventures to offer a strong rebuttal of Marxist historians on caste. She takes them to task for ignoring temple “role of patriarchy and subjugation of women in its ideology and rules of endogamy”. Referring specifically to Kosambi, she goes to the extent of saying that some of his assumptions smack of the “racial explanation” given by the colonialist Herbert Risley. There are two other important thrusts emerging out of this study: the potentialities of the regional specificities of caste; and the crucial role played by the suppression of women as a class, apart from the factors of endogamy, occupational specialization and hierarchical gradation, in the formation of caste society (emphasis added). In underlining both thrusts, Jaiswal clearly stands out as a Marxist historian who is not prepared to be herded.

This study is also notable for the absence of two points. First, the 500 years from 200 B.C. to A.D. 300 constitute a landmark in the evolution of the Indian social organism. Second, another half a millennium of early medieval India (A.D. 500-1000) also witnessed the proliferation of castes. Jaiswal ought to have found separate space for these rather than subsume them under the paradigms of “early Buddhism” and “brahmanical integration” respectively. For instance, how far can the emergence of segmented identities by the early centuries of the Christian era be related to what some historians have called the “Vaishya mode of production”? Also missing is a similar thrust villages-villages the proliferation of castes in early medieval India. This would have put a question mark on the overarching, socially integrative role ascribed to brahmanical initiative. It would have also buttressed Jaiswal’s critique of Dumont’s “brahmanical view of caste”.

Some prophets of doom, especially of the unprofessional Right, proclaim the impending “funeral” of Marxist writings on Indian history. Others sitting or writing in cozy locales of Paris and Heidelberg tend to take on the ‘Left establishment’. Both converge on the point of treating Neolithic-colonialist writings with kid gloves. At a time when it is fashionable to criticize Marxist writings in the manner of a passerby enjoying giving a brutal blow to an unknown fallen “criminal” on the road, it is quite courageous of Jaiswal to have come out with this anthology. It is a forceful reiteration of her well-known Marxist position. Insofar as she has also stressed the indispensability of focussing on women as a class, she has not only provided a fresh gendered perspective of caste, but also a refined Marxian disposition towards this well-entrenched phenomenon of Indian society.
MORTON Klass

Morton Klass, who taught anthropology at Barnard College and Columbia University for over 30 years, died on April 28, 2001, at his home in Washington Heights, New York, at the age of 73. Born in 1927, Klass an anthropologist with a focus on religion and consciousness, was known by his peers, friends and family, as a passionate and effective teacher, and as someone who embraced egalitarian values in his work and life. Barnard President Judith Shapiro, a cultural anthropologist, said: "I came to know Morton Klass when I first began graduate work at Columbia University, and was happy and grateful to find him still doing his wonderful work for the Department of Anthropology when I came to Barnard as president in 1994. He was a beacon of thoughtful and balanced eclecticism at a time when many of his profession were being driven to theoretical extremes".

Chairman of the Department of Anthropology at Barnard, Klass taught at Barnard College and Columbia University since 1965. Klass was also the member of the Executive Committee of the Southern Asian Institute since its founding in 1967, and later served as the Director from 1982-85. With his thirst for knowledge and passion for the field of anthropology, Klass helped to revitalize the Barnard Anthropology Department, along with professor emeritus Abraham Rosman and professor emerita Paula Rubel, his colleagues and friends at Barnard of over 35 years. His primary areas of interest were South Asia, South Asians overseas, and Europe. His main topics of research included: religion, new religious movements, social organization, ethnicity, race and racism, anthropology of the future, and immigration and emigration.

Professor Rosman said: "Mort will be remembered as a passionate and effective teacher whose students loved him, and as a gentle human being, whose door was always open, not as a famous scholar in the ivory tower writings books, whom on one even knows". Paula Rubel added: "Mort hired me in 1965 as a lecturer when I was pregnant with my daughter and it was very hard for a woman to get a position anywhere while pregnant back then. Mort truly thought of women and men as equals and embraced these egalitarian values with his scholars and students before the idea of feminism was even born".

Klass, who grew up in Brooklyn, NY, graduated magna cum laude with a major in anthropology from Brooklyn College in 1955. After graduation, Klass was accepted into the masters program for anthropology at Columbia University, and graduated 1959 with a Ph.D. While at Columbia, he was awarded several scholarships and distinctions. A member of Phi Beta Kappa and Alpha Kappa Delta honor societies, Dr. Klass conducted extensive field research in Trinidad and in West Bengal, India. In 1957, Klass received a Research and Training Fellowship from the Institute for the Study of Man in the Tropics, Trinidad, West Indies. The Following year he received a Social
Science Research Council Fellowship to study cultural change and persistence, community structure among East Indians of Trinidad, the descendants of the nineteenth-century migrants from South Asia, who came to work on sugar plantations as laborers. Klass argued in his dissertation that the East India community in the vi of Amity was culturally more Indian than Caribbean. His dissertation, East Indians in Trinidad, was selected for publication by Columbia University Press in 1961, and received the prestigious annual Clarke F. Ansley Award from Columbia.

In 1964, Dr. Class traveled to West Bengal, India, to conduct field research. There he studied the impact of industrialization of life in a West Bengal village. For his work, Klass was awarded a Research and Writing Grant from the American Council of Learned Societies, allowing him to continue his research in West Bengal. Based on the study of the same village, which had become a site for a bicycle factory, Klass was able to analyze the Indian caste system in the factory. As a result of his findings, he argued for a more expansive and theoretical approach to the caste system in India, and published a book in 1978. From Field to Factory: Community Structure and Industrialization in West Bengal. In 1980, Klass finished his research on the nature and origins of caste in South Asia, and published Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System. In 1985, Klass received a Barnard Faculty Research Grant to study the Sai Baba religious movement in Trinidad and Tobago. His fieldwork on the Sai Baba religion and the Indian holy man culminated in Singing with Sai Baba: The Politics of Revitalization in Trinidad (1991). His most recent works, which reflected his continued interest in the anthropology of religion, included: Ordered Universes: Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion (1995) and Across the Boundaries of Belief: Contemporary issues in the Anthropology of Religion, which he edited together with Maxine K. Weisgrau (1999). A productive and gifted scholar, Klass leaves behind an impressive body of work and several unfinished manuscripts, including a book on the anthropology of consciousness, due to his sudden death.

In addition to his impressive academic career, Klass was a gifted community actor, memorable as George in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Twelfth Night, and Bogart in Play it Again, Sam. Klass is survived by his wife Sheila Klass of 48 years, sister Fran Goldman-Levy, brother Philip Klass, three children: Perri, David and Judy, and grandchildren: Orlando, Josephine, Anatol, and Gabriel. The memorial service for Morton Klass was held on Sunday, April 29, 2001, at The West End Synagogue.
CHAPTER-11

CASTE AND THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

In India we come across a special type of social stratification in the form of castes. Although evidences of caste are to be found in many parts of the world as among the present day Massia, the Polynesian, the Burmese and Americans the most perfect instance is that which exists in India. Here we find a social organization “as elaborate in its heaped-up storeys as one of its own pagodas-and vastly more intricate”.

1. THE MEANING OF CASTE

Origin of the word: The word ‘caste’ owes its origin to the Spanish word ‘casta’ which means ‘breed, race, strain or a complex of hereditary qualities’. The Portuguese applied this term to the classes of people in India known by the name of ‘jati’. The English word ‘caste’ is an adjustment of the original term.

Various definitions: Various definitions have been given of the word ‘caste’.

(i) Risley has defined caste as ‘a collection of families or group families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling, and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.

(ii) According to Lundberg: “A caste is merely a rigid social class into which members are born and from which they can withdraw or escape only with extreme difficulty”. It is the type of stratification system which is most rigid in matters of mobility and distinctness of status.

(iii) E.A.H. Blunt defines caste as “an endogamous or a collection of endogamous groups, bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary; imposing on the members certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse; either following a common traditional occupation or claiming a common origin; and generally regarded as forming a single homogeneous community”.

(iv) H. Cooley says, “When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste”.

(v) According to Maclver, “When status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then class takes the extreme form of caste”.
(vi) According to **Henry Maine**, castes started as natural division of occupational classes and eventually upon receiving the religious sanction, became solidified into the existing caste system. The caste system comes into being when it becomes an integral part of a religious dogma which divides the people into superior and inferior groups with different responsibilities, functions and standards of living.

(vii) **Keltar** says, “A caste is a group having two characteristics –

1. Membership is confined to those who are born of members and include all people so born,
2. The membership is forbidden by an inexorable social law to men outside the group”.

(viii) **Martindale and Monochesi** define caste as “an aggregate of persons whose share of obligations and privileges are fixed by birth, sanctioned and supported by religion and usage”.

(ix) According to **E.A. Gait**, “Caste is an endogamous group or collection of such groups bearing a common name, having the same traditional occupation claiming descent from the same source, and, commonly regarded as forming a single homogeneous community”.

(x) According to **Green**, ‘Caste is a system of stratification in which mobility, up and down temple status ladder, at least ideally may not occur.

(xi) According to **Anderson and Parker**, “Caste is that extreme form of social class organization in which the position of individuals in the status hierarchy is determined by descent and birth”.

(xii) According to **Williams** “Caste is a system in which an individual’s rank and its accompanying rights and obligations is ascribed on the basis of birth into a particular group”.

Thus thinkers have variously defined the term ‘caste’. But as Ghurye states, “With all the labours of these students, however, we do not possess a real general definition of caste. The best way to understand the term ‘caste’ is to examine the various factors underlying the caste system. Megasthenes, the Greek traveller in the 3rd century B.C. to India, mentions two of the features characterizing the institution of caste. He says, “It is not permitted to contract marriage with a person of another caste, nor for the same person to undertake more than one, except if he is of the caste of philosophers, when permission is given on account of dignity. Thus according to Megasthenes two elements of caste system are (i) there is no intermarriage, and (ii) there can be no change of profession. The statement of Megasthenes, though, draws attention to two important factors of caste system, yet it does not give us a complete idea of the system. To give a complete idea of what a caste is, the following features may be described.
(i). **Segmental division of society:** The society is divided into various castes with a well developed life of their own, the membership of which is determined by the consideration of birth. The status of a person does not depend on his wealth but on the traditional importance of the caste in which he had the fortune of being born. Caste is hereditary. No amount of wealth and no amount of penance or prayer can change his caste status. Status is determined not by vocation but by birth. Maclver says, “whereas in eastern civilization the chief determinant of a class and status was birth, in the western civilization of today wealth is a class-determinant of equal or put up greater importance, and wealth is a less rigid determinant than birth”. There are regular caste councils to regulate and control the conduct of all caste members. This council rules over the whole caste and is temple most powerful organization which keeps the members in their proper places. The government body caste is called Panchayat which literally means a body of five members, but in fact there are many more who meet whenever decisions are taken. It takes cognizance of the offences against the caste taboos which prevent members of the caste from eating and drinking or smoking with members of other castes; against sex regulations which prohibit marriage outside the caste. It decides civil and criminal matters. The Panchayat was so powerful that during the British regime it retried cases which were once decided by the state in its judicial capacity. Its chief punishments were (i) the fines; (ii) feast to be given to the castemen; (iii) corporal punishment, (iv) religious expiation like taking bath in holy waters; and (v) outcasting. In Short, “caste is its own ruler”. It is a small and complete social world in itself, a quasi sovereign body, all inclusive and marked off from one another and yet subsisting within the larger and wider society. The citizens owe their moral allegiance to the caste first, rather than to the community as a whole. Though in recent times with the introduction and extension of the courts of law and the substitution of village panchayats for caste panchayats, the authority of the latter has been somewhat weakened yet the modern caste does control its members and influence their behaviour.

(ii) **Social and religious hierarchy:** The second important feature of caste system is that it has got a definite scheme of social precedence. Each caste has a customary name that helps to set it apart. The whole society is divided into distinct classes with a concept of high and low. Thus Brahmins in India stand at the apex of the social ladder. According to Manu, the Brahmin is the lord of this whole creation, because he is produced from the purest part of the Supreme Being, namely, the mouth. By his mere birth as a Brahmin, a person is the living embodiment of the eternal law. Feeding the Brahmins is one of the acknowledged ways of enjoying religious merit. A Brahmin is entitled to whatever exists in the world. The whole world is his property and others live on his charity. Vishnu is more audacious than Manu. He observes: “The gods are invisible deities, the Brahmins are visible deities. The Brahmins sustain the world. It is by the favour of Brahmins that the gods reside in the heavens; a speech uttered by Brahmins never fails to come true. What the Brahmins pronounce when highly pleased the gods will ratify; when the visible gods are pleased the invisible gods are surely pleased as well.”
In contrast to the high position enjoyed by Brahmins the Sudras were subjected to manifold disabilities. They could not use the public roads nor avail themselves of public wells, they were forbidden to enter Hindu temples; to attend public school. Servitude is proclaimed to be a permanent condition of Sudras. A member of the first three classes must not travel in the company of Sudras. They were considered to impart some sort of defilement to objects like bed and seat by their touch. Severe punishments were prescribed for a Sudra in case he committed certain types of offence. Thus according to Kautilya, a Sudra, if he violates a Brahmin female shall be burnt to death. If he intentionally reviles or criminally assaults a Brahmin the offending limbs shall be cut.

(iii) Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse: Another element of caste is the complex of taboos by which the superior castes try to preserve their ceremonial purity. Each caste develops its own sub culture. Thus there are restrictions on feeding and social intercourse and minute rules are laid down with regard to the kind of food that can be acceptable by a person and from what castes. For example, a Brahmin will accept ‘pakka’ food i.e., food prepared in ghee from any community, but he can accept ‘kachcha’ food at the hands of no other caste. The theory of pollution being communicated by some castes to members of the higher ones places severe restrictions on the extent of social intercourse. Thus there are restrictions with regard to distances. Among the people of Kerala, a Nayar may approach a Namudiri Brahmin but must not touch him; while a Tiyan must keep himself at the distance of thirty-six steps from the Brahmin, and a Pulayan may not approach him within ninety-six paces. A Pulayan must not come near any of the Hindu castes. Even the wells are polluted if a low caste man draws water from them. So rigid are the rules about defilement that Brahmins will not perform even their ablutions within the precincts of a Sudra’s habitation. Even a modern Brahmin doctor, when feeling the pulse of a Sudra, first wraps up the patient’s wrist with a small piece of silk so that he may not be defiled by touching his skin”.

(iv) Endogamy: A person born in a caste remains in it for life and dies in it. Every caste is sub-divided into sub-castes, every-one of which forbids its members to marry persons outside it. Thus each sub-caste is endogamous. This principle of endogamy is so strict that one sociologist regards endogamy as “the essence of the caste system”. There are few exceptions to this general rule of endogamy which are due to the practice of hypergamy. Excepting the cases of hypergamy each caste has to contract matrimonial alliances within its own limits. Any man violating this law is put out of his own sub-caste.

(v) Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation: Members of a particular caste are expected to follow the caste occupation. They cannot change to other occupation. The abandonment of hereditary occupation is not thought to be right. No caste would allow its members to take to any occupation which was either degrading, like today tapping or impure like scavenging. It was not only
the moral degrading, like today tapping or impure like scavenging. It was not only the moral restraint of one’s occupation, but also the restriction put by other castes whose members did not allow members of the castes other than their own to follow their occupation. Thus no one not born a Brahmin was allowed to function as a priest. But the records show that Brahmins did all sorts of odd jobs. During the Maratha upheaval and after they entered the profession of arms, during the reign of Akbar they were seen engaged in trade, cultivation or any advantageous pursuit in general. At present though Brahmins are engaged in pursuits of various kinds, still the priestly profession is largely carried on by them. Similarly, the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are now engaged in pursuits other than their original occupations, yet they still retain in varying degrees the tradition of their original calling. “Every profession, with few exceptions, is open to every description of person”. Baines observes, “The occupation, again, which is common to the latter (the caste), is a traditional one, and is not by any means necessarily that by which all, or even most, of the group make their living in the present day”.

(vi) Civil and religious disabilities: Generally, the impure castes are made to live on the outskirts of the city. In southern India certain parts of the town or village are inaccessible to certain castes. It is recorded that under the Marathas and the Peshwas, the Mahars and Mangs were not allowed within the gates of Poona between 3 p.m. and 9 a.m. because before nine and after three their bodies caste too long a shadow, which falling on a member of the higher castes defiled him. All over India the impure castes were not permitted to draw water from wells used by the members of other castes. The public schools did not admit impure castes like Chamars and Mahars. The Sudras could not study the sacred literature. During the career of Swami Madhavrao, the Peshwa’s government had decreed that Mahars, being ‘ati sudras’, beyond Sudras, could not have their marriage rites conducted by the regular Brahman priests. The untouchables could not enter the temples. A Brahman could not be punished with capital punishment. If he was imprisoned, he was given a more liberal treatment than temple other classes.

2. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CASTE AND CLASS

Above we have described the features of caste system which are generally absent from class. On the distinction between caste and class, Maclver observes, “Whereas in eastern civilizations, the chief determinant of a class and status was birth, in the western civilization of today wealth is a class determinant of equal or perhaps greater importance, and wealth is a less rigid determinant than birth; it is more concrete, and thus its claims are more easily challenged; itself a matter of degree, it is less apt to create distinctions of kind, alienable, acquirable and transferable, it draws no such permanent lines of cleavage as does birth”. While distinguishing class from caste, Ogburn and Nimkoff observe as follows:
“In some societies it is not uncommon for individuals to move up or down the social ladder. Where this is the case the society is said to have “open” classes. Elsewhere there are little shifting, individuals remaining through a lifetime in the class into which “they chance to be born”. Such classes are “closed”, and if, extremely differentiated constitute a caste system”. “When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary”, states Cooley, “We may call it a caste”.

Warner and Davis write: Briefly caste may be defined as a rank order of superior superordinate orders with inferior subordinate orders which practise endogamy, prevent vertical mobility, and unequally distribute the desirable and undesirable social symbols. Class may be defined as a rank order of superior and inferior orders which allows both exogamy and endogamy, permits movement either up or down the system, or allows an individual to remain in the status to which he was born; it also unequally distributes the lower and higher evaluated symbols”.

The fundamental points of difference between class and caste are the following:

(i) **open vs. closed.** Class is more open than caste, Hiller writes, “A class system is an open system or rating levels….. If a hierarchy becomes closed against vertical mobility, it ceases to be a class system and becomes a caste system”. Since class is open and elastic social mobility becomes easier. A man can by his enterprise and initiative changes his class and thereby rise in social status. If a man is born in a labouring class, it is not necessary for him to live in the class for life and die in it. He can strive for money and success in life and with wealth he can change his social status implied in the class distinction. In case of caste system it is impossible to change one’s caste status. Once a man is born in a caste he remains init for his life-time and makes his children suffer the same fate. A caste is thus a closed class. The individual’s status is determined by the caste status of his parents, so that what an individual does has little bearing upon his status. On the other hand the membership of a class does not depend upon hereditary basis, it rather depends on the worldly achievements of an individual. Thus class system is an open and flexible system while caste system is a closed and rigid system.

(ii) **Divine vs. secular:** Secondly the caste system is believed to have been divinely ordained. “Maclver writes, “the rigid demarcation of caste could scarcely be maintained were it not for strong religious persuasions. The hold of religious belief, with its supernatural explanations of caste itself is essential to the continuance of the system. The Hindu caste structure may have arisen out of the subjection or enslavement incidental to conquest and perhaps also out of the subordination of one endogamous community to another. But the power, prestige and pride of race thus engendered could rise to a caste system, with it social separation of groups that are not in fact set apart by any clear social signs, only as the resulting situation was rationalised and made “eternal by
religious myths”. It is everybody’s religious duty to fulfill his caste duties in accordance with his ‘dharma’. In the Bhagavadgita the Creator is said to have apportioned the duties and functions of the four castes. An individual must do the duty proper to his caste. Failure to act according to one’s caste duties meant birth in a lower caste and finally spiritual annihilation. Men of the lower castes are reborn in higher castes if they have fulfilled their duties”. Caste system in India would not have survived for so many centuries if temple religious system had not made it sacred and inviolable. On the contrary, there is nothing sacred or of divine origin in the class stratification of society. Classes are secular in origin. They are not founded on religious dogmas.

(iii) Endogamous: Thirdly, the choice of mates in caste system is generally endogamous. Members have to marry within their own castes. A member marrying outside his caste is treated as outcaste. No such restrictions exist in class system. A wealthy man may marry a poor girl without being outcasted. An educated girl may marry an uneducated partner without being thrown out from the class of teachers.

(iv) Class consciousness: Fourthly, the feeling of class consciousness is necessary to constitute a class but there is no need for any subjective consciousness in the members of caste.

(v) Prestige: Fifthly, the relative prestige of the different castes is well established but in class system there is no rigidly fixed order of prestige.

3. THE ORIGIN OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The exact origin of caste system cannot be traced. The system is said to have originated in India. The records of the Indo-Aryan culture contain the first mention and a continuous history of the factors that make up caste. The people, who are known as Indo-Aryans belong linguistically to the larger family of peoples designated either as Indo-Europeans or as Indo-Germans. They comprised the Anglo-Saxons, the Celts, the Romans, the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the Iranian among others. One of the branches of these peoples which reached India about 2,500 B.C. is called Indo-Aryans.

(i) Racial Theory: According to Dr. Mazumdar, the caste system took its birth after the arrival of Aryans in India. In order to maintain their separate existence the Indo-Aryans used for certain groups and orders of people the favourite word ‘varna’, ‘colour’. Thus they spoke of the ‘Dasa varna’, or more properly the Dasaa people. Rigvedic literature stresses very significant the differences between the Arya and Dasa, not only in their colour but also in their speech, religious practices, and physical features. The three classes’ Brahma, Kshattra and Villages are frequently mentioned in the Rigveda Veda. The name of the fourth class, the ‘Sudra’ occurs only once in the Rigveda.
Veda. The first two classes, i.e., Brahma and Kshatra represented broadly the two professions of the poet-priest and the warrior-chief. Villages comprised all the common people. The Sudra class represented domestic servants approximating very nearly to the position of slaves. On the relations subsisting between the four classes the Rigveda Veda has little to say. However, the Brahman is definitely said to be superior to the Kshatriya.

(ii) Political Theory: According to this theory, caste system is a clever device invented by the Brahmans in order to place themselves on the highest ladder of social hierarchy. Dr. Ghurye states, “Caste is a Brahmanic child of Indo-Aryan culture cradled in the land of the Ganges and thence transferred to other parts of India”. The Brahmanic literature of the post-Vedic period mentions certain mixed classes (Sankara jati) and also a group of outcaste classes (Antyavasayin). Among the four varnas, the old distinction of Arya and Sudra now appears as Dvija and Sudra. The first three classes are called Dvija (twice born) because they have to go through the initiation ceremony which is symbolic of rebirth. “The Sudra was called “ekajati” (Once born). The word “jail” is henceforward employed to mean the numerous sub-divisions of a “varna”. However, this demarcation is not rigidly maintained. The word “jati”, is sometimes used for “varna”. In the Brahman period the position of the Brahman increased manifold. The three lower classes are ordered to live according to the teaching of the Brahman, who shall declare their duties, while the king also is exhorted to regulate his conduct accordingly. The pre-eminence of the Brahman had secured him many social privileges sanctioned by the law givers. The statement that God created the Sudra to be the slave of all is repeated and he is given the name of “padaja” (born from the feet).

As the priestly influence grew in India, complicated rules of ritual and conduct were built up and incorporated into the religious books. The Brahmans closed their ranks and tried to maintain their superiority over the other classes. It is true that in the beginning there were no rigid restrictions but slowly and gradually the idea of separation stiffened. It was first the ritual and ceremonial purity which as time went on took an exaggerated aspect. Distinction began to be made between things pure and impure. Restrictions were imposed on food and drink. When the Brahmans closed their ranks, it was but natural that other classes also should follow suit.

(iii) Occupational Theory: According to this theory, the origin of caste system can be found in the nature and quality of social work performed by the various groups of people. Those professions which were regarded as better and respectable made the persons who performed them superior to those who were engaged in dirty professions. According to Nesfield, “Function and function alone is responsible for the origin of caste structure in India”. With functional differentiation there came in occupational differentiation and numerous sub-castes such as Lohar, Sonar, Chamar, Bhangi, Barhai, Patwa, Teli, Nai, Tamboli, Kahar, Gadaria, Mati, etc, came into existence.
(iv) Traditional Theory: According to this theory, the caste system is of divine origin. There are some references in Vedic literature wherein it is said that castes were created by Brahma the supreme creator, so that human beings may harmoniously perform the various social functions essential for the maintenance of society. According to Dr. Mazumdar, “if, however we take the divine origin of the Varnas as an allegorical explanation of the functional division of society, the theory assumes practical significance”.

(v) Guild Theory: According to Denzil Ibbetson, castes are the modified forms of guilds. (i) Tribes, (ii) guilds, and (iii) religion. The tribes adopted certain fixed professions and assumed the form of guilds. In ancient India the priests enjoyed greater prestige. They were a hereditary and endogamous group. The other guilds also adopted the same practices and in course of time became castes.

(vi) Religious Theory: Hocart and Senart are the two main advocates of religious theory. According to Hocart, social stratification originated on account of religious principles and customs. In ancient India religion had a prominent place. The king was considered the image of God. The priest kings accorded different positions to different functional groups. Senart has tried to explain the origin of caste system on the basis of prohibitions regarding sacramental food. He holds that on account of different family duties there grew up certain prohibitions regarding sacramental food. The followers of one particular deity considered themselves the descendants of the same ancestor and offered a particular kind of food as offering to their deity. Those who believed in the same deity considered themselves as different from those who believed in some other deity.

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

(i) Hereditary occupations;
(ii) The desire of the Brahmans to keep themselves pure;
(iii) The lack of rigid unitary control of the state;
(iv) The unwillingness of rulers to enforce a uniform standard of law and custom and their readiness to recognize the varying customs of different groups as valid;
(v) Beliefs is re-incarnation and the doctrine of Karma;
(vi) Ideas of exclusive family, ancestor worship, and the sacramental meal;
(vii) Clash of antagonistic cultures particularly of the patriarchal and the matriarchal systems;

(viii) Clash of races, colour prejudices and conquest;

(ix) Deliberate economic and administrative policies followed by the various conquerors particularly by the British;

(x) Geographical isolation of the Indian peninsula;

(xi) Static nature of Hindu society;

(xii) Foreign invasions;

(xiii) Rural social structure.

All the above factors conspired to encourage the formation of small groups based on petty distinctions from time to time. The lack of rigid unitary control of the state, the unwillingness of the rulers to enforce a uniform standard of law and custom, their readiness to recognize the varying customs of different groups as valid, and their usual practice of allowing things somehow to adjust themselves led to the growth of groups and promoted the spirit of solidarity and community feeling in every group. “Multiplicity of the groups and the thoroughness of the system are also due to the habit of the Hindu mind to create categories and to carry things to their logical end a characteristic manifest in our literature, philosophy and religious creeds”.

It may, however, be noted that caste system is not specifically an institution of the Hindus but is a typical Indian institutions. Buddhism in its practice at least was no opposed to the caste system and the two primary attributes of inter-dining and inter-marriage between different hereditary determined sets of people in the same community are also found among the Moslems of India. Further, caste system is not a monopoly of India. It existed and still exists in many parts of the world. The feudal system of medieval Europe was a species of caste system. Certain ethnic groups such as Jews and Negroes are still treated as castes in many civilized countries including the United States. What is unique in the Hindu caste system is that it alone classified some groups as untouchable and unapproachable. It may, however, be noted that caste system is not a monopoly of India. It existed and still exists in many parts of the world. The feudal system of medieval Europe was a species of caste system. Certain ethnic groups such as Jews and Negroes are still treated as castes in many civilized countries including the United States.
4. MERITS AND DEMERITS OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Merits.

From time to time the Indian caste system has been attacked from various quarters and to it have been ascribed all the numerous evils from which society is suffering. But the very fact that it continues in spite of these attacks as before, goes to prove that the system is not so bad as it is thought to be. The very fact that the Brahmins retained their supremacy for two thousand years proves that they were eminently fitted to be in a position of domination. The merits of the caste system are the following:

(i) Trade union and orphanage: It has provided every individual with a fixed social environment. In the words of Hutton, “He is provided in this a way with a permanent body of associations which control almost all his behaviour and contacts. His caste canalizes his choice in marriage, acts as his trade union, his friendly or benefit society, his state-club and his orphanage; it takes place for him of health insurance and if need be, provides for his funeral”.

(ii) Spirit of cooperation: It has fostered the spirit of co-operation and fellow-feeling among members of the same caste. By helping the poor and needy, it has avoided the necessity of the state supporting the poor. It minimizes envy or unhappiness.

(iii) Defines economic pursuits: It defines the economic pursuits of the individual. There is an occupation pertaining to every caste so that the child’s future is not only carved out already but also a proper place of apprenticeship is provided. Since there is identification of work with caste, and little thought of change, there is more pride in workmanship. Ancient India was a land provided with generations of craftsmen and soil cultivators who were extremely skilful in their avocations.

(iv) Racial purity: It has preserved the racial purity of the higher caste by forbidding indiscriminate inter-marriages and has greatly fostered the habits of cleanliness by insisting on ritual purity.

(v) Influences intellectual make-up: It influences the intellectual make-up of an individual. Since the caste dictates to each member customs to be observed in the manner of diet, the observance of ceremonies and whether he may marry a widow, his views on the social and political matters are bound to be influenced by his caste customs. This fosters the spirit of equality within the groups.

(vi) Integration of the country: It develops class consciousness without breeding class struggle. It has created in efficient organization of Hindu society without giving any chance to class frictions and factions. It was a best device to
organize within one society people of different cultural levels. It prevented the country from splitting up into warring racial units. It integrated Indian society into one vast and variegated community and provided the country with a sure basis of security and continuity whereby a stable and orderly organization of society could be possible.

(vii) Provides for various functions: It provides for the various functions necessary to social life “functions ranging from education to scavenging, from government to domestic service of the most menial kinds and it makes this provision under the sanction of a religious dogma, the belief in Karma, which renders the superficially inequitable distribution of functions acceptable as being part of the divine order of the universe”. It provides a much better method of division of labour than the European class system.

(viii) Cultural diffusion: It helps in cultural diffusion within the group. The caste customs, beliefs, skill, behaviour, the trade secrets are passed on from generation to generation. Culture is thus carried from one age to another.

(ix) Separation of Social from Political life: It has separated the social from political life and has maintained its independence from political influences. S.C. Hill says “His intimate life, the life which to the Hindu really matters, is altogether independent of the political conditions, which happens to prevail”. It serves as a great church and maintains its own religious system by providing for the worship of caste gods.

Demerits.

But the system has given rise to several evils.

(i) Denies mobility of labour: It has denied mobility of labour since the individual must follow the caste occupation and cannot change it according to his likes or dislikes. This leads to stagnation.

(ii) Untouchability: It leads to untouchability. According to Mahatma Gandhi it is “the hate fullest expression of caste”. Large sections of people are reduced to the state of virtual slavery. In addition, it has also created many other social evils like child marriage, dowry system, purda system, and casteism.

(iii) Solidarity retarded: It has retarded the growth of solidarity and brotherhood in the Hindu society by rigidly separating one class from another and denying any type of social intercourse between them. It has led to the disintegration of Hindu society and weakened it.

(iv) Wrong man in occupation: It often results in putting man on wrong occupation. There is no guarantee that a priest’s son would also like to be a priest or would possess the qualities for a successful priest. Under the caste
system he cannot take up any other profession even though he may possess the skill and liking for that. It does not utilize fully the talents and capabilities of the population and is therefore a barrier to optimum productivity.

**(v) Obstacle to national unity:** It has proved an obstacle to the growth of national unity in the country. The lower classes feel discontented at the behaviour meted out to them in society. As Dr. G.S. Ghurye states, “It is the spirit of caste-patriotism which engenders opposition to other castes and creates an unhealthy atmosphere for the growth of national consciousness”. E. Schmidt also pointed out that one of the most tragic consequences of the caste system is that it prevents the development of general national consciousness.

**(vi) Obstacle to social progress:** It is a great obstacle to the social and economic progress of the nation. Since the people believe in the theory of ‘Kharma’, they become conservative. And because their economic position is fixed; they are led to inertia killing their initiative and enterprise.

**(vii) Undemocratic:** Lastly, the caste system is undemocratic because it denies equal rights to all irrespective of their caste, creed or colour. Social barriers are erected specially in the way of lower class individuals who are not given freedom for the mental and physical development and are not provided with opportunities for that.

On the perusal of comparative merits and demerits of caste system it may be safely concluded that the demerits far outweigh the merits. Although caste system played an important role at a certain stage of Indian History by supplying temple social foundation to the village community system, it has lost its utility in modern India. A caste system, makes for a lethargic and stable society. Where status is determined at birth and cannot be either lost or improved by the actions of the individual, there is little encouragement of exceptional endeavor. Few will do more than is demanded of them and some will even do less. Whether he worked or played, the aristocrat remained an aristocrat. No matter how hard a Harijan worked, he could not escape serfdom. It is on account of the closed character of Indian caste system that the people of India are so lowly motivated and the society as a whole is inert and apathetic. As James Bryce says, ‘Social structure is an important factor. Where men are divided by religion, or caste distinctions grounded on race or on occupation, there are grounds for mutual distrust and animosity which make it hard for them to act together or for each section to recognize equal rights in the other’. Until the caste barriers are fractured and it becomes possible for a man of low status to profit by individual effort, such effort will not be forthcoming and the society will ultimately suffer.
VILLAGE COMMUNITY

The village community played a vital part in the economy of medieval India. There is no consensus of opinion among the scholars about the nature of this village community. There are mainly three schools of thought, the first holding the view that the members of the village community, who held the lands either individually or in common, had originally belonged to one single family group, the second that the members held the lands in common, and not individually, the village community as a whole having proprietary rights in all lands, different shares being assigned to the various members for purposes of cultivation and the third that the members held the lands individually, and not in common, the village community acting only as an intermediary between the villagers and the Government in the matter of assessment and collection of land revenue. This can be taken as a broad classification of medieval Indian village communities, there being minor variations under each of these heads.

The village community in Mughal India was founded on two mutually opposite ideas, the mode of individualistic production and the pattern of collective organization, owing to the need for the production of market goods and the necessity of having a self-sufficient economy. Thus it contained within itself two self-contradictory elements. The village produced a large number of goods for sale in the urban markets and also the use of the members of the village community. Thus each member acted in a double capacity; when producing commodities for sale in the neighbouring urban markets he acted in his individual capacity, but when providing the essential services and goods for the other members of the village, he acted in a corporate capacity. In matters of production the individual’s right to his lands was recognized and in other matters they acted collectively. The records of the times give us an impression that the peasant was an individual landholder.

Broadly speaking, there were six classes of people in the village community under the Mughals. The first class was composed of Zamindars, money-lenders and grain merchants; the second, of the wealthy cultivators; the third, of the ordinary peasants having their own lands; the fourth, of peasants who were not well-to-do but who had to borrow money from others for purchasing seeds, cattle and other equipment necessary for cultivating lands; the fifth, of those peasants who did not have proprietary rights in land, but who cultivated lands owned by others and yet were free individuals and the sixth, of landless labourers. These landless labourers worked in various capacities such as agricultural workers, cobbler, scavengers and carriers of baggage. The existence of landless labourers forming the lowest class in the society, engaged in menial work and attached to the caste peasants, could be partly explained by the rigidity of the caste system and partly by economic reasons which made them unable to stand on their own legislatures, possessing their own lands. The above is, however, a very broad generalization of classification of people in the villages on the basis of their economic conditions. The peasants often belonged to the same caste and even to the same sub-caste. They generally claimed to have been descended from the same
brotherhood or fraternity called bhaiyachara, those outside this fraternity and having no lands of their own, being treated as belonging to a lower caste.

There were three important features which were inseparable from the village life in Mughal days. The village was always self-sufficient. This self-sufficiency was achieved owing to a steady supply of essential services provided by different craftsmen such as the village carpenter, the village smith, and the village mason. The members following such vocations belonged to their own castes, each one's vocation was determined by his caste, and the members stuck to their own castes and crafts owing to the rigidity of the caste-system. Briefly, self-sufficiency, division of labour and caste cohesion held the village community together.

The village community in Mughal India, especially in the north, did not signify that all the lands were held by the village and that individual members did not have their independent and distinct proprietary rights in the land. But it only meant that individual peasants had the exclusive ownership rights over their lands, while in some cases they acted collectively. For example, peasants of the villages acted in a collective capacity while paying the revenue to the Government, or when defying the authority of the State. The Patwari was appointed collectively by all the peasants. The village had its common finances or a common financial pool. The accounts maintained by the Patwari showed that the village income included the bachh or the rate paid by every member of the bhaiyachara fraternity into the common pool and the land revenue or the behrimal paid by every member for his own share or behri of the village lands of the fraternity. This is similar to the vritti system of the agraharas in South India, where temple agrahara village was divided into a number of shares called vrittis assigned to individual members of the agraharas. The village accounts also showed the various requisites and fees paid by the villagers. The village income thus collected was spent in the payment of the land revenue to the Government, in the payment of fees and perquisites to the various officials and their agents, and in the payment of the allowances to the Muqaddam, to the Patwari and others, for constructing water-canals, for buying seeds, and for entertainment purposes. The village expenses also covered hospitality to guests and charity to the needy. Thus, from the village common financial pool, not only was the land revenue paid, but an all-round development, social, economic and religious, of the whole village was sought to be achieved. Generally, a small body consisting of the heads of houses called the Panchayat looked after the management of village affairs. There were also villages wherein the peasants were not organised into a community, the village management being in the hands of a few rich and influential members. As for the village officials, the Muqaddam or the village headman was entrusted with the collection of land revenue from the villagers and its payment to the Government, with the maintenance of peace and order in his jurisdiction, and with the administration of the village in general. He was assisted by a village accountant called Patwari charged with the duty of maintaining village accounts, and by some other village officials.
In medieval Karnataka, there were principally two kinds of village communities, namely, the uru and the agrahara. In these bodies, the actual management of village affairs was looked after either by a small executive body headed by the village headman or by the executive body and the people of the village together. In Vijayanagara we have a number of such instances. The executive of the village assembly generally consisted of the panchayat and the village headman called by different names individual parts as the Gauda or Gaunda. The Gauda acted in a double capacity, as a representative or the spokesman of the villagers and as an agent of the Government. The office of Gauda or Gaudike was conferred on him either by the King, or by his officers, or by the villagers themselves evidently taking into consideration some meritorious service rendered by the candidate or his capacity to discharge the responsibilities of the office. In some cases, we find a number of Goudas who might have represented different parts of the village, or the heads of influential families in the village. The village accountant was the next important functionary. He was styled Senabova or Kulkarni, a term made up of two words, kula meaning a family or a peasant (a taxpayer) and karani signifying an accountant. Thus, the Kulakarni must originally have been either an accountant or different families of the village or the tax-paying peasants of the village. He was usually a hereditary official. He acted in a double capacity, like the Gauda, as a servant of the people and as an official of the Government. According to an inscription dated 1565, the offices of Senabova, Jyotisha, Purohita, etc., were hereditary, and even after a small break due to some reasons, the former occupants were confirmed in their offices on consultation with the former residents of the locality.

The village community was served generally by twelve village servants or officials called Ayagars in Karnataka, and Barabalute in Maharashtra. Aya signified an allowance of grain which the village servant got from the villagers for his services to the village community. Therefore a recipient of the Aya was known as the Ayagara. The records of the early medieval Karnataka mention the following Ayagars, viz., the Gauda, the Senabova, the Talara, the Barika (Watchman), the boatman, the Totiga, the stone-mason, the blacksmith, the goldsmith, the carpenter, the barber, the astrologer and the washerman. These Ayagars received either rent-free lands or their prequisites called aya (generally in kind) from the village community. An inscription of 1544 speaks of the twelve Ayagars. The Vijayanagara and Mysore records show that all these Ayagars continued to function down to the late medieval times.

1. A copper-plate inscription dated A.D. 1720 coming from the Sira taluka of the Tumkur district in Karnataka given the following Ayagars:

Just before the government was taken over by the British, there were in Mysore the following 13 village officials and servants, usually called Barabalute:

1) Shanbhog. 2) Patil. 3) Toti .4) Talawar .5) Nirgunti (distributer of water) .6) Iron Smith and Carpenter .7) Potter .8) Chuckler .9) Washerman .10) Barber .11) Astrologer .12) Pujari or Priest .13) Village Shroff.

2. In Vijayanagara, we find the Gauda, the Senabova, the Panikattu-ayagara (waterman or turncock), Talara (watchman), the Begara (forced labourer), the Jyotisha (Astrologer), and the Sthala-purohita (village priest). From the Annals of the Mysore Royal Family we know that under Chikkadevaraya the following twelve Ayagars were functioning as village servants, viz., Gauda (Headman), Sanbhaga (Accountant), Panchangada Brahmana (the Astrologer), Kabbinada Kelasadavanu (Blacksmith), Akkasale (Goldsmith), Kumbhar (Potter), Agasa (Washerman), Kelasi (Barber), Toti (Labourer), Talavara (Watchma), Kereniruganti (Turncock) and Ojaravanu (Priest). The services of these village servants were remunerated either by grants of lands or by grants of perquisites or by grants of both.

The Gaudas received grants of lands sometimes called Gaudumbali, and also various perquisites such as dues from the fairs, presents during the festivals and rates on the sale of lands, etc. He was the executive head of the village. He performed a number of important functions such as maintaining peace and order in the village, trying petty criminal cases, organising the village militia, looking after the construction and maintenance of tanks, temples, guest-houses, gateways, drinking water sheds, etc., and above all collecting the revenue from the villagers. In the times of Chikkadevaraya in Mysore, the Gauda received a solige of foodgrains as his aya from each cultivator, besides the house-tax, flour, presents, etc. The Senabova received his regular salary, half in kind, half in cash, besides getting one-fourth or one-half or three-fourths or one hana from each landholder according to his standing in the village. This money was known as the accountant’s perquisites (Kadatada-Kanikeya-hana). The priest, the barber, the potter, the washerman, the turncock assistant, the blacksmith and the watchman were each to receive a bundle of grass with the ears of corn, and a kolaga-ful of foodgrains from the threshing-floors of each of the ryots. To the village astrologer, the toti, the watchman and the turncock were granted lands for subsistence rated at varahas ranging from one to six, depending on the importance of these Ayagars. The village communities discharged their functions through the village officials or Panchayats. The maintenance of peace and order in the village was, of course, its first and foremost function. But often it was called upon to settle boundary disputes and regulated water supply for irrigation purposes.
The village assembly in early medieval Karnataka was known as the uru or the okkalu. In the case of the agrahara villages, it was called the assembly of mahajanas. Although the village executive generally carried on the day-to-day village administration, in some cases all the members of the village community (Samastapraje) were associated with the administration. They made, for instance, assignments of taxes to temples.

In Vijayanagar and Keladi times, the members of the village community were sometimes denoted by a common phrase hadinentujati, eighteen castes, or classes or professions. In South Kanara, the village communities were known as jagat and janani whose permission even the king had to seek in some cases. Sometimes, the members of the village communities were indicated by their numbers only like the Aivattokkalu (50 households), the Aravattokkalu (60 households) and the Aravattagrahara (60 agraharas), or simply the 50 or the 60. A study of such village communities suggests that the number of the original colonisers was given to the village, that the same number was retained even after many more families came to settle in these, and that the members of the original families exercised considerable influence, as in the bhaichara villages, in village affairs. We have it on record that members of these village communities often held meetings, where deliberations took place on important matters, and that whenever important decisions were taken either by the Government or by the village headmen, the consent of these bodies was always taken.

An important village community in the Deccan was the agrahara or the Brahmin village community. The agraharas were usually granted to the Brahmin for their sustenance, each member receiving his share of lands called vrittis into which the village was divided. And such recipients of vrittis and the members of the agrahara were known as mahajanas. The agrahara was assigned to the Brahmins for their learning by the king or his officers, whereas the uru was formed by the households. The members of the agrahara were engaged in religious, educational or intellectual pursuits, whereas the members of the uru were primarily engaged in agricultural pursuits. Thus although the members of both the types of village communities were landholders, the emphasis on their duties was different in the two cases. It may be incidentally noted that the body of the mahajaras in Karnatak was the counterpart of the Sabha of Tamilnad. In Karnatak the headmen of agrahara were known as mahaprabhus or urodeyas. When the agrahara was granted to an individual, evidently the head of a number of Brahmins, he distributed the shares or vrittis of the agrahara among the various Brahmin members. If the agrahara was newly built and bestowed on the Brahmins, the proprietary rights in land together with their produce belonged to its Brahmin members. If, on the other hand, an already existing village was converted into an agrahara and then bestowed on the Brahmins, they got only the rent from the lands. The agrahara lands were either completely exempted from taxation or were made to pay only a quite-rent. If the agraharas were not taxed at all, they were specifically
mentioned as sarvamanya agraharas. The agrahara meetings were summoned either by an officer representing the Government, or by the parties to a dispute, or it could meet of its own accord. The mahajanas assembled for conducting the proceedings of their meetings either in the open at some important place or in specially constructed assembly-halls or town-halls, or even in temples and schools. The decisions were generally arrived at unanimously. Often these village communities made their own rules and regulations called samaya or maryade, and insisted on their being followed, the violaters being duly punished.

In Maharashtra the village community was called the Pandhari and was mainly composed of three classes of person’s viz., the Watandars, the Mirasdars and the Upairs. The term Watan originally signified one’s country or place of residence or home. In Maharashtra, it signified rent-free lands or lands paying a small quit-rent, or only some rights and perquisites granted to a hereditary official for his services renders to the society. The officials enjoying their Watans were thus known as Watandars. The Watan tenure was mainly an office tenure, whereas the Mirasi and Upari were land tenures. As far as the village Watandars were concered, they held their office either in return for a grant of lands or for a grant of rights and perquisites or for a grant of both. The village headman called generally the Patil enjoyed the Inam lands as well as his perquisites, whereas the village servants who generally, but not always, numbered 12, received only their perquisites, some of them rarely enjoying grants of lands. The Watandars of the village could be classed under two heads, the officers of the village and the servants of the village. The officers of the village were the Muqaddan or Patil, Kulkarni and the Chaugula. The Patil was at once a nominee of the village and of the Government. His main duties were the collection of revenue from the villagers, protection of the village community and administration of village justice, carried on with the help of other members of the village community. The Kulkarni’s position was analogous to that of the Patil, but his functions were to maintain the village accounts and to assist the village headman in the realisation of the village revenue. The Chaugula was also an assistant to the Patil. The servants of the village were known as Balutas or Balutedars, generally twelve in number, and hence the term Barabalute (the twelve Balutas). Baluta originally signified an yearly allowance of grain due to a servant of the village for the essential services rendered by him to the village community. But later the recipient of the Baluta himself came to be known as a Baluta. The twelve Balutas or Balutedars who generally figure in the records are the carpenter, the cobbler, the blacksmith, the washerman, the potter, the barber, the turncock, the goldsmith, the astrologer the priest or Gurav, the Mahar and the Mang. This is, however, a general list, the records often mentioning more or less village servants than the traditional twelve, some of them including the Taral or the messenger, the Jangam or the Lingayat priest, and Maulana or the Muslim Priest. It is very interesting to observe that these village servants in Maharashtra had each one of them their own symbols or marks of attestation which are generally found impressed on Mahzars and other judicial documents. Thus, the carpenter had as his attestation mark a
chisel, the cobbler had a thread with a pricker, the washerman a mallet, the potter a wheel, the barber a looking glass, the goldsmith a pair of tongs, the Gurav a censer and the Maulana a knife. The astrologer and priest generally, though not always, did not have their marks, they were putting their signatures only, probably because these were literate and knew how to sign their names, whereas other village servants were mostly illiterate and therefore they put their hand impressions or thumb impressions on the documents together with their attestation marks.

It is interesting to notice that the term Ayagars used in Karnataka means exactly the same thing as the Balutedars of Maharashtra. Aya like Baluta is an allowance of grain, and hence an Ayagar is a recipient, like the Balutedar, of his allowance of grain from the peasants for his services rendered to the village community. Some differences are, however, noticed between the Ayagars and Balutedars. Among the Ayagars, the village hadman and the accountant were generally counted, whereas they were excluded from the Balutedars for the Balutedars were considered to be village servants, whereas the Patil and Kulkarni were the village officers. A very important difference between them was that in Maharashtra, unlike in Karnataka, these village servants had their own professional insignia or attestation marks.

The next class of the members of the village community in Maharashtra was that of Mirasdars, or landholders, having absolute hereditary proprietary rights in their lands. The Mirasdars were also known as Thalkaris in some villages. The Mirasi tenure was essentially land tenure, as against the Watan tenure which was office tenure. The Uparis, who constituted the next class in the village community, were ordinary cultivators tilling the lands, but having no propriety right in them. An Upari, literally meaning a stranger, was obviously an outsider in the village, and became an enant-at-will holding his lands on lease for short terms. The lease was known as a Kaul, and the lease-deed a Kaulnama. Thus, the Mirasdar was a peasant-proprietor, whereas the Upari was only a lease-holder. Mirasi was a free tenure, whereas Upari was a servile tenure. The Uparis, it may be noted, gradually, say after about twenty years or so, assumed the status of Mirasdars, by acquiring the proprietary rights in the lands they were cultivating, as did the copyholders in medieval England, who were originally holding lands by village tenure like the Uparis in medieval Maharashtra. The lowest class in the village community was probably constituted by the landless labourers. Thus was the village community in medieval Maharashtra composed of the village Watandars, the Balutedars the Mirasdars having hereditary proprietary rights in their lands, the peasant-proprietors who had originally been lease-holders but who in due course acquired the ownership rights in their holdings, the Uparis, and finally the landless labourers.
The village community in medieval Maharashtra, as noted already, was called Pandhari, while the village council was known as the Gota or Gotasabha. The Pandhari consisted of all the members of the village, whereas the Gota seems to have comprised only the heads of the Mirasdar families, the Watandars and some other influential members. It appears that there were principally three cohesive forces which held the village community together, viz., the Watan, the kinship and the community of interests indicated by the phrases watan-bhau, ghar-bhau and biradar-bhau respectively. The ghar-bhau element in the village community of Maharashtra, it may be observed, had a striking resemblance to the bhaichara element of the village community in North India under the Mughals. The village community in Maharashtra, as elsewhere in India, was politically autonomous and economically self-sufficient. The village headman maintained peace and order in the village utilising the services of the watchman, collected revenue and other dues with the assistance of the Kulkarni and Chaugula and carried on the village administration in general in consultation with the Gotasabha. All the disputes, civil and criminal, were settled in the village, the Pandhari itself trying the important cases. Some cases, however, had to be decided by higher bodies.

The economic self-sufficiency was achieved by the Balutedars and the peasants together. The Balutedars satisfied the economic requirements felt by the cultivators and the residents of the village providing both agricultural implements as well as consumer commodities. The services were largely paid in kind. The peasants also produced some market commodities which either they themselves carried to the neighbouring market places for sale or disposed them of through some merchants or Sawkars residing in the village. These merchants were also the shopkeepers generally. But this did not mean that there was money economy, for the production of market goods on a large scale solely with the object of earning profits was impossible, because of the bad means of communication or of their total absence, because of the existence of a small number of market places or towns, and because of the inability of the peasants to wait for a favourable time for the sale of their goods owing to the wide prevalence of the barter system.
Caste and Urban Centres

Caste in the South Indian Nagaram.

In recent years much of the historical research on medieval South India has concerned itself with agrarian structures, peasant settlements and the general pattern of socio-economic changes. Problems in the interpretation of epigraphic records, the confused state of numismatic evidence and the inadequacy of statistical data have deterred scholars from reconstructing the history of urban development, despite their interest in trade patterns, merchant and craft organizations, and state participation in such activities. Conventional historical works abound in references to urban centres and trade organizations, but fail to provide any meaningful framework, conceptual or chronological, for understanding urban processes. One of the major flaws from which such works suffer is purely methodological and lies mainly in their isolated treatment of agrarian and urban institutions – and their development – as entirely unrelated aspects, as also in covering wide spans of time without pausing to recognize and demarcate the phases indicating change or progress. The study of the Chola state by Burton Stein introduces a new conceptual model for the medieval South Indian state, namely the segmentary state. This work makes serious efforts to provide a framework for the empirical data on South India, rather ambitiously attempting to cover a vast span of time, a ‘longitudinal interest’ of about 17 centuries. Notwithstanding the interest that it has aroused and the critiques that it has provoked, the work has little to offer on urban institutions. It takes passing note of the nagaram as an organization of merchants and makes oblique references to ‘temple urbanization’ of the 12th – 13th centuries as an inevitable part of the changing scene at the decline of Chola power. The author’s treatment of the nagaram is cursory and incidental to his major concern, namely peasant society and the agrarian order.

Some useful investigation in the direction has been made by Kenneth R. Hall, whose works are mainly devoted to the study of the nagaram as a marketing centre. The works of both Stein and Hall have undoubtedly been inspired by and draw largely upon the scientific study of the agrarian unit called the nadu and its assembly, the Nadu, by Y. Subbarayalu, the nadu being the segment in Stein’s analysis of the Chola state and the nagaram its marketing centre in Hall’s interpretation. While Hall’s works are admittedly more relevant to the study of urban processes, they also exhibit the same tendency as the others in treating the whole of the Chola period (AD 850 – 1278) as an undifferentiated unit, particularly in using epigraphic data of widely divergent dates for the study of urban institutions like the nagaram and merchant guilds. His main work, Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cholas,
however, lays emphasis on the role of the Periya nadu and the increasing role of merchants, the latter in collusion with warlords, as a contributory factor in the decline of the Chola state.

Hall’s major concern is the nagaram and its interaction with other local institutions like the brahmadeya and ur and what he, like Stein, calls the supra-local assembly, i.e. the Periya nadu. His study of the Tiruvidaimarudur urban complex is an attempt to view ‘the peasant state and society of Chola times’ from the vantage point of an urban centre near the core of the Chola region. This is partly a critique of Stein’s theory of a powerful nattar and nadu autonomy. It posits the idea that Chola policy favouring the nagaram as much as the Brahmadeya – in opposition to the primacy of nadu institutions – was aimed at reducing nadu autonomy and discouraging the mutually supportive interactions among local assemblies through the temple. These, in Hall’s view, were the centralizing efforts of the Cholas, in response to which the nattar created the Periya nadu as a supra-local unit of societal integration to protect their self-interest villages-a-villages the Cholas. It is not Dr. Chambakalakshmi’s direct concern here to show the incorrectness of the assessment made by both Stein and Hall of the role of the Periya nadu. It may however be emphasized that the Periya nadu was a different kind of organization meant to serve as a guild of agriculturists, or, more correctly, of dealers in agricultural commodities, a development of great significance in the urban activities of medieval Tamil Nadu. Hall’s study of the economy of Kanchipuram is, on the other hand, of greater interest to urban historians, for it provides some comparisons between urban experiences in medieval South India and medieval northern Europe.

This essay aims to identify some areas of fruitful research and promising lines of investigation in relation to urban processes in medieval Tamil Nadu. Two major periods of urbanization can be recognized in Tamil Nadu, the first coinciding with the early centuries of the Christian era, i.e. the Sangam period, and the second with the period of Cholas, i.e. from the ninth to the 13th centuries AD. The intervening period provides through fairly large-scale agrarian expansion the basis for the growth of urban centres in the Chola period. These two periods represent different kinds of urban experience, characteristic respectively of a tribal society in the process of development and an agrarian society with well organized institutions. The predominant factor in the urbanization of the Sangam period would appear to be maritime trade, in which the early chiefdoms actively participated. (There is a need to rethink the nature of the polities of the Sangam Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas, which may at best be described as chiefdoms or potential monarchies – although the term Vendar used in Sangam works for rulers has been interpreted as ‘kings’). The decline in overseas trade led to the decline of urban centres, most of which were ports or emporia of trade. It also partially explains the sudden disappearance of the early chiefdoms.
Early medieval South India, Tamil Nadu in particular, provides a conspicuous example of rural-urban continuum without a clearcut demarcation of rural-urban boundaries. In this context it is relevant to raise certain crucial questions relating to pre-industrial societies. For example, what are the links between agricultural production and urban growth and the degree to which agricultural growth and the availability of a surplus is a necessary precondition to urban development? Does an increase in commerce and overseas trade, and the consequent emergence of centres of commodity exchange or an entrepot market, stimulate agricultural production? To what extent do towns develop as centres of commodity production or distribution centres in relation to the internal economy, as opposed to the growth of towns in response to the demands of overseas trade? In the South Indian context, answers to these questions may be sought first in the agrarian development which preceded and continued through the Chola period. In the pre-Chola period, Pallava dominance over the region north of the Kaveri and the revival of Pandya power in Madurai (6th to 9th centuries AD) marked a major shift in agrarian organization through the introduction of new elements as integrative forces, namely, the brahmadeya and the temple. Land grants to brahmanas (brahmadeyas) and the (devadanas) by ruling classes (and subsequently by socially important groups like the velala landowners) were initiated by the Pallavas and Pandyas, marking the extension of cultivation, an increase in agricultural activities, and a more intensive agrarian organization. This was followed by the emergence of trade centres, initially in key areas, leading subsequently to the evolution in the Chola period of a network of such centres dependent on a degree of agrarian expansion.

A further step towards this process was the development of organized trade through merchant guilds, specialization in the marketing of specific local commodities through the nagaram, and exotic and luxury goods through itinerant guilds. Trade and commercial activity were consciously promoted by royal policy through conquests, the development of ports, and the encouragement of production centres and guild activity. In response to this constant demand and encouragement, specialization of crafts followed and production centres catering to an expanding market – internal and external – through organized commerce, emerged. A conspicuous shift in the emphasis from agricultural to non-agricultural economic activities and commercial agriculture in some centres was also a part of this process. Urban growth in the Chola period relates mainly to the expansion of existing rural settlements. Clusters of such settlements emerged in the core areas or delta regions, forming the nuclei of medieval kingdoms. They may be described as ‘pluralistic’ settlements, with several temples as centres of different socio-religious groups pursuing various economic activities.
The temples as the institutional base for socio-economic and political integration assumes great significance from the period of the Bhakti Movement (7th to 9th centuries AD). Under the Cholas some of the bhakti centres became leading political, sacred or pilgrimage centres and evolved into huge urban complexes, either around a single large temple or with multiple temples together forming parts of an urban complex. Such temples were built by the major ruling dynasties and their subordinates, either to legitimize their sovereignty or to bring various socio-economic groups within the orbit of bhakti centres. Temples became landed magnates, with tenants and temple servants remunerated through land. They also received gold and money endowments from the 9th century and invested such grants again in land, or occasionally in trade. The growth in the economic activities of such temples led to urban development. There was also a corresponding expansion in the architectural structure of the temple from a small nuclear shrine into huge horizontal temple complexes with several enclosures and towering gateways, encompassing many shrines, halls of educational and cultural activities, hospitals, and monastic establishments with lineages of religious heads controlling temple administration.

The rural-urban continuum is best illustrated by such centres, which had a dependable hinterland where agricultural output was assuredly above subsistence level. The trade in agricultural commodities and local goods as well as luxuries and exotic items from distant lands that such centres attracted must be seen as a complementary factor in this development. The demand generated by the local elite and the temple for locally unavailable goods brought itinerant trade to these markets and encouraged the large scale settlement of craftsmen and artisans, who were eventually accommodated in the temple centre. The process was slow and spread over a span of four centuries. Thus, initially one could look for urban growth among core regions where clusters of brahmadeyas and devadanas emerged. One of the leading examples of such urban growth is Kudamukku-Palaiyarai, the residential capital and twin city of the Cholas. This twin city came up on the banks of the Arisilaru and Mudikondan, distributaries in the Kaveri delta which was the resource base of the Cholas both in the early period (the 2nd century B.C to the 2nd century A.D) and later, when they re-emerged as the most powerful South Indian dynasty in the 9th century. The resource potential of this region is indicated by the numerous peasant settlements dating from the early historical period and also by the tendency of early brahmadeyas to cluster together and proliferate rapidly in this area. Statistical data shows that the brahmadeyas were densest around Kumbhakonam (ancient Kudamukku). During the 7th to the 9th centuries the Pallavas and Pandyas attempted to colonize the Kaveri delta through brahmadeyas and, in the process, were drawn into a series of armed conflicts with each other, before the re-emergence of the Cholas with the same region as their nucleus. The river system in the delta was carefully built up into an irrigation network from the 9th century by the Cholas, and thus came to represent a rich source of revenue, with a large surplus capable of supporting a major concentration of population. The foundation of Tanjavur and Gangaikonda Cholapuram as the capitals was perhaps determined by Chola anxiety to protect this resource base.
Two early nagarams called Tiraimur and Kumaramarttanda-puram served as market centres for this region after the 9th century, apart from a colony of merchants called nandipuram in Palaiyarai. Kudamukku represented the religious or sacred complex and Palaiyarai the palace complex. In both the complexes, temples came up at different points of time between the 9th and 13th centuries, each with a settlement around it, akin to a modern colony in a large city. The major economic activities centring around these temples are reflected through endowments in the form of land, cows, goats, gold, and money for a variety of purposes such as religious festivals, the feeding of brahmanas and other ascetics, the burning of lamps, reconstruction and renovation of temple structures, ornaments to the deities, religious discourses, and educational institutions. The temples had their treasuries, archives and administrative machinery usually controlled by the landed groups, particularly brahmanas and high-caste non-brahmanas or velalas.

The social groups involved in these activities were members of the royal family, Chola officials of high rank, palace servants, personal retinues of the royal members, members of elephant corps, leading landowners from other parts of the Chola kingdom, local merchants, horse traders from the distant Kerala region, merchants from other districts of Tamil Nadu and the itinerant merchant guilds. In order to look after the temple’s movable property, such as cows and goats, there was a special class of shepherds called manradis. The Kaikkolas (part-time soldiers and weavers) were another important community involved in the gift-making processes. Gifts of land came mainly from the landowning groups, while gold and monetary gifts came more often from merchants, local and itinerant. Coined money as a medium of exchange became regular from the 10th century onwards. The Chola mint was located in Kudamukku. With intensive architectural and sculptural activity between the 9th and 13th centuries, regular colonies of architects and sculptors must have existed here throughout the Chola period and after. Two of the major industries of the Chola period, metalware and textiles, were located in this complex. Apart from the making of copper and brass vessels, the ritual needs of the temples led to the evolution of a big centre for the art of casting bronze images for the temples, a craft in which Chola artists achieved unparalleled skill and excellence. To this day the Kumbhakonam region remains a major centre of bronze-casting and vessel-making. Weaving was the second major industry and was so renowned that in the 16th and 17th centuries weavers from Saurashtra (western India) migrated and settled in Kumbhakonam.

With the decline of the Cholas, the administrative and political importance of the city as a nerve centre of Chola administration also declined, and Palaiyarai, or the palace or residential complex, disintegrated into small villages and hamlets which are at present suburbs of modern Kumbhakonam, a taluk headquarters. In the post-Chola period, Kumbhakonam survived as an urban centre due largely to its continuance as a sacred centre. Apart from the core region of the Cholas, situations of a similar nature led to urban growth in
other areas, although the pace and extent of growth differed in various
degrees. Two major brahmadeyas of the Tirunelveli district became the nuclei of
a huge urban complex with the occupation of the Pandya country by the
imperial Cholas in the 11th century. Rajarajachaturvedimangalam, the present
Mannarkoyil which grew around a Visnu temple built early in the eleventh
century by the Chera subordinate of the Cholas, developed into an urban
centre by temple beginning of the 12th century. The present Tiruvalisvaram and
Ambasamudram (Ilangoykkudi), north and south of Mannarkoyil respectively,
were also parts of this centre. In Brahmadassam, east of Mannarkoyil, one may
recognize its origin as a brahmadeya. Rajendracholapuram was the first
nagaram or marketing centre of this urban complex and dates from the period
of Rajendra I (1018-44), after whom it was named. The Chola-Pandya viceroys
had their residential quarters in Rajendracholapuram. A second nagaram called
Vindanur also came up by the 12th century in the vicinity of Mannarkoyil.
Merchants from the Kumbhakonam region, i.e., from the distant
town of Kumaramarttandapuram and the itinerant merchant guild called the
Nanadesi Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvar participated in the trade and commercial
activities of this city from the 11th century onwards.

The Siva temple at Tiruvalisvaram was entrusted to the care of the
Chola army called Munrukai Mahasenai, a feature of great significance in
temple management and protection, when considered along with the fact that
Tiruvalisvaram acquired the status of an Ervirappattana, a merchant town
protected by armed troops. The part played by the Golaki matha in the urban
development of Tiruvalisvaram in the 13th century was no less important, for
such mathas attracted itinerant trade on account of their organizational
network. Lying between the Temraparni and Gatana rivers (called
Mudikondacholapperaru and Rajarajapperaru in Chola inscriptions) the
Mannarkoyil urban centre is located in the picturesque amphitheatre that
descends from the Podiyl hills commanding entry into the Pandya country
from the Chera land (Kerala). The whole area between the two rivers forms a
rich agricultural tract, which the Cholas selected as their base in the Pandya
region, creating new brahmadeyas and nagarams. The size of this urban
complex was about 6.44 kilometres/4.83 kilometres, comparable to the
Kudamukku complex in the core of the Chola heartland.

Further East was Cheravanmadevicaturvedimangalam (Sermadevi) on
the south bank of the Tamraparni, dating back to the period of Rajaraja I (985-
1014), with a concentration of small settlements around it, linked to the main
brahmadeya. Among its more important hamlets are Karisulndamangalam or
Kailasamangalam or Ten Tiruvengadam and Pattalmdai, with huge Visnu
temples in addition to the major Visnu and Siva temples of the main centre. The
nagaram of Rajendracholapuram with its palace also served as the major
market centre of this region from the 11th century. The merchant corporation
of the Five Hundred patronized the Visnu temple of Nigarilicola Vinnagaram
in this centre. Kakikkola and Saliya weavers and terinda-kaikkola army men,
sculptors and merchants, both local and from other towns, were among the many socio-economic groups involved in the commercial activities of this centre. Saiva and Vaisnava mathas and a Sarasvati bhandara or library attached to one of the Visnu temples are the other institutional forces which contributed to the urban growth of this centre in the 12th-13th centuries. The location of the Chola palace in this region and the concerted efforts of the Cholas towards the development of the region in the 11th century would seem to have been greatly influenced by their trade policy, as also their interests, which are visibly heightened in this period, in the northern part of Sri Lanka.

Madurantakan (Madurantakacaturvedimangalam) in Chingleput district became the nucleus of an urban centre from the time of Parantaka I (907-55), its various quarters developing around Vaisnava and Saiva temples built by the imperial Cholas in the 10th-11th centuries. It acquired several hamlets through endowments and a market called Viracolapperangadi. In comparison with the huge urban complexes in the core region of the Cholas and Pandyas of the 11th-12th centuries, this centre appears to be a small town. Nonetheless, urban features were present in varying degrees in several such small towns, many of which attained the status of a taniyur (tan-kuru) due to an increase in size, population and economic functions. Madurantakam was a tanitur in Kalattur Kottam. Uttiramerur, an early brahmadeya, also acquired the status of a taniyur in Kaliyur-Kottam by the 10th century. Ennayiram (also called Brahmadesam) and Tribhuvani (Tribhuvanamadevi caturvedimangalam) in South Arcot district also belong to the same category. The former had a huge Vedic college and a hostel attached to the temple. Which attracted Valanjiyar merchants, who traded in articles required by the hostel in return for money deposited with them? Tirukkalukkunram, also a taniyur in Kalattur Kottam with three temples – one of which dates from Pallava times – had its own nagaram or marketing centre by the 11th century.

Bahur (Vagur or Alagiyacola Caturvedimangalam) in Pondicherry, Udaiyarkudi, Villupuram (Jananatha Caturvedimangalam) and Chidambaram, all in South Arcot district, and Tiruvannamalai in North Arcot district, are some of the other taniyurs of the Chola period. They became fairly numerous from the middle Chola period and had dependable hinterlands to meet the demands of a sizeable town and an occasionally mobile population. A major consequence of the earlier agrarian expansion of the 7th-9th centuries was an increase in commercial activity after the 9th century. Large-scale commercial activity was confined to a few areas in the pre-Chola period. Kacci of the Sangam period assumes the role of the premier city in South India from Pallava times, both as a seat of political power and as the largest textile production and commercial centre, apart from its character as a Ghatikasthana or seat of learning. It became a sacred centre by acquiring, both under the Pallavas and Cholas, a large number of Saiva and Vaisnava temples. Kacci was snaskritized into Kancipura and Kancimananagara, the latter nomenclature being indicative of
its commercial growth into a great or more prestigious market. Such a managaram more often owed its creation to state sponsorship than did a mere nagaram or market centre. The other managaram of the Pallavas was the port of Mamallapuram on the coast. Both acted as centres of a large network of maritime commerce which connected Tondaimandalam with the outside world. While Mamallapuram is on the coast, Kancipuram’s location on the banks of the Veghabati (a tributary of the Palar) provided easy access to the port of Mamallapuram, as also to Vayalur, another important Pallava centre on the coast at the mouth of the Palar.

Using the networks and centres model in his study of the nagaram as a market centre in South India in the Pallava-Chola period, Hall has argued that Kanci’s economic growth was also linked to the development of inland commerce, in which it played a dominant role. This model, derived from that of Skinner for rural China, suggests the existence of market centres (i.e. nagaram) serving networks of villages, i.e. the nagaram as a well developed system even in the Pallava period, with Kancipuram as a managaram at the apex of a pyramid of different levels of exchange. This system, according to Hall, linked the villages with market centres or nagaram, and the nagaram in turn with managaram. However, there is no clear evidence of such a link in the Pallava period, for the earliest datable reference to a nagaram, which served as the nuclear marketing centre of the agrarian unit called the nadu (which was its local marketing territory) is of the early Chola period in the 10th century. In Pallava inscriptions very few nagarams are met with and their relation to the pastoral-agrarian unit called kottam of the Pallava period cannot be ascertained. In all, there are four nagarams known from Pallava inscriptions, apart from Kanchi and Mamallapuram as managarams, namely Virincipuram in North Arcot district on the south bank of the Palar (Seruvalaimangalam in inscriptions) of the 8th century, Tiruvadigai near Cuddalore on the coast in South Arcot district of the late 9th century, Kilur (Tirukkovalur) in South Arcot district, an inland market centre on the banks of the Ponnaiyar, and Tirunagesvaram (Kumaramarttandapuram in inscriptions) in Tanjavur district on the banks of the Arisil, a distributary in the Kaveri delta. 24 kottams are traditionally assigned to the Tondaimandalam or Pallava region, of which only a few are known from Pallava records. Such a network-centre model is therefore not useful in the context of the Pallava period. On the other hand, Hall’s study of the nagaram of the Chola period is consistent with this marketing system, into which the itinerant merchant guilds were drawn from the 11th century onwards. Itinerant merchant guilds which traded with Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka are visible in the Pallava records only in the 9th century. The Manigramam is the only such guild known to Pallava inscriptions and from Takua Pakistan on the Isthmus of Kra in Southeast Asia.

Kanchipuram became a secondary political centre under the Cholas, but its commercial character continued as before. Even when it lost its importance as a political centre at the end of the Chola period, its sacred
character has helped to retain its vitality as a commercial centre down to modern times. Mamallapuram was superseded by Nagapattinam as the chief port of the Cholas. Yet it continued to be a part of the huge commercial network till about the 13th century. The nagarams of Tiruvadi, Tirukkovalur (Kilur) and Virincipuram continued as market centres under the Cholas. In addition, their sacred and political associations kept alive their urban character even beyond the Chola period.

The emergence and proliferation of the nagaram kept pace with the increase in commercial activity under the Cholas. The pattern of their distribution led Hall to treat them as marketing centres, a maximum of one per nadu, each nadu serving as the local marketing territory for the nagaram. While this appears to be generally true, there is evidence of more than one nagaram in some nadus, which may perhaps be attributed to a greater density of settlements in those nadus. Eventually, the nagarams became points of intersection for the exchange of local goods with exotic and locally unavailable goods in which the itinerant merchant corporations traded. Thus, the nagarams were brought into a wider network of international trade. Hall’s model of networks centres links the villages of the nadu to the nagaram, the nagaram in turn to ‘the higher marketing centres’ of trade centres called erirvirappattinam and managaram, where the guilds, it is suggested, controlled a major part of the trade and commercial activity. The suggestion of a hierarchy of relationships implied in this network model cannot be overlooked and needs to be more closely examined. Further, commerce in the managarams was organized and controlled by the local nagaram members rather than by itinerant merchant groups. Nagarams undoubtedly represented potential centres of urban growth. It must, however, be emphasized that not all nagarams became huge urban centres, nor were they consistently drawn into this network of inter-regional and overseas trade irrespective of their location. Most of them were no more than a common market for the nadu villages and helped in the exchange only of local goods. Some, like Tanjavur, had powerful nagaram organizations over which the itinerant traders had no influence. In a few places, where the demand for goods to and from distant regions created a market for the itinerant merchant groups traversing parts of South India irrespective of political boundaries, the urban growth was rapid and at times phenomenal.

The history of the nagaram shows that at least three major phases of its activity can be demarcated in the Chola period, corresponding to the early (850-985), middle (985-1150) and late Chola periods (1150-1279). The role of the nagaram comes into sharp focus in the reign of Parantaka I (907-55) with a visible change in the medium of religious gifts to metal (gold and silver) and money, in addition to land and cattle (including goats), and in the quantity of such gifts in the early Chola period, compared to the earlier and later periods. Gold and other expensive gifts increase in the middle Chola period, i.e. under Rajaraja I, Rajendra I and Kulottunga I (between 985 and 1120), but dwindle considerably in the late Chola period. Invariably, such gifts came from
rulers, elite groups and nagaram members. The evidence of Chola numismatics is not beyond dispute regarding the identification and attribution of coin issues, yet the beginnings of regular coinage are assignable to the early Chola period, particularly to Parantaka I, whose inscriptions abound in reference to gold and silver coins. A partial monetization of the economy from this period contributed to a greater involvement of the nagaram in commercial ventures.

Contacts with the larger mercantile organizations is as yet minimal in the delta region and more clearly visible only in certain areas like Pudukkottai, Salem, Uraiyyur, the north western parts Tiruchirapalli district, Tirunelveli district and South Arcot – i.e. the peripheral regions and route areas. As yet there is also no clear evidence of a deliberate royal policy directed towards active encouragement of overseas trade or the development of new ports. Kaverippattinam seems to have continued to be the major outlet for Chola commerce.

The middle Chola period is marked by a conspicuous increase in nagarams, which now cover not only the whole of the Chola heartland but also appear in areas giving access to powerful neighbouring kingdoms and in areas newly conquered by the Cholas. In consolidating their conquests the Cholas not merely renamed the conquered areas, as for example Gangavadi into Mudikondacolamandalam, but also founded brahmadeyas and nagarams such as Mudikondacolapuram (after Rajendra I), Nigarilicolapuram (after Rajaraja I) and Rajendracolapuram (after Rajendra I), after the conquest of the Ganga and Pandya regions. This was a practice followed right through the Chola period, particularly in the reigns of Kulottunga I and Vikrama Chola – a period of constant movement of Chola troops into Karnataka and Andhra. Thus, the nagarams were used as much as the brahmadeya as interdependent agents of political synthesis under the Cholas. As a result, the nagarams became part of a wider network of inter-regional and overseas trade from the 11th century, with enhanced political influence in areas of crucial links. Erivirappattanas, or chartered mercantile towns, also begin to appear only from the 11th century, pointing to the need for creating protected warehouses for merchant groups on major trade routes. The pattern of nagaram distribution shows only a marginal increase in the late Chola period in the areas controlled by the Cholas, whereas with the re-establishment of Pandya power early in the 13th century, new nagarams emerged in the Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli districts. This helped to intensify to a large extent commercial ventures and itinerant trade in the southern region.

A second important development in the middle Chola period due to increased commercial activity relates to specialization in marketing and trade. While nagaram refers merely to an organization of local merchants, the increasing specialization in marketing led to the rise of special merchant organizations – such as the Saliya Nagarattar for marketing textiles and Sankarappadi Nagarattar for supplying oil and ghee – whose activities seem to have been confined to a specific locality. In both cases, the nagaram would
appear to be composed of people who had been practising professions like weaving and oil-producing, but who had turned into merchants. Similar groups like the Sattum Parisatta Nagaram and Paraga Nagaram refer to organized suppliers of cloth and seafaring merchants. The Vaniya Nagaram, also dealing in oil, was a wider organization of oil-mongers, which, like the larger merchant organizations, seems to have been composed of merchants from various regions, frequently referred to as Vaniya Nagarattar of the 18 Visaya (regions). They often figure conspicuously, along with other merchant organizations, in inscriptions granting maganmai (tolls) to temples, particularly in the 13th and 14th centuries. They are comparable to the Teliki of Vijayavada, a huge organization of oil merchants known from the close of the 11th century in the Andhra region. Horse trading was yet another specialized occupation and was entirely in the hands of merchants from Malaimandalam (Kerala) throughout the medieval period. Arab trade in horses was conducted mainly through the western ports and the Cholas depended on Kerala merchants to procure and transport them into the Tamil areas. Settlements of people from Malaimandalam known as Malaiyalangudi existed in the heart of the Chola country and in the Pudukkottai region. Even Parasikas (Persians) figure in a Gangaikondacolapuram inscription of Kulottunga I.

The nagaram organizations and specialization in the marketing of specific commodities thus proved to be a major factor in the urbanization of the 11th-13th centuries, and is often characterized as ‘temple urbanization’, for the temples, particularly the large ones, were the biggest consumers, apart from the ruling classes, of goods both local and foreign. The simultaneous appearance of a large number of diverse occupational groups, i.e. non-agricultural groups, in such centres resulted in an elaboration of the temple town, with separate quarters for merchants, artisans and weavers in particular, most of whom were accommodated in the Tirumadaivilagam of the temple. The highly complex social stratification of the 12th -13th centuries, with the dual division of the Right and Left Hand castes – distinct from the brahmana and high-caste non-brahmana (or Velala) groups – would seem to be another notable feature of this urbanization. This division has baffled all attempts at a clear definition of caste groupings, but its connection with the emergence of specialized crafts and artisan groups is undeniable.

Traders, individually and collectively, are mentioned in inscriptions throughout the Chola period. Organized trade, especially long-distance trade, can be dated from the 9th century. The Pudukkottai region (Munisandai) of Tamil Nadu was involved in this trade for the first time through the Ayyavole guild, known to Tamil inscriptions variously as the Ainnuruvur or Nanadesiya Tisai Ayirattu Ainnuruvur (the Five Hundred of the thousand directions of several countries). The Manigramam of Kodumbalur (also in Pudukkottai) and Uraiyyur (Tiruchirapalli) is another group which, like the Five Hundred, conducted organized trade in the early Chola period. The Valanjiyar is the third such organization seemingly a militant component of the larger itinerant
organization/corporation, seen in the Chola country from at least the 10th century. The area covered by their movement was initially confined to the peripheral districts of Pudukkottai, the western part of Tiruchirappalli and Tirunelveli, and by the middle Chola period their activities extended over the whole of Tamil Nadu, although a concentration of the Five Hundred and Manigramam inscriptions is still to be found in the Pudukkottai region, marking a major trade route. It is also at this point, as mentioned earlier, that the Erivirappattanas begin to appear.

Erivirappattanas have been described as ‘inland ports’ and are believed to have come up only in remote and inhospitable areas. This view is based on the fact that the Ramanathapuram region has been classified as a tribal area, where the martial tribe of Maravars was predominant even from the Sangam age. It would, however, be more correct to look at these as centres on trade routes used as warehouses by itinerant merchants. These merchants often had such centres converted into specially protected warehouses with royal sanction – or sometimes on their own, in the absence of a recognizable political overlord – and defended them with their own troops. ‘Erivira’, which Hall interprets as ‘heroes of the road’, has earlier been translated as ‘mercenary soldiers armed with spears’, and therefore is associated with armed protection. The militant character of these merchant guilds, whose caravans moved with armed protection, is well attested to by epigraphic references to their use of force in some centres. Erivirappattanas on such trade routes were Basinikonda (Siravalli) in Chittoor district, Aiyapolil Kattur (Chingleput district), Tirumalagandarkottai (Ramanathapuram district), and Vikramacolapuram (11th century Vembatti, Coimbatore district). The reference to an Erivirappattana in Tirunelveli district is particularly significant as it was part of a large urban settlement where the temple, its treasury and temple servants had been placed under the protection of the army called Munrukai Mahasenai, taken to be the Chola army stationed there after the Pandya country was conquered and placed under Chola-Pandya viceroys.

In the period of Kulottunga I and Vikrama Chola (1070-1133) the guild activities extended to the Andhra region, with new avenues of trade linking Andhra ports like Kulottunga Cholan pattinam (Visakhapatnam), Cholapandiya pattinam (Ghantasala) and Designation Uyyakkonda pattana (later Motupalli). Almost simultaneously, the Citrameli Periyanadu, an organization of Tamil agriculturists, also makes its appearance in Andhra and Karnatak. In the late Chola period and under the later Pandyas, i.e. in the late 12th, 13th and early 14th centuries, not only do we find a phenomenal increase in their activity but also an attempt to acquire greater control over the movement of goods by the different merchant bodies coming together and jointly fixing the rates of maganmai (tolls) and pattanappagudi (the share of the town). Invariably, the inscriptions recording such joint decisions are found in coastal towns other than those directly controlled by the royal families, but which later assumed importance due to the absence of any single political authority.
More important, however, is the association of the Citrameli Periyanadu with other merchant bodies, where the Citrameli organization seems to assume a position of primacy in the decision-making process. The joint prasasti (eulogy) evolved by them for such occasions gives the place of importance to this organization by mentioning it at the head of the prasasti. The Citrameli organization of agriculturists dates from the middle-Chola times but is hardly mentioned together with other groups till the 13th century. In fact all these organizations acted only in their independent capacity and also as mere participants in gift-making, temple-building and allied functions associated with donors. The right of fixing the tolls, commission, share of the town, etc. was exercised by them only in a joint capacity, and, more conspicuously, towards the close of the Chola period when royal authority became virtually ineffective in regions beyond the core area. The Vaniya Nagarattar, Manigramam, Anjuvannam and Samanta Pandasalis were also involved in such joint donations out of the income from taxes on import and exports. This in effect represents the institutionalization of the relationship between different bodies which acted independently at first and later in a joint capacity. Their common eulogy is the first known expression of the ascendancy of trading groups in a predominantly agrarian society.

The composition of some of these organizations makes an interesting study. Recent work on the Ayyavole guild has shown that such guilds were controlled not by any one religious community but various groups, including the agrahara brahmanas, who were either collectively or individually landowners. Similarly the Citrameli Periyanadu, which originated in Tamil Nadu and later extended its activities to other parts of South India, was evidently an organization of landowners drawn from various social groups and which wielded great economic and political influence from the twelfth century onwards. Consisting of many non-brahmana landlords (Velalas), this body, as seen above, joined with merchant guilds in controlling trade in certain areas, particularly urban centres. In addition to textiles, fragrant woods, spices, incense, etc., in which the merchant guilds traded, a number of agricultural commodities are also found mentioned in inscriptions referring to both these organizations. There is some indication that the agricultural surplus was mobilized and brought from rural areas to urban settlements through nagaram members. Presumably, the Citrameli were in control of this movement by virtue of their position as grain dealers at the centres where merchant bodies met. The marked development of such centres from the 12th century would indicate that mobilization of agricultural surplus made possible the expansion of urban activities.

A significant change in the pattern of land ownership may also be perceived from the 12th century, when non-agricultural groups figure more prominently in the control of land, exercising, at the same time, commercial influence. The rise in the power of these landowning groups, such as the weavers (Kaikkolas) and merchants, apart from the Velalas, also indicates a
greater sharing of authority between brahmana and non-brahmana caste groups and increasing social mobility, as opposed to the dominance of brahmanas and a small ruling elite in the earlier period. The revival on South India of long-distance trade in the 10th century as part of the increase in South Asian trade, involved not only the merchant guilds but considerably influenced the external policy of the Cholas. The Chola wars in South Karnataka may be described as an attempt to establish trade links and to control the major trade route between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, facilitating the easy movement of the Ayyavole or Nanadesis. Their attacks on northern Sri Lanka and their occupation of it for nearly 8 decades in the 11th century, were not mere pillaging or plundering attacks, as held by Spencer, but a deliberate policy of encouraging new trade ventures by enabling already existing pockets of Tamil culture dominated by merchants to engage in lucrative commercial ventures. Presumably, mutual benefit rather than tight political control over trade and trading communities was the motivating force behind such ventures. The same motive led to the two major maritime expeditions of Rajendra I and Kulottunga I in Southeast Asia ending up in Srivijaya, obviously to establish trading rights in these regions, and over the much coveted Isthmus of Kra to reach China. Chola missions to China in the eleventh century and Kulottunga’s physical presence in Cambodia, his coins, exchange of gifts – including the ‘tribute missions’ mentioned in the smaller Leiden Grant -, grants of lands and villages to the Buddhist vihara at Nagappattinam, and the abolition of tolls, are all part of the trade policy of this early medieval dynasty. It is significant that in the wake of these military expeditions the South Indian trade guilds begin to appear in Burma, Malaysia, and Java. The recent excavations in Takua Pa indicate a great deal of work on the dynamics of South Asian trade shows that trade overtures or agreements acquired some form of legitimacy through religious donations to temples and viharas. This is clearly illustrated in the elaboration of the port of Nagappattinam, where a Buddhist vihara of considerable size and importance was erected by the Sailendra king. To this vihara the Chola rulers made liberal endowments in the 11th century. Earlier, Nagappattinam is known through literary references as a bhakti centre of the Saiva and Vaisnava creeds. It was drawn into the huge network of overseas trade with the active trade policy of Rajaraja I and Rajendra, and later Kulottunga I in the 11th -12th centuries. The persistence of Buddhist influence in Nagappattinam – particularly the Theravada influence – in the 11th -12th centuries may be attributed to the trade relationships of Southeast Asian countries with the South Coromandel coast. Through Srivijaya, first China and later Burma and Sri Lanka were involved in this activity. Reference has been made to the tribute missions from Southeast Asian islands. Chinese gold came into the port in the 11th century through the agents of the Srivijaya kings. At least three hoards of Chinese copper coins ranging in date from 142 BC to AD 1252 have been found in the Pattukkottai taluk of Tanjavur district. Chola missions to China during the period of Rajendra I and Kulottunga I are recorded in Chinese annals.
With Kulottung’s accession to the Chola throne, much of the trade in the Andhra region was also regulated by the Chola kings through the itinerant guilds. Visakhapattinam, also called Kulottunga Cholan pattinam, became a leading port, where the Ayyavole acted jointly with the Anjumannam or Arab merchant organization which is known to have traded even in the ninth century on the Kerala coast. Tamil merchants settled in Andhra ports and visited other interior trade centres. State patronage of the Ayyavole and other major guilds is increasingly attested to by several inscriptions of the Cholas and Pandyas, and oral traditions refers to a specific invitation by the Pandyas to a Vaisya community, which was part of the guild, to settle in their kingdom. The location of some regions such as Pudukkottai – Ramanathapuram and Salem-Coimbatore, facilitating trade routes, was a stimulant to urbanization. The Pudukkottai region, which was a buffer between the Chola Pandya heartlands, assumed great significance from the tenth century, when the Cholas entered into a close alliance through matrimonial ties with the Irukkuvel chiefs of Kodumbalur in order to gain control over the trade that passed through it to Sri Lanka, and also to extend political control over Madurai and the surrounding region. Being a buffer zone between the Cholas and Pandyas, the major battles between these two powers were fought in or on the outskirts of this region. Its commercial importance in the earlier Sangam age is recommend through numismatic and epigraphic evidence, such as the hoard of Roman coins probably deposited there in the late-first or early-2nd century AD, and the early Tamil Brahmi inscriptions in Sittannavasal in the Pudukkottai district. Sittannavasal was a major centre of the Jains, and the pattern of distribution of early Jain centres shows that they tended to be located along old trade routes.

In this region commerce was not directly linked with a concentration of population and the generation of local demand for goods from outside, nor with the development of a regular exchange system as in the rich Kaveri valley. The major factor in its commercial importance was its access to the coastal towns through which trade between South India and other countries was carried on. The nearby port of Tondi received in the early period products such as aloeswood, silk and sandal, which are known from the same region even as late as in the 13th century under the Pandyas. The Manigramam of Kaverippumpattinam migrated and settled in this region around the 10th to 11th centuries, perhaps due to the supersession of Kaverippumpattinam by other Chola ports. The marked increase in commerce from the 10th to the 13th centuries is reflected in their activity as well as that of the Ayyavole or Ainnurruvur guild, both of which appeared here around the 10th century and became extremely active in the Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram areas, the latter being known as Chettinad in modern times.

Kodumbalur was a nagaram of considerable size, where the Manigramam was active, apart from being the political or administrative centre of the Irukkuvels of Konadu. Narttamalai or Nagarattarmalai on the way to
Kodumbalur was a major nagaram with which the Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvur, or the merchant corporation of the Five Hundred, had active links in the 11th century. South of Pudukkottai in Ramanathapuram district two major centres of merchant activity were Kamudi and Piranmalai, where, in the 10th and 13th centuries, members of several merchant organizations met and recorded their endowments to the local deities in a joint donation. In both the records reference is made to 18 pattinams, 32 valarpurams (velarpuram) and 64 kadigaittavalams from which members hailed. While a few of these places can be identified with well-known towns, quite a large number of them cannot be located. Tavalam would seem to represent a fair, while pattinam was undoubtedly a town of considerable commercial importance and more often a port. Valapuram would perhaps be a growing trade centre.

In the 12th -13th centuries the merchant corporation of the Five Hundred and the Valanjiyar of Sri Lanka are seen making endowments at the temples of Sivapuri, Tirunelveli and Aruppukkottai, and also in the Ramanathapuram district during the period of the Pandyas, who gradually recovered this region from the Cholas by the end of the 12th century. Several nagarams of this region are known to have interacted with the itinerant guilds. They are Vanavanmadevipuram (Sattur), Kulasekharamapuram (Devadanam), Rajanarayanapuram (Pillaiyarpatti), and Velangudi (Vaniyanagaram). A late 13th century inscription from Tittandatanapuram (Tondi) records an agreement made by several merchant groups like the Anjuvannam, Manigramam and the Samanta Pandasalis, on the levy of certain taxes on commodities sold and purchased for the rebuilding expenses of the local Siva temple. An Erivirappattinam was located at Idaivali (Tirumalagandarkottai, Ramanathapuram district). The Salem-Coimbatore region (ancient Kongunadu) lay along an ancient trade route linking Tamil Nadu with Kerala and Karnataka. The route may be traced with the help of early Jain centres, as in temple Pudukkottai region. This region also shown a concentration of early Roman coin-finds and punch-marked coins. Along the same route, once again, merchants of medieval South India travelled constantly, bringing horses from the western ports and perhaps taking textiles back. Seafaring merchants, cloth merchants and merchant guilds frequently used this route, leaving a trail of trading centres behind. Berikai and Kavanapalli in Hosur taluk of Dharmapuri district were two such horse-trading centres mentioned in 12th century inscriptions.

The road to Puramale Nad bordering Mysore is referred to in an early-10th century Nolamba inscription from Dharmapuri. The Atiyaman Peruvial (highway) passed through Papinayakanhalli near Dharmapuri or Tagadur, the capital of the Atiyamans. Navartaivalam, where trade fairs were held, was at a distance of 29 kadam from Papinayakanhalli. Traders from Mayilarppil, Palaiyarai and other places in Tamil Nadu constantly figure in the inscriptions of Salem, Erode, and Coimbatore districts. Perhaps the most remarkable of the trading centres of the Chola period was Mudikondan in Coimbatore district.
Rounded by Rajendra I after the conquest of Gangavadi, it was known variously as Mudikondacholapuram, alias Designation *Uyyakkondapattana*. The merchants of the eighteen towns north of the Kaveri, including Talaikkadu (ancient Ganga capital), alias Rajarajapura, and those of the eighteen towns south of the Kaveri, including Mudikondacholapuram, made several grants to the Visnu temple of this place in the period of Hoysala Visnuvardhana. It was also used as a military station by Ballala II after the withdrawal of Chola power from this region.

Vikrama Pallavapuram (modern Vembatti) in Bhavani taluk, Coimbatore district was made into an Erivirappattana in the reign of Kulottunga I, and a militant group of Vira Valanjiyar is known to have resided at this centre. Among the many nagarams established in this region during the Kongu-Chola period (12th -13th centuries), mention must be made of Perur in the Coimbatore district, where merchants who had the title ‘Cakravartin’ resided. The merchant corporations of Nanadesi Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvur and Manigramam of Kodumbalur were active in the Kongu region from the 10th to the 13th centuries. Areas of economic importance in medieval Tamil Nadu have not been clearly defined. Production and craft centres are equally difficult to locate, as inscriptions present a great many problems of interpretation. It has, however, been possible to identify centres of textile production, the earliest known industry in South India. Traditional weaving centres have more or less continued down to the modern times, as shown by a comparison, in a recent survey, of modern textile centres with the geographical distribution of weaving centres in medieval India. The right type of soil for the cultivation of cotton, the availability of raw material, especially dyes, and the proximity of ports seems to have been the major factors determining their location.

Of the modern districts of Chingleput, Coimbatore, Madurai, Salem, Tanjavur, Tiruchirapalli and Tirunelveli, with the exception of Coimbatore and Madurai, the other districts have fairly numerous records relating to weaving centres of the Chola period. It is only after the migration of Devanga weavers from Karnataka and weavers from Saurashtra in the Vijayanagar and post-Vijayanagar periods, that Coimbatore and Madurai became major textile producing regions. Weaving as an industry was systematically promoted by the rulers of South India from pre-Chola times. The Cholas bestowed special care on old centres of textile production and also encouraged the settlement of weavers in new areas. Kanchi was the centre of one of the major cotton-producing regions of Tamil Nadu, the other being Madurai. However, it is only for Kanchipuram that evidence of Chola patronage is clear, particularly from the time of Uttama Chola. The demand, both internal and foreign, for the cotton textiles of South India encouraged production, and Kanchi developed into a premier weaving centre even in pre-Chola times. Although Pallava inscriptions hardly provide detailed evidence of this process of growth, the early Chola records, particularly of Uttama Chola, make special provisions, this city had become the most prestigious textile production centre, with its weavers
specially chosen for producing royal garments. By the end of the Chola period, several centres came up around Kanchipuram, and eventually, the city came to represent the venue of the Mahanadu or corporate organization of weavers, which controlled production and marketing of cloth and its trade. Regular settlements of weavers were encouraged in other centres as well, in the Tirumadaivilagam of the temple, from the late 11th century, through special privileges or tax concessions. Sirkali, Arantangi, Kumbhakonam and Nannilam taluks in Tanjavur district and Chidambaram taluk in South Arcot district had several weaving centres under the Cholas from the eleventh century, to which many more were added under the Pandyas in the 13th to 14th centuries.

Under the Pandyas, weaver settlements appeared in Olagapuram, Srimusnam, Chidambaram and Nerkunram, all in South Arcot district, Tillaiyadi in Tanjavur district, Pusankudi (Radhapuram) and Sermadevi in Tirunelveli district, indicating the growing importance of this industry. Weavers-cum-traders formed themselves into Saliya Nagarattar, as at Chidambaram and Tirukkoilur, and enjoyed the rights and privileges usually extended to other nagarams like the Sankarappadi and Vaniya Nagarattar. In the Kongu region (i.e. Dharmapuri, Salem, Erode and Coimbatore districts) several such weaver settlements were established in the 12th to 14th centuries under the Kongu-Cholas and Kongu-Pandyas. Some of them were Kadagattur (Dharmapuri district), Vijayamangalam and Tirumuruganpundi (Coimbatore district) and Aragalur (Salem district). Through this region the rich trade in textiles passed into Karnataka and Kerala, as Cilai Cettiyars and merchants from Mayilappur, an old weaving centre in Madras, are seen moving across the area into Karnataka and other parts of South India.

Fairly detailed references to varieties of silk and cotton textiles, techniques of weaving, printing and dyeing are found in literature and occasionally in inscriptions, indicating the high degree of specialization attained by this craft. Commercial taxes levied on cotton, yarn and woven fabrics, as well as professional taxes on weavers and dyers, progressively increased in the Chola period, showing that the industry was developed to such a degree that the revenue from these taxes was considerable. Not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned articles of merchandise in the inscriptions of the merchant guilds are cotton and textiles. Comments of foreign travellers like Abdul Feda and Chau-Judgment-Kua (13th century) provide a very clear idea of the variety of Coromandel textiles and their popularity abroad. The development of this highly productive craft led to the enhancement of the economic and social status of the weavers, some of whom rose to the rank of merchants and, perhaps, also master weavers. This is also reflected in the increasing participation of weavers in gift-making, temple rituals and acquisition of land control in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries.
Craft production was perhaps more intensive in the Kongu region, where 12th to 14th century inscriptions indicate large-scale artisan activity, and participation in important civic duties, which conferred special privileges upon them. Privileges were collectively granted to the Kanmalar (artisan) communities in Kancikkuvalnadu (Pariyur inscriptions of the 13th century), of Vengala Nadu (Karuvur and Modakkur inscriptions of the 13th century), of Kangeya nadu und Pandurai nadu (Vellodu inscription of the fourteenth century) under the Kongu-Cholas and Kongu-Pandyas. Agreements among artisan communities for various purposes also became common during this period. Some kind of craft organization, at least among the artisans of a specific region, was perhaps emerging by the 13th century. However, their dependence on the merchant organizations is underlined in an inscription of the late 11th century from Erode, where the Nanadesi organization set up a ‘refugee’ centre for the artisans. Erode and Mudikondan were specially noted for merchant domination over local temples, particularly in the latter.

It is also important to note that the Right and Left Hand divisions are more prominently mentioned in the records from areas in which the merchants assumed control and management of temples and even acted as protectors of the craftsmen and artisans, obviously due to the interdependence of these two sections of the commercial world. Rules regarding the Valangai and Idangai sects were sometimes framed by the Ayyavole guild as seen in the 13th century inscription of Tenkarai, Madurai district. The artisan community, as participants in gift-making processes, is seen to be coming to its own only after the 12th century, i.e. in the late Chola and Pandya periods. In a predominantly agrarian set up, the artisans were attached to the locality, i.e. to the temple and to landed brahmanas and Velalas through interdependent land tenures. However, the demand for their services both by local landed groups and itinerant merchant organizations, particularly in temporary-building and allied activities, resulted in their receiving concessions and privileges, conferred sometimes by the temple authorities and local chiefs, and sometimes by the merchant organizations. Thus, in Punjai (Kidarankondacholapuram, Thanjavur district) the temple authorities granted privileges to certain members of the anuloma Rathakara castes – blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters and stone masons – in the late Chola period (late 12th century). Under the Pandyas, such instances were more frequent, as seen in the 13th century inscription of Nodiyur (Thanjavur district) where the Kanmalas of several places met and agreed to assign a tithe collected from among themselves to the local temple, and to get differences settled conjointly with the temple trustees and local chief. The Right and Left Hand divisions are thus more visible in the 13th -14th century inscriptions, claiming privileges which were directed towards the improvement of their social position.
The revival of South India’s active participation in Asian trade from the 9th century, once again saw the emergence of coastal towns, with a shift in the location of major ports now oriented to serve new hinterlands, as, for example, Nagappattinam at the mouth of the Kaveri serving the core region of the Cholas. Special importance was attached to ports developed by ruling families, such as Mamallapuram under the Pallavas and Nagappattinam under the Cholas. Nagappattinam superseded Mamallapuram, the latter still the outlet for the Kanchipuram hinterland but subordinate to the Chola port. Kaveripattinam continued to be used under the early Cholas, but it gave place to Nagappattinam in the 11th century. Of the Sangam (early historical) ports, Marakkanam (Sopatma) north of Pondicherry, and Tondi and Korkai on the Pandya coast were still in use. However, a series of secondary towns once more dot the coast-line, starting from Tiruppalaivanam (Chingleput district), the northernmost on the Tamil coast, down south to the coast of the Tirunelveli district where Korkai and Kayal are located.

Tiruppalaivanam and Mayilarppil (now a part of Madras) served the region north of Kanchipuram between the 11th and 13th centuries. Kovalam (Viracholapattinam) in the 12th century, Tiruvadandai (and Taiyur) in the 13th century, - all located north of Mamallapuram – Sadras (Sadurangapattinam) and Puduppattinam south of Mamallapuram (both in the 13th -14th centuries), Pallava Pattinam (Kudalur), Cuddalore (Nissankamallan Pattinam) and Tiruvendipuram in the 13th century, show the increase, towards the end of the 13th century, in coastal towns where the constant presence of the merchant groups suggests that most of them served as halting places for the itinerant traders on a coastal road, or perhaps for coastal shipping right through. It is also significant that the merchant bodies exercised the right of fixing tolls and duties on articles of merchandise in their joint capacity in these towns, apart from some interior markets. Mannaikondacholapattinam (Tirukkarugavur) and Sadanganpadi (Tranquebar) north of Nagappattinam, were new towns added in the 12th and 13th centuries respectively. Several such towns came up also to the south of Nagappattinam in the late Chola period.

The salt manufacturing centres (peralam) of the Chola period are located near these coastal towns. From Marakkanam in South Arcot district down south to Vedaranyam near the salt swamps of Umbala Nadu, were a series of salt manufacturing centres established by the Cholas from the 11th century. Named after their royal founders, these were invariably under the care of royal officials who, on the basis of the income from salt, organized the scale of expenses in the local temples. Salt was a major item of exchange in local and inter-regional trade, as indicated by the reference to assignments of salt in Mahipala-Kulakalaperalam (Achchapuram in Sirkali taluk) to the Siva temple at Nallur Tirupperumanam for requirements of sandal paste, incense etc. Salt was carefully excluded from the jurisdiction of the nagaram, which had the right of fixing and assigning taxes on all commodities except salt.
It would seem superfluous to speak of the religious factors in the development and sustenance of urban centres, for most certainly religion provides the most constant denominator of all, i.e. the legitimization of all ventures, political, economic and social. However, sacred associations have been the most active determinant of the urban character and survival of centres like Srirangam, Tirupati, Chidambaram, Tiruvannamalai and many more such temple towns, whose umland extended not merely to the immediate neighbourhood or cultural region, but sometimes over long distances which pilgrims traversed at periodic intervals. Discussing the pattern of urbanization in South India, particularly in relation to Kanchipuram, Hall and Spencer highlight the contrasting urban experiences of medieval northern Europe with those of South India. As against the conflicting episcopal and burgher interests of medieval Europe, they emphasize the integrative aspects of Kanchipuram’s political, religious and cultural institutions, which helped to preserve its urban character and vitality, although primacy must be assigned to economic factors. The latter, discussed by them at length, stress the importance of Kanchipuram as a weaving and commercial centre, a true managaram whose economic outreach, as indicated by Chola epigraphic evidence, conveys the impression that Kanchipuram was a logical meeting place for the merchants of its hinterland. Kanchipuram’s role of ‘superordinate’ integration among political, religious and economic activities was not unique, for similar roles may also be recommend in other multiple temple centres like Kumbhakonam single temple centres like Tanjavur, Chidambaram and others. The difference, however, lay in the accent on and ascendancy of either the political, commercial or religious factor in its urbanization and survival.

Terminology, as seen in place names, is an indicator of the prevalence of urban features, as for example, when a puram, nagaram or pattinam suffix, or a new name with such suffixes, is given to an expanding centre or to new quarters within an expanding centre, as in Kudamukku-Palaiyarai. Palaiyarai was also known by names ending with the puram suffix, such as Nandipuram and Mudikondacholapuram. Pattinam usually refers to a coastal town or port, but interior towns with names ending in pattinam are also known. It would perhaps be more useful to look for a hierarchy among urban centres and the nature of inter-relationships, for urban activity invariably tended to move towards core regions where capitals and administrative centres were located, and all important traffic converged on them, as indicated by medieval highways.
CHAPTER-1V
CASTE AND MEDIEVAL IDEOLOGY

LEGITIMATION OF THE CASTE-VARNASrama DHARMA.

Social life in India in the post-Mauryan period was rich in content and comprehensive in outlook. The literary and archaeo-logical sources of the period are replete with interesting information regarding different aspects of social life such as the division of society into groups, asrama system, samskaras, family, food, dress, ornaments and other miscellaneous aspects. Evidence relating to singing, dancing, music and other items of entertainment like dramatic performances and magical shows, are afforded by the literary and other sources of this period. The invasions of the foreigners like the Greeks, the Parthians, the Sakas and lastely the Kusanas had no impact on the basic structure of the Indian society which retained its vitality.

Varnasrama System.

The Hindu society depended on the unique system of varnasrama which concerned itself with the organization and management of the individual as well as the group or society. Together the two systems are known as varnasrama vyavastha, (the organization of Varna and asrama), and they are interrelated and inter-coordinated with each other.)

Varna System.

The Dharmasastras formulated the theory regarding the origin of the Varna system. The theory that the four varnas proceeded from the limbs of the Creator is found in the Manu-Smriti. The same theory also finds a place in the Mahabharata which states that the brahmana originated from the mouth of the Brahman (the Creator), the kshatriya from His arm, the vaisya from His two thighs, and the sudra from His feet. This theory is more or less based on the old Vedic concept enunciated in the Purusasuta if the Rigveda. The main idea behind this theory is that the varna system is God’s creation and not man’s. The divine origin of the varna system has been propounded probably to show its sanctity.

It was generally believed that there were only four varna. Manu positively asserts that the brahmana, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra are the only four varnas in existence, there is no fifth Varna. The four-fold division of the Hindu society is mentioned in the Milindapanho along with their usual functions. It is evident from Manu that in order to protect this universe, different duties and occupations have been assigned to the different varnas by
the Creator. The brahmanical hierarchy was a living force, and the members of this Varna continued to enjoy special position. There were two classes of the brahmanas, i.e., the degenerate and the respected. The passages, referring to the Kali age in the Purana literature, depict the condition of the degenerate brahmanas. The Kurma Purana, a work of later period states, “The brahmanas, who are less educated in the Vedas, and are less fortunate and powerful, honour the sudras with flowers, decorations and other auspicious things. Though thus honoured, the sudras do not cast even a glance at the brahmanas. The brahmanas dare not enter the houses of the sudras but stand at the gate for an opportunity to pay respect to them. The brahmanas, who depend upon the sudras for their livelihood, surround them, when they are seated in vehicles, in order to praise them and teach them the Vedas.” As already discussed, the descriptions of the Kali age in the Puranas are taken as a faint indication of the conditions that prevailed during the post-Mauryan period. Thus it appear that there were some brahmanas who cared very little for the injunctions of the Dharmasastras.

Besides them, there were a large number who held an exalted position in the society. The Purana literature enumerates the distinct categories of the brahmanas prevalent in contemporary society. Some brahmanas were in the category of rsis; i.e., Saptarsi, brahmasri, devarsi and rajarsi. There sages possessed some supernatural powers and were engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. It is very difficult to state as to how many such sages lived during this period. They appear only as shadowy figures. Such a classification might have helped the brahmanas to keep their position very high in society. The Mahabharata states that the brahmanas are superior to all castes. Manu says, “the brahmana is the master of the varnas on account of his superiority of origin (from the mouth of the Creator), on account of his submitting himself to discipline (or holding up the Vedic lore) and on account of the eminence of the sacraments (samskara) in his case”). The law givers support the old injunction confining Vedic studies to the twice-born. The brahmanas devoted themselves to gain the knowledge of the Vedas and the various other branches of learning. They also imparted Vedic education to others. It was nothing new to them as they had been doing that since ancient times. Some brahmana teachers were also engaged in instructing sudras. But such teachers were not respected in society. Manu lays down: he who instructs Sudra pupil or learns from a Sudra teacher should not be invited to the sraddha.

As in earlier periods, the brahmanas held the honoured position of priests in sacrifices in this period. They accepted daksina in the sacrifices, which were a means of profit for them. The acceptance of gifts was another source of income for the brahmanas. The sacrifices were now elaborate and the priests had to devote much time, but the income did not increase proportionately. The causes of the decline of sacrifices in this period are apparent. It is discussed elsewhere that heretics had started preaching against Brahmanism, sacrifices and funeral rites. They believed in the principle of non-
violence and disregarded Vedic literature and the brahmanas. Further, the growing popularity of the doctrine of ahimsa was also the main cause for the decline in popularity of the Vedic sacrifices. Thus anti-Brahmanism gave a blow to the sacrifices which were the brahmanas’ main source of income. The Dharmasastrakaras, mostly being brahmanas, were aware of anti-brahmanical feeling, and hence, they adopted various means for popularising dana in the society. Some religious colour was added to gifts. It was believed that gifts were given to the brahmanas for the welfare of pitrganas of the donor. It is mentioned in the Purana literature that those who do not give donations are not devotees of God Visnu. The Puranas assign a hell to those persons who do not make gifts to brahmanas. The Visnu Purana advises even the sudras to make gifts to brahmanas. The brahmanas did not hesitate to accept donation even from foreigners. It is evident from the inscriptions of the time of Usavadata that donations were made by the Saka kings to the brahmanas. The Kusanas also made donations to brahmanas. It is evident from epigraphic sources that gifts and donations in cash and kind were made to the brahmanas. In a Mathura Brahmi inscription of the time of Huviska, two foreigners, Banakapatia and Kharasalerapati made special provision for the feeding of a hundred brahmanas in the open hall, out of the interest from the perpetual endowment. Thus it is evident that in practice the brahmanas accepted gifts from all, including the fallen and lower castes and foreigners.

The changing circumstances and pressure of social and economic necessities, forced some of the brahmanas to abandon their hereditary profession of teaching and priesthood. The brahmana Dharmasastrakaras appear to have been quite aware of this and hence, they permitted a brahmana to take up the professions of other castes for the sake of livelihood. In times of adversity or distress, however, the brahmana may follow the occupations of the Kshatriya. How the brahmana could follow the occupations of the vaisyas, i.e., the trade, agriculture and cattle-breeding are discussed elsewhere. There were some brahmanas who were vendors of Soma, village-priests and some became woodmen. Thus it appears that brahmanas were following different kinds of livelihood including lowly ones in this period. Several laws were also laid down to raise the economic position of the brahmanas in this period. The Smrtikaras prescribe low rates of interest for the brahmanas in comparison to other castes. Further, Manu lays down that a srotriya is to be free from taxes. In the law of treasure-trove, the brahmanas was more favourably treated than a member of other varnas. It is interesting to note that some attempts were made to safeguard the property of a brahmana. Manu states that even when starving, a ksatriya can never seize the possessions of a virtuous brahmana, but he can appropriate the belongings of a dasya or a person who neglects his sacred duties. Thus these rules lead to the conclusion that definite attempts were made by the Dharmasastras of the period to ensure the economic well-being of the brahmana Varna.
The brahmanas often took active part in the administration in this period. Some brahmanas like the Sungsas, the Kanvas and the Satavahanas were rulers in the post-Mauryan period. Some brahmanas also revolted against the tyrannical rule of the king. The brahmanas were appointed as judges to administer justice. The Smrtikaras advice the king to dispense justice with the assistance of a learned brahmana. The law givers further ordain that the learned brahmana should be appointed as ministers. Other facilities were also given to the brahmanas in our period. In the field of justice, for instance, a brahmana was not to be cited as a witness by a litigant who was not a brahmana. Manu impliedly shows that even a srotriya could not be cited as a witness by a brahmana. Further, the brahmanas were given lesser punishment in comparison to persons belonging to other castes. The brahmanas were not to be offended or assaulted. Actions such as threatening a brahmana with assault or striking him, raising had on him or occupying his seat or spitting on him drew severe punishment. They were also exonerated from six kinds of punishment. Manu prescribes fines for the brahmana who is guilty of giving false evidence or who is guilty of rape or adultery.

The brahmanas were not allowed to mix with the sudras and the chandalas. The sudras and even the chandalas were prohibited from contact with the brahmanas. By now it shall be evident that the brahmanas enjoyed the highest place in the society of the period. They had access to several kinds of economic, social and religious facilities. But it should be noted that some sudras openly defied the existing social system and dishonoured the brahmanas. There are several evidences in the Mahabharata which suggest that the sudras were especially antagonistic to the existing order. The Great epic states that sudras are the destroyers of the king, and hence a wise ruler should not be complacent towards them. At another place, the same epic defines a vrsala as one who defies the established order. Certain sections of sudras such as actors, gamblers, keepers of gaming houses and other persons of this kind are taken as sources of disorder to the state because they cause harm to the subjects of higher classes. All this is clear from the descriptions of the Kali age in the Puranas. The Kurma Purana, a composition of later period, describes the behaviour of sudras towards the brahmanas. “The foolish Sudra officials of the king force the brahmanas to give up their seats and beat them. The king dishonours the brahmanas in the Kali age on account of the changing times, and the sudras occupy high seats among the brahmanas.....” A somewhat similar description can be found in other Puranas also. The descriptions of the Kali age, which are in the form of complaints and prophetic versions made by the brahmanas, cannot be brushed aside as imaginary descriptions. This shows the pitiable condition of the brahmanas in the post-Mauryan period. The causes which compelled the sudras to dishonour the brahmanas are not very far to seek. R.S. Sharma is of opinion that the foreign invasions most likely caused an upheaval among the sudras, “who were seething with discontent. Naturally the sudras turned against the brahmanas, who were the authors of discriminating provisions against them. How long and
in which part of the country this social convulsion prevailed is difficult to
determine for lack of data. But it seems that the intense hostility of the
brahmanas towards ‘sudra’ kings was on account of the latter’s fraternization
with the sudras”. It has been suggested that the formation of new guilds and
the rise of new crafts, the economic policy of some rulers and the advent of
foreigners in the post-Mauryan period helped to improve the position of the
sudras. Thus due to their improved position, the sudras resisted the old social
order and dishonoured the brahmanas.

The Kshatriya occupied the second position in the Hindu society. Their main
duty was to protect the people, give presents to brahmanas, perform various
sacrifices and study the scriptures. While describing the
duties of the kshatriyas, the Visnu Purana states, “His especial duties and
sources of maintenance are arms and the protection of the earth. The
guardianship of the earth is indeed his special province, by the discharge of
this duty a king attains his special province, and realises a share of the merit of all
sacrificial rites. By intimidating the bad, and cherishing the good, the monarch,
who maintains the discipline of the different castes, secures whatever region he
desires”. It is clear from literary sources that a Kshatriya, in times of distress,
was allowed to adopt the means of livelihood of a Vaisya but not that of the
Sudra. The Vedic education of a kshatriya was not neglected in our period.
Manu makes provision for confining the Vedic studies to the twice-born.
According to him, a twice-born man who, not having studied the Vedas, applies
himself to other occupation is reduced to the condition of a Sudra, and his
descendants also meet the same fate. The Purana literature shows that
ksatriya kings like Saunaka, Krta, Satanika and others received Vedic
education. King Priyavarta’s three sons, i.e., Medha, Agnibanu and Putra were
well-versed in yoga, and they did not pay attention to
administration. Krtadhvaja and Kesidhvaja were well-versed in the Adhyatma
Sastra. All these instances indicate that the kshatriyas were not only adepts in
their traditional profession, but were anxious to acquire versatility.

In the religious sphere, the Kshatriya continued to enjoy the right to
perform the Vedic sacrifices. They had the privilege to perform tapas. The
Purana literature is replete with instances of several kings retiring to forest for
the performance of penances. They led an ascetic life and the Samnyasasrama
was also open to them. Further, it is clear from the Mahabharata that the
brahmanas and kshatriyas alone were eligible to observe the vow of
fasts. Aindra heaven has been assigned to the kshatriyas who do not flee from
battle. In the field of judicial administration, a kshatriya was to act as a witness
in the transactions of his own caste only. Many states that a judge should
cause a Kshatriya to swear by his chariot or the animal he rides. Other castes
had to swear by touching different things. A Kshatriya was to receive more sever
punishment than a brahmana, but lesser punishment than a Vaisya or a
sudra. Manu prescribes a fine of 500 panas to a Kshatriya for the malfaeasance
of violating a guarded woman. If a Kshatriya and a Vaisya offend against a
guarded brahmani who is the wife of an eminent brahmana, they shall be
punished like a Sudra or be burnt in a fire of dry grass.
Manu formulates certain rules to distinguish the Kshatriya from the rest of the varnas. He recounts the old story of creation that the Kshatriya originated from the arm of the Creator. He also prescribes a form of greeting for a Kshatriya which is quite different from that of other three varnas. The Smrtikara further introduces Varna distinction in the namakarana ceremony. According to him; a Kshatriya name should denote the title to power. He states that the title of the Kshatriya should imply protection. Being a member of twice-born Varna a Kshatriya is also prohibited certain articles of food. The raksasa form of marriage has been prescribed for the Kshatriya in the Smrti literature. The law giver further adds that the Kshatriya can also practice the asura, gandharva and the paisacha forms of marriage. The niyoga was in practice among the kshatriya varna. Usually brahmanas were called in to beget offspring on Kshatriya women. The inter-varna marriage was prevalent among the Kshatriya Varna also. Manu abhors the idea of a Sudra woman being the first wife of either a brahmana or a Kshatriya.

The relationship between the Kshatriya and the brahmans may be mentioned here. It is the king’s duty to protect and support them as they are the preservers of the Vedas which are the roots of dharma. It is evident from the Great epic that several kings protected and served the brahmans. The assistance of the brahmana to the Kshatriya was essential for his success. The brahmans regarded themselves as superior to the Kshatriya because of their superiority in spiritual knowledge, but the latter were no less strong in temporal power. The Mahabharata considers the brahmana as the political refuge for the Kshatriya. The superiority of the brahmans was not accepted by all the kshatriyas. King Nahusa imposed taxes even on the sages, and king Pururava took away the property of the brahmans in contravention to the dicta of Dharmasastra. There are instances to show that sometimes the two varnas were in conflict. The Puranas state that some sages, becoming disgusted with the tyrannical rule of king Vena, revolted against him. There are several references to the armed conflicts between the two castes in the Mahabharata. The vast empire of Dandaka kshatriyas was destroyed by a brahmana. Parasurama is said to have destroyed the kshatriyas several times. It thus appears that sometimes the brahmans came into conflict with the kshatriyas, but on the whole the relationship between these two castes remained cordial.

The vaisyas were regarded as the third Varna in the Hindu society. Manu avers that the king should order a Vaisya to do trade, to lend money, to cultivate the land and to tend cattle. The Visnu Purana also refers to their main professions such as cattle-breeding (pasu-palya), trade (vanijya) and agriculture (krsi). It appears that their main sources of income were agriculture; trade and cattle-rearing. They were not to swerve from their duties. Manu advises the king to compel the vaisyas and the sudras to perform the tasks assigned to them; because if these varnas swerve from their duties, they will throw the world into confusion and disorder. This passage is of great
importance, because such an idea is not mentioned in any earlier text. R.S.
Sharma is of opinion that such a measure seems to reflect a period of socio-
economic crisis, which is evident from the Yuga Purana which mentions that
during this period even women took to ploughing. The learned scholar further
argues, “Manu’s measure for making the Vaisyas and Sudras work may have
been necessitated by social convulsions made worse by foreign invasions”.

Sometimes the vaisyas took to the profession of a Sudra. According to
the Visnu Purana, the Vaisya will abandon agriculture and commerce in the
Kali age, and gain his livelihood by servitude or the exercise of mechanical arts.
Manu also lays down that in times of distress, a Vaisya may maintain himself
by following the Sudra’s mode of life. Thus it appears that there were some
vaisyas who followed the professions meant for the sudras. On the basis of the
professions assigned to vaisyas, it may be inferred that generally traders,
merchants, agriculturists, cattle-breeders were included in this class. There
were sub-sections among the vaisyas. Even in the Gupta age the Vaisya caste
included various sub-castes like agriculturists, the merchants and the cattle-
rearers etc. They were more conscious of their own sub-groups than of their
being members of the theoretical Vaisya Varna. In the field of judiciary, the
vaisyas were competent to give evidence when called by a suitor. Manu, while
mentioning the modes of swearing by different varnas, says that the judge
should cause a Vaisya to swear by his kind, grain and gold. In case of perjury,
the vaisyas, like other castes, were to be fined and banished by the king. A
Vaisya was to be fined more heavily than a brahmana or a Kshatriya.

The vaisyas were quite different from other varnas in many respects.
Manu mentions the old story of origin of varnas which places the vaisyas above
the sudras. He also repeats the law prescribing the different forms of greeting
used for the vaisyas. The law giver introduces Varna distinction even in the
ceremony of naming the child. The vaisyas had to follow the different forms of
marriage. It is evident from the Manu-Smrti that the asura form of marriage is
for the vaisyas and the sudras. The same authority further adds that the
vaisyas can follow the asura, gandharva and the paisacha also. A Vaisya, like
other two higher varnas, was not allowed to marry a Sudra woman. Manu
states that a Vaisya becomes an outcaste if he has male offspring by a Sudra
wife alone. The Vaisya also enjoyed the right of studying the Vedas. The vaisyas
were entitled to make gifts to the brahmanas. The period of impurity after the
death of a relation for them lasted for 15 days only, but for a Sudra it was for a
month. While referring to the mode of purging impurity; many state that a
Vaisya can become pure by touching the goad or nose-string of his oxen. After
death, Maruta heaven has been assigned to the vaisyas who carry out their
duties. The vaisyas, like other varnas, were given the right to worship Visnu
and Siva.
The sudras were regarded as the fourth and the last Varna in the Hindu society. The literary sources of the period prescribe various ways for the sudras to earn their livelihood. Manu repeats the old theory that the Sudra is to serve the three higher varnas. The Mahabharata and the Visnu Purana also favour the same maxim. The Visnu Purana appreciates the sudras for their service to higher varnas in the Kali age. It may be deduced that such duties were assigned to the sudras for the benefit of higher varnas. Without their services, the twice-born might have faced many difficulties in their daily activities. Though it was not a free service, the income might have been too low to cover necessities. The wages of domestic servants (mostly sudras) have been discussed elsewhere in the present work. The servants were served left over food as meals, given old clothes, beds, refuge of grain, worn out umbrella and clothes. It appears that their economic condition was pitiable, and their services to higher varnas were not remunerative. So there were other means of earning for the sudras in this period. They were employed as hired labourers and slaves. They were mostly engaged in agricultural work by individual land owners. Some of them became artisans.

Manu states that sudras should take to the occupation of artisans only if they fail to secure livelihood through direct service of the upper varnas. The Visnu Purana also holds a similar view. The post-Mauryan period witnessed tremendous improvement in the conditions of artisans. Some artisans formed their own guilds. It has been suggested that the sudras worked as weavers, wood-workers, smiths, leather-dressers, potters, painters, etc. Thus sudras followed the profession of different artisans and this idea grew stronger in the Gupta period. The Amarakosa, a work of the Gupta period, refers to the Sudra varga which includes different artisans such as garland-makers, washermen, potters, brick-layers, weavers, tailors, painters, armours, leather-workers, black-smiths, shell-cutters and metal-workers. The same work also includes players on drum, flute and vina, actors, dancers and tumblers. They were also engaged in trade. Besides it, the sudras earned money by engaging themselves as hired labourers, slaves, potters and carriers. Even in the Gupta period various types of hired labourers and servants were included in the Sudra section.

Manu does not want a Sudra to accumulate wealth. But this provision, formulated by Manu, was probably ineffective. In spite of such provision, the sudras enjoyed the right to property. It is evident from the law of inheritance, mentioned to literary sources that the sudras owned property. The Yajnavalkya-Smrti gives the smallest share to the Sudra son of a higher caste person. While fixing the share of the Sudra son of a brahmana, Visnu lays down that a Sudra son of a twice-born father can inherit one-half of his property. The Sudra got smallest share from the treasure found by him. Apart from it, the sudras performed the work of banking and earned money. There is evidence to show that in the 2nd century A.D. money was deposited with the potters, the oil-millers and even with the weavers. Staunch followers of Buddhism deposited money with such persons for providing robes and other essentials to the monks. Thus it appears that contrary to Manu’s laws, the sudras could accumulate wealth in the period under review.
The sudras did play a role in the administration of the post-Mauryan period. Some sudras became kings. There was no liberal attitude in the appointment of judges. The sudras were not considered competent to act as witnesses. They had to face corporeal and severe punishment in case of defaming, insulting or assaulting the twice-born. The sudras had the lowest position in the society of this period. The Dharmasastras mention the old story of creation which indicates the lowest position of the Sudra in the society. There were different forms of greetings in relation to the members of the four varnas. According to Patanjali, an elevated term was not used in addressing the sudras. The term bho was generally used in addressing a Kshatriya or Vaisya, but not a Sudra. It is apparent from the Natyasastra that a mode of address indicating command should be used with servants, artisans and mechanics. The life of pa Sudra was not held valuable as compared to the life of persons of other higher varnas. Manu prescribes the performance of the lunar penance for the expiation of the sin of murder. Such expiation varies in length according to the Varna of the murdered person. Manu prescribes a penance of three years in the case of the murder of a brahmana, and a penance of two months and a quarter in the case of the murder of a Sudra. The prayaschitta he prescribes for killing a Sudra is the same as that for killing a number of small birds and animals like cat, dog, frog, own and crow. Even in naming the child, the Sudra had to confine his choice to something associated with contempt. Thus it appears that attempts were made to keep the position of sudras low in society.

There was a wide gulf between the brahmanas and the sudras. The brahmanas were advised not to keep contact with the sudras. Manu says that the snataka should not travel with the sudras. The texts repeatedly mention that a brahmana should not accept the food offered by a Sudra. The penalty for doing so unintentionally was fast for three days, but if intentionally done, a difficult penance was to be performed. All these references clearly show that some steps were taken to "prevent all social contacts between the lower orders and the educated brahmanas. The Sudras were not allowed to study the Vedas but they were not debarred from general education. Moreover, the two philosophical systems of Yoga and the Samkhya arose in the 3rd century A.D. and these were open to the Sudra also in that age.

The sudras were deprived of several religious rites. They were not to consecrate sacred fires and perform Vedic sacrifices. Manu states that the sudras are not worthy to receive the sacraments and have no right to follow the dharma of the Arya. He also advises the avijas not to associate the Sudra with the performance of rites. He further ads that a brahmana should not beg from the Sudra anything required for the sacrifice. But in the 3rd century A.D. there are indications of changes in the religious rights of the Sudra. Visnu provides that under certain circumstances a Sudra has to perform sacred libation. Yajnavalkya very clearly states that a Sudra can perform five sacrifices with the namaskara mantra. The Visnu Purana refers to the performance of pitrsraddha
and offering of water to ancestors by sudras. Bhasa mentions that the sudras worshipped the deities without mantras. There were some brahmanas who officiated as priests for the sudras, but such priests were condemned in the society. The Smrtis disapprove them. The sudras were not debarred from attaining heaven. The Visnu Purana assigns Gandharva heaven to the sudras engaged in menial services during their lifetime. The sudras were considered as the most impure section of society. The period of impurity for a Sudra was a month. He could become pure by touching his staff. In this age the sudras showed some inclinations towards the heretical doctrines. This has been discussed elsewhere in the present work. Though the sudras were attracted towards the heretical sects, the Brahmanical society did allow them to lead ascetic life. The sudras could also embrace Bhagavatism and Saivism.

To sum up, the sudras were chiefly employed as domestic servants, agricultural labourers, slaves and wage-earning labourers. They also followed the occupations of different artisans. They were also employed in carrying on trade. They also performed the work of banking and several people deposited their money to the guilds of artisans. Thus they earned money through various means. As against Manu’s laws, the sudras accumulated wealth. They also enjoyed several religious rights and embraced Bhagavatism and Saivism. Though they were deprived of Vedic education, they were given the right to get general education.

**Mixed Castes**

The period under consideration witnessed the rise and growth of several mixed castes. The Mahabharata advances a theory that several castes, Bhismu states that when a man cohabits with a woman of higher varna than his own, the offspring born of such a marriage is regarded as being outside the pale of the four varnas. Manu’s theory of the origin of mixed castes is, in certain respects, different from that of the Mahabharata. Manu mentions the mixed castes such as the nisada, the parasava, the ugra, the ayogava, the ksattr, the chandala, the pukkasa, the kukkutaka, the svapaka and the vena. These castes are said to have come into existence from the inter-mixture of the varnas. According to Manu, a brahmana begets on a woman of an ugra an avrta, on the daughter of an ambastha an abhira, and on the woman of the ayogava a dhigvana. Further, he adds that on the daughter of syogava the dasyu begets a sairandhra, the vaidehaka a maitreyaka, the nisada a dasa who is also called a kaivarta. A chandala begets on a vaidehaka woman a pandusopaka and the nisada an ahindaka. Similarly, Manu traces the origin of other mixed castes such as karavara, andhra, meda, antyavasayin. He further mentions that the suta, the vaidehaka, the chandala, the Magadha, the ksattr and the ayogava beget offsprings who are more sinful than their fathers on women of similar mixed castes. Such offsprings remain outside the pale of the Varna society. Thus he mentions about 57 castes which were formed as a result of inter-mixture of castes. The Mahabharata also mentions several mixed
castes and introduces some new castes such as mamsas, svadukaras, ksadras, saugandhas who are stated to have been issues of magadhi mothers through wicked men of the four varnas. A vratya is said to have been begotten upon a Kshatriya woman by a Sudra. He is fallen from the duties of the twice-born, and is placed in the rank of the chandala. It is mentioned in the Mahabharata that a Vaisya is begotten by a Sudra on a Vaisya woman.

Thus it is clear from the above discussion that the Dharmasastras of the period have tried to explain the origin of all mixed castes by a system of hybridization, and they are not considered to be within the pale of the recognized four varnas. The theory is fully explained in the Smrtis and the Mahabharata. R.C. Majumdar takes the theory of the origin of mixed castes by a system of interbreeding as assured. Jolly opines, “The system of mixed castes bears most clearly the stamp of artificiality on the very face of it. R.S. Sharma bolds the view, “the theory of origin of new castes through the inter-mixture of varnas was fanciful. It appears that Brahmanical law givers wanted to bring all the varied elements of population in the lower strata of their social fold. Thus the theory for the origin of mixed castes is propounded to show the low status of new castes in the Brahmanical society and to bring them within the fold of the Sudra class.

All mixed castes were distinguished by their occupations. They were assigned distinctive vocations. We learn from Manu that the chandalas, the svapakas and antyavasayins were engaged for executing criminals. The misadas thrived on fishing, and the medhas, andhras, madgus and chunchus lived on hunting of wild animals. Ksattras, the ugras and pukkas were employed for catching and killing of animals’ resibing in holes. Manu states that some of the Varna samkaras (mixed castes) followed some important craft-professions. The ayogava followed wood-work, and the dhigvana and the karavara practiced in leather work and the pandusopaka worked in canes. The margava or the dasa adopted the profession of a boatman. The venas played on drums and the maitreyaka rang a bell at the appearance of dawn. The sairandhra was to adorn and attend on his master. Some of the mixed castes, mentioned by Manu, were untouchables. After mentioning the functions of the nisadas, ayogavas, medas, andhras, chunchus, madgus, ksattras, pukkasas, dhigvanas and vena, Manu states that they should reside outside the villages near trees and burial grounds and in groves. The chandalas and svapachas also lived outside the Brahmanic settlements. Dogs and donkeys were regarded as their main property. The chandalas took their meal in broken dishes; they used ornaments made of iron, clothes of dead people and wandered from one place to another. The Mahabharata also mentions iron objects used by chandalas. They besmeared their bodies with the dust raised by dogs and asses. The chandalas were not allowed to stay in towns and villages at night.
Certain rules were framed by the Dharmasastras to avoid all contact between the higher varnas and the untouchables. Manu states that the brahmanas should not give the untouchable grain with their own hand. He further adds that a snataka should not live with the untouchables. The brahmanas were not to look at the chandala, village pigs, cocks, dogs etc. at the sraddha functions. Manu advises the brahmanas to avoid philosophical contact with chandala women; for that shall lead to their fall from brahmanahood. He further declares if a brahmana resorts intentionally to a chandala woman, he shall be reduced to the position of a chandala. The very sight of a chandala is regarded as impure by the Visnu Purana. Such ideas about the chandala can be found even in the Jataka literature, where it is mentioned that a daughter of a sethi of Varanasi, washed her eyes on seeing a chandala. The chandalas were not invited to religious ceremonies or even to the sraddha. They were equated with eunuchs, papls pasandas, cocks, dogs, nagnas, monkeys and village hogs. Thus it appears that the chandalas and other untouchables were relegated to the lowest status in the Brahmanical society. The untouchables were backward and subsisted like the aboriginal tribes. They lived in separate habitations outside Brahmanical settlements.

The Varna system divided society not on the basis of wealth or profession, but on birth. It is evident from the Divyavadana that a brahmana finding his son deficient in learning had to console himself with the thought that not all brahmanas were accomplished in the Vedas, but still continued to be brahmana by birth. The rules and regulations of the four-fold division of the Hindu society were fully developed. The highest place of honour was given to brahmanas, and they continued to enjoy special position. The next in the rung of ladder were the kshatriyas who also enjoyed several facilities in the society. The vaisyas were in the third position and the sudras in the fourth. The despised castes, the chandalas and several untouchables were included in the sudra varna. They occupied the lowest status in the society. This shows the prevalence of gradation in the caste system. Separate duties and functions were assigned by the law givers for all four varnas; even then such rules were not followed in toto. As pointed out earlier the sudras openly defied the existing Varna system. The pasandas, nagas and other heretics also protested strongly against the caste-system in general and brahmanas in particular. Sometimes the three higher varnas also neglected their duties assigned by the Dharmasastras; they disregarded the rules of Dharmasastras and went in for inter-varna marriages. Some brahmanas married women of Sudra Varna. They accepted food from the low castes. Such deteriorating condition of Varna system led the law givers to lay emphasis on it. Manu always favoured the old social order declared that people would reach the most blessed state if they would act according to the prescribed duties even in times of distress. Visnu and Yajnavalkya are also in favour of establishing the Varna system. Several kings also tried to establish the old Varna system in this period. The execution of the sudra Sambuka by Rama, as mentioned in the Ramayana, may be cited as a typical instance. The Nasik Cave inscription of Gautami Balasri, belonging to
the Satavahana period, supplies a concrete illustration of royal interference in caste regulations. In this inscription we find the Satavahana king Pulumavi being extolled for his success in preventing the admixture of the four varnas. Attempts were made to establish the old varna-system by way of narrating stories. The sage Markandeya narrates the story as to how a brahmana ascetic named Kausika was taught the principles of the varnas and dharma by Dharma-vyadha of Mithila. The Dharma-vyadha informed the brahmana that the former was only carrying out the dharma prescribed for him. He also says that he who sticks to the dharma of his own Varna acquires great glory. Besides it, different heavens were assigned to all the four varnas who stuck to their duties. Fourthly, the feeling of caste superiority was also intense in this period. The brahmanas considered themselves superior to all the three varnas. Not only this, certain subsections within the castes grew up, and they considered themselves higher than others. The brahmanas such as Trinachiketa, Trimadhu, Trisuparna, who were devoted to the Vedic studies, were regarded as higher than other brahmanas. The caste consciousness deeply pervaded the society. It was so high that the brahmanas did not like to be invited along with others such as sellers of soma (some vikrayi), village-priests (grama-yajakah), and teachers of servant (bhrtakadhyapaka, vrsalisutiposta, vrsalipati (husband of vrsala women) and devalaka Due to caste consciousness, the idea of inter-dining was not highly favoured in the society. The Purana literature seems to be against the brahmana dining with those who are anti-Vedas. Several people such as, sellers of daughters, sellers of soma and village-priests, were not to be invited to partake the sraddha meal along with learned brahmanas.

Great emphasis was laid on the principle that the Varna system was based on one’s karma. The Mahabharata states that a person of lower Varna may ascend to a higher-varna in the next birth by following his own dharma in the present birth. The person who neglects his own dharma will be born again in a lower Varna. Karma determines one’s birth in high or low castes. Thus it appears that the varna-system was based on the principle of one’s karma. It was believed that if one was born in a lower Varna, then by practising dharma of his own Varna in this birth he would gain a higher Varna in the next. It is also evident that good deeds may succeed in securing a higher Varna for one, but not in the present life. The duties assigned in this birth are due to one’s past deeds, and hence they must be followed in a just manner if a better life is desired in the next birth.

**Asrama System**

The Hindu society was based on the asrama system also. According to the Mahabharata the four stages of life form a flight of four steps. By ascending that ladder one attains the region of Brahma. Each of the asramas is a stage of life in which the individual has to train himself for a certain period, exert himself in its ambit and qualify himself for the next. The asramas are four in
number: the brahmacharya (that of a student); the grhastha (that of a married man, the householder); the vanaprastha (that of a retired life in the forest); the samnyasa (the life of complete renunciation of earthly attachments). There is no fifth stage. According to Manu, each individual should normally pass through these four stages of life, one after the other, and live in them in accordance with the sastras if he wishes to obtain moksa (salvation). After crossing from one asrama to other and after performing the sacrifices with senses under full control, realizing the limitations and futility of a life dependent upon alms and offerings, if one leads the life of samnyasi and dies thereafter he becomes blessed. After performing the duties of the first three asramas, one should turn his attention towards the attainment of salvation. The Smrtikara also remarks that the man who fails to carry out any of the obligations due to him during the first three stages of life, is not entitled to attain salvation; and he who desires salvation without fulfilling his duties in the first three stages will sink to damnation.

Different periods of life were for the different asramas. The natural span of life of an individual is supposed to be a hundred years, and the Kamasutra states that one should divide this period into childhood, youth and old age. In childhood, the individual should acquire education; in youth he should satisfy his natural craving for enjoyment and pleasure; and in his old age, he should seek dharma and moksa. After completing his education, the young man enters the householder’s stage. He is expected to retire to the forest from the grhasthasrama after performing the duties of this asrama in the proper manner. In the forest he has to lead a simple life, receiving alms, performing sacrifices and studying religious books. After passing the stage of life in forest, he may live as an ascetic in the fourth asrama giving up all attachment to worldly objects. Each asrama disciplined and trained the individual for the next stages of life.

The brahmacharyasrama is the first stage in which one gets an opportunity for education. This stage of life begins with the upanayana samskara which is compulsory for all three higher varnas. This samskara is regarded as the second birth of the young boys of the three higher varnas, and after this they become dvijas or twice-born. The followers of this stage had to spend their time in the gurukula for education. The Smrtis prescribe several rules for the students’ residence at the guru’s house where they received proper training. They had to follow the rules and regulations and be steadfast in brahmacharya. They could opt for any of the several branches of learning which were offered. After the completion of his course of studies, the student leaves the place of the teacher; and returns home. At that time a samavartana ceremony is performed by the student, his brahmacharyasrama comes to an end, and he becomes a snataka. Now he is fit to enter the next asrama viz., the grhasthasrama.
In the grhasthasrama the individual has to fulfill his obligations to the members of his family, to his deceased ancestors, to strangers and to gods. The real life of a householder starts with the marriage of a snataka. This stage was very essential for an individual in the Hindu society. Much importance has been laid on this asrama in the Dharmasastras. The Purana literature regards this asrama as the best of all asramas. This stage has been regarded as the mainstay of all students and ascetics. Other sources have also lauded this stage. The Mahabharata regards the life of a householder as very superior and sacred, and gives scope for fulfillment (of the life’s mission). The Santi Parva mentions that the householder is the supporter of birds, animals and various other creatures. In fact, this mode of life is considered as the very basis of all the others. The Smrtis also bestow the highest praise on the grhasthasrama. This special acclaim on the householder’s life should not be misunderstood. In the post-Mauryan period there were several foreign rulers who abhorred in varnasrama dharma. This period also witnessed the rise of anti-Brahmanical religions. Due to their influence several persons renounced the world for asceticism. The tendency of becoming ascetics, without passing the householder’s life, might have caused upheavals in the Brahmanical society; so the Hindu dharmasastrakaras praised the grhasthasrama not only to attract the attention of the Hindus towards this stage, but also to desist the people from becoming ascetics before the prescribed period. This asrama was also exalted on the grounds of its being the axle on which the other three asramas revolved.

The Dharmasastras lay down several rules and regulations for the grhasthasrama. A householder has to perform the five great sacrifices, (i.e., panchamahayajnas) viz., brama-yajna, the pitr-yajna, the deva-yajna, the bhuta-yajna and nr-yajna (i.e., manusya-yajna). The teaching and studying of Holy Scriptures are to be pursued as expressive of the brahma-yajna which is offered to the memory of the distinguished and learned sages of the past. The study of the history, the Vedas, the Vedangas and stories of heroes are included in this sacrifice. Its main aim seems to be to preserve the Vedic knowledge and the past traditions of the Hindus. In the pitr-yajna the offering of water and food, known as tarpana, is offered to ancestors. It was done to preserve the memory of past ancestors. In the deva-yajna; the householder worships Gods by offering oblations into fire. Another sacrifice is bhuta-yajna in which the food is offered to all creatures. The main idea behind this sacrifice seems to show kindness and tolerance towards all creatures. The fifth sacrifice is nr-yajna, i.e., the hospitality shown to a guest. The Dharmasastras have highly praised the hospitality shown to guests. The Visnu Purana states that he who feeds himself and neglects guest, goes to hell, and a man becomes free from sin after showing hospitality to the guests. A guest, who departs disappointed from any house and proceeds elsewhere, transfers his sin to the owner of that house and takes away with him the householder’s merits. The motive behind the advocacy of hospitality to guest is clear. In ancient India there was neither inn nor hotel. The travellers might have faced several
difficulties in obtaining shelter and food; only a householder could provide both to a guest. So the householder was repeatedly advised to show favour to his guests. Thus it is clear that the main purpose behind the five sacrifices was to devote oneself to god, to show respect to the sages who had composed the sacred texts, to remember ancestors, to show feelings of love and affection towards human beings and all creatures. The law givers ordain that every householder should offer these five great sacrifices to gain permanent happiness. Manu states that indeed, these five, viz., the sages, the ancestors, the gods, the spirits and the guests look up to the householder in expectation of these offerings. The householder has to keep the sacred fire alive ceaselessly and perform daily and periodical duties. The Purana literature gives details of usual, outstanding and important activities of a householder such as getting up from bed, saucha (bodily purity), snana (bath), sandhya tarpana, bhojana (dinner), study of holy scriptures, gifts and going to bed.

The vanaprasthasrama, the third stage of life, comes after the householder stage. In this asrama, as the name itself suggests, the individual has to leave the shelter not only of the family and of the home, but also of the village too and retire to the forest to live there. A householder has been allowed to enter into this stage at the beginning of his old age. Manu states that one may go to a forest with one’s wife or leave her in the charge of one’s sons. The wife may accompany her husband if she desires. In the vanaprastha one has to restrict his food to vegetables, roots and fruits he is not to touch sweet things or meat; he must not accept fruits or roots grown in the village. He is to take food only once either in the day in the fourth part or at night. Manu ordains that a follower of the vanaprastha may accumulate food materials only for a day or a month or a year (but never for more than a year) and should throw away his stored food grains every year in the month of “Asvina. For his clothing he has to use the deer-skin or the bark of a tree. He has to allow his beard and nails to grow. He should make no deliberate attempts to obtain comforts; and he has to lead a celibate life, sleeping on the floor and residing under a tree. He has to perform the five great sacrifices which he used to perform in the grhasthasrama. He has to offer the guests who may visit him, according to his might. He has to perform the srauta sacrifices of the newmoon and fullmoon. Besides, he has to utilize his time in studying the Upanisads and the Srutis and to recite them inaudibly. Manu advises him to study the various sacred texts and practice penances for the purity of his body, for the increase of his knowledge and ultimately for realizing Brahma. The follower of this asrama should practice severe austerities by standing in the midst of five fires, by standing in the open in the rain, by wearing wet garments in winter. He is to devote himself to his studies and meditation at the same time; he has to lead a life of self-control friendliness and charity to others and he should bear a compassionate attitude towards all creatures. If the forest hermit suffers from some incurable disease or feels death to be near, he should start on mahaprasthana subsisting on water and air alone till his body falls on earth to rise no more.
If he survives the vanaprasthasrama, the individual has to enter the last asrama, i.e., samnyasa casting off all attachment to the world. Manu allows the individual to enter this stage of life immediately after the grhasthasrama. But Yajnavalkya permits a person to take up the samnyasasrama either after the vanaprasthasrama, or directly after he has done with the grhasthasrama. After leaving home, wife, children and possession, the follower of this stage should dwell outside the village and stay under a tree or in an unhabited house. He should possess nothing, he must always move about all alone without being dependent upon any one for help or support. He should care neither for life nor death. Manu states that by restraining his senses, by casting away the love and hatred within himself, and by living life of compassion to living beings, the samnyasi becomes fit to achieve immortality. The Smritikara further adds that all the sins of an individual, who passes through the stage of samnyasa in this way, are washed off and destroyed and thus he attains the ultimate goal. The Samnyasi is to live on begging. The Dharmasastras lay down several rules regarding begging for this asrama. Manu states that the Samnyasi should neither feel dispirited when he fails to procure alms nor should he feel delighted when he is able to procure. He should hoard nothing and possess nothing except his tottered garments, danda and water-pottery. He should avoid all troubles or injury to creatures and should equally avoid attachment to anything. A wandering mendicant is to call nothing his own, and to suppress desire, anger, greed and pride. The Visnu Purana states that a hermit, who gives no trouble to living beings, need never apprehend danger from them.

This asrama was meant only for dvijas. A Sudra was not allowed to become an ascetic. The Santi Parva lays down that a Sudra cannot become a bhiksu. In the Mahabharata a Sudra says, “I am a Sudra and so I have no right to resort to the four asramas”. It is clear from the same epic that several people assumed the outward signs of the fourth asrama, got their head tonsured and moved about in ochre-coloured garments for securing alms and gifts. There were some sudras who tried to become ascetics. The Visnu Purana states that in the Kali age sudras, seeking subsistence by begging and assuming the outward marks of religious mendicants will become the impure followers of impious and heretical doctrine. But the Sudra ascetics were condemned in the society. Yajnavalkya lays down that Sudra ascetics should not be fed in the worship of the gods and ancestors. He prescribes the fine of one hundred panas for those who give a meal to Sudra ascetics in rites for gods and manes. The Ramayana also condemns the Sudra ascetic Sambuka who threatened the security of established order by trying to acquire merit through ascetism.
Thus the above discussion shows that the varnasrama system was in a fairly developed form in the post-Mauryan period. It is very difficult to say as to what extent people followed the rules and regulations of this system. There were some people who paid scant attention to this system. The Visnu Purana mentions the neglect towards varnasrama dharma in the Kali age. The Purana gives us a picture of the society of the Kali age in which the people did not follow the rules of caste and asrama. The picture of the Kali age given in the Puranas has been regarded as the reflection of the post-Mauryan period.

The causes for the neglect of the varnasrama dharma are not far to seek. The anti-Brahmanical movements, foreign invasions and the rise in the status of Sudra affected the Brahmanical society based on varnasrama system in this period. Elsewhere it was seen that the heretics were against the brahmanas and the authority of the Vedas and were not favourable to the varnasrama system. The rise and propagation of the heretical religions, i.e., Buddhism and Jainism proved injurious to Brahmanical society and detrimental to the varnasrama system in the post-Mauryan period. This period also witnessed foreigners’ rule over some parts of India. The foreigners created disturbance in the society. The Purana literature refers to several foreign races such as the Yavanas, the Sakas, the Abhiras, the Gardabhilas and many outlandish dynasties as the successors of the Andhras. The casteless foreign races have been held in contempt in the Purana literature and they have been called mlechchhas and jnimical to Brahmanism. The conducts of the foreign rulers and the disturbance created by them are mentioned in the Visnu Purana in great detail. The political upheavals of casteless and unrighteous foreigners must have given a blow to the varnasrama system which was basically based on a static way of life and hence, people became careless of dharma and immorality prevailed. Lastly, the sudras openly defied the existing social system.

The Dharmasastrakaras of this period appear to have been well acquainted with the existing conditions in their society. They adopted various means to establish and popularize the varnasrama dharma. The author of the Visnu Purana highly condemns the foreigners and calls them Sudra kings and mlechchhas who were opposed to the varnasrama system. Not only this, Manu provides a number of safeguards against the sudras who were not following this system. He states that those non-aryanas which wear marks of aryanas should be treated as thorns and removed without delay. He advises the three varnas to take up arms, if there is hindrance to the performance of their duties on account of outbreak of revolution. Sometimes arms were raised to crush the violent people who were against the existing social order. The Vayu Purana mentions the exploits of Pramiti who tried to annihilate various people such as the mlechchhas and the vrsalas. Hence it appears that attempts were made to crush the outbreaks against the established order. Besides it, much importance has been attached to the varnasrama dharma by associating it with gods and goddesses. The Visnu Purana says, “The Supreme Being is
worshipped by him who is loyal to the duties required by his own caste and stage of life. There is no other way of satisfying him”. Thus it was believed that a man could worship Visnu by observing the rules of varnasrama system. The various heavens were assigned for different varnas and asramas. The Visnu Purana states that men who follow the rules of varnasrama system can also be saved from the hell and the power of Yama. At another place it is stated in the same source that Yama advises his massenger (yama-duta) not to touch the Visnu-worshippers, who were devoted to the Varna dharma. The descriptions of hells and of the punishments inflicted there on the sinners are also very fearful. It is believed that in hells the sinners are punished with great cruelty for neglecting the varnasrama dharma. A hell called Samdamsa has been assigned to the violator of a vow and the rules of asrama. Besides, several stories were fabricated in the Puranas to show the bad results of the violation of rules of varnasrama dharma. For example, in the Visnu Purana the king Vena violated the rules of varnasrama and, hence, he was killed by the sages.

The foregoing discussion shows that society was fully acquainted with varnasrama dharma in the post-Mauryan period. But there was a section who opposed it. The neglect of varnasrama system was also in existence. But several attempts were made to popularize it in this period.

**Marriage and Divorce**

Marriage is a very important event in the life of a woman. It determines the fate of a woman to a greater extent than it affects the fate of a man. A.S. Altekar opines, “A good marriage is a welcome protection for the woman, a bad one is worse than a painful chain”. In the Hindu society, marriage is generally considered essential for every individual; because the birth of a son is said to enable one obtain heaven after death. It is clear from the Mahabharata that marriage was indispensable to lead a happy life. Manu considers marriage as a social institution for the regulation of proper relation between the sexes. He also states, “He only is a perfect man, who consists of his wife, himself and his offspring”. For practising dharma the co-operation of wife was obligatory. The law givers of the post-Mauryan period enumerate eight forms of marriage: brahma, daiva, arsa, prajapatiya, asura, gandharva, raksasa and paisacha. Manu divides these forms into two groups i.e., the disapproved and the approved. He declares that disapproved forms should not be practised.

The paisacha form comes first in the list of the disapproved marriages. In this form, according to Manu, a man cohabits with a girl in a lonesome place when she is either sleeping or is mad and intoxicated. So the deception of the girl in her insensible condition and carrying her away fraudulently are the two essential features of this form. It is based on seduction and force. The raksasa form is described as “the forcible abduction of a maiden from her home, while she cries and weeps, after her kinsmen have been slain or wounded and their houses broken”. This form is based on forcible abduction of a maiden and the victor does not wait for the consent either of the guardian or the girl herself.
In the asura form of marriage, a bridegroom has to give money to the father or kinsmen of the bride. Therefore it is more or less purchase of the bride. In the Milindapanho there is a reference to choosing a girl and paying the price for her. Manu has discouraged this type in which bride price is involved. He considers selling a daughter even for the smallest gratuity amoral. The Mahabharata states that the sale and purchase of the maiden should never be done by good men, for continuous sufferings in hell would be the punishment for the man who sells either his son or daughter. Mutual love and consent of the bride and bridegroom are the prerequisites in the gandharva form of marriage. The young man, after persuading his beloved to be his bride and life-mate, is advised to arrange, with the help of mutual friends, the time and the place for the two to meet together and sanctify their love in the presence of the sacred fire. The Kamasutra states that the two lovers should go round the fire thrice, with due rites of oblations in accordance with the rules laid down by the Smritis. The same authority regards this marriage as ideally good. In the arsa form, the father of the bride is permitted to accept a cow and a bull from his son-in-law for facilitating the performance of sacrifices in which cow’s milk is required. Thus, this form of marriage appears not to be based on purchase but on sham-purchase. The demand of a cow and bull cannot be taken as the price of the bride.

The daiva form, is one in which the girl is given as a part of the sacrificial fees to one of the priests after the completion of the sacrifice. In the brahma form the bride’s father invites a man learned in the Vedas and of a good character and gives away his daughter, after decking her with ornaments. The girl has no say in the choice of her husband. This form of marriage appears to be free from the physical force, imposition of condition and the lura of money. The prajapatya form of marriage is one in which the father makes a gift of the daughter, by addressing the couple with the formula “may both of you perform together your duties.”

What were the qualifications for marriage? The first qualification required in a young man for marriage is the fulfillment of his obligations of the student’s life. The law givers state that he must have studied, in due order, the three Vedas or two of them or at least one, without violating any of the rules of brahmacharyasrama. In Vatsyayana’s opinion, only such a youth who has completed his course of studies has a right to marry. The bride, who is to be selected for marriage must be a virgin. The Hindu dharmasastrakaras not only lay emphasis on pre-nuptial chastity of the female, but they demand prenuptial chastity on the male also in the form of brahmacharyavrata. Manu lays down elaborate rules for the conduct of the brahmachari till his marriage. By this time caste consideration had become the most important factor in marriage ceremony, and there was a tendency to preserve the purity of blood through marriage. It is clear from several authorities of this period that marriage between the persons of the same Varna was the rule. Vatsyayana commends marriage within one’s own Varna. The Mahavastu refers to a blacksmith’s son producing a very fine needler before claiming the hand of another man’s daughter of the same caste. The marriage with a girl or other Varna was ruled out by the texts of this period.
But the caste system did not put much hindrance in the way of marriage in the post-Mauryan period. Even in the days of Manu, the caste system was very flexible. As regards inter-varna marriage; Manu permits the members of a higher Varna to marry the women of lower varnas. Manu states that status of the wives from different varnas must be settled according to the order of the varnas, the Sudra wives to be assigned a very low status. It is clear from the Mahabhasya that the dasi and the vrsali were meant for satisfying the pleasures of the men of higher varnas. The Mahabharata also supports this view. Therefore the anuloma marriages, i.e., marriages of males of the higher with the females of lower castes were not uncommon in that period. But the marriage of a twice-born man with a Sudra girl has been condemned by the lawgivers. Manu states that the twice-born men who wed Sudra wives soon degrade their families and children to the status of a Sudra. He is opposed to the idea of a brahmana having intimacy with a Sudra woman. According to him, such a person will sink into hell after his death. If he begets a child by her, he will lose the rank of a brahmana and his family will very soon perish. Other texts are also against such union of a brahmana with a Sudra girl. There are several historical evidences to show the prevalence of inter-varna marriage in this period. The brahmana king Agnimitra of the Sunga dynasty married a Kshatriya princess named Malavika. The king Gautamiputra accepted a Saka bride for his son Vasisthiputra Satakarni. The inscription of the Kusana age, discovered from Mathura, shows that an iron-monger and jeweller were joined in matrimony. Thus it is clear that inter-caste marriage was prevalent even in the upper castes of the society. Though the brahmanas advocated the theory of maintaining the purity of caste-system some of them married girls of other castes, and thus violated the rules and regulations of the Varna system.

Several authorities of this period lay down rules regarding the prohibition of marriage in one’s own gotra. A.S. Altekar opines, on the prohibition of such marriage, “It is also likely that marriages among sagotra persons may have been prohibited with a view to discourage clandestine love affairs among persons closely related to each others”. Marriages among near relations were also discouraged. It is laid down by Visnu that the parties to a marriage should not be sapinda, i.e. related to each other within seven generations on the father’s side and five generations on the mother’s side. Other authorities are also against sapinda marriage. Incest was strictly prohibited. The Visnu-Smrti holds that for a person who has committed such a heinous crime, there is no other way of expiation but burning himself by throwing himself into the fire.

There were other factors which influenced marriages. The families of the bride and bridegroom had a large say in this period. Colour-complexion in the selection of a bride was also taken into consideration. The Visnu Purana does not allow a person to marry a girl of dark or of yellow complexion. Some girls were avoided on physical and biological grounds. The lawgivers state that a man must not marry a girl with reddish hair, or with extra bodily limb; or
who is sickly or has no hair or too much hair on the body or who is garrulous or who has red eyes. According to the author of the Visnu Purana one should not marry the bride who is from birth a cripple or deformed or blind or with podgy hands and feet or whose eyes are circular or who croakes like a crow or whose voice is hoarse. A sickly bride, was not considered fit for marriage. Besides, beauty was an important factor in the choice of the bride. Manu holds that a man should marry “a maiden free from any bodily defects with agreeable name, with majestic gait of a hamsa or an elephant with a moderate quantity of hair on the body and head, with small teeth and delicate limbs. It is to be mentioned that concealment of the defects of the bride by her father or her kinsmen was a highly punishable crime in this period.

Regarding marriageable age for girls and boys in the post Mauryan period, there are different opinions in the Dharmasastras. It is clear from the Dharmasastras that the age of the bride must be less than that of the bridegroom. Manu states that a man of thirty should marry a girl of eight. The Mahabharata holds that a person of thirty years of age should marry girl of ten years of age wearing a single piece of cloth or a person of twenty years of age should marry a girl of seven years of age. The Purana literature states that the age of bride should be a third of the bridegroom’s age. All these evidences show that pre puberty marriage for girls was prevalent in society. This fact is corroborated by Yajnavalkya who insists that a girl should be married before the age of puberty otherwise her guardians will be guilty of the destruction of the embryo every month. But post puberty marriage was fairly common in that age. Vatsyayana does not seem to have been in favour of child marriages, because he refers to the bride as prapta-yauvana and vigadha-yauvand (mature). His descriptions of gandharva marriage as a highly respected one and of the exchange of love letters between the lover and beloved perhaps clearly show that Vatsyayana is in favour of mature marriages. The law givers are in favour of such marriages.

Men were allowed to have more than one wife. Manu declares that after the death of his wife one should, according to the religious rites, take another wife, without delay. After describing the funeral of the wife, the law giver immediately proceeds to inform the bereaved husband that he ought to marry again. The Smritis allow a man to marry any number of wives from his own Varna or from among the lower ones, but he should not accept a wife from a varna higher than his own. A brahmana can carry four wives, one from each Varna; the Kshatriya can marry three wives, one from his own Varna, one from the Vaisya and one from Sudra Varna. The Vaisya can marry two wives and the Sudra can marry only one wife. A householder could marry another wife in the life-time of his first if the latter had no issue. According to Manu, a wife who is barren may be superseded by another wife in the eighth year after marriage. She whose children do not survive may be superseded by another wife in the tenth year after marriage; she who brings forth only female issues may be superseded by another without delay. He further states that a wife who is kind
to her husband or virtuous in her conduct may be superseded only with her consent and must never be disgraced by such an act even though she suffers from diseases. Vatsyayana is also in favour of marrying a second wife if the first wife is barren or she has no male issue. Thus it appears that polygamy was very common in the society. Polygamy was a fashion amongst the wealthy of our period. Vatsyayana advises the young maiden to choose a poor man as a husband who may be solely devoted to herself rather than a rich man whose riches would probably divide his love among many.

The most complicated problem arises when a husband dies without any issue or he is unable to procure son. During such a situation what is to be done or what is the remedy if he is too old to produce sons? Niyoga system was allowed to procure sons. An issueless woman was permitted to bear a son to the younger brother of her husband or any sapinda or sagotra of the husband. The law givers state that the person, who is appointed under niyoga to beget a son for the widow, is to approach her anointed with clarified butter silently, to give her one son only, and by no means a second. Manu states that after the purpose of niyoga is attained, the man and the woman have to behave towards each other like a father and a daughter-in-law. He further ordains that if they behave otherwise, they become guilty of defiling the bed of preceptor or of a daughter-in-law. The child born of niyoga was considered as a ksetraja, son of the deceased husband. However, this custom has been condemned by Manu, who considers it as beastly behaviour. But Yajnavalkya does not condemn it, and Visnu permits it within certain limits. This shows that towards the latter part of the pre-Gupta age this custom was gaining ground in the society.

Were widows allowed to remarry in this period? The remarriage of widows was generally not favoured. The author of the Mahabharata regards it as a grievous sin if a woman transgresses her husband and transfers her affection to another person and marries him. The law givers state that a true wife must preserve her chastity as much after as before her husband’s death. Manu states that a widow should never think of remarriage after her husband’s death. He eulogises the woman who keeps her husband’s bed unsullied after his death. The widow must not even mention the name of another man after her husband’s death and she should lead her life with chastity for obtaining heaven after death. Vatsyayana is also not in favour of widow-re-marriage, and he puts sex-relation with a widow in the same category as with a prostitute.

**Divorce**

Marriage in the Hindu society was considered as indissoluble. Manu states, “Let man and woman, united in marriage, constantly exert themselves so that they may never be disunited and may not violate their mutual fidelity. The husband and his wife are to be mutually devoted to each other till death. The wife’s marital tie and duty do not come to and even if the husband is to sell
or abandon her. But under certain circumstances the marital knot was united. Divorce was permitted in the post-Mauryan period. Manu states that a wife is not to blame if she abandons a husband, who is impotent, insane, or suffering from an incurable or contagious disease. This abandonment of the husband was just like a divorce. Wives were also divorced by husbands on certain grounds. The Smrti writers say that if the husband discovers serious disease or loss of chastity in the bride after the marriage, and not before, he may abandon her. Manu gives a long list of “grounds” on which a wife may be supplanted by another, and then he adds that a wife who, being superseded, departs in anger from her husband’s house, must either be instantly confined or cast off from the presence of the family. A wife showing disrespect to a drunkard or diseased husband shall be abandoned for three months and be deprived of her ornaments and furniture. It was very easy for a Sudra wife to secure dissolution of marriage. In the absence of husband, it was easier for a Sudra wife to cut the marriage tie and take another husband than in the case of the wives of other three varnas. In such a case a waiting period of only one year has been prescribed for the sudra wife, but the brahmana, kshatriya and vaisya wives have to wait for four, three and two years, respectively. Thus it appears that divorce was permitted for all varnas.

**Family: Samskaras**

The real family life of a snataka starts with his marriage. Here he has to practice all rites which are intended for the preservation and continuity of the kula. As already marked a householder had to follow the rules and regulations of the sastras, the domestic and five great sacrifices. He had to keep the sacred fire alive ceaselessly with great vigilance. The householder performed daily the sacred sandhya rites and other sacrifices. Every member of the family had to undergo the samskaras, the sacramentys prescribed by the sastras, for sanctifying the body. According to Manu, the individual has to pass through many samskaras. The samskaras are intended to purify the body beginning from the moment the embryo develops into foetus to the death of a person. There are nearly 48 samskaras as enumerated in the Grhyasutras. The (garbhadhana) ceremony was performed to fulfill the obligation of continuing the family line. Due season and night time were prescribed for favourable conception. Certain auspicious dates and all the festivals were prohibited for this samskara. Only the husband was considered as the right person to perform it with his wife. Adultery was highly condemned in the society. When the husband was physically unfit; a substitute was allowed. Begetting of sons by the niyoga system was also prevalent.

In the simantonnayana, the hair of a pregnant woman was parted. Its long procedure has been discussed in the Grhyasutras. The purpose of this samskara perhaps was to safeguard the focus in the womb from evil spirits, to take care of the pregnant woman and to keep her in happy mood. The pumsavana samskara rite was performed during the third month of
pregnancy. For obtaining a son to ensure the continuity of the family. The jatakarma was performed at the birth of the child. Certain deities were worshipped by the father after the birth of a child. The Grhyasutras lay down that the child should be fed with honey and butter followed by the introduction of breast feed by the mother. The umbilical cord of the child was cut after this. Evidently every care was taken for the safety of the baby and its mother. The nama-dheya rite was performed at an auspicious time to name the child. Usually either the tenth or twelfth day after the birth of the child was chosen. The Dharmasastras lay down certain rules for naming the child. Manu states that a brahmana’s name should denote something auspicious, a Kshatriya’s name power, a Vaisya’s name wealth and Sudra’s name scorn. He further ordains that the titles of the four varnas should respectively indicate happiness, protection, prosperity and service. But the Visnu Purana mentions different surnames for the four castes, i.e., sarman, varman, gupta, dasa for brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra respectively. It further adds that the first term in the child’s name should be the name of a god. The name of the child should express some meaning and it should not be indecent, unlucky, or fearful. It should consist of even number of syllables. It should neither be too long nor too short nor too full of long vowels but should be capable of easy articulation.

The niskramana ceremony was celebrated in the fourth month after the birth of a child. Here the child was presented to the Sun with a ritual, perhaps for his first contact with the greatest natural force and the world outside. The anna-prasana ceremony was carried out in the sixth month after the birth. The child was given boiled rice for the first time. It was essential for the growth of the child. The chauda-karma or the first tonsure of the hair took place in the first or the third year or at any age according to the family transport. It is clear from the Grhyasutras belonging to early period that an auspicious time and place was chosen for this samskara. The purpose of this samskara was to secure longevity for the child.

The upanayana ceremony inducted the boy to the brahmacharyasrama and he began his study of the Vedas. It was only for the three higher varnas but not for the Sudra. The Smrtis prescribe the age, which differed according to the boy’s Varna, for the performance of this samskara. On an auspicious date some relations took the boy to the teacher selected for imparting Vedic study. A gridle made of munja grass in the case of a brahmana, bow-string in the case of a Kshatriya, and woolen thread in the case of a Vaisya was tied to the boy. Then he was given a staff (danda) of palasa or bilva wood if a brahmana boy, of nyagrodha wood if a Kshatriya, and of udumbara wood if a Vaisy. The smrtis do not throw ample light on the rites of this samskara. Most probably the rites of the Grhyasutras were followed in this age. After the boy had put on the sacred thread, the preceptor enquired of him, his name, family and other particulars and then accepted him as his student, and initiated him to the Savitri mantra. Then the boy was asked to go to his
near relations and beg for alms which had to be presented to his teacher. The Smritis regard the upanayana samskara as the second birth of the boy. The boy now began his study of the Vedas which lasted a number of years. Thus this rite, marks the boy’s entry into the brahmacharyasrama, and entitles him to learn the well-preserved sacred texts of the Hindus.

The Savitri was to be performed in the brahmacharyasrama. Manu holds that it is to be carried out sometime before the completion of the sixteenth year for a brahmana, of 22nd year in the case of a Kshatriya, and of 24th year in the case of a Vaisya. The samavartana ceremony marks the culmination of the boy’s studies at the abode of his preceptor. This rite signifies the return of the student to his home from the gurukula. It also qualifies him to enter into the householder stage. The vivaha ceremony indicates the individual’s entry into the householder’s life. It was essential for the grhastrhasrama. The antyesti samskara, being a funeral rite is the last. This was performed after death. The individual’s life span and earthly career have reached the end. The corpse was washed with holy water and decorated with garlands and later burnt outside the village. The Smritis lay down the rules for the bier, the removal of corpse and funeral procession. Kinsmen, having bathed with their clothes on, were to offer libations to the deceased, addressing him by name. The mourners entered into the village at sun set or on the appearance of stars. Then the period of asaucha, which for a brahmana was ten days, for a Kshatriya twelve, for a vaisy half a month and for a sudra a whole month began. The mourners, during the asaucha period, were to avoid meat. During this period; gifts, sacrifice and sacred study were suspended. Then followed the ceremony of asthi-chayana, i.e., the collection of bones. In order to preserve the old traditions, the remains of bones were collected and buried after a few days. At the end of the period of impurity, a brahmana can become pure by touching water, a Kshatriya by touching the animal on which he rides and his weapon, a Vaisya by touching his goad or the nose-string of his oxen and a Sudra by touching his staff. After this ceremony the mourners become pure.

The Hindu joint family consisted of, the father, mother, wife, son, brother, grandfather, daughter-in-law and even the paternal grandfather. The grandson (pautra) and great grandson were also members of the family. The grand children are also mentioned in the recorded gift of Vijayasri, daughter of Babu, wife of Rajavasu, mother of Devila and paternal grand mother of Visnubhava. Asvaghsa also mentions the young half-brother as a member of the joint family. An inscription refers to the sister’s daughter’s daughter. The relation on the in-laws side included the parents-in-law (svasura, svasru). The recorded gift of Vijayasri mentions that she (i.e., Vijayasri) was the daughter of Rajavasu, mother of Devila and grand mother of Visnubhava on the paternal side. This shows that husband, wife, father, mother, grand parents all lived together. The father-in-law of Vijayasri must have been dead at that time and that probably accounts for the absence of his name. Thus it appears that the family circle was not a narrow one consisting only of parents and
children. Often, it used to be wide there being presumably no limit to its size. On the basis of the Hindu texts, Jolly opines that occasionally, however, the family may include four generations, and of course, any number of members. “Not only parents and children, brothers and step-brothers live on the common property, but it may sometimes include ascendants, descendants and collateral up to many generations”.

**Pastime and Recreations**

The people in that period took part in various kinds of recreation, according to their taste and circumstances and sex. The Saddharmapundarika refers to the pleasant gardens laid out for recreations. Some persons delighted in plucking flowers. Some of these sports relating to the plucking of flowers are illustrated in sculptures of this period. A graphic account of this popular pastime is found in the Avadana Sataka: “Once the Lord Buddha dwelt in the Jetavana the garden of Anathapindaka – at Sravasti. Several hundred thousand boys assembled there, gathered Sale blossoms, played, made merry and roamed about. In the Gandhara art, Maya Devi is seen holding one of the branches of Sala tree. The motif of the woman plucking flowers from a distended branch of tree is represented on the toranas of Bharhut and Sanchi of the Sunga period, and such representations continued on the railing pillars of Mathura during the Kusana period.

The celebration of Samajotsava was another source of entertainment. Patanjali explains the Samaja as a place where people flock together for festivities. The Mahabharata states that people of the Matsya country celebrated the utasava of Brahma in the month of Asadhya and on those occasions Samaja also was held in which many wrestlers exhibited their skill. The Jatakas give clear information about Samajjas (Samajja), “where crowds of men, women and children gathered together and witnessed various kinds of shows and performances, like dancing and music, combats of elephants, horses and rams bouts with quarter staff and wrestling. In the Samajja gatherings seats were arranged for men and women in tiers upon tiers. There are historical evidences of holding Samaja. The Hathigumpha inscription and Nasik inscriptions of Vaisisthiputra indicate that Kharavela and Gautamiputra Satakarni held Samaja for the recreation of their people. Several other festivals were also held in this period. The Kaumudi mahotsava was an utsava or festival of state popularity. The Mahavastu refers to its celebration in Varanasi. Another festival astaka is noticed in the Milinda panho. That the display of acrobatic feats was also common is known from the very interesting scene represented on the pillar post of Bharhut. The stone has circular panels at the top and the bottom. In the middle there is a representation of a group of hanging men, nine in number, who hold firmly the feet of the one just above. To the right and left stand a male and female with folded hands.
Dharma was another source of entertainment. The Mahabhasya states that the story of Kamsa and his slaughter, and the binding of Bali were shown on the stage. In these performances, not merely the action but also the narrator’s ad-libs and dialogues were much enjoyed. The actor used different types of head dress. A company of two hundred dramatic personages is mentioned in the Mahavastu, while the Lalitavistara speaks of the theatrical stage. Wrestling was also an important form of entertainment. The wrestling matches attracted wrestlers. Patanjali refers to mallasya samgrahah-mustikasya samgrahah (grip of wrestler). Sometimes boxers were appointed by kings. Attractive arenas were constructed to accommodate all classes of people, royal ladies and the wives of citizens. The king generally occupied a high and lofty platform. Judges were also appointed. Sometimes unfair means were adopted at the time of wrestling. Wrestling was done without weapons. Wrestling is noticed in the Bharhut sculpture. The Gandhara art of the Kusana period also depicts a wrestling scene.

Games of chance, particularly with dice were popular in this period. Patanjali refers to gamblers and stakes of gold. Knavery and cheating were common in this game. The Milinda panho refers to a judge in this game. Sometimes, this game led to hot discussions and quarrels among the players. Small children played outdoor on sand and indoor with toys. Very beautiful terracotta toys of men, women, animals and birds belonging to the Sunga and Kusana period have come to light. Besides, they enjoyed games and exercises like leaping (langhana), jumping (plavana), excursions and acting. Music, dancing and acting as a profession was confined to certain families known as Sailalakas mentioned in an inscription from Mathura. Patanjali refers to female dancers. There are also references to troupe of dancers or actors in the Mahabhasya. The Mahavastu refers to a troupe of dancers coming from Taksasila to Varanasi. An adept in dancing was known as natacharya. Two dancing kinnaras have been represented in Bharhut sculpture. In the Prasenajit railing pillar of Bharhut, four dancers and their movement have been depicted. The dancing scene of Deva dharma sabha from Bharhut shows damsels dancing in different poses to instrumental music by men. Some railing pillars from Mathura depict girls dancing. One scene carved on a round pillar depicts a female dancer with her right foot bent and left hand raised in a typical pose to the music from a tabor played by a male instrumentalist.

Playing on musical instruments for pleasure was also common. A list of musical instruments is given in the different works of this period. These instruments are: drum (bheri), conch (samkha), trumpets (patah), noisy drums (sughosah), cymbals (dundubhi), sweet lute (vina), tobor (mrdanga), another kind of drum (panava) and some other instruments like vallaki, tunava and mukunda. Different kinds of drums, big and small, tabors and a long curved pipe cow-faced at the end have been represented on the Sanchi torana. Vina was another favourite instrument. One of seven strings is shown in the bas-
relief of the Indra Sala guha and the andabhuta Jataka scenes. A stringed vina in the hand of Panchasikha the famous harper of Indra is most conspicuous in another relief. The sculptures of Sanchi also depict lute with many strings. Lute was played either with fingers or with the help of plectrum. Different instruments such as conchshell perforated at one end, flutes, big drums and tabors have been depicted on the Sanchi torana. The Gandhara sculptures of the Kusana period also provide interesting profiles on this aspect of social life. In the famous family drinking scene of five figures, the old man is holding a wine bowl in his hands, and the woman carries an amphora in her left arm. The young man is playing on a tambourine and keeping time with his left foot and his wife is playing on a two-stringed vina. In one sculpture from Kafirkot, now in the British Museum, Nagaraja with his orchestra of musicians and attendants can be seen. Several instruments such as lute, harp, lyre, pan pipe, tambourine and small drum have also been depicted in this scene. Marshall assigns this sculpture to the third quarter of the 1st century A.D. The sculptures from Mathura also depict different kinds of musical instruments such as tabor, flute, conch, drum, a big pipe etc. There is a terracotta figure of young man playing on a harp.

Food and Drinks

Food is an indication of the taste and refinement of its consumers. Different kinds of foodgrains were used for food. Rice was one of important grains. Sastika rice was considered very nourishing. Wheat and barley were other commonly used cereals. Barley and rice were considered staple foodgrains. Different kinds of pulses and several oilseeds were used by the people in that age. The favourite vegetarian food was boiled rice called odana or bhakta. Patanjali has compared the heap of boiled rice served on a plate to the mountain Vindhya. It was very popular in our period. Different kinds of food were prepared from rice, i.e., parched rice (laja) and milk-rice (payasa). Kulmasa (Ghughri in Hindi) was another prepared food article. It was a steamed food, heavy to digest and dry in effect. It was regarded as an inferior food fit for poor workman. The Mahabharata calls it the poor man’s food. Vatya was a gruel prepared with barley. Of the barley preparations groats, yavagu; yavaka and apupa were very popular. Yavagu or gruel was a liquid which according to Patanjali, was made of barley by pounding in pestle and mortar first and then boiling the grain in water or milk with sugar added to it. Saskuli was a delicious cake prepared with fine rice, mixed with sesame and fried in oil. Krsara was a porridge prepared with sesame, rice and mass pulse. Apupa was a sweet cooked food made of wheat flour or ghee as is being prepared even now. A preparation of rice or wheat was called visyanda, when the former was fried in ghee and the latter mixed with ghee and milk. Saktu was an important and popular item of food, generally offered to a guest, but at times included even in the daily meal. It was eaten with curd (dadhisaktu). The Mathura stone inscription of Huviska also refers to saktu. This inscription, recording a perpetual endowment by a foreigner, mentions articles of food to be given daily to the hungry and the thirsty, consisting of barley meal (saktu), salt, flour and some green vegetables.
Besides foodgrains, milk formed an important item of food. Charaka recommends it for its nourishing qualities. Under and over boiled milk was considered to be very heavy and difficult to digest. The Mahabharata does not allow brahmanas to drink milk of sheep, mare, asses, camels, deer and a cow which has recently calved. Susruta states that the milk of buffalo is good for those whose digestive system is good. Honey was used to sweeten it to make it more tasteful. Curd was also used in that age. Charaka does not recommend the use of curds in the autumn, summer and spring season. Curd was eaten even if it became sour. Patanjali refers to mathitika, i.e., one who sells churned curd. It seems that curd was sold in the market in this period. Curd churned without water was also used. Susruta states that the condensed upper part of clarified butter is good for health. Sweets were also included in the menu. The Ramayana refers to the use of honey especially with parched rice. Among several varieties of honey, the one collected by small bees was considered to be the best. People used the sugarcane juice. It was used in making guda which was the principal ingredient of many sweets. All the products of sugar-cane such as phanita (inspissated juice of sugar-cane), guda, red sugar (guda sarkara), crystal sugar (sarkara), unrefined white sugar (khanda) were widely used. Patanjali refers to other sweets such as apupa, saskuli, palala and modaka.

People used different kinds of salt. The medical books of the pre-Gupta age refer to several kinds of salt. Different kinds of spices such as pepper (maricha), cumin (ajaji), asafoetida (hingu), aloes (aguru), nutmeg (jati) and ginger were used in this period. Consumption of fruits was common. Patanjali mentions bimba (momordica monadelpha), dadima (pomegranata), mrdvika (vine having reddish grapes) and kuvali (jujube tree). The medical books commend grapes, date, palm fruit, cocoanut, mango, jack fruit, banana, pomegranate, organges, pistachi etc. Some dry-fruits such as almounds, walnuts, pistachi etc. were also used in that age. The Susruta Sutra does not recommend fruits which are rotten, over ripe, unseasonal and unripe.

Vegetables used in that period included flowers, leaves, stems and bulbs. Charaka mentions different kinds of vegetables and leaves. From the Mahabharata it appears that many abstained from eating garlic, onions and mushrooms. The use of onion and garlic is interdicted in the Yajnavalkya-Smrti. Onions were mostly eaten by non-vegetarians.

The slaughter of animals for meat was restricted by custom. It appears from Patanjali that only five nailed animals were allowed. The wild boar and the wild cock could be eaten, provided these were not from the village itself. Deer (especially Saranga) and sheep were killed in Patanjali’s time for food. The flesh of deer was cooked with rice. Fishes were eaten after removing the scales and small bones. The flesh of birds and onion were probably included in the non-vegetarian menu. The two higher varnas, i.e., the brahmanas and the Kshatriya also used meat in their diet. The Mahabharata mentions that Pandava princes offered meat to brahmanas. On the occasion of a sraddha brahmanas were
generally fed with meat diet. People, who were out of the pale of the Aryan influence, were very fond of meat preparations. Very tasteful meat dishes were prepared at that time. Sometimes whole animals were roasted on live charcoal. Meat cooked with rice was a favorite dish. Charaka prescribes meat diet for the weak, convalescent, others addicted to wine and women, and also for those doing excessive physical work. Meat soup formed a part of the non-vegetarian menu. Susruta mentions that meat soup, prepared with salt, cumin and asafoetida is a pleasant tonic. People had ideas about clean and unclean meat in that period. Brahmanas were to avoid the flesh off many unclean animals. Manu gives a list of animals and birds whose flesh was to be avoided. Meat eating was prohibited on certain auspicious days. Charaka does not permit taking of dried or putrid flesh as well as the flesh of those animals which are diseased, old, poisonous and bitten up snakes.

Different kinds of drinks, both soft and alcoholic, were enjoyed by the people in the post-Mauryan period. The Mahabhashya mentions the following intoxicants; sura (which was distilled from molasses), sunda (a spirituous liquor) and asuti (a religious drink prepared by the priest). Other kinds of wine were kilala, maireyd and varuni. Another one was asava with its different varieties. The medical books of this period mention several wines. They prescribe a limited use of spirits of good health especially in the winter season. Charaka mentions drinking as pleasing, digestive, nourishing and providing intelligence if indulged in a proper manner, but discourages inebriation, particularly in summer and rainy season. The drinking of wine in the post-Mauryan period can be corroborated by some sculptural evidences. The Sanchi torana sculptures depict many scenes of wine drinking. Many Bacchanalian scenes have been represented in the Kusana sculptures at Mathura. Here men, sometimes even women, are shown holding wine cups in their hands. Some men have been depicted in a drunken state. A new piece of sculpture from Maholi depicts a Bacchanalian scene, comprising several members of the family, including parents and children. In the centre a graceful female figure in half kneeling posture, is prevented from falling by her husband with his arm. A small girl on the left holds the drinking cup. A female attendant stands at the back. Women holding wine-bowls are noticed in the family drinking scenes of Gandhara art.

Food was prepared in the kitchen by cooks, who were experts in cooking different types of dishes. Cooks were engaged by some persons. The Milinda Panha refers to an apprentice cook. According to the Mahabharata, Bhima and Nala were adepts in the art of cooking. Nala could prepare various kinds of fine dishes within very short time. Charaka is acquainted with the value of cooking on a slow fire. He describes the preparation of various kinds of dishes such as preparation of cereals, vegetables, fruit and soup from parched rice, preparation of boiled pulses. He further mentions the properties of various substances and the effect of mixing these; for such knowledge was essential for health. He has arranged cooked food into two groups; easy to digest and difficult to digest. The vessels of daily use were bowl shaped (kunda),
plate (sthalika), ordinary vessels (bhalanam), and metal pots. The wealthy generally used utensils of gold, silver of precious stones while the middle class used utensils of other metals and the poor used utensils of clay or leaves. Manu lays down that utensils of stone should be cleaned with ashes, of gold and silver with water, of other metals with alkaline substance. The Gandhara sculptures depict the drinking horn, the wine bowl and the water vessel and a two-handled wine cup.

Several rules regarding dinner etiquette were current in the post-Mauryan period. A householder had to feed his guest first. The servers were not expected to partake while the guests were eating. A householder was to feed children, dependents, old men, pregnant women and helpless members of the family before he took his daily meals. Feasts were generally arranged at the time of sacrifices and other religious functions. The Mahabhasya gives two terms for invitation: nimantrana and amantrana. The former was extended to taking food at sacrifices or a sraddha. It was obligatory to accept it as its refusal entailed a sin. Amantrana was only a friendly invitation without any obligation attached to it and so could be rejected freely. Generally, noble brahmans were invited in sraddha to partake of formal food. Yajnavalkya states that in the sraddha the brahmans should be invited on the previous day. All kinds of tasteful dishes were served by waiters. In Patanjali’s time boiled rice was considered a decent dish to feast brahmans and friends. The Yajnavalkya-Smrti mentions the practice of offering meat dishes at a sraddha. It further refers to unhusked or well husked boiled rice, preparation of meat and fish, intoxicating drinks, cakes, rice with curds, milk rice which are to be served at the time of the worship of god Vinayaka.

The common meal was called samasa which probably implied taking food on the same table or in the same row on the floor in different plates as generally was the custom. People paid attention to tidiness at the time of meals. Taking of food was permitted only after the daily bath, japa, homa and tarpana. The householders were to take their meals after perfuming and dressing themselves in clean clothes. They had to wash their hands, feet and mouth before they took their daily meals. They sat for their meals either facing the east or the north. It was considered improper to eat food left by any persons. To eat what the sudras had left was considered a great sin. The Mahabharata and the Smrtis give a long list of persons from whom leftover food should be avoided. Some general rules governed meals. For instance no one was to eat the food placed on a chair or bed. Food was to be taken in privacy and silently. The Visnu Purana wants one to keep an attentive mind and partake the courses in due order while taking food. The meal was to begin with a dish of sweet flavour followed by salty and sour ones the middle course, and finished with pungent and bitter courses. The Purana assures that the man, who commences his meal with fluids, then takes solid food and finishes with fluids again will ever be strong and healthy. The custom of betel chewing after meals was common during the time of Charaka.
Ornaments

Ornaments were regarded as traditional form of wealth. Men and women both, used jewellery for personal decoration. During this period, people adorned themselves with different ornaments. Head ornaments were used by both sexes in this period. The Ramayana mentions the use of kirita. The Natyasastra refers to various types of head ornaments such as mukuta, kesamukuta, mauli, kirita and chudamani used by men and chudamani, sirasjala, muktajala gavaksaka, veniksaka, venikunja, sikhapasa, sikhajala, sikhpatra, vartalalatika and lalatikatilaka used by women. The sculptures and the terracottas of the period confirm this. The figure of Indra from Bodhgaya reveals the use of a bead string near the lower edge of the head-dress. The head ornament can also be noticed in the figures depicted in the sculptures from Bharhut and Sanchi. Almost all the Kusana kings are portrayed on the coins wearing the same sort of head ornaments. Most of the female figures of the Sunga period are found wearing head ornaments. Women continued to use head ornaments even in the Kusana age. The terracottas, belonging to the Kusana period, show the use of bead chains for parting hair and tiara.

Different kinds of hand ornaments were used in this period. Patanjali refers to the use of a hand ornament called kataka (bracelet). Various types of wrist and arm ornaments referred to in the Natyasastra are valaya (bangles), ruchika (wristles), hastavali (bracelets), keyura (armlets) and angada (armlet with overlapping ends) used by men, and angada (armlets with overlapping ends, valaya (bangle), svechchitika (bracelet), kalasakha, hastapatra (an ornament like pahunchi) used by women. The archaeological evidence supports the use of hand ornaments by people. The figure of Indra as Santi from Bodhgaya has been represented wearing as many as five rings round his hands. He also wears spiral-shaped armlets. The sculptures of Bharhut and Sanchi depict the hand ornament worn by people. The female figures from Bharhut wear as many as thirteen rings in each of the hands, while a few wear armlets. Different types of hand ornaments are also represented in the Gandhara and Mathura sculptures.

Neck ornaments were also used in this period. Patanjali mentions it as ruchaka (most probably a heavy type of necklace). The Natyasastra refers to various kinds of neck ornaments used by both sexes. The sculptures of this period also support this. The figures of Indra as Santi from Bodh-Gaya reveal the use of a flowing type of necklace consisted to five strings. Female figures, represented at Bharhut and Sanchi, wear neck ornaments consisting of several strings or necklaces set with gems. The figure of yaksi Chanda wears a long chain of beads hanging down to the waist, and ornamental necklaces of six strings and another chain consisting of several strings of beads. The yaksi Chulakoka wears a necklace of six strings. During the Saka-Kusana period, men as well as women used necklaces. The figures of Bodhisattva belonging to the Kusana period have been shown wearing neck ornaments. Other sculptures also show the use of various kinds of neck ornaments by male. The necklace worn by women can be marked in the terracotta female figurines and in the sculptures of the Gandhara and Mathura.
The ear ornament (kundala) has been mentioned in the Mahabhasya. The Natyasastra refers to the various types of ear rings such as karnabharana (ear-drops), Kundala (round ring), mochakata (a single ear-ornament), kila (like ear-pin stand) and Sronisutra (perhaps a gold thread to hold the ear ornaments). The sculptures of the period depict these ear ornaments. The figure of Indra as Santi from Bodhgay reveals ear rings of round shape probably made of perforated beads. A figure of a male holding a pottery in one of the medallions of Bharhut reveals the use of a taselled ear ring. The ear ornament, represented in the female figure of Bodhgaya, is round in shape. The female figures of Bharhut have been represented with two types of ear rings, namely, round and rectangular. In the Kusana period the most commonly found ear ornaments are circular rectangular and flower shaped. Various types of ear ornaments, represented in the terracottas of the Kusana period, are cup, ring and funnel shaped. They can also be noticed in the Mathura and Gandhara sculptures of the same period.

Girdles were another ornament used in this period. The Natyasastra says that two types of girdles, tarala and sutraka (tarala is a loose girdle, but sutraka is a girdle-string), were used. It refers to various types of girdles used by women such as kanchi, mekhala, rasana and kalapa. All these types can be marked in the sculptures of the post-Mauryan period. The female figures from Bodhgaya have been represented wearing girdle made of strings of beads. The use of three stranded girdle can be marked in a terracotta female figurine from Bulandibagh. Several kinds of girdles have also been represented in the Gandhara and Mathura sculptures. Legislature ornaments were also in use in this period. The Natyasastra refers to various types used by women: padapatra, nupura, kinkini and padakataka. The Buddhist texts also refer to nupura used by females. The figures of Laksmi from Bodhgaya shows the representation of eight rings in each of the legs. The terracotta figure, found in Bulandibagh, is seen wearing anklets. Some female figures have been shown wearing kada or bell-shaped anklets. Various kinds of legislature ornament can also be seen in the female figures from Gandhara and Mathura.

Dress

During the post-Mauryan period, men and women used different kinds of dress and garments. Males generally used two garments – one for the upper and the other for the lower parts of the body. In the Mahabhasya, the lower garment is mentioned by the term upasamvyana corresponding to modern dhoti or loin cloth which was generally white and the upper garment for covering shoulders is described by the term patta. Asvaghosa states that people adorned themselves with clothing and ornaments. The shawl was meant for covering both the shoulders. The poet also mentions the dress suited for merry making as distinguished from that of mourning. The royal family used a special variety of cloth with wide borders which covered the entire body. High quality cloth like fine cotton and silk from Kasi is mentioned in the
Lalitavistara, which also refers to the use of ordinary cotton for making summer clothes and blankets. The sculptures also depict different kinds of male dresses. The different modes of wearing upper garment or dupatta can be marked in the sculptures. The figure of Indra from Bodhgaya is shown with the chest covered from right to left and the two ends of the garment are so arranged that they pass through the back and finally fall gracefully on the left forearm. The Bharhut and Sanchi sculptures depict different styles of wearing a scarf. Men used different styles of lower garments. The figure of Indra from Bodhgaya has the lower garment falling down right up to the ankles. The loin cloth appears to be wrapped up. The lower garment (i.e., modern dhoti) covers the loins and thighs reaching below the knees, with its ends hanging down to the ground in front in a series of extremely stiff and normal folds. The common men have been depicted in the sculpture dressed up to their knee only. In the Gandhara sculpture, ploughmen, workers and wrestler have been shown wearing short lower garment covering the upper part of thigh only. In a family drinking scene (now in the Musee Guimet, Paris) two men are shown dressed differently. The older man wears himation, only falling from the left shoulder and leaving the body bare, while the younger one has a shirt, sleeved tunic tied round the hips with a girdle.

The headless statue of Kaniska in the Mathura Museum gives an indication of the dress of foreigners. The king is shown dressed in a toga reaching to the knees, and held round the loins by a girdle. The long coats, heavy boots with straps round the ankles are very evident. On the coins the Kusana king is depicted wearing a long heavy coat and close fitting trousers and peaked helmet. The king is also dressed in a long sleeved tunic with richly embroidered border. He is also wearing heavy boots. Some people used leather garments as is evident from the sculptures of this period. The dress worn by women is no less fascinating. The Saddharmapundarika refers to sati (modern sadi). The Divyavadana speaks of the use of a lower cloth and scarf as lower and upper garments used by women. The female figures depicted on the Bodhgaya railings show that women generally used two pieces of cloth – one for the upper and the other for the lower half. The lower garment is either hanging down to the ankles or near about the knees. There are several pleats on the lower garment of women. The lower ends, however, hung gracefully near the knees. The Gandhara sculptures also depict different modes of wearing the lower garment. It is wrapped round the waist and the remaining portion is either pleated and tucked in at the back or thrown over the left shoulder. Women also used skirt (ghanghara). A terracotta female figure wears a ghanghara like lower garment. The depiction of ghanghara can also be seen on the Kusana coins. Among the sculptures at Mathura can be noticed women dressed in lahanga and a woman with a lamp in her hands wearing a printed ghanghara from the lower portion of breast to the knee. In one depicting a Bachhanalian group a woman is clad in a long sleeved jacket and a skirt reaching to her feet. She wears thick shoes and has heavy ornaments on her person. In another sculpture, bearing the inscription of the time of Huviska; the
female figure is shown dressed in a short petticoat with a loose garment hanging down her left arm. In a family drinking scene, women are seen with long sleeved chiton reaching from the neck to feet and over it a himation draped from the left shoulder and across the legs. In another scene woman wear a long double tunic instead of himation.

There were separate head-dresses for males and females. The Ramayana mentions a golden diadem or a kirita for the head. Turban was also popular. The archaeological sources clearly show the nature and mode of wearing turban such as dot and leaf design over the bale, pleat over the bale, torques and tassels, fan design and betel leaf design. The sculptures from Bodhgaya and Sanchi also represent different styles of wearing turban. Various types of caps were also used by men. The Sanchi sculptures reveal different types of caps such as the conical cap, the close-fitting skull-cap with a knob at the forehead, the trapezium shaped cap and decorated conical cap. Cass of different forms, designs and shapes figure in the Mathura sculptures of the Kusana period. The foreigners used helmet as their head-dress. Eucratides, the Indo-Greek king, used helmet adorned with ear and horn of bull over his head. Such helmets can also be marked on the coins of Lysies. Kaniska, on some of his coins, has been shown wearing a peaked helmet, while on some other coins wearing a wide brimmed hat. Besides these, there were other head-dresses. The Indo-Bactrian kings used Kousia and elephant-scalp. Some foreigners used diadems. The diadem can be marked on the coins of Indo-Bactrian rulers. The use of diadem continued in the Kusana period also.

Women also used some sort of head-dress. A large number of terracottas and stone sculptures of this period bear witness to this. The sculptures of Bodhgaya railing depict two kinds of female head-dresses – a turban without a top-knot and a turban with ball or oval shaped top-knot. The figure of Chulakoka Yaksini of the Bharhut railing has her head covered with a scarf. The Sanchi sculptures depict odani and turban on the heads of women. Women also used some sort of dress to cover their heads even in the Kusana period. The Gandhara sculptures depict female figures with veils, turbans and crown beset with jewels. The terracotta female figurines, belonging to the Kusana age, have been shown wearing veils, caps, turban, hats and helmets on their heads. On the Kusana coins, the goddess Nana wears a scarf over her head while Ardoxo wears a hat like head-dress and Mao wears a diadem.

**Toilet and Treatment of Hair**

The Purana literature speaks of daily bath either in the water of a river, or pond or natural channel or water drawn from a well. Bathing scenes have been depicted in the sculptures of this period. The State Museum at Lucknow, and the Mathurs Museum, have two door-jambs depicting a number of bas-reliefs. The scenes range from the bath to the completion of dressing. In the first scene, a woman is seen receiving her garment from her spouse.
taking bath, people used to apply unguents on their bodies. The cosmetics included salve (vilepana), paint (visesaka) and ointment. The Mahabharata refers to fair complexioned women beautifying their eyes with collyrium (anjana) from the Trikakut Mountain. A small paper stick was used for the application. Chandana paste was applied over the body by the lady herself. Mirror was also used during toilet. The Saundarananda narrates that Sundari puts the mirror into her lover’s hands saying, “just hold this up in front of me while I paint”, and he held it up. A bathing scene in one sculpture shows a lady giving a mirror to a male to hold it up for her while she applies cosmetics to her face.

Staff and chhatri where other useful articles for a person. An umbrella was used for protecting oneself from rain and sun. Some people also used boots. In the contemporary sculptures people have been depicted wearing shoes. In solitary figure of a soldier at Bharhut the shoes have been shown reaching upto the legs and fastened by a cord with two tassels. In one sculpture at Sanchi, a man is shown wearing sandals. In the Gandhara art, Bodhisattva is found wearing sandals. The statues of Kusana kings are seen wearing heavy boots.

**Hair dressing**

Men and women of this period used to dress their hair in different styles. The Visnu Purana advises the householders to keep their hair clean and decorated with flowers and scent. The Purana literature mentions that the Pasandas practiced tonsure. It adds that king Sagara compelled the Yanas to shave their heads entirely. On some Indo-Greek coins, kings are shown with shaven heads. Another male hair style was long hair knotted on top. Snatakas were allowed to keep long hair. Those in the vanaprasthasrama also used to keep long braided hair and beard. In the contemporary sculptures some men have been shown keeping long hair tied with top-knots around which the folds of turbans are arranged. The ascetics have also been shown with long hair. Curly long locks touching the neck were favoured by musicians, charioteers and soldiers. The figures of Siva, represented on the coins of the Kusana kings, reveal various methods of arranging the hair. In some cases, the hair of Siva has been arranged in top-knot, while in some other cases the locks fall on either side of the face in curls, besides the usual top-knot in jata style. On some coins, it is coiled at the crown of the head. Some men used to keep beard and moustache in this period. According to the Visnu Purana, king Sagara compelled the Pahlavas to let their beards grow. The Divyavadana also refers to the dressing of the hair and the beard (kesamasru). The sculptures of the post-Mauryan period also attest to the prevalence of the practice of keeping beard. Moustache and beard can be marked in the Gandhara sculptures also.
Women were very fond of arranging their hair in different patterns and took great pride in the beauty of their hair. The Purana literature states that in the Kali age, the hair shall be given the pride of place in beauty and gold, jewels, diamonds, clothes will all perish; the hair will be the only ornament with which women can decorate themselves. Women used flowers profusely to add charm to their coiffure. The treatment of hair, according to the Milindapanha included first shampooing (dhovana) followed by the tying of ribbon (bandhana), combing and then dressing (koppaka). This was done before a pure mirror. The Mahabhasya has it that hair was arranged with a parting line in the middle of the mass of hair, was gathered together at the back and plaited into one or two long pig tails or twisted and tied into a large knot at the back. Several styles of hair dressing are noticed in the sculptures and terracottas of this period. Some terracotta female figurines, belonging to the Sunga period, reveal that the hair was neatly brushed and parted in the middle and was allowed to fall on either side of the forehead. At Bharhut and Bodhgaya, the most common method was to arrange the hair in a top-knot. Sometimes, the hair was dressed and allowed to fall down at the back and then divided into two equal halves which were further sub-divided into two parts. In another style, the loose hair was allowed to fall at the back and then looped and knotted. The female figures depicted at Sanchi show that either they plaited their hair or coiled it round the head. The female figures of the Kusana period show the hair arranged in spiral shape or top-knot. The hair was plaited either into a single braid which was let down at the back or bound into a loose knot which was finally allowed to fall at the back near the neck. In another type has hair on both sides of the parting line been arranged in a zigzag manner. Sometimes women plaited and braided their hair into one or two big tails. Sometimes the hair was arranged in a horizontal ridge on the crown of the head from which tassels fell at the back. Some women also arranged their hair in a form resembling the feathers of a peacock. On one of the Kusana coins, a female figure is depicted having brushed her hair backward and it is evident that she has knotted it on the right side of her head.

Education

The process of education started with vidyarambha samskara. Every male child belonging to the brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaisya varnas was prepared for his educational career with the performance of upanayana ceremony. The child who did not go through the upanayana rite did not enjoy all the rights of an Arya. After upanayana, he became a dvija, a twice-born. This rite was not for the sudrás. After the upanayana, the boys went for higher education to the gurukula. This is a unique feature of the Hindu society; he had to live in the hermitage of his preceptor. The Smrtis of this period prescribe rules for the student’s residence at the guru’s house. In the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, there are several instances to show that all students, be they princes or paupers, were treated alike and had to undergo the same rigorous training. The Visnu Purana records that Balarama and
Krsna led the hard life of students at the asrama of guru Sandipani of Avanti. The existence of the gurukula can be marked in the sculpture of the Bharhut railing where pupils are seen studying before a teacher. The system was patronized by the ancient Hindus, to give proper training to the boys under the total care of the teacher without being influenced by external factors during his education. There a boy could come in contact with the environment and surroundings which were free and favourable to his healthy, moral and mental development. Under the gurukula system, the young boy had to live with his teacher, often far away from his nearest relations, so that the preceptor alone was his main guide.

In the gurukula, the students had to lead brahmacharya life and follow the rules and regulations of that stage. While stressing brahmacharya, Manu forbids the young student even from “looking at or touching women”. Every student had to observe it till he completed his studies. The main aim of the brahmacharya life was to focus the student’s mind to his studies without being diverted by earthly pleasures, and train him in simple living and high thinking. In the gurukula, a student had to rise up in the morning before sun rise. He was not to sleep during the day. He had to offer the Sandhya prayer twice daily. He had to take his bath every day. Thus physical purity was given the same importance as mental purity. The Dharmasastras of the period lay emphasis on the begging by students of the gurukula. Manu ordains that a student should proffer to his preceptor all the aims he has collected and with his permission keep that much he is allowed. The Satapatha Brahmana points out that begging are meant to produce a spirit of humanity and renunciation in the heart of the pupil. It appears that the rule of begging was laid down for a student in order to teach him humility and make him realise that he was getting education with the help of society. Through begging, a student could learn self-reliance and self-restraint.

Manu ordains that he should take meals only twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening, and must abstain from taking a third meal between the two. He further states that the student has to avoid over eating for it causes ill health, shortens the duration of life, and prevents acquisition of spiritual merit. A student was not to eat flesh or honey or stale sweet. A proper dress was prescribed for students. Manu opines that a brahmana student should wear a piece of hempen cloth; a Kshatriya student a piece of silk cloth, a Vaisya shall wear sacred threads of three strings. According to Manu, the sacred threads are made of three strings of cotton thread for the brahmana student, the hempen thread for the Kshatriya, and woollen thread for the Vaisya. It seems that such a provision was made only to differentiate the three varnas.
Students had to show a very high degree of reverence to their teachers. Yajnavalkya says that the student “waits upon the teacher for the sake of learning”. He should always promote his teacher’s interest by all actions of body, mind and speech. The Great epic states, “The guru deserves greater respect than either the father or the mother”. Students had to render service to their teachers and they had to lead disciplined life. Manu also formulates similar rules for the students. Students were neither to censure nor to defame their teachers. These rules not only cemented the relation between teacher and the taught, but also ensured the success of the gurukula system. The teacher’s duty towards his pupil was to impart to him truth exactly as he knew it. Manu ordains that the teacher must never weary of instructing his pupil, and must try to maintain a high standard with respect to his own academic attainments. Mutual obligations were essential in gurukula. It is clear from the Milindapanha that the teacher was expected to conduct himself in accordance with the twenty-five virtues prescribed for him. These included keeping watch over his pupil, telling him what to cultivate and what to avoid, where to be earnest and what to neglect and giving him proper instructions relating to bed, sickness, food and company. He should boost the student’s morale by encouraging him not to fear. He should teach nothing partially, neither keeping anything secret, nor indulging in foolish talks with him.

The teacher could punish the pupil for any lapse. Manu advises the teacher to be sympathetic in dealing with pupils. He states that the teacher may beat his pupil, if he has committed a fault, with a rope or a stick, but this can be done only on the back, and never on any private parts of the body. The Mahabharata and the Visnu-Smrti are also in favour of the rod for such purpose. The place of study could be the home of either the pupil or teacher. The school was known as lekhasala or lipisala suggesting that writing formed part of the curriculum. Writing was done on a table made of wood with the help of pen, ink and pencil. Counting was done at the joints of the ring finger. It is evident from the Divyavadana that the elementary day scholars returned from the school for their meals. The Lalitavistara refers to tests in writing and calligraphy. There were several kinds of scripts in this period. The teachers imparted education to as many as five hundred pupils at a time. The students committed the lessons to memory.

Different subjects were taught to different varnas. Generally the brahmanas were given education in the Vedas. The curriculum prescribed for a brahmana student was that he should be conversant with the Vedas, along with the glossary ritual, legends and could expound them verbatim. The Kshatriya princes, according to the Milindapanha, were educated in eighteen silpas and sciences, and there are systems of philosophy, arithmetic, music, Purana, Itihasa, astronomy, magic, spell, and art of war, poetry, holy and traditional laws. King Milinda was taught all these subjects. The Divyavadana
also prescribes several subjects for the study of Kshatriya princes. These included the study of arithmatic, accounting, counting, rules relating to debts, deposits, examination of articles of jewels, inspecting and testing of elephants, horses, wood, cloth, martial training such as elephant riding, charioteering, archery, use of weapons, boxing etc. The Milinda ponha mentions the training in archery under an expert who was rewarded for it by the king. The Vaisya boy was given training in writing, arithmetic, accounting, and several types of money in use, laws and rules relating to debts, deposits and trusts. The Milinda panha advises a merchant to investigate goods before purchasing them. The Vaisyas were also given the right for the Vedic studies. The sudras were not allowed to study the Vedas. The study of the Vedas was not carried on in the presence of the sudras. This does not show that they were debarred from general education. There were some teachers who instructed the sudras. Such teachers were called bhrtakadhyapakah. But they were respected in society. Manu states that he who teaches Sudra pupils or learns from a Sudra teacher should not be extended invitation to the sraddha. The sudras were not debarred from hearing the Mahabharata, Itihasa and Purana. They could get education in the Natyasastra, i.e., dramatics, which was open to them.

The education of the Buddhist monks was quite different from the brahmanical system. According to the Milindapanha, the Buddhist monks were taught by important teachers in a Vihara. Entry into Buddhist samgha as a pupil was necessary for learning Buddhist hymns. He was to study the whole Abhidhamma and other Buddhist texts. The Avadanasataka refers to the study of the three Pitakas (baskets of learning). The Buddhist students committed the bid texts to memory. There was also provision for vocational education in this period. The two branches of medical science, i.e., medicine and surgery acquired considerable importance in this period. Asvaghosa refers to skilled surgeons who could perform complicated operations upon portions near the heart. Susruta furnishes data regarding the initiation of pupils into the science of Medicine and Surgery. The student desiring initiation was to be a dvija one, of the three twice-born varnas, of tender years and from a good family. Susruta is of opinion that a Sudra of good character and parentage can be admitted but the mantras usually recited on such occasions are to be omitted. He also refers to certain prohibited places and dates when the study of Ayurveda was to be avoided. The student thoroughly trained himself in holding the lancet, cutting, marking or piercing with it in treating sick to heal them. The training of the physician was quite different. He was expected to be acquainted with all diseases. He was to know all the drugs found on earth. There was also provision for the teaching of gynaecology. The Avadana Sataka refers to the performance of caesarian operation and delivery of a baby. Several kinds of diseases are mentioned by Charaka and Susruta. The physician was expected to know about the diseases and cure them. Besides medical science, there was provision for other vocational courses. The Milinda panha refers to cooking as a vocational course, essential for those wanting to gain entry into royal kitchens.
Though girls were not entitled to the upanayana samskara, their education was not neglected in this period. Patanjali refers to the lady scholars of his time, who were well-versed in Mimamsa sastra, a work written by a lady called Kasakrisni. He also distinguishes between the terms upadhyaya (lady teacher), upadhyayani (wife of a teacher). The Mahavastu refers to the literary accomplishments of ladies. Amara, an artisan’s daughter had literary talents. The same source further refers to a banker’s daughter, educated by an ascetic in religious subjects. Manu and Yajnavalkya expect every housewife to keep account of the family income and expenditure. The Kamasutra mentions the training in sixty-four kalas or arts of life which are meant for women alone. Thus it appears that education was not neglected in this period. The relationship between the teachers and the taught was good. Different subjects were taught to the students. Sudra women could get education in that period.

People generally believed in the divine origin of the caste system. Brahmanas occupied the highest position in society and enjoyed several facilities. But there were several degenerated brahmanas. Kshatriyas and vaisyas were parts of the Varna system. Sudras occupied the lowest position in society. In this period they could raise their economic status. Sometimes they were against the existing social order. Several mixed castes were in existence in this period. The asrama system was not only in vogue but highly respected. Marriage was a sacred institution and its sanctity was in no way affected by polygamy. The system of niyoga, widow-remarriage, and divorce were prevalent at that time. The family life, with the hegemony of the head, had not undergone any change in this period and appears to be one of happiness and contentment. Women enjoyed considerable freedom. There is not trace of Parda system in sculptures. People participated in several kinds of recreations such as dancing, music, wrestling, dice-playing etc. Items of food and drink were many. Men and women both used different kinds of dress and ornaments. The multifarious items of toilet and styles of hair-treatment easily indicate that people in general and women in particular were conscious of make-up for presenting a graceful appearance. Education was not neglected in that period. On the whole, the picture of the social life of the period does not appear to be much different from the one of the earlier period.

KARMA THEORY

The meaning of the term karma has undergone a curious evolution. The word is Sanskrit and means ‘act’, ‘action’, ‘deed’. The theory or idea which the term was originally used to refer to is that conscious beings – typically humans – determine their own destinies through the quality of their acts: man is master of his fate. In popular use, however, the term has acquired a fatalistic ring, so that if one sighs, ‘It’s my karma,’ the implication is that one is the helpless victim of destiny. Logically, these two ways of seeing karma are not really far apart, for the theory of karma holds that it operates over long periods, up to many lifetimes. If I look at myself now, I may feel free to choose my
actions, my karma, and so influence my future. But when misfortune befalls me for no obvious or immediate reason, I may consider karma retrospectively and decide that the reason for present suffering must lie in a misdeed which I cannot possibly remember because I did it in a former life. (The same goes for good luck as for bad.)

The theory of karma is thus linked to that of rebirth. Writing of Gujarati peasants, David Pocock says that belief in rebirth tends to relate to the past: ‘some sin in a previous life “explains” why a man is born as an untouchable, or why some woman has had the great misfortune to survive her husband.’. He also writes: ‘Rebirth is primarily for other people.’ In this context karma theory functions as what the West calls a theodicy, a theory to explain why there exists what appears prima facie to be unjust suffering; the answer is that the suffering is in fact deserved. In such a context, ‘karma’ is used to mean what from the classical point of view should be called the result of karma. Various forms of the karma theory are found in all the three main religions that began in ancient India: Brahmanism/Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. All share the assumption that karma is ethically charged – though ethics is not always fully separated from ritual. Thus karma is (morally) good or bad, and the theory holds that the universe contains a mechanism to ensure that a good deed will bring good results for the doer, a bad deed bad results. If this mechanism is impersonal, as it is in Buddhism and Jainism, it is not strictly appropriate to call these results rewards and punishments, for the results arrive simply through the operation of a causal law comparable to the modern idea of a law of nature.

**Early history.**

The Sanskrit word karma is an action noun derived from the common verb k®, “to do, to make”. The stem of the noun is Karman; karma is the nominative. While originally any act could be described as karma, in the Vedic texts which were primarily concerned with ritual, the Bråhmaˆa-s, the term came to denote ritual action: karma was a rite. Some rites could be performed for evil purposes, as black magic, but the karma par excellence was a prescribed rite. Further, the theory was propounded that a person who carried out all prescribed rites could be sure of rebirth in a heaven. The causal mechanism by which this took place was, naturally, anything but obvious. An analogy was drawn with agriculture: a certain kind of seed is sown and after a time a corresponding plant appears and can be harvested. Like a harvest, the result of karma is always finite. This analogy provides the karma theory with some of its basic vocabulary: the action is a seed (Sanskrit: b¥ja) and its maturation (vipåka) is a fruit (phala). The process by which this occurred came to be known in brahminical Sanskrit as “the unseen” (ad®Σ†a).

The theory of karma first occurs in the last part of the Íatapatha Bråhmaˆa, a text better known as the B®had Óraˆyaka UpaniΣad (7th or 6th century BCE?). The sage Yåjñavalkya takes his questioner Órtabhåga aside to tell him, ‘A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action.’ Here we cannot tell whether good / bad action (karma) refers to ritual or ethical goodness; it is possible
that ‘bad action’ refers to incorrect performance of sacrifice. However, the next time that Yājñavalkya talks of good and bad action, in 4.4.7, it is clear that good action means action done without desire, so that there is at least an ethical dimension, even if the ‘action’ is ritual action. In the first of these two passages, it is said – by Örtabhåga, not by Yājñavalkya, though the latter does not dissent – that when a man dies all his constituent parts, including his mind, are distributed through the world: ‘his speech disappears into fire, his breath into the wind, his sight into the sun’ etc. But in the second passage Yājñavalkya says, ‘A man who’s attached goes with his action to that very place to which his mind and character cling. Reaching the end of his action, of whatever he has done in this world — from that world he returns back to this world, back to action.’ The former passage does not sound like a theory of rebirth, the latter does; in fact it looks like a very simple ethicised theory of rebirth, in which this world is the scene of action and the other the scene of reaping the results, and when the results have been reaped one repeats the cycle.

The main passage concerning rebirth, however, occurs in the sixth and last book of the BÓU, in a passage widely known as ‘the five fire doctrine’ (pañcågni-vidyå). This describes three possible fates at death. Those who offer sacrifices, make donations and perform austerities are said to go on the path of the fathers (pit®-yåna), and reach their world (pit®-loka) (evidently a heaven), but then in the end return to this world via the rain and get reborn. Better than these are those who have understood the teachings of the BÓU and thus go by the path of the gods, bypassing the world of the fathers, and escape rebirth; worse are those who know neither of the two paths, who become insects and other lowly creatures. From this point on, all karma doctrines are indissolubly linked to a theory of rebirth, which takes the form that whether one’s actions in life conform to the requirements of the particular ideology or not determines whether after death one is reborn higher or lower in the scale of being. The scale of being goes down from gods, who live in heavens, to demons and suffering souls, who live in hells at the bottom; humans and then animals are about half way down. Those who accept these doctrines all hold that the cycle of rebirth, known as saµsara, involves far more pain than pleasure, so that salvation lies in escape (mokΣa).

Jainism.

Probably the oldest elaborated theory of karma which we know of – and which indeed still survives – is that of Jainism. It accepts these main tenets but in other ways is quite unlike the brahminical theory. Jains believe that all matter contains sentient life in a form which adapts itself to the size and shape of whatever body it inhabits, and yet is defined as immaterial. It is called a j¥VA, which literally just means ‘life’. The Jain conception of karma likewise runscounter to most ideas of materiality, for it defines karma as matter. A j¥VA is naturally pure and buoyant, and if left inviolate will float to the top of the universe, where it can remain in eternal bliss. But every act (karma) attracts something analogous to dust which clings to the j¥VA and weighs it down. So to gain
release one has to scrub off all the old dust and not let any new dust gather. Karma comes in six different colours: the purest is white and the worst black. But ultimately even white karma is a bad thing, for it keeps the jīva in saṃsara. Indeed, ‘the earliest detectable Jain doctrine of karma leaves no room at all for the idea of meritorious action.’ A further unique feature of the Jain doctrine of karma is its extreme elaboration in terms of possible karmic effects; these include not only effects on one’s future thought and behaviour but also the precise kind of being one will be reborn as, one’s future longevity and environment. In early Jainism, karma was strictly a matter of overt action: intention was irrelevant. By the time of Umāsvāti (c.400 CE?), this had changed, probably under the influence of Buddhism, which had taken a diametrically opposite position. While the Jain theory of how karma operates is completely different from the brahminical theory, both evidently draw on a social background of agriculture. While the Brahmin vocabulary likens actions to crops, the Jain emphasis seems to be on the sweat and dirt of agricultural labour.

**Buddhism.**

We know from the earliest Buddhist texts that theories of karma were much debated in the Buddha’s environment, especially among religious leaders who, like the Buddha, did not accept the Vedic teachings of the Brahmins; and that some teachers denied rebirth while others denied that one’s actions could affect the process. For the Buddha, to deny the theory of karma was the most basic of all ‘wrong views’; correspondingly, his own teaching was based on karma. The first step on his ‘noble eightfold path’ is ‘right view’, and that is explained as acceptance of the karma theory. At the same time, curiously enough, the Buddha’s own theory of karma is more closely linked to the Upanishadic one than to that of the anti-Vedic Jains. He did not regard karma as material or, indeed, attempt to explain how it worked. He saw the possible ethical range of karma as symmetrical, good or bad. However, he took a step no less radical than defining action as a form of matter: he explicitly defined karma as intention (cetanā). For the Buddha, all that counts happens in the mind; so the moral quality of an act depends solely on the intention behind it. This was an astonishingly bold move. In opposition to Brahminism, it deprived ritual activity of any intrinsic value. In opposition to Jainism, it located ethics in the mind, not in externals. The implications are enormous. If karma is located in the mind, all sentient beings are ethically on the same footing. In particular, the caste-bound ethics of Brahminism is denied, since intention is the same whether it is intended by male or female, young or old, Brahmin or outcaste. Along the same lines, the Buddha used the brahminical words for ‘pure’ and ‘purifying’, terms appropriate to correct ritual action and status, and
Used them to mean ‘virtuous’ or ‘meritorious’; it is ‘purifying acts’ (pu´ya karma) which bring Buddhists good results in this and future lives. In fact, the metaphor of purifying the mind is constantly used to express progress towards the final goal, nirvana.

If ethical value lies in intention, the individual has the kind of autonomy which in the West we associate with Protestantism: the final arbiter is one’s conscience. Accordingly, the general principle was that the Buddhist monk or nun could not be disciplined for an offence which they did not acknowledge. In the same spirit, the moral rules laid down for the laity are formulated as personal undertakings: the Buddhist layman declares, ‘I undertake to abstain from taking life,’ and so forth, articulating personal commitment. We suggested at the outset of this article that in popular imagination the emphasis is laid on the latter end of the karmic process: events are interpreted as the results of past deeds, themselves forgotten. The Jains’ minute elaboration of types of karmic result suggests a similar emphasis. Early Buddhism – let us say, the Buddha’s teaching – was just the opposite. Karma is all-important, but by this is meant what you, the agent, decide to do. Here the karma doctrine is an assertion of free will. Admittedly, our decisions how to behave accumulate to create character, which means tendencies: it is harder for a tiger not to kill than it is for a monk. But that is because one has been born as a tiger because of a propensity to murder, a propensity which is one’s own responsibility.

That such a radical doctrine of free will could be widely accepted suggests that the first generations of Buddhists must have lived in unusually fortunate circumstances, a society in which people were less at the mercy of despots and other thugs than has been the case for most of human history. What we know of northern India in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE makes this plausible. This benign state of affairs did not last, and nor did the original spirit of the Buddha’s version of karma. Post-canonical Buddhist literature, like that of Hinduism and (above all) Jainism, is permeated with the basic ideology of karma, but it is mainly viewed retrospectively, as setting strict limits on the ability to control one’s life.

Transfer of merit.

The first major shift in Buddhist karma doctrine seems to have occurred shortly after the Buddha’s lifetime. This is the distinctive Buddhist doctrine of transfer of merit, a doctrine and practice which have accompanied Buddhism wherever it has spread in Asia. Originally the practice had two rather precise forms. Firstly, at funerary rituals the bereaved family fed monks and with their (ritual) help transferred the merit of this act to the deceased. Secondly, the Buddha was supposed to have advised that after any act of piety, typically feeding monks, one transfer the merit to the local gods. To explain how one could ‘transfer merit’, exegetes had recourse to the basic doctrine of intention: If one witnessed, say, an act of generosity, and got oneself into the same generous frame of mind as the donor, one had achieved the same mental purification and acquired the same merit. Of course, nothing was really transferred: that was just a vulgar way of looking at it. The proper analogy was with lighting one lamp from the flame of another.
ingenuity of this explanation, it is clear that in the popular imagination merit is treated like cash, which one can spend to help either oneself or others. It is unlikely to be an accident that this doctrine arose at the same time as northern India was developing a monetary economy.

In the Theravadin view of merit transfer, the recipient has to play an active mental role. You cannot transfer merit to someone who is unaware of it. This restriction was abandoned by the Mahayana. Any act of piety in Mahayana Buddhism is supposed to end with a wish that the merit be transferred to all sentient beings. Moreover, in devotional forms of the Mahayana, the great Bodhisattvas (and even Buddhas) are believed constantly to transfer merit to the rest of the world. This is incompatible with earlier doctrine; in Christian terms, a doctrine of works has been subverted by a doctrine of grace. Similar developments, probably beginning shortly before the Christian era but spreading and developing over several centuries, took place in Hinduism. The doctrine of karma was called into question, or supplemented, from two directions. The Buddha had firmly defined karma as one’s own responsibility, and other traditions had to respond to that; but in theistic Hinduism there was always a problem about who was the true agent, oneself or God. A famous verse found in some versions of the Mahabharata runs: ‘I know what is right and don’t do it; I know what is wrong and don’t stop it. You, Kṛṣṇa, stay in my heart, and I do what you move me to do.’ The other problem was whether God was himself bound by karma, in the sense that he could not but punish the wicked and reward the good. The theory that he could not interfere with the system of retribution was that he ‘has regard for karma’ (karma-sāpekṣa). The more monotheistic a religious tradition was, the more it tended to view God as a completely free agent who need have no regard for karma (karma-nirapekṣa) and could thus have mercy on the sinner. The only logically satisfactory resolution of this pair of dilemmas is to ascribe all true agencies to God; this extreme solution is found, for example, in the Tengalai School of mediaeval Vaishnavism. At this point karma has come as far as can be from its early Buddhist form, and is eclipsed in importance by devotion and subservience to the will of God.

THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

Meaning of the Bhakti Movement:

By the Bhakti Movement we mean that movement which was going on here even before the coming of the Turks and which continued till the time of Akbar. This movement stressed the establishment of mystic relationship between God and man. Some historians say that Bhakti Movement is as old as Aryan Vedas but the movement took roots from the 7th century A.D. The Nayanar Shaiva Saints and the Alwaar Vaishnav Saints rejected the Buddhist and the Jain concept of ‘Aparigraha’ and held individual devotion to God as the only way to ‘Moksha’ or Liberation. They rejected the difference of Varna and Jati and propagated the message of love and individual devotion to God.
The exponents of the Bhakti movement in Medieval India were mystic saints who had many things in common. They were non-sectarian in the sense that they were not affiliated to any particular sect. They had no desire to set up separate religious sects of their own. They were free from the bondage of any particular creed. They had no blind faith in any sacred scriptures. They attained greatness by individual exertion. They did not follow any rituals or ceremonies. Most of them condemned idolatry. They believed in one God. They realised the unity of God although different names such as Rama, Krishna, Allah etc. we used by different religions. Their view was that Bhakti or Devotion to God was the only means of salvation. Bhakti implied single-minded, union-interrupted and extreme devotion to God without any ultimate motive. The love of a devotee was compared to the devotion of a servant to his master, love between friends, affection of a mother for her child and the passion of a lover for his beloved. God was the source of all joys or eternal bliss. He did not live in a temple but in the hearts of men. Approach of God through personal love and devotion was the foundation of religious life. That required the purification of body and mind from all sins which could not be done without the help of a Guru or a religious preceptor. Even a Guru could not lead to salvation because that depended upon the grace or Prasad of God. It was necessary that the devotee must completely surrender before God.

Islam posed a serious threat to Hindu Religion. With a view to save Hinduism and modify it according to the changed circumstances Hindu saints and philosophers took upon themselves the task of reforming Hinduism. They tried to purge Hinduism of all evil practices, particularly those relating to rigours of caste and image worship, and started a movement popularly known as the Bhakti Movement. However, it is wrong to assume that the Bhakti movement was the direct outcome of the emergence of Islam in India. In fact, the history of the movement can be traced back to the time of Shankaracharya who provided a solid background to Hinduism. He established a logical monistic system and laid emphasis on attaining salvation through knowledge. However, as his system was too philosophical, the common people could not follow it. The saints of the Medieval Period made Hinduism a living force by attracting the popular mind towards it. The movement received great encouragement because the people found solace in devotion in God. Hindu society at the time was highly caste-ridden and the members of the higher castes committees all sorts of atrocities on the members of the lower castes. The Bhakti Movement, which did not believe in caste and other distinctions, was a logical development. To escape from the tyranny of the caste system, a large number of low caste Hindus were embracing Islam. Saints and reformers through the Bhakti Movement, reduced the rigours of the caste system and paved the way to their retention in the fold of Hinduism. A large number of temples and idols of the Hindus were destroyed by the Muslims and the people resorted to the Bhakti Movement. The view of K.N. Panikkar is that “Bhakti was the outcome of
a feeling of escapism which dominated human so as a result of the conquest of India by Islam. The reaction of the Hindus to the challenge of monotheistic Islam was the rise of many devotional sects based on Bhakti”.

The view of Max Weber was that “The idea of Bhakti as a means and condition of salvation was borrowed from Christianity”. A similar view was expressed by Grierson. However, there is no evidence that there was close contact between Indian Saints and Christianity. The view of Dr. Tara Chand, Ahmed Nizami and Dr. Oureshi is that “the Bhakti Movement was largely an outcome of the Muslim impact on Indian society”. Yusuf Hussain writes, “The Movement of Bhakti may easily be divided into two distant periods. The first was from the time of the Bhagavad-gita to the thirteenth century, the time where Islam penetrated into the interior of the country. The second period extends from thirteenth and the sixteenth century, an epoch of profound intellectual fermentation, the natural result of the contact of Islam and Hinduism”. Earlier Theories that Medieval Devotionalism originated either in the North or the South under the impact of Islam are negated by the simple fact that the earliest genuine devotional Bhakti poetry of Tamil Nadu precedes the coming of Islam. Islamic, and particularly Sufi, influences, men have been felt later. In Tamil Nadu, the hymns of the Alvars and the Nayansars became a part and parcel of temple worship as well as of popular devotional life. The first great poet to follow them was Kamban, the author of the famous Tamil Ramayan. Basava inaugurated Hindu renaissance towards the end of the 12th century. He founded the sect of the Virasaiva who believed in social equality and inculcated Bhakti to Siva.

There was nothing new in the fundamental teachings of the Bhakti Saints. The belief in the unity of God, discarding of the worship of images and Bhakti as a mode of salvation, were already well known in India. The first two can be traced back to the time of the Vedas. The Bhakti cult was developed to a large extent by the Vaishnava sects during the early centuries of the Christian era. The same ideas are found in the Upanishads. To quote the Katha Upanishad, “That Self content is gained by the Veda, nor by understanding, nor by much learning. He whom the Self chooses by him the self can be gained. The Self chooses him as his own”. The Upanishads describes Brahman as the source of all human joys. The doctrine of Self-surrender is found in the following words of the Gita, “Give up all religious paths and take refuge in me alone. I shall deliver them from all sins, Sorrow not.” Similar ideas are to be found in the Bhagavata Purana and Jayadev’s Gita Govinda. The practice of teaching in Vernaculars and disregard of castes are to be found Buddhism and Jainism. The Sahajia cult which is the latest form of Buddhism resembles Medieval Mysticism, both in its spiritual and social aspects.

Prof. A.C. Banerjee points out that Sankara and Ramanuja needed no inspiration from Islam so far as monotheism was concerned. Their writings clearly show that their eyes were directed towards the past of their country and not to the regions beyond the seas whence merchants and missionaries were coming to seek hospitable shelter in India. They based their arguments on ancient scriptures. There is no trace of the influence of Islamic Theology in their
interpretation of India’s spiritual heritage. In giving decadent Hinduism a new and more attractive form they really defended it against all rivals, whether Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity or Islam. In the ancient scriptures and religious traditions, they had a vast reservoir of ideas which they could mould through different techniques of interpretation. They were conservative in temperament and training and were not likely to absorb new ideas and even to receive old wine in a new bottle. No radical deviation from ancient scriptures was needed in South India where Islam had made little headway in their times. It need not be presumed that simply because the word Islam means surrender, the idea of surrender to God was a gift of the followers of Mohammad. The idea of surrender without any prospect of material gain, which is the essence of the teaching of the Bhagavata Purana, is foreign to Islam. A true devotee “weeps, laughs, dances and sings with joy when he thinks of God and acquires His grace”, but orthodox Islam does not recognize such expression of emotional fervour. The path of Bhakti requires the guidance of a Guru (preceptor) which is considered to be identical with God, but the idea of Guruship is foreign to orthodox Islam in which there is no room for priests although it is a recognized feature of Sufism. The Vaishnava ideal of Bhakti was not localised in South India. It found a ready response in Eastern India at a time when there was no question of penetration of Islamic influence. It is expressed in the Gita-Govinda of Jaidev which was written on the eve of the appearance of the Muslims in Eastern India and was not obviously influenced by them. The conclusion of Prof. A.C. Banerjee is that “The cult of Bhakti was not a medieval contribution to the development of religious thought. It had a long and continuous history from the earliest stage of Indian spiritual adventure. In its ancient scriptural form, it had two important limitations. In the first place it was meant primarily to the spiritual emancipation of the individual and not for his liberation from the bondage of social disabilities. Bhakti was not allowed to transcend or bypass the ordinary caste rules. There was no question of abolishing the taste system although persons belonging to the lower castes were allowed to seek salvation through Bhakti. Their participation in a common mode of worship, along with their social superiors belonging to the higher castes, was a significant relaxation of orthodoxy. Secondly, there was no elimination of traditional rituals such as worship of idols, recitation of Mantras and pilgrimages to shrines in spite of the overriding emphasis on Bhakti. The Bhakti cult developed as an integral feature of orthodox Hinduism”.

Prof. A.C. Banerjee further points out that in the Tamil country the Alvars who flourished between the 5th or 6th and 12th centuries brought to the Bhakti cult deeper passion and fervour as also wider social implications. Drawing their ideas largely from ancient scriptures and ethics, they tried to evolve a form of Vaishnava faith which could offer a powerful challenge to Buddhism, Jainism and Saivism. The Bhakti cult was given a Saiva form by the Adyars who also belonged to the Tamil country. The greatest of the Adyars was Tirujnana-Sambandhar who came to be regarded as an incarnation of Siva. The religious teachers of South India responded to indigenous
problems in their own way. Their teachings did not represent a reaction against the challenge of Islam. They also did not borrow from Islam. Islam had not become a serious challenge to Hinduism in South India before the 14th century even though contact had begun much earlier. Contact in its initial phase did not necessarily lead to borrowing from Islam. “The argument for borrowing cannot be substantiated by direct proof, philological or otherwise. However, there was a resurgence of the Bhakti cult when the challenge of Islam seriously threatened Hindu society as the North in the 13th and in the South in the early 14th century”.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar writes, “All the higher thinkers, all the religious reformers, all the sincere devotees among the Hindus from the earlier times, have proclaimed one and only for supreme God behind the countless deities of popular worship and have declared the equality, all true admirers and placed a simple sincere faith above religious ceremonies. They have all tried to simplify religion and bring it to the doors of the commonest people”. Therefore what really happened after the Muslim conquest was a ‘re-emphasis on the essential monotheistic character of the idea of God and the superiority of the path of devotion over ritualistic sacrifices and mere books of knowledge and wisdom’. Thus stress was laid on the subordination of rites and ceremonies, pilgrimages and fasts and the multiplicity of Gods.

Causes of the Rise and Spread of the Bhakti Movement.

1. Evils of Hinduism: During medieval times before the spreading of the Bhakti movement some evils had crept in the Hindu religion. Caste system and untouchability were widespread and the Islamic missionaries were trying to attract Hindus towards Islam by virtue of their propaganda as to the ideas of brotherhood and anti-untouchability campaign. Therefore the Hindu devotees tried to defend the Hindu religion, against the Islamic propaganda and the ‘Tabligh’.

2. Hindu-Muslim Integration: A basic cause of the extension and popularity of the Bhakti movement during this time was that majority of its propagators tried to bring about unity in the two major communities – Hindus and Muslims. They tried to make the people believe that Rama and Rahim were one and the same and if Hindu religion suffers from the evils like idolatry, fasting pilgrimages, etc., Islamic religion also suffers from evils like crying aloud from a top of the mosques going for Haz etc. They depreciated the hatred of fanatic Ulema between man and man.

3. Muslim Sovereignty: An important cause of the rise of the Bhakti movement was Islamic sovereignty and Indian reaction to it. When Muslim sovereignty (whose basis was military power came to be permanent over here, the Hindus became indifferent to it, not because of the fact that the Indians were not capable of throwing them away but because Indians did not pay much attention towards it because Indian Society was divided on the basis of religion, it was a feudal society based on agriculture. The number of Muslim ruling class and nobility was constantly increasing. The Hindus came to the conclusion that it was difficult to drive them out. On temple other hand, even the Muslims saw
that the Hindus were very numerous and it was impossible to force all of them to embrace Islam. Therefore both sides started making an effort for coming closer to each other. From the Hindu side this effort was initiated by the Saint devotees.

4. The Path of Knowledge of Shankaracharya: Shankaracharya had stretched the worship of “Nirguna” Brahma and attainment of Moksha through knowledge in his ‘Adwaitvad’ (theory that God and man are identical). This path could not remove the disappointment of the common man. This path was very difficult for common man. The Vaishnava Saints placed more emphasis on ‘Saguna’ school of devotees and Bhakti instead of Gyan (the knowledge). This became very popular with the people.

5. Propagation of Sufi Saints: The efforts of Sufi saints like Khwaja Muinuddin Chsthi. Bakhtiyar, Kaki, Fariduddin Ganj-i-Sakar, Nizamuddin Aulia, and Nasiruddin Chirag-i-Delhi also prepared a favourable atmosphere for the Bhakti movement in India. They restrained the fanaticist of the Muslims. The style of songs and music adopted by them also favoured in ‘Saguna’ school of Bhakti or devotion.

6. Rise of Saint Devotees: The most important cause of the constant development of this Bhakti movement from the 13th to 16th century was that it was continuously enriched by the inspiring thoughts of devotee Saints, like Bhallabacharya, Ramanuja, Ramanand, Chaitanya, Kabir, Guru Nanak, etc. helped in the growth of the movement by their preachings.

Salient Features of Bhakti Movement:

The following are the salient features of Bhakti Movement:

1. *Unity of God*: Majority of Saint Devotees stressed the fact that God is one. Their extention was that with whatever title you call the God, He does not change. They said Ram, Raheem, Krishna, Vishnu and Allah are names of the same God.

2. *The Path of Devotion*: This movement stressed the devotion to God. Ramanuja propagated the principle of Bhakti within the Vaidantist Philosophy. Kabir said that the path of Bhakti was greater than knowledge and action because without the feeling of devotion to god penance etc. were all useless.

3. *Emphasis of Religious Simplicity*: The propagation of the Bhakti Movement also emphasized that superstitions, and orthodox rituals should be removed from the religion. According to them true religion was simple. They stressed human qualities and moral characteristics. They said that man is religious whose mind is pure and behaviour simple. They asked the people to imbibe qualities like honesty, truthfulness, justice, brotherhood, cooperation, mercy etc.
4. Opposition to Idolatry by Many Devotee Saints: Almost all the propagators of the Bhakti Movement opposed idolatry. Guru Nanak and Kabir both were against idolatry. Kabir openly exclaimed:

‘Pathar Puje Hari Mile, to main Poojoon Pahar,
Yate to Chaki Bhali, Pees Khaye Sansar’

5. Emphasis on the Devotion to Guru: Many of the propagators of the Bhakti Movement like Ramanuja, Kabir, Nanak and Chaitanya stressed the grace of the Guru for the attainment of liberation. According to them surrender before the Guru is the only easy method of attaining liberation, without the grace of the Guru, liberation is impossible. Kabir giving priority to the Guru said:

“Guru Govind Dou Khare, Kake Langoon Paya,
Balihari Guru Apne, Jin Govind Dio Milaya”.

6. Popular Language: The Bhakti saints did not consider Sanskrit or any other language as superior to other languages and placed their views in the language of the common man. They believed rightly that language is only a medium for exchange of ideas. The simpler the language, be easier will it be for the people to understand the ideas expressed. Kabir in fact adopted words of many languages. Therefore many scholars describe his language as mixed.

7. Self-sacrifice: Majority of the Bhakti saints said that man should surrender completely before the Lord and the wish of the Lord should be accepted as the supreme fact. Man should try to divert himself of such faults as Kama, anger, attachment, greed, and vanity before starting the worship of God.

8. Humanitarian Attitude: Bhakti saints believed in humanitarianism. They considered all the men as equal and opposed those who differentiated between man and man on the basis of birth, gender, caste, and religion. Kabir taught all his life the fact that all men are equal by birth. Guru Nanak also said that people of all castes and communities are children of same Lord and opposed practices like untouchability and consideration of high and low on the basis of birth.

9. Harmonious Attitude: Majority of saints of Bhakti Movement tried to generate an atmosphere of goodwill between the Hindus and the Muslims. Ballabhacharya wanted to bring about harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims remaining aloof from the politics. His door was open for all alike, be he Sudra Brahmin, Muslim, rich or poor.

10. Social Reform: Majority of Bhakti saints were also social reformers along with being religious reformers. In addition to opposing caste system, they proclaimed untouchability to be a crime against humanity and God. They also made efforts to reform the condition of women. Many saints opposed practices like Sati, female infanticide, and slave system. Ballabhacharya opposed economic disparity also as an effort towards social reform. Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya etc. declares that people of all castes could be their disciples.
Two Different Schools of Thought:

We can see the following two different schools of thought in the Bhakti Movement:

1. **Nirgun Saint Tradition**: In Nirgun Saint Tradition most famous were Kabir and Nanak. They believed in Lord having no particular form as such.

2. **Sagun Saint Tradition**: In Sagun Saint Tradition famous Saints were Ballabhacharya, Tulsidas, Surdas, Mirabai, and Chaitanya. They stressed the worship of Lord in the form of Rama or Krishna.

The Nirgun Saints emphasized individual penance etc. whereas the Sagun Saints emphasized idol worship, theory of incarnations, singing devotional songs etc.

Main Propagators of Bhakti Movement:

1. **Ramanuja (1060 – 1118)**: The earliest exponent of the Bhakti Movement was Ramanuja. He was born at Tirupati and educated at Canjeevaram and Shrirangam. On account of his scholarship, he was appointed the successor of his teacher Yamunamuni. He travelled all over India and ultimately settled down at Shrirangam. He established Vaishnavism on a sound foundation. According to Ramanuja, the way to Moksha lies through Karma, Gyan and Bhakti. The performance of duty without any selfish motive purifies the mind. This makes meditation of the Jiva on itself possible. Through such meditation the Jiva acquires knowledge of itself as dependent on God. Then it begins to love God and contemplate Him. Bhakti involves meditation just as Gyan does only in Bhakti. The meditation is characterized by the soul’s feeling of love for and dependence on God. When Bhakti matures and becomes complete, the soul has a vision of God.

Ramanuja propagated the cult of devotion to God. According to him, salvation lies only in devotion to God. It is true that he did not oppose the ancient practice of restricting the privilege or reading the Vedas to the high classes, but he advised others to follow the path of complete surrender having absolute faith in the preceptor. To quote him, “Those who surrender to God are saved by him. When their bodies fall they go to the Highlands of the blest. (Vaikuntha) and there enjoy constantly the presence of God”.

2. **Nimbarkara**: The next leader of the Bhakti Movement was Nimbarkara, a younger contemporary of Ramanuja. He was a worshipper of Krishna and Radha. He advocated the principle of self-surrender and worship of Krishna and Radha. According to him, the way to eternal beatitude is Bhakti for the lotus-like feet of Krishna. There are a large number of his followers in Uttat Pradesh.
3. Madhavacharya (1238 – 1317 A.D.): He ranks with Shankar and Ramanuja as one of the three principal philosophers of the Vedanta System. He spent a lot of time in study and has left to us 37 works. His view was that the final aim of man is the direct perception of Hari which leads to Moksha or eternal bliss. Release from transmigration can be secured only by means of knowledge and devotion.

Jayatirtha: Jayatirtha was a successor of Madhavacharya. He wrote a scholarly commentary on his master’s Sutra Bhashya which defined Bhakti as a continual flow of love for the Lord which cannot be impaired or affected by thousands of obstacles, which is many times greater than love for one’s own self or love for what is regarded as one’s own and which is preceded by a knowledge of the Lord as the possessor of infinite number of good and benign qualities. Such a Bhakti would be able to obtain God’s vision through the help of his preceptor or guru.

Ramananda (1299 – 1411 A.D.): Ramananda has been described as “the bridge between the Bhakti Movement of the South and the North”. According to one tradition, he was born in 1299 at Prayag, educated in Advaita Philosophy at Banaras and initiated in the Visishtadvaita Philosophy of Ramanuja by ‘Raghavananda’. Another tradition is that he was born at Maikot in Mysore and lived in the end of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century. Another tradition brings him from the South but discards the tradition of his connection with Ramanuja’s sect and supposes him to have belonged to a school of Rama worshippers which took him to the North about 1430. The connection of Ramananda with Ramanuja is stressed in the Bhaktamaala of Nabhaji.

The view R.G. Bhandarkar is that Ramananda was born in 1299 – 1300 and he died in 1411 A.D. If the tradition that Kabir, a disciple of Ramananda, was a contemporary of Sikander Lodi (1489 – 1517) is correct, it is better to fix the birth of Ramananda in the 14th century and death in the 15th century. Ramananda lived during the period of Muslim rule. He found Islam entrenched in a strategic position not only in the political but also in the religious life of the country. He found Islam in action against Hindu Society which was seeking refuge in a shell of orthodoxy. Ramananda initiated the process of breaking that shell to meet the danger from Islam. His movement offered generous recognition to the spiritual and social needs of the common people. As a reformer, he was nearer to the spirit of the age than Ramanuja. He made considerable relaxation of the caste rules in respect of religious and social matters. He threw his spiritual door wide open. He admitted disciples of all castes and allowed them to eat and drink together. He called his followers Avadhutas or “Emancipated”, i.e., persons who had liberated themselves from old prejudices. To quote Ramananda, “Let no man ask a man’s caste or sect. Whoever adores God, he is God’s own”. He popularised his religion by using the Vernacular language instead of Sanskrit. The result was that he was able to reach the masses. Ramananda bypassed Ramanuja and followed the example of the Alvars and the Adyars. It was a revolutionary change. Socially and linguistically, his religion descended to the level of the common people.
There was hardly any pronounced difference between Ramanuja and Ramananda in regard to purely theological tenets. However, Ramananda introduced the cult of Rama and Sita in place of Narayana and Lakshmi as the objects of worship. That was a concession to regional sentiment. Rama and Sita were far more familiar to the people of the Upper Gangetic Valley than Narayana and Lakshmi who commanded greater emotional allegiance in the South. The spread of Rama worship by Ramananda reached its culmination in the 16th century in the hands of Tulsidas. Rama was one of the names given to God by Guru Nanak.

Ramananda put emphasis on Bhakti and avoided both Jnana-marga and Karm-marga. “He deemed forms of worship superfluous and held that the supreme reward of devotion was to be obtained by incessantly uttering God’s name”. In the hymn attributed to him in the Adi Granth, Ramananda says that “God dwells in man’s heart and is contained in everything”. One of his songs runs thus: “I had an inclination to go with sandal and other perfumes to offer my worship to Brahman. But the Guru revealed that Brahman was in my own heart. Wherever I go, I see only water and stones (worshipped), but it is Thou who hast filled them all with The presence. They all seek Thee in vain among the Vedas. My own true Guru, thou hast put an end to all my failures and illusions. Blessed art Thou; Ramananda is lost in his master, Brahman; it is the word of the Guru that destroys all the million bonds of action”. Some of the disciples of Ramananda were cobbblers, weavers, barbers and peasants. He raised the status of women and gave sanctity to family life. He put emphasis on love and devotion and not on rituals, religious ceremonies and pilgrimages.

About the contribution of Ramananda to the Bhakti movement, Prof. Radha Kamal Mukerjee writes, “From the South he imbibed the mystical devotion of the Tamil Saints and the Visistadvaita doctrine of absolute self-surrender and reliance upon God’s redemptive love and goodness, but he protested against caste orthodoxy which would not admit the Sudras to religious education, let alone religious equality and brotherhood. He also repudiated the barren ceremonialism of the Mimamsa School and the Vedic way of life which he found to be anarchonism in the fourteenth century”.

**Kabir**

Kabir was undoubtedly the greatest of the religious reformers who followed the trail of Ramananda and made the Bhakti Movement more meaningful and responsive to the needs of the people. He was probably the most cosmopolitan of the saints of Medieval India Macauliffe writes “Kabir has written works which all religious denominations can accept, and which, if perused without bigotry, are advantageous for the salvation of the persons. Kabir was so steadfast in the utterance of God’s name that in comparison with it he deemed worthless the rules of caste and the Hindu and Mohammedan religious observances”. Kabir was cosmopolitan in his outlook. He
had a variety of religious experiences. He spoke of himself as a Sudra. He was most probably brought up in the family of a Muslim weaver. He lived in a predominantly Hindu environment. He had his association with Muslim Saints. He was not conversant with the religions scriptures of the Hindu or Muslims but his association with the saints of different religions gave him knowledge of those religions. Kabir was a non-conformist and he was persecuted by the orthodox sections of both Hindus and Muslims. He was summoned before Sultan Sikandar Lodi and condemned to death. According to tradition, he was a disciple of Ramananda. Mohsin Fani writes in the Dabiston “At the time when he was in search of a spiritual guide, he visited the best of the Musulmans and Hindus, but he did not find what he sought; at last somebody gave him direction to an old man of bright genius, the Brahman Ramananda”. Kabir himself has acknowledged his debt in one of his verses in these words: “I was awakened by Ramananda”. The association of Kabir with Ramananda has been challenged on chronological grounds. Kabir seems to have lived during the reign of Sultan Sikandar Lodi (1489 – 1517), the traditional date of his death being 1518. If that is so, he cannot be a contemporary of Ramananda. If we accept the suggestion that Kabir was born in 1398, we have to reject the tradition that Kabir met Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539) and his condemnation to death by Sikandar Lodi.

There is a controversy whether Kabir was a Hindu or a Muslim religious teacher. As he believed in the unity of God, it is the view of some Muslim writers that he must be considered a Muslim Saint. However, this view does not seem to be correct. Kabir had no faith in the Quran and he did not believe that Muhammad was the last and the greatest Prophet. Even Muslim Sufis do not reject the authority of the Quran and the Mission of Muhammad. The fact that he stood for a compromise between Hinduism and Islam shows that he was primarily a Hindu thinker and teacher. No Muslim in that age honestly believed that Hinduism and Islam were the same in essence. The teachings of Kabir had little or no effect on contemporary Muslim thought and practice. There are a handful of Muslims who follow the teachings of Kabir and call themselves the descendants of Kabir and hence their adherence to his sect. However, they do not inter-marry with other Muslims and even with other weavers. When Kabir died, both the Hindus and Muslims claimed his dead body.

Kabir believed in one God. He rejected both the Vedas and Quran and the supremacy of the Brahmans and Mallas. He preached against the meaningless formalities and rituals of Hinduism and the rites and practices of Islam. He was opposed to caste and image worship. He criticised the Muslim form of prayer, the fasts of Ramzan and the reverence of tombs and graves. He emphasized the unity of God and path of love, devotion and Bhakti. Like his Guru, Ramananda he preached in Hindi. His poems, particularly Dohas, had a great appeal for the common people. According to him, Ram and Rahim, Krishna and Karim, Mecca and Kashi were the expressions of the same
Although Kabir was an unlettered man, he was the author of a large number of poems which contain his teachings. The most important of his works are the Bijak, Sabads, Sakhis, Mangal, Basant, Holi, and Rekhtal. His poems are in many metres but most of them are Dohas.

The teachings of Kabir had a profound effect on the masses. His brand of the Bhakti cult did not die with him. His teachings hardly produced any impression on the Muslim masses. A small minority of Hindus appreciated his stand and accepted his mission. The lower order among them particularly welcomed his teachings and many of them accepted him as a teacher. Kabir did not make any distinction between Hinduism and Islam. He used to say that “Kabir is the child of Allah and Ram”. Again, “If you say that I am a Hindu, then it is not true nor I am Musalman. Mecca has verily become Kashi, and Ram has become Rahim”. According to Kabir, there is only one supreme being although He is called by different names such as Ram, Rahim, Allah, Hari, Khuda and Govind. God is without shape or form. He is the supreme object of love. God and soul are identical. There is no distinction between the absolute and the devotee. A devotee does not require a temple or mosque to reach him. There is no necessity of idols, Avatars, Pandits and Ulema. The love of a devotee for God is enough. Union with God can be achieved through Bhakti. There is no necessity to give up the world.

The message of Kabir and the spirit of his teachings can be understood from his poems. According to him, “Sanskrit is the water in a well, the language of the people is the flowing stream. If by worshipping stones, one can find God, I shall worship a mountain. Rama, Khuda, Shakti, Siva are one. Neither the Hindu nor the Turk, neither the Jain nor the Yogi is cognizant of the secret. Allah and Ram are Thy names. It is no use bending the shaven head to the ground. It is no use washing your bodies with water. The Hindu observes 24 fasts of Ekadasi, while the Muslim observes his full month fast. If only one month is sacred, what about the other 11 months? A man may read many books before he dies and yet not be a Pandit. He is a Pandit who understands the two and a half letters which form the world 'love'. O Qazi, what book is expounded by thee; all such as are pondering on the book are killed; give up the book, adore Ram. If by wandering about naked union with Hari be obtained, then every deer of the forest will become emancipated. If by shaving the head perfection is obtained, the sheep is emancipated. If by immersion in the water salvation be obtained, the frogs bathe continually. As the frogs, so are these men; again and again they fall into the womb”.

The following are some of the poems of Kabir:

(1) It is not by fasting and repeating prayers and the creed, that one goeth to heaven;
the inner veil of the temple of Mecca
Is in man’s heart if the truth be known.

Make thy mind thy Kaaba, thy body its enclosing temple,
Conscience its prime teacher;
Sacrifice wrath, doubt and malice;
Make patience thine utterance of the five prayers;
The Hindus and the Mussalmans have the same Lord.

(2) If God be within the mosque, then to whom does this world belong?

If Rama be within the image, then who is there to know what happens without?

Hari is in the East; Allah is in the West, Look within your own heart, for there you will find both Karim and Rama.

All the men and women of the world are His living forms.

Kabir is the child of Allah and Rama; He is my Guru; He is my Pir.

Vain too are the distinctions of caste.

All shades of colour are but broken arcs of light.

All varieties in human nature are but fragments of humanity.

The right to approach God is not the monopoly of the Brahmans, but belongs to all who are sincere of heart.

(3) He is one; there is no second,

Ram, Khuda, Shakti, Shiv are one.

By the one name I hold fast.

Kabir proclaims this aloud.

(4) On my tongue Vishnu,

In my eyes Narayan, in my heart Gobind dwells,
My meditation with Hari.

(5) O Servant, where does thou seek me,

Lo, I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque;

I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash?

Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor

In Yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me;

Thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.

Kabir says, “O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath”.

(6) The Yogi dyes his garments, instead of dying his mind in the colours of love:

He situations within the temple of the Lord, leaving Brahma to worship a stone.

He pierces holes in his ears, he has a great beard and matted locks, he looks like a goat;

He goes forth into the wilderness, killing all his desires, and turns himself into a eunuch.

He shaves his head and dyes his garments; he reads the Gita and becomes a mighty talker.

Kabir says: “You are going to the doors of death, bound hand and foot!”

About Kabir, Gertrude Emerson writes, “Kabir was not only a saint but a stern reformer hating religious cant and hypocrisy, as be gathered from his terse and often caustic verses which are still sung all over Uttar Pradesh and Punjab”. Again “His rejection of rituals and image worship might well have been inspired by the tenets of orthodox Islam and his ridicule of caste might as easily have sprung from the underlying Islamic doctrine of social democracy. But when he attacked fasts and ablutions and pilgrimages as useless performances and found the outward insignia of religion just so much foolishness, he attacked both orthodox Islam and orthodox Hinduism. Added to this, he proclaimed that Allah and Ram were names of one and the same God
that He was to be found neither in the temple nor in mosque, neither in Banaras nor in Mecca but only in the heart of His devotees”. Dr. Tara Chand says in influence of Islam on Indian Culture. “It is not the number of the following which is so important, it is his influence which extends to the Punjab, Gujarat and Bengal and which continued to spread under the Mughal Rule, till a wise sovereign correctly estimating its value attempted to make it a religion approved by the State. Akbar’s Din-i-llahi was an isolated freak of an autocrat who had more power than he knew to employ, but an inevitable result of the forces which were deeply surging in India’s breast and finding expression in the teachings of men like Kabir. Circumstances thwarted that attempt, but destiny still points towards that goal”.

The teachings of Kabir exercised considerable influence on later generations but they did not provide a clear-cut and firm doctrinal background for his followers. The result was that his followers known as Kabir-panthis failed to develop into an organised and integral community like the Sikhs. There was also the lack of a continuous and centralised leadership to give the new religious community a direction and purpose. Kabir did not nominate his successor and his son Kamal refused to be the leader of the disciples of his father on the ground that his father was against sectarianism. The result was that the followers of Kabir were divided into many small sects. The two main divisions of them have their headquarters at Banaras and in Chhattisgarh.

Vallabhacharya (1479 – 1531).

Vallabhacharya was a Telegu Brahman. He began to show signs of greatness from childhood. He acquired a lot of knowledge at a very early age. He visited a large number of places such as Mathura and Brindaban and ultimately settled down at Banaras. His view was that there was no distinction between Brahma and the individual soul. The latter could get rid of its bondage by means of Bhakti alone. His view was that home is the centre of all desires and should be given up completely. If that is not practicable, one should dedicate oneself to the service of God who alone can free man from evil. He was the author of a number of scholarly works in Sanskrit and Brajbhasa. The important among them are ‘Subodhini’ and ‘Siddhant Rahasya’. His teachings had an emotional appeal. They elevated themselves art and poetry of Braj, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Vallabhacharya advocated the worship of Krishna and dedication of everything to Him alone. His Vaisanavism degenerated during the time of his later successors. What they preached and acted upon was that God should be pleased not by self-denial and austerity but by enjoying worldly pleasures in every possible way. For this reason, his philosophy came to be known as “Epicureanism” of the East.”
Chaitanya (1485 – 1534).

Chaitanya was the greatest saint of the Bhakti Movement. He was born in Bengal in 1485 A.D. He gave up the world at the age of 25 and became a Sanyasi. He wandered about the country and taught the people to love and worship Krishna. Wherever he went, thousands of people flocked to him. He gave them the message of love and peace. He was so much absorbed in love for Lord Krishna that the very thought of him playing upon his flute in the woods of Brindaban, threw him into ecstasy. He wanted his followers to have perfect humility in their actions and absolutely no pride in whatever they did. To quote him, “Krishna dwells in every soul and therefore gives respect to others, without seeking any for himself”. Again, “Neither do I want followers, nor wealth nor learning, nor poetical powers. Give unto my soul a bit of devotion for Thee. Great pride never produces any good. How will he who is called the vanquisher of the proud bear with your pride?”

Chaitanya had too much love for the poor and the weak. Whenever he saw their sorrows, his heart melted with pity. He was opposed to the caste system. He believed in the universal brotherhood of man. His conviction was that the name of Lord Krishna does not know the barriers of caste and race. Haridas was one of the followers of Chaitanya and he was an outcaste. He asked Chaitanya not to touch him. While embracing him, Chaitanya said, “You have dedicated yourself to me, that body of yours is mine in every respect; the all-sacrificing and all-loving spirit dwells in it; it is holy as a temple. Why should you consider yourself unclean?”. Love was the watchword of the cult of Chaitanya. To quote him, “Every man must offer body and soul to Him and must disdain his personal gratifications. He must be prepared to carry out his Lord’s will and in doing so must not shrink from any sacrifice. He must worship His image, he must talk of Him; he must weave flowers for Him; he must burn incense and wave the Chamaris in His temple and offer his services day and night to the Lord and to the world as well. Vaisnavism, it must be repeated, is not the religion of the recluse, nor is it a non-proselytising creed”.

Chaitanya gave the following advice to religious teachers:

“Do not take too many disciples, do not abuse gods worshipped by other peoples and their scriptures, do not read too many books and do not pose as a teacher continually criticising and elucidating religious views. Take profit and loss in the same light. Do not stay there where Vaisnava is abused. Do not listen to village tales. Do not by your speech or thought cause pain to a living thing. Listen to temple recitation of God’s name. Recollect His kindness, bow to Him and worship Him. Do what He wills as a servant, believe Him to be a friend and then dedicate yourself to Him”.  

The teachings and philosophy of Chaitanya became popular not only in Bengal and Orissa but also in therefore parts of the country. He preached a gospel which went straight to the hearts of the people. His message of love for a personal God acted as a balm for suffering humanity. It showed that human heart could rise above political and social sufferings. “It imparted freshness to life, creative power to literate and richness to human relations”. Prof. Radhakamal Mukerjee writes, “The Chaitanya Vaisnava movement added a new strand of morality and goodness to the Indian character, the maturing and the transcendent quality of authentic human approach to the deity. Through him, Vaisnavism, which is the philosophical expression of the ideal of love for God, unusherred in a new era”. The view of Theodore Goldstucke is that “Chaitanya comprehended five stages of Bhakti – quietism as that of sage, servitude which every votary takes upon himself, friendship for the deity honoured with his acquaintance, tender affection for the deity of the same nature as love of parents for their children, and the highest degree of affection for the deity of the same nature as love of parents for their children, and the highest degree of affection; such passionate attachment as the Gopis felt for their beloved Krishna”. It is said about Chaitanya that “No one man has left a more indelible stamp upon the social and economical life of Bengalis and exerted a more lasting influence on the very elements of Bengali character. The Bengali mind, as it shows itself today, has been largely shaped and moulded by Chaitanya and his associates. He released the tidal waves of emotion, faith and the ecstasy of mystic vision that lay dormant in the Bengali mind, all its poetry and pathos and high strung emotionalism”.

**Guru Nanak (1469 – 1538).**

Another exponent of the Bhakti Movement was Guru Nanak. He was born on 26 November 1469 at Talwandi in Sheikhupura district of the Punjab (now in Pakistan). His father’s name was Kalu and his mother’s name was Tripta. Nanak received his early education in the local school. It was found that he was not taking interest in study and liked the company of religious men. His father forced him to study Persian so that he could become an accountant. He was married at an early age but he did not take interest in family affairs. He spent his time in carrying on discussions with Sadhus or saints and composing songs in praise of God. He met Kabir when he was about 27 years of age and learnt much from him. When he was about 30 years, he gave up his home and his job and became a Sanyasi. He travelled widely accompanied by Bhai Bola and Mardana. He died in 1538 at the ripe age of 70. Guru Nanak’s Janam Sakhis say that the first words uttered by Nanak after his revelation were: “There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman”. These words spell out his mission. He was determined to keep himself above the religious differences of the Hindus and Muslims. He followed Kabir in offering an alternative.
Nanak laid emphasis on the oneness or unity of God. His concept of God was Nirguna (attributeless) and Nirankar (formless). He used the names of Hari, Ram, Allah and Khuda for God. To the Muslims, his advice was: “Make kindness thy mosque, sincerity thy prayer carpet and what is just and lawful thy Quran”. He always praised what was good and condemned what was evil. He declared that man’s soul was a ray of light emanating from the Divine Light but being enmeshed in Maya (Illusion), men are deluded into thinking that their existence is apart from His. The aim of man should be to merge in God. That could be done by complete surrender to Him and not by pilgrimages, idol worship, self-torture or mechanical recitation of His name. Unless one was saturated with the true love of God, nothing could avail him. For the love of God, renunciation from the world was not necessary. Renunciation implied running away from the tumult and turmoil of life. He advocated a middle path between extreme asceticism and free satisfaction of the senses. He believed in leading a normal life. He attacked the caste system of the Hindus as it was against the will of God. To quote him, “Class and caste distinctions are just so much nonsense that all men are born equal”. Again, “I am lowliest among the lowly; Nanak is with the lowly and has nothing to do with high”. Again, “God’s eye of mercy falls on those who take care of the lowly. Nonsense is caste and nonsense the titled fame. What power has caste? Nobody is without some worth”.

Nanak did not believe in the Vedas and the Quran. He was against the supremacy of the Brahmans and the Mullas, ritualism and formalities of religion. He believed in the doctrine of Karma and the theory of the transmigration of souls. In his teachings, morality, humility, honesty, charity, truth and mercy had a prominent place. Alms-giving, repeating the name of Hari (God) and absolute obedience to the Guru in body and mind were the main duties of the Sikhs. Loving devotion to God was an indispensable necessity for them. Nanak was a well-educated man. He had studied Persian and Hindi. He wrote inspiring poems and songs which were collected in a book form and later on published as the Adi Grantha. Dr. A.C. Banerjee writes, “The sweetness of his character and the simple truth behind his teachings made him an object of love to all and even today he is remembered as Guru Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindu Ka Guru, Mussalman Ka Pir”. Nanak did not intend to start any separate religion of his own but gradually his followers evolved a new religion known as Sikhism which is based on his teachings.

Mirabai (1498 – 1546).

Mirabai was a great saint of the Bhakti Movement. She was born at the village of Kudki in the Merta District of Rajasthan in or about 1498 A.D. and was married to Rana Sanga’s eldest son and heir-apparent Bhojaraj in 1516. Bhojaraj died in the life-time of his father leaving Mira a widow in her youth. She was highly religious from her childhood and a follower of the Krishna Cult of Vaishnavism. After the death of her husband, she devoted
herself completely to religious pursuits. Her father Ratan Singh fell in the battle of Kanwah in March 1527 fighting on the side of Rana Sanga who also died in 1528. Mira gave herself up completely to a life of devotion. Her fame as a sincere devotee of Krishna and a patron of men of religion spread far and wide and drew hermits of both the sexes from distant places to Chottor. Rana Vikramaditya tried to get rid of her by poison but failed. Mira went to reside with her uncle Biram Deva who was the chief of Merta. There also she continued her daily routine. She remained engrossed in spiritual meditation and religious music and dance. She also continued having Kirtan in the company of other religious men and women. She died in 1546. The message of Mira was that none by means of birth, poverty, age or sex can be debarred from His divine presence. The only way is that of Bhakti. The portals will open when the Teacher will bless the devotee with his company and teach him the mysteries of the Sabda. Once He is reached, no further or future separation is possible. Sooner or later, everyone is to meet his Lord. Time is a great factor and it can be shortened by the intensity of one’s affection for the Lord. God cannot be reached through Yoga exercises or learning.

Bankey Behari writes, “To me Mira is the moth that burns itself in the candle of love for Girdhar and for all times filled the temple of Devotion with fragrance. Undaunted by fire or frown, unperturbed by persecutions, this devotee of Shri Krishna sang her song of princely renunciation and self-surrender that shall infuse courage in the aspirants in the Path of Love. Mira lived the message she preached, scoffed at cold intellectualism and boldly proclaimed the doctrine of absolute faith in and Devotion to the Lord”. Mira Bai was not a reformer or preacher like Kabir, nor did she present a special world-view like Tulsidas. She accepted all the tenets of Bhakti and followed them unwaveringly all her life. Like most devotees, her ultimate goal was the release from the cycle of birth and rebirth, and to be united with the Supreme Being, who for her was symbolized in the human, personal, beatific, and joyous form of Krishna.

**Tulsidas (1532-1623).**

Tulsidas was a great poet and a devotee of Rama. He was born in a Brahman family in 1532. On account of a taunt of his wife, he is said to have taken to the life of a religious hermit. He was the author of 'Ram Charit Manas', popularly known as the ‘Ramayana’. In this book, he makes an exposition of religious devotion of the highest order. He was a humanist and Universalist. He laid stress upon knowledge, devotion, worship and meditation. To him, Rama was a personal and Supreme God who had feelings of compassion for the suffering humanity. To quote Tulsidas, “There is one God. It is Rama, creator of heaven and earth and redeemer of mankind. For the sake of his faithful people, a very God, Lord Rama became incarnate as a king and for our sanctification lived as it were the life of an ordinary man”. Again, “The Supreme Spirit, the All Pervading who has become incarnate and done many things for the love that he
bers of his faithful people. Tulsidas was a worshipper of Rama and the looked upon him as an incarnation of God. He believed that man could reach Him only through Bhakti or affection. The Ram Charit Manas of Tulsidas is considered as the Bible of the Hindus. J.E. Carpenter writes, “Tulsidas starts from the fundamental conception of philosophical theology, the eternal Brahman, passionless, formless, without attributes (Nirguna) and yet possessing the fundamental quality of goodness (Satya); nay, in still bolder speech, at once the sum and the negation of all qualities, same in all time – past, present and to come”.

**Surdas (1479 – 1584).**

Surdas was a saint and a poet. He preached the religion of love and devotion to a personal God. He provided inspiration to millions of men and women in Northern India. His works include ‘Sur Sagar’. ‘Sahitya Ratna’ and ‘Sur Sarawali’. In Sur Sagar, he dealt with the life of the childhood of Krishna. His works and poems exercised tremendous influence on the people who were encouraged to follow the path of Bhakti. He borrowed his main theme from the Bhagwat Purana but his work is not in any sense a paraphrase in Hindi verse of that Purana. It is an original work through and through. The “Sur Sagar” is saturated with love and devotion for Krishna. Surdas made use of “Brajbhasa” and the message that runs through his works is that life itself is poetry. It is a sport and adventure and not a struggle or a story of disappointment.

**Malukdas (1574 – 1682).**

Malukdas was born at Kara in the district of Allahabad. He condemned the externals of religion like pilgrimages, and idol-worship. According to him, true religion is an inward faith. Maya is the enemy of man. The name of God is the only protection against it. The world is transitory and the worldly relations are of no avail. Man is born of dust and will return to dust. Those who are not devoted to spiritual life are the dogs of the world. Salvation is obtained by knowing the self, killing pride and egotism, controlling passions, trusting the Guru and loving god. Malukdas put great emphasis on the unity of the Hindus and Muslims. To quote him, “Where is the string of beads (Mala) and the rosary (tasbih)? Now awake and rely not on them. Who is infidel (Kafir) and who is barbarian (Mlechcha)? Look upon Sandhya (Hindu worship) and Namaz (Muslim prayer) as one. Where does Yama live and where is Gabriel? He himself is the judge (Qazi), who else keeps accounts? He calculates the good and the evil deeds and renders account and sends one where he deserves to go. Malukdas, why art thou in error, Rama and Rahim are the names of one”. 
Dadu Dayal (1554 – 1603).

Dadu Dayal was a weaver from Ahmedabad. He made an important contribution to the Bhakti Movement. He was a cobbler by caste and he renounced the world at an early age. In his teachings, he put emphasis on the promotion of love, union, sentiments of brotherhood and toleration among the people of various faiths. To quote him, “The illusion of Allah and Rama hath been dispelled from my mind; since I see Thee in all, I see no difference between Hindu and Turk”. Dadu Dayal was against idol worship, caste distinctions, the “theory of Avtars” (reincarnation of God), external formalities of religion and the practice of worship at the shrines of the departed saints. He insisted upon the unity of God. He regarded Him in his two-fold aspect of transcendence and immanence. To him, he is one immortal, incomprehensible being. He is brightness, effulgence, light, illumination and perfection. He is within the heart of all beings. Dadu Dayal was free from any taint of religious bigotry or sectarianism. He tried his best to bring the Hindus and Muslims together. He established a sect whose followers are known as Dadu-Panthis. The ideas of Dadu are contained in the book known as “Dadu Ram Kingdom Bani”.

Sunderdas (1596 – 1689).

Sunderdas was a disciple of Dadu. He was born in a Bania Family in Rajasthan. He gained great popularity as a poet and a saint. His reputation rests on his work entitled “Sundervilasa” which deals with the six philosophic systems of the Hindus and emphasises their inadequacy for the salvation of man.

Raidas.

He lived at Banaras and earned his living by mending shoes. He lived a life of simplicity and contentment. Instead of indulging in high philosophic speculation about God and nature in his hymns; he aimed at the unity of Hinduism and Islam. There is a spirit of harmony in his writings. He rejected the theory of incarnation, looked upon the world as the play of God and advocated complete surrender to Him. His cardinal doctrine was: “Hari is in all and all is in Hari”.

Birbhan.

Birbhan was a contemporary of Dadu. He was born near Narnaul in Punjab in 1543. He founded the famous sect of Satnamis. He was a monotheist. He described God by the name of Satnam or truth. He did not believe in caste distinctions and was opposed to idol worship. He put emphasis on meditation and virtuous life. He asked his followers to abstain from intoxicants and animal food. The religious book of the Satnamis is known as ‘Pothi’.
Sankardev (1449 – 1568).  

Sankardev was the greatest religious reformer of Assam who introduced the Bhakti Cult in the Brahmaputra Valley. The premature death of his wife was a turning point in his career. He became a Yogi, studied Brahmanical religious scriptures and finally recognised the significance of Bhakti. He visited many sacred places both in North and South India. His message centred round absolute devotion to Vishnu or His incarnation, Lord Krishna. Its essence was monotheism and it came to be known as “Eka-Sarana-Dharma” (Religion of seeking refuge in one). The forms of devotional exercises recommended by him were prayer as also simple Brahmanical worship with flowers and modest offerings. His hymns and other writings provided material for evening prayers in the villages. Sankardev insisted upon ‘Niskama Bhakti’ and recognised the sanctity of ‘the “Bhagwat Purana” whose copy was placed on the altar to the exclusion of all idols. He preached the rejection of ritualism, including idol worship. A section of his followers practised celibacy. He denounced the caste system and preached his ideas to the masses through their mother tongue. He founded many Satras or monasteries and Nam-Ghars in which people of all classes and castes assembled for religious and social purposes. His creed was known as ‘Mahapurushiyada Dharma’ which exercised widespread and far-reaching influence on all aspects of life in Assam. Sankardev succeed in preaching Vaishnavism not only among the Hindus but also among the tribal people.

Jnanesvara (1271 – 1296).  

Jnanesvara wrote his commentary on the ‘Bhagwat Gita’ called ‘Bhavartha Dipika’ which is commonly known as Jnanesvari. It is the fountainhead of Maharashtrian Devotionalism. It is more than a commentary. It is a religious sermon in the form of a song composed in Marathi. Jnanesvara used Marathi, the language of the people, to convey the thoughts and ideas which hitherto had been hidden in Sanskrit M.G. Ranade writes, “Jnanesvara’s influence has been greater than that of any other Maratha Sadhu (saint), except Tukaram. Jnanesvara appeals to the pantheistic tendencies of our people’s intellect, while the charm of Tukaram and Namdev lies in their appeal to the heart and in the subjective truth of the experience felt by them in common with all who are religious by nature”. Jnanesvara firmly opposed the Brahmans who would not allow the lower castes to read the scriptures. He is said to have confounded them “by causing a buffalo to recite the Vedas.

Namdev (1270 – 1350).  

Namdev was a contemporary of Jnanesvara. He was a tailor by caste. He was surrounded by other low-caste saints, viz., Gora the potter, Samvata the gardener, Chokha the untouchable, Sena the barber and Janabai the maid. The object of his devotion was Vithoba, the form of the Great God Vishnu.
residing in the Pandharpur temple. This Vithoba was the God of the Varkari Panth, a sect that has an important place in the history of devotionalism in Maharashtra. Namdev preached the sublime gospel of love and devotion and liberated the people from the shackles of rituals and caste system. He was opposed to idol worship and religious intolerance. His view was that salvation could be achieved through Bhakti or devotion to God. To quote Namdev, “Vows, fasts and austerities are not at all necessary to go on a pilgrimage. Be you watchful in your eating food or drinking water; fix your mind on the feet of Hari”. Yoga or sacrificial ceremonies or giving up objects of desire is not wanted. Realise a fondness for the feet of Hari”. The songs of Namdev reflect a passionate nature, completely given to the love of Bari and the continuous invocation of his name.

**Eknath (1535 – 99).**

Eknath was a Brahman born in a family of celebrated saints. As a scholar, he published temple first reliable edition of the ‘Jnanesvari’ and gave the “Marathi Gita” back to his people. By writing a commentary on the “Ramayana” e also presented the story of Rama to them. He wrote his famous commentary on the eleventh book of the ‘Bhagavata Purana’. He invented a form of deep religious life that needed no institutions or monasteries and no resignation from the world. He was a family man but devoted and austere. His life was regulated around his hearth and his manuscripts. In spite of the obstacles the Muslims put in their way, he told the Hindus that they could still aspire to the deepest experience of their religion within the ordnary framework of life. Everyday his practised Kirtan. His songs are a part of the Marathi heritage. They have a strong moral basis. They are concerned with the simplest aspect of life and yet they soar to great heights of mysticism.

**Tukaram (1598 – 1650).**

Tukaram was the greatest Bhakti Poet of Maharashtra. He can be called greatest Bhakti poet in the whole of India. He was born in a rural family of grain traders. A famine took away one of his two wives and his son and left him broken-hearted. His work consists of a collection of hymns, expressing the cry of his soul. They are the glory of devotional poetry. Tukaram was a mystic overpowered by love, by the presence or absence of his Lord. Again and again, his songs describe the terrifying passage through the “Dark Night of the Soul”. His burning desire for the vision of Lord was frequently fulfilled and in that fulfillment an ecstasy took hold of his mind and his senses and transported him into visions. Tukaram was the poet of the people. He talked their language and used their similes. He talked about their life and called upon them to become the pilgrims of the inner life and contemplate the mysteries of the love of God.
Tukaram rejected ceremonies, Vedic sacrifices, visits to holy places, worship of stones, putting on saint’s guise, fasts and other types of austerities. He also tried to reconcile Hindu and Muslim faiths. His conception of God is similar to that of Kabir. To quote him, ‘He has neither form nor name, nor place of abode. He is present wherever we go. He knows neither form nor change of form. He pervades the moving and unmoving world. He is neither with nor without attributes. Who, indeed, can know Him? He will turn to none, says Tukaram, who has no faith in Him’. The teachings of Tukaram are contained in his numerous Abhangas. Shivaji had great admiration for him.

**Ramdas (1608 – 81).**

Ramdas became an orphan in his childhood. He left home and after long years of spiritual training and wandering, he settled down on the banks of the Krishna river where he built a temple of Rama. His main work is ‘Dasabodha’. For him, devotionalism and activism were closely wedded. Whereas the other saints centred their devotion on Krishna and the Vishnu of Pandharpur, Ramdas was a devotee of Rama. Shivaji was greatly inspired by the teachings of Ramdas. He advised Shivaji “to adorn his body not with clothes and ornaments but with shrewdness and wisdom”. According to Ramdas, the essential qualifications of a good ruler included the following: “To spread the message of God, to protect the poor, the pious and the helpless, to strive for the well-being of his subject and to remain eternally vigilant and to practice the virtue of forbearance and tolerance”.

**Bahina Bai.**

Bahina Bai was another great saint of Maharashtra. She received her Mantra in a vision from Tukaram and accepted him as her Guru. She produced outstanding poetry in the style and meter of Tukaram. Regarding the work of the saints of Maharashtra. M.G. Ranade writes, “The saints come out well in their struggle with their foreign rulers and they prevailed not by fighting, not by resistance but by quiet resignation to the will of God. There was a tendency perceptible towards a reconciliation of the two races in mutual recognition of the essential unity of Allah with Rama, and by the time Shivaji appeared on the scene, this reconciliation seems to have been almost complete, though occasional outbursts of Muhammadan fanaticism were not altogether unknown even then”.

**Chandidas.**

In addition to Chaitanya, there were other saints of the Bhakti Cult in Bengal. Chandidas (14th century) is a great name in Bengali Bhakti Literature. His poems testify to his being influenced by the ‘Gita Govinda’ and the ‘Sahajiya Doctrines’. His view was that the only way to salvation is the love of God. That love must be based on an earthly passion for a particular
person. That person needs to be sublimated and one should choose an inaccessible person for its object. The washer-woman Rami became the focus of his own desire. Some of his most beautiful poems are about her. His ‘Krishna Kirtan’ is devoted to the love of Krishna and Radha, imbued with great depth of feeling and transfused with profound symbolism.

**Vidyapati.**

Vidyapati did not write in Bengali but in Maithili. His songs on Radha and Krishna are a part of Bengali Vaishnavism. He wrote eight works in Sanskrit. About a thousand of his love-ballads have been collected. His work is similar in content to that of Chandidas, but his poetry is more classical, polished and learned.

**Contribution of the Bhakti Movement.**

The Saints of the Bhakti Movement put before the people a way of life which could be followed by them without much difficulty. They were not required to depend upon the charity of the Brahmans. The religious teachings of the Bhakti Saints had a great appeal to the masses. By showing a path of direct communion with God, they struck at the exploitation of the masses by the priestly class. The eyes of both the Hindus and Muslims were opened against the superstitions in which they were caught and exploited. The saints paved the way for equality based on solid foundations of amity and brotherhood. Some of the saints put emphasis on removing the causes of misunderstanding between the Hindus and Muslims. They also tried to reform the existing social conditions. Their attacks on polytheism and pilgrimages helped to check expensive rituals and ceremonies. Their condemnation of the caste system created a new consciousness among the masses, particularly the people belonging to the lower castes. They saw a ray of hope for raising their status in society. Some of them joined the Bhakti Movement and some of them became saints of the Bhakti Movement. One of the disciples of Kabir was Dhanna, an ordinary peasant. His other important disciples were Sain the barber and Raidas the cobbler. The Bhakti Saints were men of high character. Many of them travelled widely and extensively. During their travels, they met people of all shades and opinions. They helped in the development and enrichment of the languages of the people. The saints of the Bhakti Movement helped the growth of Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Telegu, Kannada, Tamil etc.

About the Bhakti Movement, **Prof. K. Damodaran** writes that “The Bhakti Movement attained varying degrees of intensity and sweep in different parts of the country. It appeared in a variety of forms also. However, it had some basic principles. Those were the recognition of the unity of the people irrespective of religious considerations, equality of all before God, opposition to the caste system, faith that communion between God and man depended on the virtues of each individual and not on his wealth or caste, emphasis on
devotion as the highest form of worship and denigration of ritualism, Idol worship, pilgrimages and self-mortification. The Bhakti cult recognised the dignity of man and denounced all class and caste distinctions and caste tyranny in the name of religion. It awakened the masses to a new consciousness and generated a popular impulse to action. However, it was not capable of either making a rational investigation of the social problems or giving a rational solution to them. It failed to grasp the real causes of the maladjustments in the social and economic set-up and could not offer the radical cure to human suffering. Dr. A.L. Srivastava points out that the Bhakti Cult was a widespread movement that embraced the whole of India for several centuries. It was the movement of the people and aroused interest among them. It was an indigenous movement and had nothing to do with Christianity. Although its basic principles of love and devotion to a personal God were purely Hindu, yet the movement was profoundly influence by Muslim beliefs and practices. The Bhakti Movement had two main objects in view. One was to reform the Hindu Religion so that it could withstand the onslaught of Islamic propaganda and proselytism. Its second object was to bring about a compromise between Hinduism and Islam and to foster friendly relations between them. It succeeded in realising to a great extent the first object of bringing about a simplification of worship and liberalising the traditional caste rules. However, it failed in attaining the second object of Hindu-Muslim unity. Neither the Turko-Afghan rulers nor the Muslim public accepted the Ram-Sita or Radha-Krishna Cult. They refused to believe that Ram and Rahim and Iswar and Allah were the names of the same God. However, temple Bhakti Movement helped the evolution and enrichment of vernacular literatures in India. Most of the Bhakti Saints preached to the people in their mother-tongue and thereby enriched Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Maithili, Gujarati, and Punjab. The period of the Bhakti Movement was the golden period in the history of the growth of the vernacular literature in India.

The view of Dr. Yusuf Husain is that “The Bhakti Movement of Medieval India represents the first effective impingement on Hindu Society of Islamic culture and outlook, but it received a great impetus from the presence of Muslims in this country. This movement not only prepared a meeting-ground for the devout men of both creeds. It also preached human equality and openly condemned rituals and caste. It was radically new, basically different from old traditions and ideas of religious authority. It sought to refashion the collective life on a new basis, envisaging a society in which there shall be justice and equality for all and in which men of all creeds shall be able to develop to their full moral and spiritual stature”. The Bhakti Saints preached universal toleration and brought about a revolution in the structure of Indian Society. They loved humanity and were devoted to God. However, their disciples created sects and sub-sects. The result was that Indian Society was further divided into new cults based on orthodoxy. Although all the Saints taught the same truth, India failed to attain cultural unity. According to M.G. Ranade, “The main results of the Bhakti Movement were the development of the vernacular
literature, the modification of caste exclusiveness, the sanctification of family life, the elevation of the status of women, the spread of humaneness and toleration, partial reconciliation with Islam, the subordination of rites and ceremonies, pilgrimages and fasts and learning and contemplation to the worship of God with love and faith, the limitation of the excesses of polytheism and the uplift of the nation to a higher level of capacity both of thought and action”. To that may be added the removal of distinctions between the higher and lower castes and outcastes in the religious sphere. The saints of the Bhakti Movement raised their powerful voice against the vices prevailing in society and called upon their followers to abstain from them. Those saints preached against infanticide, Sati and other evil customs prevailing among the people. Kabir, Ravidas and the Sikh Gurus discouraged the use of intoxicants like wine, tobacco and toddy. Guru Govind Singh prohibited the use of tobacco. He called it an evil drug which, “burned the chest induced nervousness, palpitation, bronchitis and other diseases and caused death”. To quote him, “Wine is bad, Bhang destroys one generation but tobacco destroys all generations”. The Bhakti saints condemned adultery, sodomy and other immoral practices. “Approach not another woman’s couch either by mistake or even in a dream. Know that love of another’s wife is as sharp as a dagger”.

**Impact of the Bhakti Movement:**

1. **Social Impact:** Bhakti Movement dealt a blow to caste system, untouchability and social distinction of high and low. Most of the saints took their disciples from various castes. They criticized severely the caste system and declared Brahmins and Shudras as equal. Thus the bonds of caste were loosened but it would have to be conceded that even the Bhakti Movement could not completely remove the evil of caste system from Hindu Society. The Saint-Poets supported the idea of women being given an independent and high status in Society. Kabir and Nanak preached to women also. They opposed evil practices like Sati. This movement encouraged the spirit of social service because the saint-poets preached to the people to serve the poor and orphans.

2. **Religious Impact:** The Bhakti Movement influenced the religion most. Because of the very movement atmosphere was created for opposition to ritualism and superstitions among the followers of Hindu and Muslim. The popularity of idol worship amongst the Hindu diminished. The feeling of Hindu-Muslim unity and integration received encouragement. The Bhakti Movement was responsible for the birth of new religion in the form of Sikh religion. Guru Nanak Developed was the first Guru of the Sikhs and the Guru Granth Sahib was like a Bible for the Sikhs (the holybook consists of most of the preachings of Guru Nanak which was later on compiled by fifth Guru Arjun Developed). In it is compiled the message of majority of saint-poets of Bhakti Movement. It encouraged religious toleration. The bitterness existing between temple Hindus and the Muslims decreased gradually because of this movement. This movement dealt a severe blow to priests and Brahmins. Religious fanaticism decreased and religious tolerance spread.
3. **Cultural Influence:** The Bhakti Movement led to common languages becoming popular. The saint-poets composed their works in many provincial and regional languages. The language of Kabir is a good example of the mixture of many languages and it is actually called a mixture or ‘Khichari’. Malik Muhammad Jayasi and Goswami Tulsidas composed their works in ‘Awadhi’. Sudras adopted ‘Brij’ language and Guru Nanak Hindi and Panjabi both languages. Chaitanya used Bangla language and many saint-poets used Urdu language. In course of time these works came to be an important part of Indian literature. Along with literature this movement influenced art as well because at many places monuments were erected for the saint-poets.

4. **Political Influence:** The Bhakti Movement influenced the country’s politics as well. Many of the Sultans and Rulers and later on the Mughal emperors also adopted a liberal policy towards the Hindus, considering religion and politics to be two separate Realms. The State followed a completely secularply in the time of Emperor Akbar and Jahangir.

5. **Economic Influence:** The Bhakti Movement dealt a severe blow to economic disparity of the so, e.g. Kabir criticized the economic set-up as well. The truth which was recognized in the modern times by Karl Marx and his friends, Kabir described about 300 years before them viz. that struggle in state and society was mainly the result of economic disparity. They opposed the amassing of too much wealth and emphasized earning of livelihood through hard work.

In essence, the effects and influences of the Bhakti Movement can be described thus in Prof. Ranade’s words that “it led to a development of reverence towards Bhakti or devotion, writing of literature in popular languages, development of feeling of toleration between Hindus and Muslims, loosing of the bonds of castes and a progress in society at the level of thought and action both”.

**SUFISM IN INDIA**

What is Sufism? It is connected with the mystic philosophy in Islam. There are so many definitiosn of Sufism. Scholars are not united in their opinion about the definition of Sufism. Some important definitions are as under:

**Prof. Arberry** describes Sufism as “the attempt of individual Muslims to realise in their personal experience the living presence of Allah”. It has been defined by **Dr. Tara Chand** as a “complex phenomenon; it is like a stream which gathers volume by the joining of tributaries from many lands. Its original source is the Quran and the life of Muhammad. Christianity and Neolithic-Platonism swelled it by a large contribution. Hinduism and Buddhism supplied a number of ideas and the religions of ancient Persia, Zoroastrianism,
and Monism brought it to their share”. The view of Davis is that “Sufism is essentially a religion of love without a creed or dogma. No merciless hells leap up in the Sufi’s belief. He has no one-way theory for the beyond! The ways of God are as the number of souls of men”. According to K.D. Bhargava, “Muslim mysticism or Sufism may be regarded as love as supreme beauty. The thought of the East and the West converges in the fundamentals of love”. According to Prof. K.A. Nizami, “Sufism is an independent high standard thought”. On the contrary according to Abul Hussain Annuri, “Sufism is love with God and disdain towards the world”.

**Origin and Growth of Sufism.**

There is controversies amongst scholars regarding the origin of Sufism. Some of the views are as under:

The view of Yusuf Husain is that Sufism was born in the bosom of Islam and the foreign ideas and practices exercised no influence on it. Dr. A.L. Srivastava does not accept this view. According to him, Sufism was profoundly influenced by Hindu thought, beliefs and practices. The very concept of a loving God and the relations between God and soul as one of the beloved and the lover are peculiar to Hinduism and were adopted by the Sufis in India. The pacifism and non-violence which were imbibed by the Sufis in India were peculiar to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Some of the ascetic practices involving starvation and torturing of the body were borrowed from the Hindu and Buddhist practices. The view of Prof. K.A. Nizami is that the Chishtis adopted many Hindu customs and ceremonials in the initial stages of the development of their order in India. The practice of bowing before the Shaikh, presenting water to visitors, circulating a bowl and shaving the head of new entrants of the Sufi order had close resemblances to Hindu and Buddhist practices.

There is also a difference of opinion among scholars regarding the origin of the word ‘Sufi’. Some opinions are as follows:

One view is that the word ‘Sufi’ was derived from the word ‘Safa’ which means pure. Those saints among the Muslims who advocated a life of purity and renunciation were called ‘Sufi’. Another view is that the word ‘Sufi’ came out of the word “Sooph” whose meaning is wool. Those saints who put on woollen clothes after the death of Prophet Mohammad came to be known as Sufis. Rampujan Tiwari, in his work, ‘Sufism Sadhana Aur Saahitya’ writes that ‘Sufi’ comes from the Arabic word ‘Sufism’ which means wool. The saints leading a simple life wearing woollen clothes were called ‘Sufis’. Still another view is that the word ‘Sufi’ is taken from the Greek word ‘Sophia’ whose meaning is knowledge. Other view is that those persons were called ‘Sufis’ who took shelter outside the mosque constructed by Prophet Muhammad at Madina and got devoted to God. According to Prof. K.A. Nizami, “The main source of
Sufism is Holy Quran and life history of Prophet Mohammad himself”. But according to some scholars, “Sufism was influenced by the Christian concept of human service and activities of Hindu yogis and practice of devotional songs”.

Whatever be the truth, we cannot place the Sufi religion among the ancient religions of the world because it rose as an amalgam of many religions. The opinion of Tara Chand appears to be true when he says that “Sufism is like that sea where rivers of many regions have come together. Its main sources are Holy Quran and life history of Prophet Muhammad himself”.

**Growth of Sufism.**

Its development was aided by Christianity. It was influenced by Hindu and Buddhist principles. The Sufi saints were promoters of a liberal spirit. They entered India from Persia and other Central Asian countries. The saints were mostly pure in their character. It developed mostly in Persia. They were immersed in love of God. Even while supporting Islam, they opposed ritualism. They tested the teachings of Islam by their experience and arguments. Before India, Basra was their main residing place where Sufis from various countries came and settled and discussed about the mysteries of the world. Majority of the Sufis were great devotees and were unhappy at the moral decline in Islam after the establishment of the Islamic Empire. These Sufis had no concern with the worldly empire. Sufi Rabia (a lady) in the eighth century and Mansur Bin Halaz in the 10th century were among the initial Sufis, who placed much emphasis on the loving relationship between God and Man. Mansur Bin Halaz was the first Sufi who proclaimed himself as the Anal Haqq. Because of his concept of all-pervasiveness of God a struggle ensued between him and the conventionalist. The rumours of these conventionalist opponents led to Mansur being punished by hanging but in spite of the mystic ideas continued to hold roots among the people. Among the Sufi Saints Ibnul Arabi was the first one to establish the principle of Wahadat-ul-Wazud (God is everywhere and is reflected in everyone). Later on, by the twelfth century Sufis became divided into twelve orders. Each order had a leader or the Chief, who lived in Khankah along with his many disciples. In the Sufis’ thought great emphasis was placed on relations between the Guru or the Pir and the Shishya or Murid. Every Pir nominated his Wali or successor or who became the leader of the order after him and carried on the work of his order. The people at Khankah were divided into two sections-permanent or Mukim and itinerant or temporary. Whatever might have been the original form of Sufism outside India, it was transformed in its new setting in India.
What is Wahadat-ul-wajud?

Sufism sprang from the doctrine of Wahadut-ul-wajud or the Unity of Being. It means in plain language that God is the unity behind all plurality and the Reality behind all phenomenal appearance. It emphasises that “there is nothing in existence except God and union with God results from an intuitive contact with Him and a complete detachment from the world and all that is other than God”. This doctrine was propounded by Shaikh Muhi-ud-din Ibnul Arabi (1165-1240 A.D.) This doctrine became an acknowledged belief of the Muslim Sufis in India. In their journey to achieve union with God, the Sufis had to pass through ten stages of spiritual development in which there was excessive love and yearning for God. As a lover longs for the company of his beloved, similarly a Sufi was inspired to go as near God as possible and forget everything else. The Sufi voluntarily renounced materialistic pursuits and shunned not only government service but also any contact with the rulers and administrators. They imbibed a love for humanity and believed in poverty, vegetarian diet, pacifism and non-violence. The goal of the Sufi was emotional communion with God and service of humanity.

The Sufis in India were successful in converting a large number of Hindus to Islam. They placed before the Hindus, particularly those belonging to lower castes; the message of equality of Islam. They learned the language of the people and their religion along with their practices. They laid the foundation of the Urdu language which became the medium of intercourse between them and the Indian People. In order to win over the Hindus, the Sufi Muslims tried to look like Hindu Sadhus and adopted some of their practices and outward behaviour in order to remove suspicion from the minds of the Hindus. Sometimes they made use of trickery and the authority of the state to compel the Hindus to embrace Islam or to get them put to death by declaring them apostates if they declined to become Muslims.

Early Sufis.

One of the earliest Sufis was a woman saint, Rabia of Basra. Rabia said, “Love of God hath so absorbed me that neither love nor hate of any other thing remains in my heart”. The most celebrated role in the evolution of Sufism was played by Bayazid Bustami, a Persian Saint, who introduced the element of ecstasy and mystic doctrine of the immanence of God. Abdullah-al-Muhasibi was the first Sufi writer who used the Christian Gospel. He died in 857 A.D. An important contribution to the development of Sufism was made by Jussain Ibn Hansur Al-Hallaj in the 10th century A.D. He conceived the relation of God with man as the infusion of the divine into the human soul. He provided the basis for the development of the doctrine of Insan-i-Kamil. (The perfect Man) which was worked up by subsequent Sufi writers. Farid-ud-din Attar (1136-1230) wrote 114 books on Sufism. He also compiled biographies and sayings of Muslim Saints in Tadhkirat-al-Auliya which is considered to be a source book.
for the study of early Sufism. Jalal-ud-din Rumi left a vast store of spiritual knowledge in his ‘Masnavi’ which is considered to be the test for the study of early Sufism. According to Davis, “The Masnavi has all the beauty of the Psalms, the music of the hills, the colour and scent of the roses and the swaying of forests”. The view of Reuben Levy is that “The Masnavi is an immense work which contains in its six books all the doctrines, traditions and legends of Sufism, presented in a series of parables, allegories and pseudo-historical narratives”. According to Rumi, “Love is the greatest virtue which purifies the spiritual sentiments giving us the vision of the Supreme. His beloved is not confined within the Temple, Mosque or Church but resides in the pure heart”.

**Ghazali.**

Abu Hamid-al-Ghazali (1058-1111), a Philosopher and a Theologian, provided a real metaphysical basis to Sufism. He tried to reconcile it with orthodox Islam. He put emphasis on immediate experience, ecstasy and inward transformation without which no salvation is possible. Another important authority on Sufism was Abdul Karim al Jili who wrote a treatise named ‘Insan-al-Kamal’. He also wrote a commentary on ‘Futuhat-al-Makhiyah’. He believed that man attains spiritual perfection by passing through 4 stages. According to him, all faiths were thoughts about one Reality. He was profoundly influenced by Hindu Vedanta.

**Data Ganj Baksh.**

After the Ghazanavid conquest of the Punjab, a large number of Sufi Saints appeared in India. Shaikh Ismail of Lahore was the first among them. He was followed by Shaikh Ali bin Usman al Hujwairi, better known as Data Ganj Baksh, who died after 1088. His tomb at Lahore is a popular shrine in Punjab. He was the author or several works and he might be described as the founder of the Sufi Cult in India which gained much popularity among the Muslim masses and profoundly influenced their entire moral and religious outlook. He was the author of the celebrated manual on Sufism entitled Kashful Mahjub. Another saint of this period was Sayyid Ahmed Sultan Sakhi Sarwar, popularly known as Lakhdata. He died at Shahkot near Multan in 1080.

The period from 1200 to 1500 A.D. is considered as the period of permeation of Sufi thought in India. During that period, a number of new sects and movements were started which formed a midway between Hinduism and Islam. Abul Fazl mentions “14 Orders or Silsilahs of the Sufis in India. Of those Orders, the Chishti, the Suhrawardi, the Naqshbandi, the Qadiri, the Qalandaria and the Shusttari Orders were important. The Chishtis established themselves at Ajmer and some other towns of Rajasthan and in some parts of the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Deccan. The Suhrawardi Order was confined to Sind, Multan and the Punjab. Some saints of this Order also settled in Delhi and Avadh”.

Chishti Order.

The Chishti Order was founded by Khwaja Abdul Chishti in Heart. It was brought to India by Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti (1141-1236) who was the greatest figure in the history of Sufism in India. He arrived at Lahore in 1161 A.D. and settled at Ajmer about 1206. He was the founder of the Chishti Order in India. He worked among the low caste people and spent his life in the service of the helpless and the downtrodden. His view was that the greatest form of devotion to God consisted in service of humanity. His attitude towards God and people won him great popularity and even today his tomb at Ajmer attracts every year lacs of pilgrims. The Khwaja had many disciples and followers. Two of the most important among them were Shaikh Hamid-ud-din and Shaikh Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Shaiksh Bakhtiyar Kaki came to Delhi during the Reign of Iltutmish. The Sultan requested him to stay near his palace but Kaki declined the offer and stayed in a Khanqah outside the city. He also declined the post of Shaikh-ul-Islam. Although he took no interest in political activities, his immense political prestige made his Khanqah a meeting place for Muslims from all walks of life. He died on 15 November 1233.

Shaikh Farid-ud-din Masud Ganj-i-Shaker (1175-1265) was a disciple of Kaki. He worked in Hansi and Ajodhan. His religious activities were responsible for raising the Chishti Order to the status of an All-India Organization. He trained a large number of disciples and established many Khanqahs. He was so popular that he was almost always surrounded by visitors and disciples. He was one of most respected Sufis in India. He disliked popularity and preferred solitude. He believed that one should keep away from kings and nobles because a Darvesh who makes friends with them ultimately comes to grief. He put emphasis on the concentration of heart and abstaining from prohibited means of livelihood. Sultan Balban was devoted to Baba Farid. Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya (1238 – 1335) came to Delhi in 1258 A.D. and became a disciple of Baba Farid. He continued his spiritual activities at Delhi for nearly 60 years. Although he saw the Reigns of seven Sultans, he did not visit any Royal Durbar. He considered it below his dignity to pay a visit to a Sultan. He refused to grant an interview to Sultan Ala-ud-din Khalji. He avoided the company of the Sultans in order to avoid a conflict with the orthodox Ulama, who dominated the courts of Sultans. He was a man of literary outlook and took keen interest in music. Hated by the orthodox Ulama, he was loved by the common people. One of this principles was love of humanity. To quote him, “O Muslims! I swear by God that He holds dear those who love Him for the sake of God. This is the only way to love and adore God”. Auliya was generally known at Mahbub-i-llahi (the beloved of God). He represented a great spiritual force in the history of Muslim India. His disciples were spread all over the country. His personality and the breadth of his religious outlook assured the popularity of the Chishti Order in India. He inspired men with the love of God and helped them to get rid of their attachment to worldly affairs. Auliya did not keep anything to himself. On many occasions, he had to live without food. On those occasions, he used to say, “I am a guest of God”.
The relations of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq with Nizamuddin Auliya were far from cordial. His son, Muhammad Tughlaq, became a critic not only of some customs and practices of the Sufis, but also of their attitude of isolation from the state. His dislike fell primarily upon the Chishtis. According to the Siyar-ul-Auliya, “Muhammad Tughlaq declared that religion and state are twins”. Religion must be mobilised in support of the state. The view of Barani is that “Muhammad Tughlaq wanted to combine priesthood with kingship. He wanted the Sufis to make their talent available to the state in the execution of its policy”. Muhammad Tughlaq appointed Shaikh Nasiruddin, the successor of Nizamuddin Auliya, “as his servant and assigned to him the duty of taking off his clothes”. That was not enough. In order to humiliate Nasiruddin further; Muhammad Tughlaq sent him his meals in a golden plate. If the saint took his meals in the golden plate, he was to be guilty of violating the Shariat. If he did not take his meals in the golden plate, he was to expose himself to punishment for the violation of the order of Muhammad Tughlaq. However, the purpose of Muhammad Tughlaq was defeated because Nasiruddin took some gravy on his palm and then took the food. One of the results of the hostility of Muhammad Tughlaq towards the Chishties was that their Khanqahs, which were the centres of their contact with the masses, were disorganised. Even their central organization was considerably weakened by the transfer of his capital by Muhammad Tughlaq from Delhi to Daultabad. The result was that their Khalifahs and zealous preachers were scattered. The hostile treatment towards the Sufis turned the tide in favour of the Ulama and the Shariat. They gained ground during the reign of Firuz Shah Tughlaq. Firuz Tughlaq insisted on the strict observance of the Shariat and that also weakened the influence of the Sufis. In the Firuzi Madras set up by Firuz Shah Tughlaq, Tafsir, Fiqh and Hadis were the principal subjects of study. The growing emphasis on orthodoxy gradually reduced religion into a dead formality and exaggerated the value of empty rituals. From the second half of the 14th century to the first half of the 16th century, Islam remained more or less a religion of ceremonies. Blind adherence to Pirs and Mullahs, visit to tombs etc. became normal religious conventions in Muslim Society. Guru Nanak warned the Muslims against the acceptance of false religious teachers in these words:

(1) ‘Shaikhs, Disciples and Pirs weep
For fear of suffering at the last moment’.
(2) ‘Make your mosque the abode of kindness,
In it spread the prayer-management of faith,
And as you read the Koran, think of what
Is just and what is lawful.
Let modesty be your circumcision-
Your pledge to God,
Gentle acts the fast of Ramadan.
Thus will you be a good Musalman.
Let righteous conduct be your Kaaba
And truth your spiritual guide’.
The result of this spiritual crisis was that Sufism in the Punjab, which was its homeland is India lost to a large extent its original spiritual and poetic fervour. Nizamuddin Auliya was the last great Chishti Saint.

An important Chishti centre was established at Nagaur by Shaikh Hamid-ud-din Nagauri (1192-1274). He lived at Nagaur like an ordinary Rajasthani cultivator. He kept himself completely aloof from those in political power. He was an authority on Ghazali’s works. He was a strict vegetarian. He adopted the local language called Hindawi as his own. The Hindawi verses ascribed to him and his successors are the best examples of early Hindawi translations of Persian Mystical Poetry. Shaikh Nasir-ud-din Muhmud, popularly known as Chiragh of Delhi, was a great Sufi of the Chishti Order. He decided to become a mystic at the age of 25 and prepared himself for that kind of life. He would spend practically the whole day reading; praying and meditating in a mausoleum outside his hometown. He led this kind of life for years. At the age of 45, he went to see Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya at Delhi and became his disciple. He lived up to the high standard prescribed by his teacher and cultivated poverty and resignation. He avoided kings and their courts. He was appointed his successor by Nizam-ud-din Auliya and he continued his tradition. He avoided going to court and came into conflict with Qutb-ud-din Mubarak (1316-1320) who wanted him to come for his prayers in Masjid Miri. He declined to go there and prayed in a monsque near by. He was saved from trouble on account of the death of Mubarak. He had also some trouble during the Reign of Muhammad Tughlaq. He died in 1336. He was the last great saint of the Chishti Order who enjoyed All-India reputation.

In Bengal, the Chishti Order was introduced by Siraj-ud-din Akhl Siraj who lived in Gaur and died in 1357 A.D. Nur Kutb-i-Alam was one of his successors who died in 1410. He established Khanqahs in Pandua. Shaikh Ala-ud-din Ali Ahmad Sabir was a disciple of Baba Farid. He died in 1291. His two immediate successors lived at Panipat. Ahmad bin Abdul Haq died in 1434 A.D. He established his Khanqah at Rauduli, about 50 miles east of Lucknow. Shaikh Abdul Quddus (1455-1536) established his Khanqah at Gangoh in the Saharanpur district of Western Uttar Pradesh. Saiyid Muhammad Gesu Daraz (1320-1422) made Gulbarga, the first capital of the Brahmani Kingdom, as the centre of his activities. A number of other Chishti saints who were compelled by Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq to leave Delhi for Daultabad helped in spreading Sufism in the Deccan. During the Mughal period, the Chishti School of Sufis lost ground as it did not produce any outstanding saint like Khwaja Muin-ud-din, Shaikh Farid and Nizam-ud-din Auliya who could put vigour in their teachings. Its advocacy of the pantheistic form of Sufism offended the puritan element in Muslim Society. Its aloofness from politics and administration was out of tune with the prevailing political and social conditions in India at that time.
Shaikh Salim at Fatehpur Sikri was a contemporary of Akbar. It is said that Prince Jahangir was born due to the blessings of Shaikh Salim. Salim continued the saintly traditions of his order and acquired great fame. He died in the life-time of Akbar and was buried in the enclosure of the famous Jami Mosque of Fatehpur Sikri. A beautiful and attractive mausoleum was erected over his grave. His sons and grandsons rose in the employment of the state under Akbar and his successors. Jahangir banished Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Faruqi Thaneswari, an eminent Chishti Saint, for blessing his rebellious son Khusro. In the reign of Shah Jahan, the Chishtis again became prominent. The Chishtis claimed that they were the loyal supporters of the King and the Empire. In the Reign of Aurangzeb, the Chishti group belonging to Shah Kalimullah Jaharabadi School advocated coexistence with the Hindus, Shias and even with militant Sunni groups.

As regards the lives of the Chishti Saints, they lived simple and pure lives. They did not possess property which was considered to be a big hindrance in the development of their personality. With the exception of Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya, all other Chishti Saints lived married lives and had children. They did not accept charity from the state and lived on the presents given to them by their disciples. They were so much absorbed in contemplation that they had no time to look after their children. The result was that their children possessed worldly wisdom and not spiritual integrity. The Chishti Sufis cultivated fasting in order to weaken and control their basic desires. Their clothes were scanty and usually they wrapped themselves in a patched Dotahi. They liked to put on tattered clothes. The married life of most of the Sufis of the Chishti Order was happy. The Chishti Sufis asked their disciples to lead a life of poverty and asceticism. They depended on the charity of ordinary people. They aroused public interest by their practice of Pas-i-Anfas (control of breath), meditation, Chilla (40 days of hard ascetic exercises in a cell or some lonely place) and Chilla-i-Makus (40 days of ascetic exercise performed with the head of the ground and the legislatures tied to the roof or a branch of a tree). Their most popular practice was Sama (the recital of holy songs) which was intended to arouse a state of ecstasy in their audience. They spent a lot of their time in meditation.

**Suhrawardi Order.**

The Suhrawardi Order was founded by Shaikh Shihab-ud-din Suhrawardi (1145-1234). He sent disciples to India who settled down in North-Western India. One of them was Shaikh Baha-ud-din Zakariya Suhrawardi (1182-1263) who was the founder of the Suhrawardi Order in India. He set up a Khanqah at Multan where he worked for almost half a century. He did not believe in poverty and torturing the body. He led a balanced and comfortable life. He faithfully followed the rules of Islam. He wanted the external forms of Islam to be faithfully followed and rejected the Hindu practice of bowing before the Shaikh which was followed by the Chishtis. He took active interest in
political affairs and freely mixed with rulers and administrators. He openly took
the side of Iltutmish in his struggle against Qubacha and got the title of
Shaikh-ul-Islam (Leader of Islam). He avoided the company of ordinary men and
associated only with the religious and political elite. A large number of rich
people became his followers. He accepted lands and gifts from kings and
nobles. He was probably the richest saint of Medieval India.

After his death, the Suhrawardi Order was split up into two branches
viz., one at Multan and the other at Uchch in Sind. His son Badruddin Arif
became the head of the Multan branch and his disciple Jalal-ud-din Surkh
Bukhari became the Head of the Uchch branch. Badruddin Arif looked after
the Multan branch for about 23 years. He differed from his father in the matter of
accumulation of wealth which he considered as a hurdle in the development of
spiritual personality. He gave away in charity seven lacs of tankas which he ad
inherited from his father. He led a very simple life. Jalal-ud-din Surkh spread
the Suhrawardi Order in Uchch. He converted a large number of Hindus to
Islam. Shaikh Jalal-ud-din Tabrezi established a Khanqah and a Langar (centre
for the distribution of free meals) first at Laknauti and then at Devatalla a near
Pandua in Bengal. He is said to have converted a large number of Bengalis to
Islam.

The Punjab, Sind and Bengal became three important centres of
Suhrawardi activity. It appears that Suhrawardis were keen to convert Hindus
to Islam and they were helped in their work by their affluence and connections
with those in power. Suhrawardis such as Makhdum Jahaniyan (1308-84) and
his brother Raju Qattal were militant evangelists.

**Differences between Chishti and Suhrawardi Orders.**

There was a fundamental difference between the Chishti and
Suhrawardi Orders on many points. The Chishti Order considered the
possession of wealth as a great hindrance to the spiritual progress of an
individual. All Chishti Saints, from Khwaja Muin-ud-din to Nizam-ud-din
Auliya, led an indigent life. It is said of Nizamuddin Auliya that there were many
occasions in his life when he had nothing to eat. He fasted in order to control
his desires. The Chishtis put on very simple clothes. The clothes of many Chishti
Sants were torn and they took pride in it. They believed that they must have
control over their desires. They put all the emphasis on pious thoughts and
color. Baba Farid was anxious to throw away “the bundle of worldliness”. It
is said of him that after getting up very early in the morning, he performed his
Namaz and then went into Samadhi. Even at night after the Namaz he spent the
rest of the time in contemplation of God. The belief of the Chishtis was that they
must give up their pride in order to meet God. The Chishtis were very liberal in
their views. They believed in love towards all mankind. They gave the highest
place to service of humanity. They considered it their duty to serve the poor and
the distressed. They did not believe in personal property and did not look after
the welfare of their children. On the other hand, Baha-ud-din Zakariya was a wealthy man. His view was that wealth was not harmful for a man who knew its right use. The Saints of the Suhrawardi Order led comfortable lives. They made ample provision for their families. They even employed teachers on attractive salaries for the education of their sons. They believed that there was no harm “in possessing and dispensing of wealth if the heart was detached”. However, some of the Suhrawardis such as Shaikh Sadr-ud-din despised wealth which, according to him, was a source of distraction from the spiritual path. He gave his share in patrimony amounting to Rs. 7 lacs of Tankas in charity.

The two Orders differed from each other in their attitude towards the state. The Chishtis kept aloof from the affairs of the state and avoided contact with the rulers. Baba Farid used to say that “every Darvesh who makes friends with kings and nobles will end badly”. Nizamuddin Auliya never visited the rulers and never dabbled in politics. M.W. Mirza writes, “While monarchs came and went and dynasties rose and fell, while ambitious princes fought and contested, conspired and planned and while courtiers flattered and betrayed, the saint stuck to the duty which he had imposed upon himself and carried on his work of spiritual salvation calmly and quietly in his sequestrated monastery at Ghyaspur. On the other hand, the view of Baha-ud-din Zakariya was that active participation in state affairs was no hindrance to spiritual progress. He himself accepted the office of Shaikh-ul-Islam under Iltutmish and Ruknuddin followed his example in the reign of Ala-ud-din Khalji. The Suhrawardis believed that “they could perform their functions more effectively if they cultivated relations with the political authority. They actively associated with the Government and accepted the posts of Shaikh-ul-Islam and Sadr-i-Wilayat. They exhorted their followers to be nearer the kings who “are the chosen of God, the Almighty. Under no conditions showing disrespect to them or disobeying their orders is permitted or proper in Shariat”. Shaikh Ruknuddin was of the view that it was essential for a Shaikh to have money, learning or scholarship besides spiritual attainments to satisfy all sorts of people who visited him. The contact of the Suhrawardis with the court and camp kept them aloof from the masses. Their spiritual ministration was confined to the selected few. The Chishti kept the doors of their Khanqahs (monasteries) open to the masses. All were welcome. The Suhrawardis provided separate accommodation to their selected followers in their Khanqahs. They neglected the people in general and paid special attention to their rich followers. They had fixed hours for meeting them.

There were differences also in respect of religious practices. Music was an integral element among the Chishti saints but the same was rejected by the Suhrawardis. The Chishtis allowed their disciples to practise Sijda (prostration) before their Pirs, but the Suhrawardis forbade it. The Suhrawardis were more conservative because they realised that orthodoxy was the indispensable instrument of unity for the numerically weak Muslim community in India. In a country with an overwhelming majority of non-Muslims, Sufism had to make
such adjustments with the political and social needs of the Muslim state and the Muslim Society as it was not called upon to make in a Muslim country. The view of the Suhrawardis was similar to that of the orthodox Ulama who upheld rigid Sunni ideas, but the Chishtis protested against the worldly life of the Ulama who used their learning and religious influence for accumulating wealth and participating in political power and whose prayers, fasts and pilgrimages meant little more than mechanical conformity with conventional rituals. This ideological conflict between the two Sufi Orders did not assume serious proportions because both of them accepted the orthodox theology and the Shariat for all external practices even though their internal spiritual strivings might be regulated by mystic conceptions and discipline.

The difference in the attitude of these two Orders towards the non-Muslims went a long way in determining the range and sphere of their influence. The Chishtis believed in the “control of emotional life as a prerequisite to the control of external behaviour. The Suhrawardis tackled the problem from the other end and emphasized the necessity of regulating actions prior to the control of emotions. This damped the prospect of Suhrawardi expansion in non-Muslim environment. It worked well in Muslim surroundings and served the spiritual needs of the Muslim community, but when it came to non-Muslim lands, its progress stopped”.

**Firdausia Order.**

The Firdausia Order was a branch of the Suhrawardi order and its activities were confined to Bihar. It was popularized by Shaikh Harf-ud-din Yahya who was a disciple of Khwaja Nizam-ud-din Firdausi. He tried to bring about moderation in Islamic law. He also tried to reconcile the “Unity of Being” with the principles of Islam. His view was that the union with God is not like the union of a body, or of a substance with a substance, or of an accident with an accident. It is an intuitive contact and a detachment from the world and all that is other than God. He was not only a practical guide but also a great writer. Apart from being the author of Maktubat tubat and Malfuzat, he compiled many books for the guidance of his devotees. He put great emphasis on the service of humanity as a part of his mystic discipline. He wanted his followers to serve the needy by pen, tongue, wealth and position. The nearest way to reach God was to help the needy and offer a helping hand to the downtrodden. According to him, the real function of a ruler is to feed the people well, to clothe the naked, to rehabilitate the desolate hearts of men and to help the needy.
Qadiri Order.

The Qadiri Order was founded by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166) of Baghdad. This Order reached India in the 15th century A.D. It was popularized in India by Shah Niamatullah Makhdum Jilani. Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis of Delhi (1551-1642) had Qadiri preceptors. Miyan Mir (1550-1635) advocated a broad and humane outlook on life. He asked both Jahangir and Shah Jahan to be considerate to all groups of their subjects. According to him, distinctions between believers and Kafirs and heaven and hell were frivolous. True prayer was devoted obedience to the will of God. His disciple Mulla Shah was both a mystic and a poet. He defined a believer as one who could reach God and see Him and a Kafir as one who failed to do so. Mulla Shah was the preceptor of Dara Shikoh, son of Shah Jahan. The followers of this order were opposed to music and singing. They wore green turbans. Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan, was a follower of this Order. To begin with, this Order was confined to Uchch in Sind but later on it spread to Agrahara and other places.

Nakshabandi Order.

This Order was founded in India by the followers of Khwaja Pir Muhammad. It was popularized in India by Khwaja Baqi Billah (1563-1603) who came to Delhi from Kabul in the last years of the Reign of Akbar. Of all the Sufi Orders, it was nearest to orthodoxy and it tried to counteract the liberal religious policies of Akbar who was considered by them as a heretic. The death of Abul Fazl gave Baqi Billah an opportunity and he was able to bring under his influence some powerful nobles such as Akbar’s foster brother, Mirza Aziz Koka, Shaikh Farid, the Bakshi, Qilich Khan, Governor of Lahore and even Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan.

The Nakshabandi Order reached its climax under the leadership of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624). He was the most distinguished disciple of Baqi Billah. He was opposed both to the Hindus and the Shias. His first pamphlet ‘Radd-i-Rawafid’ was written against the Shia religion. He criticised the pantheistic philosophy of the Sufis and propagated his own theory of the “unity of the phenomena”. He was strongly in favour of following the Shariat in practice and spirit. He did not agree with the Chishtis that the saints should keep aloof from the court and the king. He wanted to utilize them for the propagation of Islam. To quote Sirhindi, “The monarch is to the world as the heart is to the body. If the heart remains pure, so does the body and vice versa. The purity or impurity of the State depends upon its ruler. You are aware of what the Muslims have suffered during the previous reign. In former periods of decadence the plight of Muslims had not exceeded the point that they followed their religion, while unbelievers followed their own, but in the previous (Akbar’s
reign) the infidel forced pagan practices on the Muslim land and the Muslims were prevented from observing their religious commandments”. For him, Islam and Kufi (Hinduism) were the antithesis of each other and no reconciliation was possible between them. His views led to bitter conflict between his followers, Khawja Masum Saifuddin and those who believed in the pantheistic doctrine of Wahadat-ul-Wajud such as Miyan Mir of Lahore, Mullah Shah of Kashmir and Sarmad of Delhi and even Dara Shikoh who wrote Majority natural-ul-Bahrain to emphasize the basic unity of Muslim and Hindu religious thought. The views of Sirhindi gave a setback to the process of Hindu-Muslim reconciliation particularly on a spiritual level. He alienated not only the Hindus but also the Shias. The philosophy of Sirhindi greatly influenced Aurangzeb in whose reign it became an instrument for the propagation of religion and persecution of the non-Muslims. Dara Shikoh himself was executed on the charge of apostasy. About Sirhindi, Aziz Ahmad writes, “He was the pioneer of what modern Islam is today in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent – isolationist, self-confident, conservative, deeply conscious of the need of a reformation but distrustful of innovations, accepting speculation in theory but dreading in practice and insular in its contact with other civilizations”.

Another Saint of the Nakshabandi Order was Shah Walliullah (1702-1762). His fame rests on the fact that he successfully reconciled the two doctrines of Wahadat-ul-Wajud and Wahadat-ush-Shuhud. He believed that there was no fundamental difference between the two theories. According to him, real existence belongs to God alone and He alone is an actual independent being. God is the only self-subsisting, external and necessary being and all else is created and has a contingent existence. Shah Walliullah was a scholar of repute and he wrote a number of books on mysticism. He possessed a powerful intellect which secured recognition from the intellectuals of the age. Khwaja Mir Dard was an important mystic of the Nakshabandi Order. He was a notable poet of Persian and Urdu. He was the author of a number of books on mysticism.

The Shattari Order.

It during the Lodi Dynasty that Shah Abdullah brought the Shattari Order to India. This Order produced a number of saints and Muhammad Ghauth (1485-1562) of Gwalior was the most important. He was a disciple of Haji Hamid Husur. He was the author of two well-known books ‘Jawahir-i-Khamsah’ and ‘Khalid-i-Makhzin’. These books deal with Sufi doctrines and practices. His other book ‘Bahr-al-Hayat’ or Ocean of Life describes the practices of the Yogis. He respected all religions. As a matter of fact; he stood up even when he received the non-Muslims. Tan Sen, the great musician, and Humayun seem to have been attracted towards this Order. The saints of this Order tried to bring the Hindus and Muslims nearer by putting emphasis on
the similarity of spiritual thoughts and practices. Shaikh Qadiri learnt Sanskrit to understand the scriptures of the Hindus. Wajih-al-Din Gujarati and Shah Pir of Meerut were other prominent saints of that Order. The view of the Shattaris was that the Shaikh or the Pir was in direct communication with all the saints, prophets and even God. It was not necessary for a Shattari to undergo the rigours of self-discipline. The very membership of the Order absolved him of that penance. The Sufis of this Order led a spiritual life in comfortable worldly surroundings. This Order did not make much headway and the number of its followers was not large.

In addition to the above-named Sufi Orders, there were other Orders which existed in India and they included Madariya or Tabaqatiya, Gurzmar, Jalaliyamusa, Sohagiya and the Wahabi but those Orders had very little influence on the people.

Apart from the Sufis, there was a class of Muslim Ascetics known as Qalandars who were allied with the Chishti and Suhrawardi Orders. They were wandering Derveshes living in seclusion, renunciation and poverty. They did not organise religious orders or establish spiritual centres. They were engrossed in a state of Sukr (mystic intoxication). They “confined their religious activities to the obligatory part of Islamic religious observances only and did not pay any heed to the formalities of social life and material needs. They did not conform fully to the injunctions of the Shariat and were known as Be-Shara. Some of them demonstrated their spiritual power through magical and occult practices.

Khanqah.

The Khanqah was the centre of the activity of the Muslim Sufis. A Chishti Khanqah or Dargah usually consisted of a long hall which was known as Jamaat Khanqah. Its roof was supported by a number of pillars. At the foot of each of these pillars was accommodated a Murid or a disciple with all his belongings. A senior person was appointed to look after the management of a Khanqah. Each Khanqah had an open kitchen or Langar. In the case of Chishti Khanqah, there was not enough food for all those who visited it and they shared whatever was available. All of them helped in the cooking and serving of food. The rest of the time was spent by the disciples either in prayer or in the service of the Shaikh who was the central figure in the Khanqah. In addition to prayers in congregation and meditation, the Shaikh received hundreds of visitors. Those included Derveshes, nobles, scholars, politicians and soldiers who came to him with all kinds of their problems, whether spiritual or material. They found spiritual solace in him. In some cases, a Chishti saint was obliged to request the Sultan to redress the grievances of those who came to him.
The pattern of a Suhrawardis Khanqah was different from a Chishti Khanqah. As the Shaikhs of the Suhrawardi Order freely mixed with the Sultan and nobles and even accepted jobs and jagirs, they were able to collect a lot of money. The result was that there was a regular income from jagirs to support the Khanqahs of the Suhrawardi Order. Unlike the Chishtis, the Suhrawardis did not distribute the money among the needy as and when the same was received. They kept it with great care and used it sparingly. Therefore, there was a lot for those who visited the Suhrawardi Khanqahs. Moreover, a Suhrawardi Khanqah was not open to all. Only a few selected persons were allowed to seek the blessings of the Shaikh. The Suhrawardi Khanqahs were splendid and much better furnished than those of the Chishtis. They were meant for the aristocrats and not for the common people. The atmosphere was congenial for prayers and meditation.

The religious and political ideas of Aurangzeb were opposed to mysticism and liberalism generally associated with the Sufis. Moreover, Sufism was affected by its involvement in politics and administration which fostered worldly greed. Saintly preachers were replaced by greedy and corrupt courtiers. Sufi saints began to accumulate more and more wealth. The result was that Sufism died out as an active religious force in India.

**Impact of Sufism in India.**

There is a difference of opinion among scholars regarding the impact of Sufism on India. The view of Dr. A.L. Srivastava is that “Although the Sufi Movement might have in the long run exerted some influence on the contemporary Hindu religious practices, the Hindus in general kept themselves aloof from the Muslim Sufi Saints for a pretty long time. Some Hindus of the lower classes might have come into contact with the Sufis, but the bulk of them did not associate with them. It was from the time of Akbar that the Hindus came into close contact with them and with the passage of time; a large number of Hindu intellectuals not only associated themselves with Muslim Sufis, but also adopted Sufi thought, behaviour and practices. The view of Prof. A.C. Banerjee is that “There is little evidence in support of the assumption that the Sufis secured mass conversion to Islam in the 13th century and the process came to a dead stop in latter centuries because the liberalism of the Sufis was overshadowed by the ascendancy of the Ulama”. Prof A.C. Banerjee points out that “the controversy between the champions of Wahadut-ul-Wajud and Wahadat-ush-Shuhud was beyond the comprehension of the low-caste Hindus to whom the appeal of the Sufis was particularly addressed. It is true that many of them were impressed by the catholicity observed in the Khanqahs of Chishtis and also the asceticism of the Sufi saints but that admiration did not result in mass conversion. The philosophical tenets of the Sufis were in the Persian language which was not understood by the illiterate Hindus masses. The Hindus who were converted to Islam found that they were not accepted as social equals by the Muslims of foreign descent. However, in Bengal some aggressive Piris and Mullahs, rather than Sufis, converted low caste Hindus to Islam on a large scale.
The view of Dr. R.C. Majumdar is that “The historical importance of Sufism in Medieval India is considerably limited by the fact that the number of Indians directly affected by it was not very large. The number dwindled very appreciably in course of time and Hinduism did not show visible signs of being seriously affected. Both Hinduism and Islam pursued their even tenor, resembling the two banks of a river, separated by the stream that flowed between them. Attempts were made to build a bridge connecting the two but they ended in failure. Even if there was any temporary bridge, it collapsed in no time”. The view of Yusuf Husain is that “The Sufis in India attached great importance to the teachings of the Koran. They preached inward light as against the dogmatic formalism of the ecclesiastics and the legists. Their exalted idealism brought spiritual solace and comfort to those whose hearts were tossed on the sea of uncertainty and doubt”.

It cannot be denied that the Sufis were responsible for the spread of Muslim culture among the masses in various parts of India. The concept of equality and brotherhood of men preached by the Sufis attracted the lower classes of the Hindus who were not allowed to read the scriptures or enter the temples. There was no discrimination between the high and the low in the Khanqahs of the Chishtis. All worked together and dined and slept together. The Chishti saints showed a spirit of toleration towards all religions and creeds. They put emphasis on unity and similarity and not differences among the various religions. Amir Khusrau writes, “Though Hindu is not faithful like me, he often believes in the same God as I do”. This broad and cosmopolitan outlook helped in breaking the spirit of mistrust and isolation which honeycombed relations between the various cultural groups of India and paved the way of rapprochement at all levels, social and ideological. The Sufi saints were not interested in the theoretical aspect of Hindu philosophy and thought but were more concerned with the actual practices and psychological and emotional content of Hindu religion. The common medium of expression or dialogue was important for communication. That led to the use of Hindu words and ultimately the birth of Urdu as a separate language. The Sufis put emphasis on the unity of God and superiority of the path of devotion over rituals and ceremonial pilgrimages and fasts. That affected the minds of those Indians who became the pioneers of the Bhakti Movement. The Sufis set a high standard of morality and discipline before the public. They raised their voices against all vices such as drinking, gambling, and slavery. They were instrumental in “maintaining the social equilibrium of the Medieval society”. The Sufi Saints preached the gospel of brotherhood of man. The Sufis borrowed a lot from Indian environment. Baba Farid made his contribution to Punjab literature. The writings of Kutuban, Manjhan, Jayasi and Noor Muhammad are in Avadhi language.
Some of the impacts of Sufism are as under:-

1. **Religious Impact:** Majority of initials Sufi Saints were liberal in their attitude. Their efforts led to lessening of religious fanaticism in India. Many Hindus were followers of Sufi saints and often visited their Khanqah. After the death of many Sufi saints their devoted followers got their Samadhis constructed which later developed into places of pilgrimage. These places are not only important as places of pilgrimage but also architecturally e.g. the Dargah of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer and Tomb of Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi have a special place in architecture. Sufi saints believed in unity of God which led to removal of mutual differences among the people.

2. **Political Impact:** Many Sufi saints influenced politics as well. The liberal Sufi saints encouraged the Delhi Sultans to follow a liberal religious policy. Their influence was most visible during Akbar’s time. In the words of Prof. Rashid “the Sufis made a notable contribution towards arising the feeling of national unity”.

3. **Social Impact:** Sufi saints criticized social evils and instructed their followers to serve the poor, disabled orphans and widows in the society. Sufi saints asked their followers to cultivate good behaviour and liberal attitude. They tried to reform the moral character and attitude of the people. They got big grants from the states, which they spent for the poor and asked their devotees and followers also to give grants liberally. These efforts promoted a spirit of grant, and sacrifice in the society. Many Delhi Sultans opened orphanages; women service centres etc. at the instance of the Sufi saints. Sufi saints led to a decrease the social evils like communalism and casteism. Human and moral qualities were promoted in people.

4. **Cultural Impact:** Alongwith the propaganda of Sufism many Dargahs were constructed which led to progress in architectural sphere. As has been mentioned earlier, tomb of Nizamuddin Aulia and Dargah of Nizamuddin Chishti are important architectural contributions. Sufi saints popularized music and songs. Many Sufi saints composed literary works in many languages. Among the disciples of Nizamuddin Aulia main were Amir Khusro and Amir Hassan Dehlvi. Khusro composed many poetic works including historical romances. He experimented with many political styles and invented a new Persian style which came to be called ‘Sabak-i-Hindi’ or the Indian style. Sufi saints like Malik Muhammad Jayasi of Jaunpur wrote his work in Hindi.

**Main Principles of Sufism:**

1. **Oneness of God:** As Sufism was quite inclined towards Islam, it also believes in oneness of God. They called him Allah or Rahim. But along with the teachings of Prophet Mohammad, they also gave importance to the teachings of their own Guru or Pir. According to Sufi Saints, God is above ‘wishes’, above ‘sight’, above ‘extent’ and beyond ‘diversities’
2. **Atma**: Sufi saints consider the Atma as God. The Atma consists of five external and five internal elements. They hold Atma to be imprisoned in the body that is why Sufi saints welcome death but they agree that without the mercy of the Lord, God and Atma cannot unite.

3. **World**: According to Sufi saints, God created this world. It is not illusionary. It is mirror in which God is reflected.

4. **Human Beings**: According to Sufi saints, man is supreme amongst all beings; all living beings try to imitate man.

5. **Quran and Mysticism**: According to Sufi saints, Quran is a great work but great importance should be attached to its meaning rather than mere words. According to Sufi mysticism, one should not fear the ‘Qahar’ of Allah. God is kind so man should become one and identical with him.

6. **Importance of the ‘Pir’**: Just like the devotee saints, the Sufis also accepted the importance of the ‘Pir’. Sufi devotee considers him his Pir who is a full being. According to them, nothing can be achieved in this world without the grace of the ‘Pir’. According to the Chand, Prophet Muhammad taught men to surrender before ‘Allah’ and Sufism taught surrender before Murshid or Pir or Guru.

7. **Attainment of Goal**: The ultimate goal of Sufism is attaining identity with Allah. Many ways lead to this goal: (i) Zikr or remembering Allah loudly but devotedly. Sufis considered the stage of identity with God as ‘Fana’. In this condition a devotee merges his identity with the Lord detaching himself from worldly objects. The stage of ‘Fana’ can be achieved only when the feeling of ‘Aham’ or self is annihilated.

8. **Stress on Devotion**: Sufis hope to attend God through love and devotion which leads to disclosing of the secret of Lord and attaining nearness with him. Sufis consider the Lord to be the beloved and devotee to be ‘Mashook’ or lover, who is eager to meet his Lord. Through his devotion he enjoys boundless beauty because where there is no love, there is no beauty. Therefore devoted service is the only way to feel God. Through devotion and feeling of love, according to Sufis, is more important than ‘Roza’, and ‘Namaz’. Because of this very principle and thought the attitude of the Sufis became liberal and many non-Muslims were attracted towards the Sufism. This is the view of scholars.
CHAPTER-V

CASTE IN ORGANISED FORM

EARLY REBELLIONS

The early medieval socio-economic formation was marked by grossly unequal rights over distribution of land and agricultural produce. Many landlords were not directly engaged in cultivation but lived on rent, mainly in kind, collected from the cultivators. They also exploited the labour of the peasants for various purposes including constructions and transport work. Since trade and handicrafts were languishing and the availability of cash was limited in day-to-day transactions, it was difficult for the peasants to go to the market to seek relief. All this created conditions for popular protest. Examples of popular revolts against oppressive rulers appear in the Buddhist Jataka stories which belong to the period 300-200 BC. According to B.C. Sen, ‘whenever a story is told of a popular victory over royal absolutism or acts disapproved by the people, it is shown to be the result of an amalgamation of the brahmanas, the kshatriyas and the vaisyas. The voice exercised by these communities was made effective by the joint use of physical forces’. But the king was supposed to represent the kshatriyas, and it seems that in several cases the brahmanas led the revolt. In one instance, both the town and the country folk joined in the revolt, and the king was beaten to death along with his priest.

We have discussed the nature of conflict suggested by the description of the Kali age. Land grants were made on a large scale when it was found difficult to collect taxes and tributes and remunerate priests, warriors and officials. But land charters adversely affected production relations. There could be conflict between one beneficiary and another, between the kind and his vassals, and above all, between the landlords and peasants. Some land grants indicate the possibility of such conflicts. A 9th century grant from Garhwal advises the people not to create trouble (upadrava) for the grantee and considers disobedience to be mahadroha or great rebellion. These conflicts could assume various forms. One important form was litigation to which only the beneficiaries and the advanced sections of the peasantry could resort. The landed beneficiaries and some other landed people who may have acquired land by force or custom may have been involved in lawsuits. Apparently, the need to settle land disputes in favour of the beneficiaries brought in a new provision in the Dharmasastras or law books. According to it, the claim based on the royal charter would override the claims based on custom, agreement and religion. It occurs from the fifth to the tenth centuries in the law books of Narada, Brhaspati and Katyayana, and also in the Agni Purana. Consequently, the claim to land made by the peasant or any other party on the basis of custom, contract or even religion could not be sustained in the face of the charter-based claim of the beneficiary.
In addition to litigation, peasants protested in various other ways. They took advantage of royal visits to complain to the king. When Harsa’s army was passing through the countryside, a large number of rural folk came out to welcome him, but at the same time they complained to him against the oppression of the bhogpatis, who had been placed in enjoyment of revenues from the villages. Self-immolation, particularly in south India, was another form of protest. People registered their protest by killing themselves in public. A dancing girl threw herself from the temple tower to assert the right of her relatives to till the land assigned to her for her maintenance. More importantly, a brahmana immolated himself to support the cause of the temple guards and servants who laid down their lives for the same reason. Many Jains believed that they would attain salvation by subjecting themselves to physical hardship until it ended their lives. Perhaps, these religious methods of ending life adopted by the Jains for the sake of salvation were repeat performances of the Jains for the sake of salvation were repeat performances of the actual methods adopted by the peasants of south India in protest against their exploitation by the landlords. It seems that self-immolation, prevalent in south India till recent times, such as the one on the occasion of the death of M.G. Ramachandran, the Chief Minister to Tamil Nadu, is a survival of the practice of protest against unbearable conditions of life.

Several instances of violent conflict between the landlords, who were brahmanas, and the peasants in the 11th to 13th centuries in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have been cited. The peasants launched armed attacks against brahmana landlords, and the landlords burnt whole villages and standing crops, and thus carried on their war against peasant villages. Many hero stones were raised in south India in order to record the act of bravery performed by those who laid down their lives in defence of the brahmana’s land or those who died in the violence unleashed on them by the landed beneficiaries and others. Such hero stones, called viragallu or virakallu are found largely in Karnataka and in many other parts of southern India. An inscription from Hasan district in Karnataka shows that in AD 1212 the chief of Hanche died fighting the people of Kerehalli for a pond, for which a stone was raised in his memory. In the 11th to 14th centuries, many inscriptions from Karnataka mention not only the endowment, construction and maintenance of tanks but also speak of fights for their possession. All this was natural since the tank formed the chief means of irrigation. The case mentioned above suggests that the peasantry of the entire village was pitted against the chief who wanted a larger share of water for himself. It would be worthwhile to map such hero stone inscriptions area-wise and period-wise and to work out their implications from the point of view of rural conflict.

Numerous instances of peasant protest occur in the Chola and other inscriptions found in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring areas. We have consulted the summaries of these inscriptions published in the Annual Reports on South Indian Epigraphy (ARE). Even these summaries give a fair indication of the
strong reaction of the peasants to the oppression of the landlords and occasionally of the royal agents during the first half of the thirteenth century under the Chola king Rajaraja III. We find that his vassals benefited from the discomfiture of the Chola monarch at the hands of the Pandyas. The Pandya invasions were followed by trouble and agitation (ksobham) marked by insecurity and damage to property. Temples were deserted, images removed and, what is more significant, land records and title deeds destroyed. All this happened in the heart of the Chola kingdom in Tanjore district. Records and title deeds may have been destroyed by vassals and rival beneficiaries, but the tenants and other peasants who suffered from oppressive taxes would nonetheless be interested in damaging them. Sometimes in such cases the temple managers took the side of those who were engaged in the service of the temple. An inscription from Shrirangam in the ninth year of Maravarman Sundara Pandya, who ascended the throne in AD 1216, shows that the temple managers colluded with the Ottar to the detriment of the income of the temple. Venkataramayya reads the world Ottar as Oddiya (people of Orissa) and postulates a Kalinga invasion as far as Shrirangam in about AD 1224. But according to Vankatasubba Ayyar, the term Ottar must be taken to mean ‘those who have undertaken to do a thing or given an agreement to the temple’. The people of Orissa are referred to as Oddiyar in Tamil inscriptions and not as Ottar. Ayyar’s interpretation of Ottar apparently refers to the servicing sections which included artisanal groups and agricultural labourers who were given land for their maintenance. These might also include devadana-kammi or serfs attached to temple lands. It seems that the managers of the Shrirangam temple took up the cause of the servicing sections and rose against the head of the temple; their action reduced the income of the temple and upset its routine. Eventually, the managers were expelled by the Pandya king Maravarman Sundara. Lasting two years, evidently, it was a major protest of the temple artisans and land labourers led by its managers.

Records citing cases of turmoil, social disorder and anti-state activities are found towards the end of the reign of Rajaraja III. On account of such occurrences there are many instances of confiscations and public sale of property. A record of the 23rd year of Rajaraja from Tanjore district gives details which can be considered typical of several others of its kind. According to this record, two temple priests, called Shiva-brahmanas, were punished by a congregation of Shaiva worshippers or mahesvaras who were joined in this act by the village assembly (Ur) consisting of the non-brahmanas. The temple priests were punished for raja-droham and Siva-droham or treason against the king as well as Shiva. The accused had given away the jewels of the goddess to a concubine, misappropriated the temple funds placed in their charge, refused to pay dues on the lands held by them and had misbehaved in other ways. They ignored royal commands and avoided the king’s messengers. They had committed indescribable sins through the Kannadigas and are said to have collected 50,000 kasus from the peasants. For all these crimes, the accused priests were expelled from the temple and ostracised, and the property –
movable and immovable, including the servants – was confiscated by the state. This record shows non-brahmana Shaivas to be enthusiastic supporters of the temple grant system which was being violated by some brahmana priests in the temple of Shiva.

In the 19th year of the reign of Rajaraja III a document registered the renewal of the title deeds by the village assemblies of all the residents who enjoyed lands in the several hamlets of the village up to the eighteenth year of the king. This renewal was affected by two functionaries whose surname was Pillai. This name suggests that they held high positions in the state. This action had to be undertaken because old registers and documents had been lost in the disturbed state of the kingdom in the 5th, 11th and 16th year of the reign of Rajaraja III. All this relates to the temple of Sankhanarayanesvara which was located in Tanjore district. What has been stated above would show that the reign of Rajaraja III witnessed several rural revolts, especially in the first quarter of his rule, even in the heart of the Chola kingdom. In every case the records relating to land were lost which would suggest that the peasants were not prepared to accept the religious beneficiaries. In the case of Sankhanarayanesvara, eventually, the village assembly, comprising the assignees, had to renew the titles of those who enjoyed lands in various hamlets of the villages.

A similar case of protest is found in the 23rd year of Rajaraja’s reign. The record states that at the time of a famine, a person called Andaranda, in cooperation with others, opened the coffers of the temple lands. For this act, according to the decision of the judges and other residents of the village, his lands as well as those of his associates were confiscated. All this happened in the district of Tanjore. This cryptic account leaves many things untold. It is not clear in what ways the leader and his supporters mismanaged temple lands. What seems most likely is that they settled the temple lands with agriculturists on reduced rent on account of the ravages of famine. Naturally, because of this ‘mismanagement’, the income or advantages from the temple lands were directed to the tillers during the time of famine. The leader and his supporters were eventually punished with the deprivation of their lands.

We also have a case of rajadrohins or traitors to the king being punished, but it is not clear whether they acted against the local landlords such as the Shiva-brahmanas and their followers; certainly they had acted against the king. This anti-king conspiracy was put down through the device of divide and rule based on ethnic lines. According to the record, Kulottunga Chola III, when encamped in the Pandya country, called one of the chiefs and ordered him to accept the chiefship of a village in the Tondaiamandalam. The Pandya chief accepted the offer and on reaching the village, he punished the traitors of the king (rajadrohins). One of the reasons for asking a native of the Pandya country to rule over a village of Tondai was evidently the disturbance caused by the traitors whom the new chief must have eventually expelled from
the village. Undoubtedly, many more instances of rural tension and violence can be cited. Though these do not clearly indicate the revolt of organized peasant groups against the landlords, they show the destruction of land records and titles, which were usually based on charters granted to the temples and the brahmanas. The peasants would certainly take advantage of the rivalry between the various types of beneficiaries, religious and non-religious, and also of the rivalry between beneficiaries and the state. Since the peasants themselves would be unlettered they were invariably led by such priests as were either learned or disgruntled.

There are a few instances particularly of tribal peasants rising in open revolt against the landed powers. The famous case of the revolt of the Kalabhras, who seem to have been a tribal people, occurred around the sixth century in south India. Nilakanta Sastri, who refers to this revolt in several of his writings, does not have any good words for the Kalabhras. They are condemned as the scourge of humanity and the enemies of civilization. The Kalabhra chiefs are called evil kings, and charged with the resumption of brahmadeya lands enjoyed by the beneficiaries. The Pandya inscriptions of the eighth and ninth centuries speak of the loss of such lands in the wake of the Kalabhra aggression and also of the encroachment of the sudras on a donated village. The period for which the Kalabhras dominated the scene in Tamil Nadu, especially at the cost of the Cholas, is called a dark age. Although their rule lasted for only 75 years or so, they upset the existing social and political relationships. The Pandyas brought an end to the so-called dark period inaugurated by the Kalabhras.

THE KAIVARTA REVOLT.

In eastern India we may refer to the revolt of the Kaivartas, a tribe who were absorbed into brahmanical society as a low mixed caste. According to Manu the Kaivartas were boatmen. But in east Bengal they were mostly peasants, and identical with the Mahisyas, who were considered to be the offspring of a kshatriya father and vaishya mother. Today the Kaivartas are peace-loving sharecroppers and agricultural labourers in Bangladesh. It would therefore be hard to believe that they repeatedly revolted against the Palas in Varendri (modern Rajshahi district), in the 11th century. But this is the main theme of the Ramacarita of Sandhyakara Nandi, who belonged to north Bengal. The author recounts the achievements of Ramapala in suppressing the Kaivarta revolt, which is viewed from two opposite angles. One school sees in it a popular revolt in which the people asserted their rights against a tyrannical ruler. The other school deprecates it as a disturbance against the rightful rulers, who had been raised to the throne with the consent of the people. The first view, advanced in the 1930s can be better appreciated against the background of the nationalist mass movement launched against British rule. The second does no more than reflect the anti-Kaivarta orthodox prejudices of Sandhyakara Nandi, who castigates the Kaivarta leaders in
In modern times the second view has been put forward by those who uphold the achievements of British rule and consider all revolt to be illegal. In the process, the economic dimension of the Kaivarta rebellion has been overlooked. The fact that the Kaivarta chiefs and peasants were alienated from the land they were cultivating and were oppressed with taxes has not been taken into account.

In order to form an accurate idea of the whole episode we should examine its genesis and the two phases of the revolt, one led by the Kaivarta chief Divyoka and the other by his nephew Bhima. The early history of the relations between the Kaivartas and Pala kings is obscure. It seems that some Kaivarta chiefs were granted land for services rendered to the Palas. The Belwa copper plate of Mahipala I, issued in his 5th year (A.D 993), refers to the grant of 210 standards of land in one of the royal domains in Osinna-Kaivartavrtti, i.e., in Osinna, which had once been allotted to the Kaivartas for their service. This area formed the total number of fields spread over three villages. We do not know whether military or other services were rendered by the Kaivartas. The first revolt of the Kaivartas took place under Divyoka about 75 years after the revocation of the grant. The dispossessed successors of the Kaivarta assignee may have nursed it as an important grievance against the Palas. The charge of oppression brought against Mahipala, who resumed the grant, may not be true, but the Ramacarita refers to his misgovernment and obsession with war which implies an increased burden on his subjects, particularly the feudal vassals. In any case, when Mahipala’s brother reoccupied Varendri, he oppressed the people with taxes. This can be inferred from the account of the author of the Ramacarita. We have no details by which to determine the exact nature of the revolt of Divyoka. He was no doubt an official of some importance, but there is noting to show that he led the uprising of the vassals against Mahipala. He probably took advantage of the confusion caused by the feudal revolt and, with the support of his community, established his power after killing Mahipala. Divyoka seems to have successfully intervened as a third party in the civil war between Mahipala and his vassals. That he was detested by the brahmanas can very well be inferred from the terms robber (dasyu) and cheat (upadhi-vrati) applied to him. Divyoka’s rule proved to be ephemeral. He was suppressed by Ramapala, who succeeded Mahipala.

The second revolt of the Kaivartas was led by Bhima. His revolt against Ramapala (A.D 1077-1120) proved to be abortive but had a more popular base than that of his uncle Divyoka. When Bhima organized a revolt against Ramapala, after being deprived of his possession of Varendri he enlisted the support of soldiers who were literally naked (kisabalena). Apparently he failed to win the allegiance of the samantas who alone could supply him chariots, and had to fight without chariots (arathakam). Although lacking in equipment, the Kaivarta army was fierce, for it enjoyed the goodwill of the people who were discontented on account of taxation (kara-ksobhita-rucitam). A part of this
army was made up of peasants who were perhaps tribal people. They rode buffaloes (kasara-vahana) and fought with bows and arrows. Significantly, the buffalo appears as the vehicle of Yama, the God of Death. Its association with the Kaivartas underlines their fierceness. The Kaivartas also retained their tribal identity under the leadership of Bhima. The Ramacarita repeatedly refers to the slaughter of Bhima’s kinsmen. We do not know of any early medieval army which comprised mainly peasants and not mercenaries and regular soldiers. The allegation of heavy taxation against Ramapala is credible, for he could rally the samantas around him only by offering them huge grants of land and wealth. There is no doubt that such grants were made on an enormous scale, for the list of kings and chiefs, whom Ramapala took great pains to woo, is imposing. Ramapala’s son, who was commissioned to quell Bhima, is said to have ‘exhausted the golden pitchers by his wartime gifts’. It would thus appear that the second phase of the revolt was more popular than the first. It seems to have been a spontaneous expression of the feelings of the Kaivarta peasants against the oppression of the Palas and their landed beneficiaries. It may be that, as a leader of the Kaivarta peasants, Bhima dispossessed the brahmanical and other beneficiaries and levied taxes from them. This can be inferred from the Old Commentary on the Ramacarita, 1.48. According to it, after the fall of Bhima, the chief concern of the Pala officer Sivaraja was to ensure the protection of the land which belonged to the gods, brahmanas and others. For this purpose inquiring about the distribution of the land of the beneficiaries in various territorial units such as visaya, grama and bhukti was done away with.

Though, as many as 13 important vassals rallied round Ramapala, none of them came to the rescue of Bhima. The situation, as it obtained around A.D 1075, reminds us of the civil war between Stephen and Matilda in England about a century later, when the barons wrung unprecedented privileges as a price for their support to both parties. But in this case, the barons from Bengal and Bihar did not help the Kaivarta chief, Bhima, probably because he represented the interests of the peasants who also happened to be his kith and kin. It is really astounding that in order to suppress the armed Kaivartas Ramapala had to enlist the support of about two dozen feudatories from different parts of the kingdom. The Palas maintained a standing army, but it was not sufficient to cope with the Kaivartas. This shows that the revolt was not confined only to Varendri, but also embraced a wider area and involved a large population. It had its roots deep down among the masses, who rose in defence of the new regime. Perhaps they refused to pay land revenue which had to be collected forcibly. It appears therefore, that the protracted struggle between Ramapala on the one hand and the Kaivartas on the other caused a dent in the supra-tribal solidarity, with the result that the Kaivarta chiefs did not receive any help from the other tribal chiefs; they had to depend on their kinsmen. Therefore, the extent of the kin-based solidarity in these revolts has to be examined.
In analysing the nature of these revolts one has also to assess the role of religion in mobilizing peasants against their oppressors. Clearly the Kalabhras were anti-brahmanical, and they are called Buddhists. Reference to the Kalabhras is found in the writings of a Buddhist monk, of about the 7th century or so. Similarly, the Kaivartas were Shaivite and they were pitted against the Palas who were very much pro-Buddhist. Although, Narayanapala granted land to the Pasupatas and erected numerous temples for them in the 10th century, Buddhism and Shaivism were locked in opposition in eastern India in later centuries. The iconography of eastern India shows aggressive Buddhist gods. Trailokya Vijaya from Orissa (tenth century) is a Buddhist deity shown trampling Shaivite divinities under foot. Similarly, a 10th century pantheon from Nalanda shows the dominance of the Buddhist deity Aparajita over Shaivite deities. This religious conflict cannot be isolated from the social situation in which Buddhist monasteries enjoyed huge landed properties at the cost of both the brahmana beneficiaries and the ordinary peasants following the Hindu religion. Bhima, the Kaivarta chief, was a devotee of Shiva and Bhavani, and his community may have been Shaivite. It is significant that when Ramapala gained victory over the Kaivartas he constructed a large number of Shiva temples in the newly founded capital, Ramavati, in order to pacify the local people, who were obviously Kaivartas.

The situation was different in south India where the Shaivites and the Vaishnavites persecuted the Jains and the Buddhists. The competing claims for grants of land may have been an important cause; the Jains were granted land for the basadis and the Buddhists for viharas. In the long run, such antagonisms ended in reconciliation. Since references to these revolts are wanting in non-religious or secular idiom, it becomes difficult to examine their social dimensions. Sometimes, discontented brahmanas who were not fortunate enough to receive grants also led revolts against landed brahmanas by mobilizing the peasants. It is significant that in the Jataka stories revolts are led by brahmanas with the backing of the common masses. They result in the replacement of the tyrannical king by another ruler who promises to govern according to the norms set by religion and society. It is not easy to identify that aims and objectives of the peasant revolts and the issues involved in them. The issues mostly were of immediate concern to those who revolted. Most probably, the Kaivartas wanted back the land that had been resumed from them by Mahipala and transferred to the Buddhists. They also sought relief from oppressive taxes imposed on them by the Palas. The brief period for which they supplanted Pala rule did not bring about any transformation in social and political relationship; only the place of the Pala ruler was taken by the Kaivarta chiefs, Divyoka and his nephew Bhima.

The revolt seems to have raised the ritual status of the Kaivarta community. Formerly, a brahmana could not accept food from a Kaivarta, who was called an antyaja (literally last born but really untouchable). But later the myth of his origin from the union of a Kshatriya father and vaishya mother was
popularised, and he was considered a sat Sudra who could perform certain
ceremonies and one from whom food could be accepted. A text written 400
years after Vallalasena (twelfth century), and yet attributed to him, states that
the king raised the social status of the Kaivartas and prescribed menial or
domestic service as their livelihood. Mahesa, the headman of the Kaivartas,
was honoured with the rank and title of mahamandalika. The ordinary kinsmen
could bask in the glory of their chief. According to a tradition, Vallalasena
allowed the Kaivartas, as desired by them, ‘to change their profession from
fishing to agriculture’. In other words they were formally recognized as
peasants by the king and came to be known as casi-halika. Sridharasvami
(A.D.1400) in his comment on a verse from the Bhagavata Purana also shows
that the Kaivartas gained in status. The Kalabhras who supplanted the power of
the three Tamil kingdoms for a short spell in the deep south do not seem to
have left much trace of the nature of their rule. They seized the land granted
to the brahmanas, and were probably more egalitarian. The Kaivartas also may
have been inspired by the egalitarian spirit. But neither can be credited with
any vision for recasting social relationships or production relations through
revolts.

Whether or not peasant protests and revolts undermined the existing
socio-economic formation needs investigation. The possibility of their linkage
with the revival of trade and handicrafts from the 11th century onwards in
many parts of India has been suggested but not explored. We also cannot state
whether the revolts were spontaneous or organized. These questions cannot be
answered, for sufficient sources are not available and adequate research has
not been undertaken. By the 12th century or so, the enormity and ferocity of
the various types of evil and oppression associated with land grants had been
sufficiently publicized and realized. This seems to be particularly true of south
India where we find some preemptive protests. In one instance, in the 12th
century, an entire village refused to be converted into a religious or educational
grant called agrahara. This clear manifestation of open dissent against being
placed at the mercy of the landed beneficiaries may have encouraged other
villagers to act similarly. Peasant protest often took the form of desertion which
was as old as the Jatakas. In the early medieval period, for fear of desertion
many donors required the inhabitants to stay in the donated villages. But in
cases of oppression the peasants did not stay in the same village but migrated
to neighbouring villages. Instances of desertion of the villages by the peasants
have been culled by B.N.S. Yadava from literary texts. It seems that in protest
against exploitation, peasants and ploughmen either escaped from the village
or joined the ranks of the mendicants. It appears that even religious suicide,
which seems to have become popular in early medieval times, was linked to
peasant protest. Apparently the peasants, in desperation, took the extreme step
of suicide in the name of religion.
Despite the instances of peasant protest assuming varied forms in early medieval times, the peasants were by and large reconciled and resigned to the situation imposed on them as a result of the rise of landlords and the erosion of their community rights. This state of affairs can be explained in different ways. In certain parts of the country, particularly in ‘backward’ areas, serfs were tied to the land granted to the beneficiaries, but serfdom was not a general feature of Indian feudalism. Wherever serfs worked on the land, they existed in small numbers. The lack of numbers weakened their position and their division into castes hampered organization. This difficulty was further compounded by wide spatial distribution. But in one case in Karnataka bonded labourers attacked a brahmana benefice, and the warrior who fought in his defence claims to have killed many of these labourers (besavagal) in the fight. Perhaps it was mainly the corporate unity of the village community which kept the peasants at bay. If the landlord and the peasants belonged to the same village, the common feeling of belonging would be used to keep them under the same umbrella. If they belonged to the same kin and caste, the illusion of corporate unity would have been stronger. At least for four centuries or so from the sixth century onwards, this sense of ‘belongingness’ was strengthened by the blending of agriculture and handicrafts based on the jajmani system, a phenomenon which has been debated repeatedly under the title of the Asiatic mode of production. The initial stage of agrarian expansion meant the multiplication of numerous self-sufficient villages and provided a congenial climate for ‘corporate’ life.

Ideological and ritualistic factors seem to have been equally important. Land seizures do not seem to have been infrequent. The donors constantly feared that the land granted by them could either be seized by their successors or resumed by the existing peasants who had occupied it for a long time. In order to forestall such possibilities, all kinds of curses were heaped on those who dared violate the provisions of the land charters granted to the beneficiaries. It was repeatedly stated at the end of the land charters that those who violated them would live in hell for 60,000 years and those who observed them would live in heaven for the same period. It would be interesting to find out how hell and heaven were deliberately visualised to indoctrinate the mass of the peasants and other people in the norms of a feudal patriarchal society. One of the main reasons why the illusion of hell and heaven was developed in early medieval times was to protect the landed property of the brahmanas and others against encroachment by their equally entrenched rivals and also by the oppressed peasantry.

Connected with the concept of hell and heaven was the Vedanta theory of karma. According to it, if people performed the duties assigned to their stations by their birth, they could look forward to social promotion in the existing social framework in the next birth. Identical with punarjanma or rebirth, the karma theory was preached to the peasant masses and others through numerous religious stories recited as kathas. The belief that there was
no escape from the consequences of birth and heredity was ingrained in the minds of the people in ancient times, but more strongly in early medieval times when social classes became increasingly unequal. Further, the varna theory coming down from ancient times was refurbished in the early medieval period. One of its greatest proponents was Krishna who taught, in the Bhagavad Gita, that people should carry out the functions assigned to them by their respective varnas. As time went on, the teachings of the Gita received more publicity and were increasingly considered sacred. However, complications were created by the rise of many landed groups or powerful families who did not fit into the fourfold traditional system. In order to absorb them and contain social discontent, new provisions were made in the Dharmasastras. If some powerful indigenous tribal families or foreign tribes managed to capture power, they came to be recognised and legitimised as kshatriyas. This theory was put forward clearly around A.D 400 by Sabarasvami, who wrote a commentary on Jaimini’s Mimamsa Sutra. Now the theory that any raja could be recognized as a kshatriya, ksatriyo-raja-ucyate, prevailed.

Similarly, when land grants helped annex numerous tribals to the brahmanical system, the new peasants came to be considered sudras. In a way the sudras who served mainly as domestic servants, slaves, artisans and agricultural labourers in ancient times were now called peasants in some texts, and more so in foreign accounts. The number of samskaras, or domestic ceremonies, was increased, and those which were not associated with Vedic mantras could be performed by the sudras. Obviously, the brahmana priests officiated at these ceremonies, although their status may have been low in society. But those sudra peasants who could afford to perform these samskaras would certainly have a feeling of social promotion and of closeness to the highest varna. It would, therefore, appear that attempts were made to give ritualistic recognition to the social changes that were taking place in production relations. The rituals served to satisfy the vanity and psychological aspirations of the Sudra peasants and to make them come to terms with the new situation in which they had been deprived of their egalitarian tribal rights.

What distinguished the early medieval period was the proliferation of castes; the Sudra peasant castes proved to be particularly numerous. These castes were ranked in a ritualistic order based on regions, clans and tribes. The theory of the origin of the Sudra castes was known as the theory of mixed castes. The mixed castes comprised numerous peasant castes supposedly born out of the union of the existing castes in the reverse or pratiloma order. However, this theory did not apply to the kutumbin caste which covered many sudra peasants. With this exception, the theory of mixed castes was conceived in such a manner that almost every mixed caste was made either inferior or superior to the other caste. Thus, although the peasants were exploited more or less in the same manner, endless division caused by castes based on ritualistic distinctions of inferiority or superiority kept them apart. The element of ritualism tended to distort the reality of exploitation to which the peasants were subjected. Therefore, the solidarity of the peasants against the landlords could not be achieved easily.
The two important religious movements that influenced the thinking of the peasant masses in early medieval times were tantrism and bhakti. Tantrism emphasised the worship of the mother goddess, many of whose names sound non-Sanskritic. Its rituals and ordination were open to both men and women without any distinction. Tantrism originated as a result of land grants to brahmanas and others in the outlying areas inhabited by tribal and non-brahmanical people. The superimposition of a class of beneficiaries eroded the rights of the tribals to land and communal resources, but their egalitarian ritualistic rights were retained and recognised in a tantric garb. Even the brahmanised peasant castes who did not enjoy ritualistic rights under the varna system could perform tantric ceremonies. Tantrism enjoyed a large following, particularly in the backward tribal areas. With the accommodation of the mother goddess in the Hindu pantheon and her elevation to a very high status in it, the exponents of the tantra system obviously succeeded in reconciling the tribals to the hardships resulting from the land grants. The initial appeal of tantra to the tribals may have petered out in the long run when the tantric hierarchy was modelled on the feudal hierarchy, and when war and sex, with which the landlords were obsessed, were given prominence in the tantra system.

But a more powerful factor that helped to contain and channelise the discontent of the peasant masses was the medium of bhakti. Originating in a new incarnation in south India around the 7th century; it affected Vaishnavism as well as Shaivism. The bhakti movement in the early medieval period was inspired by the feudal social set up. But when it crystallised it seems to have acquired an autonomous character. The peasant devotees offered the same allegiance to their landlords as they offered to their god. They seem to have sincerely believed in the ‘invisible realities’ resulting from the blessings of the all-powerful and ever-compassionate god. The idea of complete surrender to god was developed further in late medieval times. The god was conceived as father, mother, kinsman, companion, wealth and learning. His constant imaginary company was considered a great solace for those who experienced exploitation and hardship arising out of the increasing burden of taxation in medieval times. Various other methods were used to keep the peasants and the landlords together. Special mention may be made of vratas or religious vows including festivities which were prescribed for all sections of society, high and low. More importantly, temples and places of pilgrimage, which diluted distinctions between landlords and peasants, became a common feature. There is no way to compute the number of rituals that were actually performed by various princes, chiefs, landed magnates and temples in the early medieval period. But rituals were considered necessary for legitimizing quick changes in authority and social status. This partly accounts for the provision of a large number of vratas in medieval texts. A ritual was an occasion not only for making gifts to the priests but also for holding sumptuous feasts and distributing prasada by the temple and other authorities. This meant sharing of common food by the landlords and their peasants and the artisans attached to them. In a way rituals offered opportunities for ‘redistribution’ in medieval times. Thus, the process of integration and reconciliation was promoted through different devices which aroused hopes for the next world at the cost of happiness in this world.
The measures mentioned above were communicated to the people through the written or spoken word. The written word may have been confined to a few literates, but the spoken word through the recitation of the Purana stories also reached women and sudras. The ideological and ritualistic propaganda was also made through the medium of art. Social and religious ideals were articulated in representations of gods and goddesses in numerous pieces of stone and bronze sculpture. Their number in early medieval times is so large that one encounters them in almost all the settled parts of India. All these measures greatly minimized the outbreak of social conflict and tension. They moulded the mind of the peasant on such lines as made him consider exploitation an integral part of the natural course of his life. It would appear that in terms of causes, course and consequences, peasant protest was not related to only economic and political problems. It was linked to several other factors such as kin structure, the corporate unity of the village community, the concept of heaven and hell, the varna ideology, the Vedanta theory of karma, the hierarchy of peasant castes, the cults of bhakti and tantrism and to the increasing number of tirthas and vratas. Many of these elements helped perpetuate the hold of the landed classes and prevent the peasants from coming out openly against their masters.

**FORMATION OF IDANGAI AND VALANGAI**

**Right and Left hand castes**

The nadu, the basic territories unit in the South Indian macro region, gave to the agrarian system of the Chola period a highly fragmented character, elements of this remain to this day. Cultivated land and the nexus of relationships involving land exercised a strong centripetal influence upon the structure of social relationships in South India as in other pre-industrial agrarian contexts. Added to this, however, are the distinctively regional characteristics of spatially compressed marriage, kinship, and political relationships resulting in cores of peasant settlements which were discontinuous and relatively small. These settlement units remained small and isolated until the 13th century in most parts of the Coromandel plain and even longer in the western uplands, assuring to the nadu-locality its primacy as a structural unit.

Two factors tended to offset the isolation of the nadu without diminishing its integrity. One was the network of brahmadeyas from whence, during the 10th to the 12th century, emanated a general, highly aryantized culture spreading from the Coromandel plain over the entire macro region. These were powerful, corporate institutions which exercised continuous influence for several centuries. The other was the emergence, by the 11th century at least, of dual social divisions rooted in the numerous nadu societies but capable of transcending the isolation of these localities. These were potential social formations which could be activated for a variety of purposes,
but which were not corporate or continuous in character. What the Brahman settlements of the region did to foster integrative cultural bonds among dominant peasant folk within the macro region, the divisions of the ‘right-hand’ and ‘left-hand’ peoples or castes appeared to do in forging significant social links among a variety of dependent peoples of diverse localities. In both cases, cultural and social integration beyond the level of the nadu was the consequence although it was not until after the 13th century that the nadu began to lose some of its early primacy as the focus of society and culture in the macro region.

Labels for the dual social divisions have persisted for almost a millenium. Valangai, the Tamil word for ‘right-hand of ‘right-side’, as a social designation dates from the 10th century when contingencies of Rajaraja I’s armies, valangai-velaikkara-padaigal are mentioned. During the early 11th century, persons calling themselves valangai, made endowments to temples as in the case of the temple at Vembarrur, alias Sri-Cholamattanda-chaturvedimangalam in Tanjavur. References to groups of the’ left-hand’ or left-side idangai, appear somewhat later; one of the earliest recorded as affray between people of the right and left hand in A.D. 1072. This record reads in part: “....in the second regnal year of the king (Kulottunga I) there was a clash between the right-hand and left-hand communities in which the village was burnt down, the sacred places destroyed, and the images of deities and the treasure of the temple (Mummudi-Chola-Vinnagar-Alvar temple) looted”.

Thus by the late 11th century, there is evidence of two broad and at times hostile divisions of the population in at least some parts of the Coromandel plain: shortly it was to cover almost the whole Tamil country. These divisions appear also to have existed in other parts of the macro region at about the same time though there is less convincing inscriptive evidence. In southern Karnataka, the equivalent Kannada terms for right and left-hand, balagey and edagey, were used as designations for the division. Other designations later used among Kannada speakers were desa, for right-hand people and nadu for those of the left-hand division. Among Telugu-speaking people of the macro region. Slightly different designations were used. One, kampulu(literally ‘protector’ but in common usage, ‘agriculturist’) appears to have had the same meaning as the terms used in Tamil country and Karnataka for the right-hand designation while the terms panchahanamvaru and panchanulu were the same as the left-hand division elsewhere. The latter term in Telugu inscriptions refers to five artisan-trader groups usually consisting of goldsmiths, blacksmiths, braziers, and stone-and-wood sculptors, hence, pancha or five. In later centuries especially, but apparently even in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, another way of referring to the dual division among Telugu speakers was by their sectarian affiliations. Adherents to Vishnu worship, srivaisnavas, being the counterpart of the right division and Siva adherents allegedly corresponding to the left division.
Analysis of the origins and functions of the dual divisions of people of the macro region have posed difficult problems. Though the subject of serious scholarly speculation for almost a century, the origins of the divisions remain obscure. Classical poetry contains no references to the divisions, and the terms have little, if any, contemporary currency. It has proven just as difficult to understand the functions of the right and left divisions, for the dual divisions resist analysis according to such Chola cultural categories as caste, sect, and territorial (nadu) affiliation. While each of these categories may be found at times to have been related to the dual divisions, the divisions are essentially different. Thus, ranking seems present at times, as in an A.D.1227 inscription in which newly admitted groups to the division in a part of modern South Arcot are declared ‘the eyes and the hands of the idangai’, body images suggesting the performance of service for other members of the division. Generally, however, the divisions give the appearance of being non-ranked groupings of local social groups. Also, while certain elements of sect organization may be seen at times in the references to an idangai perceptor or a mandapam, the divisions are not essentially religious groupings. Finally, while the divisions have territorial focus – there being no macro region-wide divisions as such – that territory appears always to have been greater than the nadu.

The categories of caste, sect, and territory fail to help in an understanding of the dual divisions in South India because the divisions are different from each and all, and because, at least in the early period under consideration, the scope of these three social categories was very highly localized whereas the dual divisions appear to be essentially supra-local in character. It is therefore little wonder that where the divisions have been considered as something to explain by historians, these divisions are often treated together with other, so-called, ‘corporate’ institutions in a modest genre of historical literature dealing with what is called, ‘corporate’. But, two persistent features of the early right-left divisions militate against their dismissal as ‘corporate groups’ in divisions ensemble with other like groups of a caste, sectarian, or territorial in kind. One is the importance of references to the assimilation with other generally similar groups; the other is the military and life’ or ‘local government’. Colonization ventures with which both divisions of the Chola period were associated. Together, these two features of assimilation/alliance and military/colonization convey the sense of a social order were is not fixed in terms of its structural constituents nor in space, but a social order which is in flux, one expanding from its relatively isolated local forms of organization to ever wider forms of societal and cultural integration. Temple corporate imagery of the existing historiography with its presumption of fixedness and stability around bureaucratic kingship, caste, and guild or its conception of conflict resolution through factious groupings fails to appreciate the dynamism of Chola society.
Viewed as a ‘corporate institution’, the dual division is looked upon as guild-like, or as a sreni, i.e. a multicaeste body of traders, artisans, and agriculturists. This guild conception is based upon the well-recognized association of the right division with agriculture and related activities, including trade and some processing of agricultural commodities, as well as the equally consistent association of left division groups with artisan-trader activities. The guild or sreni notion also fits well with the general Indian institution usually called ‘the jajmani system’ – localized exchanges of goods and services centred on the ritual and economic dominance of agricultural patrons (jajmani, Sanskrit : yajamanà) and their clients. However, any essentially cooperative and interdependent model, whether guild/sreni or jajmani, fails to deal with the often conflictful relations between the divisions which are attested in historical records from at least the 11th century, as noted above. Thus, some scholars, cued by conflict between the right and left divisions, have applied the term ‘faction’ following the usage of some British administrators. ‘Faction’ denotes an alignment of persons for the purpose of attaining some objective in competition with others. Conflict is the business of factions, and the term fits, most aptly, certain of the activities with which the right and left divisions in South India have been associated during recent centuries certainly and possibly from a much earlier time.

As sociological elements, factions have been viewed in many ways by modern scholars, though all might agree with the humorous of social organization. Factional alignments can and have been relatively persistent in some societies, particularly at times of special internal strain and external stress. And, however unstable they may be, factional systems can achieve some important objectives through means not usually considered appropriate and often in contravention to norms regarding conflict resolution. This would seem especially true in cultures which emphasize ‘harmony and unanimity’ or where ‘cooperation’ among social groups is given high value as it is in caste culture according to many scholars. Finally, even if factions may be evanescent, ‘their component cliques and families may be stable groups’. Accordingly, the dual division of social groups in South Indian macro region may plausibly be seen to lend itself to analysis as factional systems even as it is recognized that there were important changes in the composition, purposes, and context in which the divisions operated in the course of perhaps eight centuries. Neither ‘faction’ nor ‘guild’ appear fully satisfactory terms for discussion of the early phase of the dual division of social groups in South India. If one were to adopt Nicholas’ definition of faction – ‘a noncorporate political conflict group, the members of which are recruited by a leader on the basis of diverse ties’ – it would be necessary to reject the term during the Chola period or at any time prior to the 17th century. The dual social divisions in South India were not solely nor primarily conflict groups at this earlier time, and, while ties among each of the divisions may have been varied, the core of the interests defining each are persistent and clear. Moreover, to the extent that factions may be viewed as ‘ego-centred’, essentially individual-participant ‘quasi groups’, as Mayer has called them, the South Indian dual divisions would not qualify. The constituent units of the divisions are always localized caste groups.
As neither the concept of ‘faction’ nor ‘guild which have been used to describe the right and left divisions appear to fit certain of the important characteristics of the divisions, some other way of speaking about them is necessary. The recent essay about the right and left division by Arjun Appadurai postulates a cultural model to deal with the conflict of right and left castes, especially in Madras city during the 17th century where he also uses the concept of faction. However, for the Chola period, the stress upon conflict is misconceived. Conflict appears a minor aspect of the divisions during this early period however important it becomes later. To emphasize conflict between the divisions at this early period is to impose later characteristics upon the divisions of the Chola period and thus to distort an understanding of the institution in Chola times. Most Chola inscriptions pertaining to the valangai and idangai do not refer to conflict, but to the typical subject matter of inscriptions: gifts to Brahmans and temples. From these references, we learn of various kinds of groups cooperating beyond their local bases. Among the most prominent were the valagai-masenai and idangai-masenai: the great armies of the right-hand and left-hand. Trade activities and especially relations with important itinerant trade organizations were other reasons for extra-local cooperation among locality peoples. Thus there are the numerous inscriptions referring to nanadesi merchants meeting together with local merchants of the nadu and nagara, that is merchants of ordinary agricultural villages of a locality as well as special trade settlements, including valangai weavers. And, finally, there are rare Chola records of agreements by lower caste people of the valangai and idangai divisions, in some places at least, for resistance against ‘the Brahmanas Vellalans who hold the proprietary rights (kani) over the lands of the district’.

The divisions are thus seen not as ‘absolute’ so entities, for example, as ‘super castes’ us suggested by the terms ‘right-hand castes’ and ‘left-hand castes’, but as ‘relative’ or ‘potential’ groupings of established local groups. Such aggregate groupings were capable of dealing with extra local problems beyond the scope and capability of existing locality institutions of the time and capable of being called into existence in response to a variety of problems, including conflicts, requiring extra-local cooperation. At any time and pace, the composition of right and left divisions would vary according to the exigent condition which brought temporary into being, and they would lapse into latency with the passing of that condition. Viewed as relative or potential groupings rather than as enduring corporate ones (e.g. guilds) or as ad hoc conflict groupings (i.e. factions), the dual divisions of Chola times assume an anachronistically modern appearance. That is, the valangai and idangai divisions of the Chola period appear as broad ethnic coalitions which are neither internally ranked in the manner of castes into subordinate sub-castes nor externally ranked with respect to the other bloc or division. Rather, in the manner of horizontally integrated South Indian caste associations of the recent past – the Nadars and Vanniyakula Kshatriyas – an absolute quality is claimed on the basis of birth into a named group and the ascriptive right to
certain emblems and insignia. Hierarchical bases of status or moral condition are ignored. The whole or part of such large groupings are capable of acting together for certain purposes, but they do not lose their localized bases of organization and, typically, intermarriage among the constituent groups does not occur.

The need for such supra-local coalitions was particularly great until well into the 13th century by which time urbanization provided a reliable supra-local focus at least for leading artisan-trader groups, usually designated ‘left-hand’ people. By the same time, the widespread merging of nadu-localities into the periyanadu, or great nadu, provided for collaboration among leading agrarian people – those of the right-hand – on a supra-local level. Prior to the 13th century, however, the dual divisions, with their varied constituencies from place to place, represented perhaps the sole means by which groups other than Brahmans and some military chiefs could on occasion transcend the borders of the nadu-locality. One of the major reasons for seeing the dual divisions as ‘relative’ or ‘potential’ structural entities, rather than ones which had an absolute (i.e. ‘corporate’) existence in particular places is that neither division finds mention among those groups named in the detailed Chola inscriptions dealing with matters requiring the assent of or the cooperation from important local groups. In brahmadeya inscriptions, these local bodies inevitably include the following: the nattar; assemblies of neighbouring brahmadeyas represented by their spokesmen (or headmen), the brahmadeya-kilavar; assemblies of villages (ur), part of whose income was previously granted to support Hindu temples (devadana), Buddhist and Jaina shrines (palliccanda); assemblies of villages which were trade centres and under merchants’ control, nagarattar or nagaragalitar; and assemblies of villages (ur), some portion of whose income was diverted to other forms of special purposes (kanimuruttu and vettiperu). Other Chola inscriptions refer to other bodies, including kil kalanaigal, who are described as including carpenters (taccan), blacksmiths (kollar), goldsmiths (tattar), and koliyar (weavers?). Seen in these references do the various caste groups comprise the agrarian-centred division of the valangai in Tamil country and the mobile artisans of the idangai, but there is no mention of these divisions themselves. Therefore, rather than use terms such as ‘faction’ or ‘guild’ to speak of the dual division, the term ‘division’ will be used. The meaning attached to the term ‘division’ is that of the occasional combination of agrarian-centred groups, on the one hand, and artisan-traders on the other at levels beyond the localities in which both kinds of groups lived.

One of the most important functions of the idangai division was the assimilation of groups to the expanding order of the Chola period. From the tenth to the 13th century new tracts of land not previously committed to sedentary agriculture were being brought into the expanding ambience of the Chola agrarian order. Whether by conquest or by the peaceful extension of the Chola agrarian system, people of these new tracts were brought into the dual divisions, and the groups thus included in the dual divisions might be
agriculturists who had previously practiced shifting cultivation or they might be artisans or they might be any one of the various kinds of occupational groups which were not already aligned with one or the other dual divisions. In either case, the newly recruited groups could henceforth make alliance claims upon others in their division and even cause the division in any place to change from potential to actual groupings for a variety of purposes. This process of assimilation is well exemplified in two early 13th century idangai inscriptions. The first, from the Uttamacholan temple of Urrattur, 15 miles north of the Kaveri River (Lalgudi taluk, Tiruchirapalli), is dated A.D. 1218 and reads in part: “In order to kill the demons (that disturbed) the sacrifices of Kasyapa [the priest of Visvakarma, patron god of artisans] we were made to appear from the agni-kunda (sacrificial fire pit) and while we were thus protecting the said sacrifice, Chakravartin Arindama honoured the officiating sage priests by carrying them in a car and led them to the Brahmana colony (newly founded by himself). On this occasion we were made to take our seats on the back of the car and to carry the slippers and umbrellas of these sages. Eventually with these Brahmana sages we were made to settle down in the [same] villages.....We received the clan name idangai because the sages (while they got down from their cars) were supported by us on their left side. The ancestors of this our sect having lost their credentials and insignia in the jungles and bushes, we were ignorant of our origins. Having now once learnt it, we the members of the 98 subsects enter into a compact, in the fortieth year of the king [Kulottunga III] that we shall hereafter behave like the sons of the same parents and what good and evil may befall any one of us, will be shared by all. If anything derogatory happens to the idangai class, we shall jointly assert our rights until we establish them. It is also understood that only those who, during their congregational meetings to settle communal disputes, display the insignia horn, bugle, and parasol shall belong to our class. Those who have to recognize us now and hereafter, in public, must do so from our distinguishing symbols – the feather of the crane and the loose hanging hair. The horn and the conch shell shall also be sounded in front of us and the bugle blown according to the fashion obtaining among the idangai people. Those who act in contravention to these rules shall be treated as the enemies of Ur class. Those who behave differently from the rules (thus) prescribed for the conduct of the idangai classes shall be excommunicated and shall not be recognized as srutiman (members of the community). They will be considered slaves of the classes opposed to us”.

The second record is from Varanjuram (Vriddhachalam taluk, South Arcot) and is dated A.D. 1227. It reads: “We, the nadus [assemblies of eleven localities] having assembled at the village of Tiruvalanjuram....got the following resolution engraved on the Tiruvalanjuram-udaiyar temple: ‘the malaiyamakkal and the nattamakkal of these nadus shall henceforth be admitted into the idangai-talam [left hand class of men]; they shall be considered the eyes and hands of the idangai; if we violate this resolution, we shall be considered as wrong-doers to the caste”. The resolution was endorsed by Brahmanas, and
other leaders of the locality as well as by those calling themselves of the idangai-talam including kaikkolars and saliyar (weavers), vanigars (merchants) and others. These idangai records of the 13th century presume the existence of an established supra-local social entity into which new groups could be initiated. In the first inscription it is not clear who those of the lost credentials and insignia were, though the ‘ignorance’ about origins and the references to the jungle suggest persons who, in other circumstances, would be low in ritual status. Those mentioned in the second inscription are more readily identifiable and interesting cases to which reference shall be made shortly.

A point which must be taken up first pertains to the apparent lack of emphasis upon stratified relations within either the idangai or the valangai division. It is as if the divisions were homogeneous, pluralistic aggregates in which all constituent groups shared a common status and common symbols of rank. There are two ways in which this apparent homogeneity among the constituent units of the divisions is expressed. One way is in shared natural substance that is in attributes ascribed to the divisions as living things which possess unique endowed qualities arising from how they came into existence. Thus, according to a later source, the Idangai-valangai Puranam of A.D.1692-3, both divisions were created or brought into being by the actions of gods. In one context, Siva and Indra are made responsible for the left-hand division and Brahma and a rishi (bhrigu, tamil:piruka) for the right-hand division; in another context, the divisions are seen as the result of a disagreement between Siva, as Paramesvara, and his consort Parvati. More specifically, the Idangai-valangai Puranam assigns to each division different somatic markers. To the left division, the most important are blood, skin, and eye-balls; to the right division, bones, nerves, and brain. The other symbolic way in which the constituent units of the divisions appear to have been accorded equal status and thus to constitute a pluralistic aggregate of equivalent units, was in the common emblems each division possessed even though each constituent unit had its own emblems. In the Urratur inscription above, several insignia were given prominence. According to the Idangai-valangai Jatiyar Varalaru of the Mackenzie collection, the ninety-eight castes of the right division had common emblems of the ‘Brahmani’ kite (Garuda?), the half-human, half-animal form (‘purusha-mirukam’), the elephant, assembly, and eagle, while the left division had the tiger, fox, the male bird (potu), sword, crow, ‘Brahmani’ kite, horse, lion, and a mythological animal with a face bearing features of the lion and elephant (yali).

Such shared insignia and symbols of common ‘natural’ attributes among units of the divisions may appear to imply ‘corporateness’ in the sense that castes are corporate. That is, the dual divisions may be supposed to have been something like ‘super-castes’ with the same quality of durable and diffused solidarity which characterized a caste. However, this would be incorrect. Rather, the divisions were groupings with quite specific elements of solidarity, such as possessed by sectarian groups. The religious sect, with
certain exceptions like the Lingayats, was comprised of persons of many castes (though excluding the very lowest castes), but stratified interactions were irrelevant when sect votaries acted in religious contexts. Thus, in the confines of the sect centre, all sect members, regardless of their caste affiliations, interacted as equals in ritual activities.

Differences between the dual divisions and sects are important; however. The religious sect was an absolute, not relative social form. Its enduring character was sampradaya, a tradition passed from sectarian leader, acharya to disciples; its institutional base was the matha or sect centre. In relation to the sampradaya and the matha all laic members suspended their caste identities though such identities obviously continued. Similarly, the dual divisions were composed of localized caste/occupational groups who interacted according to caste norms in their own localities. These norms could be altered to enable joint action with others in a broad, essentially occupational, alignment on a variety of matters. Co-operation in military ventures and in support of religious institutions is how the divisions are usually seen. These other activities must be seen as ancillary to the maintenance of occupational interests at the supralocal level and, of course, at the local level where it most counted. In disregarding caste distinctions among their constituent units, the dual divisions were not denying caste in the sense that sects did in obedience to bhakti principles. Religious bodies of the medieval period often affirmed the supernatural order prevailing at the sect temple centre by suspending the ‘natural’ order prevailing at the sect temple centre by suspending the ‘natural’ order of caste relationships. For the right and left divisions it is rather that caste, whether viewed as localized ethnic groups or as ritually ranked parts of a moral order, was not salient for the supra-local, occupational functions of the divisions, at least at this early time. Thus, caste groups are mentioned, but appear to have little to do with the way in which the divisions were transformed from latency to deal with the issues they did.

The endorsement of Brahmans and other prestigious members of local society in the Varanjura record cited above does not clarify the matter of internal stratification of the divisions. Along with Brahmans, referred to in that inscription as andanar, there were ekayar, i.e. ascetics, and niyayattars, i.e. local persons of prominence. Weavers and merchants who endorsed the resolution have the appearance of being persons of wealth, but there is no definite attribution of their superior status in the record. Since Brahmans are outside the divisions in most accounts, the association of Brahmans in both the inscriptions tends to confirm the equality of status that existed among the constituent castes of the divisions. It is as attendants of ‘Brahmana sages’ or through the endorsing function of Brahmans that the claim of respectability and membership in one of the divisions is made and justified. The absence of references to stratified divisions within the dual divisions does not eliminate the possibility of internal strata. For some scholars such strata appear at times to exist. References to groups like the kalkolar and other weavers and
merchants, who are mentioned along with Brahmans in the endorsement, suggest this to C.S. Srinivasachari. In his pioneering work on the dual divisions he states that there were indeed strata and that the divisions reveal a process of ‘low castes striving for higher social positions’. Further support for this view is provided by the nattamakkal folk discussed in the Varanjuram inscription.

30 years after the date of the Varanjuram inscription cited above, the nattamakkal claimed for themselves the status of pumiputtirar, ‘sons of the soil’, in two inscriptions from Vengur and Tirukkoyilur, near the site of the Varanjuram record. The title pumiputtirar is significant since it is claimed by Vallalas, the dominant peasants of the right division, the valangai. For the nattamakkal, their membership in the left division but lately attained (i.e. A.D. 1227) this was an ambitious claim indeed! But such claims become more common later. That the nattamakkal of modern South Arcot made this claim is supported by usage in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, where nattamakkal are called ‘kings of Vellalas (orusar velala)’ indicating that those migrating from what is now South Arcot to Sri Lanka during the medieval period may have carried this relatively exalted designation. However, during the 19th century, the nattamakkal as well as the malaiyamakkal mentioned in the A.D. 1227 inscription were still closely linked territorially and in marriage. This suggests that while the plains-men (nattaman) of this part of South Arcot might have sought to differentiate themselves from the hill folk (malaiman) by arrogating to themselves titles such as pumiputtirar, and by association. Vellala-like status, this claim did not hold. The nattamakkal remained a peasant people below the status of the Vellala and were often identified as part of the Palli caste, a peasant group incongruously of the left division. Therefore, if status differences were at times stressed, these were not always successful.

Military actions by the dual divisions occupy a conspicuous place in the early records of the divisions and pose most sharply the question of the potential or relative character of the divisions. There are references to the ‘great army’ (masenai) of valangai and idangai, and to fighting men called velaikkara which comprised part of the Chola army in Sri Lanka during the late 11th century according to a Tamil inscription at Polonnaruva. Also, inscriptions of the middle of the 11th century from Tiruvenkadu in Tanjavur and Tiruvallam in North Arcot refer to grants by members of both divisions to temples, notwithstanding the fact that in other places, notably Kanchi, though perhaps not at this early time, the two divisions used different temples, halls, and dancing girls.

The term valangai is first encountered in connection with military contingents under the first of the great Cholas, Rajaraja I. Analysis of Chola military organization, granted the meagreness of the evidence, leads to the conclusion that the designation valangai could only have referred to armed contingents raised and commanded by the dominant peasantry of the Chola heartland of Cholamandalam and Tondaimandalam. During the time of
Rajaraja I (985-1014) and Rajendra I (1014-44), inscriptions from Tanjavur enumerate regiments of the army of which almost one-half (thirteen of thirty-one) were entitled valangai. Other forces included household troops and troops drawn from territories on the margins of Chola country, ‘vadugan’ from the northern, Telugu, tracts and malaiyalar from the hill borders of modern Kerala in the west. These forces serving the Cholas bore the designation velaiikkkarar, and the valangai were further identified by the addition to their title of one of the many pseudonymns taken by Rajaraja and a connective word, terinda, or ‘selected’. Thus, there was the unit called: nittavinoda-terinda-valangai-velaiikkkarappadaigal, ‘Nittavinoda’s [Rajaraja’s] selected right-hand warrior regiment’.

The meaning of velaiikkkarar has vexed historians for half a century, and it is still not clear. That it refers to warriors is unambiguous from the contexts in which it appears in inscriptions and literary sources of the 10th to the 12th centuries. But ‘whose’ soldiers they were is still at issue. The central problem involving this term is whether the velaiikkkarar were special ad permanent troops of the Chola overlords or whether they were enlisted for extraordinary or occasional military service as is suggested by the velai, one of the meanings of which is ‘occasional’. If they were the permanent troops of the Chola overlords, the valangai units cannot simultaneously be considered local peasant militia units. Alternatively, if the valangai velaiikkkarar were recruited to the military adventures of the Cholas from existing military units among the peasantry – controlled and led by the peasantry – then the association of the valangai with the peasantry would appear as strong in the early period as it is in the lists of the 18th century. The prevailing view of the velaiikkkarar is stated most clearly by Nilakanta Sastri. He says that they were the most permanent and dependable troops in the royal service....they were ever ready to defend the king and his cause with their lives when occasion (velai) arose. This view is supported by the editor of the Tamil Lexicon which writes, under the entry, velaiikkkarar: ‘devoted servants who hold themselves responsible for a particular service to their king at stated hours and vow to stab themselves to death if they fail in that’. As evidence for this view, Nilakanta Sastri refers, with uncharacteristic vagueness, to later literary sources while the Lexicon cites the commentary of Periyavachchapillai on Nammalvar’s Tirumoli, to the effect that these soldiers committed suicide for their king.

This view of the devotion of the velaiikkara to their king, whom they served presumably on a permanent basis, replaced an older, less heroic, view held by the epigraphists Hultzsch, Venkayya, and Krishna Sastri. They spoke of ‘troops of servants’, ‘volunteers’, or simply, soldiers of lower status (‘working classes’) who fought in Chola armies. Other scholars have suggested that the velaiikkkarar were mercenary troops as were others in the Chola forces. It may also be noted that the word velaiikkkarar differs from the word velaiikkkarar, servant or workman, only in the retroflex ‘l’. At issue here is whether these warriors, representing half of the known regiments enumerated in inscriptions
of the great Cholas, could be considered a permanent force, supported from the resources of the Chola overlords or whether the valangai velaikkarar were mobilized from among existing peasant military units for some limited purpose, and were thus an extension of the valangai (or idangai) as a potential social formation. The former view is congenial to that of Nilakanta Sastri and others who have tended to place heavy reliance upon the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the Chola state. However, there is no evidence of the basic means of supporting a large army any more than there is for maintenance of an elaborate bureaucracy. Neither, of course, was necessary. Just as locality institutions provided most of the administrative functions required at the time, so too, it must be supposed that the major forces involved in the wars of the Cholas were supplied from the existing organizations of the locality-based society of the time. To the core of household troops maintained by the Cholas, who may indeed have held a special loyalty to their overlord, and some mercenary troops from the western and northern forest, those under the control of peasant locality leaders alone, during the 10th and 11th centuries at least, could have provided the military units under Chola command. By the 12th century, idangai forces were added to this pool of military organized folk within the macro region who could be mobilized to join the Chola kings in defensive and predatory campaigns.

The association of the Coromandel peasantry with valangai military forces is supported by an important record of the time of Kulottunga I, A.D.1072, at Avani (Mulbagal taluk, Kolar district) in Gangavadi. As discussed above, the claim of the dominant locality folk in this area to membership in 48,000 bhumi’ of Tondaimandalam makes their identity as Vellalas from that adjoining territory a relatively firm one. The central purpose of the record bears out the unmistakable peasant interests of this locally dominant folk. Furthermore, this inscription is somewhat unusual in being one of those small classes of stone inscriptions which do not relate to a temple endowment. This Kolar inscription records how various local agrarian groups were to be taxed in a locality, called the ‘eighteen vishaya of Rajendra-Chola’, under the control of persons identified as valangai of Tondaimandalam. Commenting on this important record, Nilakanta Sastri sees in it the capacity of local people to thwart the efforts of a ‘self-willed and autocratic ruler’ and the expression of a ‘popular consciousness [that] there was a clear limit to the taxing power of the government….’ According to Professor Sastri, this epigraph records a unilateral modification of revenue arrangements imposed upon the local peasantry by a Chola revenue administrator.

There are several reasons for suggesting a different interpretation of this inscription. It is, first of all, extremely unlikely that the Chola overlords presumed to establish a system of detailed rates on all the specific sources of revenue mentioned in the record: the machinery for such control was simply not there. It is further questionable whether the rates set for land tax
(melvaram) in this record – one-fifth for forest and dry crop tracts and one-third for tank-irrigated paddy land – was for the benefit of the Chola state at all. Nilakanta Sastri and other historians of medieval South India have taken the term melvaram to mean ‘government’s share’, when it means: ‘major’, ‘higher’, or ‘first’ share. Melvaram is characteristically used in relationship to the division of produce from the land; it designates the major share claimed by those who held dominant land rights. **Kudi- (cultivator) or kil- (inferior) varam** was the lesser share. In his discussion of revenue terms, Nilakanta Sastri does not include melvaram among the somewhat doubtful list of terms, but, on the contrary, in his discussion of relations between those who cultivate and those who control the land, melvaram figures very prominently. The equation of ‘major share’ or melvaram with ‘government share’ from cultivated land is based upon nomenclature of the British ryotwari system rather than upon early South Indian practice. The British adopted this well-established term relating to divisions of produce between what they regarded as ‘landlord and tenant’, then, assuming the politic fiction that the government was landlord, the British claimed the right to a substantial portion of produce. However, in its historical context, there is no connection between the melvaram and the share which may have gone to the ‘state’ during the Chola period.

The order executed by those in control of the Avani locality, calling themselves valangai of Tondaimandalam, was addressed to the local, ruling groups over whom the control of Tondaimandalam soldiery had been extended by conquest at some earlier time. In Nilakanta Sastri’s discussion of this record, it is treated as a protest ‘against unusual levies’ of a ‘self-willed and autocratic ruler or chieftain’. But, the inscription is cast in quite usual terms with a laudatory preamble dedicated to the Chola king; it is not an obvious record of protest though it does declare that an order of the adigargal-sola-muvendavelar would not be followed. The muvendavelar referred to in the inscription as having promulgated this new and inappropriate revenue regulation could of course have been an agent of the Chola overlords or perhaps a well-placed military officer acting on his own behalf. But, it is most likely that this person was a leader of the conquering Tondaimandalam valangai forces claiming to exercise the superior prerogatives of a chief. In any case, as Nilakanta Sastri has noted, defiance of his orders are clear:…..there being no tax on cows and she-buffaloes since the rise of the sacred family of Cholas in the Solamandalam nadu [or] in the Jayangonda-Sola-mandalam….Sola-muvendavelar….’ If it is supposed that, like the warrior spokesmen of the valangai of Avani, this muvendavelar personage was part of a conquering Chola army, then the conflict was between him and others of the conquering force which had taken up residence in and was claiming control over this tract. Claimed by the latter were the same rights as they enjoyed in Tondaimandalam. The demand for an enhancement of payments from this tract by a tax on milch animals was therefore rejected by those in control of the area on the basis of custom followed in the neighbouring area from which they had come.
While expressly rejecting the special and, to those Tondaimandalam colonists in control of the locality, inappropriate demand for this tax, the rates of revenue to be paid to them as the land controllers of the locality were explicitly stated. This could only have been meant for those who cultivated the land around Avani, or the ‘eighteen vishaya of Rajendra-Chola and Kandamadam’, as the place was called. An interesting postscript to the inscription throws light on who the latter might have been. Shortly after the A.D. 1072 inscription was engraved, it was defaced. A new record, dated in the same year, was accordingly incised stating: “We [the inhabitants] of the eighteen great vishaya and the great army of the right hand [valangai], armed with great weapons, have also caused it to be engraved in stone that those who [violate] this order shall incur the heinous sin of having destroyed Brahmanas, herds of tawny cows, and Varanasi and shall become hereditary enemies of the great vishaya and the great army of the right hand armed with great weapons while those who maintain this order shall acquire the merit of having performed many horse sacrifices.....”

The strongly worded imprecation of this postscript to the Avani record of A.D. 1072 appeals to well-recognized moral sanctions (e.g. the sin of destroying Brahmans and so on), to retribution from the Tondaimandalam valangai, and, interestingly, to kingly honour in the form of the horse sacrifice. The last suggests an effort to influence local chiefs. It is moreover reasonable to assume that the defacement of the original inscription was done under the orders of or with the complicity of the ancient ruling groups of the Avani locality in protest against the revenue demands made upon them and their cultivators specified in the record of the Tondaimandalam valangai. These demands, even with the tax on live-stock excluded, were probably greater than those who had existed before; in any case, after all, it was not for the benefit of local cultivators that the general tax on kine was rejected, but for the benefit of those who had invested themselves with superior rights through conquest, the Tondaimandalam valangai colonists. It would be they who would enforce this regulation.

As mentioned, the A.D. 1072 records of Avani are among those rare documents which do not relate to a temple endowment or to temple business, but to the resolution of some problem. It is even more rare in recording the explicit rejection and modification of an order of a muvendavelar or some similar personage of authority. However, the reasons for the rejection are not difficult to understand. The Avani region of Kolar was an ancient, settled, apparently prosperous area of Telugu agriculturists when it came under Chola dominance through the military enterprise of Tondaimandalam valangai soldiers. Inscriptions from the neighbourhood of Avani from as early as the 4th century A.D. speak of the region as part of andhra-mandala, or ‘Telugu country’, and it was a celebrated place of antiquity and sanctity – avantikakshetra – associated with Valmiki, composer of the Ramayana. Its sacred places during the tenth century included several devoted to figures in
the Rama legend as well as a Smartha matha. Temple Chola conquest therefore involved the displacement of quite ancient, local ruling families, or at least their subordination to the recently intrusive Tondaimandalam valangai. It is scarcely surprising therefore to discover evidence of altered revenue arrangements by the local Telugu cultivators of the place and their chiefs who were only recently subjugated by a people with a different language and customs. The defacement of the original A.D. 1072 inscription and the post-script added later may be attributed to the fact of this conquest.

Still puzzling, though, is the repudiation of the bovine tax order in the Avani inscription. As there is no further evidence on the matter, it is assumed that the revenue rates established in A.D. 1072 were put into effect. On that assumption, it cannot be seriously considered that the defacement of the order which prompted the strong imprecation of the postscript was the work of the muvendavelar adigairgal. Such a feeble response to the rebuff of the valangai colonists of Avani would appear unworthy of one with the title of muvendavelar unless it were to be thought that the title could be claimed and recognized as appropriate by persons of very modest coercive capacities. This is, of course, a possibility and one consistent with the view of muvendavelar which is proposed below. However, the more prudent reading of this aspect of the Avani record is that, whatever the power of the adigarigal, the rebuff was accepted by him. This is to agree with Nilakanta Sastri’s interpretation of the inscription as evidence of the ability of local power holders to thwart unacceptable impositions, even by one who may himself have been a valangai chief of the forces of conquering Tondaimandalam agriculturists.

The left hand, idangai, division of lower social groups in the macro region during the Chola period was as certainly associated with mercantile and craft occupations as the right-hand division was with agrarian activities. The core idangai groups in all parts of the macro region were certain merchants and craftsmen conventionally expressed by the numeral ‘five’ as in the terms panchalar (or panchalattar or panch-kammalar) and anjuvannam. These usually included goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths, and skilled carpenters and stone cutters. Others characteristically associated with the left division, according to evidence of the eighteenth century, were oil processers using presses operated by two or more bullocks, implying supplies of raw materials and markets which might be found in urban places. Certain weavers were also of the division according to later evidence, though most were of the right division. In the case of weavers, there appears to be no particular reason for the association with the left division unless scale of operation and production for the market (rather than for a fixed clientele) was a factor for weavers as it appeared to be for oil producers.
It is possible to project the 17th and 18th century occupational alignment of the left division backward in time. One important link with the past is found in rathakara inscriptions of the 12th and 13th centuries. Craftsmen identified as rathakara had enjoyed an ancient honourable status according to Vedic and later Vedic sources, but by the early centuries of the Christian era they had come to be regarded as Sudras according to the Amarakosa. Reflecting the early high status of rathakara in South India, a late 4th century Pallava copperplate inscription found in the Krishna district of modern Andhra, dated in the fourteenth year of Nandivarman I, records the grant of an agrahara to one of the rathakara caste who was called a chatuvejja, that is, one who has studied the four Vedas. Craftsmen of a later period occasionally used the rathakara designation in what must be considered an attempt to strengthen their claims to high status. A well known inscription from Uyyakondan-Udaiyar (Tiruchirapalli taluk) of A.D. 1118 records a gathering of learned Brahmans (bhatta) at Rajasraya-chaturvedi-mangalam to consider the status of a group of craftsmen, including goldsmiths and silversmiths, carpenters, stone cutters and masons calling themselves rathakarar. Having examined sastric authorities, the Brahmans concluded that since rathakarar were of high and correct birth (mahishya and anuloma), they were entitled to the sacred thread investiture and access to other important rituals. Another rathakara inscription from alangudi, alias Jananatha-chaturvedi-mangalam (Nannilam taluk, Tanjavur) of A.D. 1264 records an agreement among craftsmen calling themselves rathakarar, to raise a fund from among their number in specified localities for the construction of a pavilion in that brahemadeya. The fund was to be created from a special cess, inavari, upon craftsmen, and it was to be collected by Saivite temple functionaries, in the named localities. Among the signatories of the order were carpenters and goldsmiths. It may safely be assumed, with the epigraphist K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, that the four classes of artisans referred to in the alangudi inscription were panchalar or Kammalar, the core group of the left division of that early time and later. They had simply appropriated rathakarar myths involving the god Visvakarma and his priest, Kasyapa.

Another element of evidence linking those using the ancient rathakarar title with left division artisans of the medieval period is to be found in the identification of rathakarar as kil-kalanai, subordinate professional people, who seemed to have lived in separate residential quarters (ceri) in larger villages. An inscription of A.D.1036 from Chidambaram distinguishes between non-Brahman inhabitants of superior status, kudigal, and those of inferior status, kil-kalanai. The kudigal included two merchant groups, sankerappadiyar and vyaparin, plus three groups usually associated with the right division: Vellala, Saliyar (cloth merchants) and Pattinavar (fishermen). The subordinate workmen, kil-kalanai, were taccar (carpenters), kollar (blacksmiths), tattar (goldsmiths), and kiliyar (weavers). The epigraphist Hultzsch, in discussing some inscriptions of a slightly earlier period, A.D. 1013, noted the term ‘kammanacheri’ and hazarded that this was the
residential quarter of the kammalar, or artisans; the propinquity of the artisans’ quarters to those of the paraiyan, ‘paraicceri’, suggested the low status of the artisans. Thus, whatever the high status of the rathakarar in ancient times, and notwithstanding the use which craftsmen of the Chola period sought to make of this ancient status in assuming the title of rathakarar, they had come to be identified with middling and even poor rank in the 11th century.

During the 12th century, however, the status of artisans and merchants associated with the left division began to change. The Polonnaruva (Sri Lanka) inscription of the first quarter of the twelfth century speaks of the idangai velaikkarar for the first time and merchant groups later to be mentioned prominently. This record suggests strongly that the idangai velaikkarar were the military arm of the merchants marking the beginning of the rise to prominence of the great itinerant guilds whose military power was so conspicuous for the next two centuries. At the same time, artisans of the left division began to demand and to receive privileges which marked an enhancement of their status. A series of inscriptions from the Kongu country during the late twelfth century refer to the Makkalar of vengalanadu (modern Karur taluk) who claimed for themselves the right to use the double conch and drums at times of marriages and funerals, to use footwear (ciruppu), and to cover their houses with plaster as a mark of their respectability. The interpretation by Dr. M. Arokiaswami of these Kongu inscriptions, is that valangai colonists of the region, including Vellalas and Kaikkolars, had oppressed those of the left-hand faction until the intervention of the Chola ruler, Kulottunga III was brought by the left division leaders there, the Kammalar.

Developments similar to these were taking place in Andhra and Karnataka as well as in Tamil country. During the 11th and 12th centuries, merchants and artisans of Andhra attained strikingly public presence for the first time, particularly in the relatively densely settled parts of the Andhra plain called Vangi, comprising modern East Godavari, Krishna, and Guntur districts. In these places there are numerous temple inscriptions which record gifts of merchants calling themselves, ‘the lords of Punugonda’ and often citing gotra names. Itinerant merchants plying extensive trade networks between Karnataka and Andhra endowed temples in these regions as well as in Tamil country. These endowments are recorded in inscriptions which extoll the virtue, bravery, and dharmic pursuits of their members. Artisans of Karnataka, calling themselves Vira Panchala, had formed special relationships with certain temples and seminaries (mathas) such as the Airiyakula-matha in the Hoysala capital of Dorosamudra (modern Halebid, Hassan district); artisans of Andhra, with the name panchanamuvaru, were also associated with particular temples of the time and even referred to themselves as a corporate group. Among the most self-consciously striving groups of the time were the oil-mongers (teliki) of Bezwada and its vicinity. They called themselves, ‘the one-thousand’, and in
their records of the eleventh and twelfth centuries boast of being the hereditary servants of the Eastern Chalukya rulers of the area. According to a copperplate inscription of A.D. 1084, Teliki bridal couples were given the special right to visit the king on horseback and to obtain offerings of betel from his hand. Changes in the status of the left division people during the 12th century were dependent upon changes in South Indian society. New importance was accorded to urban artisans and merchants as a result of the temple urbanization of the period. With that came a fundamental modification of the position of mercantile and craft groups from that of the previous centuries when they were not only constrained to accept a subordinate place in relation to the dominant peasantry, but to suffer the indignity of a corporate status of pollution which is ineluctably associated with the left-hand.

The terms valangai and idangai and balagey and edagey literally mean ‘right hand and left hand’ in Tamil and Kannada. While it is possible to attach excessive importance to the simple positional distinction of left and right, there is ever-present the taint of pollution owing to the use of the left hand in bodily functions. It is also well to recognize the distinction of left and right at the level of ritual. The designation of left-hand has been attached to corrupt or perverse forms of worship called vamis (from vama: ‘left-side’ or ‘reverse’) which are secret Tantric ritual forms of Siva worship. This distinction is illustrated by the early 16th century story of how the Saivite teacher Appaya Dikshit of Kalahasti sought to discredit a Vaishnava teacher of the Tatacharya family by accusing him of having given a blessing to the Vijayanagara king, Achyutadevaraya, with his left hand as he did with people of the lower castes. Various explanations have been offered for the left-and right-hand designations. Macleane’s suggested that the ‘hand’s imagery arose from the fact of five artisan groups of the left division, the panchalar or Kammalar, as opposed to five non-artisan castes – i.e. as fingers on a hand. This is clearly unacceptable, for the number here, ‘five’ is as conventional as the number ‘ninety-eight’ which is used for each division in many of the sources. The more usual explanations about the right and left hand are positional: people of the valangai being on the right-hand side of gods, sages, Brahmans, or kings in some legendary context in which status was determined. G. Oppert appears to have been the first to notice the implication of ritual pollution in the right-and left-hand division. He attributed the dual division with its pollution implications to the conflict between Jainas and Hindus during the pre-Pallavan period. In this connection, Oppert stated: ‘The influence of Jains was perhaps strongest in the towns where artisan classes form an important portion of the population, while the Brahmans appealed to the land owning and agricultural classes.

While Brahmans remained neutral with respect to the divisions, Jainas were apparently associated with the left-hand division, edagey, in Karnataka until A.D. 1368 when the Vijayanagar ruler, Bukka Raya, intervened in a dispute involving Vaishnavas and Jainas over sect emblems and decreed that Jainas were to be considered members of the right-hand
division. As suggested above in the discussion of the Pallava period, the nominally religious conflict which was bitterly carried out during that early period was based upon important ideological factors. Under the Pallavas and their peasant and Brahman supporters, Jainism was treated as a dangerous error, and association with Jaina teachers and institutions polluting. Oppert pointed to a similar orientation of the Chola rulers toward the Jainas and the Jaina-supporting Hoysalas. Considering the stigma of pollution which attached to the left-hand, it is to be wondered that those of the idangai would have acquiesced in the title. That they did is clear from the Urrattur inscriptions cited above and numerous other insessional and literary documents of the idangai which are to be found in all parts of the macro region. There are numerous references to regular local dues collected from the left-hand people as idangai-vari as well as subscriptions collected from and on behalf of the division, the idangai-magamai. During the earliest period for which there are records, it appears that the idangai occupied an inferior and perhaps despised position among people of the region. Later, in the twelfth century and after, when idangai groups undertook to alter their positions with respect to the dominant peasant population, they continued to identify themselves by the idangai title notwithstanding that this title might have originally been a sign of their degraded status in the society of the macro region. The title was retained until the 19th century in most places.

Apart from Oppert and, recently, Arjun Appadurai, few modern commentators on the right-left divisions in South Indian society recognize the signification of impurity or pollution which accompanies left symbolism; none – including these two – addresses the question of why those of the left division accepted its derogatory designation. Appadurai notes: ‘As in other cultural systems, the left-hand in South India has connotations of impurity whereas the right-hand has powerful and positive normative associations....’ Where Oppert explains the designation as originating in the success of the Brahman-led Hinduism of agriculturists over the ‘heretical’ Jaina artisans and merchants of pre-Pallavan trade centres, he does not ask why the presumed denigrating ‘left’ title persisted and, especially, why those of the left division continued to use it in their own records later. Nor does Appadurai’s thoughtful and bold explanation of the division as a ‘root paradigm’ of conflict permit us to understand finally why, if, as he says, the left-hand connotes impurity, those of the idangai use that title. A possible explanation of this puzzling phenomenon is that the utility of the idangai title as a well-established symbol of identity outweighed for its users of the Chola period and later any stigma which might have attached to the title from an earlier time. It is after all not only in the labels which are affixed upon or chosen by a group that basic significance inheres, for new myths can be made to offset older meanings. The proud adoption of the label ‘Slav’ (from ‘slave’) in nineteenth century Europe and the more recent use of the label ‘Black’ in American society remind us of this property of ethnic labels and labelling. The capacity of ethnic labels to serve as symbols of identity and mobilization – whatever the origin of the labels and
their possibly once derogatory connotations – explains as well as any reason why the title ‘left’ or ‘left-hand’ continued to be used by a substantial number of South Indians even after the 12th century when those using the title found impressive new opportunities and importance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The span of the dual division of lower castes in South India extended over 8 centuries. Only a brief part of that span has been examined here, and this early phase of its development may not have been its most important phase. Evidence from the late 18th and early 19th centuries suggests that the dual divisions provided an essential means by which many lower castes in South India improved their means of coping with the extra-ordinary changes attending the development of British institutions, particularly those of towns and cities. However, urban contexts are of little consequence during most of the Chola period, and, to the extent that urbanization became important in the late Chola period, it contributed to the weakening of the state and to changes in the society of the macro region previously within its authority. It is especially during the Vijayanagara period and, later, during the British period, that towns assume an importance not known before, except, perhaps, during the Classical age of the Cilapadikaram. Of this most early period, only speculation is possible and that is the subject of an appending note on origins of the dual divisions.

During the Chola period, several characteristics distinguish the divisions from their later history and from other elements of Chola society apart from the rural context in which they operated. Among the most important are the military and colonization activities of each of the divisions. The 11th century Avani inscription of the Tondaimandalam valangai from modern Kolar district and several idangai records from modern South Arcot pertain to these matters. Each portrays conquest groups who have successfully installed themselves in new territories and exercise dominance over them. In these inscriptions and others, another function of the divisions was the assimilation of persons previously beyond the expanding frontier of the sedentary agricultural order. This is attested in the two thirteenth century inscriptions from Urrattur in modern Tiruchirapalli and Varanjuram in modern South Arcot. Both places would appear to have been zones of recent agricultural expansion in the thirteenth century; both were located on the edges of older riverine settlement areas. Such newly assimilated folk did not gain new identities, but, having been granted appropriate insignia, were associated with others in the loose alliance structure of a division – usually the left division – and thus eligible for the support of others of the division when that was required. They also became eligible for participation in the occasional military forays which expanded the land under regular cultivation and settlement; they finally supported temples by occasional cesses and subscriptions (vari and magamai) and thus became eligible for participation in forms of temple worship and perhaps temple honours from which they would otherwise be excluded.
These functions were occasional; the divisions were not absolute, corporate, or continuous, but potential groupings. This conception is admittedly an unexpected one and jars the presuppositions which any student of Hindu society brings to the study of the subject. For, the divisions of the right and the left are not only occasional in their organization and functions, but they also appear to be without the internally ranked segmentation characteristic of Hindu institutions. They resemble sodalities or sectarian groupings in these respects, except that therefore is no core continuity as might be provided to cults by joint worship at specific tutelary or even canonical shrines, nor is there the evidence, except in post-Chola times, of an acharya or a guru who might serve as leader of the divisions in particular places. The divisions resemble more the modern socio-political caste associations in linking spatially dispersed groups possessing some shared ethnic identifications or interests into active associations for occasional cooperation. Like the modern movements, myths were promulgated by the divisions to justify their existence, and, like the modern movements, joint efforts may have involved conflict with others over rights to certain symbols (e.g. 13th century artisans of the left division demanded and received the right to the use of the conch and to sandals just as the 19th century Nadars claimed the breast cloth). These joint efforts might also involve cooperation in the support of certain activities (e.g. medieval temple endowments and modern ‘temple entry’ rights, modern school hostels and cooperative housing societies). The analogue of the dual divisions and modern caste associations may be pressed further. In both cases, public conflict with adversaries was resolved by the intervention of legitimate authority. Chiefs, kings and Brahmans play an increasingly public part in the records of the dual divisions during the later Chola period just as British officials do in the conflicts between the divisions from the 17th to the early 19th century. In the latter cases, conflicts at times give the impression of being staged or promoted by members of one or the other division in order to produce intervention and legitimate adjudication. This would seem to have been the strategy of caste associations in more recent times, and ‘agitational politics’ is the term that has come to be applied to the execution of that strategy. During the Chola period, these strategies can hardly be identified from the relatively few and dispersed inscriptions, but the forms do appear to be present, and they are to become clearer during the Vijayanagara period under the intensified processes of urbanization and political change.

In Chola times, the divisions of the right and left present themselves as linking formations concerned with military activities, expansion of agrarian forms of the age, and the assimilation of new peoples to the society of the age. Linkages were essentially horizontal, that is the divisions brought into potential alliance structures those groups of neighbouring nadu localities whose interests were not represented in the dominant nattar of the locality. Lower agricultural groups, various artisans and traders of agricultural commodities, as well as field labourers could rely less and less upon the protection of their interests by the dominant nattar of their isolated localities.
Even more hazardous was the position of these artisan and merchant groups whose economic activities articulated poorly with the agricultural economy, whose products were not exchanged in the nexus of agricultural patron-client relations, but exchanged more widely and impersonally; whose economic fortunes, therefore, were often tied closely to itinerant merchants seen as little better than bandits by settled agriculturists, and whose pasts were tainted by urban and heretical connections which, added to everything else, made them objects of suspicion and disdain.

To both such disadvantaged groups – lower agricultural groups and mobile artisan-traders – alliances across ancient nadu lines provided a measure of security and political leverage with respect to the notables of each nadu, the nattar. These horizontal linkages across nadu boundaries complemented and were probably the consequence of the vertical integration of nadus during the time of the great Cholas, Rajaraja I and Rajendra I, when the Chola segmentary state was being perfected. The local beneficiaries of this vertical integration were the most powerful of the nattar who, in accepting the ritual sovereignty of these great kings and imitating their royal style, separated themselves as an increasingly powerful, local ruling stratum. However, even as the horizontal linkages among the less powerful occupational groupings was occurring as a means of fortifying their interests against the increased prestige and power of the nattar, the latter were themselves establishing horizontal linkages with dominant agricultural groups like themselves in neighbouring localities, creating the periyanadu, or ‘greater nadu’ which comes into historical view during the 12th century. To this and to related changes during the twelfth century attention must now be given.

A NOTE ON ORIGINS

Discussion of the right and left divisions during the Chola period has been shaped by the necessity of examining the fragmentary evidence of this early period in the light of the more complete information of the 17th to 19th centuries. However great the gaps in evidence and understanding of the dual divisions between the 10th and 13th centuries, these are as nothing compared to the difficulties of considering the origins of the divisions. The vagueness with which the dual social divisions may be seen in the period from the tenth to the 13th centuries may appear to make suggestions about origins particularly hazardous. However, it is precisely because knowledge about the divisions is so fragmentary at this time and even later that any analysis must imply a set of notions about their origins. Such implicit notions are best made explicit.

The development of the dual division of lower castes appears as the consequence of two significant structural features of the society of the macro region during its early history. These are the territorial segmentation of society and culture, and the ambiguous social status of the non-Brahman population given the commitment to Brahmanical ideology by the Pallava period. Early
attempts by peoples of the macro region to cope with these structural features produced a status system pivoting upon the power of the peasantry of the numerous localities into which the southern peninsula was divided. For a substantial portion of the population – those who were not of the dominant peasant groups – the status system of the Pallava and most of the Chola periods was unsatisfactory, and by the 11th century, merchants and artisans along with their urban and rural dependents – began to function independently of and to some extent in opposition to peasant leaders of local society. This modification occurred without altering the basic territorial segmentation of society or the ambiguous status positions of non-Brahmans in South India, and the dual social divisions of the eleventh century were to remain important for centuries. Membership in, or at least association or alliance with, established status groupings in an increasingly stratified society was the principal motivation for the division. The process of an expanding agrarian system – partly by military means, partly by peaceful means – created the need to assimilate new peoples; this was an important feature of the Pallava and early Chola periods. In this process, occupational and residential groupings were the prime organizational loci. The expanding requirements for the services of essentially urban-based merchants and artisans provided the opportunity for the development.

The emergence of groups identifying it as the left division in the eleventh century does not preclude the possibility that there might have been an earlier foundation for such a division. One such hypothesis is that the divisions represent peoples of different racial origin within South India dating from ancient times. Racial admixtures there were, but, apart from the ‘Aryan migration’ which introduced Brahmanical as well as Jaina and Buddhist institutions, there is no convincing historical evidence of a significant, racially distinct stratification which could account for the divisions as known after the tenth century. Nor does the view here deny a variant of the ancient racial argument which distinguished between ‘indigenous’ people of a culture area and ‘strangers’ who took up residence there. The later hypothesis is supported by occasional references in Karnataka where nadu and desa (for strangers) are co-equal with edagey and balagey. Valangal velaiikkarar are considered by Srinivas Iyengar to be ‘Tamilians’, whereas the idangai velaiikkarar, according to him, consisted of warriors from Andhra (vadugan), Kerala (malaiyalar), and other not of the Chola heartland of Cholamandalam and Tondaimandalam. Another manifestation of this ‘stranger’ versus ‘indigenous’ classification is in the epigram of the low caste of Paraiyan, invariably associated with the right-hand division in recent centuries: ‘the paraiyar are not of the left hand, they are Tamilians’. While the conception of ‘stranger peoples’ may have entered into the dual division, the core elements of the divisions, on both sides, must be considered as ‘indigenous’.
Another view of how earlier divisions in the society of the macro region may have served as the basis for the subsequent development of the right-and left-hand divisions appears to be emerging from recent scholarship on the Classical or Sangam ear. In the important work of N. Subramanian, Sangam Polity, there are depicted two, possibly simultaneous social orders. One was urban, cosmopolitan, trade oriented; the other was ‘tribal’ rural, and relatively simple in economic organization. The interactions between these two disparate social orders are very unclear. Poets of the one order may not have been poets of the other, and while certain cultural continuities existed between the orders – in language and beliefs at least – it is as yet difficult to see them as constituting a single civilization. However, these two orders might have comprised a single society as proposed by Subrahmanian, and this could have established the basic framework for the later, historical divisions. Such questions of possibly earlier fissures which might have formed the basis of the later divisions cannot be considered in greater detail at this point; the state of our knowledge will not permit that. The need for more archaeological and systematic literary research is essential for carrying these speculations beyond the present state. For the purposes of exploring the origins of the divisions our starting place must be restricted to the period when the evidence is superior to that afforded by racial drift theories and the information gained from the undated poems of hundreds of authors. It is to certain of the general characteristics of society which were manifest during the Pallava period and after that attention must be given. Among these is the high degree of territorial segmentation of society and some of the social structural consequences of the mature Brahmanical culture of that time.

Territorial segmentation has referred principally to the isolation of the many locality cores of peasant population, nadus, scattered over the Tamil plain. The degree of isolation conformed with physiographical factors to a significant extent; thus, in the central Kaveri basin, there was less isolation, greater continuity of settlement, than in the western parts of the basin (parts of modern Tiruchirapalli, South Arcot, and Salem) and in the tracts South of the Kaveri. In most of Tondaimandalam, the central Tamil plain, the nodes of peasant settlement conformed with physical features, especially the drainage patterns of the principal streams upon which tank storage of irrigation water depended would have been especially important. Judging from the distribution of ancient inscriptional and modern records referring to the right and left divisions; the greater the degree of isolation among the peasant cores of settlement, the more important and conspicuous was the dual division. The central Kaveri basin appears never to have developed the intensive divisional alignments found in the central portion of the Tamil plain where the dual divisions were both an early and persistent phenomenon with Kanchi serving as the centre for both.
By the late Pallava period, and certainly in the Chola period, Brahman groups were virtually closed, priestly corporations dominated by Smartas of various divisions. Most prestigious, perhaps, were the Vadama Smarta Brahmans. Their names suggest a northern origin (vada means 'north'), but the title, vadama could also refer to the proficiency in Sanskrit and vedic ritual, which then and earlier were associated with the north. Other Smarta Brahmans were divided into territorial sub-divisions. There was also a smaller group of Brahmans of Vaishnava persuasion, the Vaikanasas; it was not until some centuries later that Vaishnava Brahmans began to constitute a somewhat larger proportion of the Brahman population, and at that later time, the numbers were primarily the result of a shift of Smartas to the fold of the dynamic and expanding Sri Vaishnava sampradayas. Increasingly secure and possessing great secular authority in rural settlements over some of which they enjoyed complete control, the Brahman monopoly over higher sacral functions was firm and was to remain so until the 13th century. Brahmans were unchallenged in this sacred or secular authority either by rival religions or by warriors determined or disposed to diminish their role. Brahmans thus constituted a strong and impenetrable stratum of the contemporary social system. No less clearly defined in this social system were those at the bottom.

Enjoying neither the high ritual status nor the status provided by holding land or possessing skills essential to the maintenance of peasant agrarian operations, agrestic labourers occupied the unambiguously lowest strata of contemporary society. With the expansion of wet rice cultivation based upon secure irrigation sources, the numbers of such persons increased. Partly, these increases represented the assimilation of agricultural groups who had previously cultivated lands deficient in reliable irrigation sources. Such peasants were situated at the margins of productive peasant agriculture. When these marginal tracts were brought under irrigation by the expansion of prosperous and powerful peasant groups with requisite organization, capital (mostly in the form of superior skills but also livestock), adequate manpower, and superior military power, the former occupants of these lands were reduced to labour dependents of the expanding peasantry, or they fled to still more marginal tracts only to be incorporated later or forced once again to flee. Another source of this lowest tier of social groups was those of the forests to whom regular sedentary agricultural pursuits were unknown. When forests were felled by expanding peasant agriculture, as they were throughout the Pallava period, the fate of the forest dwellers was the same as that to whom agricultural labour was already a full-time though hazardous basis of livelihood.
Apart from the degraded status which attached to those who laboured on the fields of others and were therefore without substantial rights or means for ameliorating their conditions except the threat of absconding, there were those whose purchase in peasant social organization was even worse, by a slight degree, because they combined some polluting craft with their principal agrastic labour. Such were the leather workers, Sakkiliyar and Madiga, for example, whose low occupational status as field workers was negatively reinforced by their work with leather and the preparation of hides. Others included musicians and dancers who constituted part of the corps of bards in the classical period. Between the poorest field workers, artisans and artists and the highest strata of priests were the majority of the population. During the recent, modern past, ranking pressures have been the most severe at this level of society consisting of powerful land-controlling peasant groups and wealthy merchants, bankers, and artisans. Beneath these has been a second order of peasants who lacked the means to support a claim to being dominant peasants, pumipputirar, ‘sons of the soil’. Finally, there have been many kinds of village artisans and service groups (as washermen, barbers, and potters) whose work was tainted by a not always logical set of pollution norms. Among such varied groups, the terminology dictated by Brahmanical usage, such as ‘Sudra’, serves to analytical purpose, and, in the recent past, that label has been rejected by those upon whom it was placed by other Indians or by British administrators.

The modern term ‘non-Brahman’, comes closer than any other to encompassing the middle groups of the early period in the sense of being ‘respectable’, socially mobile, and yet clearly neither of the highest nor lowest strata. To the modern ear, however, ‘non-Brahman’, is difficult to disassociate from the 20th century context when the term was claimed by educated and politically mobilized groups of Tamil Nadu and Andhra bent on displacing Brahmans from what they regarded as places of disproportionate advantage. Still, the term ‘non-Brahman’ is more appropriate than the varna terms Vaisya and Sudra in the South Indian context though the latter terms occur in ritual manuals (agama) and inscriptions occasionally. In fact, there appears to be no generic term for those beneath the status of Brahmans in the medieval period or earlier. Sectarian terms such as cattatavan and Saiva, denoting votaries of Vishnu and Siva who were not Brahmans, are too narrowly circumscribed in their reference. In the corpus of South Indian inscriptions, there occur numerous specific ethno-occupational groups below the status of Brahmans such as; adavimar, ayogavar, kaikkolar, saligar (weavers), alavar, parampar, vellan (cultivators), anjuvannam, kammalar (artisans), pattinavar, bharatavar (fishermen), davana-chetti, teliki (merchants), ilavar (toddy tappers), kannakkanan (brazier), mannan, vannan (washermen), manradi
(shepherd), navisan (barber), taiyan (tailor); and vetkovan (potter). The terms idangai and valangai are themselves references to general classes of non-Brahmans, except that the dual divisions included among their most active members those of very low status. It seems evident that there was little of the rank striving and conflict among local ethnic groupings that one finds in contemporary South India. The 19th and 20th century claims of some middle groups to the status of Brahmans may have occurred earlier; Vellalas and Reddis, dominant peasants of the modern Tamil and Andhra plains, occasionally equated their control over land with the rights of Kshatriyas. Such claims were as irrelevant in an earlier age as they were during the 19th and 20th centuries. Ranking postulates are not based upon unilateral claims, but upon interactions among claimants with each other and with those considered the lowest and most polluted, on the other side.

From the earliest references to the dual divisions, their compositions appear to have included a wide range of groups which in more recent times maintain punctilious differentiation and relative ranking. Yet, the diction of the idangai and valangai inscriptions and the administrative and judicial records of the 17th to the 20th centuries give no importance to relative rank within the divisions. On the contrary, the divisions represent themselves or are represented as pluralistic collectivities enjoying an apparent equality as in various kinds of sodalities. The critical factor in the divisions of this early period and later was not relative ranking among the constituents, but shared substance and interests. It was not rank, but membership within a division which was important. Only the very powerful or very marginal could claim or afford a position of neutrality (e.g. the status of madhyasta in the Baramahal Records) with respect of the dual-alliance formations. The powerful nattar were in the best position to separate themselves from others of the ambiguous middle strata. Their economic control and military authority within the framework of the Chola primacy, and their close relations with Brahmans all combined to effect this separation. To those less favourably placed, but still important in agrarian relationships – peasant groups of lesser status and certain merchants and artisans – the right division provided alliance support of importance. Craftsmen and merchants less directly involved in agrarian relations sought alliance refuge in the left division, for in the balancing of status and locality solidarity which hinged upon links to the land, they had but poor claims. Moreover, to the extent that such craft and mercantile activities could be identified with the urban social order, they bore an additional status handicap of having been associated with heterodoxy. A core of military forces stood ready to support the latter coalition in the form of armed contingents of itinerant traders.
The supra-local system of dual divisions became evident first in the valangai military units of the first of the great Cholas, Rajaraja I. At that time there appears to have been no contending idangai. The designation va at this earlier time may have been the way of referring to the armed peasantry of Cholamandalam and Tondaimandalam who had overcome a considerable measure of isolation and had begun to cooperate militarily, first under various chiefs and later under the great Cholas. They had become the weapon, the ‘right-hand’, of ambitious warrior leaders. These were potential or relative structures, not absolute and continuous ones, as suggested in the term velai, in velaikkkarar, meaning ‘occasional’. It was not until two centuries after the first references to essentially localized peasant groups collaborating on wider regional lines for military purposes that the left division appears to have achieved the same degree of supra-local potential organization. Venkayya’s view that the existence of the valangai soldiers in the time of Rajaraja I implied the existence of the idangai would, under this interpretation, be questionable. It is more probable that the prior existence of the peasant-dominated right division led to the development of an opposing division at a later time that is during the 11th century.

Removed from the great brahmadeya centres of orthodoxy of the 10th and 11th centuries, which afford the most important sources of information of this period, the rise of the left-hand division and the establishment of a true dual division was slow to be registered. Mobile artisan/trader groups, even after they had shifted their allegiance from the heterodox to the Saivite orthodox faith of the era, probably continued to be held in suspicion. However, such groups could claim an ancient and honourable past during which they enjoyed respectable status if evidence such as the Classical epics, Cilappadikaram and Manimekalai are to be credited even partially and if the rathakara connection was accepted widely. Neither these artisan/trader groups nor the itinerant traders with whom they were linked would long have willingly accepted the low status which had befallen them in many agrarian settlements. They would, accordingly, seize upon the new opportunities of the 12th century and after to alter that status. Among the most important of the opportunities were those associated with temple development in that age.

**THE AFGHANS**

Aurangzeb came into conflict with the Afghans also. Conflict with the hardy Afghan tribesmen who lived in the mountain region between the Punjab and Kabul was not new. Akbar had to fight against the Afghans and, in the process, lost the life of his close friend and confidant, Raja Birbal. Conflict with the Afghan tribesmen had taken place during the reign of Shah Jahan also. These conflicts were partly economic and partly political and religious. With little means of livelihood in the rugged mountains, the Afghans had no option but to prey on the caravans or to enrol in the Mughal armies. Their fierce love of freedom made service in the Mughal armies difficult. The Mughals generally kept them content by paying them subsidies. But growth of population or the rise of an ambitious leader could lead to a breach of this tacit agreement.
During the reign of Aurangzeb, we see a new stirring among the Pathans. In 1667, Bhagu, the leader of the Yusufazai tribe, proclaimed as king a person named Muhammad Shah who claimed descent from an ancient royal lineage, and proclaimed himself his wazir. It would appear that among the Afghans, as among the Jats, the ambition of setting up a separate state of their own had begun to stir. A religious revivalist movement called the Raushanai, which emphasised a strict ethical life and devotion to a chosen pir had provided an intellectual and moral background to the movement.

Gradually, Bhagu’s movement spread till his followers started ravaging and plundering the Hazara, Attock and Peshawar districts and brought the traffic in the Khyber to a standstill. To clear the Khyber and crush the uprising, Aurangzeb deputed the chiefbakhshi, Amir Khan. A Rajput contingent was posed with him. After a series of hard-fought battles, the Afghan resistance was broken. But to watch over them, in 1671, Maharaja Jaswant Singh, the ruler of Marwar, was appointed as thanedar of Jamrud. There was a second Afghan uprising in 1672. The leader of the opposition this time was the Afridi leader, Akmal Khan, who proclaimed himself king and read khutba and struck sikka in his name. He declared war against the Mughals and summoned all the Afghans to join him. According to a contemporary writer, with a following more numerous than antiquities and locusts’, they closed the Khyper Pass. Moving forward to clear the Pass, Amir Khan advanced too far and suffered a disastrous defeat in the narrow defile. Amir Khan managed to escape with his life, but 10,000 men perished, and cash and goods worth two crores were looted by the Afghans. This defeat brought other tribesmen into the fray including Khushhal Khan Khattak, a sworn enemy of Aurangzeb in whose hands he had suffered imprisonment for some time.

In 1674, another Mughal noble Shujaat Khan, suffered a disastrous rout in the Khyber. But he was rescued by a heroic band of Rathors sent by Jaswant Singh. At last, in the middle of 1674, Aurangzeb himself went to Peshwar and remained in the neighbourhood till the end of 1675. By force and diplomacy, the Afghan united front was broken and peace was slowly restored. The Afghan uprising shows that sentiments of resistance to the Mughal rule and the urge for regional freedom were not confined to sections of Hindus, such as Jats, Marathas, etc. Also, the Afghan uprising helped to relax Mughal pressure on Shivaji during a crucial period. It also made difficult, if not impossible, a forward policy by the Mughals in the Deccan till 1676 by which time Shivaji had crowned himself and entered into an alliance with Bijapur and Golconda.
CASTE AND PEASANT REBELLIONS

THE JAT UPRISING OF 1669

Paradoxical though it might appear and strange though it might seem, the Jat uprising of 1669 under Gokul occurred at a time when the Mughal government was by no means weak or imbecile. In fact this period of Aurangzeb’s reign witnessed the climax of the Mughal Empire. During the early medieval period frequent breakdown of law and order often induced the Jats to adopt a refractory course. But, with the establishment of the Mughal rule, law and order was effectively established and we do not come across any major Jat revolt during the century and a half preceding the reign of Aurangzeb.

CAUSES OF THE REVOLT.

The underlying causes of the Jat revolt of 1669 have not been properly analysed so far. Historians have generally ascribed the said rebellion to Aurangzeb’s religious discrimination and the oppression of local officers. These, however, seem to have been the contributory causes but neither the sole nor the dominant factors which precipitated the revolt. Long before Aurangzeb even the bigotry of Firuz Tughluq and Sikandar Lodi did not provoke the Jats for any such rebellion. It leaves the impression that religious persecution of the emperor was not responsible for the Jat insurrection. When Jizya was imposed ten years later, it did not create a similar stir among the Jats and the outrageous conduct of the imperial officers seldom provoked a revolt of this magnitude. Therefore the real causes of the Jat rebellion of 1669 lay deeper than have been assigned to it so far.

One of the main causes may be sought in the changed nature and scope of the Mughal government under Aurangzeb which was detrimental to the democratic and tribal way of life of the Jat fraternity. Akbar assiduously tried to build a comprehensive state based on religious and social freedom, respect for village autonomy and willing acquiescence of the people at large. The nature of the Mughal despotism generally retained its previous character under Jahangir. In spite of Shahjahan’s intolerant attitude in the beginning, the government in his times also displayed a “sense of justice” and kept the interests of the people in its view. But, with the accession of Aurangzeb, the comprehensive nature of the state gradually yielded to a narrow and overcentralized despotic regime. A despotic system rests upon the personality of the ruler which motivates the entire administrative machinery. Aurangzeb was gifted among other qualities with an astonishing industry, a dogged perseverance and an indomitable will. This bred in him a deep distrust of an intolerance for others, a narrow outlook, a “one track mind” and a passion to personally “supervise every minute detail of administration”. Theoretically, the basis of the despotism remained the same as under Akbar, but in practice Aurangzeb’s personal character and his ideal of the state moulded it into an over centralized autocracy. The enlightened and generous outlook of Akbar caring for all his people alike, gave way to a narrow political outlook.
The over-centralized set-up, accompanied by the narrow outlook of the ruler, was naturally antagonistic to the tribal and democratic outlook of the Jats. An instinctive attachment of democratic was and a “sturdy independence” have throughout been their chief characteristics. They have a pronounced aversion to external interference and have been accustomed to self governance of their internal affairs. The tendency to settle everything pertaining to their daily life in accordance with their cherished ideals has been, and still is, in vogue among them. Unfortunately, we donot have any contemporary written evidence about the Jats of the Mathura region during the time of Aurangzeb. But the evidence of their tribal and democratic practices has come down to us in respect of certain other regions. The Jats being a homogeneous people, it would not be unfair to believe that those in perview also breathed almost, the similar spirit. Giving due regard to their tradition customs and laws, Akbar issued two firmans, dated 8th Ramzan, 987 A.H. and 11th Ramzan, 989 A.H. granting internal freedom to the clan-councils of the Jats of the Upper Doab region in religious matters and “to carry out their functions according to their ancient customs and laws”. Akbar’s sagacious policy seems to have been followed until the time of Shah Jahan. Jahangir sometimes showed the top Jat leaders the unique favour of calling them to his audience and giving khilats. But Aurangzeb, reversed this policy. He “restricted the activities” of their customary institutions. This, along with his religious fanaticism, created “concern” among the Jats. They discussed the issue in a meeting at Chhaprauli (1718 V.S.) and decided to protest against the new laws and pleaded for the reversion of the policy of the Delhi Court. We have not information about Aurangzeb’s specific treatment of the Jats of Mathura. But, on the basis of his dealings with the Jats of the Upper Doab region, it may be inferred that the former also suffered a similar encroachment upon their cherished customary rights was by itself a matter of resentment for the tribal Jats. And, as it came after the spell of Akbar’s liberal treatment, the feeling of resentment must have been deep and strong. The courageous Jats, who had reminisences of their republican past and who still retained that spirit, could hardly afford to remain quiet before an immensely centralized system based on a narrow outlook which threatened to devour their traditional tribal and democratic ways.

Probably, not less significant was the role of the economic factors in leading the Jat peasantry to rebellion. In actual operation the Mughal revenue assignment system was extremely harmful to the interests of the peasants and the Empire itself. As the proprietor of land, the Emperor assigned a certain piece of land to the officials in lieu of their pay and also to enable them to defray the expenses over their troops, on condition of their paying a sum to the Emperor out of the surplus revenue. Such grants were called jagirs. Since they were mainly grants of revenue out of which the holders (who were usually mansabdars) maintained their quota of troops for the Empire, the tendency was to fix revenue at the highest possible rate almost equal to the surplus produce. Even this high rate went on increasing with the passage of time. Under the circumstances, the peasants were financially hit very hard. They were usually left with temple barest minimum needed for supporting their lives.
What added further to the hardships of the cultivators was the frequent transfer of the jagirs to different assignees. The jagirdars held their jagirs at the pleasure of the Emperor, Bhimsen remarks, “There is no hope of a jagir being left with the same officer next year”. This constant insecurity of the tenure of office proved unfortunate in two ways. Firstly, it offered little incentive to the holders to exert for alleviating the distress of their tenantry. Instead it led them to employ all possible tactics to extort money from the peasantry. Secondly, quite often at the time of the transfer the hard hit peasants of the same jagir were pressurized to pay the same sum twice, first to the collectors of other outgoing jagirdar and then to those of the incoming one. Thus this system ended in a “mad looting” of the peasants by the rival collectors. The consequences were worse if a jagir was farmed out. Bhimsen points out, “when a jagirdar sends a collector to his jagir, he first takes an advance from the latter by way of loan. This collector, on arriving in the village, fearing lest a second man who had given a larger loan to the jagirdar was following (to supplant him), does not hesitate to collect the rent with every oppression”. If the report of Khan-i-Dauran to Aurangzeb is any indication, the lot of the peasants attached to Khalisa was by no means better either. And if the peasants refused to pay the revenue, very severe punishment was meted out to them. At times they were left with no other option than to sell their women, children and cattle, or to run away from their home to avoid extermination through ill-treatment. It is not that the Mughal government did not take measures to prevent their exploitation. But the measures were often inadequate and the officers generally discovered a way out to perpetuate their unusual excess. Thus the grievances of the peasantry generally went unredressed.

In its actual operation Mughal assignment system became extremely “ruinous to the peasants and ultimately harmful to the interests of the Empire”. The exploitation by the collectors increased as the time went on. At last a stage was reached when “excessive acts of oppression” by the officers could lead some of the peasants to shifting their hand from plough to the sword, as happened in the case of the Jats following the atrocities of Abdun Nabi. We know it on the testimony of Shah Waliullah that “the cultivators of the villages between Delhi and Akbarabad were of the Jat caste”. Wendel also refers to the rack-renting of the tenants but is not sure if the Jats resorted to lawlessness around Agra as retaliation against oppression or as a means to gratify their lust for further gains. Against this background, it was quite natural for the Jats to ventilate their resentment over the prevailing assignment system as agriculture occupied the uppermost place in their life. “To be a Jat is to be a ploughman”, is the testimony of the French Missionary F.X. Wendel, who lived among the Jats under study for quite a long time.
The author of Maasir-ul-Umra seems to represent the official attitude when he remarks that the Jats of Mathura and Agra pretended to be agriculturists. Modave, a keen French observer who visited India (1774-76), did not, however, fail to be impressed by the industry and voluntary attachment to and skill in agriculture which the Jats of Bharatpur displayed. Modave remarks, “The Jats are, in general, good men and would occupy themselves voluntarily in agriculture and the arts if they were not obliged almost always to keep themselves under arms…. One thing in my judgment does honour to the industry of the Jats; if is that.....the plain is not as much abandoned as might be imagined and the fields there are better maintained than one would have expected.

It is obvious that an oppressive system goes hard with the agriculturists. Its sharp reaction among the Jats, culminating into a rebellion, appears to have been because of their adventurous disposition and martial character. Probably not many agricultural communities possessed obstinate courage, indomitable spirit, heroic valour and tribal unity of the Jats which were needed to transfer a deep resentment into a military resistance. The Jats had been a race of warrior agriculturists. A close look into their past reveals that they were as keen to promote agriculture as to manufacture good arms and to receive military training. They highly disapproved of the enhanced revenue, the levying of “harmful taxes” and “looting by government tax collectors”. They were prone to opposing such things and other oppressions even by force, if the occasion demanded. This may explain better why in face of similar provocations other weak agricultural communities remained more or less inactive while the Jat peasants unsheathed their swords.

An auxillary factor for the Jat rebellion was the circumstantial collusion between the Jat cultivators and the Jat zamindars. The zamindars often displayed a tendency to disobey the Mughal government. In applying force against neighbours and in defying the imperial authority they had their own motives of self-aggrandisement. But the nature of their struggle against the Mughals before the reign of Aurangzeb was more defensive and passive in character. For various reasons, however, it did not remain merely defensive for long. Manucci draws attention to this change, “Usually there is some rebellion of the rajaha and zamindars going on in the Mughal kingdom”. Thus, with their peculiar set of grievances, the zamindars and cultivators joined hands to oppose a common foe. We see Gokul and the subsequent Jat zamindars providing leadership to the rank and file. But the association between the early Jat zamindars leaders and their Jat followers must have been of a precarious nature. If the general practice of the numerous zamindars of the Empire is an index, Gokul and his predecessors also might have pressed their usual zamindari rights over the Jat peasantry thereby displeasing the latter. Apart from it, the Jats, more than any other people, are reputed to be deeply attached to personal freedom and to resenting external control. These factors must have come in the way of a cohesive union between the zamindars and the peasants. But it seems that they gradually got over them.
It is against this background that the part played by Aurangzeb’s religious bigotry in the Jat rebellion may best be appreciated. By nature Aurangzeb was an orthodox man. He had claimed the Empire as “the champion of pure Islam”. As an Emperor he cherished the vision of a Muslim State. He had set his heart upon governing his composite Empire in accordance with the tenets of orthodox Islam. Aurangzeb pursued a fourfold course with regard to his religious policy, namely, promotion of Islamic practices, regulations against the Hindus, conversions to Islam, and destruction of temples. Although he made a cautious start, his fanaticism increased with the passage of time. His supreme object was to make both Muslim and non-Muslim conform to the orthodox Holy Law. Hence, he issued regulations aiming at suppressing the un-Islamic ceremonies and encouraging Muslim ways among the people at large. They corresponded to Islam but contained little which was substantially prejudicial to any religion.

But certain other promulgations were provocative to the Hindus. The revival of pilgrimage tax is a case in point. In 1665, restrictions were imposed on the public celebration of the Hindu festivals of Holi and Diwali. In 1668, the Hindu fairs were prohibited in the Empire. In 1665, discriminative duties were imposed upon the Hindus. They were ordered to pay 5% while the Muslims merely 2.5% duty on their goods. In 1667, the Muslims were totally freed from this burden. The same discrimination was practiced in respect of the taxes on the produce from gardens. These steps, apart from being a source of revenue, were intended to pressurize the Hindu into accepting Islam. In addition, Aurangzeb adopted seductive methods to attract the non-Muslims to Islam. He offered posts, money grants, public honour and even amnesty as rewards for embracing Islam.

Above all Aurangzeb embarked upon the policy of temple demolition, here he displayed his characteristic subtlety of approach. Early in 1659 he declared that his Canon Law prohibited the construction of new temples but did not ordain the demolition of the old ones. Gradually he opened out. The temple of Somnath was razed to the ground early in his reign. In 1665, he ordered to redemolish the repaired temples of Gujrat which had once been destroyed by him during his viceroyalty of the province. He next ordered the pulling down of all the newly constructed temples in Orissa. In 1669, he fully unmasked himself. In that year he issued a general order for the destruction of the Hindu scholars and temples and the suppression of their teaching and religious practices throughout the Empire. Several temples pulled down in the wake of this order included those of Malarna and Vishwanath. Thus, within a short span of 11 years, Aurangzeb reversed the liberal and tolerant approach of Akbar. While Akbar’s liberalism had secured him the willing co-operation of his people, Aurangzeb’s bigotry created mounting discontent among the suffering non-Muslims.
Mathura, the birth centre of the Jat rising, suffered heavily in Aurangzeb’s reign. This venerated place of Hindu worship was naturally an objects of annoyance to Aurangzeb. He appointed Abdun Nabi, “a religious man”, as faujdar of the place to “suppress the Hindus”. This officer amassed, through questionable means, cash worth 93,000 mohars and thirteen lakhs of Rupees and valuables worth four and a half lakhs. Abdun Nabi demolished a temple in the city and upon its ruins erected a Jama Masjid in 1661-1662. Next, in pursuance of Aurangzeb’s order, he removed the stone railing of the famous temple of Keshava Railways in 1666. All these acts must have provoked the Jats further. We know that during the Sultanate danger to our suppression of their religion generated disaffection among them. There is no reason to believe that a more systematic religious persecutions by zealot Aurangzeb did not offend the religious feelings of the Jats. Generally speaking, the Jats have never been orthodox in their religious belief. They do not bother about the philosophical or the ethical nuances of religion, but the outward ritualistic aspects do commonly touch them. Therefore measures like the closing of fairs and festivals and desecration of religious places could not but have caused concern among them.

The religious bigotry of Aurangzeb and the consequent sufferings of the non-Muslims, however, had not assumed full proportions by 1668-1669. Jiziya, orders for the exclusion of the Hindus from public officers and even the destruction of the temple of Keshava Railways at Mathura followed later. And yet the Jats under Gokul unfurled the banner of revolt. The ‘floating literature’, or the “Sakhas” as they are called among the Jats and other local people, refers to the visit of Samarth Guru Ram Das who exhorted the Jats for insurrection. He urged them to meet excess with excess. He also impressed upon them that tyranny is a sin but to tolerate tyranny is a greater sin. Having been urged and inspired by the Guru, Gokul took a vow to save the Hindus from destruction and rose in rebellion.

No doubt, an implicit reliance cannot be put on an evidence of the nature of “Sakhas” alone. ‘Floating literature’, is passed on from one generation to another orally and as such is subject to exaggeration and change in the process. However, considering the character of the Jats, it is difficult to reject the testimony of the “Sakhas” altogether. Few would acknowledge, much less a Jat, anybody’s superiority for nothing. Besides, there is a very strong and persistent tradition among the Jats about the visit and activities of the Samarth Guru in the Jat areas. The traditional account as preserved by Devdatta also avers that Ram Das came and exhorted the Jats to throw off the Mughal Yoke. The teachings and philosophy of Samarth Guru are not the matter under study but it is very well known that he was a religious preacher of a different brand. He did not subscribe to a life negating philosophy. He was vitally interested in contemporary problems facing the society and the country. His visit and exhortation seem to have considerably influenced Gokul and his followers.
The Jats being restive, fuel was ready. Only fire was needed and it was, according to the “Sakhas”, provided by Ram Das, K.R. Qanungo observes that in the revolt of 1669 “one fare of the mighty conflagration kindled throughout India by the missionary zeal of the Emperor” and revived the “Hindu Nationalism”. Thus religious factors played an appreciable part in the Jat insurrection. The economic causes, although important, may not be over-emphasized. The vices in the operation of the assignment system did not multiply overnight in the reign of Aurangzeb. Their increasing tendency was discernible even before him. But when the tightening grip of Aurangzeb threatened the age-old democratic and tribal traditions of the Jats, the economic factors made their weight felt heavily. From the foregoing discussion it may be concluded that the Jat rebellion of 1669 was essentially the result of the political provocation, aggravated by the economic discontent and set ablaze by the religious persecution.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE REBELLION.

The Year 1669 witnessed, the bursting forth of the pent up fury of the Jats into a very powerful revolt under the inspiring leadership of Gokul, the zamindars of Rilpat. A remarkable feature of this rebellion was its composite character. Though the Jats counted for its majority and provided leadership to it, it consisted of other local people as well such as, Mev, Mena, Ahir, Gujar, Naruka, Panwar and others. The rebels gathered at the village of Sahora (about 6 miles from Mathura). Abdun Nabi, the faujdar of Mathura, attacked them. At first he appeared to be gaining ground, but in the middle of the fighting he was killed on 12 May, 1669 (21st Zil-Hijja, 1079 A.H.). Overjoyed at this success, Gokul ravaged the paragaana and town of Sadabad (24 miles from Mathura) in the Doab. The turblence spread to Agra District also where Radandaz Khan was sent (13th May – 22nd Zil-Hijja) with a force to put down the rebels. Aurangzeb appointed Saf Shikan Khan as the new faujdar of Mathura. As arms failed to prevail, diplomacy was resorted to. The Mughal government offered to forgive Gokul provided he surrendered his spoils. But Gokul spurned the offer. On the other side, as the situation was assuming serious proportions, the Emperor had to proceed (28th November-14th Rajab, 1080 A.H.) in person to the disturbed area. On his way, on 4th December (20th Rajab) “Aurangzeb learnt of the circumstances of rebellion in the villages of Rewara, Chandarakanta and Sarkhud (Sarkharu?). He despatched Hasan Ali Khan to attack these places. Till noon the insurgents fought with bows and muskets. Getting desperate thereafter, many of them, having performed the jauhar of their women, fell upon the Khan. A fierce fight raged till the evening in which many imperialists and 300 rebels were killed. Hasan Ali Khan returned to the emperor, taking 250 male and female prisoners. Aurangzeb was pleased with his performance. He made him the faujdar of Mathura in place of Saf Shikan Khan who had obviously failed in suppressing the rebels.
Under Hasan Ali Khan, were placed 2,000 barqandaztroops, 1,000 archers, 1,000 musketeers, 1,000 rocketmen, and 25 pieces of cannons. Amanulla, the faujdar of the environs of Agra, was also ordered to help Hasan Ali. The latter immediately got engaged in quelling the rebellion. In January 1670, Gokul, with 20,000 Jat and other followers, rushed forward to face the imperialists at a place 20 miles from Tilpat. Both the sides suffered many casualties in the battle in which the Jats, despite showing utmost bravery, could not cope with the trained Mughals and their artillery. They retreated to Tilpat. Hasan Ali followed them and besieged the fortalice. Fighting continued for three days in which muskets and bows were used by the contestants. On the fourth day, the royalists charged the besieged from all sides and having made a breach in the walls entered Tilpat. Then ensued a sanguinary conflict. The Jats displayed their reckless courage and undaunted valour. The experienced Mughals gained the day but not before losing 4,000 men. Of the vanquished 5,000 lay dead, while 7,000 were arrested. Gokul, with his two associates including ‘Sonki’ (Udai Singh Singh), was captured alive through the efforts of Shaikh Razi-ud-Din, the Peshkar of Hassan Ali. They and other prisoners were presented to the Emperor. Being furious, he ordered Gokul and Singh to be cut limb on the Chabutara of the Kotwali (Agra). Other captives either met the fate of their leader or were put in chains.

The overthrow of their leader dampened the spirits of the followers of Gokul. Hasan Ali Khan dealt with them sternly. For a few months more he kept on slaying, capturing and plundering the rebels and their families and demolishing their strong fortresses along both banks of Yamuna. Not long after, the last vestiges of the insurrection disappeared and peace was re-established in the region for some time. On 6th April, 1670 (25th Zamindari-qada, 1080 A.H.), Aurangzeb granted audience to Hasan Ali and highly praised him for his distinguished services.

**AFTERMATH OF THE REBELLION.**

Never before in the history of the Mughal Empire had the standard of such a formidable rebellion been raised by the Jats as was done by those of Mathura under Gokul in 1669. Although the rebellion failed, it had considerable, though indirect, repercussions upon the future course of the Jat History and in the long run upon the Mughal Empire itself. The crushing defeat of the Jats in 1669 was not without a lesson. It exposed to them certain strategic flaws in their ways of fighting. They had seen their 20,000 gallant brethren being easily routed by the Mughal forces in a face to face combat. It must have been laid bare to them that, in the absence of proper military training and sufficient equipment their reckless courage and obstinate valour alone would not prove effective against the mighty Mughal army. Besides, the fall of Tilpat within the short duration of three days must have pointed out to them the hopeless vulnerability of their defence and its corresponding implications. The military tactics of Raja Ram and Churman II clearly indicate that the Jats had benefited from the failure of 1669.
They gradually turned to making a change in their existing military methods. The subsequent Jat leaders grew alive to the efficacy of discipline and proper equipment in warfare. There developed an increasing tendency to build their forts in the fastness of dense jungles capable of withholding the onslaught of powerful armies. Likewise they avoided the rashness of Gokul in inviting pitched battles with the might Mughals. Gokul’s rebellion also gave to the posterity an inspiration of political nature, namely, the usefulness of working under a united leadership. We know that the Jats had the reputation of being impatient of any external control. Although success did not crown them in 1669, it was, perhaps, heartening for them to perceive that their joint efforts could gather so powerful a momentum as to disturb even the Mughal Emperor, compelling him to rush to the disturbed region. On the other hand, it was disheartening to them that the effectiveness of their resistance withered away once their chief leader Gokul, was no more. This seems to have emphasized to the Jats the advantage to working unitedly under a common leader. Although progress in this direction was necessarily slow, in due course it proved to be of considerable political importance to them. Once their combined efforts proved fruitful under later leaders and bright future prospects appeared ahead, their circumstantial union assumed a little fixed character. Consideration of common benefit might also have been instrumental in leading the tribal and democratic Jats to prefer, accept, and finally adopt the institution of kingship. To such circumstances may be traced the genesis of the Jar state of Bharatpur and the eventual emergence of the principalities of Patiala, Nabha and Jhind which were republican until recently.

In the light of the above considerations it seems that from the viewpoint of the long term interests of the Jats, Gokul’s abortive exertions were no less significant than the more fruitful struggles of Raja Ram and Churaman II. The brighter careers of these two have dimmed the image of Gokul, whose full importance has not been duly appreciated so far. The circumstances in which they worked were not altogether similar. Gokul had to face more formidable odds that the two later fortunate Jat leaders. It is doubtful whether, even with their better organizing capacity, their success could have been assured in Gokul’s circumstances. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that though Gokul failed, his failure paved the way for the subsequent success of Raja Ram and Churaman II. Prior to the Jat uprising, other revolt had taken place in a different part of the Empire. But they were not so powerful and the places of their occurrence were comparatively too distant from the Capital. The rebellion under Gokul was, however, quite different. From the point of view of time, dimension and place it was the first fierce repudiation of the authority of Aurangzeb under his very seat. Though such an evidence is not forthcoming, the possibility cannot be ruled out that his audaciousness provided a stimulus to the later rebels such as the Satnamis.
Aurangzeb’s harsh policy itself seems to have duly contributed in fostering rebellious spirit among the Jats. Although with his overwhelming power he succeeded in suppressing the first Jat insurrection, the resentment underlying it not only lingered on but also probably received fresh provocation from his imprudent attitude. It is a fact that an autocratic regime cannot hope to survive if rebellions are not resolutely crushed. Occurring under the very shadow of the imperial Metropolis; the Jat revolt had additional ground for being crushed sternly, in that it might serve as a deterrent against similar eruptions. However, in the future interests of the Empire, the reasons justifying strict measures also warranted at the same time the removal of their just grievances and their pacification. It was for the first time that they had defied the imperial power in such large numbers in an organised way. Aurangzeb did very little to reconcile them beyond despatching 200 horsemen to protect the village crops and preventing the soldiers from oppressing the villagers or taking any child captive. He was anxious, no doubt to relieve the peasantry in general of the economic distress but his repeated Farmans, as we have seen above, remained generally ineffective.

Aurangzeb pursued a course which seems to have estranged the Jats further. He wrecked terrible vengeance upon them. Apart from the treatment meted out to 7,000 captors, the family of their leader, Gokul, was forcibly converted to Islam. Gokul’s daughter was married to Shah Quli Chela and his son renamed Fazil. Even after the fall of Gokul the Mughal forces kept on imprisoning and plundering the Jats. Not content with it, as it were, Aurangzeb broke loose his fury upon the temple of Keshava Raj. It was levelled to the ground (during the month of Ramzan, 1080 A.H. – 13th January to 11th February, 1670) and a mosque was built upon its site. Its idols were desecrated and later buried under the footsteps of the Begum Sahiba mosque at Agra. The name of Mathura was changed to ‘Islamabad’ and that of ‘Brindaban’ to ‘Mominabad’. The temples and idols of the rest of the holy places in the Brij were gradually destroyed. This added insult to injury. The affront inflicted upon the families of their leader and kinsmen must have outraged the feelings of the entire tribe in whose social consciousness and tribal sentiments have always been uppermost. It appears that Aurangzeb, despite his shrewdness, failed to appreciate properly the character of the Jat people, who are normally moderate, light-hearted and not unmanageable, unless of course when excited. Modave is emphatic on the point that Bharatpur Jats “are in general goodmen” who follow their peaceful pursuits” not obliged almost always to keep themselves under arms”. Such were generally the people whom Aurangzeb had to deal with. There is basis to believe that they might have been largely pacified and the chances of their subsequent lawlessness minimized, had he displayed a little caution and foresight in his dealings with them. But Aurangzeb lacked that “warm generosity of the heart” and “chivalry to fallen foes” which had enabled Akbar to win the people’s affection and praise. It can
hardly be called an act of political wisdom on his part to have tried to put down the warlike and stubborn Jats in a ruthless manner. Probably, Aurangzeb was too obstinate, vindictive and blind to visualize this, as in some other cases, the evil consequences of leaving such a hardy people deeply annoyed in the neighbourhood of the Capital. So long as the Emperor had a firm grip over the north, the Jats remained subdued but as soon as it loosened, their pent up fury was let loose and they resumed their lawless course with added vigour. Thus the policy of Aurangzeb towards them defeated its very object and in the long run proved harmful for the Empire. It has been rightly remarked that “a little indiscretion and persistence in a wrong policy” converted peaceful husbandmen (Jats) into flaming warriors, as it did “friends (Rajputs) into foes”. Ironical though it may sound, it appears that the persistence of the defiant attitude among the Jats and the eventual emergence of their political power were, thus, in no mean measure, due to the impolitic and vindictive attitude of Aurangzeb himself.

THE SIKHS

Although there had been some clashes between the Sikh guru and the Mughals under Shah Jahan, there was no clash between the Sikhs and Aurangzeb till 1675. In fact, conscious of the growing importance of the Sikhs, Aurangzeb had tried to engage Ram Rai, the elder son of Guru Har Rai, at the court. However, Guru Har Rai was displeased with Ram Rai, and nominated as his successor a younger son, Har Kishan, who was only six years old at the time. Har Kishan died soon after, and was succeeded in 1664 by Guru Tegh Bahadur. Ram Rai put forward his claims to the gaddi both before the accession of Guru Har Kishan, and after his death, Aurangzeb did not interfere and gave a grant of land at Dehra Dun to Ram Rai to build his gurudwara there. But most of the time Ram Rai remained at Delhi, and continued to intrigue against the guru, and to try and poison the mind of the emperor against him. After his succession, Guru Tegh Bahadur had come to Delhi, but to escape the intrigues of Ram Rai he journeyed to Bihar, and served with Raja Ram Singh of Amber in Assam till 1671. However, in 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was brought to Delhi from his head-quarters with five of his followers. Various accusations were made against him, and he was asked to recant his faith which he refused. As a punishment, he was beheaded.

Various reasons have been put forward to account for Aurangzeb’s action. According to a poetic work of Guru Govind Singh, the son and successor of Guru Tegh Bahadur; he gave up his life in defence of Hindu faith following his meeting with some Brahmans of Kashmir who had sought his support. However, we do not have any details of this meeting. According to a separate and later tradition, the guru was protesting against the oppression of the Governor of Kashmir, Sher Afghan, and large scale forcible conversion of
Hindus there. However, the Mughal Governor of Kashmir till 1671 was Saif Khan. He is famous as a builder of bridges. He was a liberal and broad-minded person who had appointed a Hindu to advise him on matters of administration. His successor after 1671 was Iftekhar Khan. He was anti-Shia, but there is no reference of his persecution of Hindus. In fact, this is not mentioned in any of the local histories of Kashmir, including one written by Narayan Kaul in 1710.

There is another tradition that the guru was beheaded because some of the enemies and rivals of Guru Tegh Bahadur, such as Ram Rai, had suggested to Aurangzeb that he should ask the guru to show a miracle to prove his claim of divine powers, and that action could be taken against him if he failed to do so. But his does not appear likely. Aurangzeb had been out of Delhi from the beginning of 1675 to March 1676, in pursuit of action against the Afghan rebels. Therefore he could not have called the guru to Delhi at the suggestion of Ram Rai. An explanation has been put forward by later Persian sources which appear to be a defence of the official action. It has been said that the guru who had a large following moved about the Punjab, in association with one Hafiz Adam, who was a follower of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, extorting money by force from the villagers. It is further said that the local waqia navis, or intelligence reporter, told the emperor that if action was not taken against the guru, it could lead to disturbances, and even to a rebellion.

We do not know the sources of the Persian account. It mentions Hafiz Adam as an associate of the guru, but Hafiz Adam had died much earlier. Also, the execution of the guru is placed at Lahore, not Delhi. An account does, however, say that guru was executed at the orders of the emperor. It would appear that for Aurangzeb, the beheading of the guru was primarily a law and order question. However, according to another Persian source, whenever any peasants came into conflict with the local revenue collector, jagirdar or zamindar, they resorted to the guru who looked after them. Thus, far from extorting money by force from the peasants, as alleged, the guru was emerging as a champion against injustice and oppression. An atmosphere of heightened religious tensions had been brought about in large measure by Aurangzeb’s emphasis on the sharia, his destruction of newly built temples, and even of some temples of old standing at Mathura, Varanasi, etc., as punishment for local rebellions, or complaints by the qazis of opening their doors and teachings to Mughals also. In such a situation, any conflict with a distinguished religious leader was bound to have larger repercussions.

Whatever the reasons, Aurangzeb’s action was unjustified from any point of view and betrayed a narrow approach. The execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur forced the Sikhs to go back to the Punjab hills. It also led to the Sikh movement gradually turning into a military brotherhood. A major contribution in this sphere was made by Guru Govind Singh. He showed considerable organizational ability and founded the military brotherhood or the khalsa in
1699. Before this, Guru Govind Singh had made his headquarters at Makhowwal or Anandpur in the foothills of the Punjab. At first, the local Hindu hill rajas had tried to use the guru and his followers in their internecine quarrels. But soon the guru became too powerful and a series of clashes took place between the hill rajas and the guru, who generally triumphed. The organization of the khals further strengthened the hands of the guru in this conflict. However, an open breach between the guru and the hill rajas took place only in 1704, when the combined forces of a number of hill rajas attacked the guru at Anandpur. The rajas had again to retreat and they pressed the Mughal government to intervene against the guru on their behalf.

The struggle which followed was thus not primarily a religious struggle. It was partly an offshoot of local rivalries among the Hindu hill rajas and the Sikhs, and partly on outcome of the Sikh movement as it had developed. Aurangzeb was concerned with the growing power of the guru and had earlier asked the Mughal faujdar ‘to admonish the guru’. He now wrote to the Governor of Lahore and the faujdar of Sirhind, Wazir Khan, to aid the hill rajas in their conflict with Guru Govind Singh. The Mughal forces assailed Anandpur but the Sikhs fought bravely and beat off all assaults. The Mughals and their allies now invested the fort closely. When starvation began inside the fort, the guru was forced to open the gate, apparently on a promise of safe conduct by Wazir Khan. But when the forces of the guru were crossing a swollen stream, Wazir Khan’s forces suddenly attacked. Two of the guru’s sons were captured, and on their refusal to embrace Islam, were beheaded at Sirhind. The guru lost two of his remaining sons in another battle. After this, the guru retired to Talwandi and was generally not disturbed.

It is doubtful whether the dastardly action of Wazir Khan against the sons of the guru was carried out at the instance of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb, it seems, was not keen to destroy the guru and wrote to the Governor of Lahore ‘to conciliate the guru’. When the guru wrote to Aurangzeb in the Deccan, apprising him of the events, Aurangzeb invited him to meet him. Towards the end of 1706, the guru set out for the Deccan and was on the way when Aurangzeb died. According to some, he had hoped to persuade Aurangzeb to restore Anandpur to him. Although Guru Govind Singh was not able to withstand Mughal might for long, or to establish a separate Sikh state, he created a tradition and also forged a weapon for its realization later on. It also showed how an egalitarian religious movement could, under certain circumstances, turn into a political and militaristic movement, and subtly move towards regional independence.
REVOLT OF THE SATNAMIS (1672-73)

The Satnamis were a religious sect of the Hindus who inhabited the territories of Narnaul and Mewat in the vicinity of Delhi; it was founded by a recluse named Birbhan of Bijesar, near Narnaul in 1543. The Satnamis believed in one God and lived their lives in partial renunciation of the materialistic world. They reared up families and earned their living by cultivation and business. They shaved their head and face, including eye-brows, and were nicknamed Mundiya Sadhus (clean-shaven saints). According to Khafi Khan ‘One of the remarkable occurrences of the year (1672 A.D.) was the outburst of the Hindu devotees called Satnamis who were also known by the name of Mundhihs. There were four or five thousand of these, who were householders in the parganas of Narnaul and Mewat. These men dress like devotees, but they nevertheless carry on agriculture and trade, though their trade is on a small scale. In the way of their religion they have dignified themselves with the title of Good Name; these being the meaning of Sat-Nam. They are not allowed to acquire wealth in any but a lawful calling. If any one attempts to wrong or oppress them by force, or by exercise of authority, they will not endure it. Many of them have weapons and arms’.

In 1672, a foot-soldier (paida) of the local revenue-collector (shiqdar) picked a quarrel with a Satnami peasant and injured his clean shaven head with a stick which was treated as an insult to the religious beliefs and practices of the Satnamis. Therefore, a party of the Satnami peasants beat the soldier to death. The shiqder sent his contingent to arrest the murderers but it was beaten back. The punitive expedition of the government led to a general uprising of the Satnamis who declared their holy war upon the unjust Mughal emperor. The victorious rebels killed the faujdar of Narnaul and established their independent rule there; they held the district by means of outposts and collected land revenue from the countryside. Let the readers enjoy further account of the revolt of Hindu devotees against the fanatical Muslim emperor in the words of an impartial Muslim historian: ‘When the Emperor reached Delhi, he was informed of this outbreak, and he sent force after force to quell it, but they (the Mughal troops) were all defeated and dispersed. It was said that swords, arrows, and musket-balls had no effect upon these men, and that every arrow and ball which they discharged against the royal army brought down two or three men. Thus they were credited with magic and witchcraft and stories were currently reported about them which were utterly incredible….Great rajas and veteran amirs were sent against them with powerful armies. But the revolters were eager for the fight, and advanced to about sixteen or seventeen kos from Delhi. The royal army went forth boldly to attack them; but the zamindars of the neighbourhood, and some…..Rajputs,
seized the opportunity to throw off their obedience, and to withhold the government dues. They even broke out into open violence, and the flames daily increased. The King ordered his tents to be brought out. He then wrote some prayers and devices with his own hands, which he ordered to be sewn on the banners and standards, and carried against the rebels. At length, by the exertions of Raja Bishen Singh, Hamid Khan and others, several thousands of the Satnamis were killed, and the rest were put to flight, so that the outbreak was quelled.

CASTE ORGANIZATION OF THE MARATHAS

The rise of the Marathas was both a regional and a class-cum-caste phenomenon. There is little doubt that the region inhabited by the Marathas was economically underdeveloped as compared to adjacent Malwa and Gujarat in the north, and the Andhra and Karnataka region in the south. The hardy Maratha cultivators could supplement their meagre income either by hiring themselves out as mercenaries to the more prosperous neighbouring states, or by preying on the caravans passing across their territories. Their attitude in this regard was not far different from the Jat peasants of the north who were hardy cultivators and notorious raiders and plunderers. In fact, just as the concept of commerce being a peaceful pursuit has been discounted, we have to discount the notion that cultivation was by its nature a peaceful occupation. The dominant castes in different regions not only had the ownership (milkiyal) rights over the bulk of the cultivable land available in the area but they were prepared to defend by force their position against outside interlopers and encroachments of rival caste groups. Castes, such as the Meenas in Rajasthan, which were unable to defend their position by arms, lost their right to ownership of land, and also sank in the social (Varna) scale. The dominant cultivating castes in Maharashtra were the Kunbis and the Marathas. Defining the Marathas, Enthoven says that the word Kunbi which is used for the cultivating classes of the area ‘denotes a status not a caste’, and that, ‘Among the Marathas there are many who believe that they, and the Kunbis of the region, belong to a common stock’. Duff said that ‘The term (Marathas) though extended to Koonbees or cultivators, is in strictness, confined to the military families of the country’.

Within Maharashtra, the superior landholding rights, i.e. the positions of deshmukh, deshpande, patil, etc., were held by Marathas and Kunbis as well as by other castes. The end result of Shivaji’s movement was that many of the participants from non-Maratha families as also the Marathas as a whole claimed and were accorded the Kshatriya status. However, this status was not accepted by all. The family purohits of Shivaji disputed his kshatriya status as
late as the 19th century. The Sindhias, it is well-known, were drawn from a Kunbi family which had the hereditary patel-ship of Kumberkerrab in the district of War. The origins of the Holkar were even more humble; they belonged to the caste of goat-herds (dungar), the family holding zamindari rights in the village of Hal. The comparative openness of Maratha society was noted in the 18th century by Minister Ibrahim Khan who observed, ‘Most of the men in the Maratha armies are not endowed with the excellence of noble and illustrious birth, and husbandmen, carpenters and shopkeepers abound among their soldiers’. This brings up one of the specific features of medieval Indian society – the element of mobility between what has been called ‘the settled and more respectable hereditary cultivators’, the khud-kashi, and the petty gentry – the deshmukhs, deshpandes, patils. The latter, as we know, were closely associated with the state, i.e. its administrative apparatus and sometimes the ruler. The khud-kasht could rise in the social scale by adding to their holdings, or acquiring an official position, muqaddami, patel-ship, etc. Similarly, the deshmukhs, deshpandes, etc. could rise in the social scale by adding to their jamiat (military following) either by their own efforts or, as was the case more often, by hiring themselves out to a more powerful leader. However, in some areas such as Rajasthan, society was more rigidly stratified, the zamindars generally being Rajputs and the owner-cultivators being Jats or even Meenas. In such cases, relations of hostility developed between the superior caste zamindars and lower caste owner-cultivators.

The petty rural gentry, the deshmukhs, deshpandes, etc. and the hereditary cultivators or mirasdras (who may be equated to the khud-kashta in Mughal records), undoubtedly formed the core of the Maratha movement. To what extent the movement drew in village artisans – specifically those now categorized as the Scheduled Castes, and others who were practically landless or were denied opportunities of owning the lands they cultivated – needs a concrete study. The deep attachment of the landed elements and the mirasdras to the principle of heredity was a powerful factor in the establishment of this principle later on in all walks of Maratha life – jagirs, mokasa, saranjams and various offices including the post of peshwa. Thus, the spread of the Maratha movement in the eighteenth century gave a powerful fillip to the process of ‘refeudalization’. Simultaneously, the weakening of Imperial authority and the crisis of the jagirdari system tended to weaken the transferability of jagirs. The Mughal system of checks and balance, with the faujdar holding administrative power and the jagirdar merely collecting the land revenue officially determined and decided upon, gradually collapsed. A new type of administrative system was slowly evolved in which mamlatdars (revenue collectors) tended to become ijaredars (revenue contractors), and the ijaredars tended to be vested with more and more administrative powers, including powers of taking action against recalcitrant elements, i.e. against those who were not willing to pay the land revenue in full or in time (unless
their plea for remission or deferring a part of the payment was accepted). That this was a broader phenomenon, not confined to the Maratha areas, but equally applicable to Awadh or Bengal is shown by the rise in Awadh of talluqedars who were given the responsibility of collecting land revenue from a tappa. In Bengal, it has been estimated that six big zamindars paid half the land revenue under Murshid Quli Khan.

It has been argued that the type of administration, outlined above, was suited to the times and that the combination of administrative and revenue powers in one individual, created a better opportunity for good administration in the area under his control. Of course, it also provided opportunity for greater oppressions, leading to the ruin of cultivation and flight of peasants to a neighbouring area. Without entering into this debate here, we would like to say that Mughal rule aimed to check precisely this type of personal capriciousness. There was a greater possibility of oppression, where the ijaredars were not local people, familiar with the local situation and amenable to the pressure of the local community, but adventurers from outside, including merchants and bankers out for quick profit. In other words, in the given situation, granting ijaredari rights to such elements, especially to merchants would not be an index of development, but of a deep crisis presaging a breakdown.

A word about the plundering proclivities of the Marathas on which so much emphasis has been laid by contemporaries, calling them ‘mufsids’ (disturbers) or ‘ghanim’ (plunderers). Plundering the neighbours was considered a legitimate activity by all tribal societies. Even settled societies did not give this up, and continued the kshatriya tradition of annual raids on the neighbouring kingdoms so that the armies could feed on the lands of their enemies. The Jat, with his tribal background, was also a plunderer – as was realized fully by the Mughal gentry living in the neighbourhood of Agra where, after the death of Aurangzeb, roving bands of Jats took away even the brass knobs of their doors. In western India, the plundering activities of the kolis and the villagers (the ganwaran) had been faced by Humayun in Gujarat. The background of the ‘Pindaris’ and the ‘Bargis’ was the ‘Pandharis’ (villagers) and bargain – loose auxiliaries who supplemented their pay by plunder. What was different in the Maratha situation was that plunder was made a regular part of Maratha military activities and legitimized in the name of ‘chauth’, as khams was in the case of the Turks.

Discussion regarding ‘chauth’ has tended to be confined to the moral factor – whether or not it was a legitimate device on the part of the Marathas to raise the resources necessary for fighting against the Mughals. A better explanation of its growth was the fact that the Maratha areas were less productive and that their resources alone could hardly have been sufficient to fight the Mughals in the north, or even in the south, whereas the Marathas had to continually fight both the local states and the Mughals. However, two questions arise. Despite the levying of chauth and sandeshmukhi on the
Mughal Deccan and then on Malwa and Gujarat during the 18th century, the Peshwa could not finance his recurrent expeditions without taking loans from the mahajans who could only be repaid by the proceeds of plunder. Thus, when Peshwa Baji Rao died in 1740, he left a debt of Rs. 14.5 lakh which had been taken from thirty mahajans @ at Re 1/- to Rs 2½ per cent! When the Marathas marched north for the decisive fight with the Afghans, the Peshwa paid Sadashiv Bhau less than Rs 2 lakh, whereas the monthly expenditure was rupees five to six lakh. This is even less explicable when it is realized that by 1756 the Marathas had moved out from the chronically deficit areas of western Maharashtra into Malwa, Gujarat, the rich and populous areas of the Indo-Gangetic doab, and from Orissa to the borders of Delhi. The inability of the marathas to make the two ends meet can only be explained by their administrative incompetence. Also, the very success of the policy of chauth created a peculiar psychosis: as long as the Maratha sardars could get their share of the chauth, they were not unduly concerned with the administrative processes. Thus, chauth at first masked and, later delayed the processes of the emergence and consolidation of Maratha power outside Maharashtra under Baji Rao and his successors. Thus, between 1740 and 1760, the Marathas did not seriously try to establish direct rule over any of the productive areas of the Ganga valley. Nor did they try to overrun and bring under their rule the rich area of the Karnatak and the Coromandel, being content to extract chauth.

The weakness of the Marathas was not only administrative and financial. It had, apparently, a technical basis, too. It seems that there was no foundry for casting guns in the swarajya of Shivaji, the latter depending for guns almost entirely on the Europeans. Under Baji Rao, a foundry for manufacturing artillery and ammunition was set up which was added to by Madhav Rao I only after the third battle of Panipat. During this entire period, the Marathas were served poorly by artillery, their artillery pieces being extremely clumsy and slow, largely on account of the wheels of the carriage which, according to Major Dirom, 'were low, and formed by large solid pieces of wood united. On account of their being very large and heavy, it was difficult to alter their level. They also suffered from poor supply of ammunition'. For reasons which are not clear, the Maratha did not favour light artillery – the zamburak or shutarnal. Indeed they relied more on rockets which created a lot of noise but were less effective militarily, except against elephants. The Marathas were also deficient in the use of muskets and matchlocks. Like Rajputs, the Marathas preferred to rely on horses, and on swords rather than on firearms. Unfortunately for them, the development of the flint gun, copied by the Iranians from the West, and later by the Afghans and Rohilas, made the disciplined infantry equal if not superior to cavalry. The new improved firearms seem not to have been adopted by the Marathas. In the north, the large community of craftsmen in metals quickly learnt to manufacture flint guns so that a ready supply was available. No such development seems to have taken place in the Maratha dominions. It would seem that a weak artisanal base, especially in the field of iron casting, metal working, etc., became a fatal source of weakness for the Marathas.
The triumph of the feudal principle of heredity at all levels made it difficult for the Peshwa to establish a firm grip on the administration of the outlying areas, and aided the virtual break up of the Maratha Confederacy after the setback suffered by the Peshwa at the third battle of Panipat. However, the new emerging Maratha states, especially those of the Sindhia and the Holkar, display a number of new tendencies. Firstly, under Mahadji Sindhia, the Maratha element in the army and administration declined, the non-Maratha elements – the Rajputs, Jats, Muslims, Purbias and Sikhs – predominating in the army. Even in the Peshwa’s personal force, Arabs and other foreigners outnumbered the Marathas. In Holkar’s army, local loose levies, the Pandharis, preponderated. Far from losing their national character, as Sen asserts, this development implied that newly emerging Maratha states were shedding their narrow, regional character, and becoming more ‘national’ in a true sense of the word. Second, Mahadji Sindhia, realizing the importance of up-to-date weapons, took steps to set up a fairly efficient factory under European supervision for the manufacture of heavy artillery and firearms. This was in line with what Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan had done at Mysore, and what the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh were to do later on. The fault of the Marathas was not that they did not stick to their traditional mode of guerilla warfare based on rapid cavalry movements, but that they did not recognize early enough the importance of modern artillery and firearms, and take steps to start manufacturing them.

The internal character of the states of the Sindhia and Holkar needs to be assessed in the light of our remarks above. Referring to Sindhia and Holkar – the Maratha rulers in Central India – Malcolm noted: “The lands of the Maratha princes are usually rented; and as many of the renters are either bankers, or men supported by that class, they have acquired and maintain an influence, both in the councils of the State, and the local administration of the provinces that gives them great power, which they solely direct to the object of accumulation”. He goes on to say: “It has been of late years a custom with the Maratha Princes in Central India to demand, from those to whom they consign countries, one year’s revenue in advance, and sometimes, if the latter are rich, two years. An interest of one percent per month is admitted on such advances. The collector, or renter, should he not have funds of his own, can easily borrow, at this or a lower rate, from bankers…….” The association of mahajans and even sahukars (bankers) in the process of collecting land revenue by standing as guarantors (mal zamin) to the ijaredar was not a new phenomenon. During the 18th century, an ijaredar had to produce a mal zamin who was usually a mahajan. The rate of interest charged by the mahajan for the purpose varied. It would appear that during the 18th century in Awadh, the practice was that the payment of the land revenue, when it was due, was always paid by the family banker. If the zamindars or talluqedar was not able to supply the banker with the necessary funds, the banker paid it from his resources and debited it as advance against the estate, to be paid as interest as rents came in. For this service, they charged interest which was generally 1% but could go up to 3% per month.
However, for mahajans and sahukars, and even more for traders, to be appointed ijaredars was a new phenomenon. As we have argued earlier, such a development was not an index of development, but of the further strengthening of usurers’ capital. The conversion of merchants’ capital into usurers’ capital was even more retrograde; it implied that opportunities for the investment of merchants’ capital were not available, or the opportunities available had become restricted. In this context, it may be kept in mind that the acquisition of a zamindari was more often the final ambition of a successful merchant since it implied social prestige. But it could hardly be the objective of a merchant eager for profit, for the return on zamindaris was often extremely low, as studies of Bengal show. The emergence of a rich banker, J. Prabhu, as diwan of Daulat Rao Sindhia, and Tantia Jogh who was diwan during the minority of Malhar Rao Holkar was thus more an index of the growth of the power of usurers’ capital, fed by the high dividends for financing the military plundering expeditions of the Marathas, than an indication of the further growth of money economy.

FURTHER READINGS:

7........ Peasant State and Society in Medieval south India.