Acknowledgments

This is a study of ‘caste’ in contemporary contexts. **Contextualised** to the Brahmin community of Karnataka, it grew out of a concern to transform the terms of current debates on caste. Seeking to animate an ‘upper’ caste context, the study is an attempt to elide the present academic obsession with studying almost exclusively castes ‘from below’. In embodying such a focus, the study attempts to demonstrate the analytical value of enlarging academic engagements with the problematic of the contemporaneity of caste.

In presenting the dynamics of Brahmin identity in Karnataka across the (historically recuperated) registers of the non-Brahmin articulation, caste associations and the perceptual universe that Brahmins as individuals and families inhabit, the attempt is to foreground dimensions of contemporary caste that have received little attention in recent researches. In particular focus are the compulsions of secularisation, the attendant equivocation vis-a-vis one’s caste identity, and the differential investment in the identity and identification of being and becoming Brahmin. These trajectories could be obtaining within all 'caste' communities, including even the subaltern ones, in the present moment. But the contemporary efforts at analysing 'caste' have remained too firmly wedded to recuperating caste almost exclusively as an identity of assertion. Of course, we recognise that this is an important aspect of the contemporaneity of caste; but it is important to point out that it is only one of them. Scholarly efforts will have to look for the larger picture, even if they appear to go against the grain.

To be sure, when Tharakeshwar, a friend, suggested that I must work on this topic, the script, as it were, was already written - one only had to adequately enact it: "How are the Brahmins successfully camouflaging their casteness even as they are firmly wedded to it?" Pithily, the idea of the Brahmin as a secular self - this was the script that needed some flesh and blood to be filled in. And indeed the 'filling in' task was earnestly taken up in the initial years of my work. When one has a script, 'reality' begins to 'act' accordingly, but the course has to be constantly re-charted. The attempt here has been, accordingly, to shift the focus to an 'upper' caste context, even while declining to subsume it within the already available scripts. Allowing the Brahmin to speak, thus, has
been an important decision. Of course, it should go without saying that the political project inspiring this work in the first place is too important to be repudiated. The study is an effort to push oneself to see more clearly what the political project can be all about. Needless to say, even as the present research forges an exploratory, and yet firmly sociological, agenda for caste studies, it does not probe the depths as it were. That precisely is the hope for a more long-term engagement with the question of the 'presents' of caste.

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All the usual disclaimers apply.

- Ramesh Bairy T. S.