Chapter Two
Middling through Method: Caste in/and/as Identity

One could venture to suggest that any methodological move which seeks to foreground ‘caste’ as a central axis in spaces that are not marked out as such will, of necessity, have to encounter questions about the casteness of caste (as indeed the bases of caste action) today. This is certainly not to be dismissive of either the past or the current trends in caste studies; only to be methodologically innovating from within them. In this chapter, we seek to do precisely this, bringing to the weight of our research those standards of reflexivity that would help lend some concreteness to the study of caste action. Indeed, one would want any reorientation of caste studies to be consistent with its own space. Besides, it is only too obvious that this issue will have to be foregrounded by a study such as our’s, which subsumes an ‘upper caste’ context - no less than the Brahmin community itself - as its object of appraisal; and, what is more, being undertaken by a researcher born into this community as well.1 Engaging this issue leads us into outlining a framework of appraisal (and justification) that is at some remove from the perspective of a social movement's vocabulary, and revolves around the contemporary fashion of theorising identities.

We then attend, in the next two sections, to the dimensions attaching to a conception of caste in/and/as identity, even as we incorporate some important corrections to the currently popular academic trend vis-a-vis the field of identity theorising and identification. In the last three sections, we lay out the specific operative contours of our study more substantively, note the research materials used and the strategies adopted in the field and present a general profile of the respondents.

We shall be taking up this latter self-referential axis for scrutiny in a subsequent section (#V). The register is important both from the perspective of data collection and theoretical articulation.
I

Recapitulating the ground of caste studies today

At the present moment, studies of caste within sociology find themselves in a fairly ambivalent and uncertain state of existence. As we characterised it at the start of our introductory chapter, it is marked by an oscillation between perspectives essentialising and totalising the space of caste and those seeking to efface the contours of its primacy and/or centrality. In the light of the subsequent commentary perhaps one could be even more conclusive about the contemporary status of caste studies. The overarching reality of caste, the predominant drift of studies in the sociology of caste seems to be suggesting, is in the realm of politics, both electorally in the case of lower caste mobilisations and in the context of state policies of protective discrimination. Of course, the anthropological construction of caste reality (albeit greatly deromanticised by an active sense of its inegalitarian character) is admitted, only to be sidelined as either belonging to the past or as being confined to the space of the rural (cf. also p. 12 above). Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to assert that there has been a great recession in the area of caste studies in sociology. It is now the political scientists who study caste and politics, just as it is historians who look at colonialism and caste, for instance. Even more glaringly, there hardly obtain studies of 'upper caste' (sic) contexts. The only significant area that has gathered and retained some momentum in the recent years within the discipline of sociology is the study of (lower) caste movements and the study of social mobility among the lower castes. But interestingly most of the sociologists who work in these areas and who offer a sympathetic treatment of the same appear to come from such communities themselves.

These features characterising caste studies emanate from principally two distinct - though related - factors. The first is a substantive factor, in that it calls attention to the 'externalities' (that is to say, the institutional and the discursive/ideological contexts) of the discipline of Indian sociology as it has developed over the last fifty years. Indian sociology in the post-independence period, defined and directed more by the Indian scholars than the non-Indian ones, has consciously sought to distance itself away from an immediate invocation or identification with caste. This had to do with the institutional as well as ideological mediations that found their way into sociology at the moment of independence. As Deshpande (1994) points out, any perceived preoccupation with matters of caste was seen as not belonging to and actually as working against the Indian
nation's wish to become modern. The test of the adequacy of its modernity seemed to rely on its unanimous wishing-away of caste.

However, this ‘unanimity’ on the question of caste appears to be more the result of a concerted blindness, for it was precisely during the time of independence that Ambedkar as well as the various non-Brahmin movements were tirelessly reminding the polity about the very vacuity of wishing-away caste. Besides, the composition of the discipline in India was such that most of its practitioners were until very recently from the same social locations that most of the mainstream nationalist leaders hailed from, and even expressed explicit sympathies with the nationalist dream of wishing-away caste. The point here, note, is not one about the deliberate and conspiratorial ‘politics’ of these locations; rather, it is about the possibilities of recognition that these locations enabled. This brings us to another observation. The externalities imposing themselves upon the structure of a discipline are not a sufficient condition to explain the silence of the discipline on the question of caste. Indeed, in spite of determined insistences on erasing caste out of the disciplinary frame, it has survived as an important marker of the discipline even to this day. In fact, the oscillation between the frames of essentialisation and marginalisation can be seen to constitute specific ways of dealing with the problem of caste. This would require some elaboration. Let us quickly return to the very trajectory of caste studies that we have contextualised in the previous chapter.

Recognising the anthropological perspectives on caste as primarily, if unintentionally, furthering a dominant agenda - as being so essentialising, totalising and exoticising as to vest caste with a "gate-keeping" function - and as being methodologically skewed have all been valuable. However these criticisms have also been overtly ideological and overdetermining in the influence wielded on the future trajectories of caste studies. Thus, not many pressed insistently upon what could be salvaged about the data and the theory issuing from the various anthropological perspectives on caste. It was plainly as though Dumont saw what he wished to see, and the critique seemed to render it on those very terms. For instance, what does one do with a figure like Ambedkar, who made no attempt to hide the fact of where he belonged and

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2 The instance of the pioneering Indian sociologist, G. S. Ghurye, is illuminating. See Dumont (1980: 220-23) for important remarks on Ghurye's sociological perspective. For a recent exposition, see Upadhya (2002). For a complementary perspective on the social conditioning of Indian sociology, albeit attesting to an earlier moment of the discipline, see Saberwal (1979).
on whose behalf he was arguing but who had a remarkably similar perception of the caste system as Dumont (for a formulation on this score, see Fitzgerald 1996). Indeed as more and more studies of communities from below unfailingly point out, Dumont’s construction of the caste system continues to be oppressively real.

The direction taken by caste studies after the anthropological moment has not only tended to obfuscate the contemporaneity of caste, it has also proved intellectually delimiting. Most post-Dumontian perspectives seem to share this burden (see the contributions anchoring Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma 1994, for instance). Indeed the demand to focus on the substance of caste has almost always been at the expense of a focus on the structure of caste - whether articulated within the frame of caste and politics or even, paradoxically, in the demand to historicise caste. The latter demand particularly has been most revealing. Apart from the illuminating instances of the Baylys, all too often the historicising impulse has terminated in an ideologically loaded and obsessed accusation about the moment of colonialism and its supposed fascination with the enumeration of populations. We are referring here to the works of Inden (1986), Kaviraj (1992), Dirks (2002) and the Subaltern Studies group. Without doubt, it has been rewarding to discover the transformations that caste underwent during the colonial period. But any extension of the space of this discovery - either by means of an “invention” theory or, derivatively, in terms of a celebration of the pre-colonial as “fuzzy” - will prove to be conceptually delimiting and even politically contentious.

What is more, this view is even less helpful in understanding the contemporary dimensions of caste, apart from embellishing the contentious standpoint that the British invented caste in India and accordingly that perhaps a sustained effort to ignore caste will end the colonial hangover on our minds. Indeed, it flies in the face of the mammoth data that works on non-Brahmin movements and Dalit assertions have brought to the fore. The colonial invention thesis, this latter data suggests, is merely inverting the picture. In much of the extant literature on the non-Brahmin movements of the late colonial period, post-independent backward classes movements and the contemporary Dalit movements begin with such assertions. This is in spite of the longer historical trajectory that they seek to draw for the resistance against and mobility in the caste system prior to the colonial moment. We shall be listing the works on the non-Brahmin movement later in the chapter, but it is important to note that works on Dalit communities such as Ram (1988), Pimpley (1990) and many others have testified to the positive effects of the legislative measures brought in by the colonial authority. Indeed, this latter admission has been almost rendered the status of a truism. In fact, even Srinivas [1987 (1975)] places the onus on the colonial rule for legitimising mobility in a system that was either greatly resistant to it or allowed it within certain limits and range. The policy of reservations, which owes its genesis to the colonial understanding of the caste system, has proved to be the
fact, Dirks' (1996) demonstration that the non-Brahmin movement of Tamil Nadu - and by extension, the entire spectrum of caste movements from below - shared the same theoretical and conceptual resource of Orientalism along with the upper castes does not really carry the point any further. By insisting on the colonial origin of the resource, this understanding trivialises the most crucial point of the varying negotiations that different communities have brought to bear on that resource.

Further paradoxes of course underwrite the contemporary dimensions of caste studies. All the different, and often opposed, frames converge on setting an agenda (or non-agenda) for caste exploration. Even as the validity of the anthropological reality of caste is accepted or denied, as the case may be, caste is often approached as being more constitutive and real in villages than in urban settings. Again, if one has to 'see' caste, then one is advised to look at politics or at caste movements from below, as also at enunciations of difference obtaining within the confines of the private and/or domestic spheres. It is this "fixity" of caste on some realms of behaviour that seems to blind contemporary caste studies to the modern and secular manifestations of caste. Srinivas (1996) and Fuller (1996) are the two most significant works that have come out over the last decade on the contemporary situation of caste. It is neither incidental nor insignificant that the cover pages of both these works have such fixed images of caste. Fuller's has an election campaign, while more tellingly Srinivas's has a photograph of the anti-Mandal agitation.

The implications of such a fixation are evident. One need not attend to caste in urban locales, in professional and non-state regulated settings (the state-defined sphere being seen as the key agency that keeps caste alive). Accordingly, caste studies as an agenda before Indian sociology is not only being summarily retrenched; it is also selectively fixated and being frozen. Only certain phenomena are perceived as being, shall we say, 'caste-d' and others as 'non-caste-d'. The trajectories of two contemporary figureheads of Indian sociology are revealing on this score - the late Srinivas and the almost generationally removed Beteille. Srinivas (2003) offers an obituary on the demise of caste as a system. He does this by according an a priori validity to the traditional anthropological construction of caste, one that is overdetermined by its ritualisation and founding cause for an emergence of a middle class among the Dalits which has been at the fore of articulating a Dalit consciousness. See Parry (1999) for just one instance of the positive effects of the policy of reservations on the Dalit communities.
the relational hierarchical ordering. This evaluation, as we noted in the earlier chapter, goes remarkably well with his early writings where (for Srinivas) the only space in which caste is staging a resurgence is in the domain of the political. This only reveals the “fixing” of caste and the determination of a certain frozen agenda for caste studies.

Beteille's works are incomparably more sensitive and theoretically alert but he too seeks to further this delimiting agenda. In fact, he goes a step further in decrying the significance of caste itself. The two essays we picked on earlier (1991 and 1996a; but see also 2002) are a definitive illustration of this tendency. It is ironical that Beteille, among the most articulate of those committed to describing the present of caste and working off the material contexts of caste (as opposed to its ideational components) should be the most consistent proponent of displacing the centrality of caste for the sociological analyses of Indian society. His diagnosis of the recent history of the Indian society and history accentuates this perception. Broadly, this seems to be issuing from two distinct but closely related quarters. One is Beteille's uncritical celebration of the mainstream nationalist elite like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Gandhi and Tagore (as indeed his studied silence on Ambedkar). The second has to do with his appraisals of the present, as reflected in his positions on the backward classes' movement and the question of reservation, as well as his insistence on the receding influence and legitimacy of caste among the "urban middle classes". It is worth quoting him at some length:

Caste has ceased to play an active role in the reproduction of inequality, at least at the upper levels of social hierarchy where it is no longer an important agent of either social placement or social control. ... The recent attack on caste by egalitarians of both radical and liberal persuasions is misdirected even where it appears well-meaning. Caste should be attacked for its divisive role in electoral politics rather than its active role in the reproduction of inequality which is relatively small and clearly declining. The role of caste in politics is neither small nor declining. Caste is no longer an institution of any great strength among the influential urban intelligentsia; but it is an instrument of great force in mobilising political support in the country as a whole. ... Equality, at least at the higher levels of society, can no longer be significantly advanced by attacking caste. (Beteille 1991: 25).

Clearly, therefore, the representational problem can be overbearing and overdetermining particularly in the 'modern' discussions on caste. The demand placed on scholars to be sensitive both to caste's conflictual and consensual aspects has gained increasing momentum in the recent decades, primarily in the wake of Hindutva and the rising tide of Hindu fundamentalism. We need maintain that this emphasis on the conflictual and consensual aspects of caste is an important and necessary one, even as the
specific determinates of and possible reconfigurations issuing out of this recognition have not always remained clear or predictable.⁴ All the same, we still have to clarify the methodological moves that could be made in recuperating the dynamics of the contemporary Brahmin identity.

II

Caste in/and/as identity

An excessive preoccupation with the substantive avatars of caste - as constituting a mobilisational resource, a collective identity, a movement of self-assertion - has contributed to a commitment to what can be grossly termed as a 'social movements' framework and to its methodological demands. This framework as extended to the reality of caste would entail the following characteristics. For one, the movements framework can only work if it presumes caste as a self-accepted, demonstrative identity - more accurately, caste as a 'hard' identity. Now, while the presumed hardness of caste as an identity is not by itself a problem, it is what follows in the wake of that presumption that freezes the operative dimensions of caste. In other words, it elides the question of identification altogether - as against the insistence of a hard identity - taking both the identities of the self and the other as a priori, in some logical sense fixed and owned unequivocally by the subjects of such identities.⁵ It is almost as if the a priori postulation of a caste identity is enough to characterise all the actions and perceptions of its subjects. 'Caste' (or anything in its place) here becomes primarily a mobilisational resource which effectively and successfully gets its subjects into collective and unequivocal action on its behalf. This brings us to another characteristic trait of the 'social movements' framework that needs repudiation.

Social movements are definitionally collective in nature, and represent deliberate and deliberated upon spheres of action in terms of clear and unequivocal (at least in intent) means and ends. The framework, consequently, takes on a normative axis of appraisal all too easily. Of course, this taking-on is neither a deliberate nor an externally mounted choice. The normative compulsion, as it were, is built into the very logic of the social movement's framework (whether articulated in terms of a 'relative deprivation' theme or organised around a mobilisational idiom and even rendered as an identity-

⁴ See Dirks (1996) for a reflection on this.
⁵ Our entire third section is devoted to a clarification of this space.
centered articulation).\(^6\) It is for this reason that, for instance, contesting claims about justice, equality, and, in more recent times, 'difference', seem to overpower this axis (see Fraser 1997: esp. the introduction and ch.1)

Such a condensation is too determinate and restrictive to measure up properly to the requirements of a processual and dynamic analysis of the malleable and contradictory nature of caste action. More frontally, following Fuller's suggestion that substantialisation of caste is a contradictory process, the ‘movements’ perspective is insensitive to this aspect of caste reality. To be sure, the paradigm of substantialisation would need to be altered so as to be operationalised, a point we shall come to in due course. But the fact is that the 'movements' framework, by exclusively focusing on castes as always-already substantivised entities (or blocs), cannot remain sensitive to the internal dynamics of caste legitimation as indeed contestation. What is more, the 'movements' register does not allow castes, either as fluid identities or as normative communities, to exhibit an ambivalence about their 'casteness' - the givenness of caste-mediated identities being always collectively ordered and definitional to the 'movements' framework.

In an important contribution significantly titled "Beyond 'identity'", Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have forcefully suggested that we do away with the very concept of 'identity'. Their reasons are that it has assumed totalising proportions, even more that it has been put to contradictory usage and made to carry many loads that are hardly illuminating. More pointedly, Brubaker and Cooper maintain that no amount of 'constructivist' gloss on the notion of identity - that identities are never given; they are always constructed - will help redeem what is but a definitional requirement of identity, namely, primordiality or a certain hardness and essentialism. According to them, if this property is sought to be taken away by prefixing any talk of identities with their so-called "multiplicity", "fluidity" and/or "constructed nature", then there is nothing left to talk about identities themselves. They suggest alternative terms that could take on "the theoretical work 'identity' is supposed to do" (ibid.: 14): of 'identification and categorisation', 'self understanding and social location, and 'commonality, connectedness, groupness'. These are necessary corrections to what can be termed as the

\(^6\) For the thesis of 'relative deprivation' as applied to social movements see Rao (1982). For the latter 'mobilisationar and identity-centered articulation see Touraine (1992).
fashionable postmodern celebration of identity politics and the logic of proliferating identities.

More significantly, however, while much of the contemporary engagement has been in the context of understanding assertions from below - identities as being decisively a question of empowerment - any reminder of their inherent instability works against the very justification of studying them. Consequently, we need to be drawing on an alternative repertoire of theoretical sources to formulate the question of identity and identification while also accommodating the concerns that Brubaker and Cooper foreground. Of course, subsuming caste to a logic of identity and identification runs the risk of according a reified status to the latter. But crucially the implication of stability and relative permanence that caste actors seem to recognise about the identities they express is important in making sense of their meaning-making activities and the action patterns they exhibit. The challenge really is not one of jettisoning the idea of identity, but binding it to more structurally ordained situations and notions.

A pioneering work in bringing the framework of identity to bear on caste is that of Barnett (1977). Building upon the thesis of substantialisation, he studies a non-Brahmin forward caste (the Kontaikkatti Vellalars) in Tamil Nadu and explicitly outlines "identity and identity choice as the central problem in situating caste today" (ibid: 393). He charts the process of substantialisation encountered in that caste as it seeks to respond to the larger processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, the non-Brahmin movement, and caste consolidation within the realm of politics. In the course of this charting, Barnett reveals the extent of corporatisation of the different endogamous bilateral kindreds within the caste, often mediated through active demands of inter-marriage across such units and by contextually determined invocations of casteness. The accompanying processes of individualisation of caste members and the resistance encountered are mapped.

7 Fuelled by the 'cultural turn' of social theory - on this see Alexander and Seidman (1990) - and the concomitant demand to focus on the fragment or the periphery, 'identity' has come to occupy a central position in social science theorisation. See Hall (1990) and Bendle (2002) for an account. The latter demonstrates the widespread and diverse concern with identity, even as it explores how problematic this concern has become in contemporary sociology. In the Indian context, particularly from the 1980s, the study of identities has come to occupy a preeminent position in social theory and research. Jodhka (2001: 14-28) points to the probable factors that account for this development. According to him, the failure of the so-called meta-narratives of development, nation, class, and modernity to accommodate the subaltern voices and concerns has given a fillip to identity-based articulations and movements. What is more, it is claimed that the prevalent theoretical frameworks sustained by notions of universal validity and rationality were ill equipped to explain these developments.
While Barnett's investigation seems to set the tone for our own, it is important to note that the former discerns sharp ruptures in the process of individuation proceeding from 'relationality' to ethnic-like caste blocs, and even pegs this transition to the early parts of the twentieth century. According to him, increasingly with the process of “ethnicisation” the very language of caste - of purity-pollution, hierarchy, and so on - is reduced to a mere ideological justification, serving its purpose by the sheer fact that individual caste members are familiar with it. Charting the dynamics of the Brahmin identity, we find however that the picture is much more muddled. This latter demarcation would have to await the unfolding of our substantive chapters. Nevertheless, Barnett’s work brings us to attend to the process of substantialisation as a viable mode of understanding the contemporaneity of caste.

In many ways, the thesis of substantialisation can be seen to prefigure efforts to understand caste in/and/as identity. It also instructs the efforts to map the transformations in caste under the rubric of ethnicity. One can conceive of a fit between caste understood as a substantivised independent bloc and the idea of identity conceived as a form of self-identification and belonging. In either case, it is not a logical necessity that such entities/identities are seen to be relative to each other, ordered on a principle that governs all such entities/identities. But this fit also enables a re-theorisation of the changes within the space of identities and substantivised entities, by allowing for differentiation within individual groups and individuals within castes. Indeed some castes might become more substantialised than others, even as individuals and families within castes could become uncomfortable with substantialised notions of identity than others within their own caste. Substantialisation, on this register of identity-formation, is primarily a process of ‘identity choice’ in which caste is but one of the many such choices available for individuals to chose from and act upon depending upon the context. Equally, it designates a process by which individual or ethnic-like identities proliferate and compete with each other without any necessary binding logic that relativises them vis-a-vis each other.

The foregoing constitute important reminders for a re-theorisation of caste in/and/as identity. At any rate, however, not much work has been done either in delineating the operative aspects of the process of substantialisation or in terms of

For a perspective on this, albeit straddling the contours of the Sikh identity, see Gupta (1996).
demonstrating at the empirical level its usefulness as a theoretical hypothesis. This is the case even if we were to retrospectively read much of the ethnographic village studies or those that sought to reflect on the larger processes of 'politicisation' of caste, caste-based mobility/movements from below etc. as hinting at precisely such a transformation of caste in recent history. Such a reading, besides, unauthorisedly burdens this body of work to take on the specific loads that the framework of substantialisation would demand. What is more, Dumont himself (even as he pioneers this thesis) does not engage with the task of illustrating the process any great deal.

The questions nonetheless about caste in/and/as identity remain - whether factored into the process and thesis of substantialisation or not. What is one to make of this space of re-theorisation, indeed its adequacy and validity? How does caste in/and/as identity unfold itself? Even if caste is privy to 'substantialisation', what of caste is getting substantialised - is it the ways in which individuals represent caste or the parameters of caste behaviour and action or is substantialisation obtaining at both these levels? Do the different aspects of casteness, and do the members of different castes, undergo substantialisation differentially? Can we speak of caste identity and identification outside of the rubric of substantialisation? What does the process of substantialisation make of the context, and in turn what does the context make of it? Does the thesis retain legitimacy outside the parameters of the Dumontian theory of caste? Even more crucially, why is it necessary that caste as structure and caste as substance remain mutually exclusive to one another - that is to say, to foreground a different axis, is substantialisation a process very unique to the modern moment? Have not caste actors made meanings of and worked on their caste identities and identifications in a substantialised sense before this moment? And conversely, is it the case that caste as a structure of relations, interdependently made sense of, is no longer available to the caste actors? Also, at another level, if caste is both continuous and changing, how does one then approach the problematic? Besides, 'continuous' and 'changing' in relation to what and compared to what?

Broadly, these are some of the questions that our study will attempt to tackle, but the modality of our answering is contextualised to the 'Brahmin' identity in contemporary Karnataka. The precise structure of our justifications for studying the dynamics of this identity - an 'upper caste' one at that - has already been laid out in our introductory chapter. In what follows, we shall set out the concrete ways in which we have gone about
operationalising our research focus and problem. In perspective are the concepts used, tools deployed and the strategies of interpretation adopted, as well as a restatement of the coordinates anchoring the field of study.

III

On identity and identification and the question of othering

It is important to approach any judgment about identity as a judgment about oneself in particular, or about some particular person or group. Thus the question "Who am I?" points to certain values, certain allegiances, a certain community perhaps, outside of which one could not function as a fully human subject. Of course, one might be able to go on living as an organism outside any values, allegiance, or even community. But what is peculiar to a human subject is the ability to ask and answer questions about what really matters, what is of the highest value, what is truly significant, most beautiful and so on. The conception of identity, therefore, is broadly the view that outside the horizon provided from some master value or allegiance or community membership, one would be unable to function as a full human subject and would not be in a position to ask and answer these questions effectively.

Within this idea of identity and identification - the latter being taken to designate a process of having an identity - it is important to note that there is no claim that 'others' will be unable to function outside one's horizon. In fact, such a claim constitutes an inherent limit within extant formulations of identity, the expectation being that the horizon of the self implicates an 'other' (or others). Thus, for instance, Jenkins, for whom social identification is "knowing who we are and who others are" (2000: 8). Since identities derive from mutually implicated relations of similarity and difference - "(s)imilarity and difference are implicit in the other, one does not make sense without the other" (Jenkins 2000: 7) - they can only be understood with reference to one another and not in isolation. To speak of 'identifying' is also to simultaneously speak of othering. It is, as Jenkins avers, the “internal and the external moments of the dialectic of identification: how we identify ourselves, how others identify us, and the ongoing interplay of these in processes of social identification. This is also simultaneously, a matter of how we identify them, how they identify themselves, and so on" (ibid. 7, emphasis in original).

But the point that needs to be emphasised - contrary to most expansive theorisations of identity and identification (for the latter, see also Jenkins 1996) - is that
the horizon necessary for oneself is not essential for human beings as such. There are some things that we might judge universally necessary - for e.g., a minimal freedom from utter deprivation, or a minimum of caring for children - and one might argue that without these, no body could become a fully human subject. Consequently the claim about identity is particularised, and needs to be approached as so. One may come to realise that belonging to a given culture is part of one's identity, because outside of the reference points of this culture one could not even begin to put together those questions of meaning and significance that are peculiarly in the domain of the human subject (cf. Taylor 1985: Part I). In other words, it is this culture that helps to identify oneself, and in the context of which one gets to know who one is as a human subject.

It is important to recognise that the question about identity and identification is a modern one; as the philosopher-theorist Charles Taylor puts it, it belongs to modern, emancipated subjects (1989: 3-52 passim). According to him, for the medieval man, there could not have been a question about the conditions of human subjecthood for the individual; indeed that one can speak only anachronistically of the identity of medieval man. In a sense, for the medieval self, there were conditions for man as such (especially in the context of a relationship with God) which one could turn their back on with disastrous consequences. The idea that conditions could be different for human subjects, Taylor holds, is inseparable from 'modern emancipated humanism' (ibid. 3-24). Accordingly, being human is not just a matter of occupying the rank assigned to humans in a divinely ordained order, rather it is that our humanity is something we each discover in ourselves. To be human is not, therefore, to be discovered in the order of things in which people are set, but in the nature that people discover in themselves (see also Schneewind 1998).

Of course, it needs to be reiterated that emancipated humanism does not of itself lead to the notion of identity (as disclosed above). It is a necessary but not sufficient condition. It is not enough to imagine the human being as an active agent fulfilling his or her purposes in the world. Indeed, for the notion of identity to take shape, there is also the question of a horizon of meaning that will be essential for this or that person's being human. The need for a horizon of meaning, and therefore of a sense of individual and
national differences, is crucial for the question of identity and identification to take shape.\(^9\)

On the terms of this account, then, coherence, vitality, depth, and maturity constitute the four dimensions of a fulfilled identity and/or identification (whether individual or collective). It seems to presuppose a theory of normative validity that is based on the authenticity and primacy of an identity or the process of having one. Not that this presupposition is inherently problematic, but the point is that it does not seem to be capable of accounting for the role of the ‘other’ (or others) in the constitution of identity. It is undeniably the case that a key dimension in the formation of identities is interaction with "others". It is precisely the strength of Jenkins’ account (briefly recounted above) that due recognition is given to this fact, although of course the limitation of his analysis is that he tends to over-emphasise the role of the other in the constitution of an identity. Chiefly his categories of ‘internal identification’ and 'external categorisation’ - as part of what he terms the “\textit{internal} and the \textit{external} moments of the dialectic of \textit{identification}” (Jenkins 2000: 7) - while artful and disingenuous in disclosing the processes of othering in the constitution of an identity and/or identification, do not seem to be sufficiently attentive to the horizon of meaning (in the sense of Taylor recounted above) implicating identity and identification. Even as a sense of self (or identity, on our terms) is founded on a tendency to construct and even demonize 'others', these 'others' provide critique and destabilisation rightly focusing on the coercions and contradictions of identity-claims. This much is true, and it is the strength of Jenkins account (see also his 1996) that he forces attention on this dimension of the process of having an identity. But to this must be added the contrary contention that in our reflections about identity and identification, we must assign equal priority to how human agents (as encumbered selves) think about matters, of how they perceive and represent those matters to themselves.

In the most general sense, accordingly, an identity and identification can and ought to possess a degree of self-integrity or \textit{self-congruency} - enough to allow for its self-realisation or 'flourishing'\(^5\). In order to be so, an identity must be autonomous, but

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\(^9\) For Taylor, the importance of a horizon of meaning and of individual and national differences comes in the Romantic period, with what he characterises as the question of identity. For each individual to discover in himself or herself what his humanity consists in, s/he needs a horizon of meaning, which can only be provided by some allegiance, group membership, cultural tradition (Taylor 1989: 368-90).
autonomy is only one aspect of identity. In fact, for an identity to be autonomous, it must also be constituted intersubjectively in a struggle for recognition. But again, this intersubjective dimension of identity is just one further aspect of identity. Finally, in order to be authentic, an identity must posit itself as a project and articulate that project with its self-understanding. That is, an identity distinguishes itself by the relationship between its sense of purpose (who or what one wants to be) and its current self-evaluation (who or what one currently is). It is this aspect of identity that needs particular emphasis. Autonomy is crucial to pursuing projects of self-realisation, and it is undeniably the case that identities are formed through interaction with others.

It should be clear that the account of identity and identification presupposed by our study is interdisciplinary in spirit - which also explains partly the three simultaneous registers (explained below) at which we explicate the dynamics of Brahmin identity in contemporary Karnataka. Being so, it combines an empirical/descriptive understanding of identity and identification with a normative/explanatory interest in the same. It is the force of this combined recognition that our clarificatory comments above on the process of having an identity have sought to record. In what follows, we shall seek to further firm up the co-ordinates of our study of the Brahmin identity in contemporary Karnataka. But perhaps we could begin by introducing the field.

IV
Introducing the field

To be sure, much of the literature on the question – not limited to Karnataka of course, but focusing on other parts of southern and western India - has been concerned to deliver precisely into the framework that we are here seeking to avoid, namely, that of social movements.\(^{10}\) Broadly in keeping with our strictures above, the challenge is not (only) to study the 'origins' of an idea or movement - something that the literature just cited does pretty well, in terms of both the conditions which caused them and those which gave them their peculiar shape or means of expression. Rather, the specific imperative is

\(^{10}\) Works on the non-Brahmin movements are rich and diverse, if skewed in their excessive attention on Tamil Nadu. Some of the works focusing on the Tamil region are: Irschick (1969), Baker (1976), Arnold (1977), Washbrook (1989), Geeta and Rajadurai (1998). Gore (1989) and Omvedt (1994) are works on western India - particularly Maharashtra. Dushkin (1974), Manor (1977a) and (1977b), Chandrashekar (1985) and (1995), Thimmaiah (1993) and Naidu 1996 are some of the works dealing with the non-Brahmin movement of the princely Mysore State. Most of these works adopt a 'movements' perspective in describing the non-Brahmin question.
to address [a] how these objective conditions were incorporated into a larger ideological scheme (if any) and why these conditions (and not others) should have assumed a new importance; and [b] the specific modalities of caste agency and response exhibited by and within this perceptual field. The present study shares much in common with the latter emphasis, although it is the dimensions of a contemporary caste register - and a singular one at that - that our investigation lays claim.

It is also important to point out that the focus on a singular caste identity - granting that we call the 'Brahmin' as constituting a bloc in the sense both of an endogamous community as well as a rank-ordered and ritually-legitimated varna - flies in the face of the historian Susan Bayly's (1983) suggestion that we move away from the study of single caste communities. Thus, even as the study seems to be innovating from within the anthropological understanding of caste (pp. 4-12 above has the details), it is not mere revisionism that is in perspective here. In focus is an effort to combine a pluralism of methods, attentive at once to the perceptual space of Brahmins, with theoretical abstractions issuing off a conception of caste in/and/as identity.

The modern imagination (whether scholarly or official, as indeed of lay actors themselves) accords the Brahmins of Karnataka with an always-already corporatised, internally homogeneous 'casteness'. More generally, the identity or identification is invested with a sacredness or religiosity which, although individual Brahmins might not emblematise, also translates into a normative definition of community. For the specific and limited tasks that this identification of being ‘Brahmins’ - of making up a caste, even constituting a kind of normative community - is expected to perform, such a postulation of identity seems to be sufficient. For instance, as far as the modern state is concerned, with respect to its policies for the upliftment of the backward classes and the Dalit communities, categorising the Brahmin caste as 'forward' was (and is, until recently of course) relatively unproblematic. Most of the Backward Classes Committees and Commissions appointed by the state from about 1918 (the year when the first such Committee was constituted) have all presumed an internal cohesion as obtaining within the Brahmin fold. In fact, given the remarkable similarities that exist in the contemporary trajectories of the different 'kinds' of Brahmins, with particular reference to their

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11 The qualification 'until recently of course' that we have parenthetically stated is a reference to the demand, at both the national and state levels, for reservations among economically deprived 'forward' caste individuals. This is however a problem that our study is not concerned to scrutinise.
unprecedented scales of urbanisation and appropriation of modern institutional spaces, the presumption seems to be valid. Even the copious scholarly literature on the backward classes and on their movements has not found it necessary to disaggregate the Brahmin category. These too have largely been content with looking at Brahmins as a homogenised whole, even when occasionally but fleetingly drawing attention to the internal distinctions, hierarchies and divisions that obtain within the fold.\textsuperscript{12}

It is indeed essential that we recognise the validity and necessity - and not merely sufficiency - of such an assumption. The identity of being a Brahmin did and continues to perform certain essential symbolic and material functions in a modern and secularising environment. Quite emphatically, questions of marriage and kinship even to this day require a foregrounding of the identity of being Brahmin, even of a specific denominational kind at that. However, by the early decades of the twentieth century itself, in establishing and sustaining informal networks that enabled Brahmin men to come to the cities to pursue modern education and employment, the significance attached to the internal distinctions had undergone a transformation. As we shall see, the self-identity of being a Brahmin was the only necessary and sufficient condition to acquire an entry into these networks. Not that there was any complete and decisive erasure of the importance of other particularities, but being Brahmin was still sufficient. Thus the corporatised imagination of the Brahmins has performed and continues to perform crucial functions, and the Brahmins themselves participate in recuperating their selves as being so (of course, with significant oscillations and ambivalences).

During the public debates on the government's decision to implement the recommendations of the first backward classes committee (1918), the Brahmins, in their defense, did invoke the internal differentiations that obtain among the different 'kinds' of Brahmins. They had then suggested that the Havyaka Brahmins and the Sankethi Brahmins have remained backward as far as their share in the modern sources and resources was concerned. Thereafter too Brahmins have engaged themselves in bitter and acrimonious public and private contestations against each successive backward classes committee and commission. But all along, the question they foreground is one of class

\textsuperscript{12} Manor, for instance, recognises that "the Brahmins of Mysore State were in so sense a monolithic, integrated whole" (1977a: 33), but is concerned to sidetrack from the details about the same.
rather than caste - the trope of the 'miserable poor rural Brahmin' is often the register on
which these scripts are written.

Nonetheless, our concerns in this work go beyond those of the state, the backward
classes commissions, scholars working on the 'other' of Brahmins (be it the Dalits or the
non-Brahmins), as indeed of the Brahmins themselves who in certain contexts and fields
recuperate themselves as non-prefixied and corporate entities. Any mapping of the
Brahmin category, identity and identification necessarily needs to be sensitive to the
question of internal distinctions, heirarchisation and divisions that obtain within a
corporately imagined Brahmin self. It is by way of making those demarcations clear that
we go on to state the manner in which the different terms - Brahmin castes and the
Brahmin community, in particular - are deployed.

In the course of our study, we shall consistently deploy the term 'the Brahmin
community' to refer to an aggregated entity that incorporates all 'kinds' of Brahmins.
That is to say, to all those who call themselves as Brahmins, subject to the condition that
the other 'kinds' of Brahmins accept their claims, whether grudgingly or not, unwillingly
or not. This is not an exclusively subjectively determined condition though. For
instance, a federating association like the Akhila Karnataka Brahmana Maha Sabha
(AKBMS) accepts the Saraswats as Brahmins even when many contending Brahmin
castes might not, and even as there have been a negligible number of marriages between
the Saraswats and other Brahmins. The AKBMS nevertheless does not accept the claims
of the Vishwakarma Brahmins (the gold-making caste) as Brahmins, even if the
Vishwakarmas themselves have for almost a century now staked claims to Brahminhood.
To be sure, the AKBMS or any such association is in no way the deciding agency that
exercises any terminal and successful moral authority over the Brahmins. For, even when
it accepts a caste group as Brahmin, sometimes its own affiliates might not accept it,
leave alone the community at large. Again, the case of Saraswats can be cited here.
While some Saraswats have become executive committee members of the AKBMS, the
Dakshina Kannada Brahmana Sabha that represents the AKBMS in Dakshina Kannada (a
coastal region) does not accept them even as members.

All the same, it is important to recognise that there exists substantial agreement
among the Brahmins as to who can be accorded that status and who are the 'pretenders'.
Accordingly, the term 'Brahmin community' is used for this conglomeration of identities.
To reiterate, corporatisation is a real and entrenched force within the Brahmin fold. Thus
even as we remain aware of internal distinctions, we can never lose sight of the fact of corporatisation. It might seem contradictory that tendencies exist simultaneously, but for the Brahmins themselves it is not so. Accordingly, we use the term 'Brahmin castes' to refer to particular caste groups that make up the Brahmin community.

An acceptance of this latter point would need at least a cursory description of the internal distinctions that obtain among the Brahmins. All the Brahmins owe allegiance to one of the three philosophical traditions - Advaita (whose adherents are called the Smarthas), Dvaita (the Madhvas) and Vishishtadvaita (the Srivaishnavas). These three traditions owe their significance to the three Brahmin philosophers - Shankaracharya (period not agreed upon and opinions range from placing him anywhere from 500 BC to 800 AD), Madhvacharya (13th century) and Ramanujacharya (eleventh century) respectively. The adherents are distinguished by popularly recognised and understood (particularly male) body insignia that they wear during the performance of elaborately defined daily rituals. The distinctions are also philosophical in nature, bordering on differences in formulating the origins and goals of (the Brahmin) life.

However, these three traditions are further internally differentiated. The distinctions that obtain among the Smarthas in particular are great in number - like the Shivalli, Hoysala Karnataka, Badaganadu, Seeranadu, Mulkanadu, Sankethi, Iyer and so on. Most of these, except the Iyers, owe allegiance to the Sringeri Smartha matha, one of the monastic orders supposedly established by the Shankaracharya himself. The Iyers have their own matha in Kanchi, Tamil Nadu, with a Shankaracharya mediating its affairs. The Madhvas too display a range of distinctions, but these appear to be primarily based on the mathas they owe allegiance to. For instance, there are eight Madhva mathas in Udupi apart from those in the other parts of Karnataka, and families are distributed across these mathas. Even the Srivaishnavas are internally differentiated, particularly on the basis of regional distinctions. For instance, marriages are rare between the Karnataka Iyengars and the Iyengars of Tamil Nadu.

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13 For a general and dated but detailed description of some of these internal distinctions, see Thurston and Rangachari (1909: 267-393).
14 See Rao (2002) for a description of the philosophical and ritualistic distinctions surrounding the Madhvas of Udupi in particular. The work even includes a pictorial representation of the body markers worn by the different categories of Madhvas of Udupi (ibid.: 54-55). The dale attributed to the three Gurus is also taken from this work (ibid.: 5-6).
We shall be confining the term 'caste' to refer to such specific entities spread across the Brahmanical tradition. Many Brahmins themselves, for instance, often use the term 'caste' to refer to three distinct axes - of being Brahmin, even Smartha (say) while also constituting themselves as Shivalli (say) - although the pressures emanating from the sense of siege that many of them experience forces them increasingly to speak of being one distinct corporate community. This latter modality is the legitimised discourse within the space of the larger corporate associations, which consistently urge Brahmins to shed their 'particular' identities (they call them 'sects' or 'sub-caste') in the face of consistent attacks from 'the others'. This oscillation between particularised identifications and corporatised definitions is neither unmarked nor carelessly tossed about, and therefore needs to be addressed as such.

V

Operational parameters and details about research materials used

Equally critical for the evolving contours of this study has been a sense of and a capacity for self-criticism, or, on our terms, reflexivity. Clarifying the scope of and identifying the conditions for this activity can thus be a theoretically and empirically challenging task. In a recent contribution, Bourdieu has argued for incorporating the social experience of the researcher in his/her efforts to 'understand and analyse other people's experiences' (2003: 287). He terms this practice - a 'device', as he puts it - 'participant objectivation'. The idea is distinct from both the post-modern narcissism (which, as Bourdieu repeatedly insists, has almost brought the enterprise of research to a grinding halt) and the egological reflexivity of phenomenology. Broadly, participant objectivation seeks to 'sociologise' the sociologist him/herself not only as a private person with unique biographical particularities but, more importantly, by objectivising the "social conditions of possibility" (ibid. 282) of the researcher's lived experience. Participant objectivation is, accordingly, to subject "to constant critical vigilance" (ibid.: 286) how one is situated in one's professional universe as also how one arrives at a research problem, the ways that one chooses to operationalise it, the objectives of the research and so on. These practices of objectivation, Bourdieu avers, feed off and into each other, and brings to sociological knowledge greatly significant analytic resources.

Evidently, deploying this device in the context of our own research - one seeking to objectify the identity-space of the contemporary Brahmin community - is useful, even if difficult. The difficulty is one of constantly guarding against the lure of interpretive
indulgence, which given the fixations of contemporary identity politics can take on overpowering normative implications that are useless as a serious analytical exercise.\textsuperscript{15} Coming as this researcher does from a Brahmin family and into the intellectual space of academic sociology can be a strange experience. Even as they appear to inhabit two exclusive - even oppositional - universes, the trajectory of the discipline in India has ensured that the ambit of its articulation has been borne predominantly by Brahmins themselves. And yet, paradoxically enough, the mediating grounds of caste politics, its rhetoric as indeed the concrete institutional practices of the modern state structure have ensured that the idea of the Brahmin stood comprehensively subjected to interrogation, even repudiation. This researcher, having been an active participant in the 'progressive' caste politics, was often an agent in this process. At once, this researcher has had to bear the mantle of being "Brahmin, after all" as well as consciously strive to disown that caste self. The trends in caste studies apart, it is the simultaneous but deeply contradictory habitation of these worlds that has guided this researcher in objectifying his object, namely, the Brahmin.

In many ways, it is the disengagement of the idea of the Brahmin from the person (in the sense of a flesh and blood creature bound by spatio-temporal particularities) that appears to be at stake here. All too often, the Brahmin family from which this researcher came seemed to bear the burden of this disengagement, and would translate into a sense of crisis - more accurately, a state of burden, even of siege - vis-a-vis its casteness, the condition of being Brahmin. It was, to be sure, not a generalised feeling of existence, that is to say, it did not permeate all its registers of the lifeworld. Nonetheless, it was an overpowering sense that the family was privy to, in particular, by an articulate father, the head of the household, who was and continues to be a 'foot soldier' in many of the caste associational efforts in Bangalore. His compulsion to participate in the activities of various associations and to regularly contribute to the monthly journal of the AKBMS was in itself a statement of self-concern about the community in a context of general apathy. The sense of crisis, of being held in a state of siege, was attributed to various

\textsuperscript{15} For the excesses of identity theorizing and its associated politics see Appiah (1992). As the latter makes clear, much of the preoccupation with identities goes well beyond clearing a space for the same to make strong suggestions about how those identities should be used. In doing so, identity politics and theorisations in terms of identities may execute a displacement of their own, in the process reproducing the essentialisms they condemn.
sources: from a "wicked" state structure to the “deeply conspiratorial” non-Brahmin communities, from "apathetic" and/or "orthodox" Brahmins to those personages who actively and publicly participate in the act of repudiating the idea of the Brahmin, and so on.

The articulation, as indeed the sentiment that underwrote it, was complete and relentless. But was it merely an instance of a ‘private trouble’ that was being voiced as a ‘public issue’ or was it a public issue after all? This question was crucial for this researcher - who, it is to be noted, was still seeking to prefigure his research question - especially since his family, when measured in terms of the community as a whole, had not been very successful in translating the cultural and economic capital of the previous generation into the present. The anxiety of a failure to be part of the 'distinctions' of the group to which one belonged was easy to recognise, and even feel as part of one's growing up. All the same, it was evident that the articulation was much more than a mere enactment of displacement - of seeking an external reason to alleviate what was really a failure of the self. One's own personal and private worlds, peopled by caste mates and kin, as indeed the public enunciations of personally unknown but recognisably Brahmin personages in the spaces of caste associations, newspapers etc. brought to fore the sharpness of this state of being. Many of these individuals and families did not share the personal predicaments and anxieties that the researcher's family was susceptible. But still most of these individuals frequently articulated similar senses of siege - even if most of them were not driven to 'soldiering' for the associations. In fact many remained ambiguous about the usefulness of these fora.

It was also evident, given the presence of three (almost four) generations simultaneously living together as one household, that the researcher's family was bearing the brunt of overloaded definitions of ritual purity and secular profanation. What however tended to complicate the picture was one of an extant practice in this social world, the practice of actively sourcing one's caste self in positive and productive ways. This was not merely limited to the deployment of kin and caste friend-networks for enhancing and consolidating life chances, which was evidently there, but more significantly of a recuperation of the very idea of being Brahmin in ways that were unmistakably enabling.

16 The terms 'private trouble' and 'public issue', note, are drawn from Wright-Mills (1959: 3-24).
What were the ontological resources that the other two worlds - of the academia and of politics - offered to make sense of this (contradictory and ambivalent) state of being Brahmin? The academic commonsense largely presented one with a set of choices. Firstly, the strain, which foregrounded its political commitments to the cause of the subaltern, that tended to be dismissive of the predicament of being 'upper caste' and 'Brahmin'. This position repudiates all protestations of such a caste self, expressing disbelief in the latter's ability to transcend caste frames of action and meaning. A second tendency is the exact opposite of the first, and entails taking the upper caste/Brahmin self's discourse as its own. This position urges one to accord an a priori sociological validity to the assertions of the (upper) caste self. Here it is often conceded, basing entirely on the assertions of the subject of research, that the caste self has indeed broken with itself. It is a self that is ‘free’ from its casteness. The point note, it is important perhaps to be reminded, is not one of the travails of being a Brahmin who displays all the genuine intentions to shed his casteness but is being denied every time from doing just that. Indeed the apprehensions of the Dalits about the 'sincerity' of the Brahmins-in-solidarity - articulated more often than not in terms of a model of appropriation - seem to require a model of historical authentication.

But still, one's own experience of being Brahmin (or, perhaps more accurately, of being a part of a social life that had to constantly negotiate with the simultaneously obtaining registers of repudiation and productive recuperation) suggested that neither of these frames was capable of framing the contemporary Brahmin. In a manner of speaking, this research marks an attempt to work out an alternative framework of appraisal issuing off the parameters of identity and identification borne by caste subjects. The initial trajectories that we begin with - of a sense of siege, a burden, of an oscillation in the self-identity of being Brahmin - have also been constitutive of our research concerns.

In operationalising this intent - of listening to contemporary Brahmins, retrieving their perceptual space, keying into the dynamics and paradoxes of 'upper caste' articulation - the methods we pursued as indeed the subjects we sampled chose themselves out. The need to carry out 'ethnography\(^5\) - albeit not one delivering from standard anthropological protocols, and even incorporating elements of a survey framework - was clear from the outset. Listening to the contemporary Brahmins talk about their selves, castes, community, their life worlds, their Others, the larger processes
that they believe are shaping their everyday lives, the reflections on their ‘past’, and so on was crucial for our purposes. Likewise, the institutional and the discursive space of the many caste associations, each clamoring for the allegiance of the individual Brahmin, had to be accounted for from within the parameters underscoring the study.

Lest we be misunderstood, it is necessary to reiterate that our ‘ethnography’ departs from the classical modes of the same. Primarily, it does not claim as its object the 'whole', nor does it seek to present it in terms of a 'total narrative'. Our intent here is less to provide a 'complete' picture of the lives of the contemporary Brahmin community as to animate a problem on hand about the patterns of dynamism that the Brahmin community has exhibited; and, in the process, to move towards interpreting what 'caste' means today. Therefore the depth, as indeed the range of detail, that one has come to expect out of what goes by the name of ethnography might not obtain here. Besides, the fieldwork was carried out using standard survey tools like questionnaire and interview schedules (more the latter) and involved both Brahmin households and caste association activists/office bearers. The fieldwork for this study was conducted during a period of fifteen months between January 2000 and March 2001. Given the theoretical and methodological focus, we had resolved to lay our hands on different kinds of data. The following is a description of how we went about gathering data and of the research materials that we have primarily relied upon in detailing our chapters. It also serves to amplify the research focus of this investigation.

Defined by our substantive focus, we attempted to get at three concurrently orchestrated types of data:

- the historical record on the late colonial period;
- the organisational efforts, over time, to mobilise the Brahmin community within the space of 'caste' associations (both as individual Brahmin castes and as a corporate Brahmin identity); and
- finally, the perceptual space of Brahmin households and of individual Brahmins largely within an urban setting.

In connection with the first of these, we have worked at collating material from the rich tradition of auto/biographies in Kannada. We also attempted to source insights and impressions from the Kannada literature of the period. A weekly journal named

\footnote{See Marcus (2002) for a reflection on the ethnographic method and its future.}
Mysore Star published from Mysore from 1881 to 1936 (it was apparently banned for a few years during the 1910s by the Mysore Maharaja for publishing ‘inciting’ writings) was sourced at a local library and its contents tracked. This journal, explicitly articulating the non-Brahmin articulation and concerns, has been a phenomenal source of information for the non-Brahmin othering of the Brahmin, while also providing clues to the Brahmin response to this process of othering. Our concerted efforts at getting at similar publications from within the Brahmin fold were on the whole unsuccessful, although wherever some disparate issues of such publications were available they have been perused. For instance, few issues of a newspaper edited and published from Dharwad by an iconic Brahmin/nationalist/Kannada leader (titled Java Karnataka) that were available in a local library have been scanned. More centrally nevertheless, allusions to the Brahmin response were also gathered together from memoirs and reminiscences penned by Brahmin men of letters as well as secondary works. The proceedings of the relevant representative institutions of the period - the Representative Assembly and the Legislative Council - were sourced. Apart from these, the successive Karnataka Backward Classes Committees'/Commissions' Reports have been scanned. Lastly, the secondary materials (scholarly works and journal articles) have been brought to bear on our recuperation of the Brahmin self and the community of this period.

Attempts to bring Brahmins together - either as individual castes or as a corporate entity making up 'the' Brahmin community - have been witnessed since the early decades of the twentieth century, and these efforts continue to the present. For data on the many pioneering attempts to form Brahmin associations, we have again gone back to the infrequent reportage of the same in Mysore Star as well as other journals and newspapers of the period like Jaya Karnataka (published from Dharwad, Bombay Presidency). Mysore Star; despite being most articulate in its attack on the perceived Brahmin dominance of modern spaces, surprisingly takes a rather sympathetic position on the question of the emergence of Brahmin caste associations. Apart from these references, the contemporary Brahmin associations - some of which have survived from that era - themselves have recounted the pioneering activities in the form of publications and brochures which have also been consulted.

As far as the contemporary situation is concerned, the data collected has been both extensive and comprehensive. Our initial effort to collate information through a detailed questionnaire that was sent to 100 Brahmin associations spread across the state of
Karnataka - the addresses of which were gathered from a directory maintained by the state-level federating organisation, the Akhila Karnataka Brahmana Maha Sabha [AKBMS] - had to be given up owing to a phenomenal rate of 'non-response'. Of the hundred questionnaires (which, as it turned out, demanded a fair amount of time and energy) that were sent along with a self-addressed stamped envelope, only five were returned duly filled in. Some more came back with either the address not being found or stating that the addressee had shifted residence or office. Characterising them as 'non-response' seems accurate, for many of the activists belonging to these associations, when individually contacted during occasions like the state conventions or other functions organised by the AKBMS, remembered having received the questionnaire. Most of them blamed lack of time as indeed the comprehensiveness demanded by the questionnaire for not filling them up.

Consequent upon this failure, we went across and personally visited the offices of the caste associations. Fifty such associations were directly contacted all over the state of Karnataka - specifically Mysore, Kolar, Hospet, Bidar, Shimoga and Udupi - apart from a more intensive coverage of the city of Bangalore. The federating association, the AKBMS, is situated in Bangalore, as are all the head offices of individual caste associations. There exist a range of Brahmin associations - distinguishable by the constituency they seek to represent. We have 'corporate' associations (like the AKBMS and its district/taluq level associations), individual caste associations addressing particular castes within the community (like the Mulkanadu Mahasabha or the Shivalli Smartha Brahmana Parishat), and associations that cater to particular localities in a city or town or the employees of an industry or organisation (like the Jayanagara Brahmana Sabha and the Indian Telephone Industries Vipra Vrinda). There are also associations that have specific and focused agendas like catering to the financial needs or marriage alliances etc. We took care to cover the entire spectrum of caste associations.

Over the last four years, almost each and every Brahmin congregation, meet, seminar, convention, and felicitation function that was organised by these associations (particularly those that took place in Bangalore, as most seemed to do) was attended. Apart from such conventions, permission was sought (and, more often than not, granted) to attend the annual and extra-ordinary General Body Meetings (which are definitionally

18 The list of Brahmin associations from which our data has been put together is given in Appendix 2.
meant for the members) and other routine meetings arranged by these associations. Apart from preparing notes of the proceedings, we also interacted with the members and activists in such settings. We have collected, wherever available, the journals that very many of these associations bring out on a fairly regular and long-standing basis apart from the souvenir issues that they publish on momentous occasions. Wherever spare copies of back issues were not available, notes were made from the library that many of these associations maintain. The files containing the pamphlets that these associations have brought out from time to time have also been sourced. More importantly, thirty five caste activists - primarily but not only the past and present office bearers of different kinds of Brahmin associations - were interviewed on the basis of an interview schedule.

The other 'ethnographic' component was embodied through extensive interviews with one or more members of one hundred households (in total 135 persons were interviewed, generally targeting that family member who was our first contact, but also including additional others for the sake of generational range and depth) - primarily in and around the city of Bangalore, but also in the cities/towns of Mysore, Hospet, Udupi, Kundapur, Bidar and Shimoga and the villages around Bangalore and Udupi. Of these 135 interviewed, 79 were male and 56 were female. The universe was largely 'purposively' sampled in accordance with the presuppositions encoding this investigation, and the numbers gathered together through the device of 'snowballing'. Many times, contacts established at public gatherings were followed up. Care was taken to make the sample as representative as possible - primarily in terms of the caste composition, class status, education, and occupational profiles of the family.

The interviews were, more often than not, conducted over two to three sittings. These interviews can be more appropriately called 'interview situations' - primarily because these would often turn from being 'one-on-one' to involving the rest of the household in animated conversations. Since most of the interviews were held in the homes of the respondents, many of the family members, even friends and visiting relatives, would in the course of the interview join the dialogue. These interjections however do not make up our list of the 135 respondents interviewed. A further clarificatory point - especially since caste association activists were interviewed separately - a small number of the latter (namely, six) also doubled up as our respondents within Brahmin households. The interviews of course were conducted separately.
Embellishing these discursively articulated interviews were the questionnaires that were handed out to these 100 households. The questionnaire was left to fill with that member of the family who was interviewed first in the family. The break-up was as follows: 63 men 'filled' in the questionnaire on behalf of the household and 37 women did ostensibly the same. The information sought related to details about family members, the recent history - migratory, marital and occupational - of the family, their affiliation to mathas, relationship with caste associations, observance of rituals (daily and otherwise), dependence on different networks at hand (kin, friends, neighbours etc.) and so on. A preliminary profile of the respondents and their families is given in the next section. Note also that the names of all the respondents cited in the following substantive chapters (Chapters Three to Six) have been changed to maintain anonymity and trust.

Broadly then, in keeping with these various data gathering techniques and sources of description, we map the contours of the differential investment that the contemporary Brahmin community endows on its casteness. These data sources also translate into three comprehensive registers of enquiry: one having to do with the very persona of the 'Brahmin' and embodied in the very agency of the individual Brahmin, the other having to do with organised complexes of action such as the caste association or even the public culture of print, and the last taking off from a longer (yet, modern and contemporary) history of non-Brahminical othering. To be sure, all these three registers evidently implicate each other, and as our chapters will disclose, we also strive actively to break this homology of data source and register of enquiry. Within the terms of rather mixed-up mode of mapping, we propose to foreground the dynamics of the contemporary Brahmin identity.

VI

A general profile of the respondents

As stated before, we interviewed one or more members of one hundred Brahmin households for the purposes of this study, while also administering these households a detailed questionnaire. The selection of these households followed the purposive sampling technique with a snowballing strategy. As is evident, this strategy is prone to many inadequacies. It introduces biases into the selection and renders the generalisability and the representability of the conclusions open to interrogation. Nevertheless, in keeping with Bourdieu's strategy of 'participant objectivation', we sought to render the field as determinate and purposive as possible. While the 'representativeness' of our
sampling technique is always open to scrutiny, adequate interpretative protocols have been introduced by way of sifting through diverse sources of data and capturing (indeed validly authenticating) a range of experience characterictic of Brahmin subjects today.

All the same, one needs to be sensitive to questions about the availability of caste specific data in the contemporary moment. The decennial census that the Indian government conducts stopped enumerating the population across the caste map since 1941, excepting that pertaining to SC and ST communities. Owing to this, but also owing to the almost negligible efforts on the part of social scientists themselves, we have hardly any information about, say, the share of a particular caste community in the state's population. In fact, various estimates of the Brahmins' share in the population of Karnataka remain at best informed projections made under by the successive Backward Classes Committees/Commissions based on the figures available in the Census of 1941. Given that such a basic information itself is not available, we have absolutely no way of determining other factors like their urban-rural population share, their residential spread, patterns concerning demography, migration etc.

Of course, the Brahmin associations have all promised, from time to time, carrying out a 'caste census'. But we have not come across a single instance of the same. All that such associations have is an inventory of the members. Taking that as the sampling frame would have distorted our selection irreparably, since membership of an association is already a statement borne by the individual concerned vis-a-vis the problematic of caste identity and identification choices. To be sure, these are restrictions that confront anybody studying caste today. Again, given such circumstances, snowballing was the only strategy that was open to us, although we were also mindful of factoring in various attributes such as caste composition, class status, educational, occupational and migration profiles of the families concerned, membership in caste associations etc. Supplementing these coordinates, of course, was the recourse to other research materials, especially the historical and literary sources and official reports and proceedings.

The following is a primary description of the respondents. The composition of the 135 respondents interviewed is the following. There were 83 Smarthas, 35 Madhvas, 10 Srivaishnavas, 05 Saraswats and 02 others who would not identify their affiliation. Among the Smarthas, the respondents came from a range of castes. There were six Iyers (a Tamil speaking caste); twenty Shivalli Smarthas, one Kota Smartha, five Smartha
Kandavara (all castes with origins in the coastal districts of Udupi and Mangalore), two each of Seeranadu and Sankethi, seven Badaganadu Smarthas, three Babboorkamme, ten Hoysala Karnatakas, twelve Mulkanadu Smarthas, four Uluchukamme Smarthas and one Sthanika Smartha (castes found primarily in the princely Mysore region). Apart from these there was two Namboodiris, two Havyakas and a Daivajna Brahmana. There were five Smarthas who would not identify their caste identity. The Madhvas were primarily divided into the Udupi matha followers and those otherwise. There were twenty-one Udupi Madhvas and fourteen non-Udupi Madhvas. The ten Srivaishnavas (or Iyengars) have been treated as a composite identification, so also the 05 Saraswats interviewed. There were two respondents who said they did not know to which Brahmin caste they belonged. One is an orphan who was receiving religious/ritual education at the Madhva institution called the Poornaprajna Vidyapeeta located in Bangalore. He however seemed completely naturalised as a Madhva owing to the norms of everyday living at such an institution. The other is a journalist who said that he did not know his caste identity. He said that he did not even know that further distinctions existed within the Brahmin fold, but anyway that did not matter to him as long as one can be identified as a Brahmin.

Of these 135 respondents, 106 were located in the city of Bangalore, 16 were from other cities and towns (Mysore, Shimoga, Udupi, Hospet, and Bidar) and 13 were residents of villages (in the districts of Rural Bangalore, Udupi and Shimoga). Thirty-seven of these respondents were below the age of thirty years and 58 were between thirty-one to fifty years. The remaining (40) were above fifty years of age. Our questionnaire profiling the educational, occupational, marital trajectories of the respondent families, the individual respondents' everyday ritual practices, commensal habits, marital alliances etc. have been factored into the account provided in the next chapter, the first of our substantive ones, that seeks to present a schematic history of the modern world of Brahmins in Karnataka. Of the one hundred individuals (who, representing the hundred households, filled in the administered questionnaire), twenty-six were below thirty years of age and forty-one were in the age range of thirty-one and fifty years. The remaining thirty-three were above fifty year. It may be important, yet, to point out that only thirty-two households had at least one who was a formal member of some Brahmin association or the other.