Chapter Three
The Modern World of Brahmins: A Schematic History

As our title discloses, this chapter attempts to profile and forward some broad considerations on the trajectory of Brahmins in contemporary Karnataka - that is, broadly over the twentieth century. Evidently, any such recuperation within the space of a chapter can only remain schematic but it is still a useful and necessary exercise. The regrouping of a history of the contemporary Brahmin is necessary not merely as a gesture of contextualisation, but more importantly in establishing the parameters of action within which the modern Brahmin identity unfolds in contemporary Karnataka. Specific historical developments, as we seek to demonstrate, are a constitutive force in bringing to life the contemporary Brahmin identity. Accordingly, even as this history provides us with an anchoring ground to analyse the dynamics of the Brahmin identity, we will seek to show the ways in which the makings of (and the contestations to) the Brahmin identity themselves constitutively structure (in the sense of both enabling and constraining) the trajectories of the identification of being 'Brahmin'.

As was pointed out in the earlier chapters, the paucity of any appreciable macro-data with reference to caste - particularly since 1941 - makes our task daunting and consequently renders it schematic. We have therefore attempted to innovate. There are different sources of data that we have sought to get at. Anchored firmly within the scholarly literature that has been produced on Karnataka (in particular, on the Princely Mysore State), we have brought to bear on such a mapping different sources. They are primarily the journals that were being published in the late colonial period, the proceedings of the legislative houses, and the reports and compilations generated by the state particularly in the form of Backward Classes Commission/Committee Reports etc. We have also sourced the reflections and introspections of individual Brahmins themselves that are available in the form of auto/biographies in Kannada. Finally the 'testimonies' of the respondents of this study have also been deployed to embellish and embody the picture the sources listed above draw. This is done primarily in terms of a qualitative and consolidated retrieval of family trajectories (as yielded by our
questionnaire and interview schedules) across the registers of education, occupation, marriage and migration and over the last three generations of families.

As can be seen, the disparately encoded sources of data are unevenly situated in responding to the demands that we place on them. We however hope that, at a future point of time, one could venture to be more determinate and systematic in mapping this history. Again, as will be evident, even as we seek to - with good reason - speak of the contemporary Brahmin - or even the Brahmin community - we remain sensitive to its internally differentiated profile. Subjective disparateness of the imaginings of the Brahmin identity apart, objectively too there were (and continue to be) many castes that obtain within the corporatised Brahmin fold (see for a description, pp. 61-3 above). However, it is in efforts to recuperate such specificities of individual Brahmin caste histories that we are left with almost no data - either macro or specific. All of them beg for intensive work, focusing exclusively on individual Brahmin castes in themselves - such as the work of Conlon (1977) which clearly demonstrated the value of such efforts. Therefore, here we have been only indicative, even definitively provisional, in our observations on such specific historical trajectories of the individual Brahmin castes. We will, nonetheless, be in a position to analyse far more confidently the question of specificities when we take up in the following chapters the problematic of the dynamics of Brahmin identity itself.

The chapter is divided into the following sections. The first section will summatively map the Brahmin predominance in the spaces of power that became available during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the native population - primarily its transformation from being an agrarian caste economy into a thoroughly urbanised, modern caste economy, enabled in particular by great deals of investments in secular, modern education and employment in modern occupations. A comparison with other contesting caste and religious communities will bring home the point regarding the virtual unassailability and dominance of the modern by the Brahmin community. This is a well-documented history at least as far the context of Tamil Nadu is concerned. The trajectory of the Brahmin community in Karnataka too follows a similar path and in summating it we have relied primarily on the disparate data that is provided on the floor of the Representative Assembly of the Princely Mysore state, representative auto/biographies of Brahmins from other regions of Karnataka, but most importantly on the extant scholarly literature. In the second section, the consolidation of this
transformation through the deployment of formal and informal networks, using (even as recasting) the governmental policy and measures, resignifying and reconstituting the 'caste' rules and norms and practices will be described. The third section profiles the contemporary state of the Brahmins of Karnataka, their overwhelming middle class status, urbanity, constitutive reliance on the resources made available by the welfare state even in the face of increasing retrenchment from the landscape of electoral politics, the anxieties generated by the reservation policy and so on. This section is primarily based on the testimonies of the respondents in recounting their family histories, their life-chances etc. even as macro and secondary data, wherever available (primarily as encoded in official reports and scholarly surveys) are also included. The fourth section recreates the processes of individuation but also of corporatisation obtaining within the community through a narration of marital and commensal strategies, efforts to negotiate caste identifications and so on. A final section briefly invokes some peculiarities in the self-identification of being 'Brahmin'. It seeks to suggest the ways in which this unique position that the Brahmins find themselves in the contemporary moment structures the very possibilities of the 'Brahmin' identification.

I

Occupying the modern

Paradoxically enough, the scholarly literature focussing on the various non-Brahmin movements that emerged in different parts of South and West India during the early twentieth century have demonstrated the unmistakable preponderance of the Brahmin community in the newly made available spaces of the modern institutions. Much of the literature describing these transformative processes that were underway among the Brahmins seem to make it as though they were 'natural', in the sense that a compulsion to urbanise or take to modern education was an inevitable course of action. While it seems quite presumptuous to assume so, it cannot be denied that the predominance of Brahmins was most acutely visible in the spaces of modern education and the state bureaucracy (even as it was also true of all other modern occupations like journalism and law). These spaces, constitutively vested with power, placed Brahmins in a key position - that of being the sole mediator between the state authority and the

We have listed some of the important works dealing with the non-Brahmin movements across southern and western India in the previous chapter (fn. 10 therein). As far as the context of Kannada region is concerned, the data is relatively scantier - in particular for the regions other than the Princely Mysore State.
society. Not only did they mediate the negotiations and perceptions of the non-Brahmin population with the state, they were able to decisively shape the policy of the administration towards its population. This arrogation of the role of the mediator or of the "spokesperson for society" (Geeta and Rajadurai 1998: xv) is rightly recognised as the fundamental element in rendering the Brahmin uniquely powerful. But it is not often that the scholarship has commented upon the transformations this unique trajectory and such a status bring about in the self of the Brahmin, which is seeking to formulate a legitimate identity for itself in the modern situation.

As in the neighbouring Tamil region, the trajectory of the Brahmin community from the middle decades of the nineteenth century has been remarkably similar in Karnataka. In the Tamil region though, there were some non-Brahmin corporatised castes which emerged as hugely successful mercantile communities during this period (Hardgrave 1969 and Templeman 1996). Their non-existence in Karnataka seems to have only rendered the Brahmin predominance more visible. The shift from an agrarian economy to one that was overwhelmingly dependent upon a modern service sector has been constitutively transformative of the Brahmin community as well. This is a process that scholars concur began in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Manor notes the weak position of the Brahmins in the rural areas of the Mysore State by the 1930s:

As only 3.8% of the population spread rather evenly across the state, Brahmins were numerically very weak in most rural areas. This weakness was compounded by the tendency from the mid-nineteenth century onwards for Brahmins to migrate from the villages to the towns and cities in search of education and employment in the "westernized" idiom. To finance these migrations, Brahmins very often sold rural land holdings and the special tax privileges they had enjoyed in

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2 See Arnold (1977: Ch. 1) for details regarding the Tamil Brahmins migration from rural to urban areas. See Chandrashekhar (1995: 20-68) for a general statement on the Brahmin communities in South India as a whole, but more importantly on their emergence as the predominant part of a powerful educated class that eclipsed the hitherto dominant business communities, particularly in the Tamil region. Note also that when we talk of 'Karnataka', evidently, we are not presuming the existence of the present day state of Karnataka, neither is it an anticipation. It is merely used as a ready-reckoner in order to unifiedly talk about the present day state of Karnataka. Evidently, when the word Karnataka is used, one is aware that the Karnataka state, as is known today, emerged only in the year 1956 and thus the reference is merely to the geographical region that was to become 'Karnataka'. The region that makes up the Karnataka State of today was distributed into many administrative entities. South Canara (today's Mangalore and Udupi districts) and Bellary were part of Madras Presidency. Belgaum, Dharwad and North Canara (and parts of today's Gadag district) were part of Bombay presidency. Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur and parts of today's Koppal were part of Hyderabad Nizam State. Coorg was a separate state (before which it was not part of Madras Presidency but directly under a British Resident, and for some time it was also part of Mysore when Mysore was ruled by a Resident). Apart from these there were as many as 22 little kingdoms including the large Princely Mysore State, which contained the present districts of Mysore, Bangalore, Mandya, Hassan. Chickmagalur, Shimoga, Chitradurga, Kolar and Tumkur.
10.9% of Mysore's villages since before 1881. This led to a marked decline between 1900 and 1935 in the economic power and numerical strength of Brahmins in rural political arenas [often replaced by that of Vokkaligas and Lingayaths who invariably bought land from the Brahmins]. The decline of the Brahmin influence in the rural context was paralleled by remarkable gains in wealth and influence in the towns and cities of Mysore (1977a: 31).

**Thimmaiah augments this observation:**

Rural Brahmins who owned agricultural lands received impressive incomes which enabled them to send their children to urban areas for English education. This helped their absorption in government service. Thus the transition of rural Brahmins was financed by rural surpluses generated from their lands (1993: 81).

The family histories that most of the respondents recounted during the course of interviews and in the course of filling in the questionnaire suggests that such reallocation of resources continued well into the twentieth century and, in many cases, even to this day. We shall point to many such instances later on in the chapter. Moreover in many parts of Karnataka, Brahmin families that owned agricultural property were not directly involved in agricultural operations and lent it out to predominantly non-Brahmin tenants:

The Brahmins held mostly the *Inam* lands - the lands granted by the erstwhile rulers in appreciation of their services. As both by tradition and also on account of the fact that they had taken up service in government and by reason of which moved out of rural areas into towns and cities, Brahmins were the absentee landlords (Thimmaiah and Aziz 1985: 46-7).

The Havyakas (a Brahmin caste predominant in the coastal district of North Canara and in Shimoga) were perhaps the only Brahmin owner-cultivating caste. They continue to be so involved in great numbers (compared to the other Brahmin castes) in the agricultural economy, particularly in the cultivation of cash crops like areca nut.³ Further, in regard to the Mysore region, it has often been observed that the distribution of land holdings was not marked by disparities. Comparing Mysore with other states in south India of the 19th century, it has been observed that “(i)t was only in Mysore that except two - the Sringeri Math and jagir of Yelandur granted to Dewan Poorniaiah's family - there were no big *zamindars*” (Chandrashekhar 1995: 11). This pattern continued into the next century too. In fact, Chandrashekhar suggests as much while analysing the data presented in the 1921 Census:

³ See Harper (1968) for a gross picture of the modern history of the Havyakas and of their interests in agriculture.
There were no marked disparities in the ownership of land ... Mysore had unusually high proportion of owner cultivators and Brahmins rarely held control over land. Though they held some lands they were not the real cultivators and more often their lands were rented out to powerful local magnates who could not be unduly (sic) exploited (1985: 4).

Thus the shift from an agriculture-dependent caste economy to what became a predominantly state-enabled service economy does not appear to have been much of a distress-shift. What is more, the shift was neither sudden nor complete. Even as most of the Brahmin families sent out each and every male member to the city to pursue modern careers - cornering a great share of even the lower grades of bureaucratic and other modern jobs - those who failed at getting any such job were retained to engage with agriculture, mostly as supervisors. This is a process that is still in currency - varying across regions primarily. For many of the respondent families from the Mysore region, for instance, the urbanity of their family life is so much taken for granted that they do not even remember and recount the familial history of migration from rural areas, if any. However the trajectory of most of the older male respondents who did migrate from their villages to urban areas is strikingly similar - more often than not, they ventured into the nearby town or city pursuing education or a career all by themselves. They have had to sustain themselves either on the money that was sent from home or, in the case of poorer families, from the institution-like practices of Bhikshaanna and Vaaraanna. Wherever Brahmins continue to have landed interest and properties, like in the coastal and Malnad regions, the migration into urban areas is still an ongoing phenomenon, the contours of which we will come to at a later point.

It appears that it is only in the post-independence years, when the state instituted measures like the Inams Abolition Acts (1954-55) and the land reforms (initiated in the early 1970s) that the economic links and networks with the rural areas got severed to a near total degree.5 This is particularly true of the Brahmin families from the coastal districts of Karnataka in which the Brahmins continued to hold land but which were cultivated by the tenants. The land under tenancy in the two districts of Dakshina Kannada and Uttara Kannada were incomparably high vis-a-vis other districts. The Land

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4 These two practices were prevalent in the urban areas of the princely Mysore State. We describe their workings and significance later in the second section.
5 There have been some studies on the impact of land reforms on agrarian relations and economy in Karnataka. See Manor (1980), Thimmaiah & Aziz (1985), Ksheerasagara (1985). However the impact of such measures on particular communities and among particular Brahmin castes is not very clear.
Reforms Act of 1974, it has been noted, has had its most profound impact in these two districts "which together account for over one-third of the applications [filed by tenants asking for the ownership of the land] in the entire state" (Manor 2002: 278).

The Brahmin quest for alternative spaces within modern institutions was realised primarily through their preponderance in the cities. Indeed their share of the urban population is truly astounding, as the following figures from the 1931 Census of the Mysore State demonstrate. A remarkable 21.7% of the total Brahmin population of the Mysore State was by the year 1931 already residing in just the two cities of Bangalore and Mysore. The other towns - particularly Shimoga and the industrialising town of Davanagere - too are supposed to have had equally significant Brahmin populations, as did the non-Mysore emerging cities of Dharwad and Belgaum, which further animates the urban nature of the community. While the Brahmins constituted a mere 3.74% of the Mysore State's [including the British administered Civil and Military Station located in Bangalore (the Bangalore Cantonment area)] population, they were the largest single community in both the cities of Bangalore and Mysore. In Bangalore, there were 32182 Brahmins and the next largest community, the Vokkaligas, numbered only 12994. Brahmins made up 18.68% of the population of the city of Bangalore - that is, almost every fifth person in Bangalore was a Brahmin. Brahmins likewise constituted 19.6% of the Mysore city's population - again a far cry from the presence of any other community in the city (Census of India, 1931, Volume XXV: Mysore - Part II - Tables; 1932: 230-2).

Evidently these are remarkable figures for a community which constituted only 3.74% of the state's population. The value of staying in cities, which, as we shall see, were drawing disproportionately the resources of the state, is self-evident.

Over the last century or so, then, the community economy of the Brahmins of Karnataka has shifted from one that is largely based and dependent on agrarian economy to one that drew relentlessly (and even disproportionately) from the establishment of the institutions of the modern welfarist nation-state. Their entry into these spaces has remained largely unabated, though in the last three decades or so dented by the modest successes of the policies of reservation. They have been greatly successful in consolidating their presence in these spheres through single-minded investment in modern education in particular. This progression has placed many Brahmins in a position now to increasingly and resolutely look beyond their sustenance and reliance on the nation-state in the current post-liberalisation period. Even as the structures and institutions of
modernity were being established to a rather unprecedented degree in the Mysore Princely State in particular, it required and necessitated a quick re-allocation of resources of any community that intended to benefit from them. Brahmins began investing economic resources quite decisively on providing their children with modern, secular education. That this re-allocation has been decisive and single-minded is proved by the account that follows.

The Princely State of Mysore in particular had a fairly stabilised idea of being an administrative entity and for long, by the scales of other Indian states and territories, had modern institutions of administration - particularly the bureaucracy - in place. It had taken up the task of building and extending educational institutions rather earnestly and the state spending on education had increased rapidly (see Naidu 1996 for details regarding the spread of western education in Mysore State). Modern institutions of judiciary and press had also emerged as important spaces. The entry and spread of such systems/institutions were varied in the other parts of Karnataka, and this factor seems to have been crucial in the historical trajectories of these various regions even to this day.

Into such spaces, Brahmins entered in a big way, as they were apparently equipped with traditions of learning and literacy. This is a phenomenon that gets replicated almost all over India but more markedly in South India, and has in fact been a well-documented claim in the academic literature. By the time the British handed the Mysore state back to the Mysore Wodeyar royal family in 1881, after 50 years of direct rule, modern institutions and spaces had already taken root in the Mysore state. The British had opened up bureaucratic positions to the ‘natives’ and it was overwhelmingly the Brahmins who had taken up such positions. The predominance of the Brahmin in these spaces was such a naturalised ‘fact’ that beginning from the 1870s to till about the latter part of the first decade of the twentieth century, it was the conflict between the ‘Madras’ Brahmins and the Mysore Brahmins over their share in such spaces that dominated the public debates. It was only from the 1910s that non-Brahmins begin to articulate demands for a proportionate share in the government services and modern education.

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6 For a recent affirmation in the context of Maharashtra, see Naregal (2001).
7 Dimensions of this conflict form a part of the next chapter.
The following account of the Brahmin dominance in the modern, urban spheres largely pertains to the context of the Princely Mysore State. However going by the accounts of the respondents hailing from other parts of Karnataka and selected Brahmin autobiographies from the period, some gross inferences can be made regarding the non-Mysore regions of Karnataka too.\textsuperscript{8} It appears that even as there were significant differences - in particular in relation to dependence on land - the larger trajectory of the non-Mysore Brahmins concurs with the picture that we are here presenting.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the Brahmin community had already a dominant and entrenched presence in the structures of the state bureaucracy and in the sphere of modern, secular education in the princely Mysore. This presence, a concomitant of the fast pace of the processes of urbanisation and modernisation, however cannot be taken to mean that its accomplishment was at the expense of their hold over the villages and the rural economy. An overwhelming number of ‘Shanubhogues’ (village accountants, a hereditary position that was primarily a Brahmin preserve) as late as in 1924 were still Brahmins. Of the 5514 Shanubhogues at that time, 5390 were Brahmins with rest coming from other communities (\textit{Hanumanthappa}, Vol. III n.d.: 263-4). This office exercised a great deal of power over the village affairs and economy, which greatly enabled the deployment and consolidation of informal networks between the various Brahmins, as we shall further see in the next section.\textsuperscript{9} Here, in demonstrating the preponderance of the Brahmin in the newly emerging spheres of modern institutions, we will present data regarding two spaces - of secular education and the composition of the bureaucracy. These two spaces were crucial and mutually sustaining of each other.

The caste composition of the students in the space of higher education was excessively skewed in favour of the Brahmin community. Sivakumar (1982: 15) presents the ‘social composition’ of the students receiving college education in the year 1916 (the year Mysore University was established). The Brahmins constituted a whopping 78.87% of the college-going population (571 out of the total 724 students). The overwhelming dominance of the community is rendered even starker when we look at the population

\textsuperscript{8} See for instance Venkatrao (1974) and Sriranga (1994) for a representation from North Karnataka (most parts of which were part of either the Bombay Presidency or the Hyderabad Nizam State). Also: Karanth (1984) and Adiga (1999) for a representation from the coastal district of South Canara, which was part of the Madras Presidency.

\textsuperscript{9} Chandrashekhar (1995: 21-2). This is a claim that is corroborated by many novels, reminiscences from that period. See Bhairappa’s novel \textit{Grihabhanga} (1970) and his autobiography \textit{Bhitthi} (1996) for instance.
share of the Brahmin community as calculated by the previous census of 1911. The Brahmin community, according to this census, constituted a mere 3.6% of the total population of the Mysore State. The next highest proportion of college-going students constituted by a single community was that of Lingayaths (whose share in the population was 13.7%), which had 29 college-going students in the community (4.01%). During the year 1924-5, 79.1% of the students taking university examinations in the state were Brahmins as against 6.8% of Lingayaths and 3.6% of Vokkaligas (ibid.:25).

The situation, evidently, was not very different in the case of professional courses like engineering and medicine. In 1924, of the 20 applicants selected for the MBBS course, 12 were Brahmins, and of the 23 selected in the year 1928, 17 were Brahmins (Hanumanthappa Vol. HI n.d.: 189). Of the 22 who passed out of the Medical College, 16 were Brahmins as against two Naidus and one Lingayath. During the year 1923-24, of the 113 scholarships that were distributed for the male medical students, 63 went to Brahmins (ibid.:267). During 1926-7, 553 Brahmin students applied for an admission in the Engineering College of which 216 were selected. The highly skewed nature of this number can be seen when compared to all other caste and religious communities. For instance, only seven Vokkaligas applied of whom five were selected (ibid. 270).

The non-Brahmin leaders often referred to the exclusive nature of the space of higher education, and thus to the unjustifiability of spending a large share of the educational budget on it. However the state continued to fund higher education rather generously. The discrepancy in the disproportionate nature of educational cess collected and the educational budget spending patterns was consistently pointed to by the non-Brahmin leaders in all available fora, including the Representative Assembly but to no avail (see Hanumanthappa, ibid. 176-181 for the debate during 1924-26). In 1924, while Rs. Eight lakhs were spent on the Mysore University, which had 2000 students, just Rs. Thirty five lakhs were spent on the entire primary education sector which had 56 lakh students. The Mysore government spent, apart from the money allocated to the Mysore University, Rs. Fifty thousand on the Indian Institute of Science located in Bangalore (ibid).

The skewed distribution of Brahmin students in the university space continued, for in 1945, 60% of the university students were Brahmins (Manor 1977a: 51). Sivakumar (1982: 29) points out that during 1943-44, 67% of the students enrolled in the Mysore University were Brahmins as against 8.1% and 5.8% of Lingayaths and Vokkaligas.
respectively. While the situation was not very different at the middle school level (see Hanumanthappa Vol. III n.d.: 188 for the relevant statistics), the case of Brahmin women is nevertheless equally informative. Even as the question of the Brahmin woman becomes a ground for varied contestations and/or collusions - between the Brahmans and the non-Brahmins, between the 'orthodox' and the ‘progressive’ Brahmans, and of course between the 'orthodox' Brahmin men and 'literate' Brahmin women - Brahmin women themselves have had a fairly impressive record in matters of education, particularly with reference to and in comparison with other women. During the years 1911-16, Brahmin women constituted 75.65% of the total number of women students in Mysore State (Sivakumar 1982: 24). Their predominance in professional education too was overwhelming. For instance, of the 13 women scholarships meant for medical students, Brahmin women received eight of them (Hanumanthappa Vol. III n.d.: 267). Even as the 'orthodoxy' among Brahmin men tried to block women's entry into modern spaces, the women in collaboration with the 'progressive' Brahmin male network had grown beyond the former's ability to regulate its directions.

Such an overwhelming preponderance was not merely reflective of the preoccupations of a few within the Brahmin fold; rather, it represented the larger trends obtaining in the community as a whole, as can be inferred from the following figures. According to the 1931 Census Report, the percentage of literacy among Brahmans was 57.3% compared to Lingayaths (16.4%), Vokkaligas (6.5%), Christians (43.2%) and Muslims (21.2%) [Madan and Halbar 1972: 135]. This was in tune with the trends obtaining in the entire southern India taken as a whole (Chandrashekhar 1995: 40). The following is a statement on the increasing levels of education/literacy in the community over a span of forty years, which strikingly demonstrates the gulf that existed between the Brahmans and the other two 'dominant' caste communities in the Princely State of Mysore. Even as the other two communities make a determined bid to improve their literacy levels, the gulf gets reproduced consistently.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Lingayaths</th>
<th>Vokkaligas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Literacy</td>
<td>English Literacy</td>
<td>Total Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td><strong>87.1</strong></td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Manor (1977a: 32). Literacy rates are in percentages.

This predominance, of course, gets reflected in the government appointments in Mysore too as the following tabular representation illustrates. What is significant here is that the Brahmin predominance does not get significantly dented even after decades of formal governmental mechanisms in the form of affirmative action favouring the backward classes are initiated. This is particularly true of gazetted positions, even as their numbers dwindled more rapidly within the non-gazetted sector. This differential trend continues to the present times wherein the top echelons of the government bureaucracy are still dominated by the Brahmins, while the lower levels tend to have decreasing number of Brahmins.\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Government Posts Gazetted (%)</th>
<th>Government Posts Non-Gazetted (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>64.86</td>
<td>69.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>61.32</td>
<td>49.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>46.89</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>35.72</td>
<td>27.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Thimmaiah (1993: 75). This source also details the comparative figures concerning the Lingayaths and the Vokkaligas (ibid).

Again, no systematic and accurate data is available to validate this assertion. However see the cover story titled *The Resilient Brahmin* in the weekly magazine, *The Week*, dated November 10, 2002 for a broad but indicative inventory of Brahmins occupying the top positions in diverse fields.
By 1918 itself - the year the Mysore government constituted the Miller Committee to recommend measures to increase the proportion of non-Brahmins in government employment - the gap between the Brahmins and the rest as far as government jobs were concerned was huge:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Subordinate Appointments (%)</th>
<th>Gazetted Appointments (%)</th>
<th>% of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>69.64</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingayath</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vokkaliga</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaisya</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuruba</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adi-Karnataka</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Manor (1977a: 32)

Between 1921-23, as many as 524 Brahmins were appointed through the Mysore Civil Services compared to 32 Vokkaligas, 46 Lingayaths and 70 Muslims (Hanumanthappa Vol. III n.d.: 263-4). This is during the years immediately following the Miller Committee's Report and the government's initiation of a reservation policy following the acceptance of the recommendations of the Committee. Further, in April 1921, of the 78 Amildars in existence, 63 were Brahmins as against four Lingayaths and Muslims each; and between 1922-25, of the 30 posts filled 20 were given to Brahmin candidates (ibid. 269). Between 1924-5, of the 74 jobs with salaries ranging between Rs. 50 and Rs. 100, 47 went to Brahmins, five each to Muslims and Lingayaths and only one to a Vokkaliga (ibid). Again, the picture at the top echelons of the bureaucracy was of course not different. During 1923-33, 36 Brahmins as compared to six Lingayaths and eight Muslims were appointed as Assistant Commissioners. 16 Brahmins as against one Mudaliar and one Urs were appointed as Deputy Commissioners. There was some sense of 'parity' in the Revenue Probationers appointments - five each from Brahmin and Muslim communities and four each from the Vokkaliga and Lingayath communities were taken (ibid. 272).
The patterns obtaining in recruitment into some other significant government departments can also be noted. Since the establishment of the Central Recruitment Board (instituted to stem the networks of nepotism) during 1927 to oversee appointments to all the government departments of bureaucracy, 2679 Brahmins as compared to 1378 Lingayaths, 1015 Muslims, 605 Vokkaligas and 383 individuals from the Depressed Classes were recruited. Even in the Police Department, at the level of Executive Officers, 367 Brahmins were employed in comparison to 40 Lingayaths, 55 Vokkaligas and 191 Muslims. In the year 1937, all the eight Government Advocates were Brahmins and out of the 22 Public Prosecutors, 18 were Brahmins. Sivakumar (1982: 18) gives the overall figures pertaining to government appointments during 1921-24 which embodies the general picture of Brahmin preponderance in the government services. Of the total number of appointments offered during this period, Brahmins took 570 jobs (54.2%) as against 42 for the Vokkaligas (4%), 63 for the Lingayaths (6%), 89 for the Muslims (8.5%) and 46 for the Christians (4.4%).

However, it is the space of the electoral politics that the Brahmins have never been able to dominate from its beginnings - indeed a striking contrast to their predominance in all the other spaces of modern institutions. By the 1930s, Vokkaligas and Lingayaths had already established entrenched positions of dominance in spaces which were determined by the logic of representative democracy, however limited the representativeness of such bodies might have been. This held good both at the larger bodies like the Mysore Representative Assembly as indeed the District Boards. It was only till about the 1920s that the Brahmins had tended to dominate these spaces, especially since neither was there a political consciousness of their numbers among the two dominant castes nor was such spaces themselves even presumptively representative (Manor 1977b: 178-183 passim). Nonetheless, it was not that in the post-1920s period, the number of Brahmins in the Representative Assembly began to become proportional to their share in the population. Brahmins continued to be in greater numbers than what a strict allocation based on their share in the population would have allowed for. This was primarily for the reason that some of the criteria for becoming members for the Assembly (as indeed for the eligibility to vote) were structured in such a way that only Brahmins could have satisfied them. Thus most of the members who went on the basis of being graduates were Brahmins. Further, a few Brahmins members of the Assembly were representing "Special Interests" such as those of 'Depressed Classes and Women' (sic).
Their numbers in representative bodies began to reflect their share in the population more decidedly only in the local level bodies such as the District Boards. Anyway, by the 1920s, it was also more or less clear that these spaces had outlived their usefulness as spaces articulating the democratic aspirations of the populace at large (Manor 1977a: 21-27).

Not surprisingly, the Brahmin members of the Representative Assembly did articulate a concern regarding the dwindling number of Brahmins in the Assembly, but stated it in different ways. They persistently demanded that the property clause be removed as a Representative Assembly membership criterion so that graduates and post-graduates can become members in greater numbers enhancing the level of erudition of the proceedings (Hanumanthappa Vol. II n.d.: 169-70). The records of the proceedings also continue to note the sustained indifference of the bureaucracy to the members and the ever-present displeasure expressed by the members against such apathy to their opinions on matters of state, economy, and society. Given the increasing propensity among the Brahmin families to convert agricultural capital into educational and modern occupational capitals, a conversion that had already reached constitutive proportions, most of the members coming on the criterion of landed property into the Representative Assembly were members from the dominant caste-clusters, like the Vokkaligas and the Lingayaths. The division and the acrimony between the members and the officials thus also had a caste dimension attached to it. We present an instance of that while discussing a Brahmin official's memoir in the next section.

All in all, the number of Brahmin members of the Representative Assembly does not appear to have been negligible. This was not merely because of the fact that most who were becoming members on the criterion of education were Brahmins. It was also because of the fact that, given their early entry into those new spaces that did not draw its primary identity from caste, they could become representatives in the Assembly of such interests. This ranged from representing the interests of Journalists to Depressed Classes (the Dalits) to Women. Even as they gained their membership on the grounds of representing interests that, by definition at least, had nothing to do with their being Brahmins, they did put to use their presence in such spaces to speak for their lot. We will present such an instance later - of a Brahmin, Gopalaswami Iyer, who was elected as a representative of the interests of Depressed Classes and who was referred to in the reports of the proceedings as “R. Gopalaswami Iyer (Member, Depressed Classes, Bangalore)".
Nonetheless, the process of circumscribing, if not retrenching altogether, the Brahmin from the spaces of the political has been an irreversible process, decidedly at local levels but also increasingly at state and national level politics. This has had important consequences for the perceptual space of the modern Brahmin self in Karnataka, in its relation to the modern nation-state, polity and society at large. We take up this theme in the subsequent chapters.

It is to be reiterated that the trajectory of the Brahmins in other parts of Karnataka - that is, outside of the Princely Mysore state - does not show a great deal of divergence from what has been mapped in the foregoing. The same investment in the twin processes of secular education and getting into the modern bureaucratic apparatus and other such occupations/professions also obtains here. The only significant divergence appears to be in terms of their relationship with land and agrarian economy in general. The Brahmin castes from the coastal region and those residents in the Malnad area continue to have stakes in agriculture, even as the primary choice of their youth has been one of education and employment in the cities. This is confirmed by the many auto/biographies available of Brahmins from these regions, as indeed from the recounting of our respondents. We will get back to these specificities in the third section. What the foregoing illustrates nonetheless is the virtually uncontested entry of the Brahmin community into the spaces of secular, modern education and government services. It is this unique positioning of the Brahmin vis-a-vis the modern public sphere that in very fundamental ways constitutes the Brahmin identity that takes shape in the contemporary times. Indeed, while the preponderance of Brahmins in such spaces has been a well-documented fact, what is perhaps more significant and yet less commented upon is the initiatives that the community has taken to consolidate this predominance. These initiatives too have been crucial in the formation of a corporatised and secularised Brahmin self in the contemporary context, especially since they necessitated the Brahmins to look beyond the individual Brahmin castes to which they belonged. In the next section we chart some of the formal and informal networks that the Brahmins used in order to consolidate their dominance over the institutions of the modern public sphere.

II

Networking to consolidate

The importance of modern formal institutions and the advantage the Brahmins held - in terms of education, traditions of learning, possession of agricultural surpluses
even while being detached from directly participating in agricultural production - in
gaining a ready access to such institutional spaces have long been recognised in studies
justifying the non-Brahmin movements of the late colonial period. However, it is not as
often that the decisive role played by informal practices and networks, primarily based on
community identities and locations, has been noted in these studies. Here, in this section,
we shall venture to describe the same. We stress the ways in which the very fashioning of
the policy of the government was, deliberately or otherwise, facilitative of the Brahmin
quest to urbanise and inhabit the newly instituted spaces of modern institutions. The
policies of ‘Mysore for Mysoreans’, eagerness to establish institutions of higher education
(the case of the Mysore University being the most stark) often at the expense of primary
and secondary education, the much touted 'modernisation' initiatives are the cases taken
up here. We also allude to some of the more direct and deliberate instances of the ability
on the part of Brahmins to deny access to such spaces for the non-Brahmins, besides
directing attention to the existence of informal networks of kin/caste/community that
bound urban areas of the Mysore State, as indeed the practices of *Vaaraanna* and
*Bhikshaanna* and the well established institution of caste hostels. The focus throughout is
on the distinctiveness of the space that the Brahmin has enjoyed, one that enables him to
make, as his own, the positions and spaces that are, at least on the face of it ‘non-casted’.

The Miller Committee, appointed by the Mysore Princely State in 1918 to look
into and recommend measures to improve the representation of backward classes in the
government bureaucracy and modern education, was rather candid when it observed:

> Under the present system of governance, the officers of the government in the higher grades of
> service have necessarily much influence in shaping the policy of the administration ... The fact
> cannot be ignored that an officer in the exercise of his duty making appointments and promotions
> finds it easier to see the virtues of his own community than those of others (cited in Thimmaiah
> 1993: 60, emphasis added).

These statements offer a summary axis on which to look at the Brahmin community and
its workings in the late colonial context, in that they accurately reflect on the trajectories
of state policy and its proclivity towards the growth of powerful but informal networks.
In fact, there was a legalised practice in the Mysore State that vacancies in the
government bureaucracy could legally be filled by "nominating" candidates of "good
birth" or hailing from "respectable families". This was an accepted practice till the
Central Recruitment Board was established. Indeed, Dewan Seshadri Iyer, as far back as
1892 itself and in response to the concerns against the Brahmin predominance in the government services, had suggested what appear to be rather cleverly drafted broad guidelines:

No Brahmin, as a rule, be selected under nominations [for the Civil Services], because already this class is too well represented and competition, for many years to come will, most probably, only add to this number. Moreover the Brahmin is, more or less, a cosmopolitan and must not complain of the selection of non-Brahmin candidates of good birth, family connections etc. Their educational qualifications may not be as good as those of the Brahmin candidates also belonging to good local families. I do not advocate any hard and fast rule to which there ought to be no exception. All I say is:

1. Let the Brahmin, if he can by the competition door;
2. Let the local non-Brahmin come by the nomination door;
3. Let the local Brahmin also come by the nomination door when a sufficiently educated local non-Brahmin is not forthcoming (Hanumanthappa Vol. III n.d.: 295).

Quite emphatically, these guidelines were not heeded. Even if they were to be, the Brahmin was already too entrenched in different senses to have been ruffled. For, as Iyer himself recognised, the door of competition was already and uncontestably the Brahmin's own. Besides, there were, at that time, very few non-Brahmin families who would have passed the twin criteria that Iyer proposed - of having a "good birth" with "family connections" and being "sufficiently educated". The non-Brahmins had to wait for almost three decades before a more rational and justifiable policy of reservations could be formulated - as it was by the Miller Committee in 1918.

Likewise, the demand that only Mysoreans be considered for the government jobs in Mysore - encoded as the slogan 'Mysore for Mysoreans' - was a long-standing one. The fact that there were, as early as 1881 itself, nearly seventy thousand people in government service in Mysore (Naidu 1996: 182) indicates the massive strides that the Princely State had made in setting up a modern administrative set-up. As we have sought to indicate in the previous section, the government service was virtually a monopoly of the Brahmins even in the face of official measures of positive discrimination to contain the Brahmin predominance. But interestingly enough what was left unmarked in this enunciation of 'Mysore for Mysoreans' was the fact that it took shape primarily in the context of an intense struggle for bureaucratic positions between Brahmins who came from the Madras Presidency and those who were residents of the Mysore State. Mysore Brahmins had by the closing decades of the nineteenth century begun to encode their interests in 'non-caste' terms - in this instance, in the form of a 'sons of the soil' register.
Almost two decades of publicly-enacted contestations and machinations later, the Mysore Brahmins prevailed over the 'Madrasi' Brahmin lobby - a victory signalled by the appointment of Vishveshvaraiah, a native Brahmin, as Dewan in 1912. He, in the very same year, brought in a change in the rules overseeing government recruitments that addressed the demand of 'Mysore for Mysoreans'. He announced in the Representative Assembly that "Only those born in or residing for a sufficiently long period of time in the Mysore state or those who have studied and taken degrees from the Mysore colleges will be eligible to take the Mysore Civil Service Examinations" *(Mysore Star)*\(^{12}\) 4-4-1912. This initiative, by default, meant that the Mysore Brahmins could now exercise an virtual monopoly over the huge resources of the state bureaucracy - for, their main threat (the Madras Brahmins) were debarred from entering the Mysore government services and they had no competition whatsoever from any other native community. What however struck at this monopoly was the almost concurrent demand of the non-Brahmin associations that some ways of checking the Brahmin monopoly in government services are brought in. The Mysore Maharaja was more than willing to accede to this demand and the Miller Committee was appointed, even in the face of an expressed disagreement voiced by the Dewan to the non-Brahmin demand.

That the change in policy in favour of 'Mysore for Mysoreans' would primarily benefit Mysore Brahmins was no unintended consequence as far as the Dewan, Vishveshvaraiah, was concerned. He seems to have been keenly aware of the implications of this move; for he is supposed to have remarked on a file during the heights of the non-Brahmin contestation an evocative Kannada proverb - *anthoo inthu kunthi makkalige raajyavilla* - alluding to the epic Mahabharatha, which means 'Whichever Way, Kunthi’s Children Never Got the Reigns of the Kingdom'. The Pandavas, children of Kunthi, were allegedly tricked by Kauravas into pawning their kingdom in a game of gambling and forfeiting it. When, after going through fourteen years of life in the forest (as was the condition), they ask the Kauravas to give back their kingdom, but are refused. Thus the Pandavas never get to rule their kingdom. Similarly,

> We will detail this contestation in the next chapter while delineating the heterogeneity that marks the category of the Brahmin.

\(^{12}\) *Mysore Star* was a weekly that was published from Mysore by a Lingayath, Yajaman Veerasangappa. This was one of the very few newspapers' which was taking pro-non-Brahmin positions, arguing rather passionately and articulatedly for the cause of the latter. It was also an important mouthpiece of the Lingayath concerns. We make extensive use of this source in the next chapter, as also Ch.4.
for the Dewan, the Mysore Brahmins had to first suffer the monopoly of the Madrasi Brahmins. Just when they thought, with the policy in favour of 'Mysore for Mysoreans' being implemented, they will be the masters, the non-Brahmins demanded that the Brahmin preponderance be checked. Thus, like the Pandavas, the Mysore Brahmins either way found themselves losing out.

The non-Brahmin leaders of Mysore, who had by then emerged as a vocal and effective pressure group, were quick in decoding this demand. They were very clear that the apparently progressive stance of the 'sons of the soil' argument was, in fact, serving the interests of the Brahmins. The policy shift in the form of "Mysore for Mysoreans" thus meant, as far as the non-Brahmins were concerned, that one set of Brahmins had replaced another set. Thus, when Vishveshvaraiah, announced the policy shift favouring the Mysoreans, the journal Mysore Star which consistently enunciated the non-Brahmin cause was emphatic in its position:

While the government has rightly become the subject of the indebtedness of the natives of Mysore for narrowing the door to block the entry of the outsiders, who can deny that it ought to pay special attention towards uplifting those among its own people who have remained backward for a rather long period of time? ... Isn't it as natural an expectation that the government should have a special interest in the cause of the backward communities, as it has for the natives, even if it were to be seen to be at the expense of the forward communities? (Mysore Star A-A-

Therefore the non-Brahmin leaders insisted through the Memorandum submitted to the Maharaja in 1918 that if qualified non-Brahmins were not available for government employment quota from within the Mysore region, then non-Brahmin candidates from outside be appointed over the Brahmin candidates from within (Mysore Star 30-6-1918; see also Naidu 1996: 195). It was indeed in responding to this Memorandum that the Mysore Government appointed the Miller Committee.

The establishment of the Mysore University in 1916 (as also the need to establish institutions providing higher education) was another such instance - clearly demonstrating the affinity that existed between the governmental policy and the concerns and aspirations of the Brahmin community. The establishment of a local university in the Mysore State was a long-standing demand of the educated Brahmins of Mysore. Vishveshvaraiah almost single handedly worked for the realisation of this demand often incurring the displeasure of the neighbouring Madras University (to which all the higher educational institutions existing in the Mysore state were affiliated) and the British
administrators of the Madras Presidency. The Mysore University began functioning in the year 1916 much to the excitement of the Brahmin community in the Mysore State. It increased the chances of the Brahmins coming from even poorer economic and village backgrounds to pursue higher education, which in turn facilitated their entry into the much sought after government services. This sense of jubilation, excitement and relief can be seen from the memoirs of many of the Brahmins who were part of the initial years of the Mysore University. Thus many young Brahmin men who would have been forced to discontinue their education for want of financial and other resources were presented with an opportunity to enhance their life-opportunities with the establishment of the university.

The establishment of the Mysore University proved to be a drain (and, at least in the initial years, a luxury that the State could ill-afford) on the resources that the Mysore State was willing to spend on education. It clearly affected the advances the State was making in the spheres of primary and secondary education. The non-Brahmin leaders were therefore none too happy with the establishment of the university. They feared that the university would demand a large share of the education allocation (as it did) while benefiting a few who would most often be Brahmins; and that, consequently, there will be lesser funding for primary and secondary education, a space into which the non-Brahmin communities were by then, even if hesitantly, making an entry.

Furthermore, the Mysore State veered towards highly subsidising higher education. In 1918, the Brahmin members of the Mysore University Senate unanimously proposed, in the Senate meeting, to abolish fees for all the Arts Education at the university level. The non-Brahmin and Lingayath leader M. Basavaiah (who was a leading advocate in Bangalore) opposed it on the grounds that almost all the students at the university level (who were Brahmins), as things stood then, were already receiving highly subsidised education. He argued that during the previous year (in 1917) 73 students were awarded degrees from the University whose budgetary expenditure for that academic year stood at around Rs. Seven lakhs, which meant that almost ten thousand

13 See the memoirs of Vishveshvaraiah titled Memoirs of my Working Life, excerpted in Iyengar (1990). See, for a representation, Iyengar (1990) and the autobiographies and reminiscences of the Kannada litterateurs Murthy Rao (1990) and Sitharamaiah (1997) who both were students of the first few batches of the University.

15 See Manor (1977a: 50-1) for the skewed budgetary spending on education and spatial distribution of educational institutions in the State.
rupees was being spent on each student; and, what is more, this sum did not include their scholarships and fee exemptions (Deveerappa 1985: 50). These claims concur with the picture that we have presented of comparative spending on the higher and primary education in the first section.

Commenting on the virtual monopoly of the Brahmins in higher education, Basavaiah draws attention to the lopsided nature of revenue-accretion and budget-allocation in a speech before the Legislative Council:

[When the collegiate education shows an extraordinary divergence of developments in the state between different communities inter-se, it regretfully happens that the university which has not any appreciable fund of its own but which liberally indents upon the revenues of the state, is thereby getting one-sided in indirectly asking those who receive little benefit from the university, to contribute largely to develop the intellectual capacity of those that least contribute to it (in Deveerappa 1985: 95).

Basavaiah’s apprehensions are very clear here. While the overwhelmingly urbanised Brahmins contributed a very negligible sum to the state exchequer through taxes, it is the predominantly rural and landed backward communities that largely make up the revenues of the state. Thus, justly, the spending of the government should reflect the taxation patterns. However the Mysore University was increasing its budgetary demands annually in order to primarily cater to the needs of one single community, which in turn was contributing very little to the tax collected, while relying excessively on tax collected largely from the rural population which was excessively non-Brahmin.

More importantly, for the non-Brahmin leaders, Mysore University was but one instance of the incongruent nature of the state policy on budgetary spending - of accruing resources from the non-Brahmins in order to spend on the welfare on the Brahmins. Thus Basavaiah rhetoricises:

How have the large hospitals constructed in large cities, the University in Mysore, grants for public improvement and other kindred items of expenditure appreciably raised [the agriculturist’s] position in life or his earning capacity?… There is a growing inequality and [the agriculturist] is invariably the butt for tapping revenue, both direct and indirect, which he certainly cannot afford to pay consistently [without any hopes for his own] progress (ibid: 100).

Similar was the debate on the Bill seeking to make primary education compulsory for girls introduced in the year 1917. While Brahmin members were in the forefront of arguing in favour of the Bill, the non-Brahmin members were more cautious in their approach. They suggested that the proposed Bill, if promulgated, should cover only the
urban areas to begin with, for in the rural areas not even non-Brahmin boys were in any appreciable numbers receiving education. The questions of women and of 'reform', which were also veiled ways of negotiating with questions of caste, are taken up for a more detailed discussion in the sixth chapter.

The Princely Mysore State was often touted as a 'progressive' and 'forward-looking' state - epithets chiefly arising out of its determined drive towards modernisation of its administration, measures such as the introduction of railways, electricity and so on. Scholars like Manor (1977a: 8-27) have drawn attention to the gross inadequacy of and misplaced enthusiasm demonstrated in such attempts. But the massive and unprecedented expansion of the bureaucracy, undertaking of newer governmental initiatives like electricity generation, irrigation projects, modern industry, mining, railways etc. were also feeding into the aspirations of the newly emerging Brahmin educated classes. The non-Brahmin leaders insistently drew attention to this felicitous convergence of interest and aspirations. Basavaiah's speech in the Legislative Council (Deveerappa 1985: 91-101) in response to the budget proposed contains many references to this affinity. It calls attention to the indiscriminate recruitment resorted to in the Engineering Department, in particular, which tended to make it "top-heavy" at great cost to the revenue-spending patterns of the government. Such recruitments - across the different departments - took place in spite of the apprehensions that the government entertained in regard to the capability of the recruited. The standard reply to any demand that more non-Brahmins be recruited to higher level positions was that there were no competent and eligible candidates available. This response is consistently offered on the floor of the Representative Assembly, in particular between the 1920s and the 1940s (Hanumanthappa Vol. III, n.d. has the details).

The Brahmin dominance and consolidation in these spaces was facilitated not only by such 'natural' convergence of the economy of their caste community and the policy of the modern state. The non-Brahmin newspapers and activists consistently referred to more direct and deliberate instances of the ability of the Brahmins to regulate access to such spaces vis-a-vis the others as indeed to facilitate entry of their own caste-men. Without doubt, the ability of the Brahmins to mediate, and if possible block, the entry of the non-Brahmins into the modern institutions was rather strong and appears to have been ubiquitous. This happened at different levels - from denying, or procrastinating in giving, admission in schools (leave alone spheres of higher education) to shaping the
policy of the administration, most importantly and decisively, deciding and defining what constitutes 'public good and welfare'. Many of the memoirs written by Brahmins of this period offer rich testimonies to the naturalised ways in which their being Brahmins seamlessly wove into their official/professional positions. They also provide candid instances of how bureaucratic positions were being filled up, the norms of which tended to 'naturally' favour Brahmins. Here we take a detailed look at the memoirs of a Brahmin official who richly details the period just before the non-Brahmin articulation becomes significant in the Mysore State. navaratna Ramarao recounts his experience of working as a Revenue Probationary Officer with the Mysore administration in his memoirs titled Kelavu Nenapugal (‘Some Memories’, 1990).

Pursuing a law degree in Madras (there was no law college in the Mysore state then) during 1900-01 and not in very financially comfortable situations, Ramarao gets a telegram from his father asking him to visit Mysore at the earliest, for the Dewan, Krishnamurthy,\(^\text{16}\) wanted to see him. Ramarao writes:

Then, in the Mysore State, Probationary Assistant Commissioner posts were given to some either on grounds of respect for their family/lineage or on recommendation from some noted person or on communal quota. ... When a friend had asked me to try for such a position, I had said, "I have too big a head to slip through such a back door"... But now when I received this unexpected telegram, I was a little excited wondering whether I could be in with an offer of an AC post (ibid. 20).

When he goes to meet the Dewan, the latter is emphatic:

We are very close to your father and we are told that you write rather well in English. It has been on our mind for a long time that we should do some favour to your father. We thought we could take you into our office and help you come up in life (ibid.: 21).

Since Ramarao thought that it did not quite sound like an AC-ship offer, he takes courage to ask the details of what was exactly being offered. The Dewan proclaims:

We usually start with a Rs. 20/- per month job in the Secretariat for BA graduates. But we cannot give such jobs to all those who come seeking them. Since we know your father rather well, we thought of taking you to our Home Office on a Rs. 50/- per month scale (ibid.. 22).

Ramarao refuses that offer and goes on to complete his BL to begin a bright career as a Revenue Probationer. But that is not the point that is being pursued here. The first

\(^{16}\) The first Mysorean to become the Dewan, supposedly put in place in order to placate the Mysore Brahmin clique even when better qualified Madrasi Brahmins were available.
striking point about the above instance is that even as late as 1900-01, jobs were being distributed on grounds of respectable family background, recommendations or communal representations. This was way before any backward class/non-Brahmin articulations of communal reservations had made an entry. Notice the Dewan’s ‘compulsion’ to promote Ramarao’s career simply because he wants to do a favour to his father (even as the recipient thinks it is too small a favour). If one takes a look at the auto/biographies from this period, one is struck by the ‘naturalness’ with which such informal networks operated.

Second, the Dewan is rather unwilling to offer jobs at the secretariat to those who come looking for them. This clearly demonstrates the willingness, if not eagerness, of the officialdom, which was constitutively Brahmin in its composition, to shut out even such thinly available public spaces to ‘others’. It was not that such job seekers at that point of time would have been anybody else but Brahmins themselves. Such instances of informal networks were not isolated. Indeed, Ramarao’s memoirs are dotted with endless instances of that order. It was also helped by the fact that there was a huge chasm between the educational levels of the Brahmins and that of the others.

Thus the Brahmin appropriation of modern spaces was not merely enabled by what is variously described as their ‘traditions of learning’, ‘writing skills’ and so on, but also because of the above described informal networks and the naturalised tendency of capitalising on the emerging norms of institutionalisation. Ramarao himself gives us glimpses of the workings of caste and community networks. Talking about a Madhva Amaldar, Ramarao states:

Sect-patriotism was demonstrated at times. Once a Madhva officer was trying a Madhva Shanubhogue in a case of embezzlement. Then Govindaraya [the Amaldar], with tears in his eyes said, “This bastard [a very endearing word, a distinct part of the Brahmin lexicon, is employed here] has committed it, sir. But he has a family to look after. More importantly, one has to respect the Angaara Akshathe [body markers of a Madhva male]. If you can agree to let him off after collecting the misappropriated money from him, I will some how try getting it out of him.”

He [Govindaraya] himself is honest and thus had remained poor. But his devotion for the Angaara Akshathe made him accept not only spending his own money but also allowing a thief go scot-free. This might not be accepted as justice but I cannot say that such compassion and devotion are wrong (ibid.: 34-5).

While the invocation of particular caste loyalties (namely, Madhva and Smartha) is seen in the above illustration, the sense of both being and belonging to the larger category of ‘Brahmin’ is not entirely absent, as many more incidents that Ramarao
himself narrates exemplify. Indeed such a differential recuperation of the Brahmin self continues into the present and is largely determined by its contexts.

Besides, needless to say, such officials had other more condescending ways of negotiating with the larger non-Brahmin populace. Even if one might attribute this to bureaucratic indifference, the non-Brahmin activists preferred to see it as typical instances of subversion resorted to by Brahmins. Here is an instance narrated by Ramaraoo in which the recipient of such bureaucratic indifference and condescension is a Vokkaliga who was no less than a member of the Representative Assembly.

Ramarao is describing how he was taught to handle and conduct the ‘Taluq Board Meetings’, presided by the Assistant Commissioner (AC), admittedly a democratic space wherein local people were supposed to negotiate with the government regarding their needs. When Ramaraoo, then a Probationer, goes to remind the AC, Krishna Rao, a Brahmin officer, of the impeding Taluq Board Meeting, the latter says:

“It’s good that you reminded me of the meeting. I had forgotten all about it. I shall show you how to conduct the Meeting. You must know, I hope, Taluq Board means /local autonomy, full democracy/... The next day, at 12.00 was the meeting. Patels [usually belonging to the Vokkaliga community] of the surrounding four large villages, two Shanubhogues [usually from the Brahmin community], four five big farmers, local moneylenders, big traders had assembled. ... [T]he Local fund clerk [a lower rank official] read out the accounts. The President then ordered the assembled to bring to his notice anything that they thought was important. Nobody had enough courage to open his mouth. Then the President pointed at a rich, landed Patel, a Vokkaliga, and shouted, “OK Gowda. You are a RA [Representative Assembly of Mysore] Member, isn't it? You say something.” Very hesitantly the Gowda got up. He was extremely nervous in front of the AC. He said [Ramarao uses the Kannada that is associated with Vokkaligas here], “Sir please get us a rotu [road] to our village from Ilavaala [the neighbouring town].” The AC screamed at him: “Rotu, it seems... You are a goner. If you don’t have anything else to say, just keep shut.” The meeting went on like that (ibid: 50-1; italicised words are the English words used in the original).

But Ramaraoo himself is clear that such an indifferent attitude towards "full democracy" and "local autonomy" is wrong and unjustified. He is also clear in making fun of such attitudes of his senior officers. However, the Brahmin-dominated bureaucracy’s ability to scuttle larger processes of democratisation can be seen by the way Ramaraoo himself

17 The non-Brahmin members of the Representative Assembly incessantly brought attention to the subversive strategies of the excessively Brahmin-dominated bureaucracy.
18 As we have noted above, such local level structures of polity were increasingly coming to be dominated by the landed communities like the Vokkaligas.
handles a 'tricky situation' during his probationary period. His superior, the Deputy Commissioner, instructs Ramarao to be in charge of a specified stretch of the route that the Mysore Maharaja is to take on his 'circuit'. His brief is to make such arrangements for the specified stretch that the journey is rendered comfortable and incident-free. He says:

Just the day before the king was supposed to reach the place to which I was made accountable, there was some news that created anxiety. The former Amaldar [a Brahmin] of Megalapura [the place for which Ramarao was now in charge] had given away some expensive land to some of his relatives - in fact to himself, and his relatives were only an alibi. Even as there were objections raised on the deal, he ignored them all and made the claims over the said land permanent. A complaint registered with the Deputy Commissioner (DC) met with no response, for the Amaldar was reportedly in the good books of the DC. Therefore, a person named Mysore Basavarajappa had decided to bring the case in detail before the king during his visit. I had known Basavarajappa to be a troublemaker. ... When the Amaldar enquired with the village elders, they reportedly said that they did not want any trouble during the king's visit but they also said that Basavarajappa is stubborn (ibid., 65).

This was the anxiety before the Amaldar and Ramarao. Even when Ramarao claims that the villagers did not want any trouble, it is apparent that the Brahmin bureaucrats are keen not to allow the king any knowledge of the appropriation. Note also the justness of the intent of Basavarajappa in taking a complaint before the highest authority, that too after trying out the other channels available. Nonetheless, Ramarao, apparently in consultation with the village elders, chalks out a plan.

Just behind the village, there was an old temple, which had strong doors to its sanctum sanctorum. I instructed the Patel thus: "Keep four strong men ready. As soon as I indicate, just carry him to the temple and lock him in it. If at all his shouts are heard when the king is here, we could always tell him that he is a mad fellow and has been locked so that he doesn't create nuisance during your visit". I then had a bugle man placed enroute, about a mile away with instructions that he play the bugle when the entourage of the king reaches that spot. ...

I tried convincing Basavarajappa assuring him of a hearing but in vain. We had to carry out our plan ensuring the smooth conduct of the brief stopover of the king (ibid., 66).

These instances mark out the Brahmins' ability to at once naturalise the powerful spaces of bureaucracy and education as their own, while also complicating the terms of access to these spaces. However even as such mediations at the level of individuals were significant, there were also some institutionalised and yet informal practices that had gained large-scale acceptance within the community, and which were facilitative of the Brahmin quest to modernity. It is to a detailing of the more significant and wide spread of such practices that we turn in the following.
What appears to have been constitutive of the 'right to city' of many a Brahmin, particularly in the princely Mysore State, are the two practices of 'Vaaraanna' and 'Bhikshaanna'. These practices, although very significant, were not the only ones in operation in this period, there were others too. A Brahmin youth studying in a university or a pre-university course could also make some money by tutoring school-going kids of Brahmin families or gain 'freeships' largely by pleading to the generosity of Brahmin officials in the education department of the college bureaucracy. They could even take up part-time jobs in the bureaucracy. V. Sitaramaiah's reminiscences of his 'College Days' describes these arrangements (1997: 14-20), that seem to have been fairly entrenched practices. Nevertheless, almost every biography or autobiography that one comes across of Brahmins who were getting educated during this period calls attention to either or both of the practices of Vaaraanna and Bhikshaanna.

Vaaraanna, which could be translated as 'weekly food', refers to the arrangement among the Brahmins residing in cities and towns of feeding one or more poor Brahmin boys, who have undergone Upanayana (the initiation ceremony), on a particular day of the week, till the completion of their education. Bhikshaanna, apparently a more time-honoured practice, translates into 'food collected through begging'. As the name suggests, students used to go around with a vessel in their hands to local Brahmins' houses begging for food. However it is the former which was more in usage than the latter. Even as such practices sound embarrassing (if not humiliating, as indeed many of the auto/biographies admit to) what is to be noted is the vitality and legitimacy that these practices commanded as well as the practical usefulness of their existence. Bhairappa (1996), an important contemporary Kannada litterateur, mentions about what a Brahmin told him regarding the legitimacy of such practices. When he, as a poor student, had to decide on going ahead with his practice of seeking Bhikshaanna, a Brahmin hotel owner who was known to him, tells him:

Any way, aren't you born as a Brahmin? Then what is the humiliation in seeking alms? I too have done that. In our side [he is an Udupi Brahmin], they call it Madhukari [collecting the honey]. Like the bee, which goes to scores of different flowers to collect the juice to prepare

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19 On the other hand, Bhairappa, a much younger contemporary of Sitaramaiah, had to overcome, during the 1930s and the 1940s, many instances of over-eager non-Brahmin officials seeking to deny him some of these privileges — of freeship, of endowment grants etc. See his autobiography Bhitti (1996).
20 Bhairappa (1996) mentions the severity of this restriction of having had Upanayana done on oneself to be eligible to seek Bhikshaanna, even while mentioning that he himself was not so 'Initiated' when he was seeking Bhikshaanna.
honey. ... It is definitely more honourable to go to ten unknown Brahmins seeking alms (Bhairappa 1996: 152).

It is to be noted that the legitimacy of the practice is being premised on the scriptural sanction of the Brahmin, to whom begging is perhaps the only justified way of finding food. However, irrespective of such a justification, the seeker himself would feel rather humiliated imploring alms (as Bhairappa himself admits to have been). Vaaraanna was definitely more honourable compared to Bhikshaanna. However, such practices did indeed perform a crucial task for the Brahmin community vis-a-vis the unfolding structures of modern opportunity. This becomes very clear particularly when one evaluates them with reference to the constant efforts of the non-Brahmin leaders to draw attention to the non-availability of comparable avenues for students from their communities.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the Brahmin community had already an entrenched presence in most of the cities and towns of Karnataka, which, by definition, had meant unprecedented access to the newly emerging modern spaces. This proved to be a defining advantage that the Brahmins held on to in exercising a head start over other communities. Thus most of the eager Brahmin youth who came to these cities or towns looking to further their education and careers would, more often than not, find a relative or a caste-fellow already stably located in these places and willing to provide shelter. They could thus invoke networks of varied kinds in finding an abode or coping with other exigencies. For instance, the household that V. Sitaramaiah (op. cit.) stays on in Mysore during his graduate and post-graduate education is one among the Brahmin households that his father had served as a priest. It is on the basis of the "respect" that the head of this household had for his father that Sitaramaiah gets to stay with the family. While shelter and food, in themselves, are evidently crucial components of being able to stay in alien locales, the advantages of residing with one's relative or a family friend (who would more often than not be an official in the government bureaucracy or a lawyer or a lecturer/teacher, each of which were crucial levers of advantage) went further. More often than not, as almost all the narratives available point to, it would also mean access to
an already entrenched network of social, economic and cultural relations that stood one in good stead in the search for a comfortable livelihood.\textsuperscript{21}

It was, therefore, usually only when a person fails in finding a relative or a family friend that he had to look for alternative arrangements - and this invariably meant a Community Hostel. These hostels, opened mainly and initially by philanthropist Brahmin government officials or lawyers or landlords, too were crucial in stabilising the Brahmins' quest for modernity and the opportunities of the city.\textsuperscript{fi}y the early decades of the twentieth century, many Brahmin castes which had formed associations established community hostels, which definitionally restricted admission to its own community students and denied the same to other Brahmin community students. Such restrictions in due course were gradually relaxed by the more secularised Brahmins in cities (primarily government employees, lawyers, and teachers). It was indeed this section that was becoming increasingly hegemonic in regulating the affairs of the 'corporatised' Brahmin community, and had learnt to articulate itself on behalf of a composite Brahmin identity. Many of the available auto/biographies do indicate towards the gradual loosening of the grip of the restrictions on inter-community dining norms among Brahmins, though not those of inter-marriages. In fact, Bhairappa, in his autobiography, even mentions the case of a Congress sympathiser, who was a landlord in a big village, in whose place even students belonging to Vokkaliga and Bestha (fishermen) castes were coming for \textit{Faaraanna} (Bhairappa 1996: 100-1; note, this was in 1947).

Given the preponderance of Brahmins in the bureaucracy, much of the government efforts at establishing Government Hostels in cities and towns too served predominantly the interests of the Brahmin students. This was both in terms of the logistics of how it worked itself out in practice (through naturalised practices of informal networking) as well as a consequence of the inherent biases in the policy. Not surprisingly, this is another bone of contention obtaining in the non-Brahmin assertions of the day.

Accordingly, the arrangements of \textit{Faaraanna} and \textit{Bhikshaanna} largely came into picture only in the context of the non-availability of a relative or a family friend or a

\textsuperscript{21} Sitaramaiah's reminiscences of his college days (1997) offers a graphic picture about the 'givenness' of a Brahmin network that makes available for him a host of cultural and social capital - from obtaining a scholarship to getting access to a vibrant network of classical music to "getting to know" important people (definitionally Brahmin) in the bureaucracy, university, journalism, and so on.
community or government hostel. While the accounts available - of individual Brahmins who had to resort to such arrangements - use the instance of such practices to present a picture of heroic fight in the face of great adversity and challenge (as indeed they might well have been), the role that these arrangements fulfilled has been critical in enabling the unprecedented urbanisation of the Brahmin community.

Such practices seem to have become obsolete by the 1960s primarily because of founding of more hostels, both by caste associations and by the State, as also the presence of more extensive kin networks obtaining in towns and cities. It would be a mistake however to underestimate their centrality in forming the sensibilities and subjectivities of a mobile generation. The Brahmin youth often coming from rural, poor and orthodox backgrounds found the ethos of the urban Brahmin households quite different and liberating, even equipped to take on the mantle of a certain secularising of the Brahmin self. These transitions were fairly crucial in preparing the ground on which the Brahmins could experiment a transformation of the ethos and self-retrievals of the community commensurate with the demands of an urban, secularised life (see Murthy Rao 1999).

With this broad mapping of the trajectory of Brahmins in the late colonial period, in the next section we attempt a more contemporary characterisation of the Brahmins in Karnataka.

III

A contemporary profile

Reconstructing a picture of the contemporary state of Brahmins is by no means an easy task. As we mentioned at the very outset of this chapter, the decision to drop the category of 'caste' (except pertaining to the SC and ST population) in the decennial census from 1941 has prevented any effort to get at a macro-picture of particular caste communities. Though unsystematic, the data encoded in the census reports could have acted as a ready-reckoner for any serious attempt to understand the contemporary caste profiles. Thus from very primary data such as the population of a given caste community to more significant information such as its rural-urban distribution, migration and occupational patterns, representation in spaces such as the bureaucracy, judiciary etc., scholars are forced to work with informed guesses or, more frequently, projections based

In fact, many of the respondents interviewed, that is, those in the age group of 50 years and above, recalled either themselves or somebody in their family being the beneficiaries of such practices.
on the 1941 census figures. On the other hand, strangely enough, there have been almost no attempts by the academic community to gather such macro-data either.

As already disclosed, the most significant efforts at a composite picture of the workings of caste have been the data generated by the various Backward Classes Committees and Commissions. Apart from the Miller Committee that was set up in the 1920s by the Mysore State, there have been successive committees and commissions instituted in the post-independence period. Paradoxically, these official reports are the only extensive documents which provide - even if unsystematically, and not often subject to the norms of social science research - some idea of the trajectory of the Brahmins in the recent years. It is paradoxical because, almost always, beginning from the Miller Committee Report to the present, Brahmins have expressed their displeasure over the various recommendations. The two Brahmin members of the Miller Committee, for instance, attached 'Notes of Dissent' to the final report. One of them even refused to sign the final report. Thereafter, however, Brahmins have either gone to the courts seeking stay on the government orders implementing the successive Commission Reports or have gone to the press stating their ire. It seems inevitable, nevertheless, to turn to these reports for further embellishing our contemporary sense of the Brahmin community (although of course our discussion also calls attention to a few of the limited studies of Brahmins in Karnataka). The resulting picture will be further embellished with the accounts of the respondents themselves as they speak of the trajectories of their individual families.

Several of the Backward Classes Committees and Commissions appointed by the Government of Mysore/Karnataka have sought to estimate the percentage share of each caste group in the state population. These reports peg the Brahmin population in the state at 4.28% in 1961 [the Mysore Backward Classes (Nagana Gowda) Committee Report, 1961]; 4.23 % in 1972 [the first Backward Classes (Havanur) Commission Report, 1975, Vol. II]; 3.81% in 1984 [the second (Venkataswamy) Backward Classes Commission Report, 1986, Vol. I], 3.45% in 1988 [the third Backward Classes (Chinnappa Reddy) Commission Report, 1990, Vol. I]. Brahmins are spread all over the state of Karnataka - but are a significant population in the districts of Bangalore, Mysore, Shimoga, Dharwad and the coastal districts of South and North Canara. The first Commission headed by Havanur projected the 1941 figures of Brahmin distribution to 1971 in order to arrive at its estimate.
The picture that these successive post-independence reports offer is consistent with the larger map drawn of the Brahmin community in our two sections above. The preponderance of Brahmins in almost all modern public contexts continue into the post-independence period, even as the overwhelming nature of their dominance has come to be increasingly circumscribed. According to the Nagana Gowda Committee, Brahmins who made up 4.28% of the total population constituted 38.8% of the students studying in high schools (cited in Thimmaiah 1993: 85). Further, as on 31 March 1959, 23.93% of the Brahmin population were state government employees, excluding those who were part of the Class IV cadre (ibid.: 88). The Havanur Commission too records the disproportionate nature of the Brahmins in different sectors of government services. Brahmins continue to corner a disproportionately larger share of these spaces as also the educational attainments compared to their share in the population. Likewise, the Venkataswamy Commission estimates the Brahmins as occupying spaces of modern education and employment to the extent of five to six times higher than what a strict distribution based on their share in the state's population would have allowed for. For instance, during 1984-85, Brahmins occupied 15.86% of the total number of medical college seats and 20.09% of the total number of engineering college seats compared to their estimated population of 3.81% of the state (1986, Vol. I: 167-8).

It is perhaps only in the space of the representative politics that there obtains a certain equation between the Brahmin share of the general population and their representation in the different elected bodies. In fact, there is more of parity as one proceeds downwards towards local levels of representative bodies such as the Taluq Development Boards, Town Municipal Councils, City Corporations and so on. (See ibid.: 162-66 for the figures). At the level of MLAs, MLCs and MPs though, 8.17% of the members of such bodies were Brahmins - more than twice of what their percentage in the

23 It is to be noted that the data presented by these reports are not similar across each other. Every commission had to undertake, each time, the daunting task of arriving at some sense of a macro-picture of the differentially placed caste communities. Each succeeding commission would find that the judiciary had already invalidated the data and the methodology employed by the preceding one. Most of them, depending upon such factors as the time available, the extent of expertise at the disposal of the Commission and the cooperation of the bureaucracy, came up with different yardsticks to determine the backwardness or otherwise of a caste community. Thimmaiah (1993) critiques the extremely diverse and at times totally unscientific methods that these Reports employed in order to arrive at their conclusions. However, our allusions to the data from these reports vis-a-vis Brahmins are primarily those that had been compiled from official records and were usually uncontested.
state's population would have allowed for. In the year 1978, for instance, there were 16 Brahmin MLAs, 10 MLCs and four MPs.

The most recent Commission has been the one headed by a former Supreme Court judge, Chinnappa Reddy, which submitted its report in 1990. It too, like its predecessors, produced rather thinly spread out and disparate data in regard to the Brahmins. Being the most recent, one could take a more extensive look at its representation of the Brahmin community of Karnataka. In the spheres of professional and higher education the predominance of the Brahmins is most acute. Between 1977-78 and 1988-89, 20.58% of the medical seats were occupied by Brahmin students compared to their share of 3.45% in the state's population. Lingayaths and Vokkaligas, despite having had the benefits of reservations more or less through out the entire history of the policy, were still lagging far behind with 7.63% and 11.56% of the seats respectively. During the academic year of 1988-89, Brahmin students occupied 24.37% of the total number of engineering seats that were available as against 12.06% and 11.07% that the Lingayaths and Vokkaligas respectively occupied. During the same year, Brahmins took 19.42% of admissions into all the post-graduate institutions as against 21.47% and 12.03% taken by the Lingayaths and Vokkaligas respectively. As far as admissions to the agricultural university were concerned, there was greater parity - with 16.06%, 16.18% and 15.94% of Brahmins, Lingayaths and Vokkaligas respectively. Except for the Lingayaths, Vokkaligas and the Scheduled Castes, there was no other community which could even begin to compare with the Brahmin community in these numbers. And considering that the Brahmin community was incomparably smaller than any of these communities - 3.45% (Brahmins) as against 15.34% (Lingayaths), 10.81% (Vokkaligas) and 16.72% (Scheduled Castes) - its sway assumes greater significance.

Even in the recruitment to government services, the Chinnappa Reddy report adduces that Brahmins had managed to acquire about 14% of the positions as of 1986, and about 12% of the same post-1986. As on 02/11/1988, they held 18.12% of the Group-A posts in government services and 26.24% of all the posts in the Groups A and B in the public sector undertakings. Again, Brahmins, in the political sphere, continued to reproduce the pattern that we have noted. While their numbers in the higher levels of representative bodies such as the Parliament, State Assembly continued to be prominent, their numbers at local representative bodies was almost negligible. While there were nine MLAs, seven MLCs and two MPs from the community, there was not a single Brahmin
Zilla Parishad President. Besides, out of the total 863 Zilla Parishad members, only 27 were Brahmins.

The Report further makes the point that while the preceding two Backward Classes Commissions had included a reservation provision for economically backward families (constituting the 'E Group') irrespective of their caste background, during the academic year 1988-89, of the total 39 seats in all the professional colleges (medical, engineering and dental) and post-graduate institutions that were given away under this category Brahmin candidates garnered 22 of them.\(^2^4\)

Of course, the data presented in the Reports of the successive Backward Classes Commissions are uneven and incomparable in regard to each other. They however obtain as the only source of macro-data on the contemporary status of the different caste communities. A relatively safe and preliminary conclusion that can be drawn from them is that the Brahmins continue to be disproportionately represented in the bureaucracy, in the spaces of higher education, judiciary, and so on. Their predominance is nowhere near the astounding levels that were witnessed during the early decades of the twentieth century (as demonstrated, say, by the Report of the Miller Committee) but as commission after commission have averred:

So far as the Brahmin Community is concerned, there can be no question that they are socially and educationally the most advanced community in the State of Karnataka even if some of them are poor (Report of the Karnataka Third Backward Classes Commission, Vol. I, 1990: 50).

This can be corroborated with the aid of some scanty scholarly works that have looked at the question of caste in contemporary social life. For instance, the urban Brahmins of Karnataka seem to have fared exceedingly well, keeping intact their sway over even the other dominant caste communities of Lingayaths and Vokkaligas. This claim is substantiated in Sivaprasad (1987).\(^2^5\) This study works with Bangalore-specific data, but it appears that one could extrapolate its findings to Brahmins in general and urban Brahmins in particular. Sivaprasad uses data collected during the years 1973-76 on the population of the city of Bangalore to study social mobility across different communities. It presents data regarding the families in the sample not only across caste communities but also across three generations in regard to each family, which gives us a

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\(^{24}\) All the above data is summated from the Report of the Third Karnataka Backward Classes Commission, Vol. I, 1990: 45-169.

\(^{25}\) See also Gist (1954) for a comparative study of Bangalore and Mysore coming to similar conclusions.
fairly clear picture of not only the relative positioning of the different communities on a scale of social mobility but also of the differential ability of the communities to consolidate the mobility made. The central conclusion is that social mobility is in concordance with the traditional ritual hierarchy of castes. The congruence is real to such an extent that no caste group has been able to defy its status as ordained in the caste hierarchy to either garner dominance or lose its hold over society. Mobility is accordingly largely communitarian, and not individualistic. Thus Brahmins outscore other communities on almost each and every count of social mobility. They are even extremely successful in reproducing the mobility chain across generations. In other words, Brahmins have not only been the forerunners in utilising the modern educational and occupational spaces; they have also successfully, over generations, consolidated their pre-eminence in these spaces. The 'gap' between them and the other caste communities (including the so-called dominant castes like the Lingayaths) is at least that of one generation, and that between the Brahmins and the Dalits is at least two generations. Brahmin women (in spite of faring badly when compared with their own 'caste' men) have also been important recipients of modern education. Their pre-eminent position in this regard outruns that of women from any other caste, including the other 'upper' castes. Even as the shift from traditional occupations to modern occupations has been seen in all castes and religious communities, it is among Brahmins that this shift is most swift and successful. Brahmins, particularly those in the age range of 30 years and below, have begun diversifying into 'production and service' occupations (like electrician, mechanic, cook etc.) even as their preference for and preponderance in professional and administrative jobs is very clear.

Brahmins likewise, as Sivaprasad's study notes, are predominantly distributed in the High and the High-medium Socio-Economic Status zones,\textsuperscript{26} where the investments that they have made on property tend to yield high returns. Their average monthly income was only next to the Jain community, which is primarily a business community. A majority of them are distributed within the categories of the High to Highest Income Groups. Further, in the sample there was not a single instance of the head of the household marrying outside the Brahmin fold. Equally significantly, Brahmins exhibit 'caste affinity' in selecting friends and interacting with them and their relatives. This

\textsuperscript{26} The study divided the city of Bangalore into five such zones based on the land value.
tendency is noted for other caste and religious communities too, but the fact of a dominant upper caste community exhibiting a propensity for closed networks of social relations will evidently have different effects than those in the case of subaltern communities like the Muslims and the Dalits.

In sum, the upward mobility made by most of the Brahmin families on each count - of education, occupation, income and women’s education - is not merely consolidated in the next generation but also successfully stretched further. This general state of well being of Brahmins is not limited to Bangalore, and seems to obtain across the contours of the state. Madan and Halbar (1972) conducted a study of the educational institutions in the districts of Mysore, Dharwad and Belgaum with particular reference to their caste composition and the differential access to education during 1965-66. It demonstrates the ability of the Brahmins, aided primarily by the sheer magnitude of their numbers as professionals and trained personnel, to circumvent the larger logic of the composition and access to educational institutions in those districts. Brahmins were the only community that defied a near perfect correspondence that was otherwise obtained between representation in the "local authority educational institutions" and the share in the general population. They were also able to overcome the neat correspondence that was otherwise obtained between the caste/community of those owning a private management educational institution and that of its teaching staff. That is, if a Lingayath owned a college, that fact was usually reflected in the make up of the teaching staff, with a majority of them being Lingayaths themselves. Brahmins were the only community which could break that pattern - they were in significant numbers in the ranks of teaching staff in most of the institutions, irrespective of the ownership. Finally, they were also the only community that defied the correspondence that obtained between the caste/community of the managements and that of the majority of the students. If an institution, thus, was owned by a Lingayath, while the general trend is for Lingayath students preponderating its student ranks, Brahmins were the only exception. The study's conclusion reiterates the general point that we have been making about the Brahmins in the modern situation. While the logic of proportional representation has caught up with them largely within the space of decentralized electoral politics, Brahmins have been rather successful in defying this logic in almost all other spheres of modern public life.

The larger transitions underway in the community - of a determined shift from rural to urban migration, becoming invisible (or inconsequential) in the rural areas, the
over-reliance on the state for its sustained social mobility, and, increasingly in recent times, the transmutation of the different forms of capital acquired under modern conditions into endowments that have prepared them to look beyond official (state-sponsored) institutions - receive an embodiment in the accounts provided by our respondents about their own personal and familial trajectories. For most of the respondents, access to modernity was essentially realised through and was translated into an access to the cities. In particular, modern structures of governance (especially the bureaucracy, judiciary and police) and the increasing importance placed on secular liberal education meant opportunities for shifting the locus of their economic and social power from land and traditional 'sacred' education. This seems to have resulted in largely making the Brahmin invisible as an entity in rural Karnataka - both literally and as an image for garnering political and cultural mileage.

Of course, Brahmins continue to reside in significant numbers only in the rural areas of coastal Karnataka and parts of Malnad - predominantly from the communities of the Havyakas and Shivalli (Smartha, Madhva) Brahmans - where they continue to be direct participants in the agricultural activity. Even in the case of these communities, it must be noted, the resource investment has not been uniformly agriculture based, for they have extensive familial and kinship ties with relatives residing in towns and cities. In fact, the aspirations of the youth of these Brahmin castes too are to seek secular, higher/technical education so as to be able to lead secure lives in urban settings.

Thisforegrounds itself in many garbs, as in the case of the changing matrimonial preferences of the Havyakas, a Brahmin caste concentrated in the districts of coastal Karnataka and Shimoga.27 The prospective Havyaka bridegrooms engaged in agriculture find it increasingly difficult to get brides from the community, for the young Havyaka women are inclined increasingly towards marrying men settled with a modern job in an urban setting. Thus, even as a female respondent (one holding office as the President of the Sri Akhila Havyaka Maha Sabha) was rather proud that their community association was the first among Brahmins to set up a Working Women's Hostel - and which was getting overwhelming response from young unmarried women from the community - she seemed pretty concerned about the trend. As she states:

27 See for a profile of the Havyakas and their continued sustenance on and investment in agriculture, Harper (1968).
It is a rather tricky situation that faces the community and its leaders. On the one hand, it is definitely heartening to see that young women from our community are stepping out of the four walls of the house, where their ability and creativity were hitherto contained, to explore possibilities of forging independent careers. This has become all the more necessary in the contemporary moment, given that doors are being closed on the Brahmin community from all sides. It is difficult, on the other, to see them refusing to go back to villages after marriage. I cannot, for a moment, suggest that they ought to return because their aspirations and talents will never be done justice to in a rural setting. But, again, it has reached alarming proportions to see young men involved in agriculture go without marriage till late in their thirties. There are also reports that such families are willing to seek alliances outside the community, among other Brahmin castes. I would not say that it is something reprehensible, but it is definitely unnecessary.

Many families from such communities which have settled down in urban areas have taken the mantle of nursing the children of relatives from rural areas who seek to pursue education and employment. As a respondent proudly stated:

Even though I do not have a family to call my own, many nephews and nieces have stayed here, got educated, employed and have set up their establishments. This gives me immense

A long process of urbanisation has also meant that for most of the urban Brahmin respondents there is no 'native' (in the colloquial) to either visit or even refer to. This is more so for the younger generations. The older generations have emotional attachments and memories of their 'native place' and the family deities situated there - usually referred to as the “MoolaDevarti” ("The Original God" of the paternal family) or the “Kula Devarti” ("The Clan Deity") - which often provides a compulsive justification to visit the place. The younger generation though show no such bonding, and gradually over two to three generations the family loses intimate, if not complete, contact with that place (unless it has economic interests). Again, it is generally families from the coastal and the Malnad regions that sustain strong networks with their 'native place'. Many such families continue to have some direct interest, usually in the form of joint property - primarily agricultural but also by way of an ancestral house - looked after by a male

Interview with Ms. Shalmali Venkatesh, President of the Havyaka Maha Sabha, October 17, 2000. Note, names of all the respondents cited have been changed to retain anonymity and trust.

Interview with Ms. Durga, 22/10/2000. She is a single, unmarried woman in her late fifties, who came to Bangalore from a village near Shimoga looking for an independent livelihood nearly thirty years ago. Many more respondents coming from these parts of Karnataka have also helped out their relatives and community members in similar ways. It has to be noted that Ms. Durga is an exceptional case - having remained unmarried and charting an independent and career of her own - and that too for her generation.
member of the family for whom it would have been a choice arrived by default. This person would invariably be one who is a failure in securing modern education. Again, if his children get jobs in a city, he too would move out of the village, sooner or later. For Brahmin families of these regions, the temple and ‘matha’ institutions (which also serve up as the major pilgrimage centres of Karnataka, like Udupi and Sringeri) have provided reasons to maintain contacts. However, these contacts have become increasingly impersonal in the sense that they no longer double-up as occasions to meet familial and kin networks. The personal bonding with an extended kin network thins down as new generations take the reigns of the family.

As the narrations of our respondents affirm, not all instances of migration have been in pursuit of secular education or jobs in the modern sphere. For most of the women, till the last generation or so, the primary mode of realisation of the right to the city was through marriage. A respondent, a 37 year old woman who graduated from a college in Kundapur, Udupi District and whose father continues to be an agriculturist (albeit primarily as a supervisor) recounted:

Though I came to Bangalore about fifteen years back after marriage from a village near Kundapur, four of my sisters have since stayed at our place pursuing different things. While one did her engineering course and one a non-technical course, two others came here after their education looking out simultaneously for jobs and marriage proposals. As you know, middle class men prefer working women. The prospects of marriage and the prospects of finding better marriage alliances are incomparably greater than what would be out there in the village.30

Accordingly, the Brahmin population that continues to exist in the rural parts of Karnataka are apparently either those families whose male heads have not been able to make it into the secular modes of upward mobility (through education and employment, primarily) or those families that have had direct landed interests.31 Another point that needs to be noted is the fact that Brahmins continue to have stakes in agriculture only in areas where the latter represents a stable form of economic activity, irrigated and with great emphasis on cash crops. Thus, even in villages, Brahmins have had a certain middle

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11 Interview with Ms. Kala, 07/01/2001.
31 A very new trend among the neo-rich Brahmins - those young men who have brought in unprecedented amounts of money into the family from their jobs in the new economy, aided by work-stints in the USA in particular - is to buy ‘farm houses’ in the villages on the outskirts of the major cities. However, these are used primarily for weekend recreational jaunts.
class existence, although their status within the fold is not equal to that of urban Brahmins.

An important instance of mobility that has not involved the educated men in pursuit of government jobs in the recent history of Brahmins has been the outflow of the South Canara Brahmins into not merely other parts of Karnataka but also other states (and even other countries). This is often held up as an exemplification of Brahmin grit, ingenuity and determination. The concerned individuals were not educated enough to take up modern occupations, but were semi-literate/illiterate workers in the vegetarian food business. The near-legendary Udupi Brahmin hotels that have come up all over the country - and now even abroad (particularly the West and the Gulf region) - are the most visible face of this development, even as many eke out livelihoods as professional cooks in the upper middle class and rich urban Brahmin households, as caterers and suppliers of cooks for special occasions like weddings, and so on.

For many Brahmin families from coastal Karnataka, the following testimony seems to hold good as a 'community biography'. The respondent, now in his mid eighties, reminisced:

I came to Bangalore in 1937 looking for a livelihood. Life was rather difficult in the village (near Udupi). We had very little land, and no assured irrigation. To top it all, we were too many brothers and by then itself, the ancestral property was divided many a time. I knew no one in Bangalore but still decided to take a chance. Then the idea of a hotel was still not a very acceptable thing. But I knew that I could work at somebody's house as a cook and survive. That was precisely what happened. I began working in a former Brahmin Dewan's house as a help to the main cook. For such jobs, they allowed nobody but Brahmins. I am a Smarth, and the Dewan was a Madhva. It did cause some minor hiccups and I could never have dreamt of becoming the chief cook there, for only a Madhva would have been allowed to take that position. But it gave me a foothold in the city nonetheless.

I came here alone and for almost twenty years my family was still in the village. After many such jobs, I started a canteen of my own and brought my family along. By then, my eldest son had finished his B. Com. and had joined the railways, which meant a source of secure income for the family. I then brought my family to Bangalore so that my other children could get better education and my daughter could get married to somebody who had a government job here in the city. I had my canteen running till all my sons were employed or educated and the daughter got married.  

This respondent continued to own some agricultural land in his native village, which was looked after by a tenant but supervised by his brother's family that had stayed behind. He

32 Interview with Mr. Venkatesh 14/04/2000.
lost that property, however, due to the implementation of the Land Reforms Act of 1974. As we indicated before, it was only the relatively successful implementation of the Inams Acts in the 1960s and the Land Reforms Act in the 1970s that effectively ended the indirect landed interests of the Brahmins. Manor (2002: 279) has observed that the districts of South Canara and North Canara had a great amount of tenancy cultivation and accordingly most of the applications before the land tribunals set up to accord land to the tiller came from these two districts.

Now, in all such land reform initiatives, there was a gap of at least a couple of years between the proposal of a reform and its implementation. This, many observers have noted, always gave the landowners enough time to circumvent the reform initiatives. Thus Manor notes that an observed increase in the proportion of owner-cultivators should be attributed to "the hasty disposal of inam lands by their owners - often Brahmin absentee landlords - in anticipation of inam abolition laws. This occurred mainly in old Mysore and Bombay and Hyderabad Karnataka" (1989: 329-30). Ksheerasagara (1985) even points to the ability of the Brahmin-dominated bureaucracy to impede the effective implementation of the Inam Abolition Acts as well as the 1974 Land Reforms Act as these were inimical to Brahmin interests. He further mentions a study to the effect that the tenants cultivating the Inam lands refused to file for ownership either as deference to or fearing the fact that the land belonged to the gods or to Brahmins. Ksheerasagara further points out that most of the Brahmins who lost their land were those who had gone to urban areas taking up primarily jobs with the government (see also Nataraj 1980 and Nataraj and Nataraj 1982).

These assessments notwithstanding, there obtains a widely felt anger against these land reform policies that is expressed even now in conversations, caste journals and association meetings. There were two Inam Abolition Acts that were enacted in the 1950s. While the 1954 Act abolished all the Personal Inams, the one notified the following year abolished those Inams that were granted to the religious and charitable institutions. These two forms of the ‘inams’ were largely held by the Brahmins - the former by individual families, and the latter, which were even more vast areas of land, by Brahmin mathas and temples. The Inam Commission set up by the British in 1864 had stated that "[t]here were 59,492 inams spread over 804,924 acres of agricultural land" (Thimmaiah 1993: 80), and much of this was at the disposal of the Brahmin community.
Therefore the families which had preferred not to sell these lands (even while becoming absentee landowners) were to lose them because of the Inam Abolition Acts.

Accordingly there was much at stake in these measures, and to this day they raise rancorous emotions. However, all the available works suggest that the Brahmins who owned such Inam lands had mostly become absentee landowners. Besides, the context of these legislations also enabled the Brahmins to spin a communal turn on the moves of the state with regard to the land reforms. In sharply articulating a position that many of the respondents voiced, a Brahmin resident of a village near Bangalore who claimed that he had lost "hundred and fifty acres of land" stated:

We tolerated when the government took away much of our land, even if through dubious means. But taking away lands that were given to temples and Mathas - this was a great attack on our religion and culture. This was the direct result of the government, in the name of secularism, targeting the Hindus. Give me one instance when the government enacted any similar law which took away the land or property of the Church or the Wakf Board.\footnote{Interview with Mr. Rama Rao, 15/01/2001. He is a Madhya Brahmin, aged 55 years. He has had his education only till the seventh standard (middle school). While he has been reduced to a lower middle class status - primarily owing to the land reforms - his parents' generation had been one of the richest families around. However, what is significant in his instance (which marks his family away from the general trajectories the community has gone through) is that his children - in particular the males - have not done well in education. While one of his sons owns a petty shop in the village, the other works as an assistant to a priest who performs at the village temple. His daughters are married to government employees (and thus into economically more secure families) but that does not usually translate into a betterment of Mr. Rama Rao's economic standing.}

Paradoxically enough, the large-scale migration into urban areas has also meant a sense of disempowerment too. As a respondent, who migrated from his village near Hassan in the late 1940s to pursue education in Bangalore, describes it:

When I was growing up, our village [near Hassan] had nearly 60 Brahmin families - all Iyengars - in the Agrahara. Almost all of them had lands. Now there is just one Brahmin family remaining there. And the Agrahara is completely taken over by the Gowdas, as are our lands which they bought. The only remaining Iyengar family runs a rice mill. The head of that family has completely transformed himself - he speaks the Gowda Kannada, wears those long half-pants, with a towel on his shoulder - the typical Gowda style that we all know of. But he has no choice - he cannot remain like an island there, speaking ‘swaccha’ [clean] Kannada like the Brahmins because he will be ridiculed. They often taunt him - "Where are the Brahmins now sir! Oh... what darpa, dhimaku [which grossly means airs and arrogance] they were showing off" and stuff like that. Now this man knows his place - he knows none of the earlier respect is shown, none can be expected. Earlier the Gowdas used to respectfully call us “ayya” or “amma” [‘father’ and ‘mother’ respectively], now they say, "Oh... What if they are Brahmins?" The most this Brahmin in the village can try to wield power is to tell some Gowda who comes to his mill in the morning.
to get his *bhattha* [paddy] cleaned to come half an hour later. It is with these useless things he can delude himself that he still has some power.\textsuperscript{34}

This is largely true of Brahmin families which find themselves isolated in rural contexts. The following is a statement made by a respondent who makes a living through agriculture. This Madhva respondent, whose family was the solitary Brahmin family in the village (near Bangalore city) which was dominated by the Lingayaths in terms of land holdings and numerically by the Dalit castes, had the following to say:

> When my father was alive, our family was accorded prestige and honour. Everybody in the village took advice from him on matters ranging from land dealings to auspicious days. He was a permanent member of the village Veerabhadra Swami Temple Trust. But now none of that obtains. The Lingayaths have taken over the management of the temple completely. Even the Holeyas and Madigas [the Dalit castes] dare to stand up to us and enter into our house without any hesitation. They now even have an Ambedkar Association in the village. I continue to survive here only because I am active in the local Congress party machinery as well as because of my socialist views. The villagers know that I do not take partial views on contentious matters. That is why they have unanimously voted me for the presidentship of different local boards.\textsuperscript{35}

These paradoxes notwithstanding, the spectacular transition of Brahmins into a modern state-dependent community is also reflected in the educational and occupational profiles of the respondents and their family members. Almost every Brahmin family among those sampled has benefited from modern education, with most even going on to acquire higher educational qualifications. None of the women in any of these families, irrespective of their rural-urban differentials and age, was an illiterate. Almost every family, over the last two or three generations, has had at least one member - but often more than one - who held a government job. And the general trend among most families in the sample has been that each generation does better than its previous generation - whether in terms of educational attainment or securing better jobs - thus leading to a better quality of life.

The following is the educational profile of the 100 Brahmin households surveyed. As we indicated in our methods chapter, the questionnaire had been left to fill with that member of the family who was interviewed first; and, accordingly, we had 63 males 'filling' in the questionnaire schedule and 37 females doing the same. Of the 63 men,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Interview with Mr. Prakash, 22/07/2000. The respondent, a sixty-two year old Srivaishnava Brahmin, is a retired officer of the state-owned life insurance behemoth, the Life Insurance Corporation of India. We shall encounter this respondent again in this chapter and in Ch. 6.
  \item Interview with Mr. Sripathi, 17/09/2000.
\end{itemize}
eleven had education below graduation. None of them was an illiterate though; besides, all except two of these were more than sixty years old. Twenty-three of them had graduate degrees and most of these respondents were in the age group of 40 to 60 years. Nine had post-graduate qualifications and 14 possessed professional degrees. Six of them had pursued religious education and all of them, except one, had failed very early in their pursuit of secular education. The lonely exception was an orphan, who was sheltered by the institution where he was pursuing religious education. Of the 37 women respondents ‘filling’ in the questionnaire, five had pre-degree education; fifteen had graduate degrees; eight had post-graduate qualifications; and nine with professional degrees. Again: the age profile corresponding with the educational qualifications matched that of the men. Everyone, irrespective of age, spatial location, class status etc. have received education in the highly subsidised government run or aided educational institutions, and this factor is responsible chiefly for the remarkable literacy levels of the respondent families over generations. Interestingly, every household, without exception, has witnessed higher educational levels in each successive generation. While only seven of the respondent families were first generation literates, 54 of them were second generation literates and 39 of them were third generation literates.

The occupational profile of the respondents (in this case the 135 interviewed) is a further testimony to their reliance on the modern state structure. One hundred and ten of the respondents were employed, apart from sixteen “housewives” (nine others were students mostly staying in caste hostels). Fifty-two of the 110 respondents were employed with the government - either retired or current - largely at the middle levels of the bureaucracy. Thirty were self-employed in business and professions and 28 others were in formal sector employment either as bank and insurance officials, software executives, accountants, etc. What further embellishes this figure are the data on employment that takes into account the entire household. Thirty-four of them had their fathers working (or having worked) in the formal and governmental sectors. Likewise, fifty-one households had their spouses in such jobs. What is more, seventy-two of them had siblings similarly employed. As is evident, many of these Brahmin households accordingly had two or more individuals holding such jobs. This entire sector - primarily the public sector industries and organisations like nationalised banks apart from the government bureaucracy, educational institutions etc., but also private sector which
promised a secure livelihood - has meant a secure middle class existence over
generations.

In more recent times, however, many Brahmin associations have been exhorting
their youth to look beyond the government. Even as many of these associations voice
their opposition to governmental (both central and state) efforts to extend reservations,
they have simultaneously insisted that the Brahmin youth should become 'self-
dependent'. Increasingly, the realisation seems to have dawned that, as a community,
Brahmins are not in a position to determine (or even influence) the state and its policies in
any significant manner. Indeed, the federating organisation, Akhila Karnataka Brahmana
Maha Sabha (AKBMS), in most of its state-level conventions exhorts the youth to
become self-employed and not wait eternally for a government job. It has even ventured
into co-operative banks, so as make available credit for starting small business enterprises
on their own, and even sought the guidance (through periodic workshops) of successful
Brahmin industrialists for the purpose.

These efforts at mobilising Brahmins for self-employment and non-governmental
jobs have not brought about a perceptible change in the occupational patterns displayed
Most of the respondents who are in their middle age now, that is those who would have
begun their careers during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, hold jobs within the
governmental machinery. It is perhaps only during the decade of the nineties that the plea
to look beyond the state has been heeded in any significant degree. The shift is obviously
neither complete nor unequivocal, nor is it consistent across different occupations and
professions. Besides, at the lower echelons of the government bureaucracy, less and less
Brahmins are found today - doubtless, an effect of the reservations policy as indeed a
consequence of the self-withdrawal of the community from such positions.

These trends notwithstanding, it is necessary to reiterate that Brahmins have been
the most extensive recipients of the welfarist measures in the post-independence period -
from subsidised education, health etc. to securing 'modern' jobs. 'Modern' employment
primarily meant a much coveted job with the government, including the burgeoning
public sector industries and nationalised banks, all of which created unprecedented and
secure employment opportunities for the Brahmin youth. A job within any of these

The space of Brahmin associations is explored more fully in Ch. 5.

Many of the highly successful nationalised banks originating from Karnataka were originally Brahmin
caste banks, like the Canara Bank. They were thus 'naturally' predisposed towards recruiting caste
sectors meant a secure middle class existence in a city that offered, at subsidised rates, residential sites, house loans, good schools, hospitals etc. Most of the Brahmin youth who have found employment in the 'new market economy' of the 1990s were all the beneficiaries of the 'capital' (social, symbolic and economic) that their parents had accumulated under the 'mixed economy' of the Nehru-Indira Gandhi era. Therefore, there are enough indications that many of them are ready for the next phase of transition - which will see a retrenchment of the welfare state from many fundamental spheres like education, health and employment and a compounding of private initiatives in these spheres.

There are absolutely no statistics available on the numbers of Brahmins in the spaces that were made possible by the 1990s policies of liberalisation of the economy and state. But all the anecdotal evidence point toward the already entrenched presence of Brahmins in such spaces. The Brahmins are becoming trans-national as never before, with their jobs as computer professionals, management experts etc. taking them beyond the boundaries of the Indian state. For many Brahmin families this has meant a virtual revolution in their financial and social status. In fact, many of the respondents interviewed had a kin or two already riding the wave of the new economy, with a consequent shift in family incomes and lifestyle. Lending voice to such a dramatic transformation of life patterns is the following statement of retired father:

My son brought home a salary after his first month of work as a software engineer which was at least twice the salary that I received in the final month of my working life. And mind you, I have worked for nearly 30 years for the LIC [Life Insurance Corporation] and retired as a middle-level manager. I had to work relentlessly all my life to buy a site (that too at the subsidised rates from the government), and to build this house. But my son went for some project-work from his company to the United States for just three years and came back to buy a site which is worth 55 lakhs in an upper class locality. I bought a car only with his help!

For my generation the model of a successful life has been one in which one had built a house in a city, if possible had a car, seen through the education and employment of the sons and marriages of the daughters - this would be then the dream come true. But within the space of say ten years, things have changed so dramatically that one cannot imagine. Many of my generation, including myself, have gone to the U.S., and for many of us the

members. However, even after nationalisation (in the late 1960s) and the introduction of competitive examinations, it was primarily Brahmins who entered these jobs. In fact, in large organisations like the Life Insurance Corporation of India, it was the conflict concerning which Brahmins are taking the lion's share of the jobs and postings that dominated the debate. There was, till the late 1980s, an acute dissatisfaction among the Kannada Brahmins that the Tamil Brahmins were recruiting only their counterparts into the organization (information from a respondent, Mr. Prakash, who is a former employee with the LIC).
US has become a fairly regular place. If anybody had told me, even ten years ago, that all this would happen I would have treated it as a joke!\textsuperscript{38}

The above statement graphically represents the phenomenal changes that are underway in the economy of many of the Brahmin families. Indeed, the newer markers of status within the urban Brahmin families have invariably to do with the ability of each to realise the 'great American dream'. The benchmark for one's status and, through that, one's family status, particularly since the 'software boom' of the mid 1990s, is one's ability to become a 'transnational'. There are of course many families which have not been able to realise the dream, and the embarrassment and feelings of inferiority find expression all too often in everyday conversations. The sudden influx of the new forms of 'capital' - which ranges from one's ability to casually talk about the American tourist spots to the consumption patterns of emigre Brahmins - seems to entail that the hitherto 'equal' neighbour (or friend or relative) is pushed a notch or two down the status hierarchy. The changes even hierarchise individual efforts within the household:

My two elder sons are employed in the United States - one works for Infosys and the other General Electric. But my youngest son is a journalist here in Bangalore. He too has a research degree in sociology. Nonetheless, when I am talking about my family with friends or relatives, they all exclaim - "what -journalism, is it?" It is a way of saying, "Oh, a calamity has struck!" I somehow feel the pressure to explain this fact to them.

Clearly, the shifts exacerbate class differentiation between and among the Brahmins, with some riding the transition while others are left behind with neither the state nor the community to fall back on. While this dimension would require a different axis of appraisal than the one we are instituting here, it seems imperative nevertheless to take cognizance of the changes. Especially, such spatial and cognitive re-drawings of the community and its self have an important bearing on the contemporary Brahmin discourse.

IV
Towards secularising and individuating identities

The trajectory that the Brahmins have traversed over the last century has meant important transformations at individual, familial, kinship and caste/community levels. Caste practices regarding commensal relations, marital norms and everyday rituals come

\textsuperscript{38} Interview with Mr. Prakash, 22/07/2000. Cf. our fn.34 above for personal details about this respondent. The quote that follows in our text is also from the same respondent.
to be marked out in distinct and different ways, even as tendencies towards the indviduation and corporatisation of Brahmin identities gather apace. Auto/biographies detailing the life of Brahmins in the initial decades of the twentieth century contain important nuggets about the changing ways of life, the relative decline in the legitimacy and influence of ritual norms and the acceptance of the changes demanded by the quest to urbanise and modernise. In fact, by the early decades of the 20th century the restrictions on commensality among the different Brahmin castes seem to have receded in their authority. For instance, Sitaramaiah, while recollecting his brief stay in Bombay in 1922, sees the need to mention that he being a Smartha had to share the room with three Mysore Srivaishnavites, and points out:

But I didn't find any difference. This fact did not present itself as any obstacle or hindrance to me as a human being. The kindness with which they looked after me remains a highly cherished memory with me (1997: 3).

His memoir describes the sharing among them of the task of cooking and eating together, without as much as a mention about commensal restrictions. Even during his stay in Mysore pursuing graduate and post-graduate education, he never sees the need to separate himself from members of other Brahmin castes. Interestingly, yet, he always marks the latter out in terms of the denomination to which they belong. The imagination of belonging to the larger category of the Brahmin community seems to have always obtained, and has contributed much towards facilitating and consolidating their urbanness and modern state of being.

What is more, commensal restrictions (and the sanctions associated with them) vis-a-vis non-Brahminical castes have also more or less disappeared today - definitely in the urban areas. Anybody who believes in the validity and legitimacy of such restrictions today will be laughed at for being "too narrow-minded" or "communal",

Restrictions concerning commensality and touchability-untouchability do not appear to have been singular across regions or communities or even families. For instance, S. L. Bhairappa, in some of his novels focusing on the Brahmin families of the plains region in the princely Mysore region, draws a picture of a village community that was fairly 'open' on such matters. See, for instance, his novel Grihabhanga (1970). Focusing on the same period but located in the Malnad region, U. R. Ananthamurthy's novels (Samskara (1966), for one) represent Brahmins in the more familiar mould - as observing strict commensal and pollution norms. Even as one is aware of the so-called politics of representation, these enunciations do indicate towards differential investment in the validity of these practices across different regions. Nevertheless, even to this day, commensal restrictions are rather strictly enforced in the interactions between agrarian Brahmin and non-Brahmin families in the coastal districts of Udupi and Mangalore. However, in these locations eating with fellow-Brahmins from denominations other than one's own is a legitimate practice and does not raise any eye brows.
although eating at gatherings where meat is also being served did make many of our respondents "uncomfortable". Indeed, seventy-one of them explicitly stated that they will not eat where meat is served; and only nine households (of the 100 administered the questionnaire) maintained that they had broken the vegetarian food habits.

Even the conduct of life cycle events - marriage being the most important instance - has undergone a process of secularisation. Marriages are held in *Kalyanamantapas* (literally, wedding halls), which are hired for a duration of two days. The rituals are truncated to a matter of few hours, from what used to last over five days. Food is served in a common hall wherein invitees - irrespective of the caste they belong to - sit together and eat. Some, in particular elders, still feel a sense of discomfort with the "uncultured" ways of eating of the non-Brahmin invitees; while a few refuse to eat in marriage halls. A popular way of tiding through such situations is by ensuring a rather subtle homogeneity in the invitees called to partake of the wedding lunch - where food is served in the 'traditional' manner by Brahmins cooks to guests sitting at tables - whereas a much more heterogeneous profile of guests is retained for the evening's 'reception' with food being served in the form of a buffet. While caste and kin-people are generally present for both the wedding ceremony/lunch and the evening's reception, 'colleagues' and 'friends' (whose caste remains unstated but not indeterminable) are invited for the reception. It must be acknowledged, however, that these subtleties are neither strict nor consistent.

Many of the 'traditional' distinctions continue to obtain yet in families, albeit in a muted form, even if they do not designate a way of life and are never overtly stated. For instance, an elderly respondent (84 years), who made a living running a small canteen, described how a non-Brahmin would be served lunch or dinner at his house:

> The guest will be served food along with the other family members in the same hall. However he will not be served on a steel plate to eat on, but on a plantain leaf. We don't make it look as though we are making a difference, for the same food will be served to all. It serves two purposes - one, after food the leaf will be thrown so that we don't have to wash it; two, we always serve food to the guests on plantain leaves, whether he is a Brahmin or otherwise. But anyway things are changing and quickly at that. Once my grand children take over the reins of the family these 'distinctions' wouldn't exist, not only because they don't care but also because they don't know the modalities.

40 It is unclear from where the word 'reception' emanates, but connotes a largely secularised space without the intervention of priests and where the bride and the groom sport 'western' wear.

41 Interview with Mr. Venkatesh, 14/04/2000.
Another respondent, a professional cook, rued the fact that he is being forced to make many "adjustments" vis-a-vis his Brahminness because of the peculiar circumstances. In his words:

I had to move into this place because the house I was staying in, in the heart of the city, became prohibitively expensive and I couldn't afford it. This is on the outskirts and I have to travel a lot more to reach my clients' places but can't help it. The owner of the house I am staying in is not a Brahmin. They are nice people but have no regard for mad/- mai/ige [clean-unclean]. They are very dirty also. They eat 'non-veg' on Sundays and the stench is excruciating. But I am so helpless I cannot do anything.\(^{42}\)

Note, it is not that all 'distinctions' are no longer marked vis-a-vis the 'traditional' notions of commensality. For instance, a young, college-going respondent described how her non-Brahmin friends still show a great deal of "deference" and "respectful fear" towards her and her family whenever they visit her:

When I get to meet new people in the college, I never ever ask their castes. It is never a determinant in my interaction with my friends. But they themselves say, "One look at your face, and anyone can know you are a Brahmin". They also say, "We are afraid to come into your house. They have too much of madi. They give us food only on plantain leaves and not in plates". I won't do it, but my parents follow it as a matter of custom. Customs are the foundation given by the elders and all castes have them.\(^{43}\)

Thus all statements describing change need to be qualified - not only because particular members within households continue to accord legitimacy to customary practices, but also because the household as a whole seems to retain them by hindsight.

Interview with Mr. Bheema Rao, 01/03/2001. Forty eight years old, Mr. Bheema Rao is a Madhva Brahmin. With very little resources to depend on and having studied only till the eighth standard (first year of high school), he struggles to make a decent living in Bangalore. He is part of two 'cook groups'. These groups are hired by families (both Brahmin and non-Brahmin) on occasions of marriages, initiation ceremonies, etc. but also increasingly for 'secular' occasions like birthday parties (which are held in increasing numbers in a 'western' manner complete with candles, cake, balloons and the "happy Birthday to you" song) to prepare food in a large scale. Given that these are uncertain and irregular work opportunities (for instance, marriages are seasonal), many of these groups remain on the brink. It is not the case with all such groups because a lot depends on the 'reputation' of the group, and thus some such groups do extremely well. This is true of another respondent, Mr. Mohan (a Smartha Brahmin, aged 35 years). After finishing his B. Com. degree, he began a small such catering enterprise and within years has seen remarkable career growth (Interview on 05/03/2000). All the same, Mr. Bheema Rao remains financially stable (particularly in that he succeeds in sending his son to a relatively good school) because of a Madhva matha. Every matha has to prepare food for a great number of people everyday (it varies from thousands, like in the Udupi temple run by one of the eight Madhva mathas of Udupi, to some scores). Mr. Bheema Rao, whenever he has no other contract, works in the matha kitchen. He has great hopes for his only son, who is in his middle school and supposedly doing very well in studies.

Interview with Ms. Sarita, 25/01/2000. She, a 21 year old Smartha Brahmin, has just finished her degree in management studies from a college in Bangalore. She is keen on pursuing a master's degree in management. Her father is a senior steno with the government.
More often than not these practices are seen to be 'functional' for earlier times, but the fact of their survival into the present is seen to bestow them a validity of sorts. Moreover, the sacred persona of the Brahmin has today refurbished itself. A crucial aspect of this persona is the rather individuated confidence that it offers to a young Brahmin of today. Indeed, as another young woman respondent remarked:

I don't believe in these notions of madi-mailige [pure-polluted; clean-unclean], enjaalu - musure [norms regarding what food can be kept with what and what food requires washing hands after touching] etc. They might have been important at one point of time. But definitely they don't serve any purpose now.

But one thing is clear. Whether I believe in these things or not, whether I follow any rituals or not (in fact, I believe only in meditation rather than in the performance of any of the rituals), I am very certain that I am given the status of being pure. I walk into any non-Brahmin family's kitchen or even their pooja room being very certain that they would not mind it. But those very friends when they come to my home are very hesitant and defensively enquire whether it is fine for them to come in, to do this or that etc. Not that I mind it any way.44

Indeed, the 'sacredness' that gets discarded by a Brahmin family on primarily the grounds of rationality - "It just does not make sense" - often comes back in those very terms, albeit shorn of all the ritualism that had marked it earlier. As a young man (29 years) stated:

I believe in the immense capabilities of Sandhyavandane [the daily ritual that is prescribed for a Brahmin male post-initiation ceremony, whose significance has begun to centralise around a hymn that is uttered while performing the ritual, the Gayathri Mantra]. In fact the Gayathri Mantra, the cornerstone of our Brahminness, is the single most powerful Mantra in the world. When I was initiated some years ago, I obviously had no idea about the significance of the Gayathri. But the greater tragedy was that none around me (including the priest who conducted the ceremony on me) had a clue about it. It was done because it had to be done. So for some years, it was just drudgery for me. My mother used to insist that I do it and I used to comply, albeit reluctantly. In fact, my father himself has quit doing Sandhyavandane for quite sometime now!

But some three years back, I came across a pamphlet published by, I think, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which in clear and simple terms told me the significance and powers of the Mantra. It is the only Mantra (religious chant) that can represent the real pursuit of the Brahmin. Gayathri is not about pleading the God for the worldly riches - it doesn't beg the God for money, power, status or anything like that. Instead it is a plea to the almighty to kindle that 'Dhee Shakti' [the

Interview with Ms. Pooja, 17/07/2000. She, a 21 year old Smartha Brahmin, is pursuing her undergraduate course in Bangalore. Her family migrated to Bangalore from a village near Shimoga recently. Pursuing a women studies course and keen to articulate those ideas in evaluating her caste self as indeed of being a woman, she was vehement in stating how Brahmin women are more liberated than the other caste women. This, she felt was primarily due to the high educational levels among the Brahmin men but also due to the Samskara that is ingrained in them from childhood to treat women with respect, for she represents the greatest force of shakti, the feminine force of divinity which, according to Brahminical mythology, surpasses the power that the male gods possess.
strength of mind and character] that is there in everybody, which, once ignited, will take that man unhindered in the path of self-realisation - towards becoming one with the Brahma. Isn't this the real pursuit of a Brahmin? They have never gone after material needs - though they remained poor, they reaped the riches of indefinitely more basic needs of humanness. Now, anybody, irrespective of caste, class, religion can pursue this - but only Brahmins are inclined towards this because of their samskara (character/conduct).

I don't need to perform all the other ritualistic acts that go with the recitation of the Gayathri Mantra. Indeed I have given up on them for sometime now. I recite the Mantra whenever I feel depressed, powerless, challenged etc. whether I am in my office or on the road or anywhere. It then gives me immense strength.

Now I am in the organising committee of a forum that will popularise the significance of the Mantra conducting a yajna (ritual ceremony) for world peace and harmony.45

As far as the striking of matrimonial alliances is concerned, the choice structures were firmly circumscribed within particular Brahmin castes till as recent as the 1960s and 1970s. One comes across - in the memoirs, biographies etc. - absolutely no instances of marriages across castes. This is corroborated in the respondent narratives of the self too. But alliances between and across Brahmin castes have become increasingly legitimate over the last thirty years or so. Almost all our respondents above the age of sixty years have married within their own Brahmin caste. However, from the next generation - including their younger brothers and sisters - marriages across not merely castes within the same traditions (among the different castes of Smarthas, for instance) but between castes belonging to different traditions (that is, a Madhva marrying a Smartha) have been accepted as legitimate. They are even seen as being necessary, particularly in abetting the widely felt need for Brahmins to "unite". Such marital alliances happen fairly regularly and are fixed by the families themselves - that is, in the so-called 'arranged marriages'. This has evidently been a crucial ingredient in the efforts towards imagining a 'Brahmin' community that seeks to work as a corporate identity.

One needs to be wary however about reaching any determinate conclusions concerning the irrelevance of particularised Brahmin identity markers. This is especially so because even to this day when a family begins to look for a marital alliance, the first and unmistakable preference is for partners from within the tradition to which one belongs - indeed within the particular caste to which one is attached. A Hoysala

45 Interview with Mr. Sandeep, 07/02/2000. He is a Smartha Brahmin. After his B.Sc., he is working for a private concern. One who strongly believes that the reservation policy has denied him his rightful opportunities, he is nonetheless confident that his merit and hard work will bring him a better future.
Karnataka family thus ideally will want a match from within the Hoysala Karnataka caste itself. If that search fails, then it extends to any Smarthas, and only then to other Brahmin denominations, with the proviso that these others are non-Saraswat. Marriage alliances with Saraswats are a rarity - an avoidance that is mutual. Thus, among the 100 households surveyed, fifty-six (including one divorcee) have married within 'traditions' - that is, Madhvas have married Madhvas, and Smarthas have married Smarthas etc. In fact, most of these marriages have also been within the boundaries of particular castes to which they belong - Shivalli Smarthas have married Shivalli Smarthas and Hoysala Karnatakas have married other Hoysala Karnatakas. Twenty households have spouses whose parental family was of a different ‘tradition’. While there was just one respondent who had married a non-Hindu (a young woman journalist, 32 years old, who has married a Syrian Catholic Christian, the latter having been her classmate during her post-graduation at Mangalore University), there was no other instance of an inter-religious union.

Marriage patterns, as deduced from our questionnaire schedule, also reflect a similar trend. The following is a description of the marital patterns that obtain within each generation. One's generation is grossly defined as comprising of siblings and cousins. Out of the 26 respondents below 30 years of age who filled in our questionnaire, twenty reported marriages across Brahmin castes and traditions in their own generation. But there were only three instances of marriages outside the Brahmin community in this group (all of which involved some cousin or such once-removed relative rather than one's own sibling). Of the families of 41 respondents in the age range of 31-50 years, there were 21 instances of marriages (in their own generation) across Brahmin castes/traditions and just one instance of a marriage outside the Brahmin community. Alternatively, the 33 who were aged above 50 years did not report of marriages either across Brahmin castes or outside the Brahmin community in unions that involved individuals of their own generation.

Marital histories across generations but pertaining to each respondent family too suggest the same trend - of opening out to alliances across Brahmin castes (even as the first choice continues resiliently to be for alliances from within) whereas marriages involving non-Brahmin individuals' remains proscribed. Strikingly among the
respondents there was, as far as their immediate family is concerned, just three instances of marriages outside the Brahmin fold (two in which the daughter of the household had married a Shudra boy, and the other was an instance of the son marrying a Shudra woman) apart from the above cited instance of a respondent herself being married to a Christian.

Marriage alliances beyond the boundaries of the Brahmin community are clearly perceived with disapproval, and are often a source of embarrassment. 'Endogamy' (albeit of an enlarged kind to include most Brahmin castes) still commands legitimacy, even as it draws its justificatory grounds from different sources. A rule of 'community endogamy' seems to be gathering shape. The justifications offered in favour of 'intra-community' marriages have also become largely secularised. Not many are predisposed to foreground the terms that could have carried legitimacy earlier (such as those of intra-denominational superiority and purity and the ordained need to not commit 'varna sankara' - the mixing of the mutually repulsive elements comprising the varnas through marriage). In its place are offered protestations about 'cultural compatibility' and family harmony. Thus a respondent opined:

Don't think that the principle of endogamy derived its legitimacy from any notions of caste purity. Those are all later inventions. It was brought into place primarily to ensure that the marital relationship be harmonious. Imagine if a Brahmin girl married a holeya[a Dalit caste] boy and goes to live with his family. Right from eating habits to cleanliness - everything will be so different for her that immediately there are conflicts. See how many inter-caste marriages have been successful. Most of them end up as failures.

Earlier, even marriages across Brahmin communities themselves posed a great deal of problems. But now the Brahmin community is sinking its internal differences. So marriages across Brahmin communities are an accepted practice today and they do not lead to a conflictual environment. So, maybe as time passes inter-caste marriages could also become acceptable and compatible. But as far as present circumstances are concerned, it is still an impossibility.4

4 That is involving either themselves or their children or their siblings.

4 Interview with Mr. Subramanya, 30/01/2000. The respondent is a - inactive - member of the AKBMS. He came to Bangalore in the early 1970s seeking to further his career in music and has been a Bangalorian ever since. Even as he actively repudiated the significance of caste - in his personal life, as indeed in the affairs of the public - he was very keen on knowing the researcher's caste background - not only whether he is a Brahmin but also to which caste among Brahmins he belonged. He showed a rather deliberate knowledge about the particular castes of the Brahmins he spoke of, and was keen to make it a point to mention it each time. Of course, he insisted that he gathers such information for curiosity. Himself a Smartha Brahmin, he was a veritable fund of stories, anecdotes, origin stories etc. concerning the different Brahmin castes.
This is a perception shared by a large number of the respondents, in the process reproducing the legitimacy of intra-community marital alliances and ensuring the retention of the various forms of capital within the community.

As already noted, most of the marriages continue to be 'arranged' by the respective families, even as the choice-structure available to the participating individuals and families have enlarged appreciably. However even the so-called ‘love marriages’ do not seem to violate the enlarged norms of endogamy. To be sure, such situations involve greater play of individual choices and preferences and heighten the chances for inter-caste unions, but invariably, given the 'caste' basis of social interactions generally, the partners in love are from one's own caste or community. Thus even as there were as many as ten Move marriages' in the respondent population interviewed, only one of them had married a Syrian Catholic Christian.\(^{48}\) Besides, as mentioned before, within the immediate families of the respondents surveyed, there were only three instances of the respondents' children marrying non-Brahmins. Thus higher levels of sustained interaction with 'outsiders' in one's public life need not ensure greater incidence of inter-caste marriages.

Nonetheless, as long as 'community endogamy' is ensured, the family indeed enables and ensures a great deal of independence in choosing the partner. Considerations of the individual's education and employment are as important as the status of the family to which s/he belongs. Women, especially those with higher education and career-oriented, demand that their husbands be receptive to their aspirations and that they share the burden of household chores. Such expectations are accepted as legitimate too, even as the translation of such recognition into actual practices is not always realised. Women are still expected to be the 'natural' caregivers, and accordingly many of our women respondents have had to give up promising careers to look after the family.

Considerations having to do with the 'safe' and 'secular' occupational attribute of the individuals are overwhelmingly important in match-making. A respondent noted with adequate amazement:

\(^{48}\) Interestingly enough, the respondent who had married a Syrian Catholic man made this observation: "My mother-in-law always tells me and my parents that Syrian Christians were all Brahmins before they converted to Christianity." Interview with Ms. Anuradha, 03/08/2000. The 32 year old Anuradha is a Namboodiri Brahmin. She is a journalist working with a newspaper in Bangalore married to another journalist who, as mentioned above, is a Syrian Catholic Christian. A recent migrant to Bangalore, she was a resident of a village near Mangalore.
Things have changed in the last ten-fifteen years. I will give you two instances. There is a Brahmin family in our neighbourhood. The father is a retired army Colonel. The son is a serving Major - a good rank, if you do not know. The family has been looking out for a girl for the last five years. They are well-to-do; and the son has a good job by any means. But everybody refrains on the ground that he works in the army. In any other community, people would have run after that boy. The other is that of young men who run hotels. Girls these days are so averse to the idea that a relative of mine is finding it almost impossible to get a match for his son, who runs a hotel which has good business. What’s more, the boy has even a B. Com. degree to boot.

Both these cases concern boys. You can no longer take it for granted that boys can be easily

Even in terms of regulating the everyday lives of Brahmin men, the authority and legitimacy of caste norms were already weakened in the early decades of the twentieth century. The first ‘social’ novel written in Kannada, *Indira Bai* (1899) by Gulvadi Venkata Rao, a Saraswat, is woven around the theme of reform. Among the issues that are narrated at length, one is the injunction against Brahmins taking voyages across the seas in pursuit of education. However, it was hardly a contentious matter by the initial decades of the last century. Many of the memoirs recounting life in these times do not think it important to state such stints across the seas as anything extraordinary. Many among these writers themselves had studied abroad - Sriranga, a playwright from Dharwad, and Kailasam, another celebrated playwright from Mysore, for instance - apart from the many other individuals they interacted with who have had similar sojourns.

Such loosening of the authority of caste norms is also reflected in many of these individuals completely renouncing the everyday ritual practices that they were supposed to perform as Brahmin men, such as the ‘sandhyavandane’, wearing the appropriate caste markers on their body and sporting a tuft, and so on. Caste defined norms seem to have largely become by this time a matter of individual preferences and propensities. Thus, personages like D. V. Gundappa (a key intellectual litterateur wielding enormous clout among the powers-that-be in the Mysore State) and V. Sitaramaiah steadfastly stick to performing *sandhyavandane*, for instance, whereas others like Sriranga and Kailasam had willfully given up these practices. Sriranga has even remarked on the individuated character of such practices:

49 Interview with Mr. Kumaraswamy, a 62 year old Smartha Brahmin (14/04/2000). He retired as an Accounts Officer with a multinational company in Bangalore. He has been an active participant in the caste associations for the last two decades.
I was born in the family of the 'Aadyas' [The First Ones]. My tradition-bound Madhva family had received the honorific title of ‘Aadya’ from the matha pontiff for its erudition. [But] when I was a small boy, I used to accompany the [non-Brahmin] farmers to the lands. Many times I just stayed behind with them, eating their food. I still remember my grand father, in a friendly manner, chiding me: "You are really a Shudra; you are born in our family by accident". During my school and college days though, I remained loyal to my brahminical tradition. The photograph on my passport, taken on the occasion of my trip to England, prominently features the akshate [a Madhva caste marker] that had covered my forehead. Even while playing cricket and tennis I had refused to wear trousers. I reached England - my tuft vanished, I had tea for the first time. Sick of eating cooked rice and potatoes, within two days of reaching England I ate meat; shaved of my moustache; paid money to learn dance; then followed cigarettes, and finally consuming alcohol beverages! Leave that - now also I neither have a tuft nor a sacred thread, but I haven't smelt liquor for the last 25 years! Even as my house has no scent of any rituals etc., it is no less to the pure atmosphere one begets in a traditional Madhva household. As my grand father had said, I am a Shudra in the exterior, but from the inside I am a loyal pure Brahmin! (1994: 5)

Elsewhere he recounts another instance:

Once (around 1944) I had gone visiting Belur and Halebid with two friends. From Belur we had cycled to Halebid. While returning, feeling thirsty and tired we asked for drinking water at a place. They simply stared at us... Finally one of them said, "We are Adi Karnatakas [a Dalit caste], sir". Then I immediately said, "It is OK then - we are also Adi Dravidas". Finally we were given buttermilk (ibid: 14)

Of course, one cannot presume that Sriranga represented general trends that obtained among the Brahmins as a whole. Even during these decades, Brahmin mathas were holding public debates on different issues of 'reform', and there still obtained a powerful current in favour of the 'orthodoxy'. What is more, in spite of the fact that traditional practices have lost their ability to be binding on individuals, a surprisingly significant number (that is, 33) out of the 79 male respondents (more elders than the youth) interviewed for the study admitted to observing practices like the sandhyavandane, albeit in a more truncated form.

While the contestation between the 'progressive' Brahmin and the 'orthodox' Brahmin is a question that we shall take up in due course (especially in Ch. 6) what is to be noted here is that the processes of individuation and secularisation impinging on the community are also enacted on a site juxtaposing the 'sacred' against the 'secular' of the modern Brahmin. Consistent with this logic, the sacredness that is always already attached to the Brahmin persona has undergone a transformation. Brahmin men who take to priestly occupations are very few and far between. It is never the primary choice across class positions and spatial locations; and only those who are considered 'failures'
take to performing the priestly task. This is a phenomenon that one encounters even from the early parts of the last century. None of the memoirs from that period even as much mention it as a probable occupational choice existing before kinsmen.

The life cycle rituals are more generally practiced, even as their schedules have seen great modifications. *Upanayana* (initiation ceremony) is still performed for Brahmin males, often at a greatly advanced age and many a time conducted just before the marriage ceremony (since it is a prerequisite for the marriage ritual to go on). As already noted, marriages are performed in a 'traditional' manner, though it has been truncated to a day's affair in tune with the demands of urban life, as against the five day weddings of the earlier times. *Shraddha* (death rituals) is performed too, but many go to temples or *mathas* for the performance. Many even have given up the entire ritualistic nature of such occasions, preferring instead to provide for a day's lunch or dinner in their caste association hostel.

Very few Brahmin men wear their caste markers outside their homes. Few even discard their sacred thread during daily life, and wear it only on given ritual occasions. Even as it has been made more difficult for the public confirmation of their caste status, a respondent pointed towards some other markers of recognising a Brahmin:

As soon as one sees me, it is affirmed that I have *Brahmana Kale* written all over my face! *Kale* refers to what is seen as being represented in the face of an individual. Thus when one says, "You have Brahmin *kale*", it means that one can make you out to be a Brahmin without getting any verbal feelers to that effect from you. It is rather intricately coded, and even the ones who make such judgments, which often are fairly accurate, feel difficult to explain the ingredients of the *to/e*. I don't know what makes them say that. But even I have thought likewise many a time. As soon as I see a face, I feel that person has *samskara*, has culture and thus he must be a Brahmin.\(^{50}\)

The invocations of the self as 'Brahmin' and as belonging to a particular Brahminical denomination go together, and are often determined by the contexts in which the identifications are made. This was witnessed even in Ramarao's memoirs mentioned above: against a context that was exclusively peopled in by Brahmins, being a fellow-Madhva played itself out in the case of the corrupt official (Sect. II, p. 98 above). Further, as we shall seek to demonstrate in the course of the next chapter, even after the non-Brahmin constitution of the image of a corporatised Brahmin, the significance of such caste identities do not cease to matter. This is also largely true of our respondents.

\(^{50}\) Interview with Ms. Pooja, 17/07/2000. Refer to fn. 44 above for some details about this respondent.
Marriages continue to authenticate and reproduce the validity of caste identities, even as enunciations such as the above recuperate the self in terms of its Brahminness. The corporate imagination of the self as ‘Brahmin’ does not necessarily obliterate the internal distinctions, for on various occasions the identities of being Smartha as against being Madhva or even a Badaganadu Smartha as against a Shivalli Smartha surface. The 'internal other' is thus still an important Other. A Shivalli Smartha respondent, even as he waxed passionate about the imminent need for all the Brahmins to come together in order to face up to the contemporary state of hostility they encounter, was rather forthright in stating the following:

These Madhvas continue to think hierarchically. While a Brahmin on the street is willing to believe that humanity is one and the hierarchies are to be consigned to the dustbin, Madhvas still stick to their notions of superiority. In fact when a relative [from his own caste] narrated some Madhva friend's abuse of the Smarthas, I told him to go right back and ask that Madhva as to who his ancestors were. Anybody should tell him that each and every Madhva is a convert from Advaita. So any abuse of the Smarthas is like abusing his own forefathers!

Theirs has been a philosophy of proselytisation. It is common knowledge how they have taken over Udupi which was a Smartha place. The Shiva temples of Udupi precede the establishment of the Madhva Ashta Mathas.⁵¹

Evidently negotiating with one's selfhood as Brahmin is richly variegated and differentiated, perhaps largely reflecting on the individual experiences, influences etc. Such entrenched processes of individuation, apart from allowing for the emergence of different Brahmin selves, has also brought differentiation in terms of economic and social standing of the Brahmin families. Class is an important factor in determining the modes of interaction possible among Brahmins themselves. Many poor Brahmin families increasingly find it difficult to translate their Brahminness into extant forms of capital. On the other hand, the trope of the ‘poor Brahmin' often accords enough ideational ammunition to the self-imagination of the Brahmins today, including that of their caste/community associations. We shall be returning to this theme in Ch. 5.

V

Prefiguring the Brahmin identity

The question needs to be posed: how does one make sense of all these developments that have been schematically represented in the foregoing sections? Indeed, do these transformations (and the relatively unique position in which they place

⁵¹ Interview with Mr. Kumaraswamy, 14/04/2000. Refer to fn. 49 above for a summary profile.
the Brahmin) prefigure and structure some of the ways in which the Brahmin identity enacts itself out? We shall attempt a brief formulation in the pages that follow.

As we have indicated in the course of this chapter, the inadequacy of the available data on the Brahmins - especially of the order that would yield a sharp macro perspective - stops us from making any determinate statements on their contemporary state of existence. Compounding this difficulty is the rather queer status of the efforts that are encoded in the various reports of the Backward Classes Committee/Commissions. Even as these documents point towards the changing and enduring profiles of caste groups, they tend to presume a corporatised interest as animating the logic of groups. Invariably, these documents prefigure the Brahmin as the 'Other', an entity that is internally undifferentiated, corporatised and working as a collective interest. While such a prefiguration is necessitated by the demands of politics and administrative compulsions, it would be a serious delimitation for more extant studies of the dynamics of caste action. The corporatised profiles attaching to caste groups and communities is often a concomitant of the processes (internal and external) to which they are subjected. Indeed, the many auto/biographies and the respondents' own recounting of their situations are a testimony to the contradictory nature of the modern state of caste - one which internally differentiates and individuates its members even as it seeks to consolidate itself into a substantialised entity. This point needs to be borne in mind in our attempts to capture the modern essence of caste, as indeed must be factored into our macro picture of caste communities and their associated identities.

Of course, Brahmins as a group were the first and foremost to enter the spaces of the modern before any other community. Obviously, for the Brahmins themselves, such an entry was made possible not by their structural location - the sheer fact of being (and recognisable as) 'Brahmin' - but because of other apparently non-caste factors like their keenness to invest in education, to readily migrate to the cities, take up modern occupations, and so on. This fact enabled a certain sense of naturalisation of the Brahmin in such spaces. Thus by the early decades of the last century itself, as we saw, self-retrievals that apparently had nothing to do with one's own casteness had begun to dominate the imagination of the Brahmin. This was most articulately expressed in the case of the Mysore Dewan Vishveshvaraiah. He rather single-mindedly refused to allow for any networks of nepotism to develop in the bureaucracy. He is said to have not taken a single of his kinsman into any government job during the entire tenure. What is more,
he was responsible for abolishing the caste-specific kitchens and dining halls that existed for the members of the Representative Assembly. He was certain that merit alone should determine an individual's chances, and it was on those grounds that he resigned from the Dewanship in 1918 protesting against the formation of the Miller Committee. However, it is easy to see that even such a position was basically an argument for and on behalf of the scrupulous Brahmin. It was as though the modern Brahmin self had to take on a certain impersonal secular garb in order to complete itself.

Thus, in most of these spaces Brahmins were not speaking either as or on behalf of Brahmins. They seem to have taken on secular identities and identifications - of being a graduate, a lawyer, a journalist, a Hindu, a nationalist, a Kannada activist, and so on. The uniqueness of this positioning comes across strikingly in the proceedings of the Mysore Representative Assembly, for instance. While definitionally Brahmins became members only by meeting the 'secular' performative criteria, other groups represented in the assembly had to carry their 'casteness' as their primary justification for being there. Further, it was only the Brahmins who were in a position to fulfill the 'modern' demands that were being placed on the public sphere. As already pointed out, there were Brahmin members in the Assembly as the official representatives of the 'Depressed Classes' (Dalits). Again, when there was a demand that women be made part of this emerging public sphere, it was inevitably the Brahmin women who came to fulfil such a secularised criterion. This unique positioning seems to have also been a factor in facilitating their entry into the upper echelons of politics and the bureaucracy.

The instance of Gopalaswami Iyer is instructive in this regard. He was a member of the Representative Assembly during the 1920s, representing the interests of the 'Depressed Classes' (the Dalits) of Bangalore. A perusal of the proceedings of the assembly clearly presents him as a vocal member. He does indeed make frequent appeals on behalf of the Depressed Classes. He frequently proposes that separate residential schools and hostels in different cities be built for them, that their womenfolk be trained in midwifery (for midwives from other communities refuse to attend on them), and that land and building materials be provided for these classes. But, interestingly enough, on various occasions he is seen arguing fervently for the cause of Brahmins. His participation in the overall Brahmin resentment against "communal representation" is very conspicuous. He is the spokesperson for the Brahmin members of the assembly on this issue. For instance, he resents 'communal' considerations being applied in matters of
recruitment to the civil services. Criticising the policy on grounds of individual merit and competence, he wonders whether the government is under the impression that "a Hospital Assistant can [carry out a surgical operation] better if he belongs to the backward community, than a Brahmin officer doing the same being a MBBS?" He adds, "God will give positions to men, but not brains to all" (cited in Hanumanthappa Vol. III n.d.: 265). He opposes the resolution seeking to increase reservation to the Backward Classes stating "It would practically close the doors of education to Brahmins" (ibid. 267).

More conclusively, it is this entrenched secularised self that successfully dominates over the other contesting Brahmin selves in the modern condition - including not only the 'orthodox' Brahmin self but also the authority structures of the Brahmin monastic order, as well as the equally modern institution of caste associations. While this is a point we shall elaborate upon in the subsequent chapters, it is important to be mindful of the fact that negotiations from within and across Brahmin castes have also been facilitative of a modern identity for Brahmins. Indeed, the secularising function of the Brahmin situation is the structuring grid that animates the dynamics of the contemporary Brahmin identity. The Brahmins who radically flouted many caste prescriptions and proscriptions (say, in terms of commensality and touchability), even questioning the caste authorities such as the mathas particularly in matters of 'social reform', sincerely believed that their interactions with themselves and others were truly taking place in a space beyond caste norms and influence. The sphere of 'caste' was thought to be a concern of the private realm. Not surprisingly, therefore, the expressions of incredulity with which they receive facets of the non-Brahminical othering (a theme we take up in some detail in the next chapter) have their source in such secularised notions of the Brahmin self.

Such a secularised Brahmin identity (or identification) is not without its paradoxes, however. Even as Brahmins began to inhabit spaces that they believed had very little to do with their own specific casteness, the structuring of those very spaces meant that they frequently encountered other Brahmins like themselves. As we have noted throughout, in all the new spaces that they opened out to - be it in the cities, in the colleges, in the bureaucracy, in law, in journalism, in nationalist/linguistic activism and so on - Brahmins tended to be present is disproportionate numbers. Thus, even as their spaces of interaction began take on a more public cast, this 'publicness' seemed to be prefigured by interactions with fellow-Brahmins like themselves. This continues to be
the case, with Brahmins, either as a matter of choice or sheer expectation, tending to have circles of interaction that are so circumscribed. Almost all the respondents indicated that their primary groups - those representing their primary units of interaction - were the family and the peer group, with the latter (be it in the neighbourhood or workplace) hardly taking on non-Brahminical others.

Of course, it is not as though these constrictions of the space of experience are not contested from within. Many Brahmins have had to negotiate with a modern consciousness made available through liberal education and inhabiting secular institutional sites and discourses such as nationalism, the office, college etc. A mixed sense of being beleaguered and ambivalent about its own Brahminness seems to configure the contemporary Brahmin identity. It is towards a description of this state of existence that we devote the chapters that follow.