Chapter Four

**Intersecting Voices, Shifting Identifications: Complicating the Contours of the Non-Brahminical Othering of the Brahmin**

By the beginning decades of the twentieth century, Brahmins had established an overwhelming dominance on the space of the modern world and its institutions. They attempted to negotiate directly with modernity on their own terms, even as they mediated it to the other castes and communities. However, the larger processes of what we called the secularising experience proved to be in excess of the Brahmin's ability to so mediate and contain. Since the experience of secularisation was primarily an experience of modernisation, of becoming modern, it required that those inhabiting the space of the modern become reflexive about themselves, their selfhood and identity. Brahmins, by virtue of their occupying such spaces before anybody else, have had to confront this demand much more than the others. Now, while this situation by itself is similar to how any caste entity is forced to negotiate with the modern condition, Brahmins have had an additional and very unique command to bear. The discourse of the 'modern' prefigures caste as a system of hierarchy and inequality that is the very antithesis of modern ways of ordering social life. As a constitutive part of this imagery, the Brahmin gets to be seen as not merely the carrier of this unequal system but also as the very embodiment of its legitimacy and normative value.

While this rendering of the Brahmin is an accomplishment of the processes of othering initiated by the non-Brahmin articulation (with of course the compulsions of everyday politics also undergirding it), interestingly enough the more secularised among the Brahmins have tended likewise to look at themselves in this ‘othered’ manner. This othering of the Brahmin, as indeed the latter’s own negotiation with its self-identity, can be adequately represented as a contending dynamic of 'community' and 'association' - with the identity of the Brahmin consistently and constitutively oscillating between these two poles of identification. It is towards an unraveling of these shifting poles of identification that we devote ourselves in this and the chapters that follow. The modern world of Brahmins has had its share of intersecting voices and shifting identifications.
More frontally, the non-Brahmin articulation was directed primarily at challenging what it viewed as the Brahmin 'reinventing' his dominance in the modern condition. In the process, the 'Brahmin' they recuperated was a corporatised identity that was always-already hegemonising. Further, as many non-Brahmin communities expressed it, the secularising function of the Brahmin had in no sense rendered his ritual status and identity incapable or insignificant, either in terms of generating symbolic-material value or reconfiguring itself in modern, secular spaces. Therefore many contending communities, like the Lingayaths, continued to challenge the figure of the 'sacred' Brahmin, even as they resolutely sought to work within modern institutional spaces, such as the courts of law, census operations, newspapers, and so on. Besides, partly in response and partly of their own will, Brahmins had also begun in many ways to query themselves, hardly content at taking on their 'Brahminness' unproblematically. It is in the context of such varied contestations and challenges that a modern Brahmin identity began to take shape. What is more, this emergent Brahmin identity has had to stave off challenges from alternative ways of imagining the self from within in order to position itself as the legitimate Brahmin self.

Given the largely descriptive ground that we traverse, the sequencing of this chapter needs to be borne in mind. The triumphant entry of Brahmins into the modern world, which often was rendered as a 'natural' outcome of events and circumstances, came to be successfully interrogated by the 'non-Brahmin' articulation that had gained momentum by the early 1910s. The modern state too - for its own reasons of legitimacy and expediency - patronised the non-Brahmin othering of the Brahmin, by bringing in different forms of legislation to check what was seen as the latter's predominance. This non-Brahminical othering of the Brahmin has had an enduring impact on the ways in which the modern Brahmin identity has come to be constituted. This forms the first section of this chapter.

The non-Brahmin challenge, which brought together many disparate and even mutually contesting caste and religious communities, by no means exhausted the nature of contestations over the status of the Brahmin. The case of the Lingayath challenge to the Brahmin's status of ritual supremacy, even as they participated actively in the secular non-Brahmin articulation, is interesting. The challenge, perforce, had to inhabit a rather contradictory space: of simultaneously inhabiting a secularised non-Brahmin space as well as asserting the right of being 'Veerashaivas', a community that had for long served
as a critical counterpoint to the Brahmin supremacy in matters of ritual status. Even as this ‘contradictory’ status of the Lingayath challenge is taken cognizance of, one needs to also place in perspective the different senses that the Brahmin himself was making of his ritual status in a secularising context. Such instances of ritual reordering and contestations are taken up in the second section primarily in order to demonstrate how the emerging Brahmin identity has had to contend with a complex terrain of mediation and negotiation.

Equally significant are the processes that were underway within the Brahmin community itself. A secularised and corporatised Brahmin - the Brahmin, in a somewhat retrospective sense - was increasingly coming to demand that the internal distinctions and hierarchies existing among Brahmin castes be set aside. Interestingly, this demand is being made even as the Brahmin's own relationship with and investment in the category of his selfhood was set to become definitionally ambiguous. Of course, neither the demand nor the ambiguity heralded the decay and death of the internal hierarchies and differentiations. The contestation over the relative status of the different Brahmin castes, the determined bid on the part of some castes to claim Brahminhood, the contests among the Brahmin castes over share in the modern space - all these form the content of our third section.

I

Categorising the Brahmin: feeding off and into the non-Brahmin articulation

The non-Brahmin articulation of the early decades of the twentieth century emerged, in many ways, as the principal 'other' of the modern Brahmin identity. The articulation, often positing the Brahmin as the very embodiment of the oppressive regime and ethos of caste and as endowed with an uncanny ability to reinvent itself in changing conditions, has proved to be an enduring one. This is demonstrated by the fact that the modern Brahmin himself incorporates many of its elements in constructing his own self. Inasmuch as the non-Brahminical rendering of the Brahmin owes its articulation to the normative ethos of a modernity built around principles of individuality and emancipation, and considering that the Brahmin himself is privy to an inexorable experience of becoming modern, it is easy to see how the latter comes to participate in his own othering.

Here in this section we outline the history of the non-Brahmin articulation, its constructions of the Brahmin, and the modern state's complicity in these exercises. We primarily use the journal Mysore Star to reconstruct the fragments of the non-Brahmin
This journal provided the non-Brahmin leaders and intellectuals a space not only to bring to the attention of the state the need for taking measures to ameliorate the condition of the non-Brahmin communities, but also to conjure into existence a 'Brahmin' with whom a polemical and oppositional engagement could be forged. *Mysore Star* was owned by a Lingayath leader, and accordingly served also to articulate the concerns of this caste order. The journal thus adequately represents the mutual - and often contending - self-identifications that go with the fact of being non-Brahmin and Lingayath. In doing so, it also reflects on the very limits of the non-Brahmin self (as indeed on particular facets of the latter’s own recuperation of the Brahmin self) The Brahmin primarily responds to such categorisation in a complex manner.

The word 'response', note, is being used here advisedly. The 'challenge' and the ‘response’ are not available in any mechanistic sense to either the Brahmin self or the non-Brahmin other. One needs to guard against imposing any notion of pragmatism or of deliberateness on either of these categories. The non-Brahmin recuperation of the Brahmin, to be sure, does not exhaust the Brahmin's own sense of what it is to be a Brahmin or at least to inhabit the space of a Brahmin. Consequently, the Brahmin's 'response' will necessarily be in excess of the non-Brahmin's retrieval of his self, both in its formulation and in its effects. This reminder, impinging on both our conceptual and methodological frameworks recounted in Ch. 2, is necessary in that it lends a sense of dynamism to the perceptual field we are going to encounter. Even as the Brahmin self subjects itself to many of the definitions that the non-Brahmin imposes, it also contests aspects of the othering that the process entails. But both in 'subjecting’ its self to the other's categorisation as well as in resisting it, there is always an 'excess' that needs to be accounted for - primarily, in this instance, the Brahmin's very own processes of secularisation and modernisation. We will also detail such strategies of the modern Brahmin self particularly in the context of the non-Brahmin construction.

Lingayaths, Vokkaligas and Muslims were the main participants in the non-Brahmin alliance that gets to be formed in Karnataka. Lingayaths and Vokkaligas were landed communities and were numerically dominant.¹ But, as we saw in the previous

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¹ Manor (1977b) delineates the problems in assuming the Vokkaligas and Lingayaths as internally homogenised castes/communities; but for our specific purposes here we will not work with these complications. Our object, to reiterate, remains the specific contours of the Brahmin response to its othering.
chapter, they had abysmal literacy rates and an appallingly low representation in the modern spaces of bureaucracy, educational institutions and the judiciary. Muslims were no different. It is primarily an invocation of this under-representation in modern spaces that informed the establishment of such alliances, although in the case of Lingayaths the counterclaim to ‘Brahminness’ also acted as an equally formative influence to begin with. Thimmaiah (1993) has noted that even the Kannada speaking regions of the Bombay Presidency witnessed the emergence of the non-Brahmin cause (see also Omvedt 1994 and Gore 1989). In these areas, the Lingayaths were numerically and economically (both in terms of land-holding and trading) the dominant community and were the leading articulators of the non-Brahmin cause. As early as in 1883, the Dharwad Lingayath Education Development Fund was instituted and many Lingayath hostels had begun functioning in that region by then (Javali 1999: 31). While data regarding the Hyderabad Karnataka region is hard to come by, Lingayaths from Bellary (a part of the Madras Presidency) seem to have been active participants in the activities of their Bombay Presidency counterparts. However, since Mysore took to modernising its ways of governance in an unprecedented scale (from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards, but particularly from the beginnings of the twentieth) there was a huge expansion of the administrative machinery. This offered unprecedented opportunities to castes and communities for upward mobility. Consequently, it is also here that the non-Brahmin cause finds determinate voice and leadership.

The contours of a non-Brahmin opposition to the 'Brahmin dominance' of government services and educational institutions begin to take shape in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. They nevertheless remain disparate and sporadic. In 1874 itself, the Mysore Government, then under the administration of the British, had passed an order reserving eight out of every ten positions in the Police Department to non-Brahmins, including non-Hindus. However the order was hardly complied with - despite being reissued in 1895 – and finds specific mention in the observations of the Miller Committee that was appointed in 1918.² Tamboochetty, a non-Brahmin who was

² The Committee noted: "In spite of this long standing order ... we find in the Police Department that in 1918, out of 361 officers, 191 were Brahmains" (cited in Thimmaiah 1993: 73). Indeed, the instance of the Police Department is an interesting one. Occupations like this and those of the Sanitation Department and the armed forces required a great deal of transgression of caste rules concerning purity. Secularisation of these 'functions' in the modern situation thus allows the Brahmin to encroach upon such spaces too, without of course seriously compromising with his Brahminness.
the Dewan for a brief while, had in 1895 itself sounded a note of concern regarding the overwhelming dominance of the Brahmins in the Mysore bureaucracy. The Maharani of the Mysore Princely State too had expressed her resentment against the Brahmin element being too strong in the public services, especially the Madras Brahmin element (Chandrashekhar 1985). In 1896, the Lingayath members of the Representative Assembly submitted a memorandum to the Maharajah seeking "by the grant of scholarships and in other ways, to encourage the spread of education in our [Lingayaths] section of the community" (Hanumanthappa Vol. III n.d.: 278-9).

The space of the Representative Assembly appears to have played a crucial role in enabling articulations of the non-Brahmin cause. The Representative Assembly, as we noted in the previous chapter, was elitist by virtue of allowing only the propertied and the university-educated to become members and voters. The criteria for membership included holding a certain specified volume of landed property, involving in trade, and so on, and, at a later point, even recognised caste associations as legitimate entities that could send members to the Assembly. Thus the Vokkaligas and the Lingayaths but also Muslims and many minority castes could make an institutionally recognised entry into the space of modern structures of governance. That these communities took this space in earnest in furthering their community interests can be seen even through a cursory reading of the proceedings of the Assembly.

By 1908 itself, the Mysore Representative Assembly was rather markedly polarised on Brahmin and non-Brahmin grounds. This is evidenced by the fact that during that year the Newspaper Regulation Bill was passed because the non-Brahmins voted for it while most of the Brahmin members opposed it. While the latter's opposition was founded on grounds of protecting the liberty of the press, the non-Brahmin members took what at first approximation appears to be a regressive position by way of favouring the Bill. The state of Mysore had by then a vibrant culture of the print media which was largely free from interventions of the state. This can be deduced from the fact that “(d)uring [1874-1908] not only as many as fifty papers started from Mysore, what is more

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3 Joseph (1981:21) has noted that "most of the members from rural Mysore, representing the rural gentry, vehemently supported the Bill", and that it was primarily due to their "myopic view" in not grasping the "liberal ideas of the century" that the Bill was passed. This, he suggests, was in contrast to the opposition of the "members from the urban centres of Bangalore, Mysore and Shimoga, chiefly of the legal profession [who] pointed out the inherent dangers involved" (ibid).

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important, these papers led and participated in several social and political movements" (Ramakrishnan 1985: 108). But as far as the non-Brahmins were concerned, this was a Brahmin dominated press, one that actively and publicly took sides on behalf of the Brahmins in the 'Brahmin versus non-Brahmin' confrontation. Except for the Mysore Star and the Vokkaligara Patrike (the Vokkaliga's Newspaper), almost every other newspaper published from Mysore and outside took active positions against the non-Brahmin demand. For instance, D. V. Gundappa (hereafter DVG) considered as the doyen of Kannada journalism, explicitly states his displeasure on the formation of the Praja Mitr Manda/i and the appointment of the first non-Brahmin Dewan, Kantharaj Urs. While closing down, in 1921, the publication of his bi-weekly English journal Karnataka, he is explicit in stating:

Only efficient and able officials/authorities have the ability to take criticism that is both unforgiving and acidic. Journalism becomes dreary and un-enjoyable when the inefficient and the narrow minded take over offices. Once the Party called the Mysore Praja Paksha was founded in Mysore state, it appeared to me that the Karnataka ought to be stopped (cited in Venkataramanan 1988: 56).

The "inefficient and the narrow-minded" that he is referring to is the first non-Brahmin Dewan, whose narrowness comes because he made it explicitly known that he is a sympathiser of the non-Brahmin cause. In his memoirs, DVG writes:

Vishveshvariah was an exceedingly able administrator. He had nurtured radically novel ideas. It is only possible to such able persons to take unforgiving criticism on the new ideas. When ordinary folk take over the administration, such acidic criticism, even if logical, will only lead to bitterness. Therefore, from here on, our criticism will have to be tempered (1997: 151).

All in all, the overwhelmingly Brahmin dominated press in Mysore was actively using the rather modern arguments of the "freedom of press", "creation of an unbiased public space" (DVG, cited in Venkataramanan 1988: 48) etc. to create public consensus against a dispensation which was explicitly supporting the non-Brahmin demand.

The decade of the 1900s proved to be momentous in the history of the non-Brahmin articulation in Mysore. The founding of the Akhila Bharatha Veerashaiva Mahasabha in 1904 in Dharwad, the Vokkaligara Sangha in 1906, the Mysore Lingayath Education Fund in 1907 and the Central Mohammedan Association in 1909 (all in Bangalore) signalled the readiness of at least a visible elite in these communities to engage in contestations over modern resources. The founding statements of all these initiatives underlined the importance of getting their communities educated and finding
adequate representation in the government services. This was equally true of other communities such as the Jains and the Urs which joined the non-Brahmin articulation (Naidu 1996: 102-5).

The joint memorandum submitted to the Maharajah in 1912, through the Representative Assembly, is apparently the first clear articulation of a willingness on the part of these communities to come together on the platform of 'non-Brahminness'. It was signed by the Central Mohammedan Association, the Lingayath Education Fund, and the associations of Aryavaishyas (a trading community), Devangas (weavers) and Jains. The Memorandum had three demands. One, that more government jobs should be given to them; two, their community members are to be accorded places in representative bodies such as the municipality and the Representative Assembly; and, three, scholarships are to be given to the students of these communities to pursue studies both in the state and abroad (Mysore Star 16 December 1912). While the response of the royal authority to the demands of these communities was overwhelmingly positive, the aggregate figures of non-Brahmins in government employment and enrolment in educational institutions (particularly higher education) do not reveal any encouraging increase. The articulation nevertheless is important. A common focus - resentment against a perceived dominance of Brahmins in the spaces of the modern - draws them together into an alliance, voicing a language of non-Brahminness that by the 1910s-1920s had been popularised by the Justice Party of Madras. The articulation takes precipitate form with the founding of the Praja Mitra Mandali in 1917.

Scholars who have worked on the non-Brahmin movement in Karnataka have been unanimous in concluding that it was elitist, urban-based, and myopic. It never spread beyond Bangalore, Mysore and Kolar. It did not attempt to fashion a mass base for itself and though it spoke apparently 'on behalf of the entire non-Brahmin population, it did, in fact, serve the needs of the elite of these communities. Besides, it was excessively focused on garnering a share in the government services (see Manor 1977a: 33; Chandrashekhar 1985: 82-3; Thimmaiah 1993: 51-2; and Naidu 1996: 197-8). Now, it is true that representation in state bureaucracy was a very important concern for these communities, simply for the reason that it was a space that they could ignore at great costs to their overall development. As we saw in the previous chapter and will further testify in this one, preponderance of Brahmins in the structures of administration had almost debilitating consequences for the development of these communities. Often, as
already posited, this meant a naturalisation of these spaces vis-a-vis Brahmins and a deliberate even if discrete attempt at restricting the entry of other's into these spaces. But equally significantly it was also about the Brahmin's ability to mediate in a number of ways the taking-on of all such identities that were definitionally available to everybody irrespective of caste status.

The non-Brahmin leaders display a keen awareness of the crucial role that a presence in the ranks of the government services plays in the advancement of a community. C. R. Reddy, a visionary and the chief ideologue of the Mysore non-Brahmins, was very clear about the importance of the space of government and bureaucracy when he asserted that “(p)ublic life in India at the present means a scramble for places and offices.” Accordingly, for him, it was necessary that these are distributed fairly as between different classes. ... Place means not only power to oneself, but opportunity to educate and find places for one's children, relations and people. Office is a clear lever of the highest importance and as such we must see that we get our share (cited in Chandrashekhar 1985: 50).

Evidently, then, the increasingly felt need to contest the growing ability and propensity of the Brahmins to appropriate and mediate the institutions and discourses of modernity went beyond a mere scramble for government jobs. There worked a clear vision of what these spaces meant in the emerging social order and the implications of any community monopolising them. Thus provision for secular, modern education, representation in government bureaucracy, judiciary etc. and accessibility to governmental fora such as Municipal Corporations, the Representative Assembly, and the Legislative Council become central in the articulation of the non-Brahmin leaders. It was also these three issues that were foregrounded in the first Memorandum that the Praja Mitra Mandal submitted to the Maharajah in June 1918 (Mysore Star 30June, 7 and 14 July 1918).

Concerning access to modern education, the Memorandum very clearly identifies the vicious circle that was in operation. It identifies the mismatch between the source of tax generation and the recipient of government spending, emphasising thereby the point that while much of the revenue that is spent on education is accrued from the rural areas, very little is being actually spent on establishing educational and allied institutions (like hostels, in particular) in rural areas. Since most of the rural schools teach in the vernacular medium, it often stifles the progression of most of these non-Brahmin students
into the sphere of higher education, forcing them to occupy the lowest levels of the government services. This latter possibility was however scarce, for most of them went back to taking up ‘traditional’ occupations like agriculture and allied services. Even if some did come to the cities seeking after higher education, many would drop out since there were very few community or government hostels.

The non-Brahmin Memorandum hints at Brahmins reinventing their ‘traditional’ dominance in the modern situation. It also suggests the ways in which that dominance gets to be consolidated:

Even as the age-old tradition and practices were furthering the hierarchical emotions affecting the growth of different communities ... [the modern educational practice and the unequal representation given to different communities in modern bureaucracy have equally adversely affected the welfare of the backward communities. ...]

We would like to point out the shortcomings in our present educational system that has actively contributed to the paradox of the inverse relationship that exists between the amount of tax paid and the educational facilities given access to:

1) Students who pass the Lower Secondary examination in Kannada or Hindusthani medium in rural schools do not have the qualification to join High Schools to further their education, to gain which they are forced to study just the English language for two or more years. To do this, they have to come to a city or a town wherein, invariably, either due to casteism or for some such social reason, they can never arrange for food and shelter for themselves;

2) There is no uniformity in syllabi nor are the educational facilities available equal. Not all the towns have hostels belonging to all the castes.

3) Even though the primary education has been made free, it is actually the rural people who are paying for much of the expenses incurred on higher education to which either their children do not have access to or they have been rendered incapable of pursuing it (Mysore Star 30 June 1918).

Linking up the issues of education and employment, the Memorandum goes on to state:

It is neither new nor novel that everybody seeks to get educated primarily to get a placement in the government bureaucracy. ... [Therefore] it is only natural that all communities ought to get adequate representation in the government services that match their share in the population. This will ensure that all the communities in the state will possess adequate motivation to get educated. In order to ensure such representation, the government should appoint, though temporarily, non-Brahmin candidates from outside Mysore till such time when education has been made available to all castes and adequate number of non-Brahmins attain qualifications to compete for government jobs available (ibid).

As far their third demand was concerned, the Memorandum beseeched:

All autonomous bodies, including the Legislative Council, have to be re-formed to ensure representation to all communities according to the share in the population (ibid).
The royal authority was quick to respond to these claims. Within two months (in August 1918), a committee headed by the Chief Justice, Leslie Miller, was appointed to look into the unequal representation of communities in both education and government employment. The terms of reference were explicit:

1. Changes needed, if any, in the existing rules of recruitment in the public service;
2. Special facilities to encourage higher and professional education among members of the backward communities, and
3. Any other special measures which may be taken to increase the representation of the backward communities in public services, without materially affecting efficiency, due regard being paid also to general accruing to the state by a wider diffusion of education and feeling of increased status which, it is expected, will thereby be produced in the backward communities (cited in Thimmaiah 1993: 58).

The clause of "efficiency" in the above mandate was in response to the widespread antipathy that the Brahmins exhibited against the appointment of the Committee. The primary ground on which they opposed the terms of reference was that 'reservation' would adversely affect the efficiency of the government machinery. On its part, the Miller Committee tended to pose the issue of efficiency differently:

Efficiency, however, is not to be measured solely or even mainly by academic qualifications and it will not be denied that there are many important branches of administration in which other qualities, such as sympathy, honesty of purpose, energy and common sense go as far to make an efficient officer *(ibid. 59-60)*.

While recommending the categorisation of most communities, save Brahmins, as 'backward'\(^4\), it maintained:

Within a period of not more than seven years, not less than one half of the higher and two-thirds of the lower appointments in each grade of the service and so far as possible in each office are to be filled by members of communities other than the Brahmin community, preference being given to duly qualified candidates of the depressed classes [Scheduled Castes] when such are available *(ibid.: 64)*.

It further recommended the abolition of competitive examinations for recruiting persons into government jobs and relaxation of requisite educational qualifications for different services. The Committee stressed the need for spread of primary and secondary education, opening more English schools, opening schools for the *Panchamas* (Dalits),

\(^4\) The Committee, note, worked with two criteria to determine the backwardness of a community: a) any community with less than five percent of English literacy rate; and b) any community which had inadequate representation in middle and higher rungs of the government services.
starting community hostels in towns and cities, and increasing the scholarships, particularly at the level of higher education.

More directly, however, the non-Brahmin construction of the Brahmin (as indeed of the question of caste) can be gleaned from the following editorial of the *Mysore Star*. It is commenting on the response of the Brahmins to the activities of the non-Brahmin movement of the neighbouring Madras Presidency:

It surprises us that barely a whimper is made by the non-Brahmins [against the appropriation of Brahmins of modern spaces] and the Brahmins and their newspapers have begun crying hoarse and alleging that *Brahmadvesha* [Brahmin Hatred] has become too strong. There is no country in the entire world wherein there exist people who do have some form of internal systems of distinction [*bhinna*]. States of distinction/discrimination are natural. ... It is a law of nature that there exist so many religions, *varnas*, castes, *kulas*, and languages. This is the natural quality of the world. However these distinctions have the destiny of unity, which is what is the goal of great philosophers. Till that state of unity is reached, *each* and every distinction needs to work for its own betterment. Many distinctions, of religion, caste and *kula*, have existed from time immemorial in our country. ... These are based on legitimate foundation and have a great deal of thinking and good will behind them. Therefore they cannot be rooted out by anybody. However, since people of recent times have made changes in the Great Reason that lay behind such systems at their moment of origin, some have begun to think that such principles of distinction themselves are the reason for all the problems. Religion, caste, *kula* (lineage) distinctions should not die. They will not, in fact. What should meet its end is the practice of unequal hierarchy that many indulge in, claiming basis in the natural *principles* of distinction. ... If merely by taking the name of the Brahmins one becomes a hater of Brahmin, it becomes difficult for others to even survive. ... When Brahmins, all so educated, themselves are rushing after government jobs as though they are the heaven in this world, it is only natural that others follow the leader. ... Some argue that if there are caste-based restrictions regulating dining habits and matrimonial networks, let there be, but they should not regulate national activities. To this, we too agree (*Mysore Star* 14 January 1917).

This statement bears testimony to a curious and even contradictory space, one that invalidates the hierarchical principle of the caste order even while celebrating the distinctions [*bhinna*] that obtains among the caste entities. Caste as constituting the differential essence of its members, and therefore the larger purity-pollution principle regulating inter-caste patterns of relations, are all seen to possess an inexorable legitimacy. Certain spaces are being defined as alien to and outside the normative purview of the caste order - the practice of inequality based on one’s caste identity, occupational choices (particularly the “government jobs”), and the space of nationalism.

The Brahmins though express a sense of disbelief at the very thought of protective discrimination, as evidenced in the Notes of Dissent that the two Brahmin members attach.
to the Miller Report and in the proceedings of the Representative Assembly. Significantly, their opposition to the proposed measures is not articulated in ritual-hierarchical terms. The dissent per se is not about the demand that Shudras or the Panchamas want to get educated or that they want to become officers of equal rank with the Brahmins; all this is recognised and accorded legitimacy. In fact, the statements of dissent of the two Brahmin members of the Committee begin with voicing an agreement with the stated cause of the upliftment of the backward classes. 'Merit' is the register within which the opposition is mostly configured. Thus K. T. Seshaiya, a Brahmin member of the Representative Assembly, argued:

Whether a candidate for office is a Jew, Christian, Protestant or Jacobite, his qualifications alone count. In no country and at no time in the annals of the world, was government service held to be representative institution to be recruited on a communal basis (cited in Naidu 1996: 205, fn. 59).

However, such statements of "qualifications alone" are also coded in order to camouflage sentiments reflective of caste norms linking occupation and ritual status. Sampadabhyudaya (a daily that represented the interests of such secular Brahmins, according to the Mysore Star) states:

The arrangement of appointing representatives on communal basis is not beneficial. And this arrangement is nowhere, in no country, practiced. He, who has the merit to do a job, alone has to be appointed to do the job. Will the job be performed to the satisfaction of all if an able Agasa [Washerman; the reference here, in fact, is to a 'lower' caste and not merely to the 'function' of washing clothes] is appointed as a minister? Or even, if a top ranking officer is appointed as a scavenger [again referring to a Dalit caste and not merely to the 'function' of scavenging]? (Cited in Mysore Star, 11 November 1917).

This position ties together, at once, the modern discursive register of 'merit' and the norms of the caste system that seek to regulate occupational entry. Such a fusion of distinctive codes, it needs to be reiterated, was not an isolated instance. The Mysore Star, commenting on the position endorsed by Sampadabhyudaya, frequently observes that it was the Brahmins who were the first to relinquish their 'caste occupation', and that if Brahmins wish other communities should go back to their traditional occupations, they should lead by example.

The dissent of the Brahmins is also about denying one community - in this instance, the Brahmins themselves- their right to inhabit these spaces. It is pointed out that they are not occupying these spaces by resorting to any illegal or even unjustifiable means, and that it is therefore unfair to punish them for their merit. Attention is also
directed at categorising a whole group as ‘Brahmins’. They point to the differences that obtain within this category, referring in particular to the Havyaka and Sankethi Brahmins who had remained largely agriculture-dependent castes. As a Brahmin member from Shimoga, S. R. Balakrishna Rao, deliberated:

[T]he principle on which groups of people were classified as backward is wrong. The Brahmin community is made up of a number of subjects and is not a homogeneous body. There were subjects among them who were really backward in education and were also poor. Should not such people be helped? (Hanumanthappa Vol. II n.d.: 377-8).

The public voicing of such a dissent notwithstanding, the non-Brahmin articulation was acutely successful in its quest to 'other' the Brahmin. 'Brahmin' as an invocation came to represent everything that was abhorrent to a modern mind. The non-Brahmin articulation renders the category of the Brahmin as 'illegitimate'. But - and by no means independent of this non-Brahmin construction - the Brahmin himself was undergoing a secularising experience primarily owing to the effects of urbanisation and the fact of inhabiting spaces such as liberal education and modern occupations. He was growing to be circumspect and reflective about his own self as 'Brahmin', an identification that was now being invested with all that the modern ethos stood against. Therefore, any active invocation and owning up of one's Brahminness was increasingly becoming a non-option. It had to be reconfigured and reinscribed. In what follows, we present two locutions of the Brahmin self, paradoxically from the pages of the Mysore Star, in order to show the possibilities that were present especially in the wake of the non-Brahmin articulation and the ongoing process of the secularisation of 'function' of the Brahmin self. It is to be noted that while the first of the two locutions was becoming increasingly difficult to defend and argue for, the second comes to dominate the retrievals of the self that the Brahmin engages with. The non-Brahmin articulation itself seems to rest content with the latter retrieval, but the former term is unacceptable and is denounced.

The following are the excerpts of a letter, titled Working of the Reforms: The Brahmins' Lot, which a 'South Indian Brahmin official' wrote to the Manchester Guardian (a journal published from England) and re-published in the Mysore Star (20 February 1920):

My poor sons are able to get on smoothly through grace in the midst of non-Brahmin administration. The British Government was encouraging Brahmins in the last century in consideration of their intelligence and education and their loyalty. They are now in a depressed
condition thinking as to what to do for their future, as in their thirst for British education and encouragement they have lost all their properties and deserted their homes. Non-Brahmins with below average education are now encouraged and the Brahmin minority is put down in all ways, socially and officially. The Brahmin villages abound in passed candidates who do not know what to do. I assure you that, excepting a few Brahmins here and there who have lost their senses, the majority are always loyal to the British Government, and appreciate the benefit of its administration. If you are pleased to pursue the 11th Skandam of the Sri Bhagavatham you will observe that the Government will pass into the hands of Shudras towards the end of Kaliyuga. The lowest castes are now forcibly and even against their will allowed to go through Brahmin quarters and to join all social functions. I beg to add and venture to assert that in a few years hence the word 'Brahmin' will have to be expunged from the Census Report.

Compare this location with another letter titled Nija Brahmananaaru? Avana Dharmavenu? (Who is the Real Brahmin? What is his Dhanna?), written by Head Master T. Nanjundaiah, a Brahmin, which appeared in the Mysore Star issue, dated 9 November 1929:

The word Vedamurthy denotes the actualisation of the Vedas in a man. I, the unscholarly [paamara] Head Master of the Hireguntanaoru Boys High School, T Nanjundaiah, who, even if one takes a thorough search from head to bottom, has not a trace of such Brahmathva [the knowledge of the Brahma, the ultimate knowledge], bow before you.
What is Brahmana? What are the Brahmana karmadl How will the Brahma Tejas be? How does one recognise a Brahmin who possesses that Tejas? - I know not. But when I asked a Mahatma, he said that one who has control over his senses, external and internal, who meditates, is clean, patient, contented, has Brahmana jnana, is invested with the qualities of scientific temper, devotion, theism, egalitarianism because of his ability to practice the teachings of his Guru is called the Brahmin. He even provided the necessary evidence from the Shastras. ... Neither do I have those qualities nor have I seen anybody endowed with them. ... since I, myself, don't have Brahminness, how will I have the capacity to recognise a true Brahmin? My conscience does not allow me to act like a Brahmin, as in a drama, when I am not following the Brahmana karma and cannot even imagine of matching up to the greatness of the Brahminhood. I have no symptoms of Brahminness. I am performing 'This Worldly' activities, I am interested in 'This Worldly' things and, to top it all, I eke out a living through offering services. That I offer services for returns in itself points to my Shudraness, since it represents Tamoguna. Brahmins, for whom Sathvaguna is the dominant quality, will know my caste [of being a Shudraj, just by the fact that I offer services. I am a straight man who says what he does and does what he says. I eat and drink where I feel like. ... Given that I don't even know myself, how will I know Brahman jnana or Brahminness? I do not like getting called Brahmin by un-true conduct. ...
Taking all this into consideration, the great Brahmins should find answers to the following questions - what is a Brahmin? What is his Dharma? Does everybody follow this Dharma? Do they believe that, at least, they themselves follow this Dharma? After finding answers to the above, if they find that they all follow Brahminness and that it is only myself who does not, then they should, I request, dismiss me from the 'Brahmin' list itself.
It is significant that both the locutions occupy modern spaces - one is a government bureaucrat and the other a school teacher. Their divergent recuperation of one's 'Brahminness' is thus a testimony to the fact that the processes of secularisation and the non-Brahmin challenge do not necessarily homogenise the Brahmin's understanding of his self. Individual trajectories and contexts were also significant in formulating the response of an individual.

The first writer unhesitatingly owns up and speaks on behalf of his Brahmin self and identity. For him, the traditional authority and the normative grounds of caste are the basis on which social life ought to be still organised. Shudras, for instance, cannot enter Brahmin colonies; nor are they supposed to take up occupations that are not prescribed for them. His own sense of self-identity is captive to a feeling of being under siege, and, given that the scriptural authority had ordained to the capacity of being Brahmin, it is beyond human control too. He is accordingly speaking from what can be seen as a self-propelled Brahmin identity. The Head Master, though, can take a step outside his own Brahmin self and evaluate it. He employs three prototypical images - the Ideal Brahmin, the Contemporary/Degraded Brahmin, and his own Brahmin Self (one that is at a remove from the former two images).

Interestingly, these distinctions endure to this day in Brahmin constructions of the self. For Head Master Nanjundaiah, his ascribed identity of being a Brahmin has no significance. It is there merely because he is born in a Brahmin family. Thus being 'Brahmin', for him, is no more than constituting part of a "list". He invests no significance to it unlike the other Brahmins around him. But again, it is not that the category of Brahmin has no meaning for him. He is re-inscribing it with a different code, and refilling it with a different content. He is investing in the category of the Brahmin an 'achievable' value - of one who has acquired an identifiable inventory of attributes, and who could be born of any caste or community. The attributes identified are interesting, ranging from egalitarianism and scientific temper (decidedly modern values) to devotion to the Guru, being pure and so on. Given this axis of identification, there are no Brahmins, including himself, who are worthy of that identity. Consequently the poser, why call oneself a Brahmin at all? Such a strategy, what could be termed universalisation of the category of the Brahmin, is an enduring frame in the context of which the secularising Brahmin begins to negotiate with his caste self.
Interestingly, what is common between the two locutions is that both are alluding to the traditional scriptural authority for authentication, even as they are putting it to divergent uses. Nanjundaiah's lampooning of the contemporary Brahmins does not come to him from any validation of modern notions of equality and fraternity; rather, from the fact that they do not live up to the scriptural imagination. While not demanding any radical break with the past that it constructs for itself, it still asks for an effort to live up to a certain inherited image.

Complementing this reconfiguration of the Brahmin self is the fact that the non-Brahmin articulation seems to content itself with the language of caste. Indeed, there are enough indications that the non-Brahmin articulation was not vested with any stated position against the caste system as such. For instance, in 1915, when the state government schools were thrown open to the Panchamas (who were untouchable castes), it has been pointed out that "not only Brahmin parents but even non-Brahmin parents (including Muslim parents) withdrew their children from such schools" (Thimmaiah 1993: 51). This is further testified to by the *Mysore Star*, particularly with reference to the Lingayaths. There is acute heartburn among the Lingayaths that students from their community are denied a "separate bathroom" in the hostel attached to the Maharajah's College in Mysore, while the Brahmin students were provided the facility. (*Mysore Star*, 6 and 27 May 1923; and 3 June 1923). It is important to note the grouse here was not that the Brahmins were following a 'caste rule' in a secular space, but that the Lingayaths were not being extended the same facility. The *Mysore Star*, which as we already noted was also a crucial articulator of Lingayath concerns, seemed to offer the latter a forum for contesting the Brahmin claim to Brahminness. This point, when combined with another about the Lingayaths constituting the most important constituency of the non-Brahmin alliance, only provides grist for the contention that the non-Brahmin discourse hardly entailed a questioning of caste as a system.

One could of course view such moves as instances of 'sanskritisation' in the idiom of M. N. Srinivas. But it could be profitable as well to approach it as 'modernisation' (or, more accurately, as a contestation over modernity itself) As we shall see, in the case of Lingayaths, disputations over being categorised as 'Shudra' was more than merely a question of their place in the 'Varna' order; it permeated their contemporary struggles over the meaning of being a modern caste community. The resolution of this question was essential for certain subaltern caste sections of the Lingayaths who were engaged in
an acrimonious battle with the elite castes within the fold over the legitimate ways of constituting the Lingayath community and the norms that ought to govern this constitution. Whether the Lingayath community be divided as Brahmana Veerashaiva/Lingayath, Kshatriya Veerashaiva etc. or whether it should be seen as a composite, non-hierarchised community raged on for decades in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (See for a description of some aspects of this contestation, Boratti 2003). Secular Brahmins like the Census Superintendent of 1931, Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, were prone to dismiss anxieties on the part of such communities over their ritual status as being of little significance, whereas for the communities themselves, these were legitimate questions about ways of imagining and re-imagining their place in the emerging scheme of things.

The non-Brahmin discourse often constructs an ‘ideal Brahmin' or a ‘Brahmin-in-essence' and ventures a positive evaluation of this figure. Such an essentialisation is encountered very frequently in the Mysore Star, ironically the converse of the strategies of othering germane to the non-Brahmin articulation. This Brahmin is not only tolerated; he is, in fact, celebrated. A write-up, in the form of questions and answers, titled Brahmadveshigalara (Who are the Haters of Brahma/Brahmins?), has a structure of argument imploring the following:

Q: What is the loss in believing that birth determines one's Varna?
A: That is plainly unfair. Then, even if a Brahmin turns corrupt/unclean and joins Islam or Christianity, he will still be called a Brahmin. ... The Shastras have defined distinct characters for different Varnas. But now, since they have the arrogance to think that they have become Brahmins by birth itself, all the goodness inherent in the Brahmin character has been rooted out. Can there be a greater loss? Isn't the one who is destroying such a great Brahmin character the Brahmadveshi? ... Instead of realising that they themselves have turned the primary threat to Brahminness, they have begun calling others Brahmadveshis.

Q: But in today's world, who cares for the quality/character? Isn't it merely the 'practice' that everybody observes? Doesn't the government too take into consideration merely the birth as the marker of one's Brahminness?
A: The nitty-gritty of such questions does not entangle the government. They merely follow the practice accepted by the outside world. Moreover, in religious matters, the decision of the king cannot be taken as final.

Q: Then, who are the Brahmadveshis?
A: Those who are destroying the Brahmin character and arguing that the Varna comes with birth and that the character is not important for determining one’s Varna - they are the real Brahmadveshis and Varnadveshis (Mysore Star 17 February 1918).
Likewise, an editorial (27 May 1917) rather appreciatively refers to a speech made by a Brahmin, which argued that:

According to the Vedas, the Brahmin and other such Varnas were born to facilitate the human quest for the development of \textit{Adhyatma} [spiritual thinking]. These Varnas, as time progressed, turned into the present \textit{occupation}-based Varnas. The Varna divisions were, in fact, facilitating caste unity and had no principle of hierarchy. The Varna contamination began happening when such \textit{Adhyatma} oriented schema began to be used for determining 'This Worldly' occupations. Therefore, we ought to grasp the essence of the Vedas and seek to uplift, and not oppress, women and the backwards.

Thus the \textit{Mysore Star} consistently makes a distinction between, what it calls, the \textit{Jaatibrahmana} (Brahmin through \textit{Caste/Birth}) and the \textit{Karmabrahmana} (Brahmin through Action for whom the "ultimate goal of life is to think for/of the good of the world") and fervidly argues for the latter. For instance, the editorial dated 19 November 1916 is a lament about the non-availability of the \textit{Karmabrahmanas}, since most of those who are Brahmins by birth have taken to Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra occupations. This editorial even goes on to celebrate the activities of the \textit{Aanandavana Vaidika Samokruta Paatachaale}, located in Bombay Karnataka and run by a Brahmin, which sought to inculcate the old Brahminical values

More pointedly, the fact that such a lamentation about the 'demise' of the 'Brahmin-in-essence' was rather shared is demonstrated by the following letter. Written by a \textit{Vaishyakulaabhimaani} (A Fan of Vaishya Community)\textsuperscript{5}, the letter challenges the Thyamagondlu \textit{Vaidika} (priestly) Brahmins to answer a few questions:

I hear that the local Vaidika Brahmins are conducting meetings regarding their Brahminness. Let them answer the following questions that are based on their present status. These questions are based on proof ... Can one be called a Brahmin even after he has committed one of the \textit{Panchamahaapaaathaka} (Five Great Sins) like drinking? Can a Brahmin, who has committed 'lesser sins' like \textit{Brithakaadhyapaapan} (receiving remuneration in order to teach) be still called a Brahmin? Can a Brahmin who has not engaged himself in learning be still called a Brahmin? Can a Brahmin, who being a hotel owner cleans the \textit{enjatu} [the left-behinds, and thus polluted] of all, irrespective of their caste, be still called a Brahmin? Can a Brahmin, who is employed in Medical \textit{Department} or the Excise \textit{Department}, be still called a Brahmin? \textit{(Mysore Star, 28 August 1926)}.

Many of the above queries would implicate the secularising Brahmin, especially those who took up employment as a doctor, hotel owner etc., rendering their self-perception of being Brahmin as both inadequate and unworthy.

\textsuperscript{5} Vaishyas were part of the alliance that formed the \textit{Praja Mitra Manda/i}. 156
In 1919, *Mysore Star* reproduced the text of the letter that the Pontiff of Kolhapur Shankaracharya Peeta wrote to the Baroda king, who was the President of the Bombay Depressed Classes Conference:

I cannot overstate the regard I have for your efforts. But I also warn you that we can neither ignore nor misread our Shastras. Regarding these aspects, our Shastras have necessary and great spiritual norms. But it is also true that over time many meaningless but harsh practices have also crept into our unions. The former are non-negotiable. The loyal, who are seeking after the realisation of Atma, have to necessarily follow the proscriptions imposed. They ought not to eat those things that are proscribed to a Nijavaidika (real Vaidika) and cannot mix with those who are prohibited. ... This is necessary not merely for their individual quest of realisation but also for the greater common good. ... Till he reaches the stage of Greatness endowed with powers of purifying anybody who comes near, he should follow all the proscriptions to stay pure. All the norms regulating Pollution and Untouchability have this very philosophy as their basis. ...

But, of course, it is indeed hard to come by the Real Vaidiks. No matter what, we cannot at all forget the changes that have happened in the affairs of our country. The practices and discourses do change according to the demands of the present. ... I strongly believe that a Hindu Loukika, who is not following the path of Self Realisation, treats the converted Muslims and Christians fairly but ill-treats the Panchamas who are very much Hindus, is committing a phenomenal sin. ... However I have a note of sermon for the Panchamas too. ... All the Panchamas, in the past, and a majority even now were/are slaves to the most polluting acts. ... We all know how, from their own communities, many a Yogi and Bhakta emerged to earn all our respect. ... I am a pontiff and I strongly state that the primary aspects regarding our practices and Dhanna ought not to be changed. But it is inevitable that many things change according to the changes in country. ...

Firstly, since many from the formerly untouchable castes are taking to 'Good Ways' but, more importantly, also since many from 'Good' castes are finding it difficult to ignore this world like their Vaidik predecessors did, such formerly untouchable people have to be treated with respect. ... [However] if the demand for change in practice becomes more widespread, I assure you that I am willing to sit with other pontiffs to prepare a charter of the changes to be brought about (*Mysore Star* 30 March 1919).

Apart from re-imagining the contents of being a Brahmin, what is significant here is the category of the 'Hindu' (with all castes, from the untouchables to the Brahmins, constituting the Hindu community) that the pontiff foregrounds. However, re-inscribing these populations into a single category of being 'Hindu' does not seem sufficient to obliterate the caste distinctions and specificities. These have to be necessarily carried over into the new self-identification of being Hindu. Such enunciations by the Brahmans, nevertheless, were enthusiastically received by the *Mysore Star*, and provided a common ground on which the greatly contesting imaginations of the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin could meet. The reconfigured Brahmin self, one that denied to its own ascribed status a moral and normative grounding but which nonetheless positively evaluated the ideal
Brahmin self, seemed successful in convincing it's Other - the non-Brahmin - of its legitimacy.

These complexities notwithstanding, what is perhaps more disconcerting for the Brahmin was the position of the modern state itself in regard to the non-Brahmin demand for representation. This is signified in the status of Vishveshvaraiah who was the Dewan when the Miller Committee was constituted. Vishveshvaraiah was perhaps the most proactive of the Dewans that Mysore had seen, and was held in great esteem by the King for his efforts to modernise the state and its economy (Naidu 1996: 187). The Dewan however was vehemently opposed to the idea of reservation and believed that merit and efficiency alone ought to be the principles guiding recruitments into government services. The King though was willing to let Vishveshvaraiah resign on the issue. This ready compliance of the stately authority, even in the face of spirited opposition from a highly respected Dewan, many members of the Representative Assembly, the Brahmin-dominated press and the bureaucracy in general, was disconcerting to the Brahmins. Many factors - such as a policy of placating local landed interests (Manor 1977a), palace intrigue and politicking (Chandrashekhar 1985) and the sheer fact of managing a population increasingly dependent on governmental attention - could have contributed to this readiness to heed the non-Brahmin demands for representation. For the Brahmins, though, it was perhaps the first clear signal that in spite of their preponderance in the executive or even the civil social institutions (in the form of the press, for instance), they cannot mediate the trajectory of the state itself. Once heeded to, this meant that the modern state begins to get articulated (both by caste associations and by individuals) as the most significant Other of the Brahmins in the modern condition. The increasing volatility of electoral politics at all levels, as indeed the persistent willingness on the part of the state to appoint successive Backward Classes Commissions and measures like land reforms, have only served to authenticate a certain narrative of state abdication vis-a-vis Brahmin subjects for every succeeding generation.

To be sure, the non-Brahmin contestation of the Brahmin and the state's legitimisation of the terms of such a contestation do not exhaust the range of external-categorisation and othering that the Brahmin has had to deal with. The case of the Lingayaths maps another array of concerns that the Brahmin has had to contend. Note it is not that the non-Brahmin 'othering' of the Brahmin inhabits a space that is entirely independent of the Lingayaths. As we have noted, Lingayaths present an instance...
wherein they inhabit the self-identification of being non-Brahmin simultaneously with that of a community that is seeking to contest the exclusivising Brahmin claim to the status of ritual sacredness. Consequently, unlike in the non-Brahmin instance, it is the ability of the Brahmin (albeit undergoing a secularising experience) to mediate and control the space of the 'sacred' that the Lingayath seeks to contest. Our next section presents some further instances of such contestation so as to point towards the complexities that were involved in the making of the Brahmin identity. It also allows us to speculate on the internal coherence of the figure of the Brahmin that the non-Brahmin often presumed as being in existence, which then leads us to the final section where we discuss the internal contestations that the Brahmin self-identification entail.

II

Contesting the ‘sacred’ Brahmin: the Lingayath instance

The cases represented here concern primarily the Lingayath interest in establishing a position in the caste ritual hierarchy that equals (if not supplants) the Brahmins. But, not surprisingly enough, the discussion will further testify to the eclectically positioned power of the secularising Brahmins to mediate even those affairs that ostensibly they had departed from. Indeed, the Brahmin's growing ambivalence with regard to his ‘Brahminness’ did not necessarily mean his withdrawal from the field of ritual status contestation.

One could begin with the struggle over the space of the two Government Sanskrit Colleges that existed in the Mysore State. This is a good instance primarily because it points towards the mutual interpenetration of the non-Brahmin identification with that of the Lingayath identity as well as the tasks that these intersections were made to perform on behalf of each other. The space of the Sanskrit colleges provided an unusual context of confluence between rival contestations. The debate over allowing non-Brahmins to study in the Government Sanskrit Colleges of Bangalore and Mysore raged for over a decade during the 1910s and 1920s. The dating of the controversy notwithstanding, non-Brahmins had to wait till Independence to get effective entry into these colleges.

There were two Sanskrit colleges in the princely Mysore State, one in Mysore, called the Maharajah's Sanskrit College and the other in Bangalore, the Chaamarajendra Sanskrit College - with the Mysore College the older and conferred with more prestige and sacredness. These colleges received patronage from the Sringeri Matha (a Smartha institution) and the Parakaala Matha (a Sreevaishnavite one, the official Gurupeeta of the
Mysore king). Nevertheless, they were primarily funded and managed by the government. The establishment of these colleges was to impart training, in Vedas and other scriptures as well as in the performance of rituals, to the Brahmin male students.

Before narrating the struggles over the Sanskrit colleges, it has to be noted that by then (if ever) the priority before the Brahmin youth was not to take to Sanskrit education or religious training. None of the auto/biographies available from this period even mention such a choice as a distinct possibility. In fact, by then (as it continues to be, almost like a rule without exception), 'sacred' education had already become a least attractive option for Brahmin young men. Most of the Brahmin boys who found themselves in such institutions of learning (as is the case today) were 'failures' in pursuing secular education, except of course for those very few students who just could not afford secular education. But interestingly enough, even in such institutions of traditional learning, the need to enable the students to work within the increasingly secularising Brahmin spaces was acutely felt. Thus C. Subba Rao, a retired Deputy Commissioner, made an endowment of Rs. 10,000/- (which was a large sum then) with the Maharajah’s Sanskrit College, Mysore as early as in 1894-95 with the expressed intent of

inducing Sanskrit scholars fall of whom were Brahmins] to receive a high English education so that the narrowing influence of their purely Sanskrit education might, to a certain extent, be remedied and they might receive the benefit of liberal education without which the stores of traditional learning were not likely to be productive of useful results (cited in Naidu 1996: 73).

Complicating this scenario is the fact of Jangamas, wandering ascetics or priests within the Lingayath fold, who have apparently had a traditional access to Sanskrit education and authored many Sanskrit texts of ritual and philosophy. While no other caste or community was anywhere in a position to contest the Brahmin monopoly in this regard, the curious status of Jangamas among Lingayaths seemed to buck this trend. Consequently, even as the demand to democratise the space of Sanskrit/religious education was definitely a demand made by the Praja Mitra Mandali on behalf of all the non-Brahmins, it is equally certain that it was also a fundamental issue for the Lingayaths themselves.

See Murthy (2000: 206-7) for a list of such texts.
It had been a long-standing demand to permit non-Brahmin students to gain admission into these two government colleges. The Brahmins resisted it for a little more than two decades. In 1920 the government appointed a committee to offer its recommendations on the issue. The Committee had nine members and all of them were Brahmins. **Significantly,** their appointment as members of the Committee was not because they were Brahmins but on the basis of them holding the relevant government positions. The Committee recommended that only the Bangalore College be rendered accessible, that too for non-Brahmins of a “high or good caste” (*Uthama Kula*). However such students would be taught only Sanskrit literature and not Vedas. The Committee held that the Mysore College ought to remain restricted to Brahmin students. It also suggested that teachers in the Bangalore College should be allowed to take transfer if they feel uncomfortable teaching non-Brahmin students. The *Mysore Star,* characteristically, responded with a scathing editorial (18 June 1922) targeting the recommendations for being undemocratic and unjust, and pointing out that the institutions in question were government colleges meant to cater to one and all. Nonetheless, a Government Order dated 10 June 1924 brought into effect the recommendations of the Committee.

In the year 1925, another committee was constituted to look into the question of the continuance of teaching Veda and *Prayoga* (the practical aspects, relating primarily to the performance of rituals) in the Bangalore Sanskrit College. This question came up because the teachers in the college (all of whom were Brahmins) were feeling uncomfortable teaching the non-Brahmin students. This Committee had four Brahmins, a Jain and a Lingayath as members. The four Brahmin members were for abolishing the teaching of Veda and Prayoga in these two Colleges, on the ground that none of the teachers in the college was willing to teach these subjects to those other than Brahmins. The Lingayath member argued that since the *Vedaghosha* (chanting of the Vedas) is quintessential for the Lingayaths, the teaching of the Vedas ought to continue. He further opined that even though the study of Sanskrit literature is thrown open to non-Brahmins, without access to learning of the Vedas, it was like a body without life. But his proposal lost out for want of majority (Murthy 2000: 213).

The point to be noted is that the Lingayath challenge was primarily articulated in terms of a spirited claim to Brahminhood, one resting on the authority of the Vedas and other sacred Sanskrit texts. Needless to say, such contests between the Brahmins and the Lingayaths were frequent and bitter. What is of significance here is that the Lingayath...
challenge to the supremacy of the Brahmin and the accompanying claim to Brahminhood never ceases to obtain; nor is it rendered ideologically problematic and unsustainable once subsumed under the non-Brahmin critique of the Brahmin. They coexist, even if uncomfortably, with each other. Such a peculiarly simultaneous existence of seemingly contradictory positions appears to have directed the inner trajectory of the non-Brahmin articulation in the princely Mysore State, given that the Lingayaths were the chief sustaining force behind its articulation.

In what follows, we shall narrate four instances that point towards the range of concerns that animated the Brahmin-Lingayath field, each instance testifying to the willingness of these entities to deploy and consolidate their versions of reality. The first pertains to the issue of categorising Lingayaths as Shudras in the Mysore Census of 1871 and the subsequent protest from the community, one that gave raise to an acidic debate with Brahmins which lasted till the first decade of the last century. The second is what came to be known as the Shubhodaya Prakarana - a controversy over the 'acceptable' modes of retrieving the twelfth century 'Sharana movement' that came to increasingly act as the grid around which the Lingayaths sought to imagine themselves as a community. The third is the controversy over the right of the Lingayaths to perform abhisheka to the Linga (obeisance to the Shiva icon) in the pilgrimage centre of Parali, then part of the Nizam administered Hyderabad State, during 1924-29. The fourth is an incidence of 'riot' between Lingayaths and Brahmins in Bagalkot (then part of the Bombay Presidency) in 1911 over the propriety of the Lingayaths in carrying the replica of sage Vyasa's shoulder (Vyasana tholu) in caste/religious processions. This latter incident also entails a further breaching of boundaries, and the forging of tacit alliances between the Smartha Brahmins and the Jangama Lingayaths against the Madhva Brahmins.

1. Census contestations

The Lingayaths were enumerated as Shudras in the 1871 Census. Not only is this categorisation continued in the next census (of 1881) despite widely articulated sense of displeasure among the Lingayath leaders, they were placed below some of the 'untouchable' communities in the ritual Varna hierarchy. This led to a great deal of dissent - tracts were written, books were published and community newspapers such as the Mysore Star were copiously distributed to assuage feelings of disbelief and hurt. The Mysore Star even served as a context wherein a (Madhva?) Brahmin working for the
Railway Department, Ranganna, came to engage himself in an extended argument over the Lingayath claims to a higher caste status. Ranganna, in his letter, primarily called into question the claims of the Lingayaths that they be treated as a Brahmin caste. The ground on which he does so is by pointing to the eclectic composition of the Lingayath community, as containing castes ranging from washermen, barbers, oil pressers to trading and agricultural castes, to Satanis (the non-Brahmins who work as low level assistants in Vishnu temples). According to him, these people merely by wearing the Lingayath markers cannot claim an exalted position of having become Shaiva Brahmins or the Srivaishnava Brahmins; such status is accorded only for Brahmins and not to any "pretender" who decides to wear the caste markers (Veerasangappa 1882: 20-22). The terms of this derision even went further:

Veerashaivas [Lingayaths] call themselves Brahmins now. Many Veerashaiva women who are staying in the palace of the Mysore King as his concubines have begotten children in such relationships. Then we could even call them Kshatriyas! Isn't it? (Cited in Murthy 2000: 201).

The editor of the Mysore Star, in the pages of his journal, carries on a rather caustic debate with Ranganna and some other Brahmins who joined it. His own defense is constructed on the basis of a plethora of Sanskrit texts, all of which are copiously cited in order to confer the status of Brahmins to the Lingayaths (Veerasangappa 1882: 24-42). This acerbic public debate went on for decades and in different fora. In the year 1884, some Brahmins of Mysore put up a public notice ridiculing the claim of Lingayaths to Brahminhood:

There is no sacred thread on the body of the Banajigas [a trading caste among the Lingayaths] and they do not have the initiation ritual. Their women, when they have their periods, do not seclude themselves but merely take bath and attend to the kitchen. When this is the case how will the Veerashaivas become Shaiva Brahmins? In places around Bellary and Hubli they have tied the Linga [the bodily worn sign of Shiva signifying a Lingayath] to Vokkaligas, Barbers [Shudra communities] and even to Harijans - how can they be called Brahmins? All of them are Shudras and that's the truth. ... If bronze can be made into gold then even you can get Brahminhood (cited in Murthy 2000: 202).

Of course, there were many other communities too that were claiming Brahmin status for themselves - like the Vishwakarmas [goldsmiths], barbers and so on. Indeed the Vishwakarma demand was rather sustained and appears to have enjoyed wide

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7 The editor of the journal later published the debates that took place as a tract titled Mysore Star Correspondence (Veerasangappa 1882). The details stated here are from this volume.
currency. Bhairappa, a celebrated novelist, in his autobiography, narrates the story that a Vishwakarma widow in his village used to detail.

When Shankaracharya was in Sringeri, he had many Vishwakarma disciples as he had Brahmans. Shankaracharya belonged to the Vishwakarma jati; that is why he is called Acharya [goldsmiths have Achari, a derivative of the Sanskrit word Acharya, as their surname]. Once he wanted to test his students. He kept his footwear at the riverbed and came back to the Math. He told his Vishwakarma students that he has forgotten his footwear at the riverbed and asked them to fetch it. Each of those boys wore the slippers for some distance each and brought them. The next day he asked the Brahmin students to fetch them from the riverbed. They reverentially kept the slippers on their head and brought them to their teacher. Then the Acharya shouted at the Vishwakarma students: "You have all become very arrogant. You don't have the reverence that the Brahmin students have. T will give them the Matha and go away." Then the Vishwakarma students fell at his feet and begged forgiveness and asked that the Matha be given back to them at least at a later date because they belong to his caste. The Acharya said, "After a thousand years, the Matha will be yours. Let them have it till then". According to calculations that period is over. But the Brahmins are refusing to give it back to them. Our people will not keep quiet; one day all of them will go together and take control (Bhairappa 1996: 23-4).

However, none of such claims seem to have ruffled the Brahmins as the claim of the Lingayaths did. This could have been due to the sustained nature of the claim, as well as due to their growing clout in the administration, increasing rates of literacy among them and an increasing presence in crucial spaces such as the press and the judiciary. The controversies were frequent and passionate and played themselves out in all available spaces, as the rest of our instances demonstrate.

2. The ‘Sharana’ controversy

Shubhodaya was a weekly from Dharwad, edited and published by a Brahmin. It carried an article titled Allama, Basavana Vrittaantavenu? (What is the Chronicle of Allama and Basava?) in its issue dated 18 April 1919, which was penned by Srinivasacharya, a (Madhva ?) Brahmin. Basava and Allama are the two figures who came to be constructed as the founding figureheads of the ‘Sharana’ movement of the twelfth century. The latter half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries saw a determined effort on the part of some sections of Lingayaths to

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8 For instance, in a case debating about the ritual status of the Lingayaths the Bombay High Court in 1926 ruled that "the Veerashaivas are not Shudras; they are Lingi Brahmins [Brahmins who wear the Linga] of the highest order" (Nanjundaradhya 1969: 75). Even the enumerators of the 1931 Census were instructed to list them as Lingi Brahmins, but reportedly not one of the Lingayaths took on that appellation. By then, apparently, the need to acquire state recognition of ritual contestations had outlasted its value.
reconstruct this 'movement' as the grid around which a corporate Lingayath community could be imagined. The piece by Srinivasacharya attempted to subvert this imagination by calling into question the caste status of Allama and the motive of Basava. The Lingayath sections that were keen on 'resurrecting' these figures, expectedly, took great offence. This controversy, which came to be known as the *Shubhodaya Prakarana*, generated a lot of community interest and efforts. Meetings were organised in different parts of the Kannada speaking regions; *Matha* pontiffs were sought out for monetary and moral assistance; and the respective community newspapers actively took part in articulating their positions.⁹

Some excerpts of the contentious article by Srinivasacharya were reproduced in the *Mysore Star* (14 September 1919):

Allama, according to the available historical records, was a Shudra. The name 'Allama' is symbolic of the Muslim god. Chitradurga’s Murugha *Matha* collects donations from the Muslims because Allama was a Muslim. ... Allama went to Kalyana to assist Basava, a minister under Bijjala, who was involved in a mission of conversions. Allama entered Basava's house, where the food was being served to the followers of the faith, with a liquor pot on his back, true to his previous caste. ... We can confidently say that Basava spoilt the sacred Virashaiva faith and did not further it. With the desire to become the king, he harboured *Mindu-Punda Jangamas* [ascetics who still partake of the worldly pleasures and create trouble] and built an army. He fed one lakh and ninety thousand Jangamas not out of *Bhakti* but out of this desire. He had a keen sense of conspiracy, and not of true devotion. Moreover he was a meat-eater too.

This expectedly triggered off an animated controversy. A Lingayath leader went to the district court in Dharwad seeking an injunction against the article. It is not very certain as to how the court went about ascertaining the validity or otherwise of the claims made before it. However, the *Mysore Star* (ibid) claimed that the court found the petition of the Lingayaths valid and held that the publication of the article had indeed hurt the sensibilities of the Lingayaths. The court censured the editor and the writer, and the matter rested with the editor apologising for publishing the said article. The Lingayaths though were not satisfied with this. The court had suggested that the Bombay

⁹ It is problematic to speak of the Lingayath community, at least with reference to this issue. The *Panchacharya* tradition, the *Mathas* which belonged to it and the (upper) castes which owed their allegiance to them were accused by those espousing the *Pirakti* tradition of actively collaborating with the Brahmins in order to defame the 'progressive' twelfth century movement, which apparently spoke against caste distinctions and often incurred the displeasure of the upper castes within the Lingayath fold. Some aspects of this internal contestation and turmoil - that witnessed remarkable upheavals in the late colonial period - can be found in Murthy (2000).
Government could, if deemed necessary, proceed against the defendants; and although many Lingayaths attempted to convince the government of the need for pursuing that option, it was never exercised.

It is significant to note that Srinivasacharya, in the course of the essay, is claiming to write a history that has nothing to do with his own Brahminness. The Lingayaths though see this as yet another attempt by the Brahmans to subvert their history and memory. By this period, the modern contestations between the Brahmans and the Lingayaths (both as non-Brahmin figureheads and as a community claiming parity in the ritual hierarchical order) had become routinised. What was more difficult to contend, as far as the Lingayaths were concerned, was the role played by Alur Venkatrao, a Madhva Brahmin who spearheaded the Karnataka Unification Movement in the Bombay Presidency Kannada-speaking areas and is today known as a pioneer Kannada activist. An extremely versatile person, Venkatrao was then the president of the Karnataka History Congress. It was in that capacity that he was asked to depose before the court in the Shubbodaya case and offer a perspective on the Varnashrama system. He says that his deposition had gone against the contention of the Lingayath side, on the basis of which the court decided the case against them. This version, of course, contradicts the Mysore Star contention that they won a censure and an apology. We have no way of checking the veracity of these claims. But Venkatrao's status as the president of the History Congress is accepted not only by the court but also by the Lingayaths. He does not describe what his arguments were though. His position nonetheless on the question can be gleaned from the other instances that he describes.

He mentions that many Lingayaths took objections to him mentioning Basava as the founder of Veerashaivism in his writings. Finding that very strange and unfathomable, he asks a Lingayath friend about the reasons for this. The friend tells him how that very question - of whether Basava is the founder of Veerashaivism (accepting which would not only mean that it is dated to as recent as the twelfth century but also

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10 For an analysis of his disparate concerns, see Raghavendra Rao (2000). This work also details the preoccupations of DVG, and forwards some conceptual considerations on these and some other Kannada/Karnataka intellectuals of the period. See also Venkatrao's autobiography (1974).

11 This information is from Venkatrao's brief essay (1989) on his good friend, Hardekar Manjappa, a Lingayath leader and one of the very few Lingayaths who had defied the general non-Brahmin (unwritten) diktat of not joining the Indian nationalist movement as it was perceived to be dominated by and furthering the interests of the Brahmans.
subverts the *Panchacharya* tradition which claimed a more antiquarian past) or just a reformer - was a major bone of contention between the two sections of Lingayaths. The resolution of the question was thus foundational for the nature of the corporatisation of the Lingayath community. Given the crucial nature of the question, and indeed given that it was being publicly debated, it is rather strange that Venkatrao, a public activist, editor of a newspaper, and the president of the History Congress, should feign ignorance of the significance of taking positions on the question. Further, he narrates the discussion that he had with Manjappa on the twelfth century ‘movement’. For the *non-Panchacharya* sections among the Lingayaths, the founding importance of the movement rested on what was seen to be its rejection of the *Varnashrama Dhanna* and accordingly in its openness to recruit anybody irrespective of caste into its fold. Indeed, for these sections (which were also the 'lower castes' among Lingayaths), the success of this assertion would allow them to stake an equal status within a corporatised Lingayath community. Venkatrao is unconvinced, even as the explanations he offers are not very clear:

*I told Manjappa that my views on the Veerashaiva Dharma are very different from the common perception. I agree neither with the perception that Basaveshwara [Basava] was against the Brahmana Dharma nor that he destroyed the Varnashrama system* (1989: 139).

Thus Brahmins such as Venkatrao and Srinivasacharya, whether deliberately or otherwise, and merely by the fact that they occupied spaces that were ostensibly outside caste, were indeed playing crucial roles of mediation in the processes of formation of other caste communities. It is not as though such communities did not recognise this mediatory role, and they even attempted to contain it. What was more difficult to contain though was an alternative imagination of these identities of being 'Brahmin' or 'Shudra' as achievable qualities rather than as purely ascriptive statuses. The following instance from DVG’s memoirs illustrates this.

DVG is here narrating a Vaidika Brahmin's "Political Thinking/Philosophy". On the way to a temple, the young DVG, in a mood to exhibit his readings on political philosophy before a Vaidika Brahmin (who is not English educated and therefore totally alien to the world of western political philosophy), explicated the ideas of democracy, socialism and so on. After listening to him in rapt attention, the Vaidika responds:

*So, it means, from now on everything is going to be *Shudra Prabhuthva* [the rule of the Shudras]. Isn't it?* (DVG 1997: 271).
A little perplexed by such a crisp response, DVG plods him on. The Brahmin’s response is summarised by DVG:

Shudra means a person who is narrow-minded; and not, one among the four varnas. Let the *Jaathi* [caste] be anything; what is crucial is to have *broadmindedness*. Look at, for instance, our own village. Who does not respect the words of ..., Muniyappa, .. Maarashetti, .. Sonnegowda or even those of Hyder Saheb, Haaji Madaar Saheb, Syed Pasha Mia [all are from non-Brahmin castes, including Muslims]? Doesn’t everybody honour them? Who will and can say ‘no’ if respectable people and intelligent people rule the state? But what you are explaining to me doesn’t sound like that. You talk of "majority"; you even talk of "larger numbers". Is it the case in any country in this world that a "majority" is intelligent and justice-bound? If the majority is indeed like that then why do we need the state? It seems in *Krta Yuga*, it was indeed like that. ... So, are you by any chance saying that *Krta Yuga* is back upon us?! The meaning of "Shudra" is somebody who is always in distress - I don’t have this, I don’t have that; this good happened to him but why didn’t it happen to me and so on. Thus Shudra is one who heightens his desires and consequently his jealousy. ... Therefore, if such people take over the responsibility of looking after the state, they might just care for themselves and their own needs. Will they take care of the state? It could only result in riots and *anomic* and never in a state that cares for justice. All that we need is justness, isn’t it? *ibid.* 271-2

Mark the different ways in which the term ‘shudra’ is being used in the two instances - that is, in the *Shubhodaya* article mentioned earlier and in DVG’s recuperation of the Vaidika Brahmin’s take on contemporary democracy. While in the former instance it calls attention to an empirically identifiable group of people, in the latter it is invoked as a value, a disposition of mind. Indeed, the simultaneous availability of these two senses of the term ‘shudra’ did make for a crucial admixture of shifting identifications, even as a certain will to mediate and overpower ought also to be recognised.

*J. The Parali case*

The case of Parali though is a more straightforward instance of Brahmin will to mediate and dominate over the affairs of other communities, at least as far as the *Mysore Star* was concerned. It again offers an instance of the above-mentioned oscillation between the two invocations of the term 'shudra'. Parali Kshethra, a famous Shaiva pilgrimage centre located in Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, was part of the Nizam administered Hyderabad State. In 1924, the local Brahmins filed a petition with the Nizam seeking to disallow the Lingayaths from officiating the offering of *abhisheka* to the sacred Linga of the temple. Their claim was that the Veerashaivas, being Shudras, do
not possess the authority to learn the Vedas; and that, consequently, any recognition of
the right to offer Vedoktha Rudraabhisheka [a ritual that involves bathing the god with
ghee, milk etc., the performance of which is authenticated by the chanting of Vedic
hymns] would be against the Dharma. The claim was accepted by the local government
authorities, who ordered that the Lingayaths should not perform the ritual. Vexed by such
a (what was termed) “gross violation of tradition-honoured rights”, Veerashaivas
approached higher authorities seeking intervention.¹²

The government decided on a shastrartha to settle the issue, wherein experts and
scholars from both the sides would argue their respective cases on the basis of the
Shastras. Even prior to this mode of resolution, a three-member Commission appointed
to look into the matter had upheld the Lingayath right to offer Abhisheka. It ruled:

Veerashaivas are Lingi Brahmins [meaning that they are Brahmins who wear a Linga on their
person, referring to the practice of the Veerashaivas of wearing a Linga on their person], and thus
have a right to learn Vedas. They are eligible to perform the Abhisheka Rudra (Mysore Star 20
June 1925).

But the Brahmins contention was that while it is true that Veerashaivas do have a
tradition of performing Abhisheka, they do not use the Veda hymns during the
performance; and that therefore they automatically become unsuitable to perform the
abhisheka (ibid). Since it became evident that such claims and counter-claims were
irresolvable through the pronouncements of modern mechanisms like Commissions, it
was decided that a shastrartha be held to decide on the issue.

While the Veerashaiva side had a ready scholar in Swamy Viroopaksha Pandita, a
Jangama who was the Vedabhashya Professor in the Indore Province’s Sanskrit College,
to lead its case, the Brahmins apparently found it difficult to find a scholar to champion
their cause. Finally, after much deliberation, a lawyer from Pune, Vishnutheertha Bhapat
was hired to argue the Brahmin contention. Both the parties began a major campaign
soliciting help in finding material proving their case as well as requesting monetary help.
The Mysore Star even alleged that two Brahmins from Parali went to Indore and told the

¹² In fact, a feeling of incredulity that apparently struck Veerashaivas was given vent to in the pages of
Mysore Star. A letter titled Brahmanara Vichaara Vaichithryavu (Bewildering Thinking of the Brahmins)
asked with great disbelief and contempt: “Leave alone the question of untouchables for a moment. If
Veerashaivas - who are the followers of the Vaidic path, who are above the Shaivas, are the practitioners of
Shaktha Vishishtaadvaita, have borne the Shivalinga that they hold equal to their life - enter the temples
of our Karnataka Brahmins, it appears that their God gets defiled!” (Mysore Star February 1925).
Brahmin Education Department officials that it is their moral duty to stop Viroopaksha Pandita from taking part in the debate; otherwise they would be indirectly contributing to an activity, which would belittle the Brahmanya (Brahminness) of the Brahmin community (Mysore Star 8 August 1925). But Viroopaksha Pandita had decided to come even if it were to be at the cost of his job. The government also suggested three names, including those of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu, to act as the arbitrator. But apparently the Brahmins did not approve of any of the names (Mysore Star 8 August 1925), forcing the Nizam to appoint a former Chief Justice of the Hyderabad High Court as the Chief Arbitrator.

The central issue here was one of proving (or disproving) the rights of the Lingayaths over Vedas and consequently their claims over Brahminhood. For about six days the Veerashaiva scholars presented their case. On the seventh day, when the gathering was in place for the counter-argument, it was found that the chief pleader of the Brahmin side had left for Pune leaving a note behind stating his inability to argue the case (or so claims the Mysore Star). Brahmins tried hard to get a Pandita to plead their cause but in vain. The Mysore Star (8 August 1925) even alleges that this inability in finding a Brahmin Vedic scholar surprised the Government Commissioner. To be sure, these are confounding claims. Here is a controversy that seems to have become a major public event and the Brahmins supposedly cannot find a single Vedic scholar who can argue on their behalf.13 The Mysore Star (ibid) even goes to the extent of claiming that the Brahmins finally employ an Aradhya (a high caste Lingayath) to argue their case. What is clear nevertheless is that the Veerashaivas are keen on establishing that their side had competent Vedic scholars and were the rightful owners of the task of Rudrabhisheka.

The evidence from the Brahmins then went on for fifteen days, but finally they were found wanting in their claim. The Nizam government, in July 1929, dismissed the case and restored the Veerashaivas the right to perform abhisheka in the temple. The 'Brahmin' that the Veerashaivas constructed, in the conduct of their defense and as part of their claim to a position above that of the Brahmin, can be culled out from the statement that Viroopaksha Pandita made during the Shasthrartha, a summary of which is reproduced below:

13 References to this debate and controversy are found in many of the journals of that period. See for instance, Svadharma (quoted in Mysore Star 2 December 1925) and Jaya Karnataka (8 February 1925).
It was proved with enough evidence in the Shastras that Veerashaivas, who are the Lingibrahmanas, are Devabrahmanas and thus it is they who have a greater right to perform the abhisheka and not the ordinary Brahmins who are a/ingi [without the Linga]. Moreover such ordinary Brahmins, for they are the products of sankara [illegitimate inter-caste unions], can never attain shuddha [pure] Brahminhood.

That they are not shuddha Brahmins is borne out not only by many an authority, but also from their ritual practices, the evidence regarding the origin of their founder Gurus and by the fact that their women are, even to this day, prohibited from worshipping the god, reciting the Vedas, and receiving initiation. Most of the Brahmin castes like the Chitpavana, Karhade, ... Shenave, Konkani [all referring to the Saraswat Brahmins], Ramanuja [Srivaishnavas], Maadhyanandina, Madhva, Saraswat, etc. were, not many years ago, part of Shudra communities such as Vyaadha, Billa, Beda etc. and only recently been elevated to Brahminness, and this, their own scriptures point to. Most of these groups, even now, eat meat and consume liquor and do not have Vedoktha samskaras. Even their own sacred books admit that their founders, like Madhavacharya, were born out of wedlock, to a widow. All these make it clear that they are not pure Brahmins ... (Cited in Nanjundaradhya 1969: 32-41).

Further on, it is stated:

Thus, they have as their Gurus who, in turn, had lower caste people as Gurus. They are made up of communities like the Chitpavans, Karhadas, Hameekas, Iadas who, not many days ago, were part of such low castes as Bhillas and Chandalas. Even now they do not eat together and fight incessantly amongst themselves over each other's position in the internal hierarchy. Therefore such Alingi Brahmins who are corrupted by the mixing of many a neecha Jati [low caste] can only be given the status of Adulterated Brahminhood and definitely not that of Pure Brahmins like the Lingi Brahmins/Veerashaivas (ibid).

The point that Viroopaksha Pandita is drawing constant attention to in his argument is the illegitimacy of the contemporary composition of the Brahmin category itself. That apart, he is also pointing to the alleged fluidity of who can be called a 'Brahmin', with the constant re-drawing of boundaries as making possible the availability of alternative (or counter) claims to Brahminhood. Saraswats and Halekarnatakas were some of the communities that were engaged in bitter disputations with avowedly 'better legitimised' Brahmins like the Smarthas and Madhvas over their Brahminhood. An associated point is the many feuds that were taking place even among the more legitimised' Brahmins over each other's ranking in the hierarchy of Brahminhood (as for instance between the Smarthas and the Madhvas) but more about it later.

One last point, even more apparent in an associated case, is the ability of these disparate communities to close ranks when an 'illegitimate' community claims Brahminness for itself. The Banavasi instance involved invoking a concept of Dashavidha Brahmanaru [Ten Types of Brahmins] as a founding plank for the Brahmin...
argument. A controversy erupted over the entry of a Veerashaiva Deputy Commissioner into the sanctum sanctorum of the famous Madhukeshvara temple on the ground that only *Dashavidha Brahmanaru* were allowed to enter that space. Even as they sought to prove their Brahminness, the Veerashaivas, in this case, also raised uncomfortable questions regarding the composition of the *dashavidha* (which included the Saraswats and the Gowd Saraswats). The composition question was crucial in the context of Karwar, because Saraswats and Gowd Saraswats were in great numbers in this district. They were engaged in an attrition of their own with the other 'more legitimised' Brahmin communities over claims to Brahminness (Conlon 1977 has the details), which continues even to this day. The Saraswats' claim to Brahminhood was (and still is) looked at with contempt on grounds that they ate fish. Their case, however, could not be ignored, in that the community had not only become economically rather powerful but, even more crucially, had entered the legal profession in large numbers. Appropriation and recognition of those communities was therefore crucial for the Brahmin fold as a whole. Finally, when the case went up to the Bombay High Court, it was a Saraswat lawyer who argued the Brahmin case but lost it.

The contests between the Brahmins and the Lingayaths, then, were strikingly frequent, most of which centred on the Lingayaths’ claim to the learning of the Vedas and performing Vedic functions. The *Mysore Star*, in its 27 March 1926 issue, carried a letter that challenged the Brahmins for a debate before the Mysore Maharajah on whether only Brahmins have the right to learn Vedas. The letter writer takes it upon himself to argue the case on behalf of the Lingayaths to establish their Shastra-ordained right to learn the Vedas. The pages of the *Mysore Star* are literally inundated with such challenges and contestations. As we have seen the claims to Brahminhood were many and not merely restricted to the Lingayaths. However, ‘successes’ in claiming Brahminhood did not automatically mean homogenisation or equalisation. For instance, even to this day, Saraswats are not accepted as partners in the marriage networks of other Brahmins, for the 'memories' of the community are still fresh regarding the 'entry' of the Saraswats into the Brahmin fold. As far as the Lingayaths are concerned, the claim for the status of Brahmin seems to have lost its attraction by the 1930s. Although the reasons for the same could be debated, the fact of the increasing willingness of the state to accord greater legitimacy to 'Backwardness' - rather than or even at the cost of claims to Brahminness - as well as the moral and material ascendancy of those Lingayath sections that were
seeking to establish the twelfth century event as the primary source of community imagination were pretty determining.

4. The ‘Vyasanatholu’ control

The final instance involving controversy over Fyasana Tholu also tells something about the rivalry between Brahmins and Lingayaths, but more importantly it enables one to raise questions on the efficacy of the corporateness of the Brahmin identity. Fyasana Tholu refers to the shoulder of Vyasa, to whom the authorship of the epic, Mahabharatha, is ascribed. The story behind the symbol of Fyasana tho/u is briefly this:

After finishing writing the Mahabharatha, Vyasa went around the world propagating the supremacy of Vishnu over every other god [the concept of Vishnu Sarvavthama]. In a place called the Naimisharanya, the Shiva devotees challenge him to propagate the same in Kashi. Taking the challenge, Vyasa comes to Kashi and with his shoulders held high declares the supremacy of Vishnu. Nandeeshavara [the principal follower of Shiva] gets angry and paralyses his arms held high. When Vishnu himself chides Vyasa for his incorrectness, Vyasa praises Shiva, accepts his supremacy and gets back his arms (Murthy 2000: 220).

Besides, it needs to be noted:

This story is very popular in pro-Shiva puranas. This symbol, which publicly proclaimed the supremacy of Shiva over Vishnu, and consequently the supremacy of the (Veera)shaiva over the Brahmin, was conspicuously tied to the Nandidhvaja [a flagpost representing the Nandi, the principal follower of Shiva] on the occasions of processions of deities and the pontiffs. ... If the Brahmins ridiculed the Veerashaivas as Shudras, Veerashaivas used Fyasana Tholu to ridicule them. By about 1900, Fyasana Tholu had turned itself into more than something that proclaimed the supremacy of Shiva - as a symbol shaming Brahmins. At that time, apart from the picture of Basaveshvara, a picture titled ‘Sri Vishnu Sudarshana Laabha’ had also become immensely popular [among Lingayaths in north Karnataka]. The latter depicted the story of Vishnu worshipping Shiva and giving away his eyes to Shiva as a mark of his devotion. This picture appears to have been very popular, as popular as that of Basavanna itself, given that Mysore Star (9 December 1917) even printed an advertisement for the picture (ibid.: 220-1).

In such a context, a Fyasana Tholu procession was organised by the Lingayaths of Bagalkot (Bombay Presidency) on 11 September 1911, occasioning a spirited protest from the local Brahmins. On their petition, the police declined permission to the

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14 The issue of the legitimacy and propriety of Lingayath pontiffs carrying themselves in a palanquin was also a bitterly contested one, with Brahmin pontiffs taking recourse to judicial authorities in order to get injunctions against their Lingayath counterparts from holding palanquin processions. The Sringeri Smartha Swamy had unsuccessfully approached the court (during 1833-43) to disallow Lingayath pontiffs from holding such ceremonials (Murthy 2000: 219). We are not sure about the details of this case, nor of the
Lingayaths, but the District Collector gave the go-ahead. Brahmins approached the court and got an injunction against the procession; but, by then, the procession had already begun. When the Brahmins went up to the head of the procession to announce the court verdict, they were beaten up. According to the Dharwad based newspaper Karnataka Vrittapatryike, "the processionists went into the Brahmin agrahara and plundered the Vitoba Temple and threw away the statue of Hanumantha" (cited in Mysore Star 30 October 1911).

The incident was a rather contentious one, and it is difficult to ascertain what 'really' took place. The Mysore Star claimed that given the "pronounced ability of the Brahmin's pen" everything was indeed exaggerated, while the Karnataka Vrittapatryike accused Lingayaths of "pretending as though nothing has happened" (Mysore Star 30 November 1911). Such street fights appear to have been rather common particularly in the northern parts of Karnataka. Apart from the rather striking fact of actual physical confrontations in which the Brahmins were involved, what is of interest here is the alleged targets of the Veeraashaiva processionists. Both Vitoba and Hanumantha are principally the gods of Madhva Brahmins. Moreover, Madhva Brahmins have had an acknowledged pre-occupation in establishing the principle of 'Hari/Vishnu Sarvotthamā' [a belief that Vishnu is the paramount among the gods], with the Smartha Brahmins being their principal 'other' in such contentions. This makes one to question the efficacy of the corporate identity of something called a 'Brahmin community' and to explore the possibility of this identity to tear at the seams.

Interestingly enough, in the specific context of the Vyasana Tholu controversy, all the symbols invoked, ostensibly to provoke and insult the 'Brahmin' community, are in fact those that would be hurting the sensibilities of Madhvas rather than that of an undifferentiated 'Brahmin community'. In fact, one may even presume that Smarthas would not have experienced any heartburn on such degradation of the essentially Madhva symbols. In the Mysore Star Correspondence called attention to earlier (vide fh. 7 above), all the Brahmin participants appear to belong to the Madhva Brahmin community, if their names are any indication15. What's more, both Ranganna and Bhujangacharya nature of its deliberations. In the immediate context of the Vyasana tholu controversy, however, this was also an issue in question.

15 Names till very recent times offered fairly accurate indications of the Brahmin caste to which a person belonged. Apart from the surnames, which are a give-away, even the first names usually remained distinct.
(the two Brahmin participants in the debate) denigrate Shiva in order to praise Vishnu [Veerasingappa 1882: 21 (Ranganna's statement) and 166 (Bhujangacharya's statement)]. They even unambiguously state that Brahminhood is only for the Vishnubhaktas, and the Rudra/Shivabhaktas are not eligible for it. Similarly, there have been instances of the Sringeri pontiff, the supreme Guru of Smartha Brahmins, being invited to mediate quarrels and contentions between Jangama māthas. There are also references to the accepted practices of inter-marriages among the Smartha Brahmins and the Aradhya Lingayaths (see Shastri 1963).

Thus even as the Vivasana Tholu incident showcases a controversy between the Madhvas and the Lingayaths in particular, it bears testimony to the lingering tensions within the Brahmin fold as well. This leads us to our third section, one designed to probe further the complications that obtained within the 'object' of the non-Brahmin articulation, namely, the Brahmin caste/community as a corporatised entity. While extant modes of internal demarcations and contests within the Brahmin fold are rendered unviable by the non-Brahmin challenge, these continue to obtain and represent a sort of mediating device structuring aspects of the Brahmin identity.

III

Some tensions within: negotiating differentiation within the fold

As we have seen, Brahmins have laid claim to a naturalised monopoly over modern institutions, and it needed a concerted policy on the part of the state to contain aspects of this monopoly. These efforts, especially aimed at 'other backward castes', have yielded mixed results - for a treatment see Galanter (1984) - with the integuments of a broad Brahmin hold over jobs and education remaining in place. The situation entails new questions - about what one makes of it (the dynamics of internal 'resilience' or hegemony) and about whether Brahmins across the spectrum of caste divisions come to appropriate such new spaces of power equally or whether only certain castes and denominations within the Brahmin fold were successful in mediating the circumstances. Answers to these questions are important for the purpose of lending sharper sociological

This has changed quite drastically as of today. Not all families prefer to keep surnames as part of the official names of their children. Obviously, this makes it difficult to guess the particular caste affiliation of a Brahmin.

16 Smarthas are not Shaivas in the sense that they are not marked by an exclusive devotion to Shiva. They worship five deities, and thus are distinct from the Shaivas.
determinacy to the data about the agency undergirding the modern world of institutions, rules and resources, as well as pointing towards the formation of the modern Brahmin self itself. As we stated in the previous chapter, there hardly exists data that answers these questions; and quite paradoxically it was the non-Brahmin demand about the 'Brahmin' that sensitised the state to collect data on the 'caste' composition of the government services, institutions of education, and so on.

Finding an answer to the question "which Brahmins?" was neither a logical necessity nor a political need for the non-Brahmin articulation in convincing the state to heed to its demands. As far as the state was concerned, it appears that since the demand came already packaged in the form of the non-Brahmin recuperation of the question of the Brahmin it too did not see the need to answer the above question. Indeed, alongside the non-Brahmin othering of the Brahmin, which as our foregoing account has disclosed was not without its paradoxes, there is also the dynamics of contestation among the Brahmins themselves that would require independent consideration.

Glimpses of this dynamic can be got as one considers aspects of differentiation within the Brahmin fold. In what follows, we allude to three specific ‘identifications’ (which also constitute axes of differentiation) that have complicated the grounds of identity available for Brahmins in the wake of the non-Brahmin articulation. One relates to the 'Mysore' Brahmin versus the 'Madras' Brahmin conflict over the sharing of government jobs in the Mysore State that dominated the happenings in the public sphere till the 1910s (that is, till the non-Brahmin articulation gained ground). Of course, with the advent of the latter articulation, the posturing of the two combatants is not erased; rather, they get shifted to other arenas or more privatised zones. Another has to do with the disagreements over the relative ritual status of and the accompanying animosity between the Smarthas and the Madhvas. The last bears on the effort of such caste groupings as the Hale Kamatakas to legitimate their status as Brahmins. While the range of these negotiations indicates the difficulties in speaking of an undifferentiated Brahmin identity, paradoxically enough they constitute the very grounds on which a certain corporate re-staging of that very identity is attempted.

The contestation between the 'Mysoreans' and the 'Madrasis' that dominated the public debates for about two decades in the Mysore State immediately prior to the articulation of non-Brahmin demands offer important clues to finding a determinate answer to the above questions. The significance of this contestation is in pointing to the
fact that internal divisions need not only be **restricted** to the space of the ritual, as they are generally thought to be; they could equally be factors to contend with even in the spaces of the secular. We have already alluded (in the previous chapter) to the acrimonious public debate that took place between the 'Mysoreans' and the 'Madrasis' - ‘the natives’ versus 'the foreigners' respectively, as the articulation went - while referring to Dewan Vishveshvaraiah's policy of 'Mysore for Mysoreans'. The policy marked a culmination of this Mysorean versus Madrasi contestation that seemed to structure the contours of administration. The following is a summation of the issue.

From **1831** to **1881**, when the Mysore State was under the direct control of the British authority, it had witnessed a great expansion of the modern bureaucracy and other such institutions of governance. Thus in **1881**, there were nearly seventy thousand people working for the government services (Naidu 1996: 182). Since no other community was in a position to lay claim to a predominant share of this resource, it was virtually a Brahmin space. However, significantly, most of these positions were held by the Brahmin men - particularly Iyers - who had come from the neighbouring Madras Presidency. This, as has been observed in different accounts on the princely Mysore State, had to do with many reasons. The Madras Presidency in general, and the city of Madras in particular, was way ahead in the spread of modern secular education compared to the Mysore State, and consequently the Madras Brahmins had better qualifications and were in greater number. Particularly from **1891**, when Dewan Seshadri Iyer introduced the Mysore Civil Service Examinations, the better-equipped Madrasi Brahmins virtually inundated the top echelons of the Mysore bureaucracy, who in turn brought in many of their own clan to work at the lower levels. What further contributed to the preponderance of Madrasi Iyers in the Mysore administration at all levels was the reported mistrust that the British harboured for the local, 'native' Mysore Brahmins. Naidu (1996:183) cites a letter that the then British Chief Commissioner of Mysore and Coorg wrote in which he calls the Hebbar Iyengars (who represented the cause of the Mysore Brahmins in this struggle) "unscrupulous" men. The British officials also apparently perceived the local Brahmins to be inefficient and intellectually poor. This impression was reportedly rather wide spread among the British **officialdom**.17

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17 The details can be had in Naidu (1996: 183-5) and Thimmaiah (1993: 40-43).
The Mysore Brahmins, who self-styled themselves as the 'natives' were predominantly the Srivaishnava Hebbar Iyengars whose language at home was Tamil. They were primarily the descendants of those Iyengar families which had either come to Mysore region along with their founding Guru, Ramanujacharya in the eleventh century (fearing persecution from the Chola Shaiva king) or had been converted into Srivaishnavism by him thereafter. Hebbar Iyengars had grown close to the Mysore king, who was even persuaded to accept Srivaishnavism and accord the status of Rajaapeeta (the status of the 'official' matha) to the Srivaishnava institution, the Parakaala matha. Thus the Hebbar Iyengars had become rather powerful in the palace lobby. Since the local Brahmins were not a major land-holding caste, their dependence on government jobs was especially acute. However, the British officials perceived them to be not only inefficient but also corrupt and thus favoured the 'foreign' Brahmins. Thus from the 1870s onwards the Mysore bureaucracy saw a significant influx of the Madras Brahmins. The introduction of the Mysore Civil Services Examination in 1891 merely formalised the British preference for the Madras Brahmins.

Apart from such formalised entry into the Mysore bureaucracy, the Madras Brahmins, once part of the administrative structure, reportedly recruited their kith and kin for the lower echelons. As the Miller Committee later remarked, "[A]n 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). Though the Committee was making this observation in regard to the corporatised Brahmin 'community' as a whole, one can draw the same parallel with the Madras Brahmins too.

Hebbar Iyengars perceived a real threat to their life opportunities. They however could not have used the language of ritual hierarchy in legitimising their claims. For instance, they could not have probably said "we are the purer Brahmins; so we should be given all the jobs". They had to invent a modern, secular language to argue their case. They accordingly brought forth a 'sons of the soil' argument, encoded as 'Mysore for Mysoreans', and maintained that first preference in government recruitments should be given to the Mysoreans. Not only did this argument underplay their casteness - in that the 'Mysorean' for them was a trope that meant a Mysore Brahmin, a Hebbar Iyengar in particular - they also glossed it with a modern ground of justification. Interestingly, the plea 'Mysore for Mysoreans' shared remarkable similarities with what was to later become the non-Brahmin argument, by way of asking for some frame of protective
discrimination, the abolition of public examinations, etc.; indeed the very same grounds that they, as a corporatised Brahmin self, were refusing to grant legitimacy to when proposed by the non-Brahmins immediately thereafter. Throughout the Dewanship of Seshadri Iyer, the Mysore Brahmins argued for restricting the Mysore Civil Services to Mysoreans, imploring that jobs be automatically given to "first class graduates and postgraduates from Mysore" on such grounds as language familiarity and the fact of discrimination of Mysore candidates by the bureaucracies of the Madras and Bombay Presidencies and by the Indian Civil Service (Hanumanthappa Vol. I n.d.: 250-265).

The emerging 'public' - particularly as represented by the newspapers - was divided along similar lines. The Bangalore Spectator took the side of the Madras Brahmins, while the Karnataka Prakasika argued the case on behalf of the Mysore Brahmins. This bitter and public debate went on till about 1912, when the appointment of the 'Mysorean' Vishveshvaraiah signalled the Mysore Brahmins' triumph. What is particularly interesting about the contours of this contestation and its 'resolution' is the naturalisation of the secular-modern as being Brahmin. Prior to the emergence of the figure of the non-Brahmin, the emergent spaces of the secular-modern were often tacitly recognised as legitimately made up of Brahmins. The press, the State (both colonial and native-princely) and the bureaucracy were all partisan entities, taking sides on behalf of one Brahmin group or the other. Such a naturalisation and consolidation of the secular sphere as a Brahmin preserve was so complete that it perplexed the latter no end that the non-Brahmins could even ask for a share in the resources and opportunities.

An equally interesting observation served up by this specific order of internal contestation has to do with the nature of the secularising experience that a caste itself undergoes: that the trajectory of its secularisation need not imply an inevitable corporatisation of caste identity. Thus the Brahmins in question here are increasingly seeking to keep their casteness under erasure, while foregrounding the secular identities that they inhabit (such as being Mysoreans, or even manning the apparatus of governance). Indeed, in the absence of an 'external' other, this strategy could be deployed to confound the identity of being Brahmin itself; but such a field of internal hierarchisation is suspended once the non-Brahmin articulation takes shape, with the othering instituted by the latter necessitating a response on the part of Brahmins as a corporatised whole.
Of course, Brahmins continued to recruit caste distinctions as resources to negotiate with secular issues, even as these never retained their legitimacy as publicly defendable actions. The dominance of the 'Madras' Brahmins, and, more importantly, the animosity between them and the native 'Mysore' Brahmins, therefore continued to be played out on the sidelines in a circumstance that was increasingly being overwhelmed by the Brahmin-non-Brahmin confrontation. Some of the memoirs recollecting the contours of the period vouch for this. A. N. Murthy Rao, a celebrated Kannada writer, recounts an instance in his autobiography (1990) which demonstrates that the non-Brahmin challenge did not necessarily put an end to the largely secular confrontations within the Brahmin fold. Noting the undercurrent of animosity that existed between the "Tamil" and "Kannada" Brahmins, Rao narrates an event of altercation between them in a school where he was teaching for a brief while. The immediate occasion for the flare-up among the Mysore and Madras Brahmin teachers was the introduction of a 'higher grade' for the high school teachers, which benefited about 30-40 of them. Of these, it was alleged that almost all except three were Iyers, leading all the Kannadigas to call it the "Iyer Grade". He recalls:

One day in the Common Room [where all the teachers sat] a Kannadiga teacher said something to the effect "These people come from outside, eat our food [meaning that they are surviving because we have allowed them to] but boss over us" ... The response from the Tamil group was swift. "Mysoreans lack brains. Therefore you had to import from Madras. We might be surviving owing to your graciousness but remember that you are surviving because of our brains" (Murthy Rao 1990: 228).

Even as Rao tries to recuperate this animosity solely in terms of 'Kannadiga versus Tamilian' - or even 'Mysorean versus Madrasi' - thereby erasing the casteness of the event, by the sheer fact of the names that he mentions it is apparent that it was primarily an exchange between the Mysore Brahmins and the Madras Brahmins. Accordingly, even as the secularising Brahmins were unitedly contesting the non-Brahmin assertion, in contexts such as the above which were bereft of the non-Brahmin presence, they were willing to foreground their other identities.

The non-Brahmins frequently alleged that Brahmins worked as networks of nepotism in recruiting and promoting caste and kinsmen into the bureaucracy. However, 18

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18 This incident takes place during 1925-26, that is long after not only the public row over the Madras Brahmin domination had died down but also fairly long since the non-Brahmin articulation had legitimised its attack on the Brahmin.
evidently such networks were further inflected in terms of the 'kind' of Brahmin one was, where one came from and so on. Thus from the days of Dewan Poornaiah (that is, after the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799) there have been complaints of nepotism in terms of favours (particularly in cases of recruitment into government service) to not just any or unmarked Brahmins, but to those who belonged to the same denomination as that of the powers that be. Poornaiah was supposed to have appointed many Madhva Brahmins into the bureaucracy (Chandrashekhar 1985: 17). With the exception of Rangacharlu and M. Vishveshvariah, all the Brahmin Dewans (till the appointment in 1918 of the first significant non-Brahmin Dewan, Kantharaj Urs) have had to face charges of favouring Brahmins of their own caste.

Contestations over ritual status and hierarchy too mark the space of the Brahmin. These too precede (but also co-exist with) the non-Brahmin imagination of the Brahmin, and mediate the dynamics of the Brahmin identity in crucial ways. While it is possible that the different Brahmin castes that come within the ambit of a single philosophical tradition (say, like the Smarthas, followers of the Advaita philosophy) too entertain notions of hierarchy among themselves, what appears to have marked the religious history of Karnataka is the mutual animosity between the Smarthas and the Madhvas. A longer religious history of the 'Karnataka' region might yield a firmer perspective on this question but the axis we are trying to recuperate here is a more contemporary one.

What makes this space of contestation unique is that it is different from a caste claiming the status of Brahminhood. Unlike the latter, the self-perception of being Brahmins held by the constituents of this field of contestation is a confident one. Thus we do not come across Smarthas saying that Madhvas are no Brahmins at all, even as they keep reminding the Madhvas that since their tradition was founded after that of the Smarthas, most of the Madhvas are converts to this denomination. While the 'Brahminness' of these groups is not the object of scrutiny - unlike that of say the Saraswats - it is their relative 'purity' and relational position in the ritual status hierarchy that is being called into question. As part of this contestation, there have also been attempts at enlisting the support of the local chieftains or other such powers of authority in order to physically take over each other's places of worship, Mathas, and landed property.

\[^{19}\text{Tambuchetty, a Tamil Christian, was Dewan for a very short period.}\]
The records available at the Sringeri Smartha Matha are replete with such instances as the following. The matter relates to an attempt on the part of a Madhva Matha in Udupi to take over the same of a relatively small Smartha Brahmin caste called the Haigas (the Havyakas of today) that owed its allegiance to the Sringeri pontiff but had its own Matha in Theerthahalli of the Shimoga District. Following a complaint in this regard, the then Mysore Dewan, Poornaiah, in a letter dated 27 July 1810 directed the local official, Shankariah to initiate appropriate action:

In the Haiga Matha of Theerthahalli, ever since the death of the elder pontiff, the minor pontiff is in charge. Some people from there reportedly went to the Puthige Matha [one of the eight Madhva Mathas located in Udupi] and slandered against the Shanubhogue [the official responsible for accounts] of the Haiga Matha. Based on this, the Puthige pontiff allegedly called the Haiga pontiff and the Shanubhogue to his presence, along with the account records. The Puthige pontiff not only has taken possession of the said records but also has got the Shanubhogue murdered. We have received a complaint to that effect based on the one registered with the Sringeri pontiff by the wife and children of the Shanubhogue ... If you find the allegation to be true, this is what you are supposed to bring to the notice of the pontiff of the Puthige Matha. That the Theerthahalli Haiga Matha belongs to the Smarthas and, consequently, comes under the jurisdiction of the Sringeri Matha which alone is responsible and has the right to regulate its affairs. Lumpens will always be there complaining with you against the Matha. But it is evidently not your job to regulate the functioning of that Matha, isn’t it? Therefore, you are hereby directed to give back all the records pertaining to the Haiga Matha to the concerned and, hereafter, not to get into the affairs of the Haiga Matha (cited in Sharma 1969: 53-4).

There continue to be recuperations to this day of this supposedly centuries old feud between the Smarthas and the Madhvas. Sharma’s Kannada book entitled Sri Udupi Kshethrada Naija Chitra matthu Chaaritthrika Hinnele (The Authentic Picture of the Udupi Pilgrim Centre and its Historical Background) published in 1969 is one such. It provides a decidedly Smartha version of the alleged forcible acquisition of Udupi from the control of the Sthanika Brahmins (a Smartha caste) by the Madhvas in the 15th century. Madhvas reportedly enlisted the help of the local Bunt and Jain chieftains and landlords to violently take over the Smartha controlled rich temples of Udupi and the vast

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20 We however have not been able to check the veracity of either the claims made or the details presented in this extremely fascinating book. Given that it cites many court records verbatim complete with citations and presents documents from the Sringeri Matha, one could grant it a primary validity. What augments our position is the fact that many of the respondents interviewed did recount the bitter animosity that prevailed between the Smarthas and the Madhvas. One of them even referred to the alleged invasion of Udupi, supposedly then a Smartha stronghold by the Madhvas, a story that Sharma narrates with great passion. Even if one decides not to stand by the contents and claims of Sharma’s book, we could take its publication as testifying to the internal contestations that mark the Brahmin fold.
areas of agricultural land that these temples possessed. It details how Vadiraja Swamy, a proactive Madhva pontiff, took the lead in this effort, even displaying a willingness to convert the Bunt and Jain powers-that-be into the Madhva fold. It further cites a series of civil and criminal court proceedings that involved the two sides.

In more recent times though, the contestation appears to have been much more muted and privatised, even if the sting remains. DVG, who as we mentioned early on was an important intellectual and writer in the Mysore State and whose life almost spans the century (1887-1975), notes the articulation of the Smartha-Madhva divide in his pen portrait of the Madhva Dewan P. N. Krishnamurthy:

Many did say that during Krishnamurthy’s dewanship, Madhvas became rather powerful. But I know that he was not responsible for that ... But still, if one were to take a look at the coterie around him, one could legitimately entertain a doubt. In the eastern side of the Dewan’s bungalow, there was a small temple of the Praanadevaru—a god exclusively of the Madhvas] ... Every evening, Mangalaarath and bhajans used to signal the culmination of the puja held in the temple. Krishnamurthy, along with his family, would be present then. After the Mangalaarathi, devotional songs used to be sung. One that some of the overly devoted Atibhakthatra used to sing on that occasion was:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Eddhedhhu odheethaane Madhvaraava} \\
\text{Namma Madhvaraava Namma Madhvaraava} \\
\text{AdvaitihBhandanna Smartha Randeegandanna} \\
\text{Eddhedhhu odheethaane Madhvaraaya} \\
\text{Namma Madhvaraava Namma Madhvaraava} ...
\end{align*}
\]

And it went on like this (DVG 1997: 51).

The following is a gross translation of the above lines.\(^{21}\) It remains gross owing to the sheer untranslatability of the spirit of the expletives used in the song.

How he kicks their butt, our Madhwaraya [Madhvacharya],
Our Madhwaraya, our Madhwaraya,
He kicks the shameless Advaithis,
The sons of bitches/widow-marrying Smarthas,
How he kicks their butt, our Madhwaraya,
Our Madhwaraya, our Madhwaraya...

Indeed, one of the Madhva respondents, during the interview, recalled that this very song was being sung just before the food was to be served in the Madhva Matha...

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Translation is by Ms. Bageshree S., a friend from Bangalore of the researcher. The complete works of DVG, in eleven volumes, are published by the Directorate of Kannada and Culture, Government of Karnataka, of which his memoirs form a big part (three volumes of pen portraits and another one of biographies).
located in Theerthahalli which he used to frequent during his childhood. This was during the early years of the 1960s.  

There were such fights concerning the other important Brahmin category - that of the Srivaishnavas - too. One of the respondents, a Smartha, recalled during the interview a popular saying that was fairly widespread among the Iyengar Brahmins, which depicted their scorn for Shiva. His Iyengar friends apparently used to cite this saying to their Smartha friends, apparently making fun of the spirited and resolute antipathy against the Smarthas that supposedly lay behind it. The saying went on these lines: a true and spirited Iyengar, or Srivaishnava, will never enter a Shiva temple, even if it is dilapidated and is not-in-use; not even when an elephant, on rampage, is relentlessly pursuing him on a night of fearsome storm and lightning.

We shall now turn to another axis of contestation. If the foregoing concerned those castes whose ‘Brahminness’ was more or less accepted by the other Brahmin communities and the outsiders, there have been insistent demands from other 'brahminical' (sic.) castes that they be accorded the status of and be recognised as Brahmins. The Hale Karnatakas (literally, Old Karnatakas), a Smartha caste that was placed under boycott by the Sringeri Matha, attempted vigorously in the early decades of the twentieth century to get back the status of Brahminhood. The following is a letter titled Brahmana Bandhugalalli Vijaapane (A Request to the Brahmin Brethren) that appeared in the 27 July 1927 issue of the Mysore Star, written by V. Ranganna. Ranganna (who, it can be deduced from the tenor of the letter, could have been a Hale Karnataka himself) calls himself "An obedient servant of Shankaracharya". The tone of the letter is evidently one brimming with sarcasm and seeks to challenge the Brahmins.

The Haleenaadu Karnatakas had requested the Sringeri pontiff that the disgrace and infamy that is heaped on them be removed and that they be allowed to regain rights of commensality and other such rights vis-a-vis other Brahmins. The Sringeri Swamy had rejected this request on 10-01-1867. However on 15-12-1923 the Swamy himself went to their houses and gave his blessings [a symbol of acceptance into the fold].

22 Interview with Dr. Ananth, 13/08/2000. A Madhva Brahmin, aged 48 years, Dr. Ananth is a medical practitioner in the city of Shimoga. He is a member of the Shimoga Jilla Brahmana Sabha (the Shimoga district representative of the AKBMS) and of a recently floated local association - the Vipra Trust, which is actively pursuing formation of Brahmin residential colonies in the outskirts of Shimoga, plots that are to be sold at subsidised rates to Brahmins, irrespective of the particular castes to which they belong.

23 Interview with Mr. Subramanya, 30/01/2000. As previously mentioned (Ch.3, fn. 47) the respondent is an inactive - member of the AKBMS. He came to Bangalore in the early 1970s seeking to further his career in music and has been a Bangalorean ever since.
Soon after this, the Brahmins of Nanjanagoodu, a pilgrimage centre near Mysore, got together in a meeting and decided that the Hale Karnatakas are not Brahmins. Consequent to the decision, they have got appropriate Prayaashchitta [expiation] done on those Brahmins who, consequent to the Swamy’s gesture of acceptance, had mistakenly eaten with the Halenaadu Karnatakas. If these Brahmins truly believe that because of this ‘act of atrocity’ committed by the Matha [of accepting the Halenaadu Karnatakas into the Brahmin fold], the Brahmana dharma and the Swamy’s pride and Tejas have been affected adversely, they could decide to boycott the Sringeri Matha itself and become autonomous so that they can save the Brahmana dharma.

The Mysore Star reported (in 1929, that is, six full years after the Sringeri Swamy’s gesture of reconciliation vis-a-vis the Hale Karnatakas) the continuing refusal of the Brahmins to allow Hale Karnatakas into the ‘Brahmin space’.

The Srikanteshvara Temple of Nanjanagoodu (a pilgrim centre near Mysore) contained a space called Sukhavaasini into which only Brahmins were allowed. The report says that the Hale Karnatakas, in spite of getting permission from both Sringeri Swamy and the Mysore Maharaja, were still not being allowed access to that space in the temple. Not only that, the report alleges, the Brahmins were putting pressure on the Swamy and the Maharaja to take back the permission.

We have not been able to follow the events thereafter, and Ranganna’s letter itself did not attract any responses - either from the Hale Karnataka Brahmins or other Brahmins or from the Matha. There is however a mention of the Hale Karnatakas in the Census Report of Mysore, 1931. The Superintendent of Census Operations, Mysore State, M. Venkatesa Iyengar (incidentally he is one of the most celebrated Kannada writers), notes:

The community known as Halekarnataka claims to be a Brahmin community and is refused that status by the three main groups [meaning the Smarthas, the Madhvas and the Srivaishnavas]; but it is treated as Brahmin for Census purposes as the people return themselves as Brahmins and cannot be said to belong to any other group (Census of India 1931 Vol. XXV Mysore Part I Report 1932: 318).

It is not possible to conclusively determine whether the state recognition in the form of the census enumeration had any better impact on the social acceptability of the Hale Karnatakas within the Brahmin fold. There appears to be no caste association too of

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24 It is significant that the journal Mysore Star (a decidedly anti- and non-Brahmin space) should make its space available for the Hale Karnatakas time and again. What is more, the Hale Karnatakas are not the only 'Brahmin' caste receiving such a sympathetic treatment at the hands of the journal; even the Gowd Saraswats, another caste bidding to be recognised as Brahmins, received similar kindnesses of positive reporting.
the Hale Karnatakas today, unlike almost all the Smartha castes which have associations that survive even today.

The aforementioned Census Report details many other castes that were staking a claim to be considered and enumerated as Brahmins. The Report is also a good study of the grounds of justification - many evidently **perfunctory** - that the census officers adopted in evaluating such claims. Here are some claims to Brahminhood and their "disposal":

Some persons of a community calling themselves Venkatapur Brahmins and ordinarily included in the Satani community desired to be enumerated separately.

The Shattada Sri Vaishnava Samaja of Kunigal requested that the people hitherto known as Satani should be shown under the name "Shattada Sri Vaishnavas".

A representative of the Brahmin community dwelling in or around Devarayamudra desired that his community should be described as Vadama Dravida.

The Aradhya Brahmanas of the Akhila Bharatha Aradhya Brahmana Maha Sabha [All India Aradhya Brahmin Federation] requested that the Lingayath community should be re-classified under a castes as shown in a statement [The statement is not reproduced in the Report] *(ibid.: 316-17)*.

The following observations, made in a section rather characteristically titled “Their [the claims]’ Disposal”, offers a window into the seamless ways in which the officials' secular positions and their casteness were entwined with each other. The section begins with these remarks:

Requests of this kind come up at the time of each Census. It does not seem to be realised by the persons who make such requests that the Census is a record of existing conditions and that it makes no attempt to grade people by their class. For the purpose of a Census no caste is either higher or lower than another. The difficulty in accepting a new name for the Census Tables arise from the fact that too many and too frequent changes from Census to Census would make the statistics collected of no use. Also when a community not generally considered a Brahmin or Kshatriya community, wants to adopt a name that makes it appear as a sub-caste among Brahmins or Kshatriyas the proposal is rejected *(ibid.: 317, emphasis added)*.

The Census then takes up each claim, and either accepts or rejects the same on the basis of the guidelines it set for itself as above.

The people of the Viswakarma community have long desired to be shown “Viswakarma Brahmins”. For reasons already stated [that the three main ”sections” of Brahmins do not accept their claim] the proposal could not be accepted.
The request that the name “Satani” may be changed to Sattada Sri Vaishnava could not be accepted because Sri Vaishnava is the distinctive name of one group of “Brahmins” and the Satani community is not generally treated as a Brahmin community. The adoption of the new name would have been misleading. The Aradhyas in the Veerashaiva community desired to be treated as a Brahmin community. The three main groups forming the Brahmin community in the general Hindu fold do not accept the claim of the Aradhyas to Brahminhood; but this by itself, would not be a reason for rejecting the claim. The special reason applying to the case of the Aradhyas is somewhat different. They are Veerashaivas though they be Veerashaiva Brahmins and to class them separately would be to begin a classification of the Veerashaiva community into castes. This is not necessary from the Census point of view and it is also not certain that public opinion in the Veerashaiva community would approve of the division of the community into many castes in the Census Tables (ibid: 317-8).

Such interventions on the part of the modern “enumerating” state - arbitrary as they evidently are and mediated by those who occupy the position of the enumerator - do not seem to have had any foundational impact on the ways in which the Brahmin community (or any such community) maintained its own boundaries; at least not immediately. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous presence of the Brahmins in such secular spaces does seem to have enabled them to ‘contain’ the claims to Brahmin status even at the official level.

In the course of this chapter, we have tried to map the contours of the emerging Brahmin self particularly in the wake of the non-Brahmin categorisation. We complicate the axes of these self-definitions and contestations in the sixth chapter while seeking to indicate towards the play of identities and identifications in the contemporary Brahmin self. But before moving on to that range of concerns, the next chapter delineates another important space in which the Brahmin identity and identification unfolds itself in the modern moment - again definitionally cast by the non-Brahmin imagination of the Brahmin self- that of the caste association.