Bose’s Deliberation on the Dynamism of Caste

Nirmal Kumar Bose’s contribution to the understanding of the caste system had been of immense help in analysing the structure and change of the Indian society. His understanding remains important for yet another reason, his inferences had all been extracted from the field observations that he had pursued tenuously for long. He was not an arm chair sociologist and his works reflected the amount of research he had done to collect a large amount of data pertaining to caste. He used various empirical methods to embark on this massive venture to unveil the dynamism entailing the caste system. He wrote prolifically on caste and did not stop at just explicating the various dimensions of caste and its directions of change, alongside he was careful to covertly weave it with the other systems found in its proximity. He wrote voraciously on caste thus focusing on its various undercurrents and tendencies (Bose: 1934, 1934a, 1936a, 1959-60 and 1960). But before expatiating on the ideas of Bose in perceiving the caste system in India, we must briefly review the work of other stalwarts in this sphere.

This is necessary to locate his work in the contemporary backdrop so as to analyse his significance and to pin down the vantage point of the position he took. Caste had always been an important social institution in the country from time immemorial. Therefore, attempts have been rigorously made by the social scientists to unveil the basis of this age old institution which had survived in the country through the thick and thin. The investigations made on the caste to test its elasticity and malleability were innumerable. But of them a few works require special mention not only because they left an indelible mark on the discourse of caste but also because Bose himself felt their relevance in his essay, entitled, Progress of Anthropology and An archaeology, for the immense influence they left on him.

Notable amongst them had been J.S Nesfield who opined that the chief function of the caste was intimately connected with the economic sphere of life. In 1944, Bhupendranath Datta in his work, Studies in Indian Social Polity, showed that castes are actually the creators of pseudo classes in the society. Castes have always divided people between the privileged and the underprivileged classes thus propagating a
socio-cultural stratification in the society. Some authors have also showed the tendency of the higher castes to create dominance on economic and political ambit. Likewise, Srinivas’s idea of the dominant caste had been yet another evolution in this direction. According to him, “caste in its essence is a religious group, membership of which entails certain ritual observances. The rules of caste behaviour are the rules of religion” (Srinivas: 1952: vii). He went on to add that,

The concept of pollution governs relations between different castes. This concept is absolutely fundamental to the caste system, and along with the concepts of *karma* and *dharma* it contributes to make caste the unique institution it is. Every type of inter-caste relation is governed by the concept of pollution (Srinivas: 1952:26).

Thus Srinivas’s work on caste had revolved around the issue of the permanence of caste owing to a particular productive organization accompanied by its attendant scheme of social relationship. Other valuable contributions on caste had been made by Satish Chandra Mukherjee, one of the pioneers of the nationalist movement and the founder of the Dawn Society. He identified castes as a corporation and believed that nationalism led to the aggravation of such corporations.

Mrs. Annie Besant also wrote an article on caste in the *Dawn Magazine* of 1903. Tagore had also made noteworthy contributions on caste. He wrote an essay in 1905, entitled *Swadeshi Samaj* which had been incorporated in his collection of prose writings which was later entitled as *Sankalan* in 1925. Bose while citing their works said,

The task of these authors was not to defend the shortcomings of the Indian social system, but to understand it and discover where its source of strength or weakness lay. In fact, they succeeded in illuminating many an obscure point in India’s social history (Bose: 1963: 43).

In the context of citing notable works on caste, mention must also be made of Sridhar V. Ketkar’s not so popular book entitled, *The History of Caste in India* (1909). Attention might also be drawn to Sarat Chandra Roy’s essays that were published in the journal, *Man in India* between 1934 and 1938. The articles were later reprinted that took the form of a book entitled, *Caste, Race and Religion in India*, in 1962.
Bose and his tradition on caste.

Bose made a brief mention in this connection of W.H Wiser whose work on the jajmani system made for a pioneering study in a U.P village based on an intensive field based investigation. Wiser’s *Behind Mud Walls* (1946) made for an interesting work on the caste system and how the networks were formed on the basis of social exchanges. Since that time the trend of in-depth field studies was initiated and the tradition was perpetuated by a bunch of anthropologists like D.N Majumder, Oscar Lewis, S.C Dube, F.G Bailey, Adrian C Mayer, Bernard S. Cohn, McKim Marriott and M.N Srinivas in both north and south of India. Bose felt such enquiries were anchored on a substantive theoretical framework compared to the previous ethnographic accounts of the travelers and colonial administrators. As Bose said,

> The purpose of most of the authors listed above has been the discovery and assessment of the strength of the several elements which constitute the totality of ‘social structure’. The role of leadership, the economic distinction between castes, the means of communication, an assessment of the effects of planned reorganization, are all being examined with care, while a deeper interest is also in evidence along with carefulness and diligence in enquiry (ibid. 43).

Thus we find the approach that Bose employed for analysing the caste system was essentially pragmatic in nature. He went on reiterating the importance of the field based intensive investigations to give a vivid account of the structure and its dispositions for transformation. It was with this orientation in mind that he himself wanted to draw our attention to. Therefore Bose pointed out,

> Bailey’s field lies in the Kandh country in Orissa. In his study of two villages, he describes how economic and political changes have affected the relationship between caste and caste like tribes. The impingement and force of new ideas have also been given their due share in the change. In both Bailey and Mayer’s work, one thing stands out clearly. The economic and political aspects of ‘social structure’ do not seem to be relatively weak in comparison with ‘religious’ ideas or feelings. In other words, one may be led to modify the idea that caste and Hinduism are as integrally inseparable as we are often led to believe (ibid: 43).
He felt it is only through such thorough studies that the various dimensions of caste, even not so popular ones might come out. New ways of analysing caste can make roads for the new ones. The initial thrust on the religious interpretation of the caste thus dissuaded in favour of more secular forces not much heard of in the past. Such new and novice versions had not been possible had we stuck to the obstinate and the status-quo position taken by the ethnographers in the past. He rejected such studies that were cooped up in social vacuum without any osmosis and because the analysis remains divorced from the reality basking outside. Bose himself said, “It was therefore more necessary to depend on field observation than on traditions in order to appreciate the actual working of caste” (ibid: 44).

**Caste and the different schools of thought as espoused by Bose.**

As far as the analysis of caste had been pursued for long in India, Bose found the preference of the one school over another. This is because the Indian social scientists have tried clinging to one theoretical edifice or the other while explaining as well as to validate their position on the caste system and its dimensions. In this connection Bose found two schools of thought extremely relevant. One had been the British school of thought and other the Chicago. He felt the former school attached more importance to the traditions and ideas as the fulcrum of analysis. The latter instead pitched in for a more historically specific study that analysed the caste conditions in particular references. Contextual understanding of the caste system is far more necessary to understand the working condition of the system that might not flourish a pan Indian structure. The disparate regions might show diversity in caste based behaviour and they might not synchronize with the unified whole. It is therefore necessary to recognize such recalcitrant parts of the caste system that defy the overall compatibility. At the same time, we also need to carry on in-depth historical studies to recognize the disparate regions that have deviated from the core. Within a single region, caste based behaviours might show erratic moods and it shall be wrong to push them to a forced conformity. Rigorous field works can only unveil such discrepancies. Bose felt while Robert Redfield left a far reaching influence on the academicians, there are only a few anthropologists who have followed him, among them the eminent ones had been Milton Singer, Mckim Marriott, S.C Sinha and L.P Vidyarthi (ibid:45).
Caste and the source of its vitality

The massive work done on the caste system from the time immemorial had instigated Bose to enquire into the source of its vitality. While deliberating on the immortality of the caste, Bose said there must be an underlying power rendering to its enduringness and durability. He said, despite the system having faced the barge of criticism, it has endured through all the odds and fared the test of time. The system is infamous for its infliction of oppression and inequality on the people. Its sectional interests have run counter to its national and political integration rendering the system impotent and insipid. However, even if all these allegations remain true, the caste still did not lose its place among the poor and the depressed classes. These classes for time and again have closed their rank behind the caste system. There had been umpteen revolts whistled to abet the system but the system had not only perpetuated unabatedly but at the same time it added prolifically to more castes. Bose said the mystery behind it needed to be unveiled for he was more interested in its underlying dynamism than its diabolical public image. Bose assumed that there must be something that dilutes the vicious perception of this system and makes it readily amiable and even stronger over days. Bose wanted to uncover this cloud of mystique shrouding the system. So he said,

As sociologists, we have to explain where the source of this vitality lies. For, unless we are able to do so correctly, we are likely to be defeated when we try to explain many of the happenings of Indian history, or have to create favourable conditions for our national regeneration (Bose:1967:216).

Thus we find that Bose was engrossed in finding out the true basis of the caste system which kept it going for so long. He started with the review of those theories that vouched for the incessant existence of the castes. He thereon refuted the theories as sham causes and went searching for its true causes. One of the theories suggested that the caste system had been formed by a group of assiduous and strategic people who wanted to resist revolt by forming caste like groupings. They therefore used the political power and the religious promotion to usher their interests. But Bose was careful to soon refute this explanation on the ground that not only the higher Hindu castes, even the Muslim rulers were magnified by the caste system. They showed conformity to the attributes of the caste system and therefore unexpectedly did not
challenge the system. The other explanation which probably rendered the system legitimate was the proposed theory of Karma. Perhaps, Bose saw the theory incapable of explaining the link, for it showed a dual tendency. The theory at the same time was used by Lord Buddha as a tool for mutiny. The same theory was re-interpreted by Buddha as a way for celebrating individual enterprise as against fatalism upheld by the caste system. He time and again reiterated that ascription was unimportant for what mattered was what man himself did. Thus Bose very resolutely uprooted the various elucidations of the caste system doing round. He now tried giving us an alternative theory on caste.

**The Vedic and the post-Vedic situations.**

Bose said that the occupational differentiation of castes had been conspicuously stated in the official census reports. The reports showed the prevalence of a rigid division of labour by caste ranking. The caste occupations were taken as perennial positions that hardly showed any possibility of change. However, Bose asserts that there had been a significant change since the Vedic times when the caste vocations became stubborn with time. The rigidity was furnished by the fact that families were made to strictly adhere to their caste positions despite their apathy for it. This was unlikely in the Vedic times when occupational deviations were allowed and the castes could profess multiple vocations without any constriction. As Bose himself asserted,

> In the Vedic times, members of the same family apparently pursued a variety of occupations. The son of a carpenter or chariot-maker could be a poet. But later on this elasticity seems to have been gradually restricted, and stricter rule enjoined on the choice of occupations. By the time of *Manava Dharmashastra*, the tradition had almost become rigid that particular jatis or castes were to follow particular occupations” (ibid:213).

Thus Bose showed that the caste obduracy has stiffened with time to such an extent that it made occupational strictures mandatory for all. As R.C Majumdar corroborated the facts by asserting that caste system had become stubborn with the revival of the Brahminical religion. In the Vedic period, the caste distinctions have been sharpened. All the attributes of the caste system, like ascriptive status, endogamy, and commensality were the results of gradual evolution. As Majumdar said,
None of these was sanctioned by ancient scriptures and none of these was established without a hard struggle which was continued almost up to the end of the Hindu period. In the end, however, the Brahmans succeeded in spite of the stubborn resistance of the Kshatriyas, and the decline and fall of Buddhism set the final seal to their supremacy (Majumdar:1922: 565).

Thus we find that over time the caste system had become more constrained. The caste rules were basically a handiwork of the Brahminical caste which concocted the rules to serve their interests. The rules were never the innate constitution of the caste system but were later on incorporated as an extended concoction of the original system. Nevertheless, undoubtedly these elements were against the ethos of the sacred literature. The rules of ascription were said to have been absent before. Therefore, it is said,

In the face of the fact that even the late Manusamhita approves of certain forms of inter-marriage between different castes, marriage was strictly confined within the caste now (ibid:566).

Every other attribute of the caste system had been emboldened with days and this had been very surreptitiously done by the caste system. Majumdar again said,

Though the sacred literature permits the cooking of food, even the sacrificial food by a shudra, and although no ancient books, having the least pretension to a sacred character, prohibit inter-dining among the different castes, elaborate regulations were laid down for controlling ‘food’ and ‘touch’ and the Brahmans were polluted even if they passed the shadow of a shudra (ibid :566).

This way the process through which the amplification of the caste rules was engineered by the brahminical civilization went on very silently. Such secondary elements which were later added to complicate the caste system were not there before the evolution of the Brahminical religion. They were slowly added to stifle the system of all its vibrancy and dynamism. As historian Jan Gonda noted,

The social system was in a state of transition between the fluidity of the older period and the rigidity of the post-Vedic age: we hear of the four classes (varna), viz. Brahmans, nobility, Vaishyas and Shudras, of
their duties, ambitions and functions and privileges; we witness the growing importance of the two higher classes, their relations and prerogatives, and the propagation of the ideal of their co-operation and complementary relationship (Gonda: 1975:361).

Bose too felt the unwarranted supremacy of the caste system and its rigidity grew with time, and the system saw a sea change from what it was before. Bose therefore said,

Occupations were not merely fixed, but they were also graded into high and low. As the Brahmical people advanced and the tribes gradually became submerged under their social system, the latter were generally assigned a lowlier station in life, and it became the effort of the dominant group to shift most of the burden of labour upon them (Bose: 1967:220).

At the same time, Bose extolled the potentiality of the caste system, as entailed within the varna system, and asked us not to discard everything in vain. There might be treasures left in the old tradition that should not be left out in sheer apathy. Instead of talking solely of its obduracy, he reviewed the genesis of the caste system in antiquity to enquire its roots.

He saw that the caste system was thoroughly revised by the Hindu society to show characteristics that hardly had any similarity with the past. The society was losing all its catholicity to embrace mindless parochialism and closure. It was well evident that the Indo-Aryan society was well acclaimed for its benevolence and leniency. The capacity for absorption was unrelenting. Talking of the Indians, Majumdar wrote,

They drew inspiration from Persian paintings and derived considerable help from the Romans in the development of astronomy.... But slowly the Hindus were all robbed of their openness. There came a time when the society was itself all prepared to burn its bridges.... the sad picture of narrowness and bigotry so brilliantly sketched by the critical and shrewd Arab scholar is an unerring sign of degradation of the Hindu society in the 11th century A.D” (Majumdar:1922:564).
It is thus noted that the parochialism had deteriorated all aspects of life in the Hindu society. As the famous Arab scholar Alberuni went on depicting the conditions of the society, he said,

All the fanaticism of the Hindus is directed against those who do not belong to them, against all foreigners. They call them *Mlechchas* i.e. impure, and forbid any connection with them, be it by intermarriage or any other kind of relationship, or by sitting, eating or drinking with them, because thereby they think they would be polluted. They consider as impure anything that touches the fire and the water of a foreigner; and no foreigner can exist without these two elements (ibid:563).

Thus it was a time when the Hindu society was on the verge of losing all its past glory. It was the time of growing gulf between the Hindus and the rest of the world. The society once known for its resourcefulness and amiability slowly started being ripped of all its communications and rapport. It was slowly growing into an insipid and vapid country that was growing an enduring reluctance to interact with other cultures and civilizations. The country was soon suffering from osmosis and relentlessly shutting its doors to the outside nations. The conditions exacerbated even more because of the caste system and its constricted rules which became more pronounced with age. Its strictures became more iron- bound to thrust its control over its own members and to slam its door on the others. Not only the rules became stricter, even the accompanying status of the caste incumbents became more differentiated with age. As Bose continued saying,

The rules became elaborate because a substantial contribution to the total population came from those who had been subjugated, and the feeling of racial superiority continued among the comparatively fair skinned conquerors. (Bose: 1967:220).

**Caste distinctions and the emergent class differentiations.**

The caste allocations brought with it an intrinsic class distinction as well. Bose wanted to show that this was not so before. In the past with the corresponding primitive mode of production, neither the economic differentiation nor the status differentials were very conspicuous. There was a dearth of technological and productive inefficiency. As a result, the economic condition as a whole was bad. 

[190]
People shared an experience of poverty and misery. For reasons like these the caste differentiations could not exacerbate the status differences. Bose noted that in the earlier times the economic differences were superseded by wisdom and learning. Society did not give much eminence to amassing wealth and material affluence but it was rather inclined towards knowledge and character. Thus the caste system generated a society which was far more sombre and balanced. The caste system gave preference to a learned Brahmin and not to an aggressive Kshatriya or a shrewd Vaishya. It thus reflected the judiciousness of the society to encourage the rightful virtues of life. As Bose noted,

In Hindu society, the highest place is accorded to the Brahmin varna and not to the ruling or trading classes. Premium is thus placed upon learning and character and not on wealth or war-like abilities” (ibid :220).

These facts had been corroborated for time and again by the ancient scripts and literature that had also canonized the place of the Brahmins. It had been shown in the Mahabharata that the caste distinctions had the corresponding tasks assigned to them by the ancient sacred texts. As Manmath Nath Dutt had shown in the Shanti Parva in Mahabharata,

The duty of the Brahmin is to study the Vedas and to bear them in memory, that of the servants is to obey the commands of their master, that of the king is to protect his people by supporting the good and punishing the wicked (Dutt: 1903:530).

Bose also maintained that the caste system not only covertly expressed its preference for one task over the other but also did it succinctly with a strategy behind it. He said,

The differentiation had a noble object in view instead of being an instrument of maintaining a distinction between the ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ classes in society. The objective was to instigate among the castes a drive to cultivate an alliance with the Brahminical ideas. It was held that even the castes in the lower rungs of the hierarchy must be made to comply with the Brahminical dictums. Those who obey those dictates pedantically in the crucial areas of social life pertaining to marriage and commensality were thought to be ordained for a blessed after-life (Bose: 1967: 221).
Bose was sensitized to such views. He was not ready to take such statements at their face value. He retorted hard by saying that despite the legitimizations put forward by the scholars to safeguard the system, the intrinsic evil in the system must be laid bare. He pointed out,

The fact cannot be denied that there was unjustifiable legal discrimination against the *Sudra*, as well as a large amount of exploitation with regard to the distribution of the economic functions in society; and this was undoubtedly the result of economic and political subordination (ibid: 221).

Bose time and again had showed that caste was good in its capacity of providing the socio-economic security to the poor. Though its catholicity in accommodating all within its fold in this respect was commendable, Bose did not place caste above scrutiny. He reviewed the system meticulously to find its innate faults. Bose though elaborated on the capacity of the caste in absorption, he did not go overboard in its admiration. He scoured the system to recurrently look for the underlying glitches that marred the society at large. It not only exerted injustice on the lower castes but also incessantly created a dual process of super-ordination and sub-ordination in the society. The caste system had sprouted a class of politico-economic elites that exploited the lower castes. Therefore, Bose continued saying, “caste assured employment and security to all”; but it also served as a steady source of economic and cultural advantage for the dominant group” (Bose: ibid:221).

**Comparing Bose and Srinivas on the analysis of caste dominance.**

On the question of dominance imposed by the caste system, there are crucial points of similarity and dissimilarity between Bose and Srinivas. The process of sanskritization discussed by Srinivas has tried to explain social mobility in pursuance of social status and privilege towing the line of the dominant castes. It is the process through which the politically or the economically dominant castes with a modest position in the caste hierarchy claim an authority on the society. A caste with substantial amount of land and political following wields power on the socio-political sphere to such an extent that it can command considerable degree of compliance from the people. Subsequently other castes start closing rank on such dominant castes in a latent desire to escalate their position up the caste hierarchy. But Srinivas maintained
Sanskritization can also occur independently of the acquisition of the economic and political power. In such a case, however, it will not help the particular caste to move up. On the contrary, it may result in that caste’s becoming unpopular with the neighbour. The leaders of the locally dominant caste may show their resentment by beating up the members of the aspiring caste (Srinivas: 1962:10).

Thus Srinivas had shown that with caste affiliations comes the question of class differentiation hinged upon the economic and political capacity of the patron castes to gravitate their other caste brethrens. Bose had also likewise shown that the class eminence of the higher castes came from their capacity to give economic security to the lower castes who will subsequently tow their line. While Srinivas spoke of both the economic and political standing as the source of dominance, Bose spoke mainly of the ritual status and economic patronage as the genesis of power in the society.

Srinivas had shown that the models of dominance and imitation can be multiple in a society seething with inequality and looking up the caste system he said,

Dr D F Pocock and A.C Mayer have mentioned the existence of two models which others have imitated, viz, the Brahmin and the Kshatriya. The Brahmin model was naturally more acceptable than the Kshatriya model (ibid:10).

Srinivas contended that not only are there significant caste models, but there can be aplenty little known models that can thrive among the significant ones. He gave the instance of the models set by the dominant castes to be taken up for emulation by the others living in the vicinity. As Srinivas said,

In the villages in south India, Brahmin residents in the villages dominated by non-Brahmin peasant castes tend to borrow the speech, style of life and values of the latter. Thus I have seen Brahmin women in rural Mysore rearing sheep and goat to be sold eventually to non-Brahmins for slaughter (ibid: 10).

Thus Srinivas pointed at several models of domination and said that each can outwit the other. However, he was giving us not a pan Indian model of caste system, but rather a local model which varied according to the contextual conditions. Likewise,
the dominance can be held either by the site of the Brahminical great tradition or by the local dominant caste as the conditions prevail. So what was important for Srinivas was not the over-imposing and exclusive control of the ritual status of the caste hierarchy but also the multiple local situations and the umpteen politico-economic forces which came to play in the social panorama. Therefore, Srinivas narrated,

At the Kundat Bhadrakali festival in Coorg, the young Brahmin priest folded his hands before the Coorg oracle of the deity and requested the latter to forgive the faults of the villagers and depart. It could be said with justice that away from the centres of the Great Tradition, the Brahminical ways of life tended to approximate to ways of life of the dominant caste in the little community (ibid:10).

Thus Srinivas was talking of the great and the little traditions being enmeshed with one another so as to fall flat on the face of stark hierarchy. He rather spoke of undoing the rigid rules of hierarchy and thus the entire chronology was set haywire. He was talking of upsetting the rigid framework of caste system in a way that the apex and the base of the system seemed blurred. Thus a general frame of reference must be banished for a contextual and particular case in point to search for the genesis of power accordingly. Thus class distinctions were likewise to be formed with the dominant castes ruling the roost. Srinivas, however, maintained that the process is not as simple as that.

He said, while in the rural areas the Brahminical ways of life had been malleable enough to move in line with the locally dominant castes, the latter have tried in turn to follow the footsteps of the sanskritized model. Thus Srinivas maintained that the process of sanskritization had rather been a circular one where the loose ends are always left to be tied. Even in places where the locally dominant castes are powerful, they still might hanker after the ritual status of the Brahminical castes and still more tightly cling to the process of sanskritization. Thus there is an unending tussle between the ritual and the secular status thus amplifying the relation between the ritually higher Brahminical castes and the secularly powerful dominant castes. Each tries in vain to outweigh the other and in this process ends up influencing one another. Srinivas therefore contended,
The Brahminical mode of life did command a certain amount of prestige even in areas where non Brahmin castes enjoyed a monopoly of secular life. That is why the latter were pulled towards sanskritization even while the Brahmins were influenced by the style of life of the secularly dominant caste (ibid: 11).

Thus the two distinct castes end up forming conspicuous classes with respective ritual and secular status in society. Bose was well aware of Srinivas’s theory of sanskritization which he delved upon in such detail. Bose also mentioned it in his writings, but somewhere down the line he could not agree upon Srinivas’s line of thinking. Nevertheless, before critiquing him, Bose tried understanding what Srinivas was trying to say.

Bose contended that according to Srinivas, the ascribed dignity generated from the ritual purity had become deep rooted among the Hindus. Therefore, this reverence for the ritual status coupled with the Law of Karma had given them a unique identity of their own. These had brought such gratification for the Hindus that they had shown immense pleasure in complying with their ascribed status without any complaint. The satisfaction was such optimum, that they had been turned in to docile mass, incapacitated of wedging any war or revolt against their strategic Hindu mentors. Bose goes on to say,

Srinivas also says that the ‘upper’ classes succeeded in maintaining their positions of advantage, not only by maintaining their positions of advantage, not only by extensive indoctrinations of the ‘lower’, but also usurping positions of authority in other ways (Bose:1967: 239).

This, Srinivas showed, was done by ownership of land and alignment with the ruling powers. He said, at present the upper castes are becoming opportunist in their bid to take hold of the higher status in the society by either westernizing themselves through education or by hob-knobbing with the elite classes. The upper castes have also resorted to the other ways of assuring their higher status by joining administrative services or by growing alliance with the prominent political parties. The castes, according to Srinivas, have taken the form of classes, such that the higher castes have well adapted themselves with the change. They have enmeshed well with all the westernizing and the modernizing ways to secure their place in the higher rung.
lower castes on the other hand have still adhered to the ancient values but they nevertheless have a strong aspiration to escalate the higher pedestals. Bose, however, could not agree with Srinivas’s analysis. He vehemently opposed it to present his own model of thinking. Bose strongly negated the above explanations held by Srinivas to assert strongly that, “These hypotheses as explanations of the continuity of the caste through ages, in spite of political or cultural upheavals, do not appear to be wholly adequate” (Bose: 1967:239-240).

Bose said that there were several other causes which could instill loyalty among the subordinated classes. He showed that in an unstable society with relative scarcity, the castes created a condition of interdependence and integration. As Bose can be quoted as saying, “The rules of the caste were devised in a manner so that various communal groups were woven together into a network of mutual interdependence” (ibid:240). Another cause for this, which Bose cited, was an ambience of non-competition and security. Such a climate was conducive enough to give protection and solace to the lower castes lest they feel threatened and scared within the dictums of strict competition. The caste system thereby empathised with the lower castes and did not encroach upon their ways of life. As Bose said,

Competition was positively discouraged. An artisan or priest could seek the protection of the king, or of the local college of Brahmins, or even of the caste or village-panchayat if he were threatened by competition by anyone who infringed upon his preserves (Bose:1967: 240).

Along with the economic security, came the question of such cultural autonomy that each caste was given absolute freedom to pursue its individual style of life. There thus prevailed a free and smooth temperament which allowed the castes to carry on with their distinctive styles of culture in an unhindered way. Therefore, Bose claimed, “in other words, cultural autonomy was thus guaranteed to each of the federated communities” (ibid: 240).

Thus, in terms of economic sustenance and cultural indigenousness, the castes assured full security to their recruits. It was probably because of this fact the reason for which growing economic differences between the different castes did not engulf the entire society. Each caste was noted for its distinct status and cultural autonomy and therefore did not wage a war against the other. This was probably of this fact that the
act of benevolence and grant giving was encouraged. The caste system did not practice hoarding but rather encouraged the act of doling out gifts to the distressed and the suppressed castes. This acted against the psyche of acquiring wealth and self-boastfulness. The people were encouraged to be humble and were asked not to showcase their wealth. Thus the higher and the more affluent castes were expected to be kind and generous towards their poorer brethrens instead of being flashy and ostentatious. This created a very ethical system where not naked materialism, but mutual consideration and self-retrospection were inculcated.

This was especially ideal for a system which otherwise could have gone wrong if left to profess itself unchecked and reckless. The castes instead were asked to show lavish acts of munificence and kindness. They indulged in expensive gift giving ceremonies to furnish their wealth. This was not socially discouraged since there was a latent interest behind it which was considered to be ethical. The acts of generosity withheld the tendency of hoarding so as to curtail the self-acquiring and self-bloating tendencies of the affluent castes. This was especially necessary in an unequal society where discouraging gift giving could have run counter to the collective conscience of the community. So showering lavish gifts, although meant blatant showcase of wealth, was still perpetuated for the excellent acts of balance and judiciousness that it served for the society. This meant working towards a just society where the richer castes were not encouraged to get richer but were rather asked to go slow by rendering a part of their wealth to those inhabiting the lower rungs of the society. Thus Bose said,

If class differences brought about a growing inequality of income, as they were likely to do, the evils of increasing polarization could be offset by the custom of ‘conspicuous expenditure’. Anyone who spent lavishly in beneficent acts, or even in sheer exhibitionism, was applauded more than one who hoarded. A practice was likewise built up in connection with birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies in which even the poorest householder had to make gifts to priests, scholars and the indigent. The more lavishly one spent, even by incurring debts, the more approbation one received (ibid: 240).

These safeguards, Bose felt, must have immunized the social structure so much so that the country was spared of the caste wars and the ensuing violence. Thus we find that Bose was persistently talking of the immunization attained by the caste system.
under conditions of distress. The surpluses of the higher castes have been recurrently
evened out by the in-built ethos of the caste system. The process of equalization was
what Bose emphasised upon as one of the moralistic basis of the caste system.
Perhaps, what Bose was trying to stress was the mild basis of the class qualities as
embedded in the caste.

Caste and class: Bose’s interpretation of Marxism.

When other theorists were vehemently focusing on the class character of the caste
system, Bose was not really ready to conform to this. He said castes were actually
moulded in another way such that it had refused to merge with the class. When Marx
wanted to see castes as the quasi-classes, Bose had different explanations altogether.
As Bose himself said,

According to the Marxian way of thinking, this ingenuous system helped
the Brahmin-Kshatriya or upper class leadership to preserve itself intact
through centuries. This was achieved by not allowing the contradictions
in the distribution of power between class and class to develop as it did
in the west (ibid: 240-241).

Bose, however, did not agree with such an explanation. He said the castes being
apparently turned into class could not solve the ensuing contradictions between the
technological progress and the growth of population. As Bose further added,

People remained poor, famine was followed by famine; and caste
persisted because it gave a feeling of security even under the most
straitened circumstances. Under the exigency of famine or natural
calamity, people turned either to their joint families, or their own
kinsmen or caste-men for protection and support (ibid: 240-24).

Thus Bose went on reiterating the fact that castes survived not because they dissolved
into classes but because they stood by the people in times of their need. So the caste
system acted as a great respite for the people against any crisis that they faced. Thus
when Marxists believed that the class antagonisms within the caste must be
spontaneously espoused to alleviate the situation, Bose suggested otherwise. For him,
the solution did not lie in turning the castes into classes by aggravating the class
conflicts but the vitality of the system lied elsewhere. The utter benevolence and the
munificence which the castes showed by making inroads into the modest living of the
populace actually made it popular among the inhabitants. So castes were not actually class in the Marxist sense of the term, for they never broke up into extreme polarities with a stiff consciousness corresponding of their positions. Instead of splitting up into contentious and opposing camps, the caste system was sensitive to the ensuing gulf proliferating between the castes and tried all means to level off the gaping divide. As Bose made it clear,

The remedy, according to the Marxian, lies in tearing aside the arrangements in the superstructure of caste which prevent the ‘natural’ sharpening of class antagonisms. That alone can prepare the ground for an already belated class conflict, which will inevitably lead to the victory of the organized proletariat under the guidance of the True Party (ibid: 241).

On the contrary, for Bose it is the superstructure of the caste which was giving soul and substance to the system. The superstructure was all important because it pertained to the mutual integration instead of generating sharp lines of antagonism. Bose actually set himself to the task of interpreting caste along the line of the constructive work and satyagraha as proposed by Gandhi.

Unlike Marx, Gandhi never spoke of a classless society or of a class war. Gandhiji spoke of abolition of the castes to the extent it eradicated the free mixing among the various castes and deteriorated the inter caste relations. Gandhiji was not ready to accept the caste system to the extent it imposed restraints on the daily exercise of inter-dining, marriage and social interaction.

K.G Mashruwala, in his book *Gandhi and Marx*, said, Gandhi, did speak of the abolition of the castes to the extent they obstructed inter-dining, inter-marriage and social intercourse; of hierarchy in the caste system, and the differences in the incomes of several callings, as also of persons doing different types of work in the same industry or institution. But the existence of classes in the sense of functional divisions is a permanent feature of any but the most primitive society, and Gandhiji suggested the solution of their conflicting interests in the two principles of *Varna dharma* and trusteeship. For Gandhi the *Varnashram* system was rather a very inevitable structure of the society for it ensures a permanent place for its members to eke out one’s livelihood. The room for traditional calling must always be made for it sharpens one’s traditional acumen to the nearest point of perfection. Pursuance of hereditary
occupation brings about a kind of social security and hones the necessary technical skills of the novice worker. Thus the *Varnashram* framework worked like the guild systems guiding the young workers for their lifelong vocations (Mashruwala:1954:73).

**Gandhi and Bose on the expatiation of the caste system**

Gandhiji said that the caste system was necessary for it rendered a kind of social stability to the rugged and uncertain lifestyles of the young craftsmen. Perhaps Gandhiji wanted to suggest that *varna* structure somehow exercised its restraint on the people so that the youth does not go haywire but remained tied to the society by clinging on to its traditional calling. But all these came with a providence which was strictly foretold by Gandhi. He said such ascriptions to the traditional callings were only supported to the extent that they did not create differences in wealth and rank. Thus Gandhi states that,

> The normal law for social life should be that a person must, as a matter of duty, practise for his livelihood the profession of his forefathers, or of one developed out of the ancestral one. A radical plunge to a different profession is not desirable (ibid:72).

Therefore, it seemed that Gandhi had his sight fixed on a kind of settled scheme where individuals would from the very beginning of their life be asked to follow the hereditary vocation which they are supposed to take upon. However, this can be done only if the said vocation is well consistent with the fundamental ethos of modern living and society. Gandhi forewarned us that this is a safer program than hankering after alternative vocations at the long drawn end of an eventful career. This way the individual did not feel baffled as he was always anchored to a safe plank. Gandhi himself warned us against the pitfalls of unchartered career when he said, if the principle was settled that one must be what his father had so far practiced for his living, we would not have the sorry spectacle of the present age, where a person even after becoming a double graduate does not know the profession he should practice for earning his living.

So Gandhi supposedly, was always in search of a very assured and certain source of livelihood and living such that it did not strain an individual’s life and force him to wander in vain. He spoke of a meaningful aim in man ‘s life which is embedded in
nourishing the traditional calling so pursued by one’s forefathers. In such a program there might be less of creativity but an assurance and a stability that seemed very vital for Gandhi in the upcoming days of turbulence and fury. As Gandhi went on to say,

The meaning of *varna* is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, is consistent with fundamental ethics, and this is pursued only for the purpose of earning one’s livelihood (Gandhi:1924:15).

Thus it seemed Gandhi extolled the *varna* scheme for its embedded virtues. He did not see the system as self-restraining or stifling rather it was liberal enough to make room for non-traditional vocations as well. As Gandhi continued saying,

To say that a Brahman should not touch the plough is a parody of *Varnashrama* and a prostitution of the meaning of the *Bhagavadgita*. Surely the qualities ascribed to the different divisions are not denied to the others. Is bravery to be the prerogative only of the Kshatriya and the restraint only of the Brahman? (ibid: 15).

Thus it seemed that Gandhi was in appreciation of the *Varnashram* system and was careful to give its due place in the society. The distortions he felt had been introduced into it by some extraneous forces which plagued the system with abject stubbornness and rigidity unheard of in the earlier times. He saw the *varna* frame in its pristine form as a much liberated system that made providence for multiple vocations. Those way occupations were not iron-laced but could be freely pursued by people from the other *varnas*. Gandhi was appalled to learn that the nobler virtues were monopolized only for the higher castes. He thus saw a malleable and flexible *Varnashram* system where attributes flowed freely from one rung to the other. Mobility was ensured easily. This was possible because of the dearth of rigidity in the hierarchy of the framework. In absence of the uncanny nexus between rank ordering and hierarchy, the framework was not left at the mercy of a handful of creamy ranks. Anybody who had sufficient virtues could climb up the ladder without any inhibition or reluctance. As Mashruwala quoted Gandhi,

If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reserve serve my country as a soldier, but must be content to earn my bread by trading...it would be quite right for any brainy
Thus Gandhi made it very clear that the *varna* framework must be made free from the shackles of rankings and gradations. The respective occupations should be taken not as a tool to amass fortunes but only to make both ends meet. With this objective in mind, the *Varnashram* system would never entail any underlying element of superiority or inferiority. The forces responsible for super ordination and subordination will not rise at all thus refusing all possibilities of emergent inequalities. The *Varnashram* system thus spoke of pervasive equality with no room for privilege or injustice. The system remained uncontaminated till it was taken over by the complications of the prolific sub- castes that destroyed the very purpose as well as the sanctity of the *varna* edifice in our civilization. Perhaps, Gandhi was in admiration of the Varnashram system devoid of its ills and vices. He considered on the other hand, caste system as truly a fortress against the bombarding or assailing forces.

For him the caste system was a treasure to be relished for it had always stood as a saviour in times of turbulence facing the civilization. Gandhiji himself said,

> They argue that the retention of the caste system spells ruin for India and that it is caste which has reduced India to slavery. In my opinion, it is not caste that has made us what we are. It was our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved us from disintegration. (Gandhi: 1924: 480).

Thus Gandhi was truly in praise of the age-old institution. When others were gregariously fighting to deface the caste system and persistently humiliating it, Gandhi extolled it. He felt the institution was dynamic and vibrant and therefore had the strength to lend support and endurance to the staggering civilization. It tried integrating the multiple rungs into a common working whole.

Bose likewise professed a similar line of thinking. He had always spoken of the *varna* system and the solidarity that it generated among the hierarchically graded castes. Bose cited various indological texts to show how an ambience of equality and resultant integration was created by the *varna* framework in ancient India.
narratives of the epic *Mahabharata*, and the Sanskrit text of Hindu law, *Manusamhita*, showed an essential kind of balance maintained by the *varna* framework in the society. Even if the Brahmins were given due respect and privilege in the social setting, yet they were asked to lead lives of deprivation and destitution. Besides they were encouraged to splurge on socially altruistic acts. Such acts were thought to bring luck and favour for the patrons who indulged on such benevolence. Thus by canonizing the mundane tasks of munificence and kindness, *varna* system brought about the necessary parity in the society.

Though this created a kind of semblance in the society, it never imposed its wills on the individuals. The Marxist socialism was not professed and the state was not asked to jeopardize the individual rights to private property. Hence, the state did not force itself on the individuals in case they did not show such acts of social generosity. Therefore, private property was encouraged and people were not forced to part away with their wealth. So, though an atmosphere of social equality percolated through the *Varna* system, there was no place of coerced equality. The state recognized the right to individual liberty and did not trespass into their personal coffers. Bose said, though the Hindu society had somewhat brought equipoise in the social structure through its *Varna* system, it could not still create the absolute semblance that it purported. However, he said that this unequal system still brought about a peaceful aura where instead of waging a war against the higher castes, their caste brethrens co-operated amongst themselves into a smooth co-existence. This was perhaps possible for the economic rendition of the *Varna* framework that made mutual dependence almost obligatory. In the same vein, Gandhi also felt, “The pursuit of the traditional profession is only for the purpose of earning one’s livelihood” (Mashruwala: 1954:73).

Thus for Gandhi, the *Varna* framework is an inevitable organ of the society for it is not a religious or divine practice but rather an ethical and secular duty of all the citizens. It is thus necessary to eke out one’s living by practising a profession that stands in close proximity to the ascribed vocation pursued by one’s forefather. At the same time, he felt all the questions of rankings attached to the *Varna* framework must be made redundant to bring about a gross equality in the society. As Gandhi himself said,
A Brahmin is not only a teacher. He is only predominantly that. But a Brahmin who refuses to labour will be voted down as an idiot. The Rishis of the old who lived in the forests cut and fetched wood, tended cattle and even fought. Similarly, a Rajput without learning was good for nothing no matter how well he wielded his sword (Gandhi: 1924:1007).

Thus Gandhi propagated a sense of equality in the society across the vertical segmentation of the Varna hierarchy. He pleaded with the cleaner castes not to run after mad crowd for wealth and riches but to stick to their swadharma or self-duty. He said to bring about parity, different Varna must not only profess their own profession but also turn to spinning and weaving as a common bond between the disparate Jatis. He added,

The spinning wheel is designed to wake up every one to a sense of his duty. It enables every one better to fulfill his dharma or duty...they must, therefore, in order to faithfully carry out their dharma, learn and practice spinning (Gandhi: 1924: 1008).

Bose likewise recognised the hierarchical division of the castes and instead of being wary of such inequality took it as a common thread of unification. Like Gandhi, Bose recognized the true economic objective of the Varna framework. This he thought was the one common string of integration running across the society seething with caste inequalities. Though not assured of economic equality, the castes were brought under a common fold of professional calling within the village economy upon which they banked upon. Such an arrangement incurred upon them a socio-economic authority that they had learnt to revere for long. Their loyalty for such a system remained beyond question, because it protected them through all the ups and downs of their life. It was a system they looked upon with awe and respect. They were enchanted with the Varna framework and there was no question of parting with it.

They accepted the imperious authority of the Brahmans since the latter did not interfere with their lokachar (folkways) and deshachar (mores). Even the newly formed Jatis were very well assured of the fluidity of the norms offered by the Hindu Aryan society. This laxity allowed the new recruits to spontaneously gel in with the caste structure. They easily found their place within the system and did not have to
compromise with their folkways to give in to the dictates of the caste mentors. Perhaps, the newly recruited members of the caste, did find a comfortable balance between their folkways and the caste rules. No one dictated the other. Their local customs were juxtaposed so well with the extraneous group regulations that there was no anomic or norm-less-ness. The two areas were neatly tied up such that there remained no ambiguity in the respective arenas. People did not suffer from role-less diffidence.

Bose thus showed, the Varnashram system served the economic as well as the mental function of bridging the gulf between the micro and the macro areas of individual’s life. The tribal men thus got sucked in this Varna framework from outside with the least reluctance. The system catered to both their local and intravenous needs besides placing them in sync with the extraneous foreign system. The adaptation became easy since the micro aspects of their tribal living were stitched in a subtle way to the macro area of caste existence to which they were increasingly becoming a part of. The socio-economic system of village economy thus stood as a great shield against the umpteen obstacles that came in the way. The civilization stood like a stoic rock absorbing all the peril that came its way. Thus it seemed that Bose was severely influenced by Gandhi and it came to be reflected in his numerous works. What is interesting is that almost the entire decade of 1930s was dedicated to writings in Gandhi, (Bose:1937,1937a,1937b,1939,1939a, 1939b, 1939c, 1939d, 1939e, 1939f, 1939g, 1939h, 1939i, 1939j, 1939k, 1939l), barring only a few (Bose:1939m), such was his impact on Bose. It especially had a bearing on his understanding of the institutional mechanisms and how they acted as a fulcrum in regulating the social world around.

**Dumont and Bose: structuring an order of difference?**

The significance of Bose’s theory can be understood well if it is compared with yet another sociologist of his time, Louis Dumont (1911-1998). Comparison between Bose and Dumont demands a well-grounded understanding of Dumont’s pinnacles of theory which we have tried to do before attempting any comparison between the two. Emphasis on structural harmony and consensus through efficacious and absolute Brahminical dominance had been pivotal to the shaping of Dumont’s model. The binary model of power and repression, had been central to the making of Dumont’s approach. Such approaches of structuralism tend to incline towards “canonical”,

[205]
“puritanical” and “doctrinal” versions of caste which are taken as permanent without any possibility for change.

Dumont’s *Homo Hierarchicus* presented a structural interpretation of Hindu social set-up that relies heavily on the indigenous texts to build up on the binary opposition between the ‘pure’ and the ‘impure’ such that both should be kept at a distance from each other. This separation of the two categories makes up the basis of the caste pyramid in the Indian society. The structural arrangement of the caste society has been made in such a way that the relations of super-ordination and sub-ordination build up the cardinal distinction between the two categories. It only means that the complementary relation must subscribe to this polarity such that one cannot exist without the other. Purity is an otherwise inter-dependent term since it cannot exist outside impurity, for an item to be qualified as pure, it must exist in relation to the impure. Dumont therefore said, “...the impurity of the untouchable is conceptually inseparable from the purity of the Brahmin. They must have been established together, or in any case have mutually reinforced each other, and we must get used to thinking of them together” (Dumont:2002:54). Thus it is quite clear that Dumont was building up structural order of society where the parts cannot exist without the whole. The structural order was presuming the gap between the secular and the ritual power. Probably the disjunction between the secular power of the king and the ritual status of the priest made for the bipolarity between the terms which Dumont had in his mind when he spoke of the complementary bipolar terms. Ursula Sharma had rightly said, “What distinguishes Hindu caste from other structures which superficially resemble it is the subordination of power to status. The secular power of the king is subordinate in ideological terms to the ritual purity of the Brahman” (Sharma:1994:3).

Even if Dumont had continued to delight us with this structuralist version of the caste system and its concomitance between the parts that constitute its whole, caste society is more dynamic than the dyad model that he was imagining. Away from the absolute wholistic community study that Dumont was proposing, there was more to the caste organization that demanded a more insightful historical sociology that unfortunately he failed to propose. Dumont was possibly suggesting that there are only two fundamental ways of thinking, “the holistic and individualistic, the traditional and the modern” (Dumont: 1972:44,36). For Dumont, then, India had come to be identified with an archaic pattern of thinking and social institutions. This, as Sharma pointed,
out “recalled the dichotomous ideal types, representations of ‘self’ and ‘others’ found in many societies” (Sharma:1994:5). Dumont took the Indian position as an ideal typical condition where the disjunction between power and status rightly characterizes its social fabric. For him, the distinguishing mark of the Indian society which makes it stand out from the others is its pre-eminence on ‘hierarchy’ that marks the conceptual integration of the whole.

It was Dumont who painted the Hindu society on the basis of values and ideological foot-prints and took the caste system as distinctive from the western perspective. In that way, Dumont’s dictums based on purity and pollution had always projected caste as the distinctive element of the Indian society. Probably what was wrong with Dumont’s theory of caste is that it does not focus on the principles but on its composition thus mistaking its constituents for the rules that guide its formation. Sharma, for instance, said, “if we concentrate on the groups rather than the principles we are liable to get distracted by the very questions which dominate local political conflicts” (ibid:5). Such theories while giving too much attention to the structure categorically ignore the individuality of the agency thus maiming the structure of its overall eloquence and vitality. Just like Dumont bases his theory on Levi Strauss’s strict concept of structure (ibid:39), on the other hand, Quigley develops his theory on the Hocartian notion of giving prime importance to the king and his patrons instead of banking on the ritual powers of the Brahmin. However, as Dumont emphasized on the separation between the ritual and the state, later anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai (1976), Nicholas Dirks (1981), Susan Baily (1989), Ursula Sharma (1969) and Maya Unnithan (1990) challenged the ideas put forward by Dumont. However, before the ideas were encountered by them, Bose had already put forward a theory which clearly questions the Dumontian structural approach of binary oppositions.

**Negating Dumont’s unilateral compliance with the binary oppositions**

Dumont while displaying his obsession for the pure-impure complementarity had shown a total indifference towards the economic and political dimensions of caste, which had remained a key dimension in the colonial and post-colonial society. He possibly held high the colonial administrative policy of keeping intact the religious
and hierarchical values of the Hindu society lest it disturbs the equilibrium of the socio-religious order which he believed was the only basis of the caste society. This also meant that Dumont possibly failed to capture the momentum of change and conflict in the Hindu society. This position was highly dissimilar of Bose who saw the Indian society as a cauldron of changes and even believed that the caste hierarchy itself was at the cross-roads. While elucidating the conditions of the state of Orissa, especially of the period between thirteenth and eighteenth century, Bose had shown how it drowned into destitution followed by repeated encounters. Recurrent invasions had affected its economic strength to such an extent that the trait-complex of the caste system had undergone radical change. Bose wrote that following the Islamic rule, the occupational order of the old Varna system received tumultuous blow. The Khandait soldiers had taken to agriculture, Karanas who were in charge of clerical works now worked and Brahmins, the erstwhile head of the society had taken to agricultural farming. Bose therefore wrote,

The entire economic arrangement has been dislocated and the caste system, as a trait complex, has changed its character, because occupations which were more strictly hereditary in former times, have now become very much less so (Bose: 1929:83).

This was quite in contrast to Dumont’s claim that caste society was an unchanging institution reinforcing his age-old binary oppositions. Bose was talking of a substantive structural change, where the entire hierarchical order of the society undergoes rampant transformations. He explained the economic factors as the sole agent of such social change. He not only gave an economic interpretation but also explained the social change in terms of a geo-historical mapping of the social contours. In this way the kind of social change that he observed was based on an explanation of local culture in accordance with the cultural and physical demography of the area thus suggesting its probable paths of diffusion. While Dumont emphasized upon the fact that colonial India saw practically no change or reformation in its socio-religious sphere, thanks to the British policy of introducing as little change as possible on the politico-economic plane, it significantly reduced the extent of change and conflict in the colonial regime (Dirks:2008:58).
Bose, on the other hand, showed how the colonial administrators introduced the policy to create a divide between religion and society to serve their own ends, which made inroads towards communal decay and disjunction. While Dumont surreptitiously admired the colonial practice of keeping intact the disjunction between religion and society to create a homeostasis in the Indian society, to curb chances of conflict or dismay, Bose on the other hand blatantly cursed the colonial policies for damaging the prospects of various artisan and trading castes who eventually lost their hereditary occupations. While Dumont time and again harped on the binary oppositions between the pure and impure, he nevertheless did not take into consideration the impact it had on the Indian economy and commerce, especially because he was interested in painting a static picture of Indian society and not the one that realistically captures the moments of change and transformation.

**The stunted social growth seen as the colonizing impact of the caste system**

While discussing the history of the castes for the period under British rule, Bose on the other hand discussed how the ideas of religious superiority and inferiority associated to tradition remained intact in colonial India preventing a free movement of labor from one occupation to another. In the town of Bolpur for instance, there is a large number of unemployed or under-employed men of the Muchi or leather working caste, and the Dom or the Hadi castes, who traditionally work as farm laborers or practice basketry. With the growth of towns, prospects have flourished for them to find occupations in towns and industries, but they cannot take advantage of these new prospects since the high caste people will not allow their entry in these new professions for the fear of contamination. These people unable to accommodate themselves in the new industries, flock back to the rural heartlands thus leading to the ruralisation of India (Bose:1964:232).

At the same time Bose narrated the history of Supur village, situated not far from Bolpur town. It was once a centre of trade during the British regime. To the west of Supur is Mirjapur, and near to it was the village of Raipur. Bose narrated the tale of a Uttarararhiya Kayastha caste family living for long at a place called Chandrakona in the northern area of Midnapur district. This Sinha family of Raipur was engaged in
the business of weaving in collaboration with the British East India Company. By virtue of this business they had gathered large amount of wealth. At this point of time there were political upheavals in Raipur for which though the other traders faced various problems, the Sinhas had a smooth ride. They became the landlord of the village and their business progressed by leaps and bounds. As Bose said,

The British merchants made thing easy for their business by getting an influential zamindar on their side. Sitikantha’s zamindari went on, and his sons gave up the study of Persian in Calcutta and turned their attention to English (Bose: 1975:140).

Thus we find that the Sinhas of Raipur took the advantage of the British Raj and were complicit with them in reaping a havoc profit for themselves. Bose said had it not been for their emerging middle class status, they would have never been known to the outside world. That they did not show any interest in traditional calling like indigo plantation or handloom weaving only showed their aspiration to move up the hierarchy by rubbing shoulders with the colonial masters. Unfortunately, Dumont did not take into considerations these undercurrents that accompanied the caste metamorphosis in the society. He was more interested in studying how the various attributes of the caste society showed a high level of integration instead of indicating tendencies towards disjunctions and discord. He never thought of considering factors other than religious status and hierarchy. That these areas are highly related with the other relevant areas of economy, polity and social change was never taken into recognition. But N.K Bose in his studies on tribal transformation and changes in the caste system brought in the dimensions of the economic and power relations seen through history beyond the prevailing concern for the study of customs (Bose:1949) (Sinha:1971:7). This was unlike Dumont’s idea of perceiving caste through customs, rituals and religion and suggesting an irreconcilable relation between religion and politics. The selection and analysis of the topics for study are peculiar of Prof. Bose's eclectic approach covering sociology, anthropology, geography, archaeology, and philosophy. Prof. Bose took them in the realm of Indian culture, as crystallized institutions conditioned and processed according to geographical background or ethnic conditions. As M.K Gautam said, he stressed the necessity of understanding Indian history, culture, civilization, caste system, and philosophy for analysing the
process of social change, or as he calls it, "adaptation into cultural inheritance". This process is created and nourished as an "interplay between life's needs and satisfaction and culture", and is said to be providing a state of dynamic equilibrium in the culture (Gautam: 1974:494). This was unlikely of Dumont who was rather myopic in explaining the fabrics of the Indian society. He painted it in monochromes based largely on religion and caste hierarchy instead of exploring its interplay with social, economic, political or other plural attributes that Bose had tried to show.

Dumont, while studying the caste system in India, makes its hierarchical principle the focus of his attention. This hierarchical principle, as he suggests, is found in its pure state in India, unlikely the west. He stressed categorically that it is a “fundamental feature of the complex societies other than our own, and a principle of their unity, not their material, but their......symbolic unity” (Dumont:1972: 260). Dumont refuses to see any material implications embedded in the hierarchical order but associates it strictly with the “cosmic order, whether or not it includes a God or a king as mediator........ hierarchy integrates the society by reference to its values” (ibid:260). He clearly could not see any other interpretation of the hierarchical principle other than that of the values or ideology attached to it. He felt that the principle was more related to the theological domain rather than being backed by any materialist or economic interpretation. This he believed was the only function of the underlying hierarchical order of the caste societies. He was probably trying to sketch an essentially abstract model of the Hindu order that rests on the stratified ends of a structure that refuses to function without the complementary values attached to its polar ends. Dumont probably was myopic enough to take Indian society as only functionally bent upon the essentialist character of the hierarchy, without taking into consideration other factors.

Talking about the importance of the hierarchical forms in the caste society. Thus he tried drawing its analogy with the tribal society in order to show its simplicity owing to its lack of gradations and segmentations. Dumont therefore said, “it is true for example that tribes, while they are not devoid of inequalities, may have neither a king nor…a society devoid of inequalities” (ibid:260). Tribal societies for him were possibly, relatively simple societies … where division of labour is little developed (ibid: 260). Possibly Dumont was unable to see any undercurrents attached with the tribal society for he was too obsessed with the caste order and spared any thought on
the possible links between the caste and tribal order. That the tribes had little defined
division of labour, could not spark cues in his mind to explore the scope for a possible
explanation behind their possible preference for caste hierarchy. Probably he was
unilinear in his line of thought to think of any other explanation behind the robust
hierarchical character of the caste order other than recurrently associating it with the
religious or cosmic connections. He possibly could not find any reason behind the
survival of the caste hierarchy other than its structural obduracy and its polarized
structuration. He could not present an intersectional theory of the caste hierarchy in
relation to the other essential units of the Indian existence such as the quintessential
tribal agglomerates or any other groups or units in question. For him any attempt to
study the Indian society, is essentially one of the caste system, that rests on the
network of the oppositions and reinforces a human tendency to incline towards binary
thinking. It therefore derives the idea that there are necessarily two basic types of
human beings and two kinds of society, nothing else (Sharma: 1994:5).

Defeating the attempt to insulate the Indian sociology from its global flavours

Dumont was in fact reinforcing colonial canons. In fact, the peculiar complicity of
Dumont’s sociology with colonial sociology was clear in his original call for
“sociology of India” (Dirks:2008:58). Dumont’s reproduction of such a typical
discourse for India ensured that he was trying to insulate sociology from the rest of
the world by trying to bank upon its peculiarity. It is an attempt to reduce the nation to
the elements of the Hindu texts. Dumont himself contended that, “...the very
existence, and influence, of the traditional higher, Sanskritic, civilization
demonstrates without question the unity of India ... it does not only demonstrate, but
actually constitutes it' (Dumont 1957:10). The statement is untenable for it does not
take in to account not only the other minor religions but also the Dravidians and the
Adivasis who were very much the pillars of the Indian civilization had been denied
their rightful place. Such contentions made by Dumont only underestimate the scope
and extent of the Indian nation and erroneously gives an impression that the nation is
constituted by the great tradition with no inclusion or representation from the little
traditions. This produces an exclusive character of the Indian society that blatantly
refuses the inclusive character of the Indian civilization that it had flourished over
ages. T.K Oomen had rightly said, “....... invoking the route of Hindu texts to arrive at
Indian social reality would only give us an understanding of the values of the 'main
stream' people of present day India: the twice-born Hindus inhabiting Indo-Gangetic plain" (Oomen:1983:115).

Bose, on the contrary, portrayed the Indian civilization as a cosmopolitan amalgamation of the high and the low culture. He was not conservative in showing that Indian civilization is nothing but the handiwork of the elite and the sanskritic culture. Unlike Dumont’s monolithic interpretation of the Indian society, Bose treated the brahminical and the adjoining higher cultures at par with the lower and the native cultures which for long had been looked down with apathy and contempt. The sociological processes of accommodation and assimilation are seen running throughout his work. For, he believed in giving an equitable and even-handed place to both the great and the little cultures, and not just to the twice born castes, as Dumont did. He showed that the civilization grew through the symbiotic relationship nestled between the royal, prime and the pink cultures as well as the native, indigenous, autochthonous and the aboriginal ones. There is a perennial flow between the upper and the lower crusts of the cultural whole which weaves the fine fabric of civilization.

**Caste: Not an institution of segregation but a medium of diffusion**

The system of caste for Dumont was an institution of segregation and not one of semblance across the multiple reaches of the society. Bose on the other hand used caste efficiently as the medium of diffusion that brought together an efficacy in integrating the various reaches of the civilization. Though true it was that the caste system was ideal in creating a semblance between the various reaches, but not in all cases was this equilibrium maintained. The hiatus between the higher and the lower reaches was still lurking and there remained a stigma in associating with the subjugated populace. The regulations of commensality and endogamy magnified with age for the ensuing gulf brought about a social differentiation which the elite culture could smug of. Bose noticed that a cultural trait like the caste system can be handed down over the generations but its ceaselessness and continuity was conditioned by its utility. The caste system therefore traversed adeptly because it was considered a mechanism for blending and creating an equipoise between the conflicting cultures. It thus worked out an equilibrium between the disparate layers thus tempering down the glaring contrast and discord. The civilization, thus steeped in its cultural traits, travelled incessantly in disguise of various forms and shapes. The caste was thus beautifully shown by Bose as an agent of equalizer in the inequality steeped society.

[213]
with a definite function and social utility that worked hard to create space for the lower reaches and combat their glaring differences with the upper crusts across Indian history.

Bose studied the evolution of castes across history and gave prime importance to historical mapping while locating the trajectory of castes across the ages. Dumont unlike Bose was indifferent to the study of history while deciding on the itinerary of the caste system and its concomitant impacts on the Indian civilization. Dirks therefore said, “Dumont used an argument about history to deny Indian history, much as Hegel did before” (Dirks:2008:58). To corroborate the statement, we can quote below Dumont, who said,

If history is the movement by which a society reveals itself as what it is, there are, in a sense, as many qualitatively different histories as there are societies, and India, precisely because she is indifferent to history, has carefully laid it down in the form of her society, her culture, her religion (Dumont:1957:21).

This clearly meant that Indian society does not have any specific history and that her culture, religion or politics do not have any history per se. For Dumont the colonial state did not play any significant role neither in the formation of modern India nor did it ever participate in the making of the Indian history. Thus very obviously it could be assumed that state, either traditional or modern was so insignificant in Dumont’s theory (Dirks:2008:58). On the other hand, Prof N.K Bose had written quite prolifically on various aspects of nation and ways to create a sustained state. He looked at the issue of disintegration from various angles and tried ameliorating the problem in relevant ways. Given his background in colonial history, Bose tried tackling the problems besetting the country in his own way. His deep knowledge of the socio-political history coupled with his inquisitive mind for extensive research led him to investigate intently about the nation and its contours. Bose looked at the problem of caste national integration from various quarters each with its distinctive elements. His work seemed resplendent with these various essences of caste history and nation-building and the ways to refurbish the nation with a fresh spurt of ideas and thoughts that seemed extremely relevant for giving the nation a strong foundation. State for him was important, and any discussion of his theory, even that of caste could not escape without a reference to the modern state, and the crisis it was facing in the
National unity, caste-community integration and the territorial integrity of the country are in danger. Seccessionist forces have emboldened their activities in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. Armed insurgency in these states is growing dangerously. Communal and caste riots are still fought in several areas causing deep concern to all right-minded people. Caste conflicts have led to a serious situation in some states and tribal areas. Some foreign powers are openly supporting divisive forces in the country by funding arms and resources. There is definitely an effort to Balkanize India. In this context, Bose raises questions about the viability of India as a nation. “Are we to remain united or disintegrate into fragments?” (Bose:1991:2).

Unfortunately, nowhere in Dumont’s work we find this concern about the nation state. By giving utmost importance to the hierarchical divisions of the caste system, he had almost forgotten about power and the state. There had been a total divorce between the state and the religion and Dumont shows no concern in joining the two. The most important institutions of the society across the history had gone astray, and this not only shows a wrongly created disjunction between the two premium institutions of the state but also misinterprets the flow of the history, at times assuming that India never had any history altogether. This tendency of the sociologists to bar themselves from an adequate understanding of history, was a pathology, even noted by the distinguished sociologist, D.N Dhanagare, who for instance said,

Barring some notable exceptions, most Indian sociologists preferred to distance themselves from historical analysis between the 1930s and 1960s. In recent decades, however, in the study of both existing structures and the processes of social change, professional sociologists in India have been increasingly reaching out to history and trying to rediscover historical connections of their discipline. (Dhanagare: 2007:3414).

**Acknowledging the place of history while studying civilizations**

On the contrary, Bose’s writings instead, strangely show a generous use of history. He does not give a fragmented idea of history but uses it chronologically for macro-structural analysis. He starts with the ancient history to go down to the middle age and then channelizes his study to the colonial era. The way he had treated history is also
interesting because he had used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to trace the trajectory of the history of Hindu caste civilization. He used history to analyse the process of change creeping in the economic organization of the Hindu caste society as a result of the Muslim rule. To do this he tried to collate the information gathered from the Muslim respondents and compared it with the history of the middle ages. So not just textual analysis, as Dumont harped on, Bose tried complementing it with the narratives taken from the fellow respondents. He warned us against singular usage of textual sources when he said, “if we are to understand the history of society and the nature of the changes taking place in it, our purpose will not be served by the accounts written by the Muslim scholars” (Beteille:1992:118).

He therefore extensively fell back on unstructured interviews and encounters along with textual discourses, something which Dumont never took resort to. Bose thus narrated his experience of meeting a stone worker who excelled in stone-architecture. He wanted to show how the pride held by the stone workers of yesteryears had become oblivious now. This he wanted to show through comparative history crowned with personal interviews and narratives. However, Dumont too made field studies and this is practically what makes his initial studies on the Tamil Pramalai Kallars (2000) so alive and invigorating to this day. Their insistence on material culture, social relations, rituals, and exchanges did in fact pave the way for the discovery in the latter of hierarchy and a model of affinity and marriage alliance in his theory (Galey:2000:325).

Another similarity which Bose possibly shared with Dumont is the idea of renunciation. Taking Dumont’s concept of ‘renunciation’, Bose argued that just as caste arrangements ensured that there is strict regimentations and one lives to the dictums earmarked by the society, similarly there is a provision of the safety valve so that individuals can escape through the back doors of the ‘sannyasa’, so that individuals can release the pressure if they feel it was choking them to death. Bose therefore wrote,

Thus, although, Hindu society suppressed the individual under normal conditions, yet the restriction took on a voluntary character, as he could escape from its rigours through the backdoor of the institution of sannyasa. We may imagine that this safety valve was responsible, to a certain extent, for the stabilization of the Hindu order of society. Those who suffered from a feeling of oppression, could escape and leave the organization itself to work as before (Bose:1964: 25).
Bose therefore drew an ambivalent character of the Indian society that was as regimented as liberal. The caste system was not unnecessarily strict, but i was obliging at times when people sought freedom the discipline of daily life. Thus the Hindu society was not totalitarian but often chose to be lenient and benevolent, especially when the regimentation of the daily lives resulted being too demanding and exertive. Therefore, Pradip Bose wrote, “Bose believed that, ......the caste system was a judicious combination of social interdependence _____ the idea that man was subservient to society alongside catering to the needs of the individual ” (Bose:2007:309). Bose was wary of the dangers of capitalism lest it creates individualism in the society and he therefore felt that castes would create equilibrium in the society by curbing excessive individualism that might put the society out of gear. Dumont placed the individual seeking renunciation in a bad light when he claimed that castes are otherwise stultifying in the sense that they do not give space to the individuals except when kept out of the purview of the society. Castes, he felt, are treacherous for; they forbid the free movement of the individuals and can be persuaded to permit so only if those individuals ritually and systematically take exit from the back doors of the caste bound society. Thus for Dirks, “the individual only has ideological significance when placed outside society, or to put in Dumont’s terms, as “the individual-outside-the world” (Dirks:2008: 59).

Bose showed that unlike Dumont, the binary oppositions are not just present in the caste system but are equally present among the tribal groups as well, hence purity-impurity could never be a central characteristic feature of the caste system as Dumont showed. Probably Dumont was so engrossed in bringing out a structured version of the caste system that he took it as an exclusive character of the Hindu society instead of searching for its traces elsewhere. Dumont might have failed in recognizing the ties between the Hindu societies with the rest of its encompassing groups which complement it. He took the Hindu groups as mutually exclusively refusing to look for its inter-relationships with the rest of the society.
Bose’s approach deserves comparison with yet another contemporary of his time, Dr B.R Ambedkar (1891-1956), one of the legends of his time. While Bose valued Hindu philosophy and searched for its treasures, Ambedkar took a scrutinizing look at this philosophy and decried it for its innate weaknesses. For Ambedkar, the Hindu philosophy of life and society must be rejected altogether for it never allowed the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity to be operational and pro-active values in the life of the people. He never visualized any ‘social utility’ in Hindu philosophy for he felt the entire social philosophy of Hinduism was vitiated by the language of inequality and discrimination (Jatava:1993:5). So, for Ambedkar, there is no democracy in the Hindu religion. The most undemocratic part of the Hindu society is perhaps the growth of the untouchables and their consolidation into parasitic groups upon whom the Hindus fed.

Nirmal Bose, on the other hand, was by no means a spokesman for going back to the production system of the past in India, but he had always felt that the two aspects of the ancient heritage embodied in the caste society have great relevance to the present. These two are: the democracy of the cultures and their federation under one system as in the case of Hinduism, and secondly, the safety valve of Sannyasa (sainthood), through which the individual could find his/her way out when the authoritarian character of the social structure proved atrocious for his/her personality. Society and state, even gave a person a respected place if one surrendered the economic advantages accruing from social conformity (Sinha: 1994:11-12).

While Ambedkar always spoke of the self-assertive power of the higher castes which closed its doors to the lower rungs of the society, his theory was a kind of a symbolic perspective which showed how various practices were discovered by the Hindu society to symbolically validate the position of the Brahmins. For instance, he stressed upon the Brahman ritual of rites-de-passage, viz. Upanayana or the ritual of the initiation, to show its implication for the wider Hindu society. As Ambedkar said, “...Brahmins have the exclusive right to perform the Upanayana. Neither Shivaji, nor Pratap Sinha nor the kayasthas, Panchalas or Palashes wanted the Upanyana to be performed by a non-Brahmin......the Brahmin is the sole judge of deciding whether a given community is entitled to Upanayana” (Ambedkar: 1970:212). Therefore,
Ambedkar claimed that Upanayana was always there to empower the Brahmins and yield their power over all mortals on the earth. Brahmins may even refuse the initiation on political grounds, which had nothing to do with religion. Thus the upper castes were all there to vitiate the life of the Shudras. Ambedkar worked hard to unfold this uni-linear traffic between the Aryan and the non-Aryan segments of the society.

Bose, on the contrary, showed that the non-Aryan communities had dared to retort against the Aryans thus validating their claim for occupancy in the Hindu caste order. It speaks of the non-Aryan sense of agency in the rigid structure which at times had tried to deny their rightful place. So credit must also be given to the sense of collective spirit of the tribal communities which have concocted several strategies to counteract the repugnance of the Hindus towards the non-Aryans. The courage which it had collected to form strong opinion to incessantly evaluate the Aryan structure and to find fault with it shows the brilliance of the tribal collectivism vis-a-vis the firmness of the caste structure. To take the sacrosanct Aryan society by storm and to scrutinise the system vehemently was unthinkable but still it was performed splendidly by the tribal groups. This only reflected the surprising daring courage of the otherwise ‘polluted’ community which struggled vehemently to fight for the rights of its members. It was never the case of upholding of the pure over the polluted or the celebration of the ritual status over the power which Ambedkar and Dumont showed. On the contrary, Bose said,

> The legitimization advocated by tribes was splendid. They argued that, even among those who are properly counted as a part of Hindu society, local customs and folk customs vary so much that there is no reason not to regard the Juangs as a non-Aryan community belonging to the Hindu fold (Bose: 1975 :38).

So Bose actually spoke of the flexibility of the Hindu society which never imposed symmetrical dispositions on men. People were allowed to think unlike others. The different ideas and practices showed the unity in diversity in the Hindu order. It gave boost to the tide of democracy entailing the larger society. Even social activists like Gandhi went on to add,
Inter-drinking, intermarrying, inter-dining, I hold are not essential for the spirit of democracy. I do not contemplate under a most democratic constitution a universality of manners and customs about eating, drinking and marrying (Gandhi:1924 :1009).

Thus it is seen that in India differences in lifestyles were encouraged across the caste society. Castes were encouraged to remain their own selves lest the social obligations for homogenization thwart their distinctiveness. The design of the Aryan society was such that it went to the extent of getting influenced by the non-sanskritic tradition. Such was the leniency of the Aryan society. Even Srinivas was found to appreciate this system whole heartedly. He said the Brahmins have been influenced by the non-sanskritic traditions and the power of the non-sanskritic deity was well discussed with a non-Brahmin friend during an epidemic like pox or cholera (Srinivas:1952 :83 ).

Thus it is seen that Brahminical society is also likewise influenced by the non-sanskritic tradition at times of crisis or trouble. The chain of interaction is therefore reciprocal and mutual. Nobody owes to the other exclusively.

Bose, though took a critical approach towards the caste system, had nevertheless considered it on the ground of boosting the threads of social integration. Caste, he felt, had not only provided the economic security but has also worked towards the all-round stability of the social organization. Caste acted as a sole custodian of the members’ social security though it was careful to constrict its occupational choices. However, that did not recede the member’s reverence towards the caste system because of the cultural democracy that it rendered for the men in the society. In this way, caste acted as a basis of national integration especially in its role as the ambivalent social benefactor. Bose himself wrote,

Caste organization was a kind of federation of many trade unions. While within it no man was free to choose his occupation, the entire social organism, at the same time, held itself responsible for the safety and security of each of its component members. Over and above that, as we have said, caste guaranteed a modified form of cultural democracy. And these several factors carried the organization unbroken through countless political vicissitudes. (Bose:1972:50).

For Ambedkar on the other hand, Hindu religion was the negation of democracy and free thinking in the country. For him, Hindus had always shown a propensity for
natural and deep-rooted conservatism. They professed a religion which is incompatible with liberty, equality and fraternity, i.e. with all the three tenets of democracy. For Ambedkar, “there is not only inequality in Hindu society but inequality is the official doctrine of the Hindu religion. The Hindu has no will to equality” (Ambedkar: 1943:66). Hindus for Ambedkar are the ones who refute the democratic traits of the individual; they are nothing but political radicals and Gandhi is no exception to it. Ambedkar, a staunch critic of Gandhi, said that he showed false liberalism and that he is an advocate of the venomous caste system. Gandhi, for him, was a fanatic Hindu who upholds the caste system like a paranoid. This is because Gandhi finds no ills with the caste system.

**Gandhi, Ambedkar and Bose**

Bose while discussing Gandhism asserted how Gandhi felt that caste had nothing to do with religion. For Gandhi, *Varna* and *Ashram* had nothing to do with caste system. The law of Varna propagates that we make our both ends meet by conforming to our ancestral vocations. Such callings are essential for they show us a definite direction of our life and sets our rights and duties. For Gandhi no vocation is derogatory or stigmatizing for they help us ascertain the gear of our life. Gandhiji said that the caste system was necessary for it rendered a kind of social stability to the rugged and uncertain lifestyles of the young craftsmen. Perhaps Gandhiji wanted to suggest that *varna* structure somehow exercised its restraint on the people so that the youth does not go haywire but remained tied to the society by clinging on to its traditional calling. But all these came with a providence which was strictly foretold by Gandhi. He said such ascriptions to the traditional callings were only supported to the extent that they did not create differences in wealth and rank. Thus Gandhi states that,

> The normal law for social life should be that a person must, as a matter of duty, practice for his livelihood the profession of his forefathers, or of one developed out of the ancestral one. A radical plunge to a different profession is not desirable (Gandhi: 1924:72).

Therefore, Gandhi had his sight fixed on a kind of settled scheme where individuals would from the very beginning of their life be asked to follow the hereditary
vocations. However, this can be done only if the said vocation is well consistent with
the fundamental ethos of modern living and society.
So Gandhi supposedly, was always in search of a very assured and certain source of
livelihood and living so that it did not disturb an individual’s life and force him to
wander in vain. He spoke of a meaningful aim in man’s life which is embedded in
nourishing the traditional calling so pursued by one’s forefathers. In such a program
there might be less of creativity but an assurance and a stability that seemed very vital
for Gandhi in the upcoming days of turbulence and fury.

Gandhi extolled the *varna* scheme for its embedded virtues. He did not see the system
as self-restraining or stifling rather it was liberal enough to make room for non-
traditional vocations as well. As Gandhi continued saying,

> To say that a Brahman should not touch the plough is a parody of *varnashrama* and a prostitution of the meaning of the *Bhagavadgita*. Surely the qualities ascribed to the different divisions are not denied to the others. Is bravery to be the prerogative only of the Kshatriya and the restraint only of the Brahman? (ibid:15).

Thus it appears that Gandhi was in appreciation of the *varnashram* system and was
careful to give its due place in the society. The distortions he felt had been introduced
into it by some extraneous forces which plagued the system with abject stubbornness
and rigidity unheard of in the earlier times. He saw the *varna* frame in its pristine
form as a much liberated system that made providence for multiple vocations. Those
way occupations were not iron-laced but could be freely pursued by people from the
other *varnas*. Gandhi was appalled to learn that the nobler virtues were monopolized
only for the higher castes. He thus saw a malleable and flexible *varnashram* system
where attributes flowed freely from one rung to the other. Mobility was ensured
easily. This was possible because of the dearth of rigidity in the hierarchy of the
framework. Anybody who had sufficient virtues could climb up the ladder without
any inhibition or reluctance. As Mashruwala quoted Gandhi,

> If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reserve serve my country as a soldier, but must be content to earn my bread by trading...it would be quite right for any brainy
carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money (Mashruwala: 1954:73-74).

Thus Gandhi made it very clear that the varna framework must be made free from the shackles of rankings and gradations. The respective occupations should be taken not as a tool to amass fortunes but only to make both ends meet. With this objective in mind, the varnashram system would never entail any underlying element of superiority or inferiority. The varnashram system thus spoke of pervasive equality with no room for privilege or injustice. The system remained uncontaminated till it was taken over by the complications of the prolific sub-castes that destroyed the very purpose as well as the sanctity of the varna edifice in our civilization. However for Gandhi, caste system was a treasure to be relished for it had always stood as a saviour in times of turbulence facing the civilization. As he himself said,

They argue that the retention of the caste system spells ruin for India and that it is caste which has reduced India to slavery. In my opinion, it is not caste that has made us what we are. It was our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved us from disintegration. (Gandhi: 1924: 480).

Thus Gandhi was truly in praise of the age-old institution which was dynamic and vibrant and therefore had the strength to lend support and endurance to the staggering civilization.

Bose also professed a similar line of thinking. He had always spoken of the varna system and the solidarity that it generated among the hierarchically graded castes. Bose cited various indological texts to show how an ambience of equality and resultant integration was created by the varna framework in ancient India. Especially narratives of the epic Mahabharata, and the Sanskrit text of Hindu law, Manusamhita, showed an essential kind of balance maintained by the varna framework in the society.

The state recognized the right to individual liberty and did not trespass into their personal coffers. Bose said, though the Hindu society had somewhat brought equipoise in the social structure through its varna system, it could not still create the absolute semblance that it purported. However, he said that this unequal system still brought about a peaceful aura where instead of waging a war against the higher
castes, their caste brethrens co-operated amongst themselves into a smooth co-existence. This was perhaps possible for the economic rendition of the varna framework that made mutual dependence almost obligatory. In the same vein, Gandhi also felt, “The pursuit of the traditional profession is only for the purpose of earning one’s livelihood (Mashruwala:1954:73).

According to Gandhi,

A Brahmin is not only a teacher. He is only predominantly that. But a Brahmin who refuses to labour will be voted down as an idiot. The Rishis of the old who lived in the forests cut and fetched wood, tended cattle and even fought. Similarly a Rajput without learning was good for nothing no matter how well he wielded his sword (Gandhi: 1924:1007).

Thus Gandhi propagated a sense of equality in the society across the vertical segmentation of the varna hierarchy. He pleaded with the cleaner castes not to run after mad race for wealth and riches but to stick to their swadharma or self-duty. He said to bring about a parity, different varnas must not only profess their own profession but also turn to spinning and weaving as a common bond between the disparate jatis. He added,

The spinning wheel is designed to wake up every one to a sense of his duty. It enables every one better to fulfil his dharma or duty...they must, therefore, in order to faithfully carry out their dharma, learn and practice spinning (Gandhi: 1924: 1008).

Bose likewise recognised the hierarchical division of the castes and instead of being wary of such inequality took it as a common thread of unification. Like Gandhi, Bose recognized the true economic objective of the varna framework. This he thought was the one common string of integration running across the society seething with caste inequalities. Though not assured of economic equality, the castes were brought under a common fold of professional calling within the village economy upon which they banked upon. Such an arrangement incurred upon them a socio-economic authority that they had learnt to revere for long. Their loyalty for such a system remained beyond question, because it protected them through all the ups and downs of their life.
It was a system they looked upon with awe and respect. They were thus enchanted with the *varna* framework and there was no question of parting with it. They accepted the imperious authority of the Brahmans since the latter did not interfere with their *lokachar* (folkways) and *deshachar* (mores). Even the newly formed *jatis* were very well assured of the fluidity of the norms offered by the Hindu Aryan society. This laxity allowed the new recruits to spontaneously gel in with the caste structure. They easily found their place within the system and did not have to compromise with their folkways to give in to the dictates of the caste mentors. Perhaps, the newly recruited members of the caste, did find a comfortable balance between their folkways and the caste rules. No one dictated the other. Their local customs were juxtaposed so well with the extraneous group regulations that there was no anomic or norm-less-ness. The two areas were neatly tied up so that there remained no ambiguity in the respective arenas. People did not suffer from role-less diffidence.

Bose, thus, showed, that the *varnashram* system served the economic as well as the mental function of bridging the gulf between the micro and the macro areas of individual’s life. The tribal men thus got sucked in this *varna* framework from outside with the least reluctance. The system catered to both their local and intravenous needs besides placing them in sync with the extraneous foreign system. The adaptation became easy since the micro aspects of their tribal living were stitched in a subtle way to the macro area of caste existence to which they were increasingly becoming a part of. The socio-economic system of village economy thus stood as a great shield against the umpteen obstacles that came in the way. The civilization stood like a stoic rock absorbing all the peril that came its way. Thus it appears that Bose was severely influenced by Gandhi and it came to be reflected in his numerous works.

Speaking of the Gandhian ideology, Bose spoke of the revolutions which raged among the oppressed natives in the district of Birbhum among the community of the cobblers (Bose: 1930:77). However, Bose was not all in praise of this ideology and showed how it adversely impacted the cobbler community. The Gandhian ideology of equality having swept the untouchable villagers made them voluble and animated. The ‘*Harijan*’ movement left an indelible impression on the cobblers so much so that they organized among themselves to make some stark resolutions. These pledges included quitting alcohol, chanting lord’s names when dusk falls, prohibiting
consumption of beef, educating their children etc. One of them even proclaimed to quit the polluting task of tanning and take over a less contaminating work of cultivation at hand. With the imperial discovery of the steam engines, leather was directly exported to the city based markets. This affected the poor farmers very much. The markets were getting inundated with cheaper shoes and the labor market was becoming infested with the migratory laborers. The Bengali tanners being cornered were increasingly falling upon agriculture in search of security and ammunition. Many of them were forsaking their caste affiliations to take upon agrarian practices so much so that their sheer differences with the peasant classes were fast obliterating. Despite this, the sense of insolence and indignity arising from the untouchable classes kept looming (Sinha: 1994:34).

The tribes were so severely affected by the higher caste Hindus that they rejected all those acts which they had pursued for so long such as widow remarriage, vocations of tannery etc. A huge impact was thus left on the untouchable castes such as the Haari, Doam, Namashudra etc. which generated an upsurge of education that swept across the uneducated untouchable community stupendously. The impact was so magnetic that some of these castes had started initiating themselves towing the line of the superior castes. This process of metamorphosing the identity tacitly in lure of newly found pseudo esteem had gained ground among the lower castes and it became an obsession among such castes. They did not leave any leaf unturned to profess this identity. Some of them even left their own home state to migrate elsewhere to change their status (ibid: 36).

Bose had showed that the lower castes in their attempt to carve out their own identity and essence were clinging tightly to the higher castes for a temptation of reverence which they were devoid of for long. Though Bose thinks such an attitude is nothing but analogous to the conciliation of the powerful and the mighty. However, it was not the same everywhere. In many places the indigenous people could astutely put forward their claim. Thus it clearly shows that Bose looked at Hinduism for its possible follies and did not admire it unnecessarily. He showed that at some places where people tried to follow Hinduism they were so taken by the dictates of the higher castes that they even followed the wrong ideals of the religion. This is just to show Bose was not obsessed with the religion as Gandhi was and therefore looked for its shortcomings and
weaknesses. He was neither a strong follower of Hinduism as Gandhi was, nor was he staunchly decrying Hinduism as Ambedkar did. What is interesting about Bose is that he was not an extremist like Ambedkar. He did analyse the Hindu texts and documents but did not find fault with everything. He rather browsed the texts thoroughly to accept what he found tenable and to reject the rest.

**Presenting a moderate theory of caste**

As we have already said, Bose presented a theory of caste and nationalism far more moderate than the radicals like Ambedkar. When Ambedkar took an extremist position about the Hindu religion and its encompassing institutions like Varnashram and caste, Bose decided to rather go slow. Bose’s theory can be taken as a middle ground between the two policies since he on the one hand upheld the national character of the Hindu Varnashram system and on the other hand celebrated upon the theorem of unity in diversity. Bose had thus vehemently advocated the benevolence of the Hindu religion and its corresponding policy to even accommodate the tribes and the non-Hindus into the national mould. However, Bose for time and again had been criticized by the followers of Ambedkar for his obsession with the Hindu society and extolling unnecessarily its policies towards tribal absorption. This was however, never broached upon by Ambedkar, who felt there are very few societies as parochial as the Hindu society. On the contrary, he saw these policies of Hindu society as shrewd strategies of domesticating the tribes with strong patronizing agenda and latent exploitation. Yet Bose never relented in admiring the Hindu religious elites and the overall malleable crust of the Hindu society. Thus, Andre Beteille reminds us,

Bose has been criticized for dwelling too much on the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the tribe and the wider society and not enough on its asymmetrical and exploitative character (58). The precariousness of the tribal economy was not always its natural condition. It resulted sometimes from a tribe being pushed back by its more prosperous or better organized neighbours from a better to a worse location where it could survive only on the lowest economic plane. As a recent writer has tersely observed about a major area of tribal concentration in Bihar, 'it can be surmised that the people of Chota Nagpur remained primitive so that their neighbours could grow' (59). But, whether these tribes were pushed out or pulled in, their lives were

Therefore, Bose did not stop extolling the generous nature of the Hindu society, which had strongly embedded economic benefits for the downtrodden classes. The exclusive monopoly over a task that was given to the tribes in the Hindu society talks of the flexibility and generosity of the caste society which Bose upheld, but Ambedkar severely criticised. Even Beteille said,

Our understanding of the transformation of tribe into caste or the fusion of tribal elements into the general society will remain incomplete without an appreciation of the role of the economic ethics of Hinduism. Evidence of oppression and exploitation cannot be used to discount its hold over the minds of people in the entire sub-continent down to our own times. The economic ethic was part of a wider system of beliefs and values which we describe broadly as Hinduism and which overflowed the boundaries of Hindu society in the narrow sense. (Beteille: 1986:58-59).

Thus it is pretty evident that Bose fell back on different elements of the Hindu society to corroborate its consideration for the other communities. It never just worked for itself but persistently incorporated the other communities standing on its threshold. Thus the argument is this that Bose was tenaciously trying to create integration along the horizontal line where he wanted to boil down all sorts of multiplicities into a single unifying sect. He tried legitimatizing this along various lines, chief among them being the religious and the caste. This becomes clearer when Bose says,

The great teachers who wanted to convey to the country their faith had always toured the whole of India and one of the greatest of them, Sankaracharya, who flourished in the eighth century A.D. built four Ashramas (Monasteries) in four corners of India, which flourish to this day. Everywhere the same scriptures are read and followed and the epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are equally popular wherever you may travel (Bose: 1991:12).

Ambedkar on the other hand strongly critiqued this position. While criticising Hindu religion, he however, did not deny the place of religion because for him religion, morality and law had a distinct place in his philosophy. Ambedkar was a true disciple
of Buddhist religion and a thorough humanist who gave supreme place to man and his social relationship with his fellows. For Buddha’s *Dhamma*, there is no scope for prayers, rituals, ceremonies or sacrifices, something which were very carefully observed and analysed by Bose to find out the interrelations between Hindu religion and the greater society, especially how such symbolic acts performed the significant tasks of integration, absorption, assimilation and such other social processes. Ambedkar by denying the place of these collective acts failed to see the ancillary acts of the Hindu religion other than its apparent acts of fragmentation and social differentiation.

Bose contrasted this form of integration with the one that followed with the British conquest when integration policies were framed along the vertical lines of stark demarcation between the people on the lines of language, religion, races and the like. He, on the other hand, upheld a form of integration that would promote the distinction of all communities that inhabited the Indian union. The tribes were not cut off from the Hindu society and they must assert their existence on their own crest. The society was modernizing fast, and the tribes would not sustain any insulation from the buzzing society, but work in unison to bring out the true essence of a multicultural society like India. Thus the merging between the two popular forms of public strategies, where a national or at least an ideal-typical value system might be built up at least carefully, in a way does not hurt the sentiments of the different groups that are opulent and ready to display their difference from the dominant culture, sect or ideology. This is necessary to resuscitate back the flexibility and resilience of a plural country, which our country truly is. This was unlike the imperial practices where the colonial forces had strong lines of coercion up their sleeves and the masses had learnt to distance themselves from the segmenting policies of the elite. Instead of tying the masses along a common cord, the foreign power had zoomed on the innate differences of each of the communities and played them one against the other. The communities were at logger heads with one another thus creating a context easier for the British forces to fragment the nation into vulnerable pockets. It is here that Bose takes a middle-range approach unlike a radical position like Ambedkar while problematizing the issue of integration.
Untouchability

Bose felt that the problems pertaining to untouchability refused to go even with education and adoption of urban professions. Though it was apparently believed that as an anonymous character of the urban life, people will be able to escape the stigma associated with untouchability, on the contrary the trauma of the same had increased in urban living. Bose said, “...if it is known that a person belongs to a scheduled caste, then it is difficult for him to secure the services of even domestic servants” (Bose:1972:200)

Similarly, for Ambedkar, untouchability is a distinctive feature of the Hindu caste system for it surely imposes dictums on the poor men and punishes severely those who deviate from the iron laws approved by the high caste Hindus. The untouchables were abstained from any such acts which showed arrogance towards Hindus. It was simply exerting rule of a class on another class. For Ambekar, that, religion is the source of power is illustrated by the history of India where the priest holds a sway over the common man often greater than the magistrate and where everything, even such things as strikes and elections, so easily take a religious turn and can so easily be given a religious twist (Ambedkar:1943: 44).

The new phase of social movements and the emerging trend of national integration with special reference to joint vs separate electorates

Bose was trying to show how the domain of national integration changed forms in the pre- and post-British regime in India. In the past he tried drawing integration along the horizontal line where the elites in the society tried creating a likeness across the multiple affiliations by trying to create a homogeneous society. He put the onus of creating this unity partly on the elites of the society and especially those that worked as the mentors of the Hindu religion. He had argued strongly of the catholicity of the Hindu philosophy that tried all means to tie the various communities within the society across their varying affiliations into a common mould. However, soon after independence, cracks appeared in this mould and the gaps became pronounced with
time. Ambedkar, on the other hand, felt the cracks had started appearing because of the widening gap between the Hindus and the untouchables, and can only be addressed by making arrangements for separate electorates for the untouchables. He felt the Hindus were reluctant to reserve seats that ought to be filled by the untouchables alone. Ambedkar never supported the Hindu opinion that the untouchable who is to be the representative of the untouchables in the legislature should be elected by a mixed electorate consisting both of the Hindus as well as of the untouchables and never so by an electorate exclusively of the untouchables.

Both Ambedkar and Bose were writing at a time when the society was on the verge of transition. Bose sensed the verve of the new ambience and was careful to keep it in mind while donning the new cap of the Commissioner of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in 1967. In the 1970s, the benefits of reservation were fast spreading like wild fire among the dalit youths. With the spread of education, the movement was fast gaining ground among such youths who were learning to vehemently oppose the Hindu ideology professed in their text books. Gail Omvedt writes,

What was striking was the changing nature of this middle class and its increased spread. In Ambedkar’s time this consisted of only a very small section of educated dalits who could provide the core of activists for a movement; by the 1970s education and the gains from reservation had produced a widespread section. It ranged upwards to a few high level government employees and political leaders and downwards to the villages, where in most areas minimal education of the boys of the most conscious dalit castes (Mahars, Chambhars, etc.) was practically universal and was slowly beginning to include the girls as well. The nature of the Indian education system made them vulnerable to the modernistic upgrading of the Hindu ideologies found in school books; but simultaneously the ability to read and write proved a powerful weapon for the movement (Omvedt: 2011:78).

This was also the time when the society was running riot with movements of all kinds. Besides education, the communication network had grown up by then to render news and images of these movements to the audience outside. All these therefore bolstered the backward class consciousness among the people and made it a necessary element of the national integration. It had by then become clear that the history of the nation could not be written by the narratives of the elite castes alone but the depressed classes must be given their due place in it. The Indian society therefore could not
remained insular from the movements waging across the globe, which, in turn, stimulated the fire in the belly of our own backward classes themselves. Omvedt writes,

Both education, whatever its limitations, and the communications network of the time made a range of contemporary and historical world events a reality for an increasing number of the poor themselves. The Vietnam revolution, the Chinese revolution, the Black movement and the Black poetry, Marxism, the women’s movement, the new left, were all part of the cultural mix that represented a worldwide phenomenon. The 1970s saw not only the rise of a new low-caste upsurge, but also the spread of a new kind of “Dalit consciousness to many other movements. (ibid:78).

Bose, though aware of the dalit emotions and the growing consciousness enraging these movements, was nevertheless, careful while doling out the benefits to them. Unlike Ambedkar, he felt that though concern must be shown for the backward classes, one must be prudent about its limitations. He thought that privileges might be rendered out in aiding men to carry out their everyday lives but one must not go overboard. While meting out loans or while forming co-operatives, considerations might be shown but such protection must not be shelled out in appointments and services where merit should not be compromised upon. Bose himself said,

Of course in matter of application for services, there is no harm if one belonging to the scheduled groups enjoys partial remission in matter of fees. But when it comes to qualification for a particular post, our object should be not to remain satisfied with the minimum requirements, but to make use of the maximum qualifications from one among those who apply for a particular office. We cannot afford to sacrifice the efficiency of services at the altar of communal parity (ibid:62).

Ambedkar thought otherwise because he felt the untouchables should be represented in that legislature by untouchables because only the untouchable could become a true representative of the untouchable voters. Separate electorate was the only mechanism by which real representation can be assured to the untouchables. Ambedkar felt the Hindu argument against separate electorate was insubstantial and unsupportable (Ambedkar:1943:33) Bose on the other hand, was wary of the fact that with
backward class emotions being over-loaded, the ripe condition might trigger a sensitized situation, which might wriggle out of the state control. The partition of the society into several blocks challenged the integrity of the nation, and created constrained predicaments for the state.

So we must keep in mind this national backdrop against which Bose was strategizing ways to chisel out a well-grounded form of national integration, which possibly Ambedkar did not have in mind for he was too obsessed with the backward classes’ interests without being bothered about the long term interests of the nation. Despite the rising differentiation, Bose like Ambedkar, never favoured advancing special treatments to particular social berths. Ambedkar, on the other hand felt that the facilities of education were not sufficiently widespread and were not used optimally to permit persons from all classes to come forth to compete for a national competitive exam. Therefore, any attempt to ask the untouchable to rely upon the results of a competitive examination for their entry into the public services is actually a matter of fraudulence.

Bose felt that reservation either in education or in public service is a crucial issue to be given due consideration while building a nation for it is necessary to maintain a secular approach devoid of any communal flavour. If protection ought to be given it must be rendered at the preliminary stage in terms of education and socio-economic assistance without letting it loom large over the later years. If the primary reservation is allowed to be indulged upon in the adolescence, the man will lose his self-reliance and pick up a parasitic orientation which is so un-productive and malevolent for the society at large. Bose also at the same time said,

The backward classes of today must be given preferential treatment in regard to educational or economic facilities, with the proviso that these do not go against the long-range general interests of the nation. It is a difficult task; but we are sure that those who are in charge of the administration today will be able to keep their vision clear, and not allow sentimentality or political expediency to drag them into steps which, though apparently just, will serve to weaken the very foundations of our nationhood (ibid:62).
Thus it seemed very clear that Bose was very careful while deliberating on the very sticky issue of reservation. He favoured reservation but not at the cost of national integration. In advocating such lines of education, Bose was not just following the Gandhian philosophy but he was also showing inclination towards Ambedkar. For, Ambedkar himself proposed a means of liberating the children from the backward sections and urging them to explore further with unbridled freedom. Ambedkar believed in harvesting the best minds of the villages, giving them necessary education and then inducting them in government jobs. This way a planned development of the nation is possible. Ambedkar felt that this way of empowering the backward masses, for ten years would create a large pool of man power. He said in this context,

Thus you will create a few people with high qualifications and place them in high posts. That will be 2000 times better than the 2000 boys educated in primary education in Marathi or Gujrathi (Ambedkar: 1956:74).

Bose was elated by this proposal submitted by Ambedkar and therefore took cognizance of this great jurist (Bose: 1972b:222). Though both Ambedkar and Bose spoke of social upliftment of the marginal sections they did not harbour similar opinions about the caste system. Ambedkar was ready to do away with the system altogether but Bose treasured varnashram system though he cursed the caste system for the inequality it garnered in the society.

Bose therefore seemed careful while granting protection to the countrymen on the scaffold of education, instead of offering mass reservation as Ambedkar did. Herein lies the greatness of Bose’s thought. He never took an extremist path like Amedkar and Dumont. This is because he wanted to find treasure in all the aspects of the Hindu civilization which he encountered, and in this venture, left his indelible imprint on the public minds and decided resolutely not to toe lines not just with Ambedkar and Dumont but even with Gandhi. So he treasured Varnashram system and urged his countrymen to extract as much lessons as possible from the institution though he never promoted caste system or its ills. Like Ambedkar he was not sceptical towards the whole Hindu ideology but picked and chose what was worth imitation or import. Herein lies the judiciousness and modernity of his approach.
Nirmal Kumar Bose and Nicholas Dirks on caste: hierarchical versus multiple hierarchy?

Nicholas B. Dirks is an American academic and the former Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley. Dirks had done pretty good amount of research on South Asian history and culture and was chiefly concerned with the impact of British colonial rule on the south Asian countries, especially India. Some of his renowned works include *The Hollow Crown: Ethno-history of an Indian Kingdom* (1987), *Castes of Mind* (2001), and *Scandal of Empire* (2006). In these works, Dirks researched to show how British colonial rule helped to mould the culture of the Indian subcontinent, as well as how some of its institutions, for instance, caste, essentially became a colonial construct. Dirks had been brought in the present literary context to contrast with Bose, because though Dirks (1950- ) was a comparatively young sociologist, he had presented new dimensions on caste which is worthy of contrast with Bose, one of the classical interpreters of caste. Dirks qualifies for a place in the present context for like Bose, he takes a post-Dumontian approach and talks vividly about the vivifications of the caste in the colonial and post-colonial India.

Dirks argued that colonialism in India manufactured novel types of civil society which have been manifested as traditional patterns of Indian society, chief amongst which is the very institution of caste. The academic discourse on India has itself indulged a colonial endeavour, nurtured by the quaint ways of studying India and its paraphernalia. Dirks unwittingly, terms this a “colonial project” (1988:4). He believed that in India, anthropologists and historians had been obsessed with caste and its many vivisections. As he comets, “Caste continues to be the central social fact for South Asia and social history remains implicated in many of the same theoretical and methodological problematics as anthropology” (ibid:4). The undying priority still given to scholars such as Weber, Dumont and Heesterman presumes that sociology, especially the ones specializing on Indian society, could not yet come out of the grip of the shadow of the imperialist sociology that still continues to haunt its systems and institutions, the caste being a case in point. Heesterman likewise still recognizes the unquestioned authority of the Vedas, which he says is the only agency that grants scriptural authority and legitimacy to individuals in the society. Heesterman, however,
observes a dual orientation engraved within the Vedas, that, though demand sacrifice and restraint from individuals, at times open its doors to break order and invite tension and violence. Heesterman nevertheless reserves the study of rituals, sacrifices and non-violence as essentially the domain of Indian sociology. He therefore said, “if there were a prize for the most threadbare topic in Indology, non-violence or ahimsa would be a most likely candidate. Given its importance, even central place in Indian religions, this is not surprising” (Heesterman:1993: 1).

Dirks opposed the views held by Weber, Marx, Maine, and Dumont who have all held that in India, in deep contrast to China, the existence of the state was marginal or nullifying. On the contrary, it was caste and not the state which firmly held the society, especially with the help of its constituent village republics and localities that cemented the society together. Therefore, caste was considered as the basis of Indian civilization, as if it was the key reason behind the transformation of the Indian society. Caste with its religious basis was the chief factor behind the unfurling of the society, which, however, was believed to have no political foundations. In Dirks’ study of the Hollow Crown (1987), it came out that “until the emergence of British colonial rule in southern India the crown was not so hollow as it has generally been made out to be in Indian history, anthropology, and comparative sociology in general” (Dirks: 1988:1).

Dirks contended that novelty was not inferior to the priesthood, and that the political turf was never enveloped by a sacred fence. State was from the very beginning an essential component of the Indian civilization, and as held by his predecessors, he refuted the claim that the civilization had a strong religious overtone as against the political undercurrents. He believed that state and polity had been the two inevitable pillars of the Indian society and that all attempts had been made to belittle their existence riding back on the tide of the hackneyed caste and its paraphernalia. For, time and again, Dirks affirmed that, “State forms, while not fully assimilable to western categories of the state, were powerful components in Indian civilization. Indian society, indeed caste itself, was shaped by political struggles and processes” (ibid:4). Dirks was of the opinion that the Indian society had a strong political basis for its caste framework, ritual practices, and political struggles were all laced with relations of power. These relations, as Dirks believed, “were constituted in and
through history; and these relations were culturally constructed” (ibid:4). For him, this reproduction or this cultural construction, as we may term, occurred only with the advent of the of British colonial rule, through which the caste was essentially re-designed as the religious bandwagon of the society, in a way such as the society had only religion but no power. Caste was thus fabricated as a cultural form that became a blueprint of “a specifically Indian form of civil society” (ibid:6).

Dirks questioned the paradoxical nature of colonialism that must have been behind the framing of what today had come to be accepted as the Indian tradition, comprising of an autonomous caste hierarchy presided conspicuously by the Brahman, as well as, “village based systems of exchange, isolated ceremonial residues of the old regime state, and fetishistic competition for ritual goods that no longer played a vital role in the political system” (ibid:5). Bose, on the other hand, said that these were the causes which could instil loyalty among the subordinated classes. He showed that in an unstable society with relative scarcity, the castes created a condition of interdependence and integration. As Bose can be quoted as saying, “The rules of the caste were devised in a manner so that various communal groups were woven together into a network of mutual interdependence” (Bose:1964::240). Another cause for this, which Bose cited, was an ambience of non-competition and security. Such a climate was conducive enough to give protection and solace to the lower castes lest they feel threatened and scared within the dictums of strict competition. The caste system thereby empathised with the lower castes and did not encroach upon their ways of life. As Bose said,

Competition was positively discouraged. An artisan or priest could seek the protection of the king, or of the local college of Brahmans, or even of the caste or village-panchayat if he were threatened by competition by anyone who infringed upon his preserves (ibid:240).

Along with the economic security, came the question of such cultural autonomy that each caste was given absolute freedom to pursue its individual style of life. There thus prevailed a free and smooth temperament which allowed the castes to carry on with their distinctive styles of culture in an unhindered way. Therefore, Bose claimed, “in other words, cultural autonomy was thus guaranteed to each of the federated communities” (ibid: 240).
Thus, Bose maintained, unlike Dirks, that in terms of economic sustenance and cultural indigenousness, the castes assured full security to their new recruits. It was probably because of this fact that the reason for which growing economic differences between the different castes did not engulf the entire society. Each caste was noted for its distinct status and cultural autonomy and therefore did not wage a war against the other. It was probably because of this fact that the act of benevolence and grant giving was encouraged. The caste system did not practice hoarding but rather encouraged the act of doling out gifts to the distressed and the suppressed castes. This acted against the psyche of acquiring wealth and self-boastfulness. The people were encouraged to be humble and were asked not to showcase their wealth. Thus the higher and the more affluent castes were expected to be kind and generous towards their poorer brethren instead of being flashy and ostentatious. This created a very ethical system where not naked materialism, but mutual consideration and self-retrospection were inculcated.

Unlike Dirks, Bose did not find any clash between the westernized and the traditional system of caste based production. He thought both could exist in its own place. We, find Bose’s obsession with the ancient economic system of production as embedded within the Varna system. He did not look at the system as one dimensional but found it as interactive and multi-dimensional. The shackles which the ascribed status had attached to the system had not been looked down on by Bose. He gave a new interpretation to it. He said instead of stifling the individual by the strict rigours of the caste system, it gives them enough space and respite. It does not turn men into mere bonded caste –recruits but there is always a backdoor to escape through sannyasa (asceticism).

Writing about Dirk’s *Caste of Mind*, Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan had rightly said, “This work sometimes straddles pre-colonial and colonial periods with ease and reports on the intermingling of language, caste, and gender politics in the formation of Indian middle classes and new rural social hierarchies” (Sivaramakrishnan:2005:146). Dirk’s *Castes of Mind*, though a scholarly work is outlived by the more researched and historically informed work of Bose. Dirks, in spite of making a colonial and post-colonial rendition of caste, fails to observe the interpolations going on incessantly between the caste and tribal identities even while discussing at length about caste and its representation in the colonial and post-colonial Indian society. N. K Bose had rightly noted the overlapping relations between fluid castes and tribes from the very
beginning of his study and this remained a powerful contribution of his work. Bose, too, studied at length the post-colonial re-designing of the caste and its impact on the present social structure like Dirks but he does not stop only at anthropometry, census and ethnographic surveys and the trials and tribulations through which caste came to be formed and re-formed by the imperial and post-imperial forces at work. Unfortunately while talking about the reproduction of the caste and its ripples on the wider society, Dirks nowhere talks about the changing caste-tribe amalgamations though ‘native identities’ were already becoming conspicuous from the period after the 1921 and 1931 censuses. Caste had undergone a sea change in the new paradigm and there seems to be no single homogeneous perception of caste in the late colonial pictures and surely such a monolithic sketch is obviously denied in the ruptured post-colonial times. Dirks had surely forgotten to take a note of this changed reality, something which Bose had done long before.

Dirks went on talking about throttled forms of colonial interventions, but failed to take note of their tectonic impacts on the wider society. Dirks himself said,” any study of colonial discourse which fails to examine the contradictory nature of colonial intervention and the institutional bases of colonial impact must be rejected” (Dirks:1988:28). However, had he himself studied the consequences of the colonial land usages, he would have better understood the caste parameters and their appropriate intersections with the othercommunities. The greatest contribution of Bose had been that he studied the journey of the caste in both the colonial and post-colonial thoroughfares and yet did not concentrate on the caste alone. He kept his eyes wide open to look for the multiple hierarchies that it wove advertently or inadvertently. Dipankar Gupta too much later talks about such multiple hierarchies especially through ideas of differences expressed by castes, that became a salient feature of the Indian political panorama from the 20th century (Gupta:2002).

That is why, chartering multiple recourses to caste and civilization, Bose studied many pathologies of this ruptured society. One of this was his grievance not just against imperial industrialization, but even against colonial land abuse. Bose discussed the colonial land usages further to explain the imperial takeover of the lower caste and tribal lands that went on stealthily. Bose felt that the tribes were slowly losing their control over their land as they were getting entrapped in the silently getting complicated rules of land revenue and the encroaching tactics of the
high caste society. He nevertheless showed little concern for the aboriginal lands and their exclusiveness. This new system of administration poached upon the original tribal land rules and absolutely jeopardized the aboriginal land system. The indigenous land system thus broke loose to make way for the invaders from outside. These changes can never be recognized if we fail to notice the alternative hierarchies waging within the caste structure; but only learning its colonial and post-colonial under-currents without taking an all-encompassing synthetic approach might be self-defeating as Bose had rightly showed.

Bose’s uniqueness lies in the point that, he eloquently dealt with the caste and tribal question in India with an open mind that did not speak of taking sides with either groups, be it the tribes or the non-tribes. He empathised with the issue of the lower caste and tribal problems and showed enough sensitization while adeptly handling the issue of the rights of the poor and the constitutional safeguards of protection. He was wary at the same time, lest the non-tribal population gets dejected at the overt-benevolence and doling strategies of the state in favour of the tribes.

Bose, it must be remembered, was weaving the problem of the castes and tribes across the framework of civilizational integration and resilience, for which he dealt in depth with the question of symbiosis of the tribal and non-tribal groups, both of which he thought are indispensable for building up a synchronised society. Bose recognised the differences between the aboriginal and the non-aboriginal ones, and this he took as nothing pathological for it should be considered absolutely inevitable for a country as diverse as ours. His relevance in today’s society lies in addressing categorically to this issue of diversity especially when the society is showing adamant approaches towards likeness and monochrome.

**The fluidity in the caste structure**

This merry-go-round between the castes and the tribes went on relentlessly from time immemorial. The ancient indological texts have stood as evidence to this shuttle between the two groups. *Manusamhita* (Hindu law text) showed that various castes like *Abhiras, Mallas, Khasas, Andhras, Vaidehas*, and *Magadhas*, being described as castes, were actually all tribes. On the other hand, weavers, potters, blacksmiths, carpenters etc. were denoted as groups carrying on particular professions but were
Bose often referred to the works of R.C Majumdar, who in the context of these switch – overs said,

This took place later than the age of Manusamhita, for they are included in the list of professions and not of castes. But in Manusamhita we find a systematic attempt of explaining the origin of this motley group of castes (Majumdar: 1922:567).

Bose also said, we find two distinct methods of explaining the origin of these groups; in the first method, the members of this group were constituted by the fallen members of the higher rungs of Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya. Owing to their disability to comply with the caste norms they have degraded themselves to the lower rungs. The other method described castes being formed by mixed caste theory. This theory stated that different castes were formed by mixed marriages between the original four castes and the resultant sub-castes. This might explain the origin of such tribes like Abhiras, Chinas, Yavanas, Sakas, Satvatas etc. Thus we find that within the Varna framework, mixed marriages were propagated to form new distinct castes. The Chandalas (untouchables), for instance, were considered to have Shudra father and a Brahmin mother (Bose:1967:230).

Thus it is found that the castes prolifically gave way to numerous sub-castes and this cumulated over time to give rise to an array of vibrant groups with multiple rituals. Therefore, though the Varna system remained rigid in terms of its rules of social intercourse, it sometimes did give way to aberrations. So mobility became possible across the various castes, and even infiltration of the tribes in the caste order. Each of the groups was allowed to retain their distinction through their separate rules of endogamy and commensality which were not tampered by the others. Thus the existence of various caste and quasi-caste groups was recognized in their own unique spirit. The differences were accepted and they were not allowed to rub shoulders with the higher castes unless need arises. So the Varna order was a fluid structure which showed a tendency towards differentiation rather than homogenization. Therefore, the castes across the Varna pedestal were not water-tight compartments but rather malleable elements in search of flexibility. At times tribal groups gave in to castes in such a covert way that it almost went unnoticed for a long time. Such was the design of the Aryan Hindu social structure that accommodation and assimilation went on
unabatedly for ages. Sometimes the castes and tribes were in such proximity with one another that the margin between the two got blurred and indistinct.

Bose showed, in the hill and forest regions of Orissa and Chotanagpur, a number of communities lived in tribal villages who worked as craftsmen or specialists. The villagers are linked with one another for economic necessities and mutual cooperation. The *Jatis* like *Pans, Chapua Kamars and Gadiya Lohars* worked in close association with one another. These groups might have been tribes previously but pursuit of a distinct professional specialization has turned them into castes (ibid:225). There are such several groups like the *Birhors* in Chotanagpur in Orissa and the *Makarkhia Kulha* tribes who make ropes and string bags from the forest creepers for sale in the weekly markets. Likewise, the *Kharias* of Mayurbhanj collect from the forest resin, wax, honey, etc., which they sell at a small price to the traders in the village. Adjacent to the Dhenkanal town, the *Juangs* sell firewood to villagers of other communities. They also sell bamboo works and have made it almost their profession. As Bose showed,

In every case one can observe that each community has adopted a particular occupation. Following variations in local conditions, the same non-Aryan communities might be constrained to adopt different occupations in different regions in Orissa. But once a community establishes monopoly over a particular occupation, others generally avoid taking it up (Bose: 1975: 38).

Thus it remains well evident that the divide between the castes and tribes were fast vanishing. The caste framework was such moulded that it easily made inroads for the new *Jatis*. It was not necessary to maintain all the criteria set for caste affiliation, and conformity to just a few ones could fetch the much coveted caste identity. Just as in the *Varna* system, the occupations were fixed and mutually exclusive, it was not so rigid in the case of newly recruited caste members. Local variations were allowed and a need for a universal caste occupation was not pressed for. The trans-regional versions of traditional occupations were recognized.

The tribal groups trying to gain a footing on the caste pedestal were allowed to go slow. Approach of the caste mentors towards them had been considerably soft and lenient. Their limitations in struggling up the rugged terrain to the *Varna* edifice were thoughtfully considered. It was accepted that the transition from one setting to the
other might not be that easy, so the new recruits were allowed to pursue regionally conducive occupations. It was spelled out, that whichever occupations they might pursue must be prolonged enough to claim a monopoly over it. The design of the Aryan society was such that it allowed such liberal provisions to the non-Aryan communities despite retaining the rigid rules for itself. Bose felt herein lays the greatness of a society that reserves the steel-framed rules for itself and makes allowance for the outsiders. It makes provisions for the newcomers and plays a gentle host to those coming from outside. There might be judicious and shrewd strategies behind the whole arrangement, but the constant tribal incorporation within the Aryan fold in the last place cannot be denied.

What stands very interesting is the resolute claim of the non-Aryan communities fighting for their place within the caste fold. The absorption must not be looked from the perspective of the generous caste mentors. There is another way of looking at it from the point of view of the tribal groups. The otherwise nubile and the vulnerable tribes should not be taken with ignominy and indignity. They had resolute opinions which were voiced very strongly. The point the researcher is trying to make is that they were not ready to be taken for granted. They formed their own public opinion based on their indigenous and folk wisdom. They were not ready to be bowed down under the Aryan gratitude. They did not see this as a sort of kindness bestowed upon them by the Brahminical society. They were not prepared to owe it to the Aryan structure. They were therefore claiming to be agents in the whole structure and raising their voice very conspicuously. It was not just a handiwork of the Brahmins but a system where they have active roles to play. They claimed a place into the caste order not by sheer mercy but by legitimacy. As Bose said on the question of tribal absorption, the tribes had a clearly formed opinion. While commenting on the opinions of the Juangs, he said,

Popular opinion in the state of Pal Lahara would say that even though the Juangs speak a non-Aryan language and eat the flesh of cows, pigs, snakes and other unclean animals, they ought to be counted among the Hindu communities. For after all even among the Hindus, those who travel overseas eat unclean meat. Also, the language of all Hindus is not same. Nor is it true that they all believe in the same deity (ibid:37).
So it showed that the non-Aryan communities had dared to retort against the Aryans thus validating their claim for occupancy in the Hindu caste order. It speaks of the tribal sense of agency in the rigid structure which at times had tried to deny their rightful place. So credit must also be given to the sense of collective spirit of the tribal communities which have concocted several strategies to counteract the repugnance of the Hindus towards the non-Aryans. The courage which it had collected to form strong opinion to incessantly evaluate the Aryan structure and to find fault with it shows the brilliance of the tribal collectivism. To take the sacrosanct Aryan society by storm and to scrutinise the system vehemently was unthinkable but still performed splendidly by the tribal groups. This only reflected the surprising daring hood and the audacity of the otherwise ‘polluted’ community which struggled like a hungry tigress to fight for the rights of its members. Therefore, Bose said,

The legitimization advocated by tribes was splendid. They argued that, even among those who are properly counted as a part of Hindu society, local customs and folk customs vary so much that there is no reason not to regard the Juangs as a non-Aryan community belonging to the Hindu fold (Bose:1975:38).

So Bose actually spoke of the flexibility of the Hindu society which never imposed symmetrical dispositions on men. People were allowed to think unlike others. The different ideas and practices showed the unity in diversity in the Hindu order. It gave boost to the tide of democracy entailing the larger society. Even social activists like Gandhi went on to add,

Inter- drinking, intermarrying, inter-dining, I hold are not essential for the spirit of democracy. I do not contemplate under a most democratic constitution a universality of manners and customs about eating, drinking and marrying (Gandhi:1924 :1009).

Thus it is seen that in India differences in lifestyles were encouraged across the caste society. Castes were encouraged to remain their own selves lest the social obligations for homogenization thwart their distinctiveness. The design of the Aryan society was such that it went to the extent of getting influenced by the non-sanskritic tradition. Such was the leniency of the Aryan society. Even Srinivas was found to appreciate this system whole heartedly. He said the Brahmins have been influenced by the non-
sanskritic traditions and the power of the village deities. Very often a Brahmin is found offering an animal to the village deity Mari through a non-Brahmin friend during an epidemic like pox or cholera (Srinivas: 1952:83). Thus it is seen that Brahminical society is also likewise influenced by the non-sanskritic tradition at times of crisis or trouble. The chain of interaction is therefore reciprocal and mutual. Nobody owes to the other exclusively. Srinivas thus said,

The presence within sanskritic Hinduism of a vast and ever growing mythology, the worship of rivers, trees and mountains and the association of deities and epic-heroes with local spots everywhere in India, makes easy the absorption of non-sanskritic cults and deities (ibid:84).

Thus the individuality of the castes was recognized instead of imposing constraints on the castes to comply with a universal pan Indian model of living. However, the castes and the tribes aspiring to climb up the ladder were not all proudly flourishing their ethnic customs. They paid homage to the Aryan society by adopting the Brahminical customs generously in their daily life. This was probably in lieu of the freedom given to them by the caste mentors. That is why such Hindu words like dharma (religion), devta (God) and devi (Goddess) have been such plaintively found in their daily sanskritised discourses. Bose recognised this duality and for time and again, this was reflected in his works.

**Caste and social change.**

Much in tune with Bose, another sociologist, Yogendra Singh, while explaining sanskritization as a form of social change had said,

> Looked at it from an ideal –typical value frame, sanskritization is a form of protest against the normative structures and principles laid down by the Great Tradition. It amounts to a rejection of the theory of karma which integrates the various levels of role-institutionalization supposed to be ascribed by birth (Singh: 1973:52).

Singh had rightly said that the process indicates towards a rebuttal of the principles of hierarchy as legitimatized by the great traditions. The lower castes while emulating the higher ones voraciously still show utter diligence in their actions. The way they choose their reference groups point out the fact that they participate in this act of
imitation because they ascribe positive value to the concept of ‘status’ and not to that of ‘hierarchy’. That is why Singh said that the lower castes do not maintain a fixed status scale for themselves but imitate anybody who procures for themselves relatively higher status than the others. Singh is also seen drawing on Pockock when he said,

Pockock is essentially right when he observes, a non-Brahmin caste of relatively low status does not imitate the idea of Brahminism nor did it have a general notion of secular prestige. For it, the models of conduct are the castes higher than itself with which it is in close proximity (Singh: ibid:52).

Thus Singh wanted to infer that the processes of absorption had always remained outside the pale of the Great Traditions. It nevertheless qualifies itself as a cultural change but in a dynamically localized context.

Such a cultural change gave a new status identity to the newly recruited caste members who were continously fighting for it. It refurbishes a society suddenly exhausted of its vigour and allows it to breathe afresh. It gives a necessary boost that the society and its members rightly deserved. Bose indicated towards such a social change while discussing the conditions of the various castes embroiled in numerous social movements. He cited one such caste in Bengal, viz, the Jogi Jati found in the erstwhile districts of Tripura, Noakhali, Mymensingh, Chittagong, Bakherganj and Khulna. Weaving had been considered as the traditional occupation of the jogi Jatis but they had been found slowly shifting towards agriculture and other occupations.

Bose discussed in detail the historical course charted out by the jogi to acquire for themselves a distinct status. They started agitating strongly when they were stigmatized publicly. Not only the jogis but all those who tried associating with them had been brutally banished by the society. It was in this context as a rebuttal of the offence meted out to them that they protested hard. They went to the Pandit’s (learned men) association of the Sanskrit college for the retribution. The caste experts heard their problems and declared them as men with a good conduct. As Bose said, “the Pandit’s Association declared the Jogis as being of ‘good behaviour’. After this some Jogis began to wear the sacred thread.” (ibid:153). In this way a cultural movement was initiated by these distressed castes to escalate their status up the hierarchy. The
movement which they started took times to spread wings, but once it did, it spread across the villages like a wild fire. In 1880, Bharatchandra Shiromani, an eminent scholar narrated the epidemic spread of this movement in his book, *Jogi Samskara*. The *Jogis* became more ambitious especially during the Morley-Minto reforms (1909). They started pressing hard for scholarship and jobs. They also went to the extent of being sycophantic with the British government whom they looked upon for favour. As Bose quoted from *Jogishakha* published in 1915, (an annual journal of the *Jogis*), “the indigent *Jogi* caste is forever loyal, our guiding principle is to wish the king well...we are ever grateful to the British.” (ibid:155).

Thus we find that the depressed castes were ready to initiate a social movement whichever way possible. They were adamant for it and went to the extent of conciliating the British forces in lieu of their vested interests. This shows how vehemently the castes were fighting for a new status. The struggle was also hinged on the desire for political advantages and economic benefits. They knew the key to their success is embedded in search of a well-founded socio-economic status. This can be ensured by a well secured job but even before that they must have access to the system of education, but this was just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath it was hidden a latent desire to rise to the pinnacle of success incredibly designed by the *Jogi Jati*. They claimed for themselves, a Brahmin status and this daring hood made them all prepared for deep-seated reforms. This included abolition of child marriages once rampant among the *Jogis*. Bose, on the other hand, observed that the caste was more interested in making advancement in learning and employment than pursuing the same in their own traditional occupations. This showed that the castes were gradually losing interest in their traditional callings but were taking avidly to other ways to scale the heights. These kinds of social movements definitely point out the radical urge of the castes to forsake their communal interests in their bid to attain modernization. Thus Bose indicated the desperation with which the castes were suddenly busy to radically transform themselves in line with the contemporary requirement.

Srinivas had rightly called this process ‘westernization’, where the castes had tried incessantly to imitate the imperial ways of life. Yet, not all elements were grossly absorbed from the west. Some elements were taken while others were rejected when they were transplanted in the Indian context. Thus we find the Indian castes showed signs of self-accretion while choosing the western patterns of life. Not all were
accepted, but they were considered in the local context where regionalism decided the fate of the western items borrowed. If they fitted well the indigenous mould, they were aptly taken up by the respective castes while others stood rejected and discarded in India. For instance, the south Indian Brahmins were lured to the English education greatly and took to the professions and government services in large numbers. As Bose likewise wrote while quoting a Jogi writer,

> The selfish Brahmin no longer enjoys a monopoly of the fruits of national advancement; western liberalism gives merit its rewards. There was a special petition for jobs and scholarships on behalf of the Jogi society. (ibid:157).

Thus it was found that the affluent and the depressed castes were alike enchanted by the wave of westernization which had swept the entire society. Be it the South Indian Brahmins or the depressed Jogi Jatis, modernization had encapsulated everyone. But Srinivas warns us not to take such enchantments at their face value for they were severely conditioned and mediated by other factors.

Srinivas cautioned us that such imitations of western life were only superficially initially. The gravitation towards the western life was only confined to the external front for their domestic life was heavily laced with rituals and traditional norms. As Srinivas said,

> The term ‘cultural schizophrenia’ naturally comes to one’s mind, but a caution must be uttered against viewing it as pathological. Only South Indian Brahmins who had prolonged exposure to western life outside India, either as students or as members of the defense services, found it possible to switch over to British diet, drink, and dance (Srinivas:1966:57).

Though initially a tendency to cling back to the traditional modes of life was there, the castes managed to come out of the intoxication and get prepared for the anonymous and impersonal urban life. Thus it was found in Bose’s writings that the depressed castes like the Jogi Jati and the Namasudra were advancing towards the road to westernization and modernization more than never before.
Srinivas tells us that there was a “broad and general correlation between traditional caste hierarchy and the new western –occupational hierarchy” (ibid:64). Thus it is evident that the higher positions have been occupied by the higher castes like Brahmins, Baidyas, Kayasthas and Baniyas. On the other hand, lower castes like the artisan, servicing, and the landless labour caste provided the essential basic goods and services. They could not find place in the white collar jobs but had to be satisfied with the blue collar jobs like landerers, barbers, domestic servants, peons, basket makers, oilmen, potters, and sellers of vegetables, milk and fruit. But nevertheless the lower castes were not contented with this but elbowed others to scale up the hierarchy. This is very well evident in the case of Namasudras so well depicted by Bose. Bose therefore added the changes affecting the lowly ascribed castes in Bengal. He wrote,

In contrast to the Yogi, who tried no more than to gain recognition as Brahmins, and this without much bitterness, or to effect certain internal reforms, the organization of the Namasudra appears to be charged with a more militant demand for recognition to a socially elevated rank. This populous and hardworking agricultural caste has suffered from a social stigma whose origin is difficult to ascertain; and it is justifiable, therefore, that there should be a considerable element of bitterness displayed by the educated members of the caste against the ‘upper’ castes in general (ibid:255).

Bose therefore pointed to a society where the low castes were avidly looking up the higher castes for imitation. Instances of such emulation are innumerable and this surely points to a very important characteristic of the Hindu society. Like Bose, Srinivas too showed that the lower caste, Ahirs have been transforming themselves widely and are even present in the Indian army. They even went to the extent of forming the Ahir regiment. A lower caste Noniya in Uttar Pradesh have been gravitated to the westernization to the extent that they call themselves Chauhans and even claim the Kshatriya status. The Chamars, the prevalent Harijan caste of north India are found in large numbers in cities such as Agra, Aligarh, Lucknow, Kanpur and Delhi. Such castes, as Srinivas said, “have shown a desire to move up not only along the traditional Sanskritic axis but also along the modern, Western axis” (ibid: 67). Bose had also shown the tendency of the castes to emulate the higher castes but he probably did not speak of the other higher castes worth emulating. He probably took the Brahmin castes as a whole and did not quite specify the various nuances
latent in it. Srinivas on the other hand spoke of the heterogeneity of the Brahmin caste and spoke of the fissions in it. Srinivas seemed to have realized that, “The Brahmins in a single linguistic region, let alone Brahmins all over India, are split up into several endogamous Jatis, and inter-Jati differences cannot be ignored” (ibid: 68).

Instead of bifurcating caste and its delicate divisions, Bose seemed more concerned about the nature and the causes that rocked the castes in the contemporary times. As had been said earlier, he saw latent virtues embedded within the caste system and was not ready to take it as a cause for national disintegration and political mobilization. He instead said,

Srinivas has indicated in his presidential address that the success of candidates in election was often due to the support which was given to them on consideration of caste. Caste rivalries also had their due share in determining the fate of candidates. While there is some reason to share the fear raised by Srinivas in his address, there is no reason to believe that, at least, in the sphere of politics, one need to give way to despair.

Undoubtedly Bose banked on the longevity and the hardiness of the caste system. For him, it was more than a mere phenomenon, it was an institution that gave shape and character to the traditional as well as modern India. What strikes more is its invincible character that gives caste system a magical immunity against all odds. Bose therefore tried to reason with the gradual decay of the system in the modern times, when he wrote,

Some have suggested that the weakening of the caste has been due to the spread of Western education. This seems to be a wrong reading of the case. Islam operated in India for nearly a thousand years with its message of human equality, both in cities as well as in villages. But the success of caste’s sub-structure was so marked that even Muslim converts in rural India continued to pay homage to it by a virtual allegiance to the hereditary pattern of endogamous guilds. It might be argued that Western education alone would not have succeeded in weakening the system if it were not accompanied by a nearly total reorganization of the economic life of the country. It has been the
success of the alternative form in the productive field, even though it was bolstered up by political power, that has helped in dealing a fatal blow to caste (ibid:261).

Along with this question of change and decay of the caste system, Bose was equally interested in its equation with the emergence of the middle class, which he felt could give strong cues, to enquire the changing character of the caste system.

**Caste and middle class**

Bose clearly recognized the role of the middle classes behind the lower castes’ urge to scale up the hierarchy. Especially in the case of the *Jogi Jati* and the *Namasudra*, he saw them being magnetized by the middle class groups. In the colonial regime, the middle classes have been eye-openers for the lower castes to track the path of westernization and urbanization. Bose in fact quite elaborately spoke of the role of the middle classes in his works. In his discussion of the depressed class movement Bose had shown how the *jogi Jatis* have imitated the middle class groups constituted of the English educated higher castes like the Brahmins, *Kayasthas* and the *Baniyas* (jewelers). These castes acted as the middle classes in the sense that they were the offshoots of the British productive economy. The East India Company while advancing its industrial drives wanted a class of Indians well versed in English who probably would initiate their commercial interests. Thereby the English education system produced a class of people who were hand in gloves with the imperial regime. They indirectly helped the British Empire to flourish and progress in India. They had thus been arranging for their own comfort and wealth by betraying their own countrymen. Abhijit Mitra while elucidating on D.P Mukerji’s idea of middle class says

> In comes the British and the society is shaken out of its torpor. The British imposes their own mode of production on the traditional economy and supplants the indigenous middle class interests in trade and commerce by British agencies and middlemen (Mitra: 1979: 250).

Mitra showed us that with introduction of the British revenue and the education system, such new classes prolifically arose. The first class was related to the landowning castes of *Zamindars* which the lower castes have looked up for imitation. The second class was a bunch of lower class clerks, officials and professionals. This
second class was the English educated one severed from the grass-root mass. They were cut off from the mainstream Indian culture and were hanging loose without any proper anchorage. Bose gave instances of such middle classes while discussing the present position of the caste system in India.

While discussing the history of the castes for the period under British rule he narrated the history of Supur village, situated not far from Bolpur town. It was once a centre of trade during the British regime. To the west of Supur is Mirjapur, and near to it was the village of Raipur. Bose narrated the tale of an Uttarararhiya Kayastha caste family living for long at a place called Chandrakona in the northern area of Midnapur district. This Sinha family of Raipur was engaged in the business of weaving in collaboration with the British East India Company. By the virtue of this occupation they had gathered large amount of wealth. At this point of time there were political upheavals in Raipur for which though the other traders faced various problems, the Sinhas had a smooth ride. They became the landlord of the village and their business progressed by leaps and bounds. As Bose said,

The British merchants made thing easy for their business by getting an influential Zamindar on their side. Sitikantha’s zamindari went on, and his sons gave up the study of Persian in Calcutta and turned their attention to English (Bose: 1975:140).

Thus we find that the Sinhas of Raipur took the advantage of the British Raj and were complicit with them in reaping a havoc profit for themselves. Bose said had it not been foe their emerging middle class status, they would have never been known to the outside world. That they did not show any interest in traditional calling like indigo plantation or handloom weaving only showed their aspiration to move up the hierarchy by rubbing shoulders with the colonial masters. As Bose corroborated this by saying,

But when the tide of events flowed on a different course under the impact of the British economic system, the Sinhas allowed themselves to be carried by it, taking sometimes to trade, sometimes to landownership, sometimes to factory management and sometimes to various occupations under Government. It was this very tide of change that tore the Varna system asunder (ibid:141).
Bose’s inferences that the higher castes turned themselves into middle classes, taking the advantage of the British mode of production and communication system have been supported from other academic quarters as well. B.B Misra, an eminent theorist of middle class, had tried showing its emergence from the 18th century to the modern times. He felt that during a prolonged span of around 200 years of British rule, a radical change in policies had led to the emergence of the middle class. Misra saw it as a consequence of the western education system coupled with the capitalist enterprise which produced an advanced system of communication, technology, land reforms and administration. The condition was thus ripe for the proliferation of the middle classes. Misra went on to add,

As for Indians, they could join British firms as junior partners, for the membership of a European trade organization was not exclusive, and although the size of the stock held by an individual was significant, the rule of law made no distinction between a European and an Indian business man. (Misra: 1960:10).

Misra insisted that the Indians were initially belittled by the European power which did not pay much heed to the poor Indian businessmen. However, later on the British men understood that they must co-operate with the Indians out of their own basic need. They therefore wanted to create a class that should be capable enough to carry on their administration. The British rulers therefore co-operated heartily with a handful of indigenous businessmen who thereafter formed the group of ambitious and heady Indian middle class. Bose said even the lower castes were found imitating the middle class like that of the Sinhas of Raipur in their bid to propitiate the British forces. The Sinhas were greatly revered and obeyed by their subjects. Bose made his point clear by stating,

At the root of these expressions of devotion and obedience to the king was the hope of some advantage and some economic advancement through jobs, etc. The interest in the spread of schools and college education began to grow among the Jogi (ibid: 140)

Not only the Jogi Jatis but the other lower castes were also seen treading the same line of thought and action. They have also come to be deeply influenced by the higher castes of Brahmins and Baniyas such that they had started growing an indirect
alliance with the British government. The lower castes had learnt the art of imitation and persuasion from the middle classes who in turn applied it on themselves. The higher castes blindly followed the British forces without giving any conscientious thought on it. The lower castes likewise have learned to grind axes with the imperial regime devoid of being thoughtful about it. Misra corroborated Bose’s ideas when he said,

These ideas and institutions of a middle class social order were imported into India. They did not grow from within. They were implanted in the country without a comparable development in its economy and social institutions. The Indian middle class which the British aimed at creating was to be the class of imitators, not the originators of new values and methods (Misra: 1960: 10).

Thus we find that the skills for imitation were very well acquired by the lower castes as well. The Namasudras, the so called lower castes were so well enthralled by the middle class’s idea of worshipping the British authority that their actions have remained incredibly appalling. Bose while discussing the Namashudra movement said that they were so intoxicated by the British policies that they even did not hesitate to forsake the national movements of freedom (Bose: 1975:76). The middle classes had become by then a role model worth emulating by the lower castes. They did not even think for once before supporting blindly the British principles. They were so adamantly running behind their goals that their values and ethics have all fallen short. They were least perturbed about these for they had no consideration for their fellow countrymen and the very motherland of which they were a part and which had served them self-lessly. Bose therefore quoted the Namashudras as saying,

By the grace of the blind regime of the Hindus we have remained asleep in Hindu society all this time. Now by the grace of the egalitarian, democratic and very powerful British, we have awakened (ibid:158).

Thus we find that the urge to emulate the British and to take over their policies have been very strong among the Namashudras. It became so strong that they even denied joining the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905. Bose therefore corroborated the fact by the following lines,
From the October 1907 issue of *Namashudra Suhrid* (a journal of the Namashudras) we learn that representatives of the Namashudra caste met the Governor and prayed that the British Government in India might remain forever (Beteille:1975:159).

Bose’s theory thus became popular enough to understand caste dynamics in the modern stratified Bengal. Similar renditions find reflections in later works by well-known experts on Indian society, one amongst them was Hiteshranjan Sanyal. Sanyal, an eminent historian turned sociologist, had also shown this tendency among the Teli caste (oil crushers) in their bid to become the superior caste of Tili. In his famous book *Social Mobility in Bengal*, Sanyal had shown how these lower castes have transformed themselves into a comparatively higher caste within their caste brethren to claim mobility. They thereupon have tried to become middle class in associating themselves with the British commercial class. Sanyal corroborated this by saying,

The expansion of Bengal’s overseas trade brought about by the European commercial concerns had created opportunities for economic growth to a considerable extent. The dissident telis took these opportunities and involved themselves in European trade. They took up production of silk and silk textiles. A large number of dissident telis are found to have prospered as small and middle class entrepreneurs in silk manufacture as well as suppliers of silk and silk textiles to Europe. The career of the family of Krishnakanti Nandi, the founder of Kasimbazar zamindari, is a representative case in point (Sanyal:1981:99).

Thus a society was fast growing where middle classes were ruling the roost. A class had thus grown which was in incessant demand of the western education and British policies of administration. They were absolutely bedazzled by the glitz and glamour of the western model of life. Bose understood and was deeply perturbed by it. He understood that the ancient economic system of production was soon getting defeated by the competition espoused by the capitalist economic regime. He saw as a result of this, the initial passion for one’s traditional occupation had dissolved and so had the strong belief in the sanctity of the varna system. Bose sobbed over the contemporary tendency to throw away the old production order in disdain.

**Conclusion**

Bose did not find any clash between the westernized and the traditional system of caste based production. He thought both could exist in its own place. On the contrary,
he felt the foreign system of learning especially the penchant for learning Persian could not have much utility since its strength to infiltrate the common masses might not be very strong. That might be the reason why despite the deep-seated inequality, the caste system had stood a firm ground in our country. We, find Bose’s obsession with the ancient economic system of production as embedded within the Varna system. He did not look at the system as one dimensional but found it as interactive and multi-dimensional. The shackles which the ascribed status had attached to the system had not been looked down by Bose. He gave a new interpretation to it. He said instead of stifling the individual by the strict rigours of the caste system, it gives them enough space and respite. It does not turn men into mere bonded caste -recruits but there is always a backdoor to escape through *sanyasa* (asceticism).

He said as long as the individual is bound by his caste regulations, he is not allowed to forsake his traditional standing, but once he takes *sanyasa*, he is set free. He performs the last rituals pre-ordained for a domestic life and is emancipated from all the bondages of life. Society frees him of all the obligations and bindings that might have chained him for so long. The caste system thus is not a draconian system of rules, as it recognizes individual freedom and never denies this to people who make an earnest plea for it. The researcher thus finds Bose somewhat obsessed with the caste system but was not hysterical about it. He asks people to scrutinize the system and to compare it with the western capitalist system along the same parameter. He asked people to set watch dogs in the society in the sense that no system, be it the ancient or the western one, can go unverified and unexamined. All system, must go through the imperative social check –posts so that they are properly checked and re-checked before they are accepted in the society. Therefore, Bose said,

We shall not revile western capitalism. Where it has helped human society in its material advancement, we shall give it due praise. But we should also remain aware of the damage it has done through excess of individualism. So also when we encounter what is offensive in the traditional caste system, we should not spare it. But if we find something valuable in the ancient system of production and of social solidarity, or of regulating the relationship between man and society, something which we may be able to put to use, we should certainly accept it (Bose:1975: 170).
Thus we find Bose was rather a functionalist who was a conformist in every sense. He believed in the organic functioning of the society where each part contributes in the effective operation of the whole. He was a traditionalist who would think in retrospection to all those lost and abandoned in lieu of the modern reformation. Instead of jumping head strong into a new and jazzy version of the society, Bose wanted to search scrupulously the old regime to find something valuable. He was a revivalist with a strong belief in the vivacity of the ancient order and did not want to readily tamper with it. He espoused various interpretations of the varna and the caste system to give them due legitimation in the society. This was especially done to give immunity to the ancient system of production and economy that have thrived in our society for long. Gandhi’s idea of swaraj and his reliance on the village economy have also helped him understand the treasure trove hidden beneath our indigenous soil. Growing up in the colonial background with a strong nationalist fervour has helped Bose draw loyalty for the ancient indigenous system and its potency. Gandhi’s critique of western capitalism and the machine based economy and his vigorous search for an alternative system of production have led him to look at the home front. He was a true indologist in the sense that he has analysed the caste system and its implications all along the long historical course that the society has undertaken. The rich analysis which Bose initiated looked for the dynamism of the caste system and its magical relationship with the varna hierarchy and the tribal order has always mesmerised us. The caste system and its affiliation to the varna order has shown how the two have woven a relationship between the individual and society. It is an ambivalent relationship of both solidarity and conflict where interactions always go on unabatedly in the society as is true for the tribal society as well. Bose thus gives us an interactive vision of the caste system which is not merely a given structure but rather an immortal process which presents before us nothing but society in disguise.
References


_____________*Cultural Anthropology*. South Asia Books, 1929.


------------------


_____________________


“Our differences”. Forward 3:1 (July.15,1939k) Print.


“What shall we say to the masses?”. Comrade (June 10,1939g): 49-52. Print.


