Chapter 3: Colonial Standardization of Indian Society and the Indigenous Reaction

3.1 Law, Varna, and Caste in Colonial Legal Situation

It is not only changes in material dimension caused by series of the land policy that the British colonial rule brought into the subcontinent. The rule also caused socio-cultural change, which, entangled with material changes, subsequently had broader and deeper effects on the Indian people and society. An important aspect of the British colonial rule was to interpret variety of things existing in the Indian society, and to reconstruct in a manner that is suitable for the rule. The process of interpretation and reconstruction was done by reviving antiquities which had not been used for a long time, and creating and introducing new concepts and categories.

The British brought 'rule of law' into the Indian society. In the field of civil law, the government adopted ancient Sanskrit codes called shastra for Hindus and shariat and hadith for Muslims in courts from the beginning of the Company rule. But this new concept of 'rule of law' was to be fulfilled by adopting remote antiquity. Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General, thought that ancient Hindu laws had continued to be held and be in force by Brahman pandits without change, and that it was necessary to make these laws accessible to the British judges. With the help of 'eleven of the most respectable pandits in Bengal' and a Bengali Muslim, A Code of Gentoo Laws; or, Ordinations of the Pundits was published in 1776, which was used in the Company's courts until the early 19th century. But there were some criticisms against this Sanskrit compilation regarding its relationship to legal tradition of the 18th century and accuracy of its English translation.¹

¹ Bernard Cohn, 'Law and the Colonial State in India', in his, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India, Delhi, 1997, pp. 60-68.
A more elaborated and extensive compilation of Sanskrit and Arabic texts has been done by William Jones and the effort was to be crystallized in *The Digest Law on Contracts and Successions* published in 1798. Although this compilation was produced from not so much administrative necessity as from Jones’s academic concern which was to discover India’s great past by studying Sanskrit texts, the knowledge which he obtained, he thought, was seemed to be applicable to his contemporary Indian society. The English translator of *The Digest*, H. T. Colebrooke, took a further step to fix ‘an interpretation of variation in the legal texts that was to become standard in the British courts’. For this purpose, he tried to explain that conflicting interpretations were due to regional differences in construing the same texts, and further to conceptualize those differences into Schools of Hindu law. He also applied chronological order to conflicting legal texts to determine which one was the older and hence authentic. His attempts and resultant legal situation was totally new because it was not sure that to what extent these codes which were adopted and compiled by the authority had been used as legal sources before, and also because these codes got a consistent interpretation despite they had had conflicting interpretations or had been ambiguously read. Now two major codes of the *Dayabhanga* and the *Mitaksara* came into being as textual legal source. Establishment of high courts and publication of authoritative decisions in English followed. As a result, Hindu legal advisors in courts were no longer necessary and was abolished in 1864. Along with those textual legal sources, case laws also increasingly acquired significance. Here, a completely new ‘Anglo-Hindu Law’ as a hybrid system of English law, Roman law and other legal systems was constructed.2

This situation invited ‘increasing divergence between flexibility-conscious customary

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practice and precedent-focused official law'. Authority attempted to fill the gap between formal law and local practice by recognizing customs as legal sources saying that 'clear proof of usage will overweigh the written text of the law'. In case there was no civil law or regional code applicable to, civil courts referred to regional customs, which had been registered by the legal authority to be ones as legal source concerning with particular region and caste. Although litigants also could claim the existence of customs, it was rarely possible to satisfy the strict requirement of evidence.\(^3\)

Regarding caste, Bombay Presidency officially took a stance of non-intervention into matters while Bengal and Madras Presidency did not. But the Sanskrit codes and subsequently accumulated case laws were premised on \textit{varna} system. When courts deal with cases such as concerned with polygamy or marriage between different castes, they had to first determine which \textit{varna} the caste of concerned individual in trial belonged to.\(^4\) Therefore whether non-intervention policy or not, they invariably and actually had to deal with caste. What we should pay attention to here is that reference criterion was not against individual but against any collective body, especially caste. As a result, this colonial legal condition urged people of India to have more concern about their own caste and \textit{varna}. At the same time, four \textit{varna} system which scholar-officlas such as Jones and Colebrooke read about in the ancient Sanskrit texts was now connected to commensal and endogamous groups which Indian called \textit{jati} and were observed in front of their eyes. Thus, 'caste system' was to be constructed in the rulers' mind.

\(^3\) Menski, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 178-185.
\(^4\) \textit{Ibid.}, 381-2.
3.2 Emergence of Caste in Colonial View and its Implementation in the Policy

As already emphasised, what was indispensable for the Other to build ruling apparatus in India was to collect huge amount of information to understand and interpret the society. In the course of colonial state formation, information collected by Western travellers, missionaries, scholars and colonial officials, and their views on Indian society were to a great extent echoed in the form of administration. But as Susan Bayly says, it was not until the mid-19th century that the role of scholar-officials increasingly became crucial in the sense that they were in positions to impose their elaborated scholarships and theories directly on the society through colonial institutions. At the same time, early writings by them did not present a view of homogenised society 'where the prevalence of inflexible caste ideas made Indians radically unlike the peoples of the West'. Indeed these works 'had little or nothing to do with the governance of colonial subjects'.

For example, Walter Hamilton, the author of *The East India Gazetteer*, paid attentions to tribes, 'criminals', and 'thieves' who were outside the world of Brahmanical value and tradition in which people belonged to any one of castes lived. William Jones and James Forbes depicted India not as a culturally and historically inferior society to the West but as a society which had cultural and historical kinship with the West.

After all, what was most emphasised as striking feature of Indian society in this period was not so much Brahmanical value as 'village community', which Charles T. Metcalf considered to be a basic unit of the society.

From the mid-19 century onward, worldwide emergence and elevation of ethnology in physical and human science, and abolition of the East India Company and expansion

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7 E. T. Stokes, *op. cit.*
of colonial governmental apparatus after the Mutiny promoted enthusiastic
data-collection and thereby created among colonial officials more attention to caste in
India.\textsuperscript{8} Number of academic writings and ethnographic reportages were produced,
whose endeavours were directed toward classifying variety of groups of human beings
in the subcontinent with reference to unified criteria.

What the British utilized in establishing the system of governance was clearly the
modern technology of governance to grasp the Indian society. Extensive descriptions by
the colonial state such as tremendous amount of land settlement report, gazetteer, and
ethnographic account, differentiated, defined, and standardized all kinds of things in
India for its efficient governance. Among them, census operation was a crucial effort of
standardising the society with its classifying, counting and quantitizing method. The
census operation started sporadically at provincial level and finally became all-India
enterprise in 1871, in which various thematic statistics such as sex, age, region,
occupation, 'infirmity', religion, caste, language, and literacy were produced. This meant
not simply grasping dynamism of the population in India but also a massive operation
of defining various feature of Indian society and creating comprehensive and universal
categories, indexes, references available all over India.

Through these attempts caste increasingly came to be considered as primary
element of Indian society. However, there were obviously a variety of views on Indian
society and caste among colonial officials. Some of officials' views rightly revealed
regional difference, contradictory reality with the principle and the historical formation.
Broadly speaking, two trend of view on caste existed. One is as those followers, like W.
W. Hunter and H. H. Risley, of race theorist of Europe at that time, who tended to
understand caste as a kind of biologically determined race. Hierarchical order based on

\textsuperscript{8} Susan Bayly, \textit{Caste, Society and Politics in India}, pp. 119-121.
Brahmanical values was understood by them as part of civilization of racially superior 'Aryan' who supposedly descended from the same racial 'stock' as the white European. Hunter, therefore, explained castes in Bengal in terms of race war which resulted that the light-skinned conqueror race imposed the hierarchical ideology on the dark-skinned conquered race. In this sense, these race theorists supposed 'a composite social landscape in which only certain peoples had evolved historically in ways which left them “shackled” by a hierarchical ideology of caste' while others were so-called tribal peoples who did not subscribe to the ideology unless conquered or incorporated into the Hinduism'.

Those who followed another trend to understand caste consisted of ethnographers and folklorists, like William Crooke, E. A. H. Blunt, Denzil Ibbetson and James Tod, whose focus was on material and occupational aspect of caste. Ibbetson, for example, insisted on diversity and historicity in the making of caste. His ethnographic study of Punjab society suggested different manifestation of caste ideologies in regional, material and political settings, and therefore a dynamic and fluid nature of caste by depicting non-'castelike' feature in substantial numbers of the population there. For these ethnographers and folklorists, 'there was nothing fixed or immutable about' caste identities. Far thus, reflecting regions on which each trend of scholar-officials were specializing, the ethnological view was considered to be more plausible for Bengal and the south while the applicability to other regions was 'dubious'.

Nevertheless, the impact of ethnologists' racial view was stronger because they conducted the study on caste 'as a subsidiary exercise in this supposedly higher and grander task of uncovering the evolutionary heritage of all humanity'. Especially it

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9 Ibid., pp. 126-138.
10 Ibid., pp. 138-143.
11 Ibid., p. 129.
was to be maximized when their key figure, Risley, took an initiative of the Imperial Census operation as the Chief Commissioner. The census in 1901 directed by him has conducted a large scale survey on caste. Along with making 'caste reference' by fixing attributes of groups (such as 'caste', 'sub-caste', and 'tribe'), the report publicly showed an 'order of social precedence' which were admitted in the locality as a consensus. It seems to be certain that there was a relative order of precedence among certain groups in a locality at that time. But what this census operation has done is that the colonial state 'officially' determined an absolute order of precedence among even larger number of group living in even larger geographical area, the Indian Empire.

Far thus, caste was fixed as 'official' category and each caste group was endowed with 'official' social status and collective profile on occupation, custom and behavioural character. As Pandey rightly suggested, colonial writings on communal riots attributed their causes to eternal antagonism between Hindu and Muslim 'communities' both of which were supposed to have existed since distant past, and to participation of some castes with 'bad character' in those riots. Colonialist, without perceiving the impact of their own colonial rule by which economic dislocation, stressing caste hierarchy on Brahmanical ideology, and popular responses were caused, essentialized their ageless and condition-free image of Indian society.

Through the standardising efforts of Indian society by the colonial state, the vague and unfixed were put in certain moulds, the fluid and dynamic have lost their time. The colonial state implemented uniformed institutions by making use of these categories for the efficient administration and thereby could increase the 'administrative power' of the state drastically. As regards caste, caste-wise recruitment into and formation of Indian

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military service based on 'martial race' theory, preventive action to communities who were regarded as 'criminal tribes', reserved seats for 'Scheduled Tribes', all contributed to make the colonial categories more meaningful and penetrate into all over India.

3.3 Appropriation of Colonial Discourses

The process of standardization of Indian society was yet to be completed only with the action of ruling side. Now we shall look at the indigenous side of colonial experience in which Indian people accepted, protested against and appropriated colonial discourses and institutions. Through this interactive process, which occurred in a kind of forced condition by the colonial state, a society where caste was its essential feature came into being.

What most of the indigenous intellectual commentators on social reform and modern nation-building or so-called socio-religious reformer had in common is that they invariably subscribed to the ethnological theory and imagined an Indian society in which caste and Brahmanical values were prominent. Susan Bayly categorises these commentators and socio-religious reformers into three groups according to their views on caste. Those who belonged to the first category considered caste 'as divisive and pernicious force' which curtailed modern human rights such as 'individual liberty' and there by becoming an obstacle to achieve the making of the modern nation. Among them were members of National Social Conference (NSC) which was established by anglophone intelligentsia including M. G. Ranade in 1887. What they insisted was not to abolish caste totally but to eliminate 'evil' elements of caste such as the banning of child marriages, promotion of widow marriage and women's education and 'uplift' of untouchables. These were all issues which were made visible and perceptible in the light of Western civilization, and were also actively dealt by Christian missionaries.
At the same time, however, majority of those who took part in NSC was Hindu and they supposed a modern nation in India equivalent to Hindu nation. Therefore they emphasized ‘puritanical ideals of bodily containment and spiritual purity’ as Hindus based on Brahmanical values whether they were for or against some key issues such as widow marriage. As a result, their insistence on ‘uplift’ of untouchables and other castes of ‘imure’ origin was to make those ‘lowly’ peoples’ social and religious lives subject to ‘purer’ standard based on Brahmanical values. When the NSC passed a resolution to promote and admit of ‘re-conversion’ of those who had become adherents of other religious faiths, it meant to restore and strengthen Hindu nation.14

The second category of commentators took positive stance to caste and regarded it as uniquely Indian national culture. While they also deplored some contemporary features of caste, they tended to praise the role which varna had taken since the distant past. Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, a president of the Bengal Brahman Sabha, for example, contended that Hindus had willingly placed on the neck varna of ‘golden chain’, which ‘had endowed Indians with selfless spiritual ideals and a concept of solidarity which had long united the subcontinent’s separate “races and clans”’. Swami Vivekananda, socio-religious reformer and founder of Arya Samaj, also took same line to say that caste had important place for modern Hindus and could become ‘a bond of moral community at the national level.’15

Although Ranade was a leading member of the NSC, his view on caste comes to the third category. He himself identified caste with jati or regional endogamous group, and regarded them as ‘an idealized corporation’ which could be ‘a source of historic strengths and organised self-improvement or ‘uplift’. Many leaders of caste associations also

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15 Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India*, pp. 163-166.
thought that caste as *jati* could take initiatives of forging collective morality for the making and modernizing of Hindu nation.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, whether Indian intelligentsia and social reformers considered caste as an obstacle for the making of modern nation or they praised it as their own moral and cultural ground, they uniformly dealt with it in terms of India's modernity and with reference to Western science and scholarship such as race theory. That was clear reflection of the colonial rule. Indeed argument and demonstration in those intelligentsias' writings were more sophisticated than colonial scholarship, although the latter was no doubt the former's theoretical source.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, as the result that NSC took revivalist turn subsequently after it parted from politically radical but socially conservative Indian National Congress, it came to emphasize social reform more strongly based on Hinduism with Brahmanical values. Although the NSC had limited role in disseminating Brahmanical values itself except among intelligentsias, it could promote founding of mass-based, popular and regional or local socio-religious organizations or caste associations, which were to conduct social reform movement primarily concerning with caste.

Arya Samaj was one of the most powerful organizations and movements of socio-religious reform which had popular impact in the later 19th century in north India. Arya Samaj and its founder, Dayanand Saraswati, clearly took Brahma Samaj in Bengal and Prarthana Samaj in Bombay as models to organize its activities. His intention 'to purify Hinduism and save it from its contemporary degenerate state' made him follow the same method as followed by William Jones and Colebrooke i.e., sought to find 'true' Hindu laws and tradition in ancient Sanskrit texts. Thus Dayanad canonized

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 166.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 167.
Vedas and considered as ‘un-arsha’ other texts which were not based on proper understanding of Vedas.\textsuperscript{18}

Arya Samaj did not have central organization until the end of 19th century when Dayanand had already passed away. The Dayanand Anglo-Vedic Trust and Management Society, which consisted of representatives of local bodies and focused mainly on school management, were established as the central organizing body in 1886. The Anglo-Vedic College was highly successful in modern and English education as well as in teaching of the classical Sanskrit and Vedas. Provincial bodies of the Samaj, called sabhas, were also set up and spread in the North-Western Provinces, Rajasthan, Bengal and Bihar, Central Provinces including Vidarbha and Bombay.\textsuperscript{19}

But an internal opposition on issues around meat-eating and English education in higher education led to breaking away of a group who claimed vegetarianism and emphasized ‘ancient Hindu education’ to follow Dayanand’s idea faithfully. The group separated from the Anglo-Vedic Trust established an ancient modelled University, Gurukul, where they focused on the study of Sanskrit and Veda scriptures. This radical section became equally strong as the other ‘College party’ and commanded local bodies. Along with Gurukul itself, their activities were also directed towards preaching and proselytisation. Institution and technique of Christian missionaries offered a model for them. Full-time missionary work was organized and their teaching and doctrine were printed and distributed. The ‘College party’ also copied many Christian organizations such as Tract Society, Women’s Arya Samaj, Young Men’s Arya Association and orphanages.\textsuperscript{20}

Dayanand and Arya Samaj rejected contemporary caste which were divided into

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, pp. 99-103; Farquhar, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 124-126.
thousands and set in hierarchical order by birth. Instead, they defined the ideal basis for Hindu society as fourfold *varna* system in which each *varna* status of individual was considered to be determined not by birth but by attainment of personal learning and spiritual purity.\(^{21}\) Therefore in 'gurukul system' children of all the castes could live and grow up together and after the completion of their education caste status was assigned to the children according to their pure merit. In addition, the Arya Bharatri Sabha, and lately the Jat Pat Todak Mandal was organized to promote inter-caste dining and marriage within each *varna.\(^{22}\)

'Uplift' of women was also an issue which had been committed by the Arya Samaj since Dayanand's period. Widow-marriage, though limited to only virgin widows, was promoted and legislation for the minimum marriageable age was demanded to avoid child-marriage. Furthermore, active effort and commitment were made by Swami Shraddhanand for the evolution of education system for women such as the Kanya Mahavidyalaya.\(^{23}\)

What became increasingly important issues in Arya Samaj were *shuddhi*, or proselytisation, and Gauraksha, or cow-protection. This was due to the fact that activity of Christian missionaries since early years, tide of Islamic revivalist social reform movements such as Ahl-i-Hadith and Deobandi or Aligarh movement which was oriented to create modern-educated Muslims created a ground for contention among these religious organizations.\(^{24}\) The results of census operation which showed the number of Hindu population was declining, also made Arya Samajists perceive a crisis of Hindu community. Arya Samaj invented a ritual of *shuddhi*, with which they tried to

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\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp. 204-6.

\(^{24}\) Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-72.
'purify' untouchables and readmit those who had converted to Islam or Christianity in order to regain the magnitude of Hindu community. In this process, whether converted or not, those who had been unfamiliar with caste norms or 'Hinduism', became subjected to the ideologies. 25 Regarding Gauraksha which was first claimed by Dayanand, Garakshini Sabha of Punjab was founded in 1882 26 and then spread to North-Western Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces.

Those who were opposed to the modern-revivalist movement called for sanathan dharm and claimed to protect 'traditional' pattern of religious duties as expressed in the existing caste system. They set up local and regional Sanatan Dharma Sabhas since the middle of 1880s. 27 But their doctrines and organizations were not necessarily unified except the fact that they were invariably against modern elements in socio-religious reform movements. An attempt was made by a Brahman pandit to overcome this fragmented situation and form a united front to defend Hindu orthodoxy. Din Dayalu was one of the leading figures who were actively running and participating in several organizations and meetings under the banner of sanathan dharm and taking up some issues such as cow protection, idol worshiping and respect for Brahman priests. He, after touring all over north India, started to bring together sprinkled organizations of Hindu orthodoxy under the Bharat Dharma Mahamandala, whose first meeting at Haridwar was held in 1887. In the following annual meetings which were held at religious centres like Brindaban and Benares, various issues such as customs and cow protection were discussed. Although the Mahamandala tried to strengthen the

26 Farquhar, op. cit., p. 111.
organization from the beginning of the 20th century onward, it remained a 'loose symbiosis'. As the Mahamandala which was funded and supported by Maharaja of Darbhanga, landed magnates and bankers were main patrons for these organizations of Hindu orthodoxy.

Interestingly, those who called for sanathan dharm had some aspects in common with Arya Samaj. While they objected government’s interference with Hindu customs, they also tried to eliminate their 'bad customs' such as dowry. ‘Uplift’ of widows and poor women was also discussed. They established local bodies of Sanatana Sabhas and had many affiliated organizations including Sanatana Dharma Schools and religious centres for rituals, through which they propagated their preaching. Publication of literature, journals and religious texts also consisted of their important activity. In particular, the cause of Cow-Protection invited unanimous support and enthusiasm from Hindu orthodoxy as well as Arya Samaj. As a result of this confluence, Cow-Protection became the most powerful slogan and symbol to organize and mobilize people as members of 'Hindus'.

Freitag separates the Cow-Protection movement of the eastern United Provinces into two phases. When the wave of Cow-Protection reached this area, it was conducted in urban areas. Gaurakshini Sabhas which sprang up all over the central Gangetic Plain were also supported by prominent figures such as Maharaja of Darbhanga and Rajas Rampal Singh of Rae Bareli, zaminars, bankers and traders, and even government officials including the English. They usually presided over Sabha's meetings held in urban centres like Kanpur, Lucknow, Ghazipur, Benares, Aligarh. Their influence was enough to mobilize 5,000-6,000 people to those mass meetings. A network of local sabhas and local agents were established to realize chutki, contribution

\[28\] Ibid., pp. 316-323; Jones, op. cit., pp. 77-82.
of grains, which was converted to cash with the intention 'to buy cows otherwise destined for slaughter and to establish and maintain *gaoshalas* (cattle pound or cow refuges)'\(^{29}\). But in many cases Gaurakshini Sabhas appear to have been dependent on some existing organization. Therefore, the movement 'prospered most where it was able to draw upon the contracts of the sanatan dharma (orthodox religion) societies or the Arya Samaj'.\(^{30}\) In addition, Freitag says, social reformers and urban politicians used these opportunities for their own purposes.\(^{31}\) Nevertheless this Cow-Protection movement had a deeper impact in the sense that it offered a symbol for identity formations in popular mind, which is dealt with in the next chapter.

The colonial view on Indian society and institutions based on it generated active reaction including discussions and oppositions. They, whether intellectuals and social reformers gathered in the NSC or Arya Samajists or advocates of *sanathan dharma*, tried to propose their visions of Indian society with some reform agendas. But these reactions were to reconstruct and invent Indian society with closely and carefully referring to and appropriating colonial discourses and institutions. This subsequently contributed to familiarise large numbers of people with 'Hinduism' with Brahmanical values and varna-caste hierarchy. At the same time, some issues discussed among them such as *shuddhi* and *gauraksha* was to cause and intensify sectarian tensions with the formation of religious identity and rigidly defined community such as 'Hindus' and 'Muslims'.

### 3.4 Impact of Religious Movement on Social Reform

Those who claim an association of sectarian traditions with pre-colonial period stress

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29 Freitag, 'Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology', pp. 606-612.
30 C. A. Bayly, *Local Roots of Indian Politics*, p. 113.
movements and ideological contentions among religious sects or leaders conducted constantly through pre-colonial and colonial period. These arguments, well represented by 'Cambridge School' are rightly criticised by Pandey. With regard to 'communalism', he contends that those arguments stressing the continuity ignore the historical context of pre-colonial and colonial settings, growth of 'communal' sense in broader level such as all-India level, and role of the colonial state with its modern, powerful and 'neutral' character. But William Pinch, carefully avoiding Pandey's criticism by admitting the role of the British in solidifying the discourse of caste into a hierarchical "caste of mind", contended that popular concern with caste, and desire and claim for higher status 'predated the colonial obsession with caste' and the census operation. Then his criticism is directed toward census reductionism arguments that the colonial census was the most significant catalyst to cause social reform and organizing movement among various castes, and insists that those arguments 'ignores the religious dimensions of the history of social reform and the very real fact that a new elite had emerged among the peasantry that sought to avail itself of connections to the colonial political arena.'

Ramnandi sect, which had a great impact from the religious side on the vast majority of 'lower' castes in the Gangetic Plain, emerged as a separate and independent tradition, sampraday, of Vaishnava. In the early 18th century, a group within this sect tried to consolidate its foundation by resorting to ideological battle. Their attempt was to elevating Ramanand, a bhakti sadhu of 14th century north India, 'to a level equal to that of Ramanuja', the founder of Vaishnava bhakti, by excluding Ramanad's disciples belonging to Shudras, untouchables and females from the guru-disciple genealogies ascending to Ramanuja. But others within the sect still admit Shudras to enter the

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33 William R. Pinch, Peasants and Monks in British India, p. 88.
This tendency of ideological difference and contention was further facilitated by the advent of modern printing press, and other communication and transportation technologies. Among commentaries of Bhaktamal, a verse compendium describing important devotees including Ramanand authored by Nabhadas of the early 17th century, Bhagwan Prasad's one became most influential, which sought to reconstruct a Ramanandi tradition by unifying variety of opinions. The Ramanandi tradition conceived by him situated Ramanad as a disciple in a religious community that descends from Ramanuja. Although ambiguity among commentators on the question of Ramanad’s life and Ramanadi tradition was ‘the rule rather than the exception’ even in the early 20th century, what is common to these commentaries was that Ramanad was from the south and had something to do with the tradition which stems from Ramanuja.\(^{34}\)

This common tendency underwent significant change after 1918 by the emergence of a fierce dispute between these commentators and ‘radical’ Ramanandis. This radical element vehemently insisted on an entirely independent Ramanandi tradition of Ramanuja, rejected those who chose to retain the Ramanuja link, and regarded them as ‘Ramanujis.’ The position of the radical group was strengthened when they, led by young Bhagavadacharya, defeated the opponent Ramanujis in the Ayodhya debate in 1919 or 1920. The new \textit{parampara} of the radicals, which place Ramanand in a guru-disciple genealogy from Ramchandra withough any mention of Ramanuja, consequently became dominant in the Ramanandi sect.\(^ {35}\)

A major background of this radicals’ emergence originated from the resentment of elitist attitude which had already discernable since the early 18th century among

\(^{34}\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 53-61.

\(^{35}\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 61-70.
Ramanujis, who desired to limit the entry of low-status individuals into the sect.\textsuperscript{36} Even moderate Bhagwan Prasad's personal activity and ministrations among people of Shudra and untouchables also aroused complaints among his peers that Shudra would refuse to do their menial work when they could develop a idea of distinguishing proper works from improper ones. According to Shivnandan Sahay, a biographer of Bhagvan Prasad, in early 1900s 'Ramanadis bring disciples from only those jatis', 'pure shudra', 'from whom water can be taken', and 'with whom restricted physical contact could be made.' The word 'pure shudra' itself indicated the existence of untouchables, and on whom Ramnandi samparday equivocated.\textsuperscript{37} And finally the direct catalyst of controversy was furnished when the head of the Shri Vaishnava Totadri math from the south refused to prostrate before Sita and Ramchandra images and to accept prasad, 'behaved like a strict Brahman who thought the Ramanandis an inferior community.'\textsuperscript{38}

These developments within Ramanandi and the emergence of radical element and ideology did not end the differences among Ramanandis. Indeed, as a result, it intensified the contention, and had a great impact on Kurmis and Yadavs, who chose to become Ramanujis to claim Kshatriya status. However, this process of 'Kshatriyaization' should be understood not in this religious context but in broader social, economic and historical context which we have discussed above.

\section*{3.5 Caste Associations and Caste Movements}

The colonial enterprise to standardize Indian society, reaction of indigenous intellectuals and socio-religious reformers and their movements, and emergence of radical bakhti ideology in religious sphere invited even larger popular reaction among

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 63.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., pp. 74-5.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., pp. 63-4.
various castes. A great number of organizations were set up based on local, regional, or even wider caste or 'caste cluster' and *varna* units. Since name of these caste organizations were usually attached with 'sabha' or 'association' after their caste name, they were generally called 'caste sabha' or 'caste association'. They also constituted substantial portion of delegates to NSC and subscribed to its social reform trend and took up issues discussed there such as 'uplift' of women, promotion of education, and adoption of 'pure' customs and abolition of 'impure'. At the same time, as they increasingly became more concerned with their social and ritual status with reference to *varna* and in comparison with other castes, they started various efforts to acquire higher status. We shall call these organized attempts by caste associations 'caste movement' here.

Government's recruitment for military and civil services, and nomination to legislature or other posts were also a strong motivation by which caste associations were organized. While they sometimes protested against Government's policy such as martial race theory in military service recruitment, those caste associations came to demand even reserved seats in assemblies when partial home rule in the central and provincial administration has started and Indian's opportunities for constitutional politics were opened. Modern and English education was also promoted to nurture suitable human resources for those posts. Thus Kayastha Pathshala, one of the earliest attempt of this kind started in Allahabad in 1873, and a sort of its rival organization, Kayastha Conference founded in 1887 both focused on promoting education among their caste members.39

But census operations gave much stronger stimulus and opportunity to various

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castes to motivate 'social mobility'. Especially the result of census in 1901, which was the most controversial one as mentioned above, was 'a pestiferous deluge of representations' in every 10 years. These were from various caste associations, whose claims were, for example, to replace nomenclature of caste groups with high sounding name, recognition of a group as a separate caste which the authority had identified with another group, and, conversely, recognition of two or more groups, who had been admitted as separate groups one another, as a single caste. For example, The Dangis, who mostly lived in south Bihar and had hitherto been considered to be 'sub-caste' of Koiri by the authority, demanded to be recorded in the name of Dangi Kshatriya as a caste name with the claim of descent from King Dangi Rai of Nepal. What is striking here is their allegations were invariably based on Brahmanical varna-jati hierarchy which, we already have seen, had been constructed and emerged under the colonial rule. Therefore they did not protest against the 'order of precedence' itself but demanded modification of their own rank in the hierarchy and their varna status recorded in the reports. Their demonstrations in justifying their demand was done by constructing community's history looking back to their distant past with reference to Sanskrit texts and various mythologies as British scholar-officials did. For example, Bhumihars, who consisted of major landholding and cultivating class and, were generally called and recorded as Babhans in the Bihar census. Bumihar Brahman Sabha, which was under the support of better-offs among the caste fellows including Raja of Darbhanga Raj, demanded to be recorded as 'Bhumihar Brahman' or simply 'Brahman'.

41 Census of India 1911, Volume V, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim, Part I Report by L. S. S. O'Malley, Calcutta, 1913, p. 444; File No. 10-C/1911/54, General Deptt., Miscellaneous Branch, Government of Bengal, BSA.
Sahajanand Saraswati, who was then committing to the sabha, by citing shastras, insisted that priesthood was not an indispensable condition to be Brahman and cultivating also important for the caste, hence Bhumihar also should be regarded as Brahman.42 In north India, the number of caste organizations that forwarded petitions in the 1901 census was 21, and it amounted to 148 in the 1931 census which produced the final caste-wise statistics in its history.43 Now the census operation became an apparatus for 'social mobility'.

In Gangetic Plain, these endeavours to organize caste associations and present petitions to the Government had gradually spread to various castes and reached to 'lower' castes who engaged in cultivation. Various castes that came under the colonial category of Ahir or Goala in Gangetic Plain started to organize and integrate these communities under the banner of Yadav or Ahir Kshatriya in the beginning of 20th century. In 1910, Ahir Yadav Kshatriya Mahasabha was founded by the initiative of Royal families of Rewari, and demanded recruitment of Ahirs into Army. In Bihar a Gopal Mandali founded in 1909 was soon developed to form Gopajatiya Mahasabha at provincial level and at pan-north India scale. Their assertion of Kshatriya origin was publicized through publications such Ahir Samachar.44

These organizing attempts among this Yadav caste cluster were further accelerated by the formation of the All India Yadava Mahasabha in 1924, under which regional caste sabhas came together from all over India. This organization endeavoured to create pan-Yadav identity by tracing their mythical genealogy back to Krishna and identified them with ancient Abhiras who were considered to be dominant in different parts of

43 Imtiaz Ahmad, 'Caste Mobility Movements in North India', IESHR, 7-2 (1971), pp. 170-171. Here 'north India' includes provinces of United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, Bengal and Sikkim, and Central Province and Berar.
India, medieval Yadava dynasty in Deccan and recent Rewari kindom under the Mughal. To the census authority, they constantly petitioned to change the caste name of Goala, Ahir, and others to Yadava.\(^{45}\) In addition, their demands contained recruitment of larger number of Ahirs in the police and all civil departments as well as proper number of representatives in provincial Legislative Council. They also requested the Government to recruit more Ahirs to the Army and to create 'Ahir Regiment' with claiming that they were martial race and '[o]ur ancient history and recent past bears testimony to our claim'.\(^{46}\)

Kurmis, who come from various local castes and altogether constituted one of the major cultivating classes with renowned high-quality skill in Gangetic Plain, started to organize in direct response to a order by the Government of United Provinces to debar some castes including Kurmi from the recruitment to police service in 1894. The Sadar Kurmi Kshatriya Sabha of Lucknow, whose members were mainly came from neighbouring districts of United Provinces and Bihar, soon ceased active campaign after the order was rectified in 1896.\(^{47}\)

Again the Census of 1901 aroused Kurmis to organize themselves at local level and later to revive the sabha as All India Kurmi Kshatriya Mahasabha in 1910.with a constitution and prospect of wider horizontal solidarity among this caste cluster. Their attempt to integrate regional cultivating castes from different parts of India succeeded in establishing strong relationships with Patidars of Gujarat and Marathas and Kunbis of Central Provinces. This Sabha was run by the initiatives and supports of barristers

\(^{45}\) M. S. A. Rao, *Social Movement and Social Transformation*, pp. 139-143.

\(^{46}\) From the Secretary, Ahir Kshatriya Sabha, Benares Division, To the Commissioner of Benares Division dated 26\(^{th}\) Mar. 1921, File No. 173 of 1921, G. A. D., UPSA: From the Secretary, Yadav Ahir Kshatriya Sabha, Delhi Province, To His Excellency, the Viceroy, dated 17\(^{th}\) May 1933, File No. 222 of 1933, Home Department, Public Branch, NAI. Both of organization seems to be regional caste sabha of Ahirs under came under the all India-wise organization.

and advocates working in Lucknow and Patna, Maharajas and ministers of Baroda and Gwalior state, and Raja of Bhosla family. They also humbly asserted the Kshatriya status. With reference to 'ample proofs in the writings of Western Scholars and old Sanskrit and Hindi literatures to show that our community is Kshatriya', for example, they requested the Government to 'classify all the sections and sub-sections' of Kurmis in the same category of 'Kurmi-Kshatriya' in the coming census of 1931 and use the word in all Government documents.

There were also number of other castes who took up same strategy, in which they integrated alleged regional 'brethrens' into caste sabhas on the ground that they had common history. Other than demanding recruitment to governmental services, their activity was directed to 'purify' their customs in the light of orthodox Brahmanical values while introducing some 'modern' features. Abandonment of drinking liquor, eating meat and child marriage, and promotion of education including women, inter-'sub-caste' dining and marriage, and donning sacred thread were usually resolved in those caste sabhas. We should not regard these programmes simply as acts to introduce social and religious customs of 'upper castes' instead of their existing ones which were considered to be degrading or inferior, 'sanskritization' in Srinivas's concept. Rather, in these programme, we notice an affinity with that of Arya Samaj. Furthermore, as Carroll says, we should not overlook the uniformity of caste cluster which they tried to embrace. Here too, we can see the standardization of caste in the indigenous side.

As Pinch pointed out, claims of 'lower castes' for higher social and ritual status had been observed sporadically. Such situation itself may imply a 'lack of clarity in the

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49 From the General Secretary to All India Kurmi-Kshatriya Association, to His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, dated 18 Nov. 1930, File No. 333 of 1930, Home (Public), NAI.
50 Carroll, 'Caste, Social Change and the Social Scientist', p. 81.
hierarchy' in pre-colonial 'caste system'. However, what is important is that the colonial state did not allow such a 'lack of clarity' to exist and tried to consolidate it through ethnographies and census operations. That sporadic and regional claims by 'lower caste' had become large scale should be pointed out as a novel feature of this period.

3.6 Distinct Feature of Caste Movements in North India and Its Implications

As 1931 census report says, most of petitions from those caste organizations were 'asking for recognition of some alleged fact or hypothesis of which the census as a department is not legally competent to judge and of which its recognition, if accorded, would be socially valueless.' Hence, the authority hardly accepted those claims. As we have already seen in case of various caste sabhas, those initiatives were always in the hand of better-off class and '[i]ts actual membership strength is a fraction of the caste potential but the Sabha claims virtual representation of the community as a whole.' Carroll, judging from her example of Kayasthas' attempts, contended that such caste organization was utilized by 'an enterprising and talented individual to acquire not social upward mobility of certain caste as a whole but to build personal honour, interest, and status for his 'one-man shows'. In this sense, these caste sabhas might embody 'superficiality' or 'veneer' character of colonial caste categories.

In Marathi-speaking region including old Maratha state in the Central Provinces and Berar, the Satyashodhak Samaj founded by Jotirao Govindrao Phule made a landmark in the history of social reform movements. Phule's ideology was total rejection

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53 Verma, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
54 Carroll, 'Caste, Social Change and the Social Scientist', p. 75 and 'Colonial Perceptions of Indian Society and the Emergence of Caste(s) Associations', p. 249.
of caste and Brahmanical values. His criticism on colonial Indian society was directed to Brahmins who, in his allegation, socially and economically had dominated Shudras and untouchables since they, Aryans, invaded India in ancient period. And the domination was, he said, further strengthened by the British colonial rule. Phule, instead of the dominant religious tradition, emphasised rationality and equality as moral base, which 'unified all men and women as equals rather than fragmenting and dividing them into separate social groups.'55 Although he did neither use the term 'Dravidians' nor theorise Maratha regionalism, his intension was to form cultural and racial non-Brahman front based on the unity of Maharashtrian masses who mostly consist of peasants.56

The Satyashodhak Samaj conducted its activity on village base and emphasised rituals without Brahmins, conducting Ganesh Chatruthi festival without Brahman or abolition of the festival itself, and abolition of fasting and offering meals to Brahmans on the ground that no middleman or priest should be mediated between God and human being.57 The organization started in Poona and Bombay in 1873 and showed a steady growth to cover all over Marathi-speaking region by 1910s. As far as the region is concerned, its impact and popularity among masses was, Omvedt claims, almost comparable to those of Arya Samaj in north India.58

In Tamil and Telugu speaking area of the Madras presidency, the first impetus was infused by Marathi-speaking Brahmins and Hindu revivalists who were actively involved in social reform activities in Madras city and other Tamil districts. These activities increased the awareness of social and political position among non-Brahman

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56 Ibid, p. 115.
And those who opposed to social, economic, and political domination by Brahmins, and directly against the Home Rule League by Annie Besant, established South Indian Liberal Federation, so-called Justice Party in 1916. They also subscribed Aryan-Dravidian race theory and it was insisted in the party's paper that 'it is a misrepresentation to say that Brahmins belong to the same Indian nation as the non-Brahmins while the English are aliens... Indian Brahmins are more alien to us than Englishman.' Along with series of resolution in the Madras Legislative Council to give larger proportion of government jobs to non-Brahman, its consistent anti-Congress policy, anti-Hindi protest movement, and separatist claim of Dravidastan by Ramaswami Naicker in later period altogether took a form of political movement with cultural agenda of anti-north Indian and anti-Brahman.

Recently, Cristophe Jaffrelot's study attempts comparison between social reform movements of north and south. He shows the limit of caste sabhas in bringing about profound impact on society. According to him, attempts by various organizations claiming social reform in south and western India could present an alternative to Brahmanical value and, therefore, developed into the Non-Brahman movement with broader and rich cultural base. On the other hand, caste organizations in north India were simply oriented to upward mobility in the hierarchy basically with reference to Brahmanical values and were not anything to cause a transformation of existing social structure.

But non-Brahman protests in the western and south India certainly overlooked an important issue. When it comes to the programme, they dealt with primarily social and cultural issues such as education, caste discrimination, and uplift of women and

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60 Ibid., pp. 51-2.
61 Cristophe Jaffrelot, India's Silent Revolution, pp. 147-213.
untouchables, although those issues were inevitably entangled with economic issues which were placed far behind. Phule sought the cause of peasant's poverty in the bureaucracy of British Raj which destroyed Indian industry and acquiesced in Brahman domination, and in urbanized bureaucratic elite who exploit peasants. Thus, 'the primary conflict in India' described by him was 'a conflict between peasantry and the elite-dominated bureaucracy. Zamindars in this area of raiyatwari settlement were more or less viewed as irrelevant.' He did not consider economic differences within peasantry and between various castes.62

In terms of participants in those movements too, an notable feature could be pointed out. In Satyashodhak Samaj, its main supporter came from Maratha-Kunbis, often called Patils, Malis, and Kolis, who were substantial cultivators or landowners and constituted 'dominant caste'.63 Although the Samaj had mass base including lower stratus of peasants and artisans such as untouchables as tenants' rebellion of Satara district in 1919-1921 suggested, consequently this movement was to strengthen non-Brahman upper-class rural elite.64 In the Madras Presidency too, the political endeavour of the Justice Party was supported by those who 'were immediately beneath the Brahman in the ritual hierarchy' and 'lords of the soil and inheritors of noble traditions'. For example, Vellalas of Tamil districts, Reddis or Kapus and Kammas in Telugu districts, and trading castes of Beri Chettis and Blija Naidus constituted these 'noble' supporters. Though large numbers of middle-class and educated people in urban areas supported and joined the party, 'there were few in the party who were poor.'65 Therefore, it could be said that non-Brahman movements in western and south India might have asserted an opposition to north-oriented and Brahmanical values and

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64 Ibid., pp. 214-227.
offered a socio-cultural alternative to it. This opposition ‘did not come from the low and oppressed castes but from the leaders of the powerful, rural dominant castes’. Their movements generally failed to recognize or intentionally ignored the economic difference within the participants and supporters.

Now we notice that Jaffrelot’s summary and comparison of social reform movements between north and south mentioned above was inappropriate. Most of studies on caste movements in north India focus on their programmes, organizations, leaders’ thoughts, and activities in constitutional politics such as petitioning to the colonial government. But only caste organizations’ demands for higher varna status, for example, were practically not enough to raise their social status in localities where people lived. The social mobility was deeply and complicatedly connected with profession, eating habit, customs, and political and social relations with other caste groups. To judge whether caste categories created by colonial rule were ‘veneer’ without reality or not, it would be necessary to study what were going on in terms of ‘caste movements’ in localities, which will be dealt with in next chapter. In fact, in north India, especially the central Gangetic plain which is focal area of this study, more profound and significant changes were to be caused by above mentioned variety of social movements. Conclusively speaking, these movements altogether stimulated castes, who were ritually, socially, and economically lower than main participants of non-Brahman movements, to nurture class-consciousness as peasant with struggling and competing with other higher castes in their localities. The class consciousness subsequently played a significant role to from broader peasant front to wage fierce class struggle against landlords in 1930s and 40s. This is what social reform movements of north India contributed to in bringing about different form of social change form the south.