Chapter XIII
Conclusion

The general survey of the gotra system, as made by us, has revealed that the notion of Brāhmaṇical origin of gotras is a priestly fiction, traceable to the later Vedic and post-Vedic periods of Indian social history. The portrait of early Vedic society is a gotra system in which varṇas have originated and followed the principle of division of labour. This social stage is later replaced by a crystallised and stereotyped caste organisation and the gotra affiliation becomes a more or less conventional mark of Indo-Aryan tradition. At this time the Brāhmaṇical interpretation of the gotras and pravaras gives them forms and shapes in conformity with the newly developed ambitions of the priestly order. The system of adoption of gotras from officiating priests has the background of rising Brāhmaṇism, which brings about changes in the whole social outlook. The gift of the Brāhmaṇistic faith to Hindu society is, on one side, the order of castes and sub-castes, and, on the other side, Aryanisation of various ethnic groups of different regions of India.

The process of Aryanisation is to a great extent responsible for the extension of gotra affiliation to all sections of people. The newly comprised groups are given affiliation to Aryan gotras and varṇas (mixed castes created for the purpose). This points to the Brāhmaṇistic outlook of social expansion. A minute and careful investigation of the gotra
names and caste designations may unfold many hitherto unknown facts of socio-cultural synthesis, effected by the priestly class. In these facts is disclosed the catholic spirit of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy and it is certain that the priestly sections have played a definitely progressive role in Aryanising various non-Aryan or Vrātya tribal groups and bringing about a fusion of Aryan and indigenous religious beliefs.

It is undeniable that the affiliation to gotras has been seriously maintained by Hindu families of different epochs, while, in most cases, these have been adopted by them. What is most striking is the continued belief in Ṛṣi-descent, revealed in the observance of gotra exogamy which has its justification in the clan-modelled society of Vedic times. Even to-day, gotra is a living tradition, associated with rules of exogamy. Marriage within the same gotra is still not socially approved, though certain smaller caste-groups exempt themselves from such restrictions.