Introduction

The word 'gotra' indicates an exogamous clan of Vedic times, consisting of members who claim descent from a common ancestor. Belief in actual or imaginary consanguinity constitutes the basis of such a clan organisation in which lineage is considered from the father's side and not from the mother's side; or, in other words, kinship is regarded as unilateral and not bilateral. Total neglect of the mother's side proceeds from the notion that the male is the determining factor in procreation. As the gotra is conceived as patrilineal, agnates instead of cognates may have affiliation to it.

The popular tradition of the origin of gotras from eight Rishi patriarchs, supposed to be Brāhmaṇas, appears to be a deviation from the original significance of gotra as the clan of early Indo-Aryans which is based upon kinship. The true relation between gotra and varṇa is obscured and distorted by the prevailing belief in the Brāhmaṇical origin of gotras which has its corollary in the custom of superimposing priestly clan names upon the members of non-priestly castes. Much historical

1 - Vide Bgt I X. 20. 21 - mātā bhastrā pituh putrah yena jātah sa eva sah; also Arthasastra III. 7 - mātā bhastrā yasya retah tasya apatyam iti apare.
value cannot be assigned to the hypothesis that the Brāhmaṇa varṇa is prior to gotra and responsible for its appearance. The more plausible conjecture would be that the gotra is an earlier institution than varṇa. It is corroborated by the presence of names of Kṣatriyas in the lists of gotras and pravaras. The story of origin of four castes from the gotras of Manu and Śukadeva also bears evidence to the fact that the gotra in its original shape may have consisted of members of all castes (viz. Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya and Vaisya). The definition of gotra as offered by Pāṇini more approaches the real nature of gotra in its earlier form determined by the kinship factor.

Deviation from the kinship feature may have been phenomenal only in a later age when adoption of a gotra appellation by one who is not by birth affiliated to it has obtained social sanction. The Vītahavyas, for instance, seem to have adopted the Bhārgava clan appellation, since their Bhārgava kinship is proved to be baseless by the Atharvaveda report of a conflict between them.

1 - Ibid, sec. XV, ch. IV.
2 - Ibid, sec. XVII, ch. IV.
3 - Pāṇ. IV. 1. 162.
4 - Vide sec. XVIII, ch. IV of the present book.
5 - Av V. 4. 4. 1
and Bhrigu and the Mahābhārata story of entry of Kṣatriya
Vitahavya in the Brāhmaṇa caste by Bhrigu’s assistance.

Similarly, the Kāvyas, known as Bhārgavas, are found to be connected
with Asuras and appear to be a non-Aryan clan adopting the
Bhārgava clan designation. Another example of adoption of an
Aryan clan appellation is detected in the case of Rāvaṇas, a sept
of Vasiṣṭha gotra, if the name refers to the descendants of the
non-Aryan king of the Rāmaṇa. Such names as Paunjiṣṭhi,
Āsurāyana, Vāleya, occurring in the list of gotras, suggest the
fact that non-Aryan or Vrātya groups of people, probably
indicated by these names, may have been affiliated to Aryan gotras.
All these names seem to refer to non-Aryan or Vrātya tribes
adopting Aryan gotra names. The process of Aryanisation may have
necessitated the extension of gotra affiliation to non-Aryan
groups of people. This means that the gotra organisation has
gradually strayed away from its kinship basis.

1 - Mbh XIII, 30, 57 - 58.
3 - Surprisingly enough the gotra of Rāvaṇa is found in the
Vasiṣṭha group; vide p. 113, Vasiṣṭha - kāṇḍam, Pravara-mañjari,
Gpnk; also p. 177, Pravara-darpaṇam, ibid; D.D. Kosambi believes
that Rāvaṇa of the list of gotras is the same as the demon Rāvaṇa
and proceeds to prove the non-Aryan origin of Vasiṣṭha gotra, see
his article entitled ‘on the origin of Brāhmin gotras’, p. 39,
JBRAS (New Series), vol. 26, pt. I, 1950; also sec. XVI, ch. IV
of the present book.
4 - Vide sec. VI, ch. VII, ibid.
Besides the incorporation of non-Aryan strangers in the Aryan clan disturbing its basis of kinship, the peculiar phenomenon of a duality of gotra affiliation has been quite contrary to the feature of common descent conditioning the membership of a clan. Dwigotra sons owing their origin to the institution of niyoga or adoption of putrikā have simultaneous membership of two clans. They have been a discordant factor within the clan of which the members are regarded as descendants of a common ancestor. The way out of this anomaly is sought by measures of restricting niyoga within the limits of the clan in the case of kṣetraja sons. The putrikā - putras are cognates and their place in the gotra is justified by considering the putrikā as a son and her son as an agnate in relation to his mother's father. All these irregularities work for the breaking up of the old kula pattern of gotra organisation and in a later period of social history the distinction between kula and gotra becomes evident.

1 - Ibid, sec. II, ch. VII.

2 - Ibid, sec. III (B), ch. VII.

3 - Ibid, sec. III (C), ch. VII.

4 - The Lalitavistara distinguishes the epithet 'kulārthika' from 'gotrārthika', vide sec. II, ch. VIII of the present book.
As the kula basis of gotra is affected, the belief in common ancestry becomes groundless and the later gotra tradition creates illusions of Rishi descent even in cases of adopted gotra designation. In the case of Devarātas, who are actually a Bhārgava or Āṅgirasa clan, the adopted gotra name is Visvāmitra; they are treated as a sept of the Visvāmitra clan. The Chyavanas (more known as Vatsas) are represented as Bhārgavas, but their Āṅgirasa lineage is not improbable. The Bhārgava or Āṅgirasa clan appellation seems to have been adopted in most cases, but the illusion of real descent from the Rishi patriarch Bṛrigu or Āṅgiras persists. Thus, the affiliation of septs to a gotra or gana may not signify real lineage, but may have been adopted. The available records of gotras provide us with informations about lineage and kinship which may mislead us at every step, though these cannot be spared.

1 - Vide sec. IV, ch. VII of the present book.

2 - Baudh I. 3; Baudhāyana includes the name of Chyavana in the pravara of Vatsa gotra.

3 - According to the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, Chyavana is either a Bhārgava or an Āṅgiras; see ŚB IV. 1. 5. 1.
We are led to suppose that the gotra traditions in their present shape and appearance are not fully reliable with regard to kinship. The fusion of Aryans and non-Aryans may have been responsible for the inclusion of new names in the gotra system. It is not a very easy task to distinguish such names. Some of the septs, included in a gotra, may not in reality have been derived from it. Thus, any investigation of the gotra system is subject to certain limitations consisting in the insufficiency of materials and unhistorical nature of the accounts. Regarding questions of lineage, the Purānic accounts are indispensable even in this field of study and enable us to recognise certain Kṣatriya gotras undergoing transformation into Brāhmaṇa clans. The portrait of Aryan kinship, drawn in ancient Smṛti literature, helps us to unveil the nature and origin of dvigotra- hood. The expected result, of course, is a good degree of probability of the conclusions reached.

The present book aims at a study of the gotra system from the historical-sociological point of view. The course followed has been an analysis of textual evidence as far as possible and epigraphic evidences have been taken recourse to in the case of examination of the nature of popular gotra beliefs of the Christian era. Certain Vedic words, indicative of the social organisation of the Indo-Aryans, have been reviewed in order to find out their exact relation to the term 'gotra'. These are jana, gana, vrāta, sārdha and vis'. The word 'gana' has been stressed, as it appears to have signified the Vedic clan even before the application of the word 'gotra' to the same kind of organisation. Each of these two words has passed through changes of meaning which have been pointed out.
The shifting of the significance of gotra from clan as such to Rishi-clan is revealed by the distinction between sāstrīya gotra and laukika gotra, noticed by the grammarians. It may be reasonably guessed that the original gotra tradition has been re-interpreted and reconstructed by the priestly class out of ambitious motives. In the midst of priestly fabrications fact-finding is no easy task, although there is no denying of the other side of the picture. The Brāhmaṇa priests, importing names of non-Aryan or Vṛātya tribes in the list of gotras, have broken the bounds of tribal exclusiveness of the early Aryans and prepared the way for social expansion.

One of the propositions in this book has been the linking up of Aryanisation with superimposition of Rishi-gotra designations as well as creation of mixed castes. Any Aryanised group, according to this supposition, has found a place in Hindu society by adopting an Aryan gotra name and being considered as a samkara-varṇa. A survey of non-Aryan influence upon the gotra system has been made. The popular tradition acquaints us with Gōttradevis, Ganaṁvās, Ganesāvaras whose story of origin lies in the syncretic activities of Brāhmaṇa priests. The inter-mingling of Vedic and indigenous beliefs has been perceptible in the creation of totemic gotras. Even in the metronymics of Upaniṣadic teachers and kings of later ages is visible the under-current of influence of non-Aryan matriarchy. These phenomena and similar facts have been dealt with at some length to render a more comprehensive shape to the present undertaking.
This little book is the outcome of a long-felt desire to fill up a gap in Hindu sociological studies, since the subject-matter chosen has hitherto failed to draw due attention of investigators. The nature of survey of the gotra system made up to the present time has been deficient on account of omissions as well as the lack of sociological view-point. Although of a sketchy character, the present piece of research-work has been submitted to the inductive method of inquiry and contains observations and hypotheses, based on illustrations from original sources.

With a view to maintaining accuracy some Sanskrit words have been retained. The Roman transliteration of words and passages quoted from Sanskrit texts has been given for the convenience of the typist and to make such transcription easier the sandhi of words has been disjoined.