CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Karve (1961) had put a new interpretation of the social group called 'caste' in Hindu Society. She defined 'caste' as an endogamous group, in other words an extended family where families could be shown as related to one another by blood relationship or affinal relationship. In Indian Anthropological literature such endogamous groups used to be called 'sub-castes' (Enthoven, 1920; Ghurye, 1950, etc.). Though these 'sub-castes' were recognised to be the ultimate significant social entity, descriptions were given in such a way that 'sub-castes' were tacitly understood to have arisen through splitting up of the bigger entity the 'caste'.

Karve's contention is that the main group is the endogamous entity and it should be called 'caste'. The term 'sub-caste' should be abolished as it leads to confusion. Thus one should recognise that there are many Brahmin 'castes' instead of a single as the older anthropologists did, that there was a Brahmin caste with
its many divisions called 'sub-castes'. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Shudra etc., indicate a certain social rank and all these endogamous groups which have achieved a particular rank name have the right to call themselves by the generic term indicated. Not only the wider terms like Brahmin, Kshatriya and Shudra etc., indicate rank but terms like Sonar = Goldsmith, Kumbhar = Potter, Nai = Barber, also indicate rank and occupation. Therefore, groups of independent origin may be Sonar of some different kinds, or the Nai's or Kumbhar as the case may be. But just because certain group call themselves Sonar it does not mean that they all originally were one group. Karve (1961) tried to show that each of such castes occupied an area different from the other, it worshipped sometimes different Gods and it had kinship pattern different from the others. And she construe the Hindu Society as made up of independent groups living side by side. She conceded that in historical times, certain 'castes' had split into smaller units or certain 'castes' were the product of coming together of different groups. But she thought that both these latter processes of a secondary nature, while the former process i.e., groups living separately side by side was a fundamental characteristic of the Hindu Society.

This hypothesis lend itself to be put into
biological genetical terms and tested on these grounds. According to Karve's hypothesis, Brahmin is not a genetical category. The term Brahmin indicates a certain hereditary profession and a certain rank. It is purely a social category. On the other hand each of the caste, which calls itself as Brahmin and is endogamous, is a biological genetical category. Members in each caste should show greater nearness to one another as regards different hereditable characteristics than the member taken together of another Brahmin caste.

In this thesis this type of test is sought to be applied to eight endogamous groups in Maharashtra calling themselves Brahmins of some sort.

2. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF 'CASTE'

In order to understand and appreciate Karve's hypothesis, it is felt necessary to give a brief description of the caste as conceived by the various anthropologists.

A good number of authors since 1881 have tried to define and describe caste, but none of the definitions put forward by these authors is really satisfactory and while one explains certain features of caste, it fails to account for the others. Hence we find no unanimity among
scholars on the subject.

The word 'caste' (or rather the Portuguese word casta from which the word caste has been derived) was first used in 1563 by Grcia de Orta. It signified breed, race or kind, and referred to the "distinct races or castes (among the Hindus) of greater or less dignity; holding the christians as of lower degree, and keep them so superstitiously that no one of a higher caste can eat or drink with those of lower" (Yule and BerneU, quoted by Hutton, 1951, p.47).

The census officers of the Indian Empire since 1881 onwards, gave a good detailed description and definitions of 'castes'. Ibbetson (1881, pp.172-76), on the basis of the census of Punjab, gives the descriptive definition of a caste as a group of people who practice a particular occupation hereditarily, and who "seek preservation and support of the principle by the elaboration from the theories of the Hindu creed or cosmogony of a purely artificial set of rules, regulating marriage or intermarriage, declaring certain occupations and foods to be impure and polluting, and prescribing the condition and degree of social intercourse permitted between the several castes". Ibbetson, thus attached the greatest importance to occupation which "is the whole basis of diversity of caste in diversity of occupation". Change
of hereditary occupation, according to him resulted into a new caste,

Nesfield (1881) also considered occupation as "the sole foundation upon which the entire caste system of India was built up" (quoted by Risley, 1915, p.68).

Risley (1915) on the basis of ethnographic and ethnological data, defined a caste as "a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion on forming a single homogeneous community. The name (of a caste) generally denote or is associated with a specific occupation. A caste is almost invariably endogamous in the sense that a member of the large circle denoted by the common name may not marry outside that circle.

Senart described a caste as "a close corporation, in theory at any rate rigorously hereditary; equipped with a certain traditional and independent organisation, including a chief and a council, meeting on occasion in assemblies of more or less plenary authority, and forming in the celebration of certain festivals; bound together by a common occupation; observing certain common usages which relate more particularly to marriage, to food and to question of ceremonial pollution; and ruling its members by the
exercise of a jurisdiction the extent of which varies; but which succeeds, by the sanction of certain penalties and above all by the power of final or revocable exclusion from the group in making the authority of the community effectively felt" (quoted by Hsley, 1915, pp. 68-9).

Kethar (1910, p.15) defined caste as "a social group having two characteristics: (i) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born, and (ii) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group".

Although Ghurye (1950) contributed a lot towards the understanding of the caste system - the unique Hindu social institution, he failed to appreciate the importance of the ultimate unit of social structure, the so-called 'sub-caste'. As would be apparent from the following passage, Ghurye considered that 'sub-castes' arose out of castes.

"A close study of the names of the various minor units, the so-called sub-castes, within the major groups reveals the fact that the bases of distinction leading to the exclusive marking off these groups were: First, territorial or Jurisdictional separateness; second, mixed origin; third, occupational distinction;
fourth, some peculiarity in the technique of one and the same occupation; fifth, sectarian difference; sixth, dissimilarity of customs; and last adventitious circumstances, suggesting certain nicknames" (p.35).

The history and origin of caste was explained by Ghurya as follows:

An early period, roughly corresponding to the Vedic period, in which one finds mention of three *varnas* but not of *jati*, then a period of four *varnas*, then a period of numerous jatis with untouchability coming in and a final period of fossilisation of the fragmented society divided into innumerable small castes. The Indian Village was depicted as the point where castes came together to form a common society based on mutual support and specialisation of function.

Ghurya states that caste was based on the attempts by the Brahmins to keep their racial purity. He makes a guess at the physical characteristics of the early Aryan settlers, tries to show that those characteristics are best preserved in all castes of the Punjab and in the Brahmin and Khatri castes of Uttar Pradesh and that as one goes down the ladder of caste hierarchy, the characteristics of the population are the farthest removed from those of hypothetical Aryans. The existence of separate castes in the homogeneous population of
Punjab is then presumably due to segmentation or fission as a result of intermingling with the aboriginal population and specialisation of occupation. He writes "the idea of endogamy and other elements of caste were taken by Brahmin prospectors with them (all over India)" (p.155). They could not influence the racial composition of the other regions as they did in the north of India, the land of their original colonisation, but they did "try to apply their scheme of occupational segregation and endogamy to various groups according to their respective. "This racial origin of the principal feature of the caste system is further supported by the early term Varna meaning colour used to specify the orders in society," (p.155). Thus Ghurye concludes, "that caste in India is a Brahmanic child of the Indo-Aryan culture, cradled in the land of Ganga and the Yamuna and hence transferred to the other parts of the country" (p.155).

According to Karve (1961, p.9) "a caste is a group which practices endogamy, has a particular area (generally within one linguistic area) of spread or dispersion, may have one or more traditional occupations, has a more or less determined or flexible position in a hierarchical scale and has traditionally defined modes of behaviour towards other castes".

As the merits and demerits of the various
theories described above have already been discussed by Hutton (1961) and others, only critical features which have bearing on the problem under consideration, are given below. They are (Karve, 1961, pp.15-16):

1) Caste are endogamous groups;

2) Caste are restricted to certain limited areas;

3) Caste have a certain traditional behaviour pattern which is enforced in many cases by a "caste-council" made up of a number of respected elder men in a caste;

4) Caste live together with other castes without mingling except on certain occasions only;

5) A caste has generally a hereditary occupation which is however not exclusive to it;

6) Caste are arranged in a hierarchical order.

As has already been stated that all these features of the 'caste' have bearing on the problem under discussion, two features viz., endogamy and preferential (consanguineous) marriages need further consideration.

There is a custom among these endogamous groups (or Mendelian populations; Dobzhansky, '51), which breaks each one of them into mutually exclusive sections, whose members are forbidden to marry within their own section.
It was Westernarck's (1921, Vol.2, p.59) view that endogamy is the essence of the caste system. The caste endogamy was broken through hypergamy and hypogamy. Of these two principles of marrying outside one's own group, hypergamy is known to have been sanctioned in the laws of Manu as anuloma. While the rule of endogamy was regarded as the best and most suitable for the higher Varna, they were permitted to take wives from the Varna lower than that of their own. Thus Brahmin were allowed to marry Kshatriya, Vaishya and in special circumstances, Sudra women; Kshatriya men could marry Vaishya or Sudra women and the Vaishya were permitted to take a Sudra woman for a wife. The off-spring of a mixed hypergamous unions were allowed by Manu the rites and duties of the twice-born (Ghurye, 1950, p.97).

The principle of hypogamy - the reverse of hypergamy - though never sanctioned by Hindu law - givers including Manu, is known to have been in practice during what is called the 'classical Age' (1st to 5th centuries A.D.). This rule of marriage was condemned by Manu as pratiloma. Persons who married women of Varna higher than their own, and the off-springs of such unions, were regarded as ritually unclean and outside the pale of the sacred law of Hindus (Ghurye, 1950, p.56).

To those interested in the problems related to
the genetic make up of the endogamous groups, the practice of hypergamy and hypogamy is certainly important. One would like to know to what extent the said practice was and is in vogue? And its influence on the gene pool of the 'castes'.

In the present day, however, hypergamy and hypogamy are rarely practiced on Varna level. Exceptions to the rule that all 'castes' are endogamous may be cited, but they are probably isolated and sporadic instances. Although nothing can be said about the frequency of these marriages in the past, a recent study by Mokashi (1965) shows that the percentage of inter-varna marriages is fairly low (less than 4%) in the city limits and decreases to almost nil (0.5%) in rural areas. The said view is further strengthened when one examines the strict endogamy maintained by migratory groups. In this connection a few examples may be cited. The inscriptions of Kumara Gupta (A.D. 473) from Mandsar (in Gujarat), indicate that the Pattavayaka, a Saurashtrian community, were induced to migrate to Mandsar from Lata district on the coast of Gujarat, to practise there, their art of silk-weaving. On the destruction of Mandsar by the Muslims, the Pattavayas seem to have travelled South to Devagiri (Daulatabad) and then, when the Muslims again appeared on the scene in the 14th century, to Vijayanagar. In the 16th century, on the invitation of the Nayak Kings
of Madura, they migrated to Tamilnad and got settled in some of the districts, like Tanjore, Trichanapalli, Madurai etc. The present strength of the community is about two lakh.¹

Recently while the author was conducting field work in Tamilnad, he observed that while there were certain marked changes in some of their cultural items, the Patta-vayyas maintained strict endogamy. Similarly Devrukhe Brahmins from Ratnagiri District (Maharashtra) migrated to Baroda (Gujarat) about 400 years ago. There is no marriage reciprocity between this migrant community and the local population.

Another example of Deshastha Brahmins may be cited. "This group of Brahmin migrated from the original Deshastha community of Bombay state during the time of Shivaji. They have settled in Mysore, Bangalore and Madras during the last 200 years. During this time, the group has practised strict endogamy" (Sirsat, 1957, p.147). These examples can be multiplied endlessly.

The other factor which needs further consideration is the consanguineous marriages. We know that populations remain in equilibrium from generation to generation

¹ Information kindly supplied by Research Scholar Shri K.S. Ramasubramanium.
where mating is completely at random. Would kin marriages influence the genetic equilibrium of a population where they are practised and, if so, to what extent? It should be noted, however, that the maintenance of equilibrium depends upon two conditions, first, that the population is large, and second, that mating occurs at random. The second condition is dependent upon the first. Mating cannot occur at random over long periods of time in small populations, as inbreeding inevitably will result. "As long as all inbred lines are maintained, gene frequencies will not be altered, but will be masked by alteration of phenotype frequencies". (Rife, 1948, p.47). In case the population is small, all possible inbred lines would not continue, with the result the gene frequencies will be altered.

The practice of consanguineous marriages is prevalent among some of the endogamous groups under investigation (please see Chapter III). The frequency of such marriages, however, is not known for all the groups. Sanghvi, et.al., (1956) reported data on the frequency of consanguineous marriages in twelve endogamous groups in Bombay. The two Brahmin groups included in their study are D.R. and S.A. Although the frequency of kin-marriages varied from 4.6% to 11.9% in Marathi speaking Hindus, the D.R. and S.A. had 5.7% and 7.1% respectively.
It may be mentioned here that the frequency of kin marriages is much higher among the people of South India. Dronamraju and Khan (1960, p. 240) reported data on various communities and the frequency of consanguineous marriages varied from 19.23% to 40.54%. In another study Dronamraju (1963, p. 155) reported 666 consanguineous marriages out of 2177 marriages (however, the data this time is not classified according to communities or 'castes'), the percentage being 31.05%. Although it is difficult to establish the antiquity of the said practice in D.E. and S.A. in terms of years, but the importance attached to it certainly indicates a long historicity.

Thus, the frequency of recessive allelomorphs in a population with a long established mating system is expected to be close to equilibrium. And the consanguineous marriages which are practised by some of the groups would not matter effectively in evaluating the data.

EARLIER BIOLOGICAL STUDIES IN MAHARASHTRA:

An attempt has been made below to give in short a brief summary of the various morphological and genetical studies carried out in Maharashtra, particularly pertaining to the groups under investigation.
The results of the present studies have critically been compared with the earlier studies.

As early as in 1915 Risley attempted a scientific anthropometric survey of the people of India. In his survey certain Maharashtrian groups were also included. Soon after his survey was published, two major drawbacks were brought to notice viz., (1) that his way of the selection of the individuals was biased, and (2) he followed Topinard's techniques. Therefore, Risley data cannot strictly be compared with the present data and where-ever certain differences are noticed, they should not be taken seriously. Moreover, as Risley has not mentioned the S.E. of individual characters it is not possible to apply statistical tests. It may also be mentioned that although Risley's studies contributed significantly towards the understanding of racial composition of the people of India, he could not encompass all the 'castes', the ultimate significant social unit.

Guha (1931) undertook a more detailed survey than his predecessor. Apart from other groups he included C.Hv, S.A., K.R. and Deshaatha Brahmins in his study. Even Guha has been charged of faulty way of selection of the subjects. A close examination of the comparative tables LVII - LXIII, reveals that there are significant
It is interesting to observe that wherever *nasion* is involved, there are significant differences. Although in both the studies same landmark has been used, it appears that the differences have been caused because of the difficulty in locating landmark *nasion*. It may, however, be stated that the present writer has strictly adhered to the Martin's definition (Chap.II). Thus the differences in N.L., U.F.H., T.F.H. etc., can be attributed to the above reason.

In characters O.N.B. and O.N.A., significant differences are observed. The slightly higher values obtained by Guha can be explained on the basis that he used different landmarks for these measurements. Instead of measuring O.N.B. between two exocanthions, (see Chap.II) he measured between the lateral bony margins of orbits. The landmark exocanthion is slightly medially placed when compared to the point considered by Guha and this difference of distance between the landmarks accounts for the difference in the reading.

Therefore to the present author it appears that the observed differences between Guha's data and the present study can mostly be explained on the basis of differences in techniques employed.
A more detailed investigation was done by Karve (1941, 1948, 1951) wherein she included a large number of endogamous groups. Unfortunately as her data lacks S.E. of means of individual characters, the differences cannot be evaluated. However, some of the apparent differences observed in A.H. etc., were explained by Sarkar (1951-52) and Rakshit (1960).

Kurulkar (Sanghvi, 1953) measured three Brahmin groups viz., D.R., M.A. and C.H. Except for group D.R. in rest of the groups there are no significant differences.

Although comprehensive morphological studies as indicated above were done in Maharashtra, only a few studies on their genetical aspect have been attempted. Karve (1941, 1948, 1951) initiated blood group studies and since then Sanghvi (1949, 1953, 1954 etc.) Khanolkar (1955), Rife and Malhotra (1963), Basu (1964) contributed significantly towards the understanding of genetic composition of various endogamous groups. However, these studies, limited as they were, could not encompass all the 'castes'.

1. However, a study in that direction has already been started and it is the hope of the writer to present the results in a separate paper.

2. It may be pointed out here that Bickstedt also measured some of the groups of Maharashtra. As his work could not be obtained no comparison with his data is attempted.
A comparison of the observed frequencies of the various characters considered herein with the other studies have been tabulated in Table LXIII. It will be observed that between Sanghvi and Khanolkar’s (1949) data and present study for groups C.H., D.R. and N.A., except for sex-linked colourblindness in case of D.R., there are no significant differences.

Thus the differences observed above in some of the characters, may be due to (a) error in sampling (b) differences in technique employed and (c) some of the differences may suggest a micro-evolutionary trend.