The caste system in India is as old as our civilization and culture. It is the system on which the traditional order of the Hindu Society is based and it is believed to have immemorial antiquity. The complex nature of the caste structure is evident from the fact that even after a century and a half of painstaking and meticulous research in the history and function of the social system, we do not possess any conclusive explanation of the circumstances that might have contributed to the formation and development of this unique system in India. The sense of discrimination became an effective instrument which proved dangerous retarding expected progress in our society. This indeed led to the emergence of a few rodents’ reformers whose sincere efforts were directed to being about equality by granting socio-economic, religious and political concessions to the economically weaker sections. The main significant idea is to bring them at par with the upper castes and communities. It is perhaps true that the most frequently mentioned peculiarity of the traditional Hindu Society is the institution of caste or as it more frequently called the caste system. The social institutions that resemble caste in one respect or the other is not difficult to find elsewhere, but it is only in India that it is known as caste. The caste system has survived in a far perfect form in India than elsewhere, but it seems that the India caste system is not an isolated phenomenon as it is often thought to be, but a species of a very wide spread genus comparable forms still exist in Polynesia.

12. Ibid.
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and Melanesia, and that clear and in modern Egypt. Hutton finds analogues institutions which resemble caste in one or other of its aspect in various part of the world like Ceylon, Fiji, Egypt, Somali, Rwanda and Urundi in Modern Africa and Burma.

Ghurye traces elements of caste outside India like Egypt, Western Asia, Chine, Japan, America, Rome and tribal Europe. It is true that social and racial differences in some form or the other do prevail in other parts of the world but the kind of system found in India is characterized more by its specific unique features like the complexity, elaboration and rigidity than by such features which it shares with caste structure elsewhere. The caste system that has developed in India is the natural result of the interaction of a number of geographical, social religious and economic factors not elsewhere found in conjunction. It is the peculiarity of India that it recognized the social differences inherent with a religious and spiritual background.

The caste system is one that is composed of small and ranked groups of persons, called jatis, each of which is a hereditary, endogamous group having a traditional association with an occupation and each is usually associated with more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system used on the concepts of purity and pollution. Relative rank affects almost all social relations. Most interaction among people of different groups involves consideration of superiority and inferiority, and superiority means greater privileges, precedence, and a large stake of the good things in life. Thus caste is not only a cultural system concerned with ideas and values but also a structural system consumed with privileges and deprivation, domination and subjugation, surplus and exploitation. The caste groups are interdependent, each need the services or goods provided by others, called the layman system. But they are hold together by religious sanction and the coversine power wielded by the superior castes.

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14 Hutton, J.H. *Caste in India*, Oxford University Press, 1946. Chapter – IX.
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As a system of social relations caste has a central point in Hindu society for several centuries.17

Caste in India is a social institution, deriving sanction and intimately interwoven with the Hindu religion. Membership of a caste is compulsory and not a matter of choice. A person is born into it. It is practically impossible for individuals to change their caste. Each caste boasts of a peculiar tradition of culture and tries to preserve it’s tenaciously. The customs by which other castes sometimes in marked their contract to those of any other caste. The caste system provides the individual member of caste with rules which must be observed by him in the matter of food, marriage divorce, birth, initiation and death.18 Wilson19 sums up in his own inimitable way as follows: Caste gives its directions for recognition acceptance, consecration and sacramental dedication and vice-versa, of a human being on his appearance in this world. It has for infancy, pupilage and manhood, its ordained method of sucking, sipping, drinking eating and voiding, of washing ring sing, risign and reclining; of moving, visiting and traveling, of speaking, reading listing, and reciting and of meditating, singing working, playing and fighting. It has its laws for social and religious rights, privileges, and occupations; for instructing training and educating; for obligation, duty and practices; for divine recognition, duty and ceremony, for errors, sins, and transgressions; for intercommunion avoidance, and excommunications; for defilement, ablution, and purification; for fines, chastisements, imprisonments, mutilations, banishments, and capital executions. It unfolds the ways of committing what it calls sin, accumulating merit, and losing merit. It treats of inheritance, conveyance, possession, and dispossession; of bargains, gain, loss and ruin. It deals with death, burial, burning; and with commemoration, assistance and injury after death. It interferes, in short with all the relations and events of life and with what precedes and follows life.20

18 Ramesh Chandra. *Identity and generic of caste system in India*, Kalpaz Publication, New Delhi.
20 Wilson, quoted in Prof. Ramesh Chandra.Supra note 6.
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It is obvious that such a system of social stratification divides the society into thousands of small, hereditary and endogamous groups, each cluster of groups having its own distinctive set of customs and practices, which together form a hierarchy. Each such group of caste or jati is associated with one or more traditional occupations and related to the other by means of an elaborate division of labour. Each caste pursues, within limits, its own style of life, having distinctive customs in the matter of dress, diet, rituals, etc. and is characterized by a degree of social and cultural identity within the country every region has its distinctive culture as well as its distinctive patterns of casts and sub-castes. Moreover a particular caste is a complex group, a successive inclusion of groups of diverse orders or levels, in which different functions are attached to different levels. Finally, for more than a group in the ordinary sense the caste is a state of mind, a state of mind which is expressed by the emergence, in various situations, of groups of various orders generally called castes. The caste systems is above all a system of ideas and values, a formal, comprehensible, rational system, a system in the intellectual sense of the term.21

2. II. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CASTE SYSTEM

The origin of the caste system is highly controversial. The exact origin of caste system cannot be traced. The system is said to have originated in India. The records of the Indo-Aryan culture contain the first mention and a continuous history of the factors that make up caste. The people who are known as Indo-Aryans belong linguistically to the larger family of peoples designated either as Indo-Europeans or as Indo-Germans. They comprised the Anglo-Saxons the Cetts, the Romans, the Spanish, the Portuguese and the Iranians among others. One of the branches of these peoples which reached India about 2,500 B.C. is called Indo-Aryans Caste in India has had a history going back to the varnas of the Vedic times. (C. 1500 – 800 B.C.)

CASTE - The term caste, originally used by the Portuguese refers to endogamous groups which in Sanskrit, are called Jatis. According to Vidya Bhushan, the word ‘caste’ owes its origin to the Spanish word ‘casta’ which means breed, race, strain or a complex of hereditary qualities. The Portuguese applied this term to the classes of people in India known by the name of Jati. The English word caste is an adjustment of the original term. The number of works dealing with the origin and characteristics of the caste system in India is legion. The origin of caste has been rise to great speculation and several authors lay undue emphasis on the elements or attach for too much importance to one point in tracing the origin of the caste system and its ramifications, such as race, tribe, occupation, as very rightly commented by D.N. Mazumdar, there are today as many theories regarding the origin of the system s there are writers on the subject.

The earliest speculation regarding the origin of caste system can be traced to the Mythological story of creation of the Four Varnas embodied in the Purusasukta (Hymn of man) of the Rig Veda. The hymn appears in the Rig Veda as well as in the Atharva Veda; in the Rig Veda it is RV. X. go.90-12 and in the Atharva Veda Av. XIX.6.6. Both stand in the name of one Rishi Narayan. It is reproduced with slight changes in the later Vedic literature and in the traditions of the epic Puranas and Dhanasastras. It states that the Brahmans emanated from the muth of the primitive man, the Khatriya from his arms, the Vaisya from his thighs and the Sudra from his feet. In point of time, the Purusasukta version may be ascribed to the end of the period of the Atharva Veda, in which it occurs in the latest portion. It seems to provide a theoretical justification for the disintegration of tribal society into classes. The
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Brahmanas were assigned teaching and studying (Veda or knowledge), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting of alms. The Khatriyas were to be ruler and warriors protecting the people, offering sacrifices, studying (the Veda); and abstaining from sensual pleasures. The Vaisya were to tend cattle, cultivate land, offer sacrifices, study the Veda, to trade and to lend money, the Shudras were to serve meekly the other three castes. According to Manu’s injunctions, the Brahmanas’ ideological activity of teaching the Vedas is graded higher than the Khatriyas political and military activity of the political management of the society. In turn, Khatriya’s activity of managing the state is higher than all the other economic activities of cattle wearing, money-lending, trade, and cultivation. The Shudras, at the lowest level, provide their toil in the service of the other three Varnas, the three superior Varnas, in subsequent elaborations of the Varna Dharma ideal, came to be known as ‘twice-born’.

In the later Vedic Period, as more and more different tribal peoples were absorbed within the spreading boundaries of the Aryan Society there emerged the untouchables, also called the ‘fifths’ (Panchamas) or outcasts.

European writers on the subjects of caste origins know about the racial difference between castes, high and low, and consciously or unconsciously, linked their findings to race weal wrote that the whole history of India, from the earliest times, had been one long story of colour prejudice and that more cruelty had probably been displayed there than in the rest of the world, believed that the Aryan races, who were white simply devised the iron system of castes to prevent the undue mixing of a dominant race with black inferior race. Sir Herbert Risley argued in his work the people of India (1908) that the caste system is the outcome of the encounter between two district racial groups: one, the Aryan people, light skinned and broad nosed, and the other, the dark skinned and narrow-nosed ‘non-Aryans’. The latter are usually referred to as Dasas in the Vedic literature. Risley explains that the Aryans, the

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dominant group, adopted the practice of hyperamy. Hypergamous marriages between
the fair Aryans and the dark non-Aryans led to the formation of a series of
intermediate groups whose social ran varied directly with their amount of Aryan
blood.

The racial significance of the caste system was recognized by Sir Herbert
Risley\textsuperscript{28}, who traced the origin of caste from Indo-Aryan immigration into India. The
prehistoric migration of the Indo-Aryans from Persia, where a four-fold division of
society was known, laid down the structure of social grouping, and the clash and
fusion of cultures between the invading people, on the one hand, and the indigenes, on
the other, who belonged to separate racial stock inferior to the immigrants, brought
about the super-structure which was the caste system. The motives principle of Indian
caste is to be sought in the antipathy of the higher race for the lower, of the fair
skinned Aryan for the black Dravidions. The invading Aryan displayed a marked
antipathy to marriage with persons of alien black race and devised an elaborate
system of taboo for the prevention of such unions. But intermarriage could not
altogether be prevented. The continual contact between the Aryan and Dravidian
elements created a series of endogamous groups, which may be roughly classified as
Ethnic, provincial or Linguistic Territorial or Local, Functional or Occupational,
Secretarian, and social. In the first of these classes the race basis is palpable and
acknowledged whereas in the remaining other classes a fiction has been generated that
they must be of a fundamentally different race. Risely\textsuperscript{29}, therefore, concluded that
“Caste was an institution evolved by the Aryans in the attempt to preserve the purity
of their own stock, and afterwards expanded and adapted, by the influence of a series
of fictions, to fit an endless variety of social, religious, and industrial conditions.

\textsuperscript{28} Quated in Ramesh Chandra. \textit{Identity and Genesis of Caste system in India}, Kalpaz Publication,
\textsuperscript{29} Risely, \textit{the Tribes and Castes in Bengal}, quoted in Ibid note.
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Among the Indian writers Hayavadana Rao\(^{30}\), S.C. Roy\(^{31}\), N.K. Dutt, G.S. Ghurye and D.N. Mazumdar\(^{32}\), have linked caste with the racial factor. The initialtin of the India caste structure has been credited to the Indo-Aryans, and the Varna is regarded as a concept or racial origin, diluted in course of time through race mixture and hybridization which have resulted from intermarriage on the principles of hypergamy and of Anuloma (meaning with the hair, i.e., natural) and pratiloma (meaning against the hair, i.e., unnatural) unions, as they are found even in present times. Dr. Ghurye emphasizes in particular the factor of precisely manipulation by Brahmans attempting to maintain the purity of Aryan invaders. According to him, ‘castle in India is a Brahminic child of the Indo-Aryan culture, cradled in the land of the Ganges and the Jamuna and thence transferred to other parts of India. He also thanks that endogamy the outstanding feature of the system, was first developed by the Brahmans in the plains of northern India and thence conveyed as a cultural trait to the other areas.

The colour question in the formation of Caste has also been considered. There was little colour distinctions between the Aryans and the non-Aryans in Europe. But the extreme divergences of colour between the Aryans and the Non-Aryans in India made the invading Aryans conscious of colour or complexion. That the colour question was at the net of the Varna which means colour as well as class and from the great emphasis with which the Vedic Indians distinguished themselves from the non-Aryans in respect of colour. The three higher Varnas were originally distinguished are from the other by the Various shades of colour that were found in earlier days, resulting from the internixture between the immigrants of Intro-Aryan racial stock and the indigenes, either of Dravidian or predravidian or roundhead racial affiliation various factors contributed to such race mixture scarcity of women among the invading group, the settled life with a house and all that it connoted among the

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\(^{30}\) Hayavadan Rao, *Indian Caste System*, Bangalore, 1931, Quoted in Ramesh Chandra Book.

\(^{31}\) Supra Note 28.

\(^{32}\) Majumdar, D.N. and Madan T.N. *An introduction to social Anthropology*, Asia Publishing House, 1956.
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indigenous population which naturally attracted the nomadic elements of the
immigrant population/ highly developed Dravidian culture with its matriarchal
system; temple worship of the mother goddess, rites, rituals and temple architecture,
priesthood and learning, all have contributed to a racial miscegenation. That class
which retained utmost purity of colour by avoiding intermixture normally gained
precedence in the social scale. The status also depended on the extent of isolation
maintained by the social groups. The Brahmins were white; the Kshatriyas red, the
Vaisayai because of large absorption of black blood were yellowish like the
mullattoes of America and the Sudras black as described in the Mahabharata.

The three higher Varnas have tried to maintain their claims to superior Status
by keeping to themselves the important professions and avocations and jealously
restricting the liberties of others with respect to their means of livelihood. Moreover,
in course of time, the Brahman ritualism became so complicated and the Brahmanic
literature became so developed at a time when writing was not known to them and
everything had to be preserved by memory alone that a special class of men were
required for the purpose who could carry on the profession from father to son and
who could improve their skill and memorials power by the adoption of strictly
hereditary principle. The same system developed in Persia, where the Atharva or
Priests in particular formed something like a caste. They had their secrets which they
were prohibited from divulging; they were spiritual guides of their ration, and none
but the son of a priest could become a priest, a rule which the Persia still maintain.
When two such parallel institutions were noticed in the two neighboring countries in a
high state of development, it is not difficult to assign the beginning of caste system in
the shape of Varna division to the Indo-Iranian period of history as the four-fold
division of society is found both the Avestan Persia and the Rig Vedic India. In
ancient Persia there were the Atharvas (Priests), Rathaesthas (Warriors), Vastriya
Fshuyants (Cultivators) and Huitis (Artisans), the only important difference lay with

33 Mazumdar, D.N., and Madan, T.N., An Introduction to social Anthropology, Asia publishing House,
1956.
regard to fourth class, which was the antaean class in Persia, and the simile or Sudra class in India. But the difference is more apparent than real if me consider that the pursuit of handicrafts was mostly assigned to the slaves or Sudras in India.

Occupational basis of the origin of caste has also been propounded. Common occupation or division of labour is the chief, if not the sole, cause of the foundation of the caste system. This theory was advocated by Nesfield who regarded occupation as the exclusive basis of caste distinction. In his opinion caste originated in India long after the Aryan invaders had been absorbed in the mass of the native people and all racial distinction between the two sets of people, Aryan and aboriginal, had disappeared. Different occupations grouped together men from different tribes into guild castes, which then borrowed the principle of endogamy and prohibition of commensality from the customs of the old tribes and thereby solidified themselves into isolated units. The ranking of any caste as high or low depended upon whether the industry represented by the caste belonged to an advanced or backward stage of culture and thus the natural history of human industries afforded the chief clue to the gradation as well as the formation of the Indian castes. Thus castes following the most primitive occupations like hunting, fishing, basket making, etc, were regarded as the lowest, the metal workers, agriculturists, and traders were higher in rank, while the highest castes was of those who were priests and teachers. He went on to add that “function, and function only was the foundation upon which the whole caste system of India was built up”.

A theory of the origin of caste which combines both functional and racial origins has been put forward by Slater in his Dravidian Elements in Indian culture. He emphasizes the fact that caste is actually stronger in Southern than in Northern India, and suggests that caste arose in India before the Arya Invasiana as a result of occupations becoming hereditary and marriages being managed by parents within the society of the Common craft becouse sexual maturity developed early and trade secrets were thus preserved. As a result of magic and religious ceremonies also,
exclusive occupational groups were built up, marriage outside which became prejudicial and contras to practice. The Aryan invasion had the effect of strengthening a tendency to associate difference of caste with a difference of colour and of strengthening also a tendency for castes to be placed in a scale of social precedence. He also maintains the existence in the Pre-Aryan society of India of an order of Priest magicians.

Denzil Ibbetson explains caste as arising from a combination of tribal origins, functional guilds and a livitical religion and lays great stress on the tribe. The turning point in the career of a tribe comes when it abandons its wild and nomadic life and adopts a particular occupation as its principal method of economic subsistence. This is the guild stage in caste history, and is common at some period or other of economic progress to all peoples in the world. The formation of guilds of occupational groups naturally led to the recognitions of skills and importance of the various guilds. In an industrial society, the technicians have assumed a dominant and even dictatorial status. In medieval times, the guilds view with one another for predominance in accordance with their economic status exercising various degrees of pressure on the social life of the country. The exaltation of the priestly guild was soon followed by the priests insisting on the hereditary nature of their occupational status, and this led to the formation of endogamous units, as more and more of the guilds wanted to conserve the social status and privileges they enjoyed and to secure these permanently for the member of the guild. The Brahmins set the ball rolling and the various other fluids followed suit and a hierarchical organization established itself. Chappel and Coon\textsuperscript{35} trace the origin of castes to the absorption of aboriginal types, and they also explain formation of new castes with reference to the emergences of new occupations.

The political theory regarding the origin of caste system says that caste system is a clever devise invented by the Brahmins in order to place themselves on the highest ladder of social hierarchy. Dr. Ghurye sates caste is a Brahminic child of

\textsuperscript{35} Quoted in majundar, D.N., and Madan, T.N. An Introduction to social Anthropology, Asia Publishing House, 1956.
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Indo-Aryan culture cradled in the land of the Ganges and thence transferred to other parts of India. The Brahmanic literature of the post Vedic period mentions certain mixed classes and also a group of outcaste classes. Among the four Varnas, the old distinction of Arya and Sudra now appears as Dvija and Sudra. The first three classes are called Dvija (Twice born) because they have to go through the initiation ceremony which is symbolic of rebirth. The Sudra was called “ekhajati” (once Birth). The word ‘jati’ is hence forward employed to mean the numerous sub-divisions of a “Varna”. However, this demarcation is not rigidly maintained. The word “Jati” is sometimes used for Varna. In the Brahmin period the position of the Brahmans increased manifold. The three lower classes are ordered to live according to the teaching of the Brahmin, who shall declare their duties, while the king also is exhorted to regulate his conduct accordingly. The Pre-eminence of the Brahmin had secured him many social privileges sanctioned by the law givers. The Statement that God created the Sudra to be the Slave of all is repeated and he is given the name of “Padaja” (Born from the feet).

As the priestly influence grew in India complicated rules of ritual and conduct were built up and incorporated into the religious books. The Brahmans closed their ranks and tried to maintain their superiority over the other classes. It is true that in the beginning there were no rigid restrictions but slowly and gradually the idea of separation stiffened. It was first the ritual and ceremonial purity which as time went on took an exaggerated aspect. Distinction began to be made between things pure and impure. Restrictions were imposed on food and drink. When the Brahmans closed their ranks, it was but natural that other classes also should follow suit.

Quite a different origin for caste is argued by Hocart, who apparently regards the whole system as originating in ritual. According to him, the basis of the

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36 Ibid.
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caste system is two –fold – descent and sacrifice. Of the two, sacrifice is the essential one; descent is merely a qualification which at times may be dispensed with for even a boy of non-sacrificial lineage can be admitted to royal, priestly or farmer rank by going through the initiation ceremony appropriate to that rank as a result of which he is reborn as a member of the particular rank. Every son of a Brahmin is born of his father but he is also born of the sacrifice, and so is every Kshatriya and Farmer. Hence, such expressions as “the twice born, first born of ritual”. Castes are merely families to whom various offices of the ritual are assigned by heredity. Since rank depends upon certain qualifications, a family can lose its ranks by using its qualifications, i.e., observance of rules which go with certain offices. Since the offices are ritual, the rules are ritual. He regards the caste system as a system for distributing through out the community the various duties connected with the royal ritual and the kings service, which are largely the same, and for ensuring that these duties are performed only by those properly qualified to perform them qualified, that is to say, both by hereditary and knowledge of the rites.

Hutton39 says emphasis on the importance of the primitive conceptions of taboo, mana, magic and soul staff in contributing to the formation of the caste system. He thinks that the primitive attitude to taboo, belief in mana and the resulting taboo on food of, or other contracts with, strangers, which may be infected with the dangerous soul matter of strangers, the occupational division of society as is found among the Naga tribes in Assam, and superstitious regard for everything strange and unfamiliar might have shaped the structure of Indian society. In other words, the fundamental elements of the caste system have been functioning in the primitive society from very early times and the Rig Vedic invaders had only to superimpose their definitely graded social classes on a society already divided into groups isolated by taboos. Roy40 also stresses the importance of the primitive ideas of taboo, mana and soul staff

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in the formation of the caste system Max Weber’s view becomes significant in this context. Caste, according to him, signifies the enhancement and transformation of social distance into a religious or more strictly a magical principle. It is not difficult to trace endogamy, occupational division and untouchability from the dread of uncanny mana the untouchables that developed in this country has been found to be mutual.

It is practiced not only by the Brahmins but by all other castes. Thus, when a Brahman has been in a Kur-echan’s house, the moment he leaves it, the place where he was seated is besmeared with cow dung to remove the pollution. or when a Brahmin enters the Para cherry of the Holiyas, men and women from the settlement come to the outskirt of the village to greet him with cow dung solution broomstick and a garland of torn shoes; these, the Holiyas Say, disarm the Brahmin of his evil mana and the Holiyas Rane little to fear from consequent social interference with the Brahmin. In many areas of south India, the sight of a Brahmin was considered ill omen. Several communities ever observe pollution from the visit of a Brahmin to their village, and parkane Nambakoodatu (Trust Not the Brahmin) has become a saying widespread among the Villagers of Tamilnadu.

The concept of mana or bongo does explain the social distance and personality fixation. It has given rise to innumerable taboos and avoidances. It regulates individual behaviors and group responses and its importance to tribal life and conduct must be conceded. The fear of pollution has also been stressed by Ketkar, who points out that the chief Principles on which the entire caste system depends is that of purity and pollution.

Pillai argues that caste is neither based on political grounds as advanced by the Europeans, nor it is based on divine dispensation as is believed by the orthodox Hindus. The political basis of caste in the presumed invasions of India by the Aryans,

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43 Ibid.
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and case quant enslavement of the original inhabitants. As there is no historical or traditional or archaeological evidence to establish an Aryan invasion, the development of caste on a political basis should be discredited as it is much more based on mistaken interpretation of certain terms used in a single hymn in the Vedas. Hence, Pillai thinks that in the absence of any other evidence, it can safely be stated that Jati or caste originated with the totem and maintained by prohibitions on inter inning and inter marriage.

According to Evolutionary theory\(^47\), the caste system did not come into existence all of a sudden on at a particular date. It is the result of a long process of social evolution. A number of factors played their part in the development of the present caste system. Among these factors we may enumerate the following ones:

(i) Hereditary occupations;
(ii) The desires of the Brahmins to keep themselves pure;
(iii) The lack of rigid unitary control of the state;
(iv) The unwillingness of rulers to enforce a uniform standard of law and custom and their readiness to recognize the ranging customs of different groups as valid;
(v) Belief in re-incarnation and the doctrine of karma;
(vi) Ideas of exclusive family, ancestor worship, and the sacramental meals;
(vii) Clash of antagonistic cultures particularly of the patriarchal and the matriarchal systems;
(viii) Clash of races, colour prejudices and conquest;
(ix) Deliberate economic and administrative policies followed by the various conquerors particularly by the British;
(x) Geographical isolation of the Indian peninsula;
(xi) Static nature of Hindu Society;
(xii) Foreign invasions;
(xiii) Rural social structure.

C. Dwarkanath Gupta, in his book\textsuperscript{48}, writes about the continental Drift theory about the origin of caste system in India. The theory says that the northern part of Australia was linked with the southern part of India, as the eastern part of Africa was linked with the western part of India. As the equator passes through the centre, the climate is very hot on account of direct sun rays. The inhabitants of this part of the world are different from those of the other parts. Short structure, brown colour, black hair, weighty lips, round heads etc., are the important features of the people of the region. Owing to the climate conditions, people’s working efficiency is low. Due to this the people of this region could not make progress compared to the progress achieved by people in other parts of the world. Taking advantage of this backwardness the Dravidians were the first to attack the aborigines of India. They were a nomadic people and wanted to live a settled life. After defeating the natives of India, they settled some of the defecated natives joined the Dravidians and some fled away into forests and mountain regions. Later on the Dravidians attained a higher sage of civilization as compared with other races.

After the Dravidians, another major attack against India was made by the Aryans. It is believed that the Aryans originally inhabited central Asia from where they spread to east and west. The Dravidians were defeated by the Aryans. The defeated aboriginals were made slaves in the Aryan social order, given low status in society and assigned the duties of serving other people. Those who did not accept slavery were driven into forests and they remained aboriginals with their social, economic, and cultural distinctions. Some turned to a nomadic way of life and began to roam from place to place.\textsuperscript{49} In this way ancients Indian Society was divided into four classes: the Aryans, the Anarayans, the aboriginals and the nomadic aboriginals criminal tribes. It was during the early Vedic period there were only two main classes; Aryans and Anaryans. Though there was no sharp distinction between their


\textsuperscript{49} Supra Note 40.
relationships, their cultures differed widely. The feeling of superiority was there in the minds of the Aryans since they were the conquerors with a distinct philosophy and religion of their own\textsuperscript{50}.

In the Rig Veda age there were only two classes: The Aryans and the Anaryans. The Anaryans were the enemies of the Aryans. The Aryans defeated the Anaryans who were considered dasas, and at later period the ‘dasas’ were assigned the status of ‘Sudras’ in the Varna Vyavastha hierarchy. The advent of Ajans was about 3000 B.C. The Victory of Aryans over Anaryans gave rise to the caste system. The historians are of the opinion that the three Varnas of the Aryans society were already established and the defeated Anaryans were given the status of Sudras\textsuperscript{51}. It appears that the Vedic society was not too rigid. There was not much difference among four Varnas. But in the post Vedic period the Varna Vyavastha was well established and made rigid on the basis of four Varnas – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysya, and Sudras. Immediately after the end of Vedic era, comes the age of Brahmanas, Upanishads and Sutras. The Varna Vyavastha became a social institution.\textsuperscript{52}

Though the caste system as it exists is peculiarly an Indian product, it must be admitted that the elements of the system existed or still exists in other countries also. One may refer to the colour problem in the united states of America as essentially a caste problem though the commensal taboo does not operate there with any regiour or to comparable forms as existed in medieval Ceylon, Ancient Iran, Ancient Rome and Greece, Ancient Egypt or as exists, in Polynesia, Melanesia a even in modern Egypt. One may also refer to the occupational hereditary groups in the Western Roman Empire as created by the Theodesian Code. Such groups could not have been created overnight unless elements of social segregation where there\textsuperscript{53}. In many societies there

\textsuperscript{50} C. Dwarkanath Gupta, Socio-Cultural History of an Indian Caste, Mital Publications New Delhi – 110059 (India). 1999.
\textsuperscript{51} Supra Note 40.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
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is a tendency of divisional occupation on racial lines so much so that particular occupation becomes associated with a particular tribe Ketker\textsuperscript{54} finds numerous cases of this kind in America.

The different theories, mentioned above, only go to show that only one or two factors cannot be indicated as probably contributing to the emergence and development of the caste system in India. On the other hand, it can be stated that caste in India is unique and peculiar because it is a composite institution, having a complex origin in the combination of geographical, historical, ethnic, social, economic, religious and political factors which have been operative only in India\textsuperscript{55}. The attempt to solve the problem of origin, requires a keen eye to discriminate between things certain, probable and plausible, a profound sense of the realities of life, and the faculty of appreciating stronger and psychological situations and even with all these qualities, it is very difficult to attain certitude in the problem's solution. There must be always wide gaps and interspaces where one can only measure possibilities, draw certain inferences, note half-seen indications, and where, after all, one can but choose the least unlikely clue among many, Sir Alfred Lyall’s warning was never more needed than when one sets out to explain the origin of caste in India; the most careful inquirer will probably never attain certitude in the solution of this problem, and all that sums possible is to choose, the least unlikely clue by reference to probabilities\textsuperscript{56}.

A. ANCIENT AGE

• VEDIC PERIOD

\textsuperscript{56} Supra Note 45.
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RIG VEDA - The extent to which caste had been developed in the age of the Rig Veda Samhita has formed a subject of keen controversy among scholars. The uncertainty regarding the exact interpretation of the basic words and phrases in the Rigveda, and the relative chronology of the various restraint passages scattered throughout that Veda, make it difficult to arrive at any conclusion that is likely to meet with general acceptance. We shall, therefore, state first of all in detail the most widely accepted version in a sense, almost the recognized version of the development of caste in the Rig Veda, contenting ourselves with only a brief statement of divergent views. Much confusion will be avoided, if we keep in view the fact, generally agreed to, that the development of caste has been a progressive one, and that we should not expect in the Rig Veda Samhita the picture of the caste system which is presented even in the Yayurveda Samhitas.

There are various speculations in later Brahmanical literature regarding the origin of castes. The most common is that which represents the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras to have been created respectively from the head, breast or arms, the thighs, and the feet of the creator. An echo of this is found in a hymn of the Rig Veda (X-90), the famous pursusha-Sukta, which describes the mythical legend of the Sacrifice of a priveval giant called purusha, the ideal ‘Man’ or world-spirit. The relevant passage has been translated thus: “When (the gods) divided purusha, into how many parts did they cut him up? What was his mouth? What arms (had he)? What (two objects) are said to have been his thighs and feet? The Brahanas was his mouth; the Rajanya was made his arms; the being (called) the Vaisya, he was his thighs; the Sudras sprang from his feet”.

This passage refers to the first three castes not as sprung from but as identical with, the mouth, arms and the thighs of the creator. But in spite of this difference

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58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
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many regard this hymn of the Rig Veda as the earliest exposition of the later Brahmanical view, and regard the essential features of the caste system as existing even in the earliest Aryan Society in India. This theory has been challenged by many scholars whose views may be briefly stated as follows:

The evidence of the Purusha-Sukta, an admittedly late hymn, is not valid for the bulk of the Rig Veda, which was produced by the as yet un-Brahmanized tribes of Vedic Indians living in the Indus region and the Punjab. The Caste system was developed only later, when a section of these Vedic tribes migrated farther east. The terms Varna (lit. Aryan colour) is used in the Rig Veda of all the three highest castes of later times, being contrasted only with Dasa (the dasyn-Varna or “aboriginal colour). The terms “Rajanya”, “Vaisya” and “Sudra” occur only in the purusha Sukta, the term “Brahmana”, also being rare in the Rig Veda. The term “Kshatriya” of which “Rajanya” is an earlier variant occurs but seldom in the Rig Veda. The term “Brahman” denotes a priest by profession only in some passages, while in others it denotes any person who was distinguished by genius or virtue, or one who, for some reason was deemed especially receptive of the divine inspiration.

It has been shown that the word ‘Varna (Colour) has been applied to Aryans and dasas in the Rig Veda, that these two were opposite camps, that Brahmanas and Kshatriyas are mentioned in the Rig Veda but the word Varna has not been expressly connected with them. The words Vaisya and Sudra do not occur in the Rig Veda except in the Purusasukta. The transition from the casteless, through classified, society of the bulk of the Rig Veda to the elaborate caste system of the Yajur Veda is to be traced to the complication of life resulting from the further migration of the Vedic Aryans from the Punjab to the cast. The necessity of carrying on a ceaseless

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
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fight with, and the conquest of, the above aborigines called for an organization of the conquring people by the merger or fusion of pettye tribes into centralized kingdoms. Thus emerged the powerful monarch, while the lesser tribal princes, deprived of their royal rank, sank to the position of nobles. The monarchy, moreover, needed now a standing armed force, prepared to meet all eventualities such as resisting the sudden incursions of native or other Aryan tribes and quelling revolts on the part of the subdued aborigines. This standing army was naturally recruited from the rank of the nobility of tribal princes and the chief armed retainers of the king. This is the genesis of the warrior class. At the same time, the ‘people’ of the Aryan masses, secure in the protection afforded by the warrior class, ceased to take interest in military matters and settled down to a peaceful life devoted to agriculture pastoral pursuit, trade, and industry. They constituted the third class the vis, later called ‘Vaisyas’⁶³. Side by side also grew a distinct community of priests. In the earlier period, not only the householder but even the petty prince could offer sacrifice to the gods for himself and his people, the ritual being very simple. When the size of the kingdom grew and military and administrative affairs kept the hands not only of the king but also of the warrior class full, while, at the same time, the ritual tended to become more complicated and elaborate, the need was keenly felt of a hieratie order, composed of the more intellectual elements among the non-fighters who could dedicate themselves, undisturbed by the distractions of war or peace to the faithful and exact performance of the highly developed ritual and to the preservation (by word of mouth) of the traditional formulae and sacred hymnology of the Aryans, a heritage in part at least from almost prehistoric times⁶⁴.

As regards the fourth class, the Sudra is mentioned for the first and only time in the ‘Purusha-sukta’. Dasyu and dasa are known to the Rig Veda, both as aborigines, independent of Aryan control and as conquered slaves. The latter may reasonably be supposed to represent the Sudras of the later texts. But not all the


⁶⁴ Ibid.
defeated aborigines could be absorbed as slaves in the royal household as in the houses of individual owners. There must have been whole villages of the aborigines, though under Aryan control. The term ‘Sudra’ was evidently applied to the inhabitants of these villages as well as to the wild hill tribes which lived by hunting and fishing and acknowledged the over lordship of their Aryan neighbors. In course of time it included even Dasyu-Varna (or dark shinned) people who remained beyond the pale of the Aryan state and who were virtually excluded from the religious and ritual cult of the Aryans. The development of the caste system in a rigid form with strictly hereditary and mutually exclusive caste groups, did not take place till the time when the Vedic Aryans had settled down in the middle country and were already Brahmanized enough to look upon the inhabitants of the North West the home of the Rig Veda as uncivilized vratyas because they did not follow the strict caste system.

The view summed up above may be regarded as the one now generally accepted by scholars. According to this recognized version, in the earliest society represented by the bulk of the Rig Veda that were probably different classes and professions, but none, not even the priestly and the warrior classes, were hereditary/ the warriors were drawn from the people at large, and any person with the requisite qualifications could officiate as a priest. This view is not however, accepted by some whose agreements may be briefly stated thus.

(1) The main, if not the earliest part of the Rig Veda was in all probability, composed not in the Punjab but in the east, in the country later known as the Madhyadesa or Brahmavarta. So the argument based on the non-brahmanical character of the Vratyas of the Indus and the Punjab becomes pointless. (2) The term Brahmans, “Son of a Brahman or Priest,” suggests that the priesthood was namely hereditary. There is no definite instance of a person other than a priest exercising priestly functions, nor was

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
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this feasible as the priesthood, even in the RigVeda, distinguishes within its fold a vast number of sub-groups of specialists and experts. (3) The power of the Purohita over the king in the Rig Veda, derivable from the fact that the correct performance of the sacrifice demanded the services of a hereditary priest, is nearly as great as in the Post RigVeda age. (4) The RigVeda knows of a ruling class the Kshatriya who, as a class of nobles, are appropriately named in the perusha Sukta as “Rajanya” or man of kingly family” As kingship was normally hereditary, the Kshatriyas were also in all probability as hereditary body. The Sudras were admittedly a separate group; so all the elements of the caste system were in existence in the age of the RigVeda. (5) There are glimpses in the Rig Veda, of a threefold (VIII. 35. 16-18) or fourfold (1.113.6) division of the people, corresponding to the well known three upper or all the four divisions of the caste system. (6) The existence of similar classes among the Iranians, namely priests, warrior, agriculturist, and artisans, makes it very probable that by the time of the RigVeda the four classes had developed into hereditary caste groups owing to the contact of the Arya-Varna, Aryans with the dark-skinned aborigines and the necessity this imposed on Aryan society of reorganizing its whole structure.

Although there is great force in some of these objections, it must be conceded that they are not strong enough to upset the recognized version. The existence of the four classes in Avestan literature certainly argues for the existence of some what similar classes in Rig Vedic society, but much stronger positive evidence is necessary to establish that these classes were hereditary Further, the term Brahmana, son of a priest, occurs very rarely, and the word Brahmaputra, in the same sense, is found only once. This, when contrasted with the numerous references to Brahman, seems to indicate that there was no idea of hereditary priesthood in the earlier Vedic period.

On the whole, it is difficult not to agree with the views, propounded long ago by Muir, that the Brahmans (far less the Kshatriyas or Vaisyas) did not constitute an exclusive caste or race, and that the prerogatives of composing hymns and officiating
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at the services of the gods were not regarded, in the age of the Rig-Veda, as entirely confined to men of priestly families. The same this was equally, or perhaps more, true of the minor professions, as the hymn refers to the father, mother and the son following three different vocations in life, viz. those of a poet, a grinder of corn, and a physician. The heredity of occupation was, therefore, not yet a recognized principle, far less an established fact. The utmost that can be said is that there were recognized professions like priesthood, or distinctions of nobility and these had in many cases a tendency to become ditary here, but as in other countries of societies, theirs ranks might have been recruited from all sections of the community of the other essential features of the caste system.

ATHARVA VEDA

The term Varna is used definitely in the sense of caste without reference to colour, in this age. The system of caste, whose beginnings may be traced in the broad fourfold classification of society in the Rig-Veda age, developed during this period in various directions. Many causes contributed to the rise of sub castes and other caste divisions. Guilds of workers tended to crystallize into castes, as occupations became more or less hereditary, as example we may cite the chariot makers the smiths, the leather workers, and the carpenters. The peculiar family constitution or the gotra tradition, whereby exogamy as well as endogamy regulated marriage connections, and whereby a man should normally marry a woman of equal birth, i.e., within his caste, but not of the same genes or within the gotra, was another factor in the development of complications and distinctions in the caste system. The original race feeling or the contrast which the Arya Varna felt between themselves and the Dasyu Varna (Abarigines) and which was sought to be mitigated by the incorporation of the conquered population into the framework of Aryan society by admitting them into the fourth class or caste, left its mark in the shape of the rule of hypergamy, whereby an Aryan could marry a Sudra wife but the Sudra never an Aryan wife. – The same rule was also gradually applied in marriages between the three Aryan classes, and while a
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Brahmana would normally marry a Kshatriya or a Vaisya girl, and the Kshatriya a Vaisya girl the male of a lower class could not ordinarily marries a girl of a higher class. This peculiar feeling as a mixed marriage is fundamental to all caste divisions and may be looked upon as the third factor in caste elaboration during this age\textsuperscript{68}.

It was the third caste group that of the Vaisyas which by virtue of its occupations came into the closest touch with the fourth caste group, that of the Sudras. The latter was continually receiving accretions from the conquered aboriginal’s population and could not therefore keep up its cultural purity to the Aryan level. There arose, the necessity of cleanly distinguishing the Aryan Vaisyes from the Sudra who was a doubtful Aryan\textsuperscript{69}.

Along with their functions and duties, the privileges and status of the four castes were being differentiated minutely in the religious and social spheres. The Satapatha Brahmana prescribes varying sizes of femoral mounds for the four castes. The deities to whom victims of the different castes are offered in the purushamedha are different. Different degrees of politeness are noticed in the modes of address prescribed for the four castes.

The Sudra class was naturally the hardest hit in these invidious distinctions, but the texts are not consistent in the position they assign to it. The Sudra cannot milk the cow for the Agnihotra milk according to the Kathaka Samhita, but the Satapatha Brahmana gives the sudra a place in the some sacrifice and the Taittiriya Brahmana prescribes formula for establishing the sacrificial fire for the rathakara also who was counted a Sudra. The Aitareya Brahmana however lays down the most reactionary doctrine. It prescribes the Sudra as Yatha-Kama-Vadhya (fir to be beaten with impunity), who could be expelled at will and who is always the servant of another. It is also declared that the Sudra has no rights of property as against the rajanya,

\textsuperscript{68} R.C. Majumdar (Ed). \textit{The History and Culture of the Indian People}. Vol. I. The Vedic Age Bharati Vidya Bhavan, Kalpati Marge Mumbai – 7. 1996.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
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especially the king. How far these extreme views were actually followed in practice it is difficult to say.

The Vaisya class was engaged in agriculture, pastoral pen suits, industry, and trade, and paid tribute to the kind and the nobles, in return for the protection given to them. A late passage in the Aitareya Brahama gives rather a low estimate of him with reference to the Kshatriya, when it says that ‘he is to be lived on by another and to be oppressed at will’. Although things might not have been really so bad as this there is no doubt that the position of the Vaisya was steadily deteriorating in this age.

The Kshatriya class was composed of the king’s relations, his nobility, his retainers and other chiefs of petty states. They fought for the protection of the country and maintained peace. They received revenue in kind from the people or masses during war. For their normal or peace time subsistence some of them were probably granted villages, because the Gramani seems to have been more often a nominee of the king rather than a popularly elected officer, and probably the post was hereditary in such cases. Others had their lands cultivated by tenants. In war, they were helped by the people, who fought alongside them.

While it is generally recognized that the Brahmana and the Kshatriya have undoubted precedence over the Vaisya and Sudra, there is not the same unanimity in respect of the relative position of the first two. The more common view is that the Brahmana is superior to the king as recorded in the Vajasaneyi Samhita and the Satapatha, Aitareya and Panchavimsha Brahmanas. The Brahmana is dependent on the king and takes a lower seat by his side, but is superior to the king. A Kshatriya can never get along without a Brahmana while a Brahmana can: nay, the power of the Kshatriya is derived from the Brahmana. On the other hand, the Kathaka Samhita says that the Kshatriya is superior to the Brahmana, while the Aitareya rates the Brahmana rather low, describing him as a receiver of gift a drinker and as liable to be removed at will. Though this is not the common view at this age it explains some facts very

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70 Supra Note 58.
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satisfactorily; the fact, for example that many kings were seers of hymns and sacrifices, and some of them were even instructors of Brahmanas in the Brahmanical lore.\textsuperscript{71}

Brahmanas are contrasted with the members of the three other castes as the privileged eaters of the oblation. According to some scholars the Brahmanas were divided into two, classes the purohitas of the kings, who guided their employers by their counsel and the ordinary village priests, who led quiet lives.\textsuperscript{72} In the view of the present writer\textsuperscript{73} there were not separate classes as such. Any one of the ordinary priests could come into contact with the king when they were engaged in some great festival and could be selected for the post of purohita, if found pre- eminent and distinguished for his learning. The post remained hereditary, only if the son was as well qualified as the father. Imprecations against royal oppressors of Brahmanas in the Atharvaveda and the statements wherein that kings that persecute the Brahmanas do not prosper, suggest on the one hand that the persecution of Brahmanas was not unknown, and on the other, the gradual consolidation of the prest of the priesthood. Even though a passage in the Aitareya exalts the Rajanya above the Brahmana whom the former can control, the references to the vaish only as the subjects of the king, suggest that the Brahmana class received preferential treatment and enjoyed certain privileges and exemptions denied to the other caste groups. The greed and lunning of the Brahmanas and many prerogatives claimed by them are reflected in the Atharvaveda and other texts, but they may not be a true picture of the class as a whole. There can be hardly any doubt that many of them deserved the highest position in society by their character and intellect.

The most glaring evil of the caste system, namely the doctrine of the impurity communicated by the touch or contact of lower castes (known as “Untouchability” to day) had not yet reached its ugly head. Restrictions on inter dining are known, but not

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
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on the basis of caste. Great importance is attached to purity of descent in the Samhitas and Brahmanas, but there are instances of Brahmanas of impure descent such as Kavasha. Vatsa, and Satyakama Jabala. On the whole it is quite clear that caste had not yet become a rigid system. And none of the three factors which definitely characterize it today, viz., prohibition of inter-dining and intermarriage, and determination by hereditary descent, was yet established on a secure basis.

- DHARMASASTRAS

The Rigveda used the term ‘Varna’ to mean colour or light and this Varna is associated with groups of people having a skin of a dark or fair colour. It has been shown that the word ‘varna’ has been applied to Aryas and dasas in the RigVeda. Brahmanas and Kshatriyas are mentioned in the RigVeda, but the word Varna has not been expressly connected with them. The words Vaisya and Sudra do not occur in the Rigveda except in the Purusasukta but even in that hymn the word vana is not employed with reference to them. It may be conceded that at the time when the purusasukta was composed the community was divided into four groups, viz, Brahmmana, Kshtriya, Vaisya and Sudras. The Taittiriya Brahmana, with reference to the Mahabrata, says that the Brahmana is the divine Varna and Sudra is the asura Varna. If we can interpret Rigveda verse with the help of the Taittiriya Brahmana then in Rig Veda, the words “asuryam Varnam” mean “Sudra tribe’. There is no doubt that the word asura when applied to gods like Varuna has another meaning also in the RigVeda.

As we have seen earlier that in Rigveda the word Vaisya and Sudra did not occur except in the Punusasukte, though both of them occur in the Atharva Veda. The position of three varnas inter see (called collective by arya) – it is clear that the samhitas other than the Rigveda and Brahmana works show that the three classes of

75 Supra Note 65.
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bhadhrmanas, kshatriyas and vaisyas had become differentiated and their privileges
duties and liabilities had become more or less fixed in those time. In Rig-Veda we
read that king alone who places brahma first dwell happy in his house, far him the
earth always remains prosperous and to him all the people bow down of their own
accord. Brahmanas are gods that are directly seen. There are two kinds of gods: for
indeed the gods are gods and Brahmans who have studied and teach the sacred lore
are the human gods’. In the Atharvaveda, there is an assertion of the pre-eminence of
brahmanas and the consequences of harming them or their cows. Therefore the
brahmanas is the foremost. Therefore the brahmana shows his might by his mouth,
since he was created from the mouth. In the Aitriya Brahmana Varuna, when he was
told that a Brahmana boy would be offered in place of the son of the king Haris
Chandra is made to say ‘a brahmana is indeed preferable to a Ksatriya. On the other
hand Satapatha Brahmana says ‘a brahmana is not adequate to manage a kingdom’
In the Taittriya Brahman, it is said that playing on the vina is to be done by a Brahmana
and a rajana. The satapatha Brahman lays emphasis on the four peculiar attributes of
Brahmana, viz., brahmanyay (Purity of parentage as a brahmana), Pratirupa Carya
(befitting deportment or conduct), Yasas (glory) and lokapakti (the teaching or
perfecting of people). When the people are being perfected or taught by him, people
endow him with four privileges. Area (Honour), Dana (Gifts), Ajyeyata (Freedom
from being harassed) and avadhata (Freedom from being beaten). The Satapatha
expressly mentions that brahmana, rajanya, vaisya, and sudra are the four varnas.
Teaching had become so much associated with the Brahmanas that when the
brahmana Gargya approached King Ajatasatru for the knowledge of Brahma, the
latter replied ‘this is Contrary to the natural order that a brahmana should approach a
Ksatriya with the idea ‘he (Ksatriya) will propound to one brahma’

The position of Ksatriya and their relation to the brahmanas falls. In some
cases rajana means only ‘a noble’ or ‘chief’ as in Rigveda rajan means ‘King.’ The
government often seems to have been tribal, such tribes as Yadus, Turvasa, Druhyus,

76 P.V. Kane, History of Dharmasastra, Vol. II, Part – I –. Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute,
Anus and Purus being frequently mentioned. The king was regarded as keeping the people within bounds. When a king was crowned it was thought that a Kshtriya was produced a lord of all beings, the defender of brahmanas and of dharma. The cooperation between brahmana and Ksatriya results in glory and success is frequently emphasized. Therefore, a Brahman must certainly be approached by a Ksatriya who is about to perform some act, for indeed that act of a Ksatriya which is sped on by brahmana succeeds. The Purohita of a Ksatriya came to occupy a very high position. The Satapatha lays emphasis on the importance of the purohits and cautions a Brahman against being the purohita of any king he meets with and adds that a brahmana may remain without a king, but a king should not be without a brahmana77.

The Taittiriya Samhita, says that the Vaisya indeed sacrifices, being desirous of cattle’ and that the gods having been defeated were reduced to the condition of being the vaisyas or Vis of asuras. The Vaisyas among men, cows among beasts, therefore they are to be enjoyed (to be eaten, to be subsisted upon) by others; they were produced from the receptacle of food : The Taittiriya Brahmana says the vis go away from the brahmanas and Ksatriyas hence the vaisyas though being eaten by others is not exhausted since he was created from the projanans and was produced with the Jagati metre, his season is the rains, therefore he is to be eaten by the brahmana and the rajanya, since he was created as lower than those two classes. The Satapatha Brahmanas says : He thus assigns to the Maruts a share therein after Indra, whereby he makes the people subservient and obedient to the nobility. According to the Aittriya Brahmana the Vaisya is one who is the food of others, who pays taxes to others. These passages show that vaisyas were entitled to sacrifice, reared cattle were for more numerous than the other two classes, they had to bear the brunt of taxation, they lived apart from Brahmans and Ksatriya and were obedient to them78.

Apart from the three varnas mentioned above there were other professions and crafts with specific name (which in later times became castes) even in the time of the

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
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Samhitas is quite clear. It speaks of Vapla (Barber), Tasta (a Carpenter or maker of Chariots), Bhasak (Medicine man) and Karmara or Karmare (Iron Smith). The Atharva Veda mentions rathakara Karmana and suta. In the Taittiriya Samhita mentions is made of Ksar (royal chamberlain or doorkeeper), Samgrahitr (treasures), taksan (Carpenter) and Ratha Kara (Maker of Chariots), Kulala (Potter), Karmara, Punjista (flower), etc. The most of the avocations and crafts referred to above have corresponding castes and sub castes for hundreds of years. It is therefore, possible to say that in the times of the Samhitas and Brahmanas there were groups founded on occupations that had become castes or were in process of developing into castes\(^\text{79}\).

The Vajasaneyi Samhita speaks of Paul Kasa in connection with hibhatsa (necessitating filth) and of chandala in connection with Vayu (wind). The Paulkasa and candela occur in Taittiriya Brahmana. In the Chandogya Upanisada the chandela is ranked with the dog and the boar\(^\text{80}\).

- **DISABILITIES OF SUDRAS**

Many of the Smritikaras and writers of digests quoted several Vedic passages on the point of disabilities of Sudra. According to those passages followings were their disabilities:

(1) Sudras were not allowed to read Veda. Not only was the Sudra not to study the Veda, but veda study was not to be carried on in his presence. This attitude need not cause wonder. The sacred Vedic literature was largely created and preserved entirely by the brahmanas (the Ksatriyas contributing if at all a very small share in that task). If the brahmanas deigned to keep their sacred treasures for the twice born classes in these circumstances, it is understandable and for those ages ever excusable. In the 20\(^\text{th}\) century there are vast majorities who are not allowed by small by small minorities of imperialistic and capitalistic tendencies to control the just and equitable distribution of

\(^{79}\) Supra Note 67.

the material goods produced mostly by the labour and co-operation of those majorities and doctrines are being openly professed that certain races among should be imparted higher and scientific knowledge while other so-called inferior races should be only hewers of wood and drawers of water\footnote{Ibid.}.

(2) The Sudras were not to consecrate sacred fires and to perform the solemn Vedic sacrifices. Among the reasons given are that in several Vedic passages only the three higher classes are referred to in the case of the consecration of fires, about the samans to be sung, about the food to be taken when observing Vrata\footnote{Supra Note 71.}.

(3) As to Samskaras, there is some apparent conflict among and the authorities\footnote{Ibid.}. Manuj says ‘The Sudra in curs no sin (by eating forbidden Articles like onions and garlic), he is not fit for Samskaras, he has no adhikara for dharma nor is he forbidden from performing dharma and in Vishnu Dharmasatra, we see’. One should not give advice to a Sudra, nor give him leavings of food nor of sacrificial oblations; one should not impart religious instruction to him nor ask him to perform Vratas.

(4) Liability to higher punishment for certain offences. If a Sudra committed adultery with a woman of the three higher castes, the prescribed punishment was to cutting off of his penis and forfeiture of all his property and if he was guilty of this offence when entrusted with the duty of protecting her, he was to suffer death in addition.

(5) In the matter of the period for impurity on death or birth the Sudra was held to be impure for a month, while a brahmana had to observe ten days period only. A Sudra could not be a judge or propound what dharma was. Manu lays down that when the king does not himself look into the litigation of people owing to pressure of other business, he should appoint a learned brahmana as a judge\footnote{Ibid.}.

(6) A brahmana was not allowed to receive gifts from a Sudra except under great restrictions. A brahmana could take food at the house of members of the three classes who performed the duties prescribed for them by the sastras but he could not take

\footnote{Ibid.}
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food from a Sudra except when the Sudra was his own cowherd, or tilled his field or was a hereditary friend of the family, or his own barbar or his dasa85.

(7) The Sudra gradually came to be so much looked down upon that he could not touch a brahmana though at one time he could be a cook in a brahman a household and a brahmana could eat food from his house. In the Anusasaraspararna it is daid, a brahmana should be served by a Sudra from a distance like blazing fire; while he may be waited upon by a Ksatriya or Vaisya after touching him. A brahmana on touching a Sudra or nisada becomes pure by acamana; on touching person lower then these, he becomes pure by bathing, pranayama and the strength of tapas.

(8) As the Sudra could not be initiated into Vedic study, the only asrama out of the four that he was entitled to was that of the householder. The life of a Sudra was esteemed rather low.

- MAHABHARATA

In Rigveda86, identical with Atharva Veda, there is evidence of internal struggle among the Aryans themselves. That probably put them into separate groups, each in term called Varna, namely, brahmana, Ksatriya, and Vaishya. The membership of each was determined purely by birth, and each was recognized, according to the theory, by a separate colour of the skin – the brahmana by the white, the Kshatriya by the red the Vaishya by the yellow and the Shudra by the black. No sooner was recounted, in the voice of the sage Bhrigu, what must have been the prevalent colour theory of the origin of the Varna social structure than the Mahabharata dismissed it straight away, in the voice of the sage Bharadvaj.

Bharadvaj -

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85 Ibid.
Historical Retrospect

“But every human body bleeds, defecates, sweats, and has phlegm and life, alike. How can the human beings then be divided into varna of different colours87“?

The Mahabharata88 is throughout concerned not with the colour of one’s skin but with the colour of one’s thoughts, feelings, and acts. It is concerned with the human colours of desires, anger, fear, greed, sorrow and hunger. While the so-called dharmashastras of the Shastric were busy separating people in a fashion thoroughly artificial, an attribute of adharma, the Mahabharata was showing what brings people together in their innate human unity, dharma. The single most important contribution of the Mahabharata in regard to Varna has been to insist that Varna is a special function and not a person. Hence to each of the four Varna a corresponding discipline was attached, an expectation from each, which was functional in the first place89. The respective disciplines, naturally interrelated, were to be, together, the foundation of social progress and social wealth, loka-yatra and loka-samagraha. In that sense, it was a collective discipline of dharma. What is functional has to be at the same time also ethical. Hence the common ethical discipline or samanya dharma, common to all special functions; and the specific discipline, or Vishesha-dharma, specific to each calling. In the event of a conflict between the two, that is, between the ethical and the functional, which one should be decisive? This question, too, was taken up by the Mahabharata. Excepting the abnormal times, during which the functional duties of the four varnas could be transposed, there is a strong and persistent element in the Mahabharata which emphasized the relativity of Varna itself. It was repeatedly hold that the positions of brahmana and Shudra for example, were relative to their conduct. Those were not to be regarded as positions fixed unalterable by virtue of birth.

- GITA

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88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.
Historical Retrospect

It is stated in Gita that the system of four varnas was created on the basis of quality (or on the basis of sattva, rajas and tamas) and actions and it specifies the qualities and actions required in the four varnas as an ideal, viz., serenity of mind, self control, austerity, purity, forbearance, straight forwardness, wisdom (spiritual knowledge,) knowledge (of all kinds), faith (in god) – these are the natural actions (duties) for brahmana, bravery, fury, energy, steadiness, capability, not running away in battle charity and rularship these are duties of a Ksatriya; agriculture, keeping herds of cows (and cattle), trade and commerce-these are the natural duties of the Vaisya; work of the nature of service in the natural duty of the Sudra. If birth had been regarded as the sale or principal basis, the words in the ‘Gita’ should have been ‘Jati-Karmavibhagasah’ (or janmakarma) and not ‘Gunakarma’. It would be noticed that out of the nine Karmani specified as natural to brahmanas most are moral and spiritual and no emphasis is laid on the elements of birth.

• MANUSMIRITIS

Manusmiriti, dated between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D., contains some laws that codified the caste system. Varna is mentioned as caste equivalent in Manusmiriti. Manusmiriti and some other shastras mention four Varnas. The Brahmanas (teacher, Scholars and Priest), the Kshatriyas (King and warriors), the Vaisyas (traders, land owners and some artisans group) and Sudras (agriculturists, service providers, and some artisans groups). Another group of untouchables excluded from the main society was called parjanya or Antyaja. A Varna can be viewed as a group of castes or a social division that consists of various sub-castes called jatis.

In Manu-Samhita, the highest superman in every respect is claimed for a Brahamana, though emphasis is also laid on the superior knowledge and qualifications on which that status rests. He must be well versed in his group of vows and must cultivate universal love. He filled the highest offices of state and society by his character – those of teacher, priest, judge, prime minister. He was punishable in law, but not by
capital punishment. A Brahmana lost his status if he violated the restrictions prescribed as to food and gifts, occupation or profession, and sought for livelihood on the strength of his mere birth or caste without its virtues or ideals. This rule applied to other castes also\(^9\).

As regards the Sudra, ‘service was his portion in life.’ He was not eligible for sacraments, nor for hearing sacred texts except their substance. But he was not denied the rites of marriage, cooking of daily food in the grisha fires, and funeral ceremonies. Manu even mentions Sudra teachers and pupils, showing that the Sudra was not denied the right to learning. On the whole the lot of a Sudra was an unenviable one. Sudra had few privileges and many obligations. The discriminating locus against him and hire social disabilities, uttered with brutal frankness, were an inheritance of the past. But manu treats him exactly like a slave\(^91\) and prescribes barbarous punishments as already noted above.

To what extent these regulations represent the actual state of things it is difficult to say. But the Jataka stories also describe how the chandalas were treated as despised outcastes doomed to live outside the city or village, and their very sight was regarded as impure. We find in this age the beginning of those ideas of untouchability which have cost a slur as Indian civilization. But as yet the sudras were not included in this category\(^92\). The most significant development in the caste system is the large increase in the number of mixed castes. We get the most elaborate account of it in Manu. This review of manusmriti will make it clear that while the old theory of caste, adumbrated in the Vedic, especially the sutra, texts, was developed and elaborated in this age, no new principle was enunciated. Further, though the caste system was gradually becoming more and more rigid, and the lot of the Sudra was becoming


\(^{91}\) Ibid.

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harden and harden, it had not yet reached the stereotyped from in which we find it today.  

The Buddhist and Jain texts also always openly declare the Kshatriyas to be less superior to the Brahmanas, and name the Kshatriyas first in enumerating the four castes. Thus, although the general framework of the caste system is admitted, the supremacy of the Brahmanas is challenged in these texts. The Buddhist texts and other evidence also leave no doubt that the so-called mixed castes really resulted from organizations, like guilds of people following different arts and crafts. The general theory of inter-marriage leading to the different mixed castes is puerile in the extreme. Texts show how the different non-Aryan tribes live Khasas and Dravidas, and even foreigners like sakas, Yavanas, Chinas, etc., were gradually incorporated into Hindu society and formed an integral part of it. The Buddhist texts also show that caste was not rigidly tied to craft in these days. They tell of a Kshatriya working successively as potter, basket-maker, reed worker, garland-maker, and cook, also of a Setthi (Vaisya) working as a tailor and a potter, without loss of prestige in both cases. The Dasas-Brahmana Jataka states how Brahmans in those days pursued ten occupations against rules.

Besides the four established castes of Hindu society the Buddhist pali texts-books speak of the peoples ranking socially below them as hina-jati ‘low tribes’, marked out by their per suits of low crafts, hina-sippa and instance the workers in rushes, fowlers and cart-makers, who were aboriginal peoples; as also mat-makers, barbers, potters, weavers and lather workers.  

- MEGASTHENES ACCOUNTS (DURING THE REIGN OF CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA)

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93 Ibid.  
94 Ibid at 547 - 550  
Historical Retrospect

A graphical account of the caste system is given by Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandra Gupta Maurya. He enumerates seven classes or castes into which the whole population of India is divided, viz. (1) Philosopher, (2) Husbandmen, (3) Herdsmen, (4) Artisans, (5) Military, (6) Overseers or spies and (7) Councilors and Assessors. He adds that no one is allowed to marry out of his own caste, or to exchange one profession or trade for another to follow more than one business. This is undoubtedly a characteristic of the rigid caste system as enunciated in the Brahmanical texts, but it is difficult to believe that the seven categories mentioned by Megasthenes confused the castes with the professions or occupations with which he was more familiar than others. It is significant that he makes no mention of the fourfold divisions of caste, and his obvious contraction between castes and occupations probably indicates that the broad division of society was based on this latter factor rather than on the theoretical classification in the Brahmanical texts of the period96.

B. CLASSICAL AGE

The rules relating to the duties and mutual relations of the four varnas in the preceding period were generally observed during the Gupta Age. We may quote by way of evidence the high authority of Hiuen Tsang, himself an intelligent foreigner belonging to a different faith, which not only refers to the four hereditary castes of Indian society together with their respective occupation, but adds that the members of a caste group marry within the caste. To this we may add that Varahamihira in his Brihat-Samhita assigns the different quarters of a city to the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisya and Sudra, as does Kautilya in his Arthasastra. There were in the Gupta Age as in earlier times undoubted departures from the strict Smriti law. This is proved by a number of authentic instances of Brahmanas and Kshatriyas adopting the occupations of the classes below them, and of Vaisyas and Sudras following those of the classes above them. An inscription of the fifth century A.D. refers to two Kshatriya

96 Ibid at. 549
Historical Retrospect

merchants living in a city in the upper Ganga basin while another inscription of the same century mentions a body of weavers from Gujarat as having gradually adopted various other occupations in their new home in Malwa. In the seventh century Hiuen Tsang and his companions, escaping from a band of robbers, met a Brahmana who was ploughing the land, with his own hands\textsuperscript{97}.

In the next place, we have in the Gupta period authentic examples of inter-marriages between Varnas, not only in the anuloma but also in the pratiloma order. In the Contemporary Sanskrit dramas and prose romances we find Brahmanas and Kshatriyas even marrying the daughters and female slaves of courtesans\textsuperscript{98}.

- POSITION OF LOWER CASTES

As in the preceding age, there were also numerous mixed castes. We know something about the conditions of the Chandalas and similar classes who occupied the lowest rank in the order of the mixed castes. According to the Smriti law the Chandalas were to perform the meanest work, such as carrying unclaimed corpses and executing criminals. They were not to walk about dining knight in villages and towns, and even during day-time they were to move about with distinguishing marks fixed by the king. In fact they were to live outside the village. Strict rules were laid down for preventing pollution of other classes by their contact. The evidence of contemporary Chinese travelers shows that these rules were followed in the Gupta Age. In Madhyadesa, at the beginning of the fifth century, as Fa-Hien tells us, the Chandalas were required to live outside the boundaries of towns and market places on approaching which they had to strike a piece of wood as a coarning to others to avoid their touch. For them was reserved the occupation of hunters and dealers in fish. In the first part of the seventh century, according to Hiuen Tsang, butchers, executioners scavengers, etc. lived in dwellings market by a distinctive sign and lying outside the


\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
Historical Retrospect

city the references in the literature of the Gupta period confirm the above accounts. We learn from them how the Chandalas, who were confirmed meat eaters, were habitually engaged as public executioners and were regarded as untouchables⁹⁹. Removed still further from the chandala and others caste lying within the pale of Indo-Aryan society were the aboriginal tribes (Pulindas-Sabaras, Kīratas, and so forth) who lived in the hills and forests of the Vindhyas and other mountain ranges. In the Dasakumara-charita, the Harsha–Charita, the Kadambari and other works of the late Gupta period we get vivid glimpses of the dress and manners as well as the religious and social customs of these tribes. We learn that the Sabaras of the Vindhya forests in the Seventh Century were used to such reprehensible and out landish practices as the offering of human flesh to their deities, living by hunting, partaking of meat and wine, and kid napping women for marriage¹⁰⁰.

C. MEADIEVAL PERIOD (1000 – 1707 A.D.)

During this period Hindu society was based on caste system. In fact the Hindu society had been divided into Varnas on the basis of division of labour since the ancient times. This continued during the medieval period. The Hindu society was divided into four Varnas Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudras. Though initially the caste system was evolved to achieve harmonious working of the society as a single social unit, but in course of time the caste became more ramified and rigid and came to acquire a religious tinge ¹⁰¹. The old position of Brahmanas and Khatriyas was materially affected by the Muslim conquest of India. The Brahmanas lost their royal Patronage. They got not job in administration. They were no longer prosperous. They lost the opportunity of earning a lot of money by officiating as priests in sacrifices. The result was the new Smriti’s laid down that they could pursue agriculture through lived labour. In times of special distress, they could themselves

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cultivate the fields. Both agriculture and trade were the occupations of the people of all castes. In view of the change, the rank and file among the Brahmans could not devote the same time and attention to Vedic studies and spiritual and intellectual pursuits as they used to do in the past. The new commentaries on the Smritis allowed them to give less time to their original occupation and contest themselves with the study of just a part of the Vedas in which they were interested and in some cases with that of the Puranas alone. This was an admission of the decline of the Vedic studies during the sultanate period and the importance of the Brahmans. There was also a change in the attitude of the Brahmans towards the Sudras. The letter were allowed to listen to recitations of the Puranas. It was made permissible to eat the food of certain Sudra castes under some special circumstances. The Sudras were allowed to engage themselves in some of the prohibited Articles of sale, including meat\textsuperscript{102}.

The Kshatriyas lost not only political power but also the opportunity of earning their livelihood as soldiers. Except is Rajasthan, Central India and the Himalayan region in the North, west, many of the Kshatriyas rank into the status of local landlords serving as intermediaries in the revenue system organized by the Muslim rulers. Guru Nanak has referred to the demoralization of the Kshatriyas in these words. “The Kshatriyas have forsaken their religious and adopted the language of the Malechchas.” This refers to the acceptance of service by the Kshatriyas under the Muslim rulers and their imitation of Muslim manners and customs. The changed position of the Kshatriyas had a direct impact on Hindu society as a whole.

The picture of the condition of the Vaisyas and Sudras and the untouchables given by Al-Biruni seems to be exaggerated. The Sudras were divided into two categories. Those of the lower category were looked down upon as inferiors, as the untouchables. The number of mixed castes had gone up to 64 and those were divided into two groups. Those belonging to the Anuloma Group (born of higher caste males and lower caste females) were considered twice-born and were entitled to the sacred

\textsuperscript{102} Supra note 94 at 249
Historical Retrospect

thread and other sacraments. Those belonging to the pratiloma group (born of lower caste fathers and high caste mothers) were considered as belonging to low castes. The lower orders of society were discriminated against and even despised. The detailed rules were prescribed to avoid contact with the despised castes. Purification by bathing with clothes on was prescribed for touching a Chandala. Different penances were to be undertaken by a Brahman for conversing, or sleeping on the same bed, or going in company with a Chandala, for looking at or touching a Chandala, for drawing water from a tank owned by Chandala, for drinking water from a well from which water had been drawn in a Chandala vessels, for eating the food of a Chandala or living for some time in the same house with a Chandala, for the entrance of a Chandala in the house of a Brahmana etc. The caste rules and the rules governing the relations between the various castes as laid down in the shastras were not strictly followed. Some Brahmanas followed the occupation of the Kshatriyas and some Sudras, “in the teeth of the canonical rule forbidding the lower varnas to take up the functions of the higher ones assumed the Kshatriyas occupation of ruling and fighting”. In the seventh century A.D., Sindh was ruled by a Sudra dynasty. There were some Sudra rulers in other part of the country. Although Al-Birumi does not mention the Kshatriyas caste, yet it had come into existence as an important caste in the later half of the 9th century A.D. The individuals of this caste had risen “to the highest public offices in different tracts” in the eleventh and following centuries103.

With the arrival of the Muslims, the caste system grew further rigid as the Hindus were not willing to mix with them and kept themselves aloof with a motive to save their religion and social system. This institution of caste system was quite unknown to the Muslims who believed in equality and brotherhood of men and did not distinguish between man and man104. The inflexibility of Islam did not permit any compromise with other religions. The Muslims believed that their religion had the

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104 I ibid
Historical Retrospect

monopoly of the whole world and no other religion could compete with them. The Muslims were not prepared to accept the religion and social structure of the Hindus and the Hindus were not prepared to accept Islam and lose their identity as other people conquered by the Muslims had done. The Hindus treated the Muslims as social out castes or Melechchas and avoided mixing with them. With the passage of time this hostility towards the Muslims died out and some of the Hindus, especially of the low castes were attracted towards Islam on account of its belief in equality of all men and brotherhood of man. On the other hand the Muslims also grew less hostile towards Hindus and developed a feeling of affinity with new land. Consequently the Muslims who did not believe in caste system also felt its impact and like the Hindus they came to be divided into four classes – Sayed, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan.

D. THE BRITISH PERIOD

- 18TH CENTURY A.D.

In the 18th century, the Hindu society was divided into four parts, viz., the Brahmans, Kshatriya, Vaisyas and Sudras. The Brahman was the priest, the sole exponent of religious as well as the teacher and guide. Both the ignorant and the educated were superstitious and the Brahmans exploited the innate human fear of the unknown. The hereditary occupation of the Kshatriyas was to wield temporal power. The kings, ministers and soldiers generally belonged to this class. Nagari Dass, the Hindi poet observed that Kshatriyas were greedy and selfish. They never did any good to anybody and were not compassionate. If they saw a beautiful woman in the house of a poor man, their strength of arm lay only in their effort to grab her for themselves. The Vaisya were the community of businessmen. They had two broad divisions. One branch took to trade and the other to agriculture. It was the farmer who was typical of

their class. They were the usurers and the sole aim of their life was to live on the interests of the money that they gave as loans. A Bania was notorious for his love of money. He was looked down upon by the society for that reason. The Sudras comprised the mass of the people. They, included the aborigines admitted to the Hindu community. Their salvation was supposed to lie in the direct and indirect service rendered by them to the three upper classes. Below these four castes were the Antyajas with their eight guilds of craftsmen. They had to live at a distance from the higher castes and still rendered their services to them. The lowest of the low were the Hadis, Doms and Chandalas. The Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were all divided and subdivided into a large number of castes and sub-castes each caste formed an endogamous group and it was only in this endogamous group that inter-dining was permissible.

19th CENTURY A. D.

The caste system and the system of untouchability linked with it, were among the primary targets of the social reformers. In the nineteenth century stress was laid on the abolition – at least relaxation - of the caste system by the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, Swami Vivekananda and many other reformers. It was Gandhi who made the abolition of untouchability important items in the constructive programme of the Indian National Congress. He replaced the hated word ‘untouchable’, by the term ‘Harijan.’ The Constitution of India has made untouchability illegal and provided special privileges for the ‘Scheduled Castes ‘including ‘Harijans’

The social reform movements which began in the nineteenth century to transform the ‘social life by purging of accumulated ills and anomalies’ has tended in

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the twentieth century. In addition to contact with the west, the social revolution was brought about by the introduction of rapid means of communication, like the railways, telegraph, postal system etc. This broke down the caste barriers to a great extent. People now began to ponder over the antiquated traditions which they were following. They felt that the time had come to modernize their social institutions. The gradual disintegration of the caste system has been due to a large extent to factors other than the crusade of the social reformers. The British rulers introduced new economic forces which undermined the caste system in different ways. Industrialization and construction of railways created new opportunities for work outside the traditional scheme of occupational castes and made close contact between workers of different castes inevitable. The right to own property in land, including the right to sell land, as also the decay of the panchayat system, led to the disintegration of the traditional pattern of the rural society. The caste system was affected by certain legal changes.

The educational system was affected by certain legal changes. The educational system provided new opportunities for the ‘depressed classes’ and contributed to the removal of social inequality. In the urban areas there developed a new social pattern in which caste played a role of diminishing importance. The struggle for freedom drew together men of different castes in strenuous common efforts. The depressed classes organized themselves in associations for the recovery of social rights of which they had been deprived of for centuries. Their greatest leader was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It is true that the caste system was in many respects a cruel and immoral system but was so deeply rooted in Hindu society that it could not be shaken even by medieval religious reforms. Guru Nanak condemned the caste system as “folly” but inspite of that it continued. Even the Sikh Gurus who were Khatris did not marry non-Khatri girl. Chaitanya stood for removing all distinctions based on caste and religious but he himself observed practice and after his death Bengal rationalism

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developed on traditional Hindu lines\textsuperscript{110}. Another aspect of the development of 20\textsuperscript{th} century line building of roads all over India, and the introduction of railways, postage, telegraph, cheap paper and printing – especially in the regional language – enabled castes to organize as they had never done before. A post card carried news of a caste meeting, and the railway enabled members scattered in far-flung villages to come together when necessary, while the availability of cheap newsprint facilitated the founding of caste journals, whose aim was to promote the interests of their respective castes. It is usual to points out that railway and factories relax rules of pollution regarding eating and drinking and other forms of contact. But that is only one side of the story. The availability of cheap paper enabled caste disputes to be recorded, and this gave permanent form to rules and precedents which were till then dependent upon the fallible; and therefore challengeable, memory of elders. I team that several castes in Gujarat have had their ‘ Constitutions’ Printed\textsuperscript{111}.

The civil and penal codes introduced by the Britishers over the sub-continent of India took away much of the power previously exercised by caste panchayats. The British also introduced a new principle of justice, viz., that all men are equal before the law and that the nature of a wrong is not affected by the caste of the person who is committing it, or by the caste of the person against whom it is committed. It is pertinent to mention here that even the use of law courts by some peasants did not put an end to caste pachayats. The peasants made use of both the systems of justice. The traditional panchayat, caste as well as village are still factoring in many parts of the country. The British rule set in motion economic forces which upset the traditional hierarchy, but this did not necessarily mean that caste was weakened thereby. In fact, it is arguable whether such a disturbance did not actually increase caste consciousness all rounds. A low caste which made money as a result of new opportunities presenting themselves to it made attempt to raise its status vis-à-vis the other castes, and this

\textsuperscript{110} V.D. Mahajan., History of Medieval India (Muslim rule in India)., S. Chand & Co. Ltd., Ram Nagar, New Delhi. 2004. p. 358.

resulted in opposition from the latter. The newly-rich castes only pressed for a higher status for themselves – they did not urge that the caste system should be abolished. It is true that the economic forces released under British rule resulted in greater mobility within the caste system, but that is quite different from making progress towards an egalitarian society.\footnote{Ibid.}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{20th CENTURY A.D. - TILL 1947}
\end{itemize}

The introduction of the principle of equality before law by the British dealt severe blow to the social and legal inequalities due to the caste system. The expropriation of the caste committees of all penal power by the British government deprived caste of a powerful physical weapon to stampede its recalcitrant members into submission. Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, the special Marriage Amendment Act, 1923 contributed to a great extent in undermining the edifice of Castes.\footnote{J.L. Kachroo., \textit{Society in India}. Cosmos Bookhine (P) Ltd. New Delhi 1990. P. 88.}

The growth of nationalist movement undermined to some extent, the caste consciousness of the Hindus. The mass movements such as the non-cooperation movement of 1921-22, and the civil disobedience movement of 1930-33 made the people of different castes rub their shoulders against the alien ruler. It automatically strengthened the community sense and weakened the caste consciousness. It strengthened the national consciousness. As a part of the national movement, Gandhi started movement against untouchability and the caste system. The fast undertaken by Gandhi in 1932 to prevent the introduction of separate electorate for untouchables is a great landmark in the history of the protest ad resentment against the caste system.\footnote{Ibid.}

In 1856, the widow re-marriage Act was passed which contained clauses practically violating the customs of the lower castes. In 1876 the High Court of Bombay ruled

\footnote{Ibid.}\footnote{Ibid.}
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that “Courts of law do not recognize the authority of a caste to declare a marriage void or to give permission to a woman to remarry”. The caste disabilities removal Act, 1850 facilitates conversion to another religion or admission into another caste without affecting the property right of the person. In 1925 in Madras, all public wells and schools were thrown open to all the classes including the depressed.

**E. CASTE SYSTEM IN POST INDEPENDENT INDIA.**

After the political independence of the country, the important factors, besides industrialization and urbanization, which have affected the caste system, are the merger of various states, enactment of several laws, spread of education, spatial mobility, and the growth of market economy. Before the independence, some states were the strongholds of the caste system; but after the liquidation of the native states and framing of the new Constitution for the whole country which generates justice, liberty and equality to all which has abolished the untouchability, the caste system no longer function on rigid lines\(^{115}\).

It has been assumed by social scientists working in or on India that the process of modernization set in motion by the colonial regime and pursued by the indigenous bourgeoisie in the post-Independence era will gradually dissolve the caste system and the collectivist ethos, and replace it with a class system and an individual ethos\(^{116}\). This assumption had its roots in the theories of socio-economic change. Anthropological and sociological studies on the caste system in India\(^{117}\) undertaken in the course of the last five decades have, however revealed this assumption to be untenable, and have even exposed the naïve socio-centric judgments emerging from it. Rather, these studies seem to emphasize that modernization does not *ipso facto* tear apart the basic fabric of the caste system. At the same time, it cannot be contended

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\(^{116}\) M N Srinivas *Caste Its Twentieth Century Avatar* (Ed), Penguin India (P) Ltd, Nehru Place, New Delhi, 1996. p.70.

\(^{117}\) Ibid.
that the caste system has not changed at all. It can hardly be gainsaid that even from the time when written accounts of its practice are available, and certainly from the time of the colonial documentation of the phenomenon, caste has undergone considerable change. In any case, it is nowhere practiced as rigidly as it was prescribed in the ancient Hindu law texts. What is important to note, however, is that the caste system has been the most flexible of the primordial institutional arrangements anywhere in the world, and it has shown an extraordinary capacity to adopt itself to a variety of changing, and often apparently contradictory, socio-economic conditions.\textsuperscript{118}

\section*{2. III. SANSKRITIZATION}

Sanskritization is the process by which a “law” Hindu caste or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, “twice-born” caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste headachy then that traditionally conceded to the claimant cast by the local caste without affecting the property rights of the person. In 1925 in Madras, all public wells and schools were thrown open to all the classes including the depressed community.\textsuperscript{119} The claim is usually made over a period of time, in each, a generation or two, before the “arrival” is conceded. Occasionally a caste claims a position which its neighbours are not willing to concede. This type of disagreement between claimed and conceded status may be not only in the realm of opinion but also in the more important realm of institutionalized practice. Sanskritization is generally accompanied by, and often results in upward mobility for the caste in question; but mobility may also occur without Sanskritization and vice versa. However, the mobility associated with Sanskritization result only in positional changes in the system and dose not lead to any structural changes. That is a caste moves up above its

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid
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neighbors, and another comes down, but all this takes place in an essentially stable hierarchical order. The system itself does not change.\textsuperscript{120}

Sanskritization is not confined to Hindu castes but also occurs among tribal and semi-tribal groups such as the Bhils of western India, the Gonds and Oraons of central India, and the Pahadis of the Himalayas. This usually results in the tribe under growing Sanskritization claiming to be a caste, and therefore, Hindu. Some castes in the omnibus category of Shudra may have a highly Sanskritized style of life whereas others one only minimally Sanskritized, but whether Sanskritized or not, the dominant peasant castes provide local models for imitation, and Kshatriya and other models are often mediated through them\textsuperscript{121}. New factors affecting dominance have emerged in the last century. Western education, jobs in the administration and urban sources of income are all significant in contributing to the prestige and power of particular caste group in the village. The introduction of adult franchise and Panchayati Raj (local self government at village, Tehsil and district level) since independence has resulted in giving a new sense of self-respect and power to low caste, particularly Harijans who enjoy reservation of seats in all elected bodies from the village to Union Parliament. The long term implications of these changes are probably even more important, especially in those villages where there are enough Harijans to sway the local balance of power one way or the other. In the traditional system it was possible for a small number of people blowing to a high caste to wield authority over the entire village when owned a large quantity of arable land and also had a high ritual position. Now, however, in many parts of rural India power has passed into the hands of numerically large landowning peasant castes, It is likely to remain therefore some time, expect in villages where Harijans are numerically strong and are also taking advantage of the new educational and other opportunities available to them. Endemic factionalism in the dominant caste is also another threat to its continued enjoyment of power. No

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.

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longer is dominance a purely local matter in rural India. A caste group which has only a family or two in a particular village but which enjoys decisive dominance in the under region which still count locally because of the network of ties binding it to its dominant relatives. What is equally important is that others in the village will be aware of the existence of this network, Country wise, a caste which enjoys dominance is only one village will find that it has to reckon with the caste enjoys regional dominance,\textsuperscript{122} his hereditary occupation occasionally, a man is heard making slighting remarks about the hereditary occupation of other castes. The other tendency inherent in the caste system is the imitation of the ways of higher castes. The vast improvement in communication during the last sixty years has contributed to the decline in prestige of purely local style of living. Rural leaders or at least their son now tend to borrow items from prestigious, urban ways of living, and the long term effects of this processes are a decrease in cultural diversity and increase uniformity, landownership is a crucial factor in establishing dominance. Land-owners generally come from the higher caste while 35\% of Harijans are landless laborers, and the bulk of those who own land “have such small holdings that their condition is hardly better than that of agriculture laborers.” Landownership confers not only power but prestige, so mush so that individuals who have made good in any walk of life tend to interest in land. If landownership is not always and in dispensable passport to high rank, it certainly facilitates upward mobility. The existence of congruence between landownership high ranks in the caste hierarchy has been widely observed, but it is important to remember that it is only of a general kind, and admits of exception in every area. The power and prestige which owning caste command, affects their relation with all castes, including those ritually higher but important as secular criteria are, ritual has on in dependent existence and power of its own.

The mediation of the various models of sanskritization through the local dominant caste stresses the importance of the letter in the processes of the cultural transmission. Thus if the locally dominant caste is Brahmin or lingayat at will tend to

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transmit a Brahminical model of Sanskritization, where if it is Rajput or Bania it will transmit Kshatriya or Vaishya models. Of course each locally dominant caste has its own conception of Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya models. Two distinct tendencies are implicit in the caste system. The first is an acceptance of the existence of multiple culture, including moral and religious norms in many local society, such acceptance is accompanied by a felling believes, and practices are relevant to once group while others one not. A peasant takes a great deal of pride in his agriculture and takes about its importance and difficulty and the skill and patiences required. An artisan or a member of a servicing has a similar attitude towards his hereditary occupation occasionally; a man is heard making slighting remarks about the hereditary occupation of other castes. The other tendency inherent in the caste system is the imitation of the ways of higher castes.123.

The influence of the dominant caste seems to extend to all areas of social life, including so fundamental a matter as the principle of descent and affiliation. Dominant castes set the model for the majority of people living in rural areas including, occasionally, Brahmins where they way of life has undergone a degree of Sanskritization as it has for instance, among the Patidars, Lingayats and some Vellalas – the culture of the area over which their dominance extends experiences a change. Brahmins –like Kshatriyas, have exercised dominance in rural as well as urban in India. In strength of numbers they have rarely been able to complete with the peasant caste, but they have enjoyed ritual preeminence, and that in a society in which religious beliefs were particularly strong. In pre-British and princely India a popular mode of expiating sins and acquiring religious merit was to give gifts of land, house, gold and other goods to Brahmin. The gifts were given as such occasions as the birth of a prince, his marriage coronation, and death. In their roles as officials, scholars, temple priests, family priests and some parts of the country village record-keepers

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also, they come to own land. Ownership of land further increased the great prestige. Brahmins already commanded as numbers of the highest caste\textsuperscript{124}.

The changes in the mode of life of the Brahmins are important, as the Brahminical model followed by the other caste is that of the post-Vedri Brahmins. The Kashatriya and Vaishya model are indeed important but not as influential as the Brahminical as a few Kshatriys and almost all Vaishyas follow the certain important religious ideas only with the increasing impact of the western model in the last several decades has the Brahminical model begun to lose ground among same section of the Hindu. The Bhakti cults are significant in yet another way. They employed regional languages to a vast and unlettered populace the contents of Sanskritic Hinduism One of the function of the Sanskritization was to bridge the gap between secular and ritual rank. When a caste or sections of a caste achieved secular power it usually also tried to acquire the traditional symbols of high status, namely the customs, ritual, ideas, beliefs, lifestyle of the locally highest caste. It also meant obtaining the services of a Brahmin priest at Sanskritic calendrical festivals, visiting famous pilgrimage centers and finally attempting to obtain a better knowledge of the sacred literature. Ambitious castes were aware of the legitimizing role of the Brahmin priest living in a village dominated by peasant had to be treated differently from poor people of other caste. The mobility characteristic of caste in the traditional period resulted only in position changes for particular caste or sections of caste, and did not lead to a structural moved up or down, the structure remained the same. It was only in the literature of the mediaeval Bhakti movement that the idea of inequality was challenged\textsuperscript{125}.

The Varna-Ashrama dharama was the social structure based on this understanding that social mobility is a social necessity. This pluralistic arrangement was accepted to facilitate the social mobility of the individual or of a group on the Varna basis, which meant choosing once vocation according to once qualifications it was open also to the people outside structured system who had to be brought within

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
the social order. There was thus a twofold social mobility, the internal and external from lower to the higher Varna and from non-Varna to Varna order. It was obviously accepted to be a continuous process\textsuperscript{126}.

The arranged sublime hierarchy of Varna was well conditioned. It was initiated with the promise of equal status for all. While all may be equal; the less equal had the opportunities to try for more equality. While the Brahmins within the hierarchy were recognized as the Dharma knowing, those who studied and tech the sacred lore are the human gods, were yet challenged from time to time. There were declarations to the effect that the Kshatriyas had no superior and that the priest was only a follower of the king. “Jainism and Buddhism may be religious revolts against the Brahmanical ritualism yet these were also the social revolts. Both of these movements were leadered by men from Kshatriya Varna. They had the support of the Vaishyas the traders.”

2. IV. VARNA AND JATI

A great deal of confusion has arisen out of the indiscriminate use if the word caste to denote both Varna and Jati. Varna is not the same thing as Jati. Varna represents the four fold division of the society while Jati represents the smaller groups exiting in society which the authors of the Dharmasastras seek to derive from one or other of the four varnas\textsuperscript{127}. Manu distinctly says that there are only four varnas, Brahmana, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras while he speaks of about fifty Jatis, such as Ambastha chardala, Dravida, Yavana etc but even Manu not to speak of later writers has confused Jati with Varna. The confusion is due to the fact that Brahmmana came to be called both a Varna and Jati, through there are many Jatis which one comprehended under the name Sudra, and a group cannot be found to day which is

\textsuperscript{126} J. L. Kachroo, Society In India, Cosmos Bookhine (P) LTD., New Delhi, 2002.
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known simply by the name of Sudra. According to Manu many castes or Jatis were produced by a series of crosses first between members of the four Varnas and then between the descendants of these initial unions. Secondly, many castes were formed by degradation from the original Varnas and account of non observance of sacred rites. There are called Vratas The Vrata Brahmans were known as Bhrijakantaka, Avantya, Vatadhana etc.

This theory which appears highly fanciful assumes, in the first place that the whole population of the world is descended from the original Varnas—even foreign and Yavana one said to have been Kshatriyas at one time, but now degraded to lower status because of the known observation of the prescribed sacrament. They belong to the same stock as the Indian Kshatriyas and are ethnically more closely related to them the latter to the Indian Brahmanas and Vaisyas. Secondly, castes which were compact tribes line the Andhras, caste which had developed out of trade guilds like the Ambastla, caste which had represented the destination between different classes of labour, between fishing, hunting, weaning, agriculture and handicrafts, are all supposed to have been produced by inter-breeding. Thirdly, the great divergence of opinion among the law-givers regarding the names of caste produced by mixed union shows the part played by fancy and imagination in the derivation and the tabulation of mixed castes. For instances, Yaksa regards the bigheads as an original castes, the fifth Varna Vishnupurana and Harivamsa them as having produced from the body of Varna; Manu traces it to union between Brahmana and Sudra.

Caste refers to endogamous groups, which in Sanskrit are called Jatis. These small groups developed in the later Vedic age based on occupations which later took the form of caste. Jatis grew in number through the incorporation of the tribes in

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128 Ibid
129 Ibid
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the Aryan society, enough further division of labour and to some extent through the ideology of varna-dharma. The varnas are four and the Jatis are numerous. In modern India one there are about 2500 Jatis which are more or less subsumed into the Varna categories. Jatis not Varna constitute the basic unit of the traditional caste system. The four Varnas are ranked in a particular order whereas the Jati ranking is both more ambiguous and more flexible, as M.N Srinivas has observed. Jatis have not grown as a result of divisions and sub-divisions within a set of four original Varnas. Rather, as Mrs. I. Karve has argued, Varna and Jatis have coexisted as two different and related systems for at least 1,000 years “Historically”. Mandelbaum writes “the Varnas of the early texts were like open classes than like fixed social strata”. The Varna model says Yogendra Singh “is in reality a cultural framework of caste as a pure category. It lays down normative principles without having much to do with actual processes of structural and functional variations in the reality of the caste system”.

Theoretically, caste system is rooted in the Varna division if society four caste category and a fifth category of untouchables, though excluded from the caste model, yet constitute its lowest stratum in the social and ritual hierarchy. In real life caste or Jatis are divided into hundreds of hierarchically ranked endogamous groups. The Jati system is an empirical order, verifiable by direct observation of caste ranking and other familiar distinctions. The Jati system is not uniform. It varies from region to region. What even, the nature of ranking, the consideration of pure and impure remains the sole common basis of the Jati system. Dumont according to Lannoy, regards two systems as homologous and to have interacted an each other.

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132 There are hundreds of Jatis among the Brahmans so is the case with the other castes.
133 Ibid
135 Ibid
136 Ibid
137 Supra note 120
138 Ibid
139 Ibid
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2. V. CASTE AND CLASS

On the distinction between caste and class; Maclver observes, “whereas in eastern civilization, the chief determinant of a class and status was birth, in the western civilization of today wealth in a class determinant of equal or perhaps greater impotence, and wealth is a less rigid determinant than birth; it is more concrete, and thus its claims are more easily challenged; itself a matter of degree, is less apt to create distinctions of kind, alienable, acquirable and transferable, it draws no such permanent lines of cleavage as does birth 140”. Ogburn and Nimkoff observed “In some society, it is not uncommon for individual to move up or down the social ladder. When this is the case the society is said to have ‘open’ classes. Else wher there in little shifting, individuals remaining through a life-time in the class into which they chance to be born”. Such classes are close, and it, extremely differentiated, constitutes a caste system, when a class in somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call if a caste141. Caste may be defined as a rank order of superior super ordinate orders and inferior subordinate orders which practice endogamy, prevent vertical mobility, and unequally distribute the desirable and undesirable social symbols. Class may be deferred as a rank order of superior and inferior orders which allows both exogamy and endogamy, permits movement either up or down the system, or allows an individual to remain in the status to which he was born; it also unequally distributes the lower and higher evaluated symbols142.

Class is more open than caste. A class system is an open system of rating levels. If a hierarchy becomes closed against vertical mobility, it ceases to be a class system and become a caste system. Since class is open and elastic social mobility becomes easier. A man can by his enterprise and initiatives change his class and there

141 Ibid
142 Supra note 126
Historical Retrospect

by rise in social status. If a man is born in a labour class, it is not necessary for him to live in the class for life die in it. He can strinc for money and success in life and with wealth he can changes his social status implied in the class destination. In case of caste system, it is impossible to change ones caste status. Once a man is born in a caste he remains in for his life time and makes his children suffer the same fate. A caste is thus a closed class. The individual status is determined by the caste status of his parent, so that what an individual does has little bearing upon his status. On the other hand the membership of a class does not depend upon hereditary basis, it rather depends on the worldly achievements of an individual. Thus class system is an open and flexible system while caste system is a closed and rigid system143.

The caste system is believed to have been divinely ordained. “Maclver Writes”, the rigid demarcation of caste could scarcely be maintained were it not for strong religious persuasion. The hold of religious belief with its supernatural explanation of caste itself is essential to the continuance of the system. The Hindu caste structure may have again out of the subjection or enslavement incidental to conquest and perhaps also out of the subordination of one endogamous community to another. But the power, prestige and pride of race thus engendered could rise to a caste system, with it social separation of groups that are not in fact set apart by any clear social signs, only as the resulting situation144 was rationalized and made eternal by religious myths.”

It is everybody’s religious duty to fulfill his caste duties in accordance with his “Dharma”. In the Bhagwatagita the Creator is said to have apportioned the duties and formations of the four castes. An individual must do the duty proper to his caste. Failine to act according to ones caste duty meant birth in a lower caste and finally spiritual annihilation. Men of the lower castes are reborn in higher castes if they have

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144 Supra note 129
Historical Retrospect

fulfilled their duties. On the contrary, there is nothing sacred or of divine origin in the class stratification of society classes are secular in origin. They are not founded on religious dogmas. The choice of mates in caste system is generally endogamous. Members have to marry within their own caste. A member marrying outside his caste is treated as outcaste. No such restrictions exist in class system. A wealthy man may marry poor girl without being outcasted. An educated girl may marry an uneducated partner without being thrown out from the class of teachers.\textsuperscript{145}

2. VI. TRANSFORMATION OF CASTE INTO CLASS

There is continuous debate among sociologist as well as among the political left in India whether caste is being transformed into class. Caste and class are different forms of social stratification. Caste in this view, are status groups characterized by rigidity, immutability, organic solidarity functional inter dependence, homo-hierarchies and pollution / purity. Class is viewed as open system characterized by individualism, competition, individual mobility and equality while the four Varnas are comparable to the estates of the pre-revolutionary France, castes or Jatis are status groups, but classes are economic groups based on a rationalized order organized along the principle of equality. The caste system is based on ideals of hierarchy supported by religious, legal and customary sanctions. Hutton has argued that class cannot be equated with class. Caste is not a principle by which politico economic groups are recruited nor does it organize relations between political groups, but it is an organizing principle within such groups. Secondly, classes are based on external possession, but caste thrives on ingrained biases, exclusive identity and a sense of superiority. Third, caste differs radically from the western concept of class is that its sanctions and structure have traditionally been backed by religion, law and customs, although in modern India legal sanctions no longer apply. Religious law was used to justify the exercise of power and ascendancy of one group over another by conquest.

\textsuperscript{145}Supra note 131.
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Further, castes or Jatis are endogamous groups the attribute of their identity, but endogamy is not an attribute of a castes. Individual is born into a caste and Maries into a caste. Fifthly, in a class system there is individual mobility, freedom of movement between classes. According to all cannons of Hinduism, a person cannot move out of his caste individually by hand work or acquisition of power through wealth. Traditionally the entire caste could however, over a period of years make up the scale through a process known as sanskritization or Kshtriyazation. Finally the units ranked in the class system are individual; while those ranked in the caste system are groups146.

Contrasting caste with class it has been argued that under the impact of socio-economic changes and democratic political process since independence a transformation of the Indian social stratification is taking place—from caste to class, closed to open from an original to segmentary system. Over the last hundred years new criteria of social differentiation based on income, occupation, education etc, have cut across castes are becoming more and more differentiated on these new criteria, new status groups on their criteria are completing with caste for peoples loyalties. New forms of association and new alliances have developed which are losing the traditional structure. Today, classes have become a distinct social reality, but like caste, class is also a complex phenomenon. It overlaps with caste, occupation, ownership of the means of production, factions and pressure groups. In villages caste hierarchy results unequal ownership of land and capital and economic hierarchy is closely related to social hierarchy. The dominant castes, not necessarily the upper castes, control power prestige and influence and consolidate caste hierarchy to further the process of exploitation. In real relationships among villagers, those of caste and class are not a duality. They are usually overlapping, in the variegating fabric of social life in the country side. Class relationships among villagers are mediated largely by affiliations that are defined neither from the class positions nor the class consciousness of their members. Caste and class distinct but composite part of the

146 Supra note 131
identities of the villagers- both well to do and poor, high and low. Apart from some untouchable castes or Jatis who are the poorest, castes and sub-castes or Jatis generally included families of different classes and exclude families of the same class. Still castes have established associations to represent their member political and economic interest. Thus, castes formation as classes because they formation as interest groups. But caste associations and caste-reeducation institutions, magazines and caste lobbies in the legislatures and government ministry have strengthened caste consciousness, not class consciousness.

Caste as a frame of analysis implies a cultural continuity between the lower and the higher strata of society; but it obfuscates the lower and the higher strata of society; but it obfuscate the radical differences which have emerged between the two, and even these differences may exist due to the labouring class character of the lower caste community. To accept class as a frame of reference amounts to neglect of culture solidarity.\(^\text{147}\)

Sivakumar and Sivakumar\(^\text{148}\) note that caste cannot be confined to a super structural role, and at the same time caste bears economic significant to a great extent. Caste and class together bear economic significant to a great extend. Caste and class together define the structure and interest. Cognitive world is not characterized by class consciousness alone. Consciousness is a highly complex phenomenon. It emanates from distribution of income and Jati hierarchy and from the intermixture of the two castes and class nexus is understood in terms of relations of various castes to land, expropriation of its surplus, and military and bureaucratic sharing wealth and power. A similar analysis of the interlinking of caste and class stresses on the substitution of the concept of class by the concept of class/Varna which is basically from of class differentiation, hence a structural phenomenon, and not unique to Indian


\(^{148}\) Quated in ibid
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society\textsuperscript{149}. Besides class-caste nexus, caste remained as an institution independent of class\textsuperscript{150}.

Thus both caste and class are real and empiric. Both are interactional and hierarchical, and incorporate each other. Both represent, to a large extent, the same structural reality. Cast is playing an important role in election, in access to jobs, admission to educational institutions, in getting license and promotions. Similarly caste is being systematically utilized by political parties and politicians for their ends. One cannot therefore categorically state that caste is being transformed into class. It is the cleavage existing between castes which constitute the main hindrance in organizing the poor against the controllers of wealth and poor. A poor Brahman and a poor dalih are hardly found to unite against a landlord for better wages\textsuperscript{151}.

In short, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that economic betterment and education and modernization will destroy the caste structure even if they accelerate mobility within the caste. Caste will play an important role in determining both on going processes and the kind of future changes which will take place in the country\textsuperscript{152}.

2. VII. IS CASTE SYSTEM WITHERING AWAY

The extent and nature of changes in the institution of caste are certainly different between the urban and rural areas. The decline of caste as a system is more perceptible in cities than in rural areas, whereas the growth of castes as articulated interest groups is more noticeable in urban areas. This should not be construed to mean that there is no semblance of a caste system in cities, and that the mobilization

\textsuperscript{150} Supra not 133
\textsuperscript{151} Supra note 131.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
Historical Retrospect

of people on caste lines is absent in villages. Rather it only means that the systematic dimension of caste is expectedly less significant in cities than in villages, whereas the locus of caste consciousness is to be found in the cities and towns rather than in the villages. Under the impact of socio-economic changes and political democracy caste system is changing in its cultural aspects (hierarchy, pollution and purity, and doctrines of Karma and Dharma,) and structural aspects (e.g. established pattern of inter caste relationships such as endogamy, restriction on inter-dinning and other forms of social relationship and unequal distribution of power). In the traditional society ritual purity, rather than the economic criteria, determined the rank of each group. In the modern context the ritual dimension has been considerably eroded and the signification of the secular dimension, with power and wealth are associated, has certainly increased. Today symbols of status are modern occupation, education, income, wealth and political power. The cultural and social distances among Jatis are being reduced as there has been a shift away from traditional symbols to modern political and technological symbols of status. Under privileged and socially backward groups at every level of society have now entered the political arena as they had never increasingly related to political participation in the district, state and national politics. Shifts in the traditional power structure have occurred in the local, district and state levels.

Despite these changes and the constitutional abolition of all caste distinction, the caste system exists and shows no sign of dying. There are several reasons. First, the dominance of power of one caste over another is a crucial factor in the continuance of the system. In the country side the dominant caste, not necessarily higher castes, by virtue of their control of land (the primary production asset) and capital enjoy real power and influence. Social disparities between them and the “other half” of the rural population the lower castes remain, powerless and without influence. The latter are dependent on the former for secured employment and financial borrowing in times of distress. There are millions of village households who live in debt bondage. Opportunities for them to change occupation are small in most villages.
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The patron-client relationship enables the dominant caste to mobilize the lower caste in their factional feuds in the villages or in their competitive struggle for political power. In many areas the lower caste votes for the dominant caste nominee either through mixture of fear, traditional subservience or ignorance. If the lower caste appears to want to exercise its own choice of candidate, the dominant caste does not hesitate to use violent coercion. The fact is that the creation of new political opportunities and new bases of power have enabled the dominant caste or caste community to develop at the regional level, in particular, “patronage-client networks” based on traditional loyalties. In most states several castes are constantly fighting for power and people are mobilized by using the caste idiom. Increased politicization of castes has given a new base of life to castes. There are castes and various sub-caste groups in virtually every state political party organization (except the communist parties), legislative assembly and government ministry. Inter-jati conflict is a major component of politics is most status. Large agglomeration of caste groups like Jatis, Vadavas, Ahirs, Rajputs and Okkaligas play a vital role in politics and through politics, in the allocation of resources and distribution of benefits to followers. Increased politicization of caste has largely led to the displacement from state legislative assemblies reformers who represented modern values by representatives of jatis and their values. In general, the modus operandi of jatis has been neither to face change nor to oppose change beyond self-interest but rather to accommodate it, profit from it or more the best of it endure\(^{153}\).

The second factor contributing to increased caste consciousness and caste-based identity of the people is the reservation policy which emphasizes not the individuality of an Indian citizen but his caste identity. Caste quotas are adjusted and are readjusted through intense political bargaining in a language which implicitly assumes that castes and not just individuals have claims. In the traditional Indian society the rights and obligation of an individual were to some extent cloying by caste. The system of quotas has strengthened the belief that every caste or group of

\(^{153}\) Supra note 131.
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castes should have a share to the nation cause. Caste which is about collective identity is thus strengthened. Thirdly, though modern occupations have expanded only minority of people have employment in areas where equality of opportunities is expected to work. The various castes, particularly Scheduled Castes, are very thirty represented in the higher administrative and managerial occupations. Any radical change in this respect depends on two things; one, greater use of the facilities of education provided to them; and two, radical changes of traditional attitudes regarding purity and pollution among the upper castes who dominate higher occupations.154

Moreover, caste associations represent their member’s political and economic concerns and to that extent they enhance caste- consciousness. The formation, fragmentation and reformation of associations of jatis, jati segments and jati alliances all over India tend to perpetuate caste distinctions. Fourth, the political system is dominated by a kaleidoscopic condition of the elites belonging to all section and the same pattern prevails in all political parties. In each of these groups whether, for example, Brahman, Jat, Rajput, Yadav, Muslim or scheduled caste, there is critical elite which is passing as spokesman of its respective constituency. In some instances they mean to do something for their constituency; but things often cannot be done. The reason is that power relations, despite the minor change, have substantially reinforced traditional power alignments, partially against the poor and under privileged. Fifth, caste is more than a system, as put it; it is a state of mind “the psychology of the vast majority if Hindus is still fundamentally a caste psychology” Indeed hierarchy and caste forms part of the unconscious psychological element of Hindu. Very few Hindus are found to carry out their social and political duties and relationship is a spirit of secularism and egalitarianism. Those who strive for social mobility do not challenged the hieratical frame but believe that they are only trying to restore their proper place within it. Those who oppose them believe that the climbers are trying to alter ordained order of society. The caste system is characterized by the dominance of the religious order the secular. To reverse this order a fundamental

154 Ibid
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changes of the value system which legitimates the caste system is required. Sixth, endogamy, the formidable pillar which has sustained the caste structure, has remained almost unshaken. Inter-caste marriages are few. Even when intermarriages do take place across castes, the barrier of untouchability is rarely crossed. Indeed, it continues to restrict intermarriage even after conversion to Christianity. The jati continues to be the principal unit of endogamy, an essential attribute of identity, a common locus for interaction.

To conclude, socio-economic changes and political democracy have profoundly affected the caste system. The caste system is changing but it persists and shows no sign of dying. The socio-political scenario of India seems to be dominated by struggle between caste for wealth and power. This struggle tends to shift the balance of caste-based bourgeois-landlord power up or down the ladder of the caste hierarchy. The hierarchy itself is left intact. The parasitic caste ideology will still rule. Individual compete with each other and claim dues as Individual in a growing number of fields, yet loyalty to caste and family both of which are intertwined have a continuing, and in some fields an increasing hold over people. The members of all caste and classes are and will be engaged in the rat-race to become an ideological rather than a political or economic manger, and a manager of others labours. Unless “Manu’s curse” is broken by a social revolution, Indian society would not be able to cast out the “casteish canker”155.

Notwithstanding the above variations in the nature and significance of change in the institution of caste are question which still remains to be answered is about the future of this institution. The general thrust of the answers based on careful scrutiny of evidence seems to be categorical, and it is admirable on adoptive structure as caste is in any serious danger of ever disappearing completely. Its religious basis may wane its systematic rigor may weaken; but its social basis will persist and its group

155Ibid.
connotation will gain strength. As far as its interface with Hinduism is concerned, though Hinduism may lose meaning as a justificatory ideology for the hierarchy and inequalities of the system, its cultural crux will persist and crystallize. Hinduism will benefit more from the survival of caste than caste from Hinduism.

2. VIII. CASTE AND INDIAN POLITICS

Till the end of the second quarter of the twentieth century lower castes were found to sanskritizing themselves; the aim of the caste movements was to emulate Brahman or Kshatriya caste status, secure the privileges of entering the temple, etc. the traditional caste system has however been profoundly altered after political independence. The forces of industrialization and urbanizations, land reforms and development measures in villages, the introduction of adult suffrage through democratization of political structure from village level (panchayats) to the state and nation all have deeply affected the caste system in several respect-socially, economically and politically156.

Land reforms and political democracy have changed and is changing the configuration of the power of castes. In peninsula India power has rapidly passed to the lower caste. The traditional dominant castes have been either expropriated from it or hold it under constant challenge from the lower castes who have been more organized. In northern India they still has a dominant role in the power structure at the village and at the religious levels. But this dominance has been subject to a new means of challenge through the power of the vote. Hence in situation where the lower caste are successful in using their numerical power to establish their claims they have altered the traditional power structure; as it has occurred in the south where the lower and the schedule castes constitution 92.9% of the total Hindu households. In the North during the early post-independence years the large jatis of well- to do formers have

156 Ibid.
Historical Retrospect

come to political prominence more recently, other jatis amalgamated as other backward classes have successes fully challenged their prominence\(^{157}\). Changes in the political structure of the village have also occurred where lower castes including untouchables enrich themselves through trade and then use their wealth to buy land and so acquire prestige and power. Where some low-ranking groups are obstructed in their mobility attempt, they can appeal outside the village to higher political authorities and organize for voting purposes. Mandelbaum\(^{158}\) writes “voters in India can be misled and manipulated as those in other countries, yet the votes of a numerous jati cannot be ignored by those who want to manage public affairs, whether in a village or in a large constituency.” The adoption of the democratic political order has led to increasing participation in the political process by section of society, which has hitherto been excluded from position of power. This has enabled them to make increasing use of political action to bargain for a better position in society. The experience being counted during elections by eminent political leaders has now given them a new awareness of their strength in the political area. A person is role as a citizen and voters has become attach to his role as jati members. The new political modus operandi of democracy is taking is toll as the principle of purity/politician. High jati politicians who would win the votes of them lowest jati constituents must woo them order tea. Untouchable jati ministers, and there are many of them expect invitations to dinner from high caste favor seekers\(^{159}\). With the right to vote, the dominant peasant castes become so power full that all political parties had to come to terms with them. They were well represented in state legislatives and cabinets, and the introduction of Panchayati Raj conferred power on them at the village, Tahasil and district levels. Political power enhances the status of the individual and his group. The political power can be translated in to economic terms—not only for oneself but for one’s relations; clients and caste folk—and can determined the future of young man.

\(^{157}\) Ibid  
\(^{158}\) Ibid  
\(^{159}\) Ibid.
and women by obtaining for them right career and well paid and prestigious jabs. This is where caste quotas are of crucial significance\textsuperscript{160}.

Politics is a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for the realization of certain goals, and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging allegiances in order to mobilize and consolidate positions\textsuperscript{161}. The important thing is organization and articulate of support and where politics each mass-based the points is articulate support through the organization in which the masses are to be found. It followed that where the caste structure provides one of the principal origination at clusters along which the bulk of the population each found to live; politics must strive organize through such a structure. The alleged casteism in politics is thus no more and no less than politicization of caste. It is something in which both the forms of caste and the forms of politics are brought nearer each other, in the process changing both. By drawing the caste system into its web of organization, politics finds material for its articulation and moulds it into its own design. In making politics their sphere of activity, caste and kin groups on the other hand get a chance to assert their identity and to strive for positions. Politicians mobilize caste groupings and identities in order to organize their power. They find in it an extremely well articulated and flexible basis for organization, something that may have been structured in terms of a status hierarchy, but something that is also available for political manipulations-and one that has a basis in consciousness\textsuperscript{162}.

By itself Sanskritizations urge produces some very basic psychological strains in the groups that is trying to acquire a new identity in its search for status, as the process its status becomes subjectively ambivalent and thus insecure, as with. Jews, Negroes and other minority groups, it is a negative assertion, a moral of submitting yet opposing the emulated group. So long as they do not succeed in raising the status

\textsuperscript{160} M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India
\textsuperscript{161} Rajni Kothari, \textit{Caste in Indian Politics}, Orient Lang man limited, S-6-272, Himayat Nagar Hyderabad 500029, 2001 P. 5
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
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of the group and this is always a long period their informed status necessarily creates an insecure and unsettled position in society-leading either to compensatory devices for social recognition or real withdrawal into something else. As it is the status urge in Hindu society is an interest frustrating and painful process. It is tribute to the subtle dynamics of Hindu society that in spite of this psychological caste, the adjustments of Sanskritisation go on all time; and one of the many reasons is that the structural distance that is sought to be jumped can often be related to the achievement of other indices of power and position is the modernist segment of society, thus facilitating the transition to a consensus on the new status of the striving group. Important in this respect is the crucial role that the distribution of secular power has always played in status ranking in Hindu society; and the consequent capacity of the system to keep adjusting to its changing hierarchical balance. Liberal education, government patronage and a slowly expanding franchise have been the three influences that have perpetrated the caste system and invoked it by stages. The involvement came as a result of a mutual give and take. Economic opportunity, administrative patronage and positions of power offered by the new institutions and the new leadership drew the articulate sections of society into the modernize network. Democratic politics of necessity led to such an involvement of the traditional structure and its leadership. Two results followed. The caste system mode available to the leadership structural and ideological basis for political mobilization, providing it with both a segmental organization and a identification system on which support could be crystallized. Second the leadership area forced to make concessions to local opinion, take its cue from the consensus that existed or regards claims to power, articulated political competition on traditional lines and, in turn, organize caste for economic and political purposes. With this came into being a new species of political organization, art cultured around particularistic divisions, yet giving to these a secular and associational orientation. Politics and society began moving nearer and a new infrastructure started coming into being. Three stages of changes in caste system the struggle for powers and for benefits was at first limited to the entrenched castes in the

163 Ibid
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social hierarchy. Leadership and occur to government patronage came from a limited group of individuals who were the first to respond to new education opportunities and were also traditionally endowed with pedagogic and sophistic skills that mattered most in the day of limited polities. This group consists of individuals from certain higher caste was not yet based on any militant caste consciousness, and was united more by a common social and intellectual endowment and idiom than through any organizational or political mobilization. However, this took place mainly on the basis of one higher caste or sub caste, it soon give rise to a feeling of deprivation and antagonism in other high caste, especially among those that had earlier enjoyed social or economic power, and resulted in the emergence of another political group, still drawn largely from the higher castes. The domination of an ascendant caste, are that was not satisfied to simply function in the context of inter-dependence and complementarily in the social sphere that characterized the social and economic system for so long. The caste system this got polarized in its first encounter with the new secularism and gore rise to a bilateral structure of caste polities, very often between two castes. Such caste also generally separated in social power and ritual status from all others or when the different higher castes were entreated at different power points, in a legitimized coalitional pattern.

This bilateralism was followed by a second stage in which power striving and demands for benefits exceeded the availability of resources, competing groups had to develop more numerous bases of support, and there started a process of competition within the entrenched and more articulated sections of society. This may be termed as the stage of caste fragmentation or of factionalism. Inter caste competition between the entrenched caste and the ascendant caste was now supplemented by intra-caste competition and the process of politicization again the process first started within the entreated caste which got factionalized and there followed a new structuring of political organization. Leadership cleavages were created, political attitudes began to condition symbols of solidarity and consensus, and there came into being multi-caste and multifunctional alignments. Mobilization of further support for each of the
contending factions gave rise to a process of co-operation from other, caste that were
till now kept out of the power system. The power structure of the caste system now
become more complex and entered into a more sophisticated network of relationships,
involving such other bases of support as economic patronage patron-client loyalties,
bond groups, and new organizational forms such as caste associations and caste
federations.\textsuperscript{164} In the early stages of intellectual awakening and urban-style political
organization, the need was for people able to deal with western and westernized
administrators, well versed in fine points of debate and ideological disputation,
processing legal acumen, and capable of founding and sustained small association of
public-minded persons that would agitate for specific causes. Such men were mainly
provided by Brahmins and traditional administrative classes who not only took to the
new education but had also been endowed by a long tradition of scholastic knowledge
and formal brilliance. With the movement into more diversified and mass oriented
polities, however, not only was there need for a wider base of support articulation but
also new types of managerial and organization at skills were needed, with this
happening, the Brahmins ad administrative castes began to be out-numbered by men
from commercial and peasant-proprietor occupations that had always called for a high
level of interpersonal skills, a programmatic and bargaining approach to problems and
an ability to marshal a new type of solidarity among their own castes, often times
based on a reinterpretation of their traditional status and a populist and ideology.

The process of factional within the entrenched caste, a similar structuring of
other ascendant caste, the system of co-operations and caste coalitions-all of these
through they brought about a fragmentation of the caste system were in reality still
very much caste-oriented and sought their bases in caste identities, in the process, of
causes , also generating politicized values and impulses for personal power, we enter
a third stage of development when the weakening of older identities and the

\textsuperscript{164} Rajni Kothari, \textit{Caste in Indian Politics}, Orient Lang man limited, S-6-272. Himayat Nagar
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introduction of politicized values coincide with other changes taking place in society through the impact of education, technology, changes status symbols, and urbanization. New and more expanded networks of relationship come into being; new criteria of self-fulfillment are created the craving for material benefits becomes all pervasive and family and migration system undergo drastic changes. With these, the structure of particularistic loyalties gets overlaid by a more sophisticated system of social and political participations, with cross-cutting allegiances, a greater awareness of individual self-interest, and forms of involvement and modern education and the modern system of social communication. An essential feature of modernization is the development of new and sharp differentiations, political, economic, educational and communications functions, traditionally performed by same social structure are now differentiated and get established in large of their own purposes, structure, and dynamics. Political, of courses is still a big enough, influence but it is better understood as an active partner in the modernization process, more as providing schemes of integration and division to the developing social system than as either destroying or replacing caste as a secular social entity. What does take place is a widening base of intuitional organization in which, on the one hand, caste identities themselves take to new forms of articulation thus changing the very ethics of the social system and diminishing the importance of its ritualistic and ascriptive bases; and on the other hand, more diverse forms of organization and interest identification enter the political system and give rise to a highly mobile and cross-cutting loyalty structure in politics caste on the one side ceases to be an exclusive political support base and on the other side lands itself to increasing political articulation, both of which contribute to its participation in a broader net-work of relationship and a shift of its emphasis from a static system of stratification to a dynamic base of competition and integration. In its traditional form, the caste system integrated society through ordering primary identities along a legitimized hierarchy of status positions and occupational, roles, including the political roles of arbitration and adjudication. By participating in the modern political system, it is at first exposed to divisive influences and later to a new form of instigation resulting from a new scheme of universalistic particularizes
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relationship. This is however no simple replacement of one system by another. In the transitions, caste provides to politics on the one hand an on going structure of division and accommodations and on the other hand a cohesive element while absorbs tensions and frustration through its intimate, particularistic, channel. Such an interact ional scheme of changes, which it does not suppress strata difference and individual interests and gives rise to relativity abrupt shifts in power relations, also provides a system of containment of conflicts and angularities that facilitates the process of transition to a modern society.\textsuperscript{165}

Secular involvement in the modern period has not only fostered new attitudes and offered new rewards. It has also exposed caste and communal ties as by themselves patently inadequate and often prejudicial for the building of stable support. The politicization of caste makes for outward-looking, upward moving orientation and as this resulted in the phenomenon of multiple memberships and overlapping identities, the result in highly secular for the polity as well as the society at large. The process of secularization of caste gets crystallized in three distinct but related forms. First, there emerges what can be called dominant elite, which is draws from different groups but shares a common outlook and a secular orientation, which is structured into a different network of relationship that stretches across social boundaries but yet continues to induct leaders from each important segment, which is homogeneous in terms of the values and rules of the game but as at the same time divided into so many special groups and various elite and sub-elite position such an elite structure articulates special interest and meaningful represents the more organized segments of society, while at the sometime allowing the mass of society to have its own pace of change and make its own adjustments with the modern world.\textsuperscript{166}

Second, castes take on an openly secular form for new organizational purposes. There are several such forms as (a) associations of caste member ranging

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid at p. 8

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
from simple hostels and recreational bodies to reform clubs and pressure groups, (b) caste institution or conferences that are more broad-based and cover districts or even states, and (c) caste ‘federations’ composed of not one but several castes which may some times be socially homogeneous but which may at other times simply have some specific interest or political objective in common. It is this specifically of purpose that distinguishes these new organizational forms-caste associations and caste federations from the more inclusive and inscriptive bodies traditionally known as caste. Generally speaking they are oriented to the securing of economic benefits, jobs or special concessions, or for the more clearly political purpose of uniting to fight the hegemony of the upper castes or the ruling castes or for bargaining with a political party or the government, but in all cases federation once formed on the basis of caste identities, it goes on to acquire non-caste functions, become more flexible in origination as time passes, even begin to accept members and leaders from caste other than those with which it started, stretches out to new regions and also makes common cause with other voluntary organization interest groups and political parties. In course of time the federation becomes a distinct political group, wielding considerable bargaining strength and numerical power, but still able to appeal to caste sentiments and consciousness, by adopting a common label (such as non-Brahmin or Kshatriya) claiming high status in the past and fostering a sense of derivation in the present, and out of all this forging a strong and cohesive political group. It has gone for beyond the earlier caste associations in articulating group interest along political channel. The dominant elite talked of include leaders drawn from such organization or in close touch with them. Third, alongside these new organizations, there has developed a vertical structure of factions along which the elite groups and their various support bases have got politically organized and through which channel of communication have been established between social and political forms. The result system of faction is such that is divides not only political groups but also social groups, both the traditional caste forms and really formed caste associations sad other interact group organizations. It facilitates the process of cross-cutting identification and provides an expanding network of political support for a leadership that is engaged in a
competitive structure of media of power relationships. Factions thus provide common media of participation for both the traditional and the modernist sector and make for their mutual accommodation and ultimate fusion.\textsuperscript{167}

By the above discussion, it is clear that caste system prevailed in all periods either in its rigid form or in flexible form but it showed its presence in all times. The lower castes people were discriminated and exploited by the so-called upper caste in every period. So in conclusion of this chapter we can say that the caste discrimination is one of the reasons of backwardness of certain class of people.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.