CHAPTER I

CASTE: DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTEROLOGICAL INDICES
The caste system in India is a fundamental and unique institution of Hindu society, and is mostly based on or derived from the holy scriptures and sacred texts. That is why the ancient sacred literature of the Hindus has had an engrossing interest for the Indologists and the Orientalists who were drawn towards the study of Hindu social organization through the ages. "The scholars as well as the average orthodox Hindu often turn to the ancient scriptures for authority and illumination on the myth or reality of the varna-oriented and jati-oriented Hindu social structure that is characterized, amid other features, by segmentation, hierarchy and the all-pervasive notions of purity and pollution. While the former have focused their attention, most studiously and rigorously, on the history and growth of the Hindu caste system, the latter have often cherished an almost nostalgic and obsessive belief about the institution as rooted in and coextensive with the hoary, Vedic past" (Saraf 1971, 82-3). An humble effort is made in the following pages to delineate this varna-jati dichotomy as sharply as possible, besides reconsidering the rich crop of conceptual formulations relating to these pivotal social categories.
The Conceptual Repertoire: A Brief Survey

When we scan through the conceptual formulations relating to Hindu social organization, we find at least three pivotal terms around which revolves the entire literature on the subject. These terms are: varna (socio-ritual status position), jati (caste) and upajati (sub-caste).

The Varna (Socio-ritual status position):

The Indologists and the Orientalists, both in India and abroad, have studiously devoted themselves to delineations of the varnas and the varna-oriented Hindu society as it was once in the remote past. Their method of study was textual rather than empirical and contextual. They often took the Rigvedic period as the starting point and made scholarly attempts to depict the entire course of evolution that the varna system followed during the long span of many centuries in the past. That the varna-oriented Hindu society began its career with the phase of social differentiation (Saraf op. cit., 83-91) only to pass through the intermediary phase of social segmentation (Saraf op. cit., 91-9) and further on to the phase of social stratification (Saraf op. cit., 99-104) is a fact which has been established by nearly all eminent scholars of Indology. Macdonell has very emphatically put it thus:
"The period of the Brahmanas is the holy texts the subject matter of which differs according to the divergent duties performed by the kind of priest connected with each Veda is a very important one in the history of Indian society. For in it the system of the four castes (i.e., the varnas) assumed definite shape, furnishing the frame within which the highly complex network of the castes (i.e., the jatis) of today has been developed. . . The life of no other people has been so saturated with sacerdotal influence as that of the Hindus for the domination of the priesthood became possible in India as soon as the energetic life of conquest during the early Vedic times in the north-west was followed by a period of physical inactivity or indolence in the plains. Such altered conditions enabled the cultured class, who alone held the secret of the all-powerful sacrifice, to gain the supremacy of intellect over physical force" (Macdonell 1905, 33-4).

The classical works of the Indologists (Max Muller 1879; Macdonell 1905; Keith 1925; Muir 1967; Dutt 1931; Pusalker 1957; to name a few) are replete with passages in which the word varna stands for the ethnic stocks of population in the early Rigvedic times as the Aryans and the Dasas:

"These two groups to which the word varna refers, stand for the ethnic stocks that are differentiated from each other by their physical and cultural traits besides a marked hostility between them. The Aryans are depicted as the vanquishing, free and fair-complexioned race — a proud and victorious people who are superior in culture and technology and who have evolved complex form of worship of such anthropomorphized deities as fire, rains, air and the like. The physical features of their polar opposite — the Dasas or Dasyus — include dark complexion, platyrrhine appearance, unintelligible speech" (Saraf, op. cit., 85).
It was during the Brahmanic period that these early Rgvedic Dasas or Dasyus were incorporated into the Aryan society and the four varnas (Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) made the then contemporary society:

"The Brahmanic references further suggest that, with the passage of time, some of the lawless and warring, perhaps raiding, autochthons who are the so-called Dasas, mellow down their age-old hostility and, acknowledging the Aryan superiority and subjugation, they got indoctrinated to the faith of the Aryans who invested them with more sophisticated and less derogatory appellation of the Shudras in order to incorporate them into the Aryan-fold. The process of transformation of the Dasas into the Shudras has been, thus, a slow and gradual, perhaps even painful, process of conversion whereby the early Dasa converts are brought, by force or by volition, within the pale of the Aryan way of life. They are accorded a place below the Aryans and are also integrated, with certain reservations though, as an organic part of the Social Body (Prathu 1958, 2x6), as the oft-quoted Rgvedic hymn\(^1\) suggests" (Saraf, op. cit., 93).

It has been emphatically argued, time and again, by the students of Hindu caste system that the theory of origin of varnas, as sketched in the ancient ethico-religious treatises, offers an idealistic, perhaps also speculative, picture in the metaphysical terms rather than sociological. Likewise, the classicists' theory of origin of castes from the cross-

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The Rgvedic hymn portrays the Brahmans as His (the Cosmic Man's) mouth, the Kshatriyas (or the Rajanya) as His arms, the Vaishyas as His thighs or abdomen, and of the emanation of the Shudras from His feet.
fertilization between the four varnas through hypergamy (anuloma) and hypogamy (pratiloma) has been discarded by nearly all empirically oriented anthropologists and sociologists. Atal has very pointedly summarized this:

"Indological works dealing with the subject sketch the outlines of the system as it was conceptualized by the authors of the ancient ethic-ro-religious treatises and speculate on its origin. These studies present an admirable picture of the system visualized in ideal terms and offer occasional glimpses of some aspects of its working. The social history of caste is, however, most inadequate, and the scriptural view of the ethic-ro-religious bases of caste in many ways distracts from the understanding of it as a functioning social system. Early empirical work on the subject was predisposed, in a large measure, to view the system in the ideal framework provided by the sacred texts and tended to ignore certain aspects of it that were crucially significant for its proper sociological analysis, but which found no mention in the ancient works" (Atal 1968, 3).

The Jati (caste):

The Hindu society in the Vedic period was varna-oriented rather than jati-oriented. This fact has been very emphatically argued by Max Muller:

"If, then, with all the documents before us, we ask the question, 'Does caste, as we find it in Manu, and at the present day, form part of the most ancient religious teachings of the Vedas?', we can answer with a decided 'No!' and

"The word jati in the sense of caste hardly ever occurs in the Vedic literature" (Prasad 1953, 4).
That the jati-oriented Hindu society is a post-Vedic phenomenon, is further stressed by the famous Indologist, Kane:

"Several centuries before the Christian era there were several castes. This follows not only from the Dharma Sutras but also from the ancient Buddhist works and from the meagre existing fragments of the work of Megasthenes on India" (Kane 1941, 51).

According to the Indologists, the jatis (castes) have proceeded from the primeval varnas through a slow and gradual process of evolution over a long period of time:

"The four-fold varna system that has prevailed through the late Vedic period -- viz., the Brahmanic and the Upanishadic periods -- has perhaps already begun to pass through its transitional phase during the late Shruti (Vedic) period only to emerge, during the period of the Dharma Sutras, into the jatis along with the primeval varnas. The Sutra period also marks the partial replacement or throwing into relief of the varnas by the jatis, some of which remain within the varna-fold, others lying outside of it. Elaborate prescriptions and prohibitions relating to commensality and connubium, besides physical touch, are a product of this period" (Saraf, op. cit., 104).

The social phenomenon of caste has drawn scholars of stature from many diverse disciplines. Social historians, Indologists and Orientalists have studied the phenomenon primarily with a view to arriving at systematic theories that
seek to explain the origin of the caste system in general. These were the macro-studies; for their canvas was large enough to encompass the entire caste system as a whole. Moreover, the time-depth of these studies encompassed many centuries rolled together. The works of Blunt (1931), Bougle (1908), Dubois (1906), Dutt (1931), Ghurye (1932), Hocart (1938), Hutton (1946), Ibbetson (1881), Katkar (1909), Nesfield (1882), Hisley (1901 & 1908), Senart (1894), and Stevenson (1954 & 1961), among many others, are such that either propound their individual theories or examine the theories propounded by others. Ethnic or racial economic, ritual and the like factors were stressed as the root cause whence caste sprang up. The middle-range theorists, however, held a more cautious view insofar as they stood on more secure grounds while they advocated a multiplicity of factors as leading to the origin and development of the institution of caste. Damle has very succinctly summarized it:

"There are certain authors who think that a combination of various factors must be taken into account to evolve a satisfactory explanation of the origin and development of caste in India. Thus, the geographical isolation of the Indian peninsula, notions of pollution, power of food, ceremonial purity, belief in reincarnation, hereditary occupation, clash of races and antagonistic cultures, guilds and association, belief in magic, association with crafts and functions, deliberate economic and administrative policy, religious philosophy and its exploitation by a highly intelligent hierarchy, etc. must be taken into account to give a satisfactory explanation of the origin and development of caste" (Damle 1961, 2).
Many volumes, big and small, have been produced by these and other scholars with the result that "the literature on caste is immense" (Rosser 1964, 75). This immensity of the literature on caste can well be visualized when one reads the 'Foreword' of Caste in India (Hutton 1951) and comes to learn that there are well over five thousand published works on the subject.

With the inauguration of the trend of micro-studies on caste, all macro-theories and -theorists began to be abandoned, and anthropologists and sociologists began emphasizing that the search for the origin of caste is a wild-goose chase and an exercise in futility. Equally unrewarding were the efforts at definitions; for the phenomenon of caste was far too complex to yield to any universal definition. Notwithstanding the difficulties in arriving at such an universal definition, scholars continued coining their definitions so much so that the definitions of caste are far too numerous, differing from author to author. Rosser has very rightly observed:

"Few terms in the whole field of social sciences have presented as many difficulties in definition or aroused such sharp differences as the term caste. The literature on caste is immense... and the number of attempts at definition is equally formidable" (Rosser, op. cit., 75).

Atal has pointed out to the "difficulties in the definition of caste" (Atal 1968, 4-6) and has proceeded to
highlight the "areas of confusion" (Atal, op. cit., 7-13),
by pointedly referring to how varna, jati and upajati have
been almost interchangeably and synonymously used in the
literature on caste. Rosser too has discussed some of these
sources of difficulty and confusion:

"One common source of confusion can be disposed
of immediately: the term caste is not used for
the traditional and largely imaginary
classification of Hindu society into four orders
or varnas -- Brahmana or priest, Kshatriya or
warriors, Vaishya or farmers and traders, and
Shudra, the service classes. That the
contemporary situation is both largely unrelated
to and infinitely more complex than this fourfold
Brahmanical model has been constantly emphasized
by all authorities" (Rosser, op. cit., 75).

And making a reference to the caste-like phenomena elsewhere
in the world and/or in the different epochs, Rosser has pointed
out how some authors have used the term caste to such "analogous
institutions" as "in the divisions of populations into
endogamous estates in Ancient Rome or Greece, although minus
their religious sanctions and beliefs about pollution"
(Rosser, op. cit., 76). He has further noted how Lowie
(1950, 274) has used the term caste to denote a system of
hierarchical grading and political and economic factors while
employing it for American Negroes, Jews in Hitler's Germany,
and for endogamous and ranked divisions among certain East
African tribes. He has still further observed how the students
of race relations have used the term caste in stead of race
only because the essential features of caste structure --
segmental division, rigid endogamy, hierarchy, absence of
individual mobility, and social discrimination -- occur in
the context of ethnic populations (Lowie, op. cit., 274).

Leach makes it very clear how the word caste has been
used in the anthropological and sociological literature with
two different shades of meaning or connotations:

"As an ethnographic category it refers
exclusively to a system of social organization
peculiar to Hindu India, but as a sociological
category it may denote almost any kind of class
structure of exceptional rigidity" (Leach 1962, 1).

The caste as an ethnographic category is a cultural phenomenon;
the caste as a sociological category is a structural
phenomenon. The former calls for cultural evidence; the
latter calls for structural evidence (Leach, op. cit., 2).

Dwelling on the empirical data on the system of social
stratification in the Swat area of North Pakistan, Barth
sees it as "a hierarchical system of stable social groups,
differing greatly in wealth, privilege, power, and the respect
accorded to them by others" (Barth 1962, 113). And after
examining his data as rigorously as any sociologist would,
Barth proceeds to conclude:
"The principle of status summation seems to be the structural feature which most clearly characterizes caste as a system of social stratification. It is mainly for this reason that I have referred to the system of hierarchical positions in Swat as a caste system. I am aware that I thereby give the word a wider application than may suit many students of Indian caste systems. However, if the concept of caste is to be useful in sociological analysis, its definition must be based on structural criteria, and not on particular features of the Hindu philosophical scheme. In this sociologically more fundamental sense, the concept of caste may be useful in the analysis of non-Indian societies" (Barth, op. cit., 145).

Invoking Hutton (1946, 49 a Ch. VI), Leach presents the "list of cultural traits" or "certain minimal set of primary characteristics which together embody the real essence of caste everywhere" (Leach, op. cit., 2). While employing the framework of such minimal set of primary characteristics of caste, Leach adds a note of caution that "there is no syndrome of cultural traits which is common to all the societies concerned; each of Hutton's minimal criteria is missing from one or other of these variant systems" (Leach, op. cit., 5). And, then, he proceeds to present his own position in a rather long passage:

"Caste, in my view, denotes a particular species of structural organization indissolubly linked with what Dumont (1957) rightly insists is a Pan-Indian civilization. In fact, a caste does not exist by itself. A caste can only be recognized in contrast to other castes with which its members are closely involved in a network of economic, political and ritual relationships. Furthermore, it is precisely with these intercaste

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relationships that we are concerned when we discuss caste as a social phenomenon. The caste society as a whole is, in Durkheim's sense, an organic system with each particular caste and subcaste filling a distinctive functional role. It is a system of labour division from which the element of competition among the workers has been largely excluded. The more conventional sociological analysis which finds an analogy between castes, status groups, and economic classes puts all the stress upon hierarchy and upon the exclusiveness of caste separation. Far more fundamental is the economic interdependence which stems from the patterning of the division of labour which is of a quite special type" (Leach, op. cit., 5).

It is precisely these difficulties and ambiguities which Ghurye sought to overcome by opting to discuss the "features of the caste system" rather than attempting it definition:

"It appears to me that any attempt at definition is bound to fail because of the complexity of the phenomenon. On the other hand, much literature on the subject is marred by lack of precision about the use of the term. Hence I propose to give a description of the factors underlying this system of castes" (Ghurye 1957, 1).

and he proceeds to list these characteristics as follows:

a. the segmental division of society into distinct groups with membership determined by birth;

b. hierarchy according to a definite scheme of social precedence with the Brahmana at the head of the hierarchy;

c. restrictions on inter-dining and social intercourse arising out of notions of ritual pollution;
d. varying civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different segments;

e. restrictions on occupation; and

f. endogamy.

And so has Dutt (1931, 3) attempted a list of features of the caste system.

Some authors have regarded the notions of ritual purity and pollution as of crucial and central significance to the caste system. Ketkar, for instance, defines caste as "a social group having two characteristics: (a) membership confined to those born of members and including all persons so born; (b) the members . . . forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group" (Ketkar 1909, 15). He further adds:

"The caste system was supported not only by theological doctrines like karma and the Transmigration of Soul, but also by ideas like those regarding purity and pollution which had practical bearing on life" (Ketkar, op. cit., 116).

Ketkar has regarded the theme of purity and pollution as "the chief principle on which the entire caste system depends" (Ketkar, op. cit., 121) or "the pivot on which the entire system turns" (Ketkar, op. cit., 121), and has ended up by saying:
"To sum up, in short, the caste system sought its justification in the theories of karma and transmigration of souls. The various gradations were simply a natural result of wild monstrous ideas regarding purity and pollution" (Katkar, op. cit., 123).

Srinivas, one of the many students of Radcliffe-Brown, produced a thoroughgoing empirical study -- Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India. The descriptive part of the monograph is as elaborate and graphic as the analytical part thereof is rigorous and methodical. Srinivas is overly inspired by both Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown (Saraf, op. cit., 7-20). Srinivas's detailed account of the varied manifestations of pole (pollution) and madi (purity) among the Coorgs has yielded him to formulate his concepts of good sacred, bad sacred and normal ritual status (Srinivas 19 , 101).

Explaining the process of upward social mobility within the Hindu caste system, Srinivas has introduced the concept of Sanskritization -- a concept which has been heatedly discussed and debated ever since its introduction (Aiyappan & Balaratnam 19 , 114f). So has Prasad (1957, 243) offered a parallel concept -- kulinization -- as explaining "the efforts made by the low castes to go up in the social hierarchy".

Stevenson (1954, 45-65) has caught the idea of "ritual
avoidances* from Radcliffe-Brown only to examine the Hindu pollution concept. "From physical touch to commensality and connubium, ritual pollution notions seem to govern the interactional patterns on the three levels: endogamous group, exogamous group, and the individual" (Saraf, op. cit., 21). Bailey has very ably summarized Stevenson's ideas as follows:

"Stevenson has argued that objects can be ranked according to a criterion of purity and impurity, and that in an analogous fashion castes fall into ritual rank according to the extent to which their behaviour patterns involve them in or enable them to avoid pollution. . . The rank of a caste or subcaste is said to be fixed by ritual values attached to behaviour customary in that caste" (Bailey 1964, 609).

All these scholars who attempted meticulous listing of caste criteria or attributes, may be designated as the attributionists and their attempts toward conceptualization as the attributional theory of caste. Marriott (1959, 92-107), however, sharply reacted to these attributionists and came forward with his interactional theory in stead, which has been very neatly summarized by Bailey:

"Marriott has pointed out that there are many difficulties in the way of such an 'attributional' theory. Firstly, the presumed values of customary behaviour do not correlate well with actual caste ranking: for example, vegetarian castes are sometimes ranked below meat-eaters. Secondly, many of the customs said to be a source of group pollution and therefore an index of low rank are in fact common

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to all castes: a woman, for example, of whatever caste, sweeps out her own household or may wash her own or her family's clothes. Thirdly, there is no criterion by which the several forms of impure activity can be ranked: for example, in itself hair-cutting is not deemed necessarily more or less impure than washing clothes or butchering meat. Fourthly, there are many discriminations in rank between castes which ought, on a purely attributional theory, to be ranked equally. Marriott notes that the attributional theory works better at the extremes of the caste hierarchy -- the Brahmana at the top and the Untouchable at the bottom -- than it does in the middle ranges of the caste system" (Bailey, op. cit.).

It is interesting to note how a rich crop of conceptualizations has been harvested by the empirically-oriented students of the Hindu caste system. Damle has summed it up as follows:

"There are various concepts which have been used by the various authors such as the concept of dominant caste, the concept of elaborateness of ranking, kingly model, concept of pollution, concept of Sanskritization and Westernization, concept of role, concept of interaction, etc." (Damle, op. cit., 1).

And discussing the "methodological problems" relating to the study of caste system, he has very rightly observed:
"Quite a few authors have addressed themselves to methodological problems pertaining to the study of caste. Some authors have pointed out that caste must be studied as a functioning reality and that reliance must not be placed on the existing theories for the satisfactory explanation of caste as a reality. In this context, mention must be made of the rejection of the Varna theory of caste. Broadly speaking, a structural-functional approach to the study of caste has been advocated... As a general trend one might observe that there is increasing emphasis on rejecting overall explanations or theories of caste. This is certainly a methodological contribution made in recent times arising out of the various field studies that have been completed during the last few years by both Indian and foreign scholars" (Darnle, op. cit., 5-6).

The Upajati (subcaste):

The word subcaste like caste has remained rather ill-defined ever since it was perhaps first employed by Ketkar. And it is worthwhile to quote from him a rather long passage:

"A caste is a social group having two characteristics: (a) membership is confined to those who are born of members, and includes all persons so born; (b) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. Each one of these groups has a special name by which it is called, several of such small aggregates are grouped together under a common name, while these large groups are but subdivisions of groups still larger which have independent names. Thus we see that there are several stages of groups and that the word caste is applied to groups at any stage. The words caste and subcaste are not absolute but comparative in signification. The larger group will be called a caste while the smaller group will be called a subcaste. A group is a caste or a subcaste in comparison with smaller or larger. When we talk

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of a Maratha Brahmana and Konkana Brahmana, the first one would be called a caste while the latter would be called a subcaste; but in a general way both of them might be called castes. . . . These divisions and subdivisions are introduced on different principles. In this way two hundred million Hindus are so much divided and subdivided that there are castes who cannot marry outside fifteen families" (Ketkar, op. cit., 15).

Ketkar's definition of caste lays stress on caste membership by birth (excluding the cases of recruitment through other channels), endogamy, and a common name. He simply suggests that a "larger group" or segment is a caste whereas a "smaller group" or segment is a subcaste: "A group is a caste or a subcaste in comparison with smaller or larger". This "comparison with smaller or larger," to use Ketkar's phraseology, is "not absolute but comparative in signification". Hutton notes this distinction with a measure of discomfort; for he mildly adds: "Here again the definition is not entirely satisfactory" (Hutton, op. cit., 43).

Hutton has also attempted a discussion on subcaste with a view to arriving at what a subcaste means and how it gets formed. Let us quote some relevant passages from him:
"One of the difficulties in defining caste is caused by a certain fluidity which shows itself most often perhaps in fissiparous tendencies, but sometimes of recent years in a tendency towards the amalgamation of analogous castes with a view to the exercise of social and political influence. . .

The tendency of many castes to split up and throw off fresh endogamous units has persisted from very early times . . .

Change of occupation is also a common cause of the splitting up of castes into subcastes. . .

Formerly fissions of this kind were often the result of migration or of political or social environmental factors, but latterly they have more often perhaps been the result of attempts by the well-to-do elements in a despised caste to cut adrift from their humbler brethren and raise themselves in the social scale by finding a new name and a dubious origin associating them with some higher caste" (Hutton, op. cit., 47).

Dwelling on the stages of the process of fission, Hutton goes on to say:

"This process of separation is generally the sequel to the segregation of part of the caste into a subcaste which for a long time has accepted wives from other subcastes while refusing to give daughters to such subcastes, thus establishing first of all the position of a superior subcaste, the claim to superiority generally being based on a change of occupation. The final step is to refuse to take wives from other subcastes and then to adopt a new name and deny all connection with the caste of origin. Thus the Kaibarttas of Bengal, perhaps a tribe originally, were long regarded, and regarded themselves, as a single caste divided occupationally into Jaliya Kaibarttas who practised the calling of fishermen and Neliya Kaibarttas who lived by agriculture" (Hutton, op. cit., 47-8).
Thus, according to Hutton, the subcastes are formed by the processes of fission and fusion. Dumont (1970, 196-200) has presented a very critical appraisal of the role of the processes of "scission, aggregation and social mobility" in the emergence of subcastes.

With a view to bringing out the distinction between caste and subcaste, Dumont writes:

"...we have been content to consider the caste as if it were one niche among others in a dovecote. Now the caste is not a niche or a block but is generally subdivided, at least at a primary level, into different subcastes, and there are often many further subdivisions. So much so that it has sometimes been suggested that the subcaste be considered the important group, the 'real' group" (Dumont, op. cit., 61).

And Dumont quotes from Senart (1894) only to reason out why subcaste should be taken as "true caste":

"You do not marry just anywhere within your caste but usually only within your subcaste, and it is also the subcaste and not the caste which has judicial institutions: it meets as an assembly covering a definite locality, and can excommunicate its members. Hence, Senart concludes, it was the subcaste, the endogamous unit and framework or organ of internal justice, which was the fundamental institution, and which in all logic ought to be called scientifically the true caste" (Dumont, op. cit., 61).

Dumont then goes on to discuss how Ghurye, "the doyen of sociology in India", has likewise stated it as categorically as Senart did, by saying:
"To regard endogamy as the chief characteristic of a caste is to treat all subcastes as the real castes... Stated generally, though it is the caste that is recognized by the society at large, it is the subcaste that is regarded by the particular caste and the individual" (Ghurye, 1957, 18-9).

He then states Karve's position which in part is opposed to Ghurye's stand insofar as Karve maintains that "castes result from the aggregation of subcastes rather than subcastes from the subdivision of castes, and more generally perhaps that castes result from the fusion of diverse groups rather than the scission of pre-existing groups" (Dumont, op. cit., 62). He also points out to the fact how Karve's use of the term caste for the subcaste, and caste-cluster in stead of caste itself is nothing but a mere "terminological plunge" -- something like "not-to-call-a-spade-a-spade".

Perhaps the most vocal expression to the concept of subcaste has been given by Mayer in his book -- Caste and Kinship in Central India, wherein the author has invested the term with concrete definitive load, as it were. Mayer's starting point is that there are three levels of membership in a caste:
"The lowest [level of membership] is that of an effective local subcaste population which I call the kindred of cooperation. This varies for each individual at any time, and around it there is a group which can be called the kindred of recognition. This is the population within which marriages are made and/or kin ties can be traced through mutual kin. . . The kindred of recognition forms a large and rather amorphous body. . . The kindred of cooperation, on the other hand, varies with individual decision. . . Beyond these two kindreds are people who are recognized as members of a subcaste which is endogamous, named and separate from other subcastes. But it usually spreads over a wide area and is therefore not an effective group" (Mayer 1960, 4).

Mayer makes it clear how a subcaste is a real social entity which is endogamous, named, separate from other subcastes, and usually spread over a wide area. He further strikes a distinction between the two levels of interaction: the "effective local subcaste population" and the "not an effective group" around which the networks of affinity and consanguinity extend -- "the population within which marriages are made and/or kin ties can be traced through mutual kin . . . a large and rather amorphous body".

The description and discussion in the foregoing pages more than amply illustrates how the terms varna, caste and subcaste have been variously employed by various authors and how rigorous and methodological exercises have been made by the different scholars with a view to investing each of these three social categories with its proper connotations in order to make definitive, more precise and more relevant.
The Conceptual Framework and the Present Study

The caste system can be best studied from its attributional and functional aspects. On the one hand the attributes of caste have to be spotlighted, treating caste as a unit and working out a hierarchy of such attributes; on the other hand, the caste as a system or, what Leach has called, the "network of economic, political and ritual relationships" has to be highlighted. Such two-pronged study would yield a better understanding of caste as both a unit and a system — the internal structure of caste and its external system of relationships.

Atal has made an attempt to work out a content analysis of some important definitions of caste with a view to arriving at an enumeration of the attributes of caste in terms of their graded relevance. In his attempt at working out such a hierarchy of attributes, Atal has employed Nadel's conceptual formulations that the latter has developed in his thoroughgoing analysis of social structure. Subscribing to the hierarchy of attributes of caste as both a unit and a system, as Atal has proposed it, I reproduce at length Atal's discussion, partly verbatim and occasionally paraphrased, in the concluding section of the present chapter; for it constitutes the conceptual framework that I have employed in the present study.
Elaborating his theory of social structure, Nadel discusses "the internal structure of roles" with a view to emphasizing how "an interconnected series of attributes... in their totality make up the character of any given role" (Nadel 1957, 31). And he further goes on to add that "any role series has a definite structure, of a hierarchical kind, in which the various attributes occupy places of graded relevance" (Nadel, op. cit., 31). Here he identifies three main grades of attributes: peripheral, sufficiently relevant, and basic or pivotal. And he goes on to define the nature of attributes of each grade as follows:

"Certain attributes are peripheral in that their variation or absence does not affect the perception or effectiveness of the role which is being performed; in other words, they are understood to be optional or to admit of alternatives" (Nadel, op. cit., 31-2).

"Other attributes are sufficiently relevant, that is, sufficiently firmly entailed in the series, for their variation or absence to make a difference to the perception and effectiveness of the role, rendering its performance noticeably imperfect or incomplete" (Nadel, op. cit., 32).

"The hierarchy of relevance culminates in attributes which are basic or pivotal in the sense that their absence or variation changes the whole identity of the role, and hence the interaction it would normally provoke... Structurally, the basic or pivotal attribute is such because, in its case, the role norm has zero tolerance... the basic or pivotal attribute is simply the attribute expected to

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entail the rest of the series. In normally entailing all the other attributes it also legitimizes them, so that, in its absence, the other attributes appear as illegitimate, unexplained, or with an altogether different meaning" (Nadel, op. cit., 32).

It is in the light of this hierarchy of attributes, as provided by Nadel, that Atal examines the hierarchy of attributes of caste.

**Caste as a Unit:**

The different attributes of caste, as mentioned by various social scientists, can be arranged as under:

a. **Basic Attributes:**
   
   Strict Endogamy

b. **Sufficiently Relevant Attributes:**
   
   Membership by birth  
   Common occupation  
   Caste council

c. **Peripheral Attributes:**
   
   Common name  
   Diacritical signs

**Strict Endogamy:**

Endogamy is regarded as one of the basic or pivotal attributes of caste, and it has been accepted as such by
several scholars. For instance, Karve defines caste as "an extended kin group" in which every member is treated as "either an actual or potential kin of another". As such, it could be argued that the kinship relations of an endogamous group may be direct or through other kin, and are undoubtedly linked by a genealogical table (Karve, 1958, 134). Likewise Davis has treated endogamy as "the central and most essential trait" of caste (Davis 1951, 176). And according to Weber, "Rules of endogamy...always form the essential basis of a caste" (Weber 1960, 32).

"In this context, it is necessary to remember that hypergamy and hypogamy are permitted between castes under certain conditions. The fact of such union does not bar the members of a caste from marrying within the caste itself. The group retains its endogamous character. There is a need, therefore, to distinguish between endogamy and isogamy. Hutton defines isogamy as 'marrying a souse from the same caste'. Endogamy, on the other hand, while it implies marriage within the group, does not eliminate the possibility of extra-caste marriages. When a group allows marriage within as well as outside, it is endogamous as well as hyper- and hypo-gamous. When no marriage outside the group is permitted, then this state of rigid endogamy may be called isogamy. Thus it is not isogamy, but endogamy, which is the basic attribute of caste" (Atal, *op. cit.*, 15).
Membership by Birth:

A man belongs to a caste by birth. As Ketkar makes clear, "the membership is confined to those who are born of members" (Ketkar, op. cit.). Though recruitment is mostly from within, in some cases birth is not the only way to acquire membership. There "are still parts of India where caste is fluid enough to make it possible for persons to acquire a caste into which they are not born" (Hutton, op. cit., 49).

Common Occupation:

A man belongs to a caste by virtue of common occupation. Barth has rightly pointed out that "Caste status and occupation status are not identical, but each caste position is identified with an occupational position" (Barth, op. cit., 118). Association of caste with occupation is generally taken for granted. For some castes, their very names indicate this association, so the association between caste and occupation is emphasized by many, but it cannot be the basic attribute of caste. This association "affects a limited number of castes and a limited number of occupations" (Karve 1958, 407).

"Where the caste name also signifies the occupation which is commonly and traditionally pursued and which has
a monopolistic character, then the name becomes a 'governing property', to use Nadel's phrase. But there are other cases where the caste name does not specify the occupation or where the same occupation is pursued by different caste groups (cf. Bougle, op. cit., 19). Accepting Karve's argument it could be said: "Occupational change does not ordinarily bring about a change in designation or composition of a caste. The injunction to follow a particular occupation has in no caste the same force as the regulations which ensure endogamy" (Karve, op. cit., 407). . . . Thus, occupation is only a sufficiently relevant attribute while endogamy remains the basic one" (Atal, op. cit., 16).

Caste Council:

A man belongs to a caste by the traditions of a caste council. "The effective caste group is one which has control over its members, and which imposes restrictions in regard to choice of mates and social intercourse with other caste groups. 'When these rules, whatever they may be, are broken, the culprit is dealt with by his caste fellows and punished according to the code of his caste' (Hutton, op. cit., 54). . . . Blunt speaks of restrictions imposed on 'commensality' and 'in the matter of social intercourse'. For effective control over caste members,
in many areas, caste councils are formed." These councils have an intervillage dimension" (Atal, op. cit., 17).
In Southern Rajasthan these caste councils are designated as the Chokhla while in Northern Madhya Pradesh they are called the Kudariya. "The areas covered by these caste councils differ from caste to caste. They are in no case strictly defined endogamous areas, for marriages outside these circles can, and do, take place. The boundaries of these circles also keep on changing" (Atal, op. cit., 17).

Common Name:

Names disclose the caste and occupation which are connected with an endogamous group. "Every caste is designated by a name. For the identification of a caste, its name is the most important clue. The name in some cases also suggests the occupational association of a caste" (Atal, op. cit., 17).

Sometimes two names are adopted by a single caste. For instance, the washermen are known as both the Dhobi and the Baretha, the barber as the Nai and the Khabas, the bamboo-workers as the Basor and the Dhanak, and the oil-pressers as the Teli and the Kothia. Sometimes two castes are seen to have adopted a common name. For instance, the Chadar as a caste name is common to both the Panbesuriya and the Athya.
**Diacritical Signs:**

Like common names, diacritical signs are provide a clue to the caste identification. Like caste names, names of the persons of a caste also help in the identification of a caste. The other indicators of differentiation may be the dress pattern, sacred thread, the *tilak* (sign on the forehead) which indicate the status of a high caste person. The different ways of wearing clothes, the different traditions — expressions of social distance, modes of greeting, celebration, etc. — decide the attributes of caste but they are not sufficient for a firm identification.

**Caste as a System:**

When we study caste as a system, we find that its basic attribute is a plurality of interacting endogamous units. A sufficiently relevant attribute of the caste system is its hierarchy. For the castes are formed and have evolved with the concept of ritual purity and pollution. As far as the peripheral attribute of caste as a system is concerned, we can only take note of the traditional division of labour.
Rural India presents a vivid portrait of caste as a system. For it is here that we find both vertical and horizontal extensions of castes. Such extensions of castes, when studied on the intravillage and intervillage planes, we discover four patterns of intra-caste and intra-village as well as inter-caste and inter-village. This has been discussed in detail in the following chapter.