CONCLUSION

The Raut caste of Chhattisgarh is divided into twelve endogamous sections. They have ethnic links in different parts of Chhattisgarh. The Jheria and the Thoththwars sections of the Rautes are spread over a wide area of Chhattisgarh. The Bandaiya, Bhorathiya and the Darhoal sections of them are small in number, and their population is further declining now. Other sections of the Rautes, i.e. the Kanaujia, Deshaha, Menav, Athhoriya, Magadha, Kawarai and the Kosariya are concentrated in fairly large number in certain parts of Chhattisgarh with prolific population.

All these groups are endogamous in nature. They are patrilocal and patrilineal. Some of the groups have immigrated from other parts of India, such as, the Kanaujias from Kanauj, the Magadhas from Magadh, etc. They have settled down in Chhattisgarh many generations ago, and the history of their migration is known through the myths, but there are no substantial data.

Family is the primary and basic unit of Raut's social structure. Most of the activities and celebrations are centered around family. In a family, the members co-operate with each other and function as a whole to defend their interests and security. As an economic unit, the family members apply a joint labour to strengthen the family's prosperity and economic self-sufficiency. Marriage is another institution which brings two families in close contact, and binds them with kinship relations for observance of rites and ceremonies. In this way, a group of families come in mutual contact within a cultural area and exchange brides forming an endogamous section and observe the social activities of the section as a corporate group.
The Rauts live with the other castes as a part of the Hindu peasantry in Chhattisgarh. They follow the Hindu ethics of religion and worship the village and home deities. Over a long period of time, there have been regular socio-economic contacts between the Rauts and other local peasant communities in this area. Traditionally, the Rauts were cattle-herders, but at present, they have adopted a variety of occupations as their caste vocations. They graze the village cattle and are employed as village and private graziers. Along with grazing of cattle, they also guard the standing crops in the village, and in return of their services, they are paid either in kind, or on share-basis. They also supply water to the houses of the farmers, and work as water-carriers. They bring water from tanks, wells and rivers depending upon the local resources of water. Ritually, they are considered a clean caste and people take food cooked by them. Even, the Brahmans accept water from their hands. They can enter the kitchen of the high caste Hindus. Their role as ritual specialists is also very important. The Raut caste is known as a principal Kamin caste in Chhattisgarh, and in some of the rituals their presence is essential, viz. marriage, death, etc.

The Rauts sell milk and milk-products in their own villages and go to other villages too, if the demand and consumption of milk are less in their own villages. Now they are going to urban centres to get higher price and good profit by selling milk and milk-products. The Rauts who get milk in a large quantity, have contracted to supply it to the hotels in the villages and towns, and get a relatively good price than the Rauts who sell their milk in the villages. They carry milk in trains and buses, but the Rauts who live in the nearby villages of the urban centres go by bicycles to sell milk, curd, whey and ghee. It is observed that the price of milk is cheaper in the villages than the price in the urban
centres is less than the price in the towns; and the price in the towns is less than the price in the industrial centres. So the mobility of Rautas is increasing day by day and they are going more and more to urban centres, as a result of which, milk is now hardly available in the villages except in the morning and evening before they go to sell it. It is also a fact that the Rautas of Chhattisgarh do not possess cattle of good breed, and so the yield of milk is poor. Due to this, milk shortage is marked everywhere in Chhattisgarh. The poor economic condition of the Rautas prevents them from purchasing cattle of good breed. So, the Rautas should be given pecuniary help to buy better-bred cattle, and they should be given training to feed them properly, to protect them from epidemics and diseases, and to rear them up carefully. They should also be helped to open dairy farms to supply milk and milk-products, both for improving their economic condition and meeting the increasing local needs.

Being a cattle-herder group, the Rautas are fully dependent on forests and pastures, which supply fodder for the cattle. They do not possess pasture lands and grow grass on them for feeding the cattle. Moreover, due to deforestation and transformation of pastures into agricultural fields, the availability of grass has become scarce, which is the main fodder of the cattle in Chhattisgarh. So the Rautas should be given adequate land and instruction as to how to grow grass and collect fodder for cattle, with other necessary help. Only then it could increase the yield of milk, which is a good vegetarian diet of a large mass of people among them, as also in other areas.

The Rautas are also employed as servants in the villages. They work as contractual and seasonal labour. The persons, who are poor, seek these jobs. They also clean the cooking and feeding utensils in the urban centres and towns. A majority of them have low economic status.
The people generally prefer to take the services of the Rauts, because they are a clean caste, and hesitate to employ other lower caste people, whom they think to be polluting. In this way, the Raut caste has become an integral part of the local peasantry of Chhattisgarh and they play a significant role in meeting the needs of others, in the system of Jajmani relations.

Their caste role is so important in this area, that other castes people often seek jobs assuming the name of 'Raut'. They keep a 'shoti' (sacred tuft of hair), wear an amulet, and carry a lathi (wood-stick). Generally such impersonation largely happens in the fairs, where these persons try to get employment by claiming themselves to be Rauts. When I enquired about this matter, I was told that in the fairs of Sheorinarayan, Paethampur, etc. in Bilsapur district, the persons belonging to lower caste groups, frequently seek employment in the hotels by introducing themselves as 'Rauts'. Thus they conceal their identity and get employed. Raut is a clean caste, so people like to be served by them. This effort of upward mobilisation of the lower caste people shows their inherent character to sanitise themselves by following the norms of the upper castes and changing their customs. Even this attitude seems to be very conspicuous among the Rauts.

All sections of the Rauts regulate their group by different norms. Some sections employ Brahmans to officiate during the marriage and other rites of life cycle, while some others only consult the priest to fix the date of marriage. Some of the sections sanction the use of palanquin in marriage, and some of the sections do not allow it to be used. In the same way, death rite is performed by many sections by cremation and burial, while the others practice only burial. It was, however, marked that all sections of the Rauts are attempting to upgrade their sense of values
and changing their customs to conform with the Brahmanical values. The Rauts claim to belong to the rank of the Kshatriyas. So they identify themselves as followers of Sri Krishna, by placing themselves in the rank of the Kshatriyas. But, it does not seem feasible, because they are dependent on other castes of the peasantry, and, actually the ranking of the castes largely depends upon the differentiation made by the dominant caste of the region, excepting the Brahmans. The Brahman caste is everywhere placed on the top rank in the hierarchy in Chhattisgarh. The dominant castes of the region put themselves on the top after the Brahmans, in the stratification of the society. Brahmans are ritually superior, so it does not seem possible for the dominant castes to push them down in the caste hierarchy. So in different regions of Chhattisgarh, we find that different ethnic groups, viz. Sonar, Baniya, Thakur, Brahman, Agharia, Kanwar, etc. dominate in the local level, and they try to stratify the society.

Rauts are always put among the clean caste people and their role significance is prominent among the local peasantry. Inter-dependence of the castes in the Chhattisgarh villages is an important feature. They are related by the Jajmani system. Each caste has got its hereditary occupation, such as, the Sonars prepare ornaments, the Telis press oil, the Lohars work on metals, the Koshtas weave cloth, the Brahmans do priestly work and, in the same way, other castes of the peasantry have got their specialised occupations. Raut, Nai, Dhobi, Kumhar, etc. are Kamin castes, and their services are needed to complete the rituals. They have also got their specialised occupations to earn their livelihood. But land is held by almost all the castes and they grow various food-crops. The families who have settled down in the villages mostly possess cultivating land, either sufficient or a little. The Rauts also give much importance to cultivation, as well as, to their traditional occupations. By agriculture,
they grow paddy and other Rabi crops. Their average land-holding, however, is small in Chhattisgarh. So they are poor, and have to be engaged in other occupations, such as, running betel-shops, grocery, etc.

Each section of the Rauts has got its own traditional caste panchayat to decide on the matters of conflict and caste disputes. It prevents breach of caste rules. It adjudicates the civil suits and other situations which tend to upset the social equilibrium. The persons who violate the caste rules are punished, and in serious cases, the erring persons are ex-communicated or expelled from the caste. This caste panchayat brings cohesiveness and solidarity in the group and the people become linked with the same norms and customs.

The role of the Rauts in the local peasantry of Chhattisgarh is very significant. They live mainly in rural areas, and are engaged in their caste occupations for their subsistence, and cultivate their own small land-holdings. The other characteristic features of this caste are low social status, simple localised traditional culture, economic inter-dependence in varying degrees with local communities and urban centres, and attachment to the soil, local community and tradition. All these attributes of peasant culture have made these cattle-herders, an integral part of the larger peasant society of this region.

The Rauts have settled in the Chhattisgarh villages and have combined agriculture with their traditional occupation of cattle-herding, which shows their shift from pastoral economy to agricultural economy, involving them in the process of pastoral-agriculture continuum. Vidyarthi (1974) has nicely dealt with the cases of Gararias and Ahirs of Bihar by placing them in the pattern of pastoral-agricultural
continuum. These two castes Garerias and Ahirs have combined agriculture with their traditional occupation of sheep-rearing and cattle-rearing, respectively. This combination of agriculture with their pastoral life gave rise to a new style of socio-economic life. It has been aptly marked in the Chhattisgarh villages that by agriculture the Rauts get fodder for their cattle and a good economy for their own livelihood, which presents a two-fold economy and makes the Rauts, a part of the peasant economy and culture.