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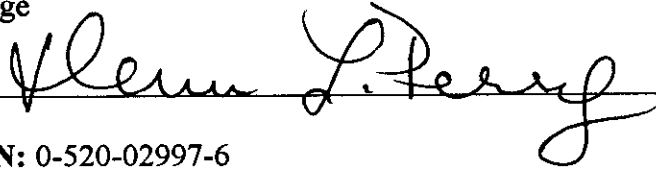
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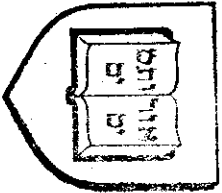
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Had not all the copies of my processed notes been burnt in the fire on 24 April 1970 at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, I would not have thought of writing a book based entirely on my memory of my field-experience. I wish therefore to acknowledge the part played by the arsonists in the birth of this book.

## CHAPTER VI

## Relations Between Castes

## 1 Introductory

IF THE Rampura villager's relation with the external environment was mediated through agriculture his relations with other human beings was mediated through caste. But it was caste in the sense of the *jati*, the small local endogamous group and not in the sense of the broad all-India category of *varna*. One of the first questions asked of a visitor was about his *jati*, and the villagers regarded that bit of information as essential in order to learn about his occupation, diet and life-style. How they behaved towards him also depended to some extent on his *jati*.

When, however, the visitor was from a different linguistic region, learning his *jati* did not make much sense. For instance, I was accompanied by a student during my second trip to Rampura in 1962. My friends were curious about his social origins and I explained to them that he was a Bania from Baroda in Gujarat. I had to explain further that Bania referred to the trading caste in Gujarat. The villagers knew the Banajigas, the local trading caste, and the urban Komati were usually referred to as *shettaru* in Mysore. The Banajigas spoke Kannada while the Komati spoke Telugu. My student spoke Gujarati and a certain amount of Hindi. His dress was a long *kurta* (or *jubbā*) and a pair of white pyjamas. Pyjamas were locally associated with Muslims but the fact the student wore homespun *khadder* suggested strong leanings towards the Congress party. In other words, the student's language and dress made it difficult to place him in the same category as any local caste. The villagers were eventually content to regard him as an outsider, Hindu and vegetarian. He was also an educated man, and my student. The fact that they could not talk to him in Kannada bothered them. They occasionally used me as an interpreter.

As I have described earlier, the older villagers cast me in the role of a Brahmin and landowner. By so doing, they were able to make me behave towards them in certain predictable ways, and they in

turn were able to regulate their behaviour to me. I may have spent many years in Bombay and abroad (*sime*) but that did not alter my caste or my belonging to a landowning family. I had, like everyone else, to be categorized, and without categorization, regular relations were impossible.

Every caste had a traditional occupation and the various castes of a region were mutually dependent. The fact that money played a minimal role in the traditional economy of the village helped to stress the inter-dependence of the members of different castes and classes. A townsman like me could not help being impressed, even in 1948, at the popularity of barter in the internal economy of the village. Linked to this was the villagers', at least the older villagers', attitude to cash. Money was to be hoarded, lent at interest, or converted into land, house or jewelry when enough had been accumulated. A five or ten rupee note was not changed into smaller notes let alone coins for fear that it would be spent.

A man inherited an occupation, and the skills and secrets involved in its practice were transmitted to him by his father, uncle or older brothers. There was a feeling that the traditional occupation was the proper or natural one for members of the caste, and there was pride in the skill required for it as well as a sense of its importance. Everyone had it though Peasants had it more than the others.

When the members of different castes met and the talk veered round to their occupations there followed a heated argument as to the relative importance of each—rather like a meeting of scholars from different disciplines each of whom is profoundly convinced that his own is the crucial one.

A term of abuse occasionally heard in the village gave an inkling of the villagers' attitude to traditional occupation. When someone was clumsy in doing a piece of work he was likely to be reprimanded by an elder, 'What is it you are doing, you *addakasha*? *Kasbu* was occupation, and a person referred to his hereditary occupation as *nanna kasbu* (our occupation). The speaker expected everyone to know that he was proficient in his hereditary occupation and that outsiders could not be expected to be equally proficient. *Addakasha* meant literally 'cross occupation', i.e. an unnatural occupation. An occupation which was not hereditary in the caste was an unnatural occupation. The corollary of proficiency in a hereditary occupation was clumsiness in a non-hereditary occupation.

Among the Hindu castes, at the annual festival of Gowri (the wife

of Shiva and the mother of Ganesha), the tools used in the hereditary occupation were worshipped. The festival came soon after the end of the hectic period of sowing and transplanting rice, and the tools deserved the thanks of those who had used them. The next hectic period came at least a hundred days later when the ripe crop was ready for harvesting. After harvest, the cattle were thanked.

But the impression of immutable, hereditary occupations which the above gives is not quite correct, for not every caste was able to make a living by practising its occupation, and agriculture and trade of some sort were common to all. For instance, several members of the artisan and serving castes in Rampura practised agriculture or trade either wholly or along with their traditional occupation. Only a few Shepherd households reared some sheep, and five or six households continued to weave *kambhis* (coarse woollen blankets). The others were whole-time agriculturists. The richer of the two Toddy-man households owned some land, a toddy shop and a half-share in a cloth shop. The senior brother also worked as a tailor at the shop.

I came across a peripatetic band of well-diggers who told me that they were originally Washermen but a switch as far-reaching as that was most unusual. In the neighbouring villages of Kere and Hogur, many Fishermen had become agriculturists and market gardeners. The Fishermen of Hogur were well-known for the skill and industry with which they cultivated their small plots of land.

While occupational specialization resulted in the interdependence of castes, hierarchical ideas, especially as expressed in endogamy and the restrictions on inter-dining, emphasized their separation from each other. Hypergamous ideas did occur in southern Mysore as elsewhere but they were not elaborated as in Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan, or in nineteenth-century Bengal. Caste endogamy was the rule, and until the thirties the smallest local *jati* was usually the unit within which marriages occurred. This was particularly true of the lower castes. But during the forties, and more especially during the post-Independence years, marriages increasingly ignored the smallest subdivisions within the main *jati*. Thus while a Shepherd (*kurjida*) still married another Shepherd, the sub-divisions separating them were often ignored. Jumping across sub-divisions was more common among the higher and more populous and educated *jatis*.

A caste or *jati* was also a commensal group in the sense that food cooked by any adult member of the caste was acceptable to all the

others. This should be distinguished from cases where there was only one-way movement in cooked food (and also drinking water). Here the acceptors of food were ritually inferior to the givers. Sometimes, the men of two different *jatis* such as Peasants and Shepherds ate food cooked by each other while the women did not. (At the huge collective dinners food was usually cooked and served by men volunteers. Within the household, however, it was the women who cooked.) However, this has to be distinguished from true symmetry which occurred only within a *jati*, or in its smallest unit. But here one very rarely came across individuals, priests or the very orthodox, who accepted cooked food only from their wives.

The maintenance of the separateness of castes and of the structural distance between them was achieved through the ideas of purity and pollution. A caste was pure in relation to a lower caste and impure in relation to a higher. The higher caste was prohibited from accepting cooked food or drinking water from the lower, let alone have communal relations with it. In extreme cases, as between a Brahmin and Harijan, a minimum physical distance had to be maintained. Violation of the rules governing the acceptance of cooked food and water, and other forms of contact, resulted in the member of the higher caste being polluted. In such cases, he was required to undergo purificatory rites. I shall discuss the part played by purity and pollution ideas in intercaste relations in Section 3.

## 2 *Hierarchy*

The idea of hierarchy was present everywhere. Each man belonged to a caste which formed part of a system of ranked castes. Particular elements of culture such as diet, occupation and custom and ritual were distinguished as higher and lower: thus there was a higher as well as a lower diet, and superior as well as inferior occupations. Animals, vegetables, plants, grain, timber and fuel were also distinguished as higher or lower. A good breed of cow, for instance, was praised as '*olle jati*' (good *jati*) while a poor breed was dismissed as '*kilu jati*' (lower *jati*).

Pride in one's caste was common, and along with it went a slighting of the other castes and their customs. A Peasant, for instance, would cite a proverb commenting on the unreliability of the Smiths (*waja nanna magana gju goju*), and another criticizing the intermarriage disputes of the Shepherds. A Shepherd, on the other hand, men-

tioned a saying about Peasants that the money earned by them was squandered in paying fines presumably to caste or village assemblies.

A proverb expressed the exasperation of invitees invited to Lingayat dinners: the food was served only after an elaborate worship of Shiva which paid little heed to the guests' hunger. The Brahmins were criticized for their incapacity to do manual labour, their love of ease and over-attention to food.

However, when in a humorous or self-critical mood, a man criticized his own caste, or joined others in criticizing it. Shepherds were not only notorious for disputing endlessly but for their lack of subtlety. Stories exemplifying either quality were told by the others. One evening Chenna, an elderly Shepherd leader, gave the headman and Nadu Gowda an account of a big Shepherd wedding in Mysore from which he had just returned. Several leading politicians and other important persons from the caste had attended the wedding. Mutton curry had been cooked in an immense cauldron to be served to the several hundred hungry guests. As the vessel was lifted from the stove and placed on the floor, the bottom suddenly gave way, and in a trice, the mouth-watering curry was all over the kitchen floor. The headman started laughing and said, 'After all, Shepherds! Nadu Gowda and Chenna joined him in the laughter, and it was not easy to tell whose laughter was the heartiest. Chenna had the gift of being able to laugh at himself and there were several others like him in Rampura.

Sometimes self-criticism occurred in an exaggerated form and this was accompanied by praise of the virtues, real or imagined, of another caste. Thus I have heard Peasants commend the sense of unity of Fishermen and contrast it with their own divisiveness.

Occasionally, however, there was what appeared to be a more objective appreciation of the virtues or skills of another caste or other group. I came across individuals who pointed out to me the skill involved (for instance) in a particular agricultural operation, weaving or basketry. A few villagers praised the aesthetics of Muslim cooking and serving, and of their gift-giving.

However, caste was not the only area for the expression of hierarchical ideas. Landownership patterns were inequalitarian in as much as there were a few big landowners at the top, each of whom owned a sizeable quantity of land while at the bottom were a large number of landless labourers. In between were small landowners many of whom were also tenants, and they were followed by tenants. Many

tenants hired themselves out as labourers during transplantation and harvesting.

A rich landowner commanded prestige just as a poor landless labourer excited in the more fortunate either pity or contempt. The former had also the capital to invest money in profitable enterprises. Typically, a rich landowner lived in a substantial house with an open, central courtyard, and was creditor to a large number of people while a landless labourer lived in a tiny hut or on the verandah of someone's house. He had to borrow money from others to survive but he was such a poor risk that it was very difficult for him to find a creditor.

There was a certain amount of overlap between the twin hierarchies of caste and land. The richer landowners generally came from such high castes as Brahmin, Peasant and Lingayat while the Harjans contributed a substantial number of landless labourers. But a few members from low castes such as the Smith, Oilman and Toddyman owned reasonable amounts of land while several Peasants and Shepherds were without land. Such lack of overlap between the two hierarchies produced interesting consequences. For instance, there were two households of Toddyman in Rampura, one comfortably off and the other very poor. As stated earlier, members of the former household commanded respect as landowners and had been placed in the second category of contributors to village festivals while in the third category were included several Peasants, Shepherds and other higher castes. In contrast to the wealthier household, the poor one was socially almost invisible. It consisted of a husband who did odd work for a landowner while his wife wove mats from dried toddy-palm leaves. The two lived on someone's verandah. While poverty did not alter caste status, there was very little communication between the two households. Thammayya, the head of the better-off household, talked to me once or twice about a really wealthy fellow-caste man's household in Mysore, and how they worshipped a miniature representation, in gold, of a toddy-palm tree (*Boswellia thurifera*). The members of the household were somewhat westernized, and prominent in public life. It was obvious that Thammayya admired them. He would probably have liked to emulate them but it needed wealth and sophistication which were beyond him.

Ideas of hierarchy derived from the *varna* model of five-layered India-wide castes are not only too simple and clear-cut but misleading in understanding the caste system as it operates at the village

level.<sup>1</sup> To mention a glaring example of the lack of fit between the all-India category of *varna* and the strictly local, though omnipresent, category of *jati*, one has only to consider the Shudra. According to the *varna* system, the Shudras are fourth in the rank-order of castes, just above the Untouchables who are said to be beyond the pale of the system. Applied at the local level, the Shudra is a blanket category for a whole range of disparate *jatils* from prestigious, landowning Peasants (who have, in places, passed off for Kshatriyas) to artisan and servicing *jatils* one or more of which were just above the Untouchability line. There was no comparison, for instance, in the social standing of the Peasants and Shepherds on the one hand and the Swineherds and Basketry-makers on the other. Again, in the *varna* system there was no place for the Lingayats who claimed to be at least the equals of Brahmmins.

Even of the five all-India castes, the fifth one is regarded as being outside the system. And there is no doubt about the exact position of each in the hierarchy. In the *jati* system, however, only the two extremes of the hierarchy are fixed with any degree of firmness and there is ambiguity regarding the position of all the others. Frequently, there is some difference between claimed and conceded rank, such difference being occasionally long-standing. Dissensus regarding the ranks of particular castes was part of the dynamics of the *jati* system.

The view of caste as a ladder-like hierarchy expressed in *varna* prevents the understanding of *jati* which is basically local. While uncertainty as to mutual rank is a marked characteristic of the middle regions of the *jati* system, it is not restricted to them. Even the popular idea that the Brahmmins occupy the top position in the hierarchy needs to be modified. Brahmmins are not a single homogeneous group but a congeries of similar-yet-different *jatils*. For instance, a large number of castes, including of course other Brahmmins, will not accept food or water handled by the Marka Brahmmins (also known as Hale Karnataka).

Marka Brahmmins were not present in Rampura but many villagers, especially the older ones, had come across them in villages which they had visited. Several *jatils* in the village, the Lingayat and Peasant among others, felt that they could not accept cooked food, drinking

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the relation between *varna* and *jati* see my essay 'Varna and Caste' in *Caste in Modern India*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1967, pp. 63-9.

water or even lime paste for betel leaves or snuff, from a Marka Brahmmin.<sup>1</sup> As an illustration of the attitude of the villagers towards Markas, I was told the story of a group of Rampurians who were on a brief visit to Kannambadi village where they did not know anyone. Walking in the blistering afternoon sun had tired them, and their throats were parched. They saw an orthodox Brahmmin, resplendent with caste marks, sitting on a verandah, and requested him for some water. He went in to get it. In the meanwhile, a passer-by told them that it was a Marka household. The visitors at once took to their legs before the kind host returned with the water. The story caused much amusement.

That the gap between claimed and conceded status can be both wide and long-standing was proved by the example of the Smiths. In southern Mysore, the Smiths were referred to as Acharis or Wajaru. Within the category of Acharis, the term Akkasale referred to workers in precious metals, Badagi to Carpenters who were also Blacksmiths, and Kanchugara to Brass and Copper workers. But these occupational divisions did not represent endogamous groups. For the latter, the Smiths were divided into three categories, Shiva-chara, Kulachara and Matachara. The first two were vegetarians and teetotallers, the first being stricter than the second, while the third ate meat and drank liquor. The Shiva-chara category was mentioned by my informants but there were no representatives of it in Rampura while there were those of the other two. It was, however, interesting that the Carpenter-cum-Blacksmiths were very largely Kulacharis while the workers in precious metals were all meat-eaters and liquor-drinkers. In other words, in spite of statements to the contrary, occupation, style of life and endogamy all overlapped considerably among the Smiths.

The Smiths were found all over South India, and their attempt to raise themselves up in the caste hierarchy through Sanskritization was an old one. In the towns, they called themselves Vishwakarma Brahmmins and wore the sacred thread. But it looked as though the Smith attempt had only roused the ire of the other castes. The various

<sup>1</sup> Powdered lime (*chunam*) was mixed with water to make a paste which was applied on the back of betel leaves and then eaten with sliced arecanut. In this part of the country, arecanut was eaten only after the nut had been sliced, boiled with *Catechu indica*, and dried.

Lime paste was also used, in minuscule quantities, by snuff-takers to knead tiny lumps of moist tobacco to powder.

artisan and servicing castes were critical if not hostile to the Smith claim to be superior to them. Two arguments were cited against the Smith claim, one being their love of meat and liquor and the other, their being grouped among the 'Left-hand' castes. It was alleged that even some Kulachara men drank on the sly, and in the toddy-booth, the Harijan, Swineherd, Muslim and Smith all had to drink out of the same mugs. The Smiths were also subjected to symbolic as well as real disabilities as they were a 'Left-hand' caste. Thus while the 'Right-hand' castes had twelve pillars to their wedding *panchals* (awnings with plaited coconut thatching and supported by stout bamboo poles), Smiths were allowed only eleven pillars. They were not allowed to perform weddings within the village. They performed them at pilgrim-centres or in villages or towns where they were represented in some strength and had temples to their caste-deities, Kai and Hanuman.

No 'Right-hand' caste, including the Harijan, accepted cooked food or drinking water at the hands of the Smiths. Smiths were not permitted to walk on the village streets with their sandals on. The Peasant headman of Kere described to me an incident which had occurred in his village during the World War I years, and which pointedly brought home to me the hostility of the 'Right-hand' castes to the Smith. A rich Smith from Mysore had lent nearly Rs 5,000/- to his debtors in Kere, and in those days it was a large sum. He walked in one afternoon wearing *chadavu* which were slip-on sandals of red leather with toes curving upwards and inwards. In those days, *chadavu* were a status symbol worn by rich men from the high castes. The *kulavadi* (or *cheliwadi*), the traditional Harijan (Holeyra) servant of the high castes, became very annoyed at the Smith's sporting the slippers, and belaboured him till he became unconscious.

It is significant that the *kulavadi* coming from the oppressed *jati* or Holeyas should have taken it upon himself to punish the Smith. And the offending Smith was no ordinary person—he was an outsider and town-dweller, and had lent money to a few leading lights of Kere. But the *kulavadi* ignored all this and looked upon him as a member of the 'Left-hand' group who had no right to take on the symbols of the high castes in the 'Right-hand' group. It gave him an opportunity to punish a member of a higher caste.

Even in 1948 elderly villagers repeatedly talked to me about the low ritual rank of the Smiths and the stigma that attached to them as a result of their inclusion in the Left-hand group of castes. The

disabilities, real and symbolic, from which they suffered were cited as evidence of their low rank. One particular symbolic disability was mentioned by several people: they not only had to have 'one pillar less' (*ondu kamba kadime*) but they were 'one colour less' (*ondu banna kadime*) than the 'Right-hand' castes. The term for colour, *banna*, is a corruption of the Sanskrit *varna* which originally referred to the division of Hindu society into five ranked categories. (The term *banna* is also used, very rarely though, for caste.)

But in spite of the general view that the Smiths were of low rank I found that they had moved upwards ritually and this was brought home to me during the Rama Navami festival (1952) when the headman made gifts to married women from Smiths and Brahmin castes. Rama was worshipped elaborately on each of the ten festival days and special dishes were cooked and offered to the deity. The expenses of each day's worship were borne by one of the better-off villagers. On the headman's day, the dishes cooked were even more elaborate than those cooked on the other days, and in addition, he gave gifts of cloth (for making blouses) to five high caste wives. He probably did this in memory of his wife who had died nearly a year ago. As mentioned earlier, widowhood was an inauspicious condition, and there was a strong belief that women who had done good deeds in their previous incarnations predeceased their husbands. A wife who had predeceased her husband was worshipped (*muttaide pyile*) on certain occasions such as a wedding. Five married women were invited and shown ritual respect and given gifts of cash, blouse-cloth, fruit, flower and betel leaves and arecanuts.

The women who were honoured by the headman were the Rama priest's wife, the unmarried daughter of the Brahmin postmaster, and three Smith wives. I was surprised to find that the Smith wives were included among those honoured. I could not help recalling a dispute which had taken place in a satellite village of Kere many years ago in which a Peasant had been punished by the village elders for allowing a young girl from a friendly Smith family to take part in a wedding procession in his household. Along with Peasant wives, this girl had carried a *kalasa* (a metal vessel filled with water and its mouth stoppered with a coconut, and with betel or mango leaves stuck between the inner rim of the vessel and the coconut). A *kalasa* was regarded as sacred, and worshipped.

It was unheard of to let a Smith girl participate in a Peasant wedding procession. Someone had complained to the elders of Kere

saying that the participation of the Smith girl in the procession had polluted all those who had attended the wedding and that the man responsible ought to be punished suitably. The matter was settled only after the wrongdoer had apologized to the elders, undergone purification, and paid a fine.<sup>1</sup>

The inclusion of the three Smith wives in the ritual performed on the occasion of the Rama Navami showed that the situation in Rampura in 1952 was radically different from that in the dispute just described. There were at least three more Brahmin wives in Rampura but they were either unavailable that day, or thought that it was beneath them to go to the temple and receive the gifts. Lingayat wives were also absent but this was probably due to their reluctance to visit temples of Vishnu.

In striking contrast to the kind of hierarchy conceptualized in *varna*, uncertainty as to relative rank characterized the hierarchy as it operated at the grassroots level. Besides, the hierarchy had its strictly local features. Thus it was not surprising to find occasionally the respective ranks of the local sections of a single *jati* varying in different villages. For instance, Barbers in Rampura seemed to enjoy a ritual privilege which was denied them in Kere and a few other villages—at least that was the view of Kempayya, the Washer-man, who had the reputation of being the veteran of many caste disputes involving abstruse points of customary law.

One of the crucial rites at the weddings of the higher castes was *dhare* at which the bride was given as a gift by her parents to the groom. This was symbolized by each close relative of the bride and groom pouring a little milk over the bride's cupped hands which held a coconut resting on a few betel leaves and arecanuts. It was necessary for the groom's hands to be touching the coconut as well as the bride's hands to signify his acceptance of the gift.

Among the Rampura Peasants it was customary for a Barber to hold a vessel below the hands of the bridal couple to collect the poured milk. He received a gift for his services but even more important was the fact that he was given a role in the wedding ritual of Peasants.

It was Kempayya's contention that the Barber's was a polluting caste, and that he had no place inside the wedding *panchal* or booth. He cited a judgement of some law court which had declared that the

<sup>1</sup> See my 'The Dominant Caste in Rampura', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 61, February 1959, pp. 1-16.

right to hold the milk-bowl belonged to the Washerman and not to the Barber. The latter had quoted in support of their claim a copper-plate inscription from Conjeevaram in Tamil Nadu while Washermen had produced a similar inscription from Keragodu in Mysore District supporting their stand, and the judge had held that as far as Mysore State was concerned Keragodu had to be given precedence over Conjeevaram. Kempayya said that the dispute in question had occurred when he was a boy, and he did not know the details. He also did not know the names of the rulers (or other authorities) who had recorded their decision on copper-plates.<sup>1</sup>

Many years ago, during one wedding season, Kempayya had managed to assert his right to hold the milk-bowl but the Barbers had appealed against it to Nadu Gowda's father, who was then the caste headman, and he had upheld their claim. Kempayya was bitter about the decision. He had strong feelings about the position of his caste, and he disliked Barbers intensely.

I discussed the question of the mutual ritual rank of the Barber and Washerman with Nadu Gowda. He did not agree with Kempayya's view that the Washerman was not polluting while the Barber was. Was the Washerman pure when he washed menstrual saris? He was impure just as the Barber was when he carried his *hadapa* (box in which he kept the tools of his trade).<sup>2</sup>

Relations between Kempayya and the Barbers were not friendly even in 1948. While he did wash their clothes he did not visit their homes to collect the washing as he did with the other castes. They had to take their washing to him. On their side, the Barbers did shave Kempayya but did not visit him in his house.

The view of the caste hierarchy as it operated at the local level was then radically different from that expressed in *varna*. Mutual rank was uncertain and arguable, and this stemmed from the fact that mobility was possible in caste. In a few cases, the chasm between claimed and conceded status was so wide that no resolution was possible.

Ambitious castes, or local sections of them, tried to borrow the customs, ritual and life-style of the higher castes in an effort to move up. That was the way to be one up on one's structural neighbours.

<sup>1</sup> References to judgements of law courts and copper-plate inscriptions occurred frequently while discussing caste, rank and customs. But details regarding dates, places and exact contents were rarely forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> The Washerman bathed after washing menstrual saris and the Barber after he had plied his trade. At least that was what they were expected to do.



The locally dominant caste was an obstacle to mobility for several reasons. In the first place, such mobility had the potential of threatening its own ambition if not position. Second, it could result in a chain reaction which could then lead to the suspension of the flow of services and goods from dependent castes. It was, however, helpless when a higher power such as the Rajah approved of the mobility, or a powerful sectarian movement swept the countryside attracting converts from low castes.

Disputes as to mutual caste-rank were conducted in a particular syllogistic domain. The kind of ritual which a caste had, its customs, myth of origin, and style of life all became points in the attempt to change its overall rank. The members of the caste stressed features which they thought supported their claim while their adversaries picked on unfavourable features. Thus Kempayya argued that Washermen had a high rank because they made things pure. (The Washerman caste's full name was Madivala Shettaru, and *madi* Washerman caste's full name was Madivala Shettaru, and *madi* referred to ritual purity. The clothes which a Washerman took were impure or *mailige* but after he had washed them they became *madi*). However, after the Barber had shaved his customer the latter was impure, and he had to have a bath and wear fresh clothes to become pure once again. But Nadu Gowda countered these arguments by saying that the Washerman was no less impure than the Barber when, for instance, he washed menstrual clothes. And perhaps also when he washed the clothes of a family in mourning, or suffering from birth-pollution.

Since each of the many items of the culture of a caste had rank implications, their evaluations did not always converge. For instance, a caste's occupation might have rated high while its dietary was low. The problem was made more intractable by the arbitrary investment of a trifling difference in custom between two *jatis* with considerable rank implications. A summation of ranks in diverse areas was not possible. This led to members of the caste stressing features favouring high rank while others picked on unfavourable features.

The articulated criteria of ranking were usually ritual, religious or moral resulting in concealing the importance of secular criteria. The influence of the latter was, however, real. For instance, while land-ownership and numerical strength were crucial in improving caste rank, any claim to high rank had to be expressed in ritual and symbolic terms. But at any given moment there were inconsistencies between secular position and ritual rank.

The idea of hierarchy was a *leit motif* underlying every area of culture. I shall illustrate what I mean by reference to two important areas, occupation and diet.

Occupations were distinguished into high and low on the basis of several criteria: non-manual occupations were superior to manual ones, and in the latter, the defiling and sinful occupations were the lowest.

The superiority of non-manual occupations was derived from a dual source: First, the Brahmins did not do manual work.<sup>1</sup> They had mastered the complicated ritual which was performed at life-cycle crises, calendrical festivals and temple worship. It was in the context of the non-manual tradition of the Brahmins that the Rama priest's over-attention to agriculture provoked harsh as well as contemptuous comments from the villagers. Once a young village boy accompanied the Rama priest and me from Gudi to Rampura and he kept telling me about the priest's indifference to his temple duties and his devotion to farming. I felt uncomfortable and the priest was annoyed but the boy took no notice of our reactions. According to him, if the priest kept the temple doors open for a few hours every day and distributed *prasa* among the devotees, the temple was certain to become popular. That might also bring in some additional money and grain to him. The boy was trying to point out the benefits of piety.

Manual labour was regarded as low but it was real work unlike non-manual activity. It was the farmer's back-breaking work which produced food for everyone. The whole world depended for its sustenance on the labour of the farmer who himself got a pittance of what he produced thanks to the rapacity of the government, landowners, and the middlemen. Many others such as priests and mendicants had to be supported by his activity.

Even though farming was the most important occupation in the world, the better-off farmers were keen that their sons should obtain education and become salaried officials in the government, or doctors or lawyers. Obviously they were tired of supporting everyone by their labours and wanted to join the ranks of the parasites. If you cannot lick them, join them.

<sup>1</sup> Brahmins who did agricultural work were, however, to be found in Western Mysore. They were the Sankethis, who spoke a Tamil dialect, and they were well-known for their capacity for hard, manual work and agricultural skill. But they managed to combine it with an orthodox style of life and also love of Sanskrit learning and Karnatic music.

The behaviour-pattern of landowners was also conducive to the lack of prestige of manual work. Generally, landowners, especially the bigger ones, only supervised the actual cultivation of their farms by their servants, tenants, share-croppers and labourers. Supervision usually meant exercising the tongue: issuing instructions, shouting, abusing, threatening, and very occasionally, praising faintly, and in rare circumstances, even the vague promise of a distant reward.<sup>1</sup> When there were grown sons, fathers were relieved of even routine supervision. However, they continued to evince a keen interest in farm work and they controlled the purse strings. They ordered their sons about as though they were children. Occasionally, they visited their farms to find out for themselves how good the supervision was.

The degree of abstinence from manual labour varied, however, from landowner to landowner. The biggest rural landowners emulated the urban upper classes and the latter in turn emulated or at least took their cues from the Mysore royalty. For instance, a few wealthy landowners in the region kept horse-drawn carriages, in imitation of the urban upper classes. Elderly villagers remembered that when the present headman's father made his occasional visits to Mysore in the first two decades of this century, he used to wear a close-collared jacket (*kotu*), a gold-bordered dhoti, worn the Brahminical way, red slippers and a gold-laced turban, a style of dress that was characteristic of wealthy and respectable citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Manual work was either skilled or unskilled, and a skilled worker in any area of activity commanded respect. I have mentioned earlier how the taciturn headman was moved to admire Koonana Javarayi's farming skill and hard work. Kulle Gowda, whose dislike of farming was well-known, was, however, respected for his skill with his hands. A young Potter immigrant from Tagadur bragged about the skill needed to lift, quickly and neatly, the hollow, tubular stem of beaten earth emerging from the wheel, after it had been severed from the wheel with a pin.

The Potter claimed that no non-Potter had fingers deft enough for the operation. I tried my hand at lifting the stem but made a mess

<sup>1</sup> However, in the 1920s, a few leading landowners such as Nadu Gowda's father and Melkote (Sr.) seemed to have had no reluctance to do manual work on their farms.

<sup>2</sup> When in Rampura, however, he wore only a gold-laced dhoti in the Brahminical way. This was probably supplemented by a shawl worn like a stole during cold or wet weather.

of it as the bottom part collapsed. My performance proved the Potter's point, and provided amusement to those present.

The young Potter's bragging about the skill involved in his traditional occupation brought home to me that there was a difference between internal and external perceptions in evaluating an occupation. But with outsiders like me, they also took the trouble to point out the skill involved in the traditional occupations of castes other than their own. They did not want me to think that rural occupations were unskilled.

When my Potter friend was expatiating on the skill involved in his craft his discourse was interrupted by the sudden arrival of an old Potter from a town about fifty miles away. He had received some training in a craft school during his younger days and could make a few pottery toys. He was urged to show his skill to me. He was a quiet man and in about half an hour he produced a few specimens of his art. We all admired them but my articulate friend's admiration reduced him to total silence. I was surprised by his reaction though I did not comment upon it. Even within the same caste unusual skill extracted a tribute from everyone.

Manual work was either clean or polluting, and polluting work lowered the rank of the caste which customarily did it. For instance, the continued care of the scavenging swine greatly lowered the rank of Swineherds. In fact, villagers had little contact with the local Swineherds, and this was only partly due to the distance of their settlement from the main village. Unlike the Harijans, they were not indispensable to the village economy, and social and religious life.

The majority of Harijans, men and women, worked as labourers on land owned by the others, and while this work was of low prestige it was not polluting. But the Harijans were also required to remove dead cattle (including buffaloes) from the houses of caste Hindus. Handling dead cattle, tanning their hides, etc. were highly polluting. It was these things which made them untouchables while the pig-eating Swineherd was not.<sup>1</sup>

Defiling occupations were distinguished from sinful ones. For instance, butchery was sinful, for the butcher killed sentient creatures

<sup>1</sup> But attempts by Harijans in this area to give up eating carcass-beef, beet the tom-tom at village festivals, etc. were met with fierce opposition from the higher castes, especially Peasants. It would have been difficult if not impossible to find others willing or able to take the place of Harijans, and in addition, an assured source of cheap labour would have ended for the landed, high castes.

for his livelihood. The regular butcher in Rampura was a Muslim and he had relieved the Hindus of the burden of a sinful occupation. Generally, a Hindu killed a sheep or goat only as a sacrifice to a deity or ancestral spirit. This was true even when a fowl was slaughtered, though sometimes it was done for an important relative or guest. Sacrificing an animal to a deity or ancestor spirit provided a religious justification for slaughter. It was then not a sin, and, moreover, the meat had become consecrated as *prasada*.

It was only at wedding dinners (*neravi*) that the slaughter of sheep was a secular act. If the host had Muslim friends or clients whom he wanted to partake of the dinner, he had the animal slaughtered by a Muslim according to Islamic ritual.

The day-to-day needs of the village were met by the lone Muslim butcher. Only the better-off villagers could afford to buy mutton once or twice a week while the others bought it less frequently. Fresh fish was even rarer than mutton. However, it was usual for villagers to keep stocks of tiny, dried fish (*sigdi*), and these, along with strips of pickled mutton (*kanda*), provided some variety to a monotonous diet.

The diets of different groups constituted a hierarchy. Thus vegetarian dietary ranked highest from a religious point of view. Vegetarians had to keep away from fish and eggs but were allowed to eat dairy products such as milk, curd, buttermilk and *ghi*. But even the vegetarians did not form a simple, homogeneous category; the strict amongst them kept away from onion and garlic, and certain 'Western' vegetables such as radish, beetroot and egg-plant (brinjal).<sup>1</sup>

Gradations were even more marked among non-vegetarians; there were those who ate mutton but abstained from the polluting fowl. And even the fowl-eaters kept away from domestic pork. At the bottom were the eaters of carrion beef. Each category of non-vegetarians considered themselves superior to those lower. This went so far that they even resented being asked whether they occasionally ate an item from the diet of a lower category.

Only the lower non-vegetarian castes drank liquor, almost invariably palm-toddy (*henda*), and less frequently, arrack (*saravi*). Drinking  
<sup>1</sup> Brahmins had a strong aversion to garlic and this was true even of those who ate onion. Non-Brahmins, on the other hand, liked both onion and garlic, and used them in their curries. There was an olfactory conflict between the two categories of castes.

lowered the status of the caste or family which consumed it. Toddy was extracted by the Toddyman who had a low ritual rank. In the toddy-booth which was patronized, among others, by Harijans, Swineherds and Smiths, the mugs were used promiscuously. While this argument made sense in terms of the beliefs of the people, I am inclined to think that it was a rationalization of the low position of the drinking castes. The primary factor was that drinking was a characteristic of the low castes, and to make matters worse, it went along with eating low meats in a ritually polluting environment.

Vegetarians regarded non-vegetarianism as sinful. The sanctity of all life, and especially sentient life, was a major value with them, and they held that non-vegetarians were responsible for the slaughter of the animals involved. The village doctor, a Brahmin, once told a few of us gathered on my verandah that on some days the first thing the headman did on waking up was to send a servant to the butcher with detailed instructions regarding the exact part of the animal from which he wanted his cut, and then ask the servant to take a bowl with him for some blood. After saying this the doctor shook his head and smiled to indicate his sense of horror.

It would not be wrong to state that the non-vegetarian castes' attitude to meat-eating was mixed. On the one hand, it made for strength and stamina while on the other it was sinful. Hindu castes in Rampura always took care to cook meat outside the kitchen and in vessels exclusively kept for the purpose. Even the stove was separate. Meat was also not cooked on certain days of the week, such as Monday, Friday, Saturday, New Moon Day and so on.

Among meat-eating castes, one occasionally came across the phenomenon of a lone vegetarian living with relatives all of whom were meat-eaters. In such cases, the man usually held a priestly office which required him to be vegetarian. He cooked his own food as he did not want to be polluted by eating food cooked by meat-eaters. The latter not only did not resent his exclusiveness but respected it, and even took a vicarious pride in his religious scrupulousness.

Meat-eating had a lower place than vegetarianism in Sanskrit ideology. It was, for instance, forbidden at all calendrical festivals and weddings. This ban was, however, *literally* interpreted by the villagers, meat being cooked on the day after the festival. Only a *si utta* (literally, sweet meal) was permitted at a festival and it meant including a sweet dish in the menu. The sweet was incompatible with meat.

Meat was, however, obligatory at the annual, non-Sanskritic pro-  
pitiation of ancestors during the *pitru pakṣiṇa* [the dark half of the  
lunar month of *bhādrapada* (September–October)] and at the period-  
ical festivals of village deities who were usually propitiated with  
blood-sacrifices.

Ambitious non-Brahmin castes sometimes became vegetarians in  
an effort to move up in the hierarchy but did not always find it easy  
to keep it up. A certain amount of cheating regarding dietary prac-  
tices was therefore part of the caste system as it operated. The Ram-  
pura Traders (Banajigas) provided an example of dual standards in  
their dietary: they had migrated to Rampura nearly six decades  
previously, and they were all followers of Vishnu, prominently dis-  
playing the sectarian symbol of *namam* on their foreheads. Their  
lineage deities were Narasimha and Cheluvarayaswami (both, forms  
of Vishnu) of Melkote, and Chamundi of Mysore. They owed reli-  
gious allegiance to a Sri Vaishnava guru at Melkote who annually  
visited them.

All the Trader households in Rampura were descended from  
Narasimha who was in his mid-nineties in 1948. They claimed the  
status of Vaishyasa and they did not eat food cooked by anyone except  
Brahmins.

One day, in the course of a discussion of the dietary habits of dif-  
ferent castes, someone volunteered the information that the Traders  
were vegetarians. Kulle Gowda, who was present, suddenly became  
angry and shouted, 'My pubic hair, they are fine vegetarians! I have  
seen bones in their domestic garbage.' Shrewd observer that he was,  
Kulle Gowda had once noticed a few bones in the garbage thrown  
by a Trader household from which he had concluded that their claim  
to be vegetarians was a hollow one: Q.E.D.

I have already described how there was a hierarchy among non-  
vegetarians and how each caste made it a point to stress the kinds of  
meat it abstained from. Thus a mutton-eater would explain how he  
would be thrown out of caste if he ate the polluting pig, let alone the  
sacred cow. He might even try to drive home his and his caste's  
fastidiousness by explaining how his mother or grandmother did not  
permit fowls to be kept in the house because of their tendency to eat  
everything including ordure and to litter the floor with their drop-  
pings. (Fowls were not kept in coops except at night.) The tendency  
to conceal meat-eating was perhaps more frequent than what ap-  
peared at first sight. For instance, a Swineherd told me that while

Peasants in Rampura and Kere avoided pork strictly, Peasants else-  
where were more lax. He had himself sold pork to them.

Sometimes, however, people violated their dietary rules without  
seeming to be aware that they were doing so—at least that was the  
impression I got. For instance, Peasants in Rampura were emphatic  
that they did not eat the rat by which they only meant the domestic  
rat and not the field-rat.

I have described earlier that in a hierarchical system such as caste  
there was an emphasis on the exclusiveness of each unit and its  
separateness and distance from the others. But opportunities for  
mobility did also exist, and the emulation of the customs, ritual and  
life-style of the higher and more Sanskritized castes was a condition  
precedent for mobility. Emulation did also occur within the local  
section of a caste, the richer, more prestigious and Sanskritized  
households being imitated by the others.

At the source of the emulation, however, were such factors as the  
acquisition of wealth, especially landed wealth, and political power.  
Traditionally, improvement in the secular status of a caste group  
was followed by an attempt to claim a higher rank for it in the local  
hierarchy. This meant, among other things, the Sanskritizing of its  
customs, ritual and life-style. The Sanskritization of a caste's life-style  
was both essential for its upward mobility and, contrary as it may  
seem, a symbol of its high rank.

The fact of heterogeneity within each caste, greater among the  
higher castes but present everywhere, was significant for mobility.  
The poorer and less educated households looked up to their richer  
castefolk for models. The urge to emulate them was all the greater  
when they were in the same village.

Among the Peasants, for instance, there were three leading house-  
holds, and they formed a hierarchy. The headman's household led  
the other two by a wide margin, and until 1952, Nadu Gowda's was  
ahead of Millayya's. The headman's sons were keenly aware of their  
leadership and derived considerable satisfaction from contemplating  
how the others tried to emulate them in whatever they did, viz. sowing  
a new seed, growing a new crop, starting a bus or lorry, or performing  
the Brahminical *shraddha* for a dead ancestor.

It was not only the Peasants who emulated the headman's house-  
hold but the others as well. But in the case of the Lingayats, who  
claimed to be superior to Peasants, emulation was confined strictly  
to secular areas. Indeed, in matters of ritual it was the headman's

household which emulated Lingayats as also Brahmmins. A Lingayat ritual expert, from another village, occasionally visited the headman's house for performing special rituals. (The priests of the Madeshwara and Basava temples did not perform domestic ritual.)

It was understandable that only the better-off among the high castes tried to emulate the headman's household. The very wealth and influence of the headman put him and his household beyond the emulative reach of the poorest in the village: 'They can afford to do it but can we?' A poor man had to be content to live as the gods had kept him.

But emulation was not confined to members of the same caste living in the village. The headman himself, for instance, was influenced by a son-in-law who had a law degree and was in politics. His political influence had enabled him to start a couple of small industries in a town near his village, and it was not unlikely that he helped his father-in-law to obtain, in 1952, licences from the State Government to start two bus lines. The headman had another prosperous affine in Ooty (in Tamil Nadu) and this gentleman was an active trader and owner of a coffee estate. The headman's horizons were much wider than those of other villagers.

The desire to emulate the higher castes emanated from other sources besides local leaders and caste leaders outside the village. Many villagers, Peasants, Lingayats, Muslims and others, were familiar with Mysore and Mandya, and were directly influenced by urban styles of living.

The cinema was also becoming significant as a source of diffusion of urban ideas and culture. And it was not only those who frequented the towns who were exposed to it: 'touting talkies' (mobile cinema houses) visited Hogur, Kere and other big villages, and Rampurians took their families to see the films. A permanent cinema was coming up in Hogur in 1948.

During the inter-War years, villages in the Rampura region had each a few leading Brahmin households. By virtue of the land they owned, their caste rank, and the contacts they enjoyed with visiting officials, many of whom were also Brahmmins, they wielded an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. Their customs, ritual and style of life were emulated by the others.

The process of emulation became increasingly complicated in the thirties and subsequent years when the State Government pursued vigorously a policy of supporting the 'backward classes' which in-

involved practising some discrimination against Brahmmins in appointments to jobs, and in promotions, and allotting seats in educational institutions. Educated village youth could not help becoming anti-Brahminical. This period also saw the rapid rise to power of the Peasants and Lingayats. The richer Peasants and Lingayats became urbanized, westernized and Sanskritized, and provided models for emulation for their rural castefellows and others. Urban cinemas, restaurants and hospitals, and increased bus and rail travelling were factors favouring changes in the style of life.

Any reference to the emulation of the life-styles of superior castes and individuals would be incomplete without a reference to the headman's unique position in the village. He was a pace-setter as far as agricultural practices were concerned. He was thorough and modern-minded and yet at the same time cautious. He was also a pioneer in initiating new commercial activity. His life-style was more Sanskritized than that of the other Peasants. In this he had taken his cue from his parents, and especially his old mother.

I have thus far considered the hierarchical aspect of caste. I have tried to highlight the difference between two conceptions of caste, the all-India system of *varna* and the purely local system of *jati*. I have tried to argue that the main features of *jati* point to a system which permitted individual castes to move up or down, unlike the ossified *varna* system in which each caste-category occupied an immutable position.

When caste is viewed as a hierarchy, it is the distinctness of each group and its separateness and distance from the others that receive emphasis. But distinctiveness and distance go along with the interdependence of the different castes living in a village or group of neighbouring villages. The two are parts of a single system.

I have presented above an over-simplified picture of the situation as it existed in 1948. But no account, however simplified, can fail to mention the overlap between caste and land categories. The bigger landowners all came from such high castes as the Brahmin, Peasant, Lingayat and Shepherd while very many of the landless labourers came from the Harijans. The smaller landowners and tenants came from a variety of castes though even here certain castes such as the Basketry-makers, Washermen, Traders, Muslims and Harijans were either not represented or only poorly represented.

Traditionally, ownership of land and power over human beings—the two were frequently linked together—were significant sources of

mobility. But they had to be supplemented by Sanskritization for mobility to be translated into caste terms.

### 3 *Purity and Pollution*

The distinctness of each caste and its distance from the others were maintained, in the last resort, by appeal to certain sanctions. Thus those who violated the rules governing the acceptance of cooked food between castes, or the rule of caste endogamy, were punished by the concerned caste council. Perhaps more important was the effect of the rules of pollution and purity which were instilled in people from their earliest years. Children were taught these rules in the household, kin group, neighbourhood, and in their travels and pilgrimages. Folktales and songs, disputes, and ordinary talk contained references to pollution and purity.

The settlement pattern of the village took note of the need to keep castes distinct though this was an ideal only insufficiently realized in practice. It may be recalled here that the village shifted from its original site on the southern embankment of the Big Tank to its present site in 1874 (*circa*) and perhaps the residential patterns of the old village could not be totally carried into the new.

Elderly Rampurians told me that the old village had an *agrahara* (street inhabited exclusively by Brahmins) at the end of which was the Rama temple. The Harijans had a street (*keri*) of their own at some distance from the others. In the new site, however, there was no *agrahara*, and the Harijan ward was separated from the rest of the village only by the Mysore-Hogur Road (see map facing page 10). Their separation was more symbolic than real in purely spatial terms but still the higher castes did not enter the Harijan ward.

Only some Muslms visited the Harijan ward freely. This was perhaps why the headman always sent messages to his Harijan workers through one or other of his Muslim clients, Karim, Nasar and Imamu. It was significant that Muslim houses were interposed between the Harijan and caste Hindu houses.

The Swineherds' huts were located far away from the main village settlement, and they had very little contact with the villagers. The adult Swineherds were tenants of the headman while a young boy drove the swine around everyday. One old Swineherd woman went round neighbouring villages begging and telling fortunes. This was a traditional occupation of Swineherd women.

The clustering of houses on the basis of caste (and kin) did occur in the village (see map facing page 10) though it was more prominent in some interior villages. The residential pattern in Rampura had been disturbed first by the emigration of all but one household of the Brahmins and finally by the various waves of Muslim immigrants.

Again, the domestic architecture was such that it enabled villagers to keep the required social distance with different castes. The middle-to-rich farmers lived in houses which had central courtyards open to the sky, and covered verandahs facing the street. The front verandah was the place where the men received friends and visitors. If the latter were equals, they sat on a mat spread on the verandah, and if they were close friends even the mat was dispensed with. (Or the host asked someone to bring a mat from inside but the friend sat down saying that he did not need one.) If the visitors were inferior, they either stood or sat on the bare floor while the owner sat on a mat. Visitors belonging to very low castes even stood on the street while talking to the owner sitting on the verandah.

Again, when lower castes had to come into a high caste house they used the backdoor, and avoided going near the kitchen, puja room (if there was one) and the bathroom, all of which were purer than other parts. Only close kinsmen were taken into the kitchen or that part of the house where the members ate. Even they had to be in a pure condition for the domestic altar was frequently located in the kitchen. The cauldron in which the bath water was heated was also pure and a bath cleaned as well as purified the bather.

Contact between different castes was regulated by the related ideas of pollution and purity, and 'contact' was defined culturally. Thus, traditionally an orthodox Brahmin considered himself impure (i.e. polluted) if he was very near a Harijan even though physical contact did not occur. But similar proximity did not result in pollution in the case of some other castes. The structural distance between different castes varied, and traditionally, each caste knew literally where it stood in relation to the others.

'Contact' had to be forbidden or regulated between castes in such other matters as accepting drinking water and cooked food, having sex relationship, and giving or taking girls in marriage, in an ascending order of seriousness. Two other types of contact need mention because they were looked upon as serious: beating another person with leather sandals, or spitting upon him, acts which resulted in the person beaten or spat on being outcasted automatically. Sometimes

even the threat of being beaten with sandals or spat upon was enough to result in outcasting. Thus in a dispute between a Potter and a Lingayat priest,<sup>1</sup> a point which proved almost explosive was the Potter's abuse: 'May I . . . the Priest's wife. May I . . . his mother. I am going to beat him with my sandals, and I am going to beat him till five pairs of sandals wear out.' I have discussed earlier how serious an insult it was to tell someone that the speaker would copulate with the former's wife. Expressing a desire to beat another with sandals was also a grave insult though in a different way. The first abuse attacked his masculinity while the second polluted him, threw him out of his caste. In the subsequent discussions of the dispute which occurred, the gravity of the threat to beat the priest with sandals was mentioned again and again. It was not only an offence against the priest but his caste and the Priest himself stressed this.

Even though the mere expression of an intention to beat someone with sandals was regarded as equivalent to the *deed*, in actual fact there was a difference. In 'The Case of the Potter and Priest', for instance, matters would have taken a turn for the worse if the Potter had carried out his intention. The Priest would then have had no alternative but to undergo the purificatory ritual with all the expense, publicity and humiliation it involved. Actual beating would have forced all the Lingayats to come together against the Potter, and perhaps against the local Potters as a whole. Lingayats from neighbouring villages might have put pressure on the village elders to mete out deterrent punishment to the Potter. Even a physical fight between the two castes was a possibility.

Contact with another person's spittle was polluting, and the spittle of a lower caste member was more defiling than that of a caste-fellow. *Enjiala*, i.e. spittle, or food polluted by having come into contact with one's own or another person's mouth, aroused a sense of disgust.<sup>2</sup> A man who had suddenly turned against his patron was liable to be taunted, 'You ate my *enjiala* all these days, and now, look at you! A man who had benefited from another was expected to be loyal, and disloyalty was immoral if not sinful.

<sup>1</sup> See M. N. Srinivas, 'The Case of the Potter and Priest', *Man in India*, Vol. 39, No. 3, July-September 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Among Peasants, Shepherd and similar castes, a mother often ate from the same dish as her young child. This was more frequent among the poor. But this was discontinued after the child had grown up.

While boiled or steamed food, or food fried in oil had to be prepared by one's own, equivalent or superior caste, food which was cooked with milk, butter or *ghi* (clarified butter) could be accepted from inferior castes. Milk, butter or *ghi* enjoyed a special status as they all came from the cow which was regarded as sacred. (The fact that the milk or butter frequently came from the buffalo was ignored.) But food cooked with water or involving the use of salt was easily pollutable. Such food was accepted only from superior or equivalent caste.

The intentional violation of a pollution rule was treated as more serious than an accidental one. The distinction was crucial in determining the kind of punishment to be awarded to the offender. While accidental violation might be punished with a light fine or even with a demand for an apology from the offender, intentional violation was punished with a heavy fine or even outcasting.

As a child grew up, it gradually learnt the complex rules of pollution and purity which governed behaviour relating to inter-caste relations, life-cycle crises, and finally, daily life. The rules were not only many but admitted of qualifications, exceptions and escape clauses depending upon the circumstances of each case. However, the villagers did not seem to experience any difficulty in guiding their lives by them. Indeed, the more orthodox villagers were so used to them that they found the behaviour of an 'emancipated' person like me puzzling, to say the least. The observance of the rules of pollution and purity had become, at least partly, the symbol of an ethical and religious life and villagers found it confusing to see me ignoring them.

On one occasion, when I had got off the bus at Rampura, one or two village boys volunteered to transfer my luggage from the bus to the Bullock House. I had a large bamboo basket with me and it contained some fried snacks which my mother had given me. One boy was about to lay his hand on the basket when another sharply asked him to stop. The second boy, who was a Shepherd or Peasant, whispered in my ear that the first was a Harijan, and had he been allowed to touch the basket, the contents would have become polluted. Not only had this not occurred to me but I was upset at the thought that the Harijan was hurt by the officiousness of the Shepherd boy.

I have narrated earlier how Laki, Rame Gowda's little daughter, was contemptuous of my ignorance of the rules of pollution and

purity. She was then a little chit of a girl but she was already being trained for her future role as a member of her husband's joint family. Laki derived her name from one of the deities regularly worshipped by the headman's household, Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. The Goddess was elaborately worshipped every Friday, the day considered sacred for her. No meat was cooked in the headman's house on Fridays, and every member had a bath before the main meal of the day.

On Fridays, it was Laki's responsibility to get the domestic altar ready for puja. She swept the puja room, decorated the space before the altar with *rangoli* designs, cleaned the vessels used in worship, and finally, got the lamps ready for lighting. She then bathed, lit the lamps, performed *puja*, and had her breakfast only later.

As I have said earlier, among the high castes, the rules of pollution and purity were drilled into children from very early in life. Thus a Brahmin child, barely two years old, would be told not to touch a member of another caste during a festival or *shradha* in the house. Questions of purity and pollution even cropped up when little boys or girls were playing. As they grew up, children became acquainted with the application of the rules of pollution and purity in a myriad contexts and this was how the rules became internalized over a period of time. Failure to observe them resulted in a sense of discomfort if not guilt. I have heard educated Brahmins in Mysore mentioning how uncomfortable (*mujagara*) they felt because they were not able to take a bath immediately after having their hair cut in a Barber's shop. Many educated Brahmins rationalized the pollution rules as rules of health.

The internalization of pollution rules was supplemented by external pressures and sanctions. Older members of the household, neighbours and caste or village elders were all likely to express their concern or annoyance when a rule was broken or ignored. I have already mentioned the role of the headman's mother in making sure that every member performed his or her religious obligations. The headman tried to play a similar role in the village. But when a serious violation occurred and the matter could not be settled at the kin or neighbourhood level, the matter was reported to the leaders of the dominant caste who inquired into the complaint and awarded suitable punishment.

I shall now discuss briefly a few characteristics of pollution. In the first place, the normal condition of human beings was a mild form

of pollution and most secular work was done in that condition. But such impurity was relative to the condition of a person at prayer or while performing other auspicious ritual. But it was less impure than that of a man affected by death or birth-pollution. (To make matters more complicated, the chief mourners who performed mourning rituals had to be in a state which was identical with extreme purity.) The variable states of purity and pollution were also caste-bound in the sense that a member of a high caste who was ritually impure owing to, for instance, having been shaved by a Barber would continue to be pure vis-à-vis a low caste man. But the situation was more complex as between structurally equivalent or near castes, and also according to the gravity of the pollution.

Generally, when a pure person or object came into contact with an impure person, the latter communicated his impurity to the former and not *vice versa*. A purificatory rite was essential to restore the lost purity and that rite was simple and inexpensive, or complex and costly, depending on the gravity of the impurity.

But there were some holy objects which could not be rendered impure. Thus millions of impure and sinful people who bathed in the sacred Ganges in the North or Kaveri in the South, became pure as a result of the bath. (Even the floating down of corpses in the Ganges did not sully the river.) Ritual purity was, of course, different from cleanliness.

Pollution was contagious: One summer evening, when the headman, Nadu Gowda and I were out for a walk, the headman wanted to slice a mango which someone had given him during the walk. But none of us was carrying a knife. Then a Swineherd tenant of the headman, who was standing nearby, suddenly produced a big knife from his shorts' pocket. The headman took it, and was about to slice the mango when a doubt crossed his mind. He returned the knife to the Swineherd telling him, 'I don't want your knife, you may have used it to cut up a pig.' The Swineherd protested that he never used it for such a vile purpose but the headman was firm in his refusal.

If the headman's suspicion was well-founded, the knife had retained its pollution from pig-slicing and no amount of washing would cleanse it. And it polluted every edible article with which it came into contact.

The above incident recalled to my mind the accusation by Mrs Tiffin, a landlady in Oxford, that her Indian lodger was a hypocrite. He was a non-vegetarian but he once refused cuts of lamb served by



Mrs Tiffin on the ground that the knife had been used previously to carve beef. Mrs Tiffin found her lodger's behaviour irrational. I tried to explain the logic underlying the refusal of the lamb but my expository powers came up against her sturdy common sense.

Theoretically, there was no limit to the contagion. Thus a man who dined with an outcasted castefellow became polluted and a source of pollution to others. In fact, occasionally, the number of polluted persons kept increasing through contagious contact, and at some point the elders had to have mass purificatory rites. The multi-plex and intimate character of village ties did not permit the long-term exclusion of a sizeable section of the local population. But sometimes matters went too far to be remedied by the elders and a new *jati* was formed by the polluted.

Pollution-purity concepts were more pervasive and systematized among the Brahmmins than the others, and next to them were the Lingayats. But, as I have stated earlier, in religious matters the richer Peasants and others tried to emulate the Brahmmins or Lingayats or both. The existence of two sectarian orders, one Vaishnavite and the other Shaivite, among the non-Brahmin castes, was relevant in this context. The Dasayyas, who were Vaishnavite, and the Jogayyas who were Shaivite, were both mendicant priests, and they were to be found among a variety of non-Brahmin castes including Harijans. Recruitment to the orders was in theory voluntary though in actual fact family tradition played an important part in recruitment. In fact family tradition played an important part in recruitment. In fact families which had a tradition of supplying recruits, at least one member from each generation was persuaded to join the order. Dasayyas were initiated by Sri Vaishnava (Iyengar) gurus while Jogayyas were initiated by Lingayat gurus. Both types of gurus had links with the monasteries of their respective orders.

In short, both Dasayyas and Jogayyas were instruments for the greater Sanskritization of the ritual of their respective families and the local sections of their castes. Dasayyas drew on the Sri Vaishnava model of Sanskritization while the Jogayyas drew on the Lingayat model.

Generally, priests had to observe the purity-pollution rules more scrupulously than the laity, and this was true of all the castes including Brahmmins and Lingayats. Of the three Brahmin households in Rampura, two were lay while the third was the Rama priest's and he had to be more mindful of purity and pollution than the others. The same was true of the Madeshwara priests, and the oldest member

of the priestly lineage, Thammayya, enjoyed a reputation for piety. Sannu once told me that he could not eat a thing before 10 a.m. each day because of his ritual duties at home and in the temple. There was a big puja room in the house which had portable images of Madeshwara, and several other sacred objects. Sannu's household was a large one with a few infants and the places dirtied by them had to be cleaned and purified. The women next attended to the cleaning and purifying of the puja room and the vessels used in worship. The women and Sannu then had their baths after which the morning puja began. Only after the morning puja in the house and temple had ended did Sannu have his breakfast.

Generally, the members of each caste had a temple of their own, the priesthood of the temple being vested in a particular lineage. (But the association of a caste with a temple did not mean that worshippers were only drawn from it.) The eldest son of the man holding the priesthood succeeded to the office after his father's death. Such a priest was termed *gudda*, and there was some variability, from temple to temple, in the duties of the *gudda*. In some temples, the *gudda* was required only to open the temple doors once a week or so and light the lamps. Sometimes, he had, in addition, an active role at the elaborate, periodical festival of the deity. But whatever the duties, a *gudda* was expected to lead a stricter life than a layman. A *gudda* who was a vegetarian, or meticulous about the observance of pollution and diet rules, was singled out for praise by the villagers just as a lax *gudda* was criticized.

Again, the older villagers were generally more pious than the younger. The difference in age frequently also implied difference in exposure to education, and to urban and political forces. Thus the younger, school-educated and politically-conscious Peasant youths were inclined to be disdainful of pollution rules. They were also critical of the older leaders' piety and contrasted it with their unethical conduct.

But I was surprised to find that on some occasions the rules of purity and pollution were violated. For instance, at the Rama Navami festival in the summer of 1948, a few village youths harassed the priest by trying to tug at his dhoti when he was distributing *prasada* (sanctified food-offering) after the elaborate morning puja. The priest was in a condition of high purity and if he was touched by anyone, including Brahmin devotees who were not equally pure, he would have become impure. Being touched by devotees from the other

castes was even more serious. Everyone knew this, and a few Peasant youths who wanted bigger helpings of *prasada* tried to tug at the priest's dhoti. If they succeeded in their efforts the priest as well as the *prasada* would become impure resulting in his having to abandon the food-tray. Tugging at his dhoti would also result in the priest's being humiliated, a condition which the high-spirited youths relished greatly. The priest ran into the *sanctum sanctorum*, declaring that he was not going to distribute the *prasada*. The angry and perspiring priest set out immediately for the headman's house, and told him excitedly what had happened. The headman there and then decided on arrangements for the supervision of the *prasada*-distribution. From the following day onwards, one member of the headman's, and another from Nadu Gowda's, households remained with the priest till everyone had received his *prasada*. I may add here that antagonism to the priest distributing *prasada* was a common enough event in the villages, though the Rama priest got more than his share of teasing.

One night, two of my lanterns were suddenly sequestered by my neighbours. In answer to my questions, I was told, 'Just come along with us.' The party reached the Mysore-Hogur road, and then walked along it eastwards till they crossed the CDS canal. They turned right immediately afterwards following the loop of the canal till they reached a particular canal lock which released waters to a big feeder canal irrigating many acres of valuable land. The lock had been closed, and a big landowner was upset at the denial of water to his precious crop. Two servants of the landowner sat down on the bare ground on opposite sides of the lock and tried to open it with an illegal key. It was a big T-shaped key and had to be turned several times after the bottom of the T had rested properly in the groove meant for it. Turning the key, especially the initial turns, was a tough job requiring much strength. Each servant took hold of the end of either arm of the T and tried to push it towards the other. The lantern-holders stood close by and everyone shouted instructions and encouragement to the freely perspiring servants. At first it looked as though the task was beyond them but slowly the key began to turn. After the first few turns, it became easier, and finally, the canal gate opened, and foaming water gushed into the dry feeder canal. There was a great shout of triumph and the faces around me beamed with pleasure.

It was significant that one of the servants involved in the above incident was a Harijan while the other was a Peasant, and in the

course of turning the key, they could not help touching each other many times over. No one even seemed to notice the fact let alone comment on it. Everyone was concentrating on the job on hand. It was obvious that whatever the rules governing inter-caste contact, even caste Hindu-Harijan contact, they were ignored in an emergency. This was again brought home to me during my second visit to Rampura in the summer of 1952. The fortunes of several of my friends and acquaintances had changed during the period 1948-52, and one of those who had moved up was Pijja, the young Harijan who had refused to be pushed around by the high caste landowners. He had been appointed a peon in the village school. The work was not arduous and carried a salary. It gave Pijja enough time to attend to his other interests including cultivating his land. But one of Pijja's more difficult tasks was to take the headman's grandson Shiva (about six years old) to school everyday. Shiva had a healthy hatred of the school and its cramping environment. On some days his hatred was greater than on others, and one fine morning he had to be forcibly carried by Pijja to school. Shiva had a lot of fight in him and protested vigorously, yelling with all his might and thrashing his arms and legs about but Pijja held him round the waist in a vice-like grip. Villagers came out on their verandahs, and watched the scene with unconcealed amusement. The yelling ended, however, after a sweating and hard-breathing Pijja had deposited the victim before the teacher for the day's instruction.

I did not hear any villager commenting on the impurity involved in the above contacts. It appeared as though contact produced pollution in traditionally-defined contexts and their modern analogues or extensions (e.g. Harijans being served tea in special cups in urban restaurants) but not where they promoted the interests of the powerful men of the dominant castes. In both the instances cited above, the interests of powerful men were promoted by contact while the priest was functioning in a totally traditional situation.

Ideas of purity and pollution were, however, weakening as a result of urban contacts, education and politicization. I have mentioned earlier how Sannu varied his behaviour according to the situation, and he was typical of the more urbanized villagers. His younger brother, Siddu, an educated man who stayed in a neighbouring town, once exhibited his contempt for pollution rules by asking a Muslim boy to bring him some drinking water and drinking it to the hilarious amusement of his friends.

The younger men who took an interest in local and regional politics generally belonged to the better-off households, and were at least literates. Ideas of equality had stirred their minds but they naturally found it easier to be convinced of their equality with the higher castes and classes than to concede similar claims made by those lower. To the best of my knowledge none of them showed any awareness of the contradiction inherent in their attitude. In one of my discussions with Kempu in the summer of 1952 I found him critical of the arrogance of Brahmins who referred to all non-Brahmins as Shudras. He then asked me whether I was ready to eat food cooked by Peasants. Village-style, I offered Kempu a counter-challenge. I told him that I would be willing to eat food cooked by a Harijan, and would he join me on the occasion? Kempu backed down at once and replied that I was quite different from other Brahmins.

It was symbolic that accepted hierarchical notions were broken by some urbanized youths on the occasion of the visit of the Finance Minister in the first popular cabinet in Mysore State. As was customary, the headman entertained the Minister and his entourage (officials, journalists and political hangers-on) to snacks and coffee. But prior to the scheduled reception of the headman, the youths who were opposed to him, sprung a surprise tea on the distinguished visitor. The tea and the snacks were prepared in the most popular teashop in the village, owned by a Peasant. Generally, food for visiting officials was cooked by the village accountant, a Brahmin, but the youths wanted to emphasize their modernity and egalitarianism. While the Minister, who, incidentally, was a Shepherd by caste, partook of the tea, his vegetarian officials, Brahmin, Lingayat and Jain, excused themselves on some ground or the other from the progressive tea.

In contrast, the headman had his food prepared by the Rama priest. Mulling over the events after the Minister's party had left the village, the headman expressed satisfaction at the success of his tea and the relative unpopularity of the youths'. His conservatism and diplomacy—he knew that the vegetarian officials preferred snacks made by a Brahmin—had paid off.

During the summer of 1952, I was told by a Brahmin landowner, an Iyengar of Kere, that a visiting State Minister, from his own sub-caste, had chosen to stay in the home of a Peasant landowner, and to accept the latter's hospitality. The Brahmin was very angry that the Minister had let down the members of his caste in the village.

Again, in 1952, I saw a growing friendship between the headman's second son, Lakshmana, and Nadu Gowda's second son, Kempu. Both were ambitious, energetic and intelligent men, and they wanted to start new business enterprises in the village. (Lakshmana nourished, at least in 1948, political ambitions, but realized, like many other urbanized men in the villages, that the road to power was a long, hard, thorny, slippery and expensive one.) They knew only too well that political connections were needed to get the permits and licences for starting new enterprises. Kempu wanted to instal a rice-mill, the second one in the village, the first being Millayya's. Lakshmana, who knew some politicians and officials, took Kempu in hand, and the two went round meeting influential men. In the course of their wanderings they went to Hunsur, a town about thirty miles to the west of Mysore, and attended a dinner. Too late, Kempu discovered that the hosts were Muslims. He asked Lakshmana, and the latter advised him to take it easy: they were moving in high circles and they could not afford to be squeamish.

A typical example of the kind of challenge posed by the new political forces to caste and pollution occurred in the summer of 1954 in Devipura, a village near the sugar town of Mandya. I was visiting the village with an official-friend, and a Peasant leader was furious about the arrogance of the local Harijans. A day or two previously a fight had occurred in a neighbouring village between gangs of Peasants and Harijans, and several men had been injured. According to the Peasant leader, Harijans had begun to claim all kinds of rights: 'Today they will want to enter our temples, tomorrow they will want to marry our girls.' I tried to tell him that the Congress Party stood for equality and that the government wanted to abolish Untouchability. I also pointed out that it was millions of villagers like him who had voted the Congress Party into power. My lecture did not, however, convert him. On the contrary, it only made him angrier: 'Let the Congress leaders first give their daughters in marriage to Harijan men before asking us to admit them to our temples.'

#### 4 *Harijans*

My shortcomings as a field-worker are brought home to me poignantly when I contemplate the Harijans and Muslims. I realize only too clearly that mine was a high caste view of village society. I stayed in a high caste area, and my friends and companions were all

Peasants or Lingayats. However, I did know a few Muslims and Harijans, and one or two Potters, Smiths and Traders but none of them as intimately as I knew my Peasant and Lingayat friends.

The Harijans deserve a separate section if only because they were treated differently from every other group in ritual matters. They were not allowed to worship in caste Hindu temples or draw water from caste Hindu wells. (Muslims were allowed to use Hindu wells.) They were also excluded from using the big tank and only the canals taking off from it were permitted to them. It was all right for water to flow from the high castes to Harijans but not the other way about.

Inconsistent as it may seem with the above situation, close economic and social relationships existed between Harijans and the others. While ritual exclusion was on the basis of caste, closeness was on an individual, or at best familial, basis. Many Harijans had been employed as *jita* servants by landowners from the high castes. In the course of performing their duties they went to all parts of the house excepting the kitchen, which was considered pure. Harijan servants were allowed by some high class masters to look after young children, and friends told me that they had seen Harijan servants fondling the children of their high caste masters.

Certain indispensable services were provided by the Harijans to the village community as a whole. Caste was recognized as a basic unit for administrative purposes by the pre-British rulers and this continued even under the British. Thus Brahmins were appointed as accountants (*shahbhog*), landowners from the locally dominant caste as headman (*patel*), and village servants (*chakra*) from Harijans. *Chakras* had been given land by the government as payment for the services they rendered. *Chakrahood* was hereditary like other offices and the amount of land which was given to the original appointee had been divided through successive partitions into minuscule bits among the present holders of the office. The main duties of the *chakras* were to assist the accountant and headman in the collection of land taxes, and act as messengers and town-criers at village festivals and other important occasions. Either in their role as *chakras* or Harijans—it was not always easy to distinguish between the two—they were called upon, during village festivals, to do chores such as whitewashing the outer face of temple walls, putting up *panchals* before temple doors, beating the tom-tom, and removing the leaves on which villagers had dined. Harijan women winnowed, and ground or pounded grain, and did other similar jobs.

Teams of Harijan women were employed by big landowners for performing such essential tasks as transplanting, weeding and harvesting. And during the off-season, they were employed to assist in constructing or repairing the smaller feeder canals, tie up pruned twigs, often thorny, into tiny bundles to be used as fuel, and for many other jobs. Landowners and others who undertook contract work for a government department or district board, employed Harijan women (and men) for canal and road repair. This meant gathering pebbles from fields, piling them up and breaking them into smaller bits, and carrying baskets of earth from one point to another on the road under repair.

The closeness of the bond that prevailed between the high castes and Harijans found expression in the *halemaga* (literally, 'ancient son') institution. But it had become defunct in 1948 and I could only get accounts of it as it functioned in the thirties and earlier. The master households came from such high castes as Peasants, Shepherds and Lingayats. The *halemaga* household had to perform menial tasks, similar to those performed by Harijans at the Rama festival, during a wedding in the master's household. The *halemaga* was also required to remove the carcass of a dead bullock or buffalo from the master's house. While the hide, horns and meat were the *halemaga's* he had to give the master a pair of sandals and a length of plaited rope to be used for the plough during wet weather.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned earlier, a Harijan functionary called *kulavadi* (sometimes also called *chelvadi*) was the custodian of an important symbol of the caste system of the region, viz. a big and long brass ladle on the broad handle of which were carved the symbols of each principal caste. Thus Peasants were symbolized by a plough and bullocks, Oliman by an oil-press and so on. Rampura did not have a *kulavadi* but Kere, the administrative capital of the *hobli*, did have one, and I expect Hogur had another.<sup>2</sup> The ladle's stem ended in a

<sup>1</sup> Occasionally, I came across the phenomenon of a caste claiming another, usually a non-local one, as its *halemaga*. Copper-plate inscriptions existing in some important place were usually cited in support of the claim. I suspect that in such cases the claim was meant to be evidence of the claimant caste's high status.

<sup>2</sup> There seems to have been some correspondence between administrative and social divisions in pre-British days, and traces of it could still be seen in Rampura and neighbouring villages in 1948. Thus the *hobli*, an administrative unit higher than the village and lower than the *taluk* (or *tehsil*), had its capital (*kasaba*), and the caste court at the *hobli* capital was superior to that at the village. But such

big and deep bowl, and at weddings, the bowl had to be filled with rice and given to the *kulavadi* along with a silver four-anna piece (*pavai*). A *kulavadi* living in a market-town was entitled to scoop out a ladleful of any grain or other produce piled up before a merchant's shop.

It was significant that the keeper of the material symbol of caste organization, the brass ladle, was the *kulavadi*, a Harijan, and a servant-cum-messenger of the village.

I have referred several times to the changes which were occurring among Harijans in the Rampura region soon after Independence. The passing by the Mysore Government of 'The Mysore Temple Entry Authorization Act, 1948' which came into force on 7 February of the same year was an appropriate response to Harijan expectations regarding the new place which they envisaged for themselves in the wider society. On the thirteenth day after Mahatma Gandhi's funeral, Harijans were persuaded if not forced by younger caste Hindu leaders to enter their temples in some villages near Rampura. This may have led the Harijan leaders to think that at least the younger caste Hindus were keen on abolishing untouchability. If so, they were in for a disappointment. For, when some time later, Harijans in a few villages including Kere and Bihalli stopped performing certain festival duties which they regarded as degrading, they were subjected to economic boycott and beaten up, and their huts burnt. Many of the younger men took the lead in punishing the rebels. One such man, Putte Gowda, a sturdy Kere Peasant, confided in me that he had worked for Harijan entry into temples on the thirteenth day, but when he found that the Harijans wanted to give up performing all their traditional services he became so angry that he joined the others in wallowing them.

Putte Gowda seemed to have thought that the Harijans should have been satisfied with symbolic entry into temples on the thirteenth day of Gandhiji's funeral. Their subsequent efforts to shed customary duties were evidence of their arrogance, and of ingratitude to those who had led them into caste Hindu temples. They had mistaken a symbolic concession for a permanent privilege.

On their side, local Harijans had come into contact with leaders from their castes who told them that beating the tom-tom on festive superiority did not extend to caste courts, if any, at the *taluk* and district capitals. Above the *hobli* court, there was another which was usually referred to as the supreme court (*amataia gadi*).

occasions, removing the leaves on which the higher castes had dined at collective occasions and removing the carcasses of domestic animals from their houses, were degrading, and inconsistent with their self-respect as human beings. They were thus caught between the forces of oppression and liberation, the former firmly in the saddle while the latter was then only a hope.

Traditionally, Harijans largely worshipped the village deities who periodically demanded blood sacrifices. However, in 1948, Harijans in Rampura and a few neighbouring villages started Rama Mandiras (shrines for the worship of Rama), where were kept lithographs of Rama and a few other Sanskrit deities, and once a week, a few men joined and sang devotional songs. The Harijans had begun to celebrate Rama Navami as a big festival. They took out their own Rama Navami procession on the day following the high caste procession.

There was a *bhajan* room in Kulle Gowda's house and Peasant and other caste Hindu youths met there once a week in the evenings and sang devotional songs to the accompaniment of a harmonium and the clash of cymbals. Sometimes, the *bhajan* group went round the village singing songs, carrying the picture of the deity and a lighted lamp with them. The *bhajan* group was founded in the thirties, and probably provided the model for the Harijan group in 1948. I may add here that ward-based *bhajan* groups and Rama Mandiras had started becoming popular in Mysore and other towns since the 1920s.

The Harijans were also getting politically organized. There was a Harijan official in the Rampura region who was urging his caste-fellows to assert themselves. He was not popular with the Peasants and other caste Hindus. He later resigned from his job to enter politics. At the general elections of 1952 he stood as a Praja Socialist Party candidate for election to the State Legislative Assembly while the headman supported another Harijan candidate who was the nominee of the Congress Party. The headman corralled all the adult Harijans in the village and arranged for them to be taken in bullock carts to the polling booths in Hogur. When the results were announced it was discovered that the former official had won defeating the Congress nominee. The headman suspected that he had been cheated. Pijja was sent for and asked whether he and his friends had voted according to instructions. Pijja was shocked at the suggestion that they could have done anything else. He replied that everyone

had put the mark exactly where the headman had asked them to. And he was surprised at the result. But the headman knew Pijja, and the latter knew that the headman knew.

While the old leader of the Harijans, Kullayya, was respectful of the distance between him and the higher castes, Pijja opposed those high caste men who tried to do him out of his due or slighted him. He was as unpopular with the higher castes as Kullayya was popular. But even Pijja's opponents recognized that he was clever, articulate, and combative, and that he could not be ignored. He was also talented: I was told that he was a skilled narrator of *prasanga*. A *prasanga* was a traditional story with a built-in problem or riddle—rather the story ended in a problem and the audience were asked to offer the solution. The latter called for an intimate knowledge of the epics, *puranas* or other mythology. When the audience failed to produce the answer, the narrator did. Pijja was also a poet who could compose a poem 'about a leaf in a whirlwind' and sing it to the strumming of his *eknada* (mono-stringed instrument).

Pijja was resourceful. As the village Barbers did not serve the Harijans, he bought himself a safety razor and a pair of scissors and used them on himself. He then provided barbering services to a few friends.

Pijja came to know that the Government had various schemes to help Harijans: For instance, there was a government-sponsored 'Grow more food' campaign under which waste land was granted to cultivators. Pijja had applied for a few acres of waste land, and his application, perhaps along with many others, was lying unattended in the *taluk* office at Sangama. Once Pijja went to the *taluk* office to find out what had happened to his application. The clerk whom he approached asked for a bribe of two rupees to push it forward to the Amildar, the head of the *taluk*. Not only did Pijja not pay but he went straight to the Amildar's office and prostrated himself before the bewildered official. After a minute or two, the Amildar asked Pijja to get up and tell him what he wanted. Pijja narrated the incident and asked how a penniless Harijan like him could get anything done if clerks did not look at his application before receiving a bribe. The clerk was fined, Pijja's application for land was supported by the official, and word spread around that Pijja was not a man to be trifled with.

Pijja had crossed swords with a few high caste villagers, and had proved himself to be more than a match for all except the most

powerful. I remember a complicated dispute between him and Thammaya, Sannu's agnatic cousin, and the oldest male member of the Madeshwara priestly lineage. It went before the headman himself for settlement a fortnight or so before the Rama Navami festival in 1948. I may add here that the headman intervened at the instance of Thammaya who had the reputation of being a hard-working but somewhat slow-witted man who needed protection against Pijja. Pijja had brought a middleman along to speak for him but when he felt that the middleman was making a point against him (Pijja) he did not hesitate to squash him. He argued his case brilliantly, scoring off Thammaya with ease. In the end, he got everything he wanted. Two days after the hearing he even persuaded Thammaya to tear up the I.O.U. which he had signed, thus depriving his creditor and employer of the only clout he possessed. On hearing of this Nadu Gowda commented, 'Pijja was born without a (proper) father, he would do anything.' It was a vicious remark and I was surprised at Nadu Gowda's making it.

Pijja was also in conflict with the conservative elders in his caste. The latter were afraid of the power wielded by the landowners while Pijja was not. At least not to the same extent. Pijja wanted the older Harijans to accept his leadership. He represented the winds of change that were blowing in the wider society. I could not help admiring Pijja's courage and fighting qualities.

## 5 *Muslims*

The Muslims were the third biggest group in the village and they had close economic and social relations with the Hindus. The Muslims appeared as a homogeneous group to outsiders, and this was enhanced by the absence of any restrictions on inter-dining between their various sub-groups. Such an appearance was, however, deceptive as sub-group endogamy was preferred though not mandatory. Further, the sub-groups formed a hierarchy, the Sheikhs and Sayyads regarding themselves as superior to the others. It was significant that neither group ate beef, while the Dayire (pronounced Dhare) did. The venerable-looking Hakim Sab told me that 'eating cow was like eating one's mother'. Hakim Sab was extremely hierarchical in his outlook and had no hesitation in dubbing people high or low. For instance, he said that the Dhare were a low caste. When I asked him why a young girl in Mamu Sab's house was wearing a

headband, he replied, 'It is not among us but only among low caste people.' I later learnt that the headband was in honour of the girl passing her first Arabic examination.

Hakim Sab was regarded as knowledgeable by everyone in the village and I therefore went to him to get an account of the customs, ritual and festivals of the local Muslims. He was a frail old man racked by a chesty cough, and my sessions with him were frequently interrupted by his coughing bouts. One of the features of Hakim Sab's interpretation of Islam was the emphasis he placed on the concept of purity (*pak*).<sup>1</sup> This together with his keen sense of hierarchy and his filial sentiments towards the cow, made one wonder how much Hinduism had gone into Hakim Sab's interpretation. But Hakim Sab also told me that a Muslim who put a *kafir* to the sword went to heaven. It did not occur to him that he was talking to a *kafir*.

Besides the Sheikh, Sayyad and Dhare, there were three other divisions, viz. Pathan, also called Moghul, Labbe and Pattegar. There was only one household of Pattegar and the head of the household practised his hereditary craft of making twisted cotton cord, an indispensable article of domestic use.

All the Muslims in Rampura were Sunnis. They were bilingual, being able to talk to Hindus in Kannada, and among themselves, a kind of Urdu.

As among Hindus, landowning households had a higher status than the others. If with this was combined a long period of stay in Rampura, that enhanced the status further. Those households which had a house and some land in the old village enjoyed special esteem in the eyes of the villagers.

Land seemed even more precious for Muslims than for the others as only a few of them could be included even among the second-level landowners. A good many Muslims were engaged in trade and commerce while a few others provided certain services and skills absent among Hindus. The fact that Muslims were prominent in non-agricultural activities drew adverse criticisms from Peasants who

<sup>1</sup> After writing the above I began to doubt whether my impression of what Hakim Sab had said was correct, and I decided to check it against the original diaries. I found that I had written: 'The concept of *pak* or purity is an obsession. Purity of body, clothes, mind, etc. is a prerequisite to religion. *Haram*: After intercourse with a woman, both parties must wash before having intercourse again. If a wash is not taken then the second intercourse has the status of adultery (*haram*). Proper intercourse is *halal*.'

thought that only agriculture was real work. According to the latter, Muslims made their living by *giffin* (corruption of 'gift', meaning polish rather than substance) and thus escaped the need to do hard work. Being poor and economically dependent on the goodwill of the Peasantlandowners, Muslims had to be respectful to their patrons and this again was interpreted as an attempt to escape hard work by seeking the support of powerful men. It was true that unlike the poorer Hindus, Muslims, by and large, preferred trade and commerce to working as *jita* labourers and this was because they were less tied to land and had to be on the lookout for other opportunities presented by trade and commerce.

Occupationally, Muslims were the most diversified group in the village. Among them were to be found traders, contractors, brokers, tailors and tinsmiths. The only butcher, plasterer, the shoer of bullocks' hoofs, snuff-maker, and cotton cord-maker in the village were Muslims. Even those Muslims who had some land or were engaged in cultivation did some trade or brokerage on the side.

Trading again varied from keeping petty grocery stores to the occasional selling of seasonal fruits and hardware and plastic gew-gaws at weekly markets in nearby villages. Shukoor kept a shop where he hired out cycles (by the hour) and petrolmax lamps for festive occasions, and sold bottled soda water. Karim, Dilli Sab and one or two others sold mangoes during summer: they bought the produce of an orchard when the fruits were still unripe, and harvested them later for sale in urban markets. The responsibility for keeping a watch on the orchard was the buyer's. The latter usually camped in the orchard till all the fruits had been harvested. He endured the discomforts of living alone in the orchard, and braved the flies, mosquitoes and other pestilential insects in the hope of a few hundred rupees' profit at the end of six to eight weeks. One Hindu confided in me, 'That kind of life is too tough for us. Only Muslims are able to stand it.'

Economically and socially, Muslims were dependent upon Hindus. This was exemplified by the fact that Muslim tenants leased land from Hindu landowners, Muslim debtors borrowed money from Hindu creditors and Muslim *jita* servants worked for Hindu masters.<sup>1</sup> Many Muslims were clients of Hindu patrons. Besides, Muslim economic activities were frequently geared to Hindu activities and

<sup>1</sup> No Muslim *jita* servant worked for a Muslim, and two Muslims had Hindu servants.

institutions. For instance, a Muslim trader bought jack fruits whole-sale at a weekly market in Tendekere village in order to sell them in Rampura at the 'Festival of the Fast' (*upavāsada habba*). A ritual fast did not mean abstinence from all food but only from normal diet. On fast days, villagers ate dishes cooked from grains other than rice or ragi, and also fruits such as banana, jack and oranges.

The bridal processions of members of the richest households, and processions at the festivals of village deities included displays of fireworks and the fireworks man was generally a Muslim from Hogur. Shukoor's and Karim's petromax lanterns were also in demand at processions. Muslim artisans derived the bulk of their income from working for Hindus.

Muslims were also socially dependent on the Hindus, and in particular on the leaders of the dominant caste. They were certain that the headman, Nadu Gowda and others could be relied upon to protect them from local harassments and indignities. According to one informant, Rampura Muslims were split into three factions, and there was little communication between the factions. Any dispute among Muslims, including disputes among close kindred, had to be settled by Peasant leaders. I myself witnessed two disputes among kin which needed the intervention of Peasants.

Relations between Hindus and Muslims were close. I was occasionally surprised at the intimate knowledge which some Muslims had of Hindu culture. Karim, for instance, was well informed about the divisions among Peasants, their wedding customs, etc. I have already mentioned Akbar Sab's interest in putting an end to my single-blessedness and the criteria he looked for in the bride would have won the approval of my Peasant friends. I found a few Muslims enjoying listening to gramophone records of dramas which were based on stories taken from the corpus of Hindu mythology.<sup>1</sup>

On the other side, some Hindus admired certain traits of Muslim culture. For instance, Rame Gowda praised the brevity, dignity and quietness of a Muslim wedding which was a striking contrast to the elaborate, noisy and chaotic Hindu counterpart. He thought that Muslims displayed and served their food aesthetically, while Hindus paid no attention to these aspects. He admired the vermicelli (*shamige*)

<sup>1</sup> At a higher level, one of the finest actors on the Kannada stage in the twenties and thirties was Peer who played leading roles in dramas based on stories from Hindu mythology. He was universally admired by the Hindus for the sensitivity with which he played those roles.

made by them. The many manual skills of Muslims, making flower garlands, fireworks, ability to repair gadgets, etc. were also admired.

However, Muslim indifference to pollution was criticized. The village accountant and Sannu both claimed to have seen Muslims spitting inside their houses. Again, unlike Hindus, Muslims felt no hesitation in visiting the Harijan ward. They did not think that they became impure from such a visit. Karim's popularity with Harijans and the fact that some of them took their disputes to him for settlement were both regarded as odd by the accountant. He also added that Karim took pleasure in pulling the legs of Harijan women. He said this when Karim was present and the poor man was embarrassed.

Friendship cut across not only castes but religious divisions as well. The Potter Sannayya and Karim were such good friends that even their wives had become close companions. Their houses were close to each other, separated only by the width of Gudi street. I once asked the Potter how it was that he and Karim were great friends, and he replied that his father and Karim's father had both been good friends in the old days. In fact, soon after Karim's father moved into Rampura, he had two pairs of bullocks which were tied up in front of the Potter's house for many months. The Potter's family had kept a watchful eye on the bullocks.

Mrs Karim had several other Hindu friends besides Mrs Sannayya. Thus when her six-day old infant died she was visited by many women including the Shepherd Kobi. Kobi consoled Mrs Karim telling her that some women had had to bear the loss of grown sons who were cultivators and mainstays of their families. Mrs Karim should compare her lot with theirs and take courage.

Shukoor who owned the hire-cycle shop was a friend of Swamy, Nadu Gowda's son. Once Shukoor returned from a brief trip to a nearby town and immediately after, he went in search of Swamy. Shukoor explained to me that if he did not see his friend for a few days he became uneasy in his mind. Such declarations of affection were frequently heard between grown men. Friendship was a value, and when a quarrel occurred between friends each partner narrated how much he had done for the other, and how much he had had to put up with. Friends who had quarrelled did not speak to each other and I came across several cases of breached friendships. An enduring friendship such as that between Nadu Gowda and the headman was certainly exceptional.



Friendship was not a simple, homogeneous category. It was either a 'horizontal' relationship between equals, or 'vertical' between superior and inferior. Thus, while the friendship between Lakshmana and Kempu, both Peasants and sons of big landowners was horizontal, that between Swamy and Shukoor was vertical. Shukoor and Aziz (a tailor) obtained occasional monetary and other help through Swamy's goodwill, just as Karim and Nenne were helped by the headman.

The relation between a patron and client was a vertical one, and it was often very close. The closeness grew with the years, and gradually, an element of friendship emerged from that inhospitable, hierarchical soil. I shall give an example of it below.

Karim's father was persuaded to migrate to Rampura by the headman's father who needed a groom and coachman for his horse and coach. He was installed in a house belonging to the headman, and given some land on a share-cropping basis, as his was a large family. Karim, and his younger brothers, Nasar and Bachche, were residents of Rampura in 1948, and all of them were the headman's clients. But Karim appeared to be closer to the headman than the other two. (But by the end of 1948 certain strains had begun to surface between Karim and the headman's lineage.)

Karim owned 1.5 acres of wet land which he and his older son cultivated, and in addition, he was a share-cropper on an equal amount of land belonging to the headman. He also received the crop growing on a few plots in the headman's rice-land for the varied services he was called upon to render. It was through the headman's goodwill that he obtained contracts from government or other agencies to repair sections of the road or canal. In 1952, Karim's young son, Mahmud, had been employed as a conductor on one of the headman's buses.

Every evening Karim had to visit the Harijan wards in Rampura and Gudi to book casual labourers, men and women for the headman for the following day. The headman's need for labour varied from day to day, and it was only around dusk that he had a precise idea of his needs for the following day. In Karim's absence, Nasar or Imamu were asked to book the labourers but Karim enjoyed a rapport with the Harijans which was denied to the others.

Karim was trusted in a way no other client was. He was once sent to a village near Billkere to investigate the economic and sectarian background of a potential groom for one of the daughters of the

headman. It was early summer, before ripe mangoes had started coming into the market, and it was easy for Karim to pose as a mango trader. He contacted a few Muslims in the village to find out if he could buy the fruits of an orchard. As luck would have it, he secured a good orchard at a low price. He became so friendly with his local contact that the latter insisted that Karim should be his guest. Gradually, Karim revealed the real object of his mission to the host who assured him that the groom's father was a big landowner and that he was financially sound. He was also a 'proper' Peasant, and not a follower of either the Dasayya or Jogayya sect. Karim reported his findings to the headman who then decided to agree to give his daughter in marriage to the landowner's son. Karim narrated the incident to me with pride, and added, with a smile, that he had made a good profit from the orchard.

As stated earlier, during the 1948 monsoon, the headman suddenly contracted bronchial infection which he was unable to shake off. It was decided to take the headman to the hospital in Mysore and Karim was despatched in the morning to fetch a taxi from Hogur, and he returned with a jeep which was usually hired out for wedding processions. Both the headman's sons went with their father to Mysore and Karim was asked to sleep in the headman's house. Several Peasants, including the headman's kinsmen, commented on the fact that Karim had been asked to stay in the house and not any relative. It was a measure of the family's trust in Karim.

While relations between individual Muslim clients and their Hindu patrons was one of trust, the relations between Hindus and Muslims as distinct groups were marked occasionally by suspicion. And this was largely due to the forces operating in the wider society especially during the critical years of 1946-8 when the country was repeatedly shaken by the riots and violence which both preceded and followed the partition of the sub-continent into the two sovereign states of India and Pakistan. Sometime in 1946 there had been a communal riot in Channapathna town (to the north-east) resulting in the migration of several Muslims into Rampura. (The riots had resulted in the brutal murder of a poor Hindu schoolmaster and this was known to some villagers.) The more politically conscious villagers occasionally expressed their suspicions about the loyalty to India of some of the immigrants. A few Shepherd youths employed in a Bangalore mill visited Rampura during Ugadi, the new year festival, and they narrated with pride their role in a communal fight

which had broken out in Bangalore in 1947. One of them told me that initially the Muslims had the better of the exchanges but this had been reversed later.

The Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir began in December 1947 and continued into 1948. The bloody and bitter communal riots of north India had resulted in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January 1948. While Gandhiji's martyrdom brought Hindus and Muslims together the events preceding it did not. The marching of Indian troops into Hyderabad in September 1948 roused mutual hatred and suspicion. For instance, Khwaja, a village grocer, told his friends that the Nizam's army would beat back the Indian troops in no time. The Nizam was the world's richest man and he had a great army. Khwaja had only a picture of Mr Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, in his shop, and none of either Gandhi or Nehru. After the successful police action in Hyderabad, he was reported to have gone on a fast.

Before and during the movement of troops into Hyderabad, some younger Peasants became excited at the attitude of Khwaja and a few others whom they considered to be pro-Pakistan. They believed that Muslims discussed political matters regularly after the Friday prayers at the mosque. The discussions were said to be anti-Indian in intent. Local Muslims were also supposed to be receiving advice regularly from their co-religionists in the cities.

While my relations with Muslims were cordial, none of them discussed politics with me or with other Hindus. I remember mentioning the death of Jinnah to Shukoor who responded with stony silence. He probably did not wish to say anything for fear of being misunderstood. But then even his silence was likely to be misunderstood given the political atmosphere of 1947-8. However, considering the crisis through which Hindu-Muslim relations were passing in the country as a whole the occurrences in the village were very subdued.

## CHAPTER VII

# Classes and Factions

### 1 *The Land-based Hierarchy*

I DISCUSSED in the previous chapter how the hierarchical system of caste operated at the grassroots level. Its complexity was compounded by its meshing in with another hierarchical system based on the possession of differential rights in land. There was a two-way relationship between landownership and caste rank. Traditionally, ownership of land conferred respectability and prestige, and this was translated into caste rank in course of time, and contrariwise, high ritual rank unaccompanied by landownership produced anomalous situations. As mentioned earlier, the secular Brahmin commanded more prestige than the priestly Brahmin who was frequently poor and dependent upon gifts from those who were better off.

Unlike caste, the hierarchy based on ownership of land was a secular one, and, in theory, everyone was free to acquire land though the higher castes had more resources as well as opportunities for it. It could also be safely presumed that the members of the higher castes, and in particular, the locally dominant caste, were opposed to land passing into the hands of the lowest castes who provided the main source of agricultural labour.

The pattern of landownership in Rampura was broadly typical of the entire country. There were very few households each of which owned twenty irrigated acres or more, followed by a substantial number which owned less than five such acres. The 'landowner' category was hospitable enough to include even those who had an acre or less of dry land. From the point of view of the villagers, a man owning ten acres of irrigated land was regarded as comfortably off while twenty represented wealth.

Those who owned less than five acres of land were frequently found to be leasing an acre or two from a bigger landowner. There was a large number of villagers who were only lessees of land. They paid the owners an agreed quantity of rice per acre after harvest. The