



Yalavarthi Naveen Babu
29-05-1964 to 18-02-2000

From Varna to Jati

Political Economy of Caste
in Indian Social Formation

Commemorating Scholar and Revolutionary Martyr
Yalavarthi Naveen Babu

Edited by
B. Ramesh Babu

With contributions from:
Yogendra Singh
Manoranjan Mohanty
Vara Vara Rao
and many others



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Silence !
Here sleeps my brother.
Don't stand by him
With a pale face and a sad heart.
For, he is laughter!
Don't cover his body with flowers,
What is the use of adding flowers to a flower?
If you can,
Bury him in your heart.
You will find
At the twitterings of the bird of the heart,
Your sleeping soul has woken up.
If you can,
Shed some tears.
And -
All the blood of your body

*(Written on the walls of a cell in Presidency Jail, Calcutta, probably by
a student during the Naxalbari uprising)*

Acknowledgements

Any commemorative volume such as this one, is difficult to put together, as it involves dealing with a lot of different people and their inputs. This is perhaps one of the reasons why it took many years to concretize, even though the idea of commemorating Naveen Babu and his contributions has been discussed by many of his contemporaries and friends off and on, ever since he was martyred in 2000. Eventually, when I first floated the concrete idea of publishing Naveen's M.Phil dissertation as a book among some of my closest friends — Raghu, Madhavi, Manoj and Bala, their instant support and enthusiasm convinced me to proceed. My complete naivety about how much work it involved was a main deciding factor. I thought it would be as simple as digitising his dissertation, adding some reminiscences and sending it to print. In the end, it took almost one year of non-stop struggle with seemingly insurmountable hurdles and roadblocks. But as I went along and persisted with the project, the enthusiastic support and involvement of many more people over the last one year made this volume possible. From the beginning, I was inundated with suggestions and offers of help from Kishore Reddy, Naveen's childhood friend introduced to me by Suryanarayana Reddy, Manohar Rao, Krishna Reddy, Laxminarayana and Nadarajah. In a sense, this group has been held together by a person not with us anymore, Naveen Babu himself. All those involved in bringing out this volume have been associated with Naveen in some way or the other.

The project was actually took off when Raghu obtained a copy of Naveen's dissertation from the JNU library with the help of Srikant and passed it on to me. I depended on him for many other kinds of help and coordination throughout this project, including suggesting

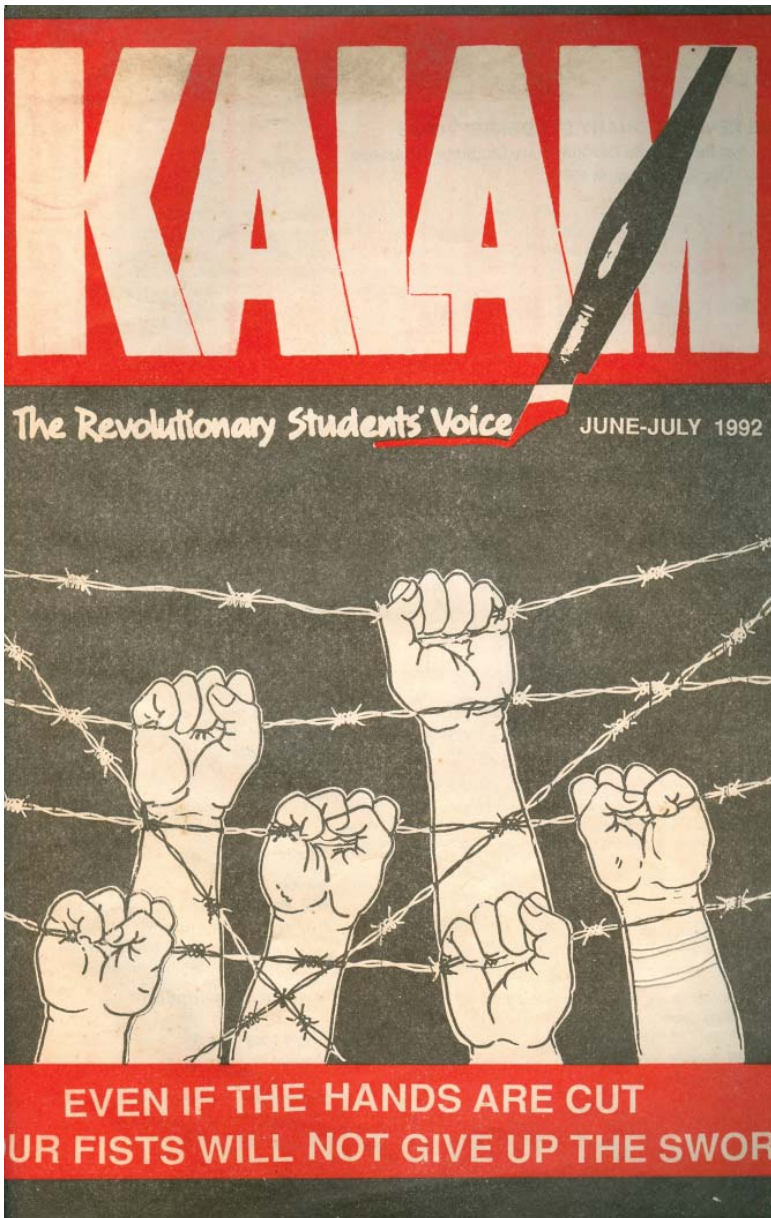
contributors and publishers. My nephew Kiran helped us in digitizing the dissertation and converting it into editable text. Then started the more difficult job of writing to various people to write their reminiscences of Naveen for the commemorative section and coordinating with them. Dr. Vara Vara Rao sent the first ever reminiscence of Naveen, a touching tribute in Telugu, which was kindly translated into English by Kolli Sambasiva Rao garu, the father of Bala. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Yogendra Singh (Naveen's M.Phil guide) and Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty for enthusiastically supporting our project with their blessings and sending in their reminiscences. Nadarajah Manickam, Naveen's classmate and closest friend in JNU sent us his memories, the best photograph of Naveen that anyone had and also helped us in many other ways, including editing my review and organizing the contents of the book. He was brought into this project by Samuel Asir Raj, another close friend of Naveen and a co-founder of "Students Forum." My close friend Bhupendra Yadav also responded with his reminiscences at the shortest notice. Rona and Ritupan helped us in copyediting and compiling the photographs and images for this book. I also thank Manohar Rao, Adapa Satyanarayna, Tankasala Ashok and Haragopal for their suggestions and help regarding releasing the book. Many of the friends also came forward enthusiastically with financial help, which is gratefully acknowledged.

So many people provided invaluable feedback and advice, such as, Sri Meka Ravindra Babu, the maternal uncle of Naveen Babu. Most of the details of Naveen's family background and how he conducted himself at home were obtained when I spoke to his sister Smt. Siva Parvathi, mother Smt. Satyavathi and father Sri Ram Mohan Rao.

Initially, my brother Srinivas who has some experience and contacts with publishers in AP took up the project, invested a lot of time and effort to find some publishers who were willing to publish it on a buy-back basis, but eventually we decided not to go through that route, as we wanted to ensure that the book reaches far and wide through a publisher with professional marketing and distribution mechanism. The enthusiasm of Dhruva, the publisher of Daanish Books, Delhi, introduced to us by Naya, who also knew Naveen in their own way, made the publishing of this book possible at a short notice. I also thank Daanish Books for editorial support and printing at such short notice.

Even though I know that most people did whatever they did for this book not for credit but as their tribute to Naveen, I apologize in advance if I have missed any names. I really mean to thank all those who have helped us in some way or the other to publish this volume in memory of a dear friend and comrade. It has been quite an undertaking, but what kept us going was our desire to bring the life of Naveen Babu and his scholarly work into the public to show such a man existed among us and with whom we had personal interaction. A man who was a complete teetotaler and lived a simple life, whose only mission was to bring about an egalitarian society — a mission for which he lived and died.

Ramesh Babu



Cover page of the students' magazine, *Kalam*, which was edited by Naveen for some time

Preface

M. Nadarajah

Any serious study of the Indian society cannot overlook or disregard the pervasive and enigmatic reality of the infamous Indian “caste system.” This is more so for a Marxist scholar and revolutionary. In the Marxian methodology, understanding specificities of the past is crucial for charting a definite path to a classless, democratic and egalitarian future. It is with this understanding that Yalavarthi Naveen Babu began his inquiry into the nature of the Indian society. In other words, Naveen believed strongly that without a correct understanding and characterization of the “caste system,” the path to a better future will forever evade the Indian society. This is certainly a reflection of “young Naveen’s” practical wisdom, which carries a message for all those intending to bring about fundamental and deep structural and cultural change in the Indian society.

Naveen was entering the prime of his youthful life when he worked on his M.Phil. dissertation on which this commemorative volume is based. Like many concerned youths of his times, Naveen was gripped by the need to contribute to the transformation and building of a far more democratic and egalitarian India. Unlike many youths, he had an opportunity to do this. And like many youths, he courageously seized that opportunity to realize his contribution. This volume, *From Varna to Jati: Political Economy of Caste in Indian Social Formation* is the living embodiment of his intellectual labour and contribution.

It is with the single-mindedness of a classical Marxist scholar that Naveen addressed the caste system. It is to his credit that he actually did not use the term “caste” but the well known Indian terms for it, Varna

and *jati*. By doing so, he was able to communicate to us the importance of being sensitive to local conceptual and cultural categories and the territories they represent (aspects that are usually lost in translation). By doing so, he is also able to pry open and lead us to a line of enquiry that is not only innovative but also pregnant with intellectual and political possibilities. Not only was he able to draw our attention to re-considering the use of these terms (Varna and *jati*) carefully but also to a rich crop of concepts and debates surrounding them.

A careful reading of Naveen's work therefore indicates two critical tendencies. One is his attempt to understand and characterize the material conditions underlying realities of Varna and *jati*; the other, his critical engagement with those who have produced ideas and theoretical narratives about Varna and *jati* in their attempt to understand the Indian society. In this regard, it may be of importance to students of Indian society to know that he takes on Louis Dumont and his understanding and characterization of the Indian society. Given the stature of Dumont, Naveen's act is simply courageous: it is the classic "David and Goliath" scene! In a sense, the widely accepted and influential Dumont's understanding of Indian society was a nagging theoretical and political challenge for Naveen. He simply had to critically confront the analysis of Dumont. And in that confrontation, his sociology melted into Marxist theoretical praxis. Within the pages of this volume, you will see the mind of a young Marxist cognitive strategist, taking us closer to understanding the reality of Varna and *jati* and their material locations in pastoral and agrarian social formations and away from overly symbolic ('superstructural') analysis of the Indian society or its seemingly unchanging nature.

A couple of years after this work, Naveen's theoretical praxis transformed and matured into political praxis and, eventually, into revolutionary military action. Such "maturity" became a threat to status quo, for it disturbed the "normal" and the "routine." The normal and the routine are sustained by powerful forces and the basis of such forces in contemporary India is the caste-class reality. In a sense, the reality he was seeking to understand and to eventually change killed him. Perhaps, the powers that killed him tricked and overwhelmed him. Perhaps, he was inexperienced in military action or was a little careless. Perhaps, he was helping another colleague. Perhaps, he was distracted for a moment... the moment that took the life of a person, who would have continued to

provide us more insights into the nature of the Indian reality... a unique view from the “other side.”

Naveen’s “career path” was no ordinary one. It is one that very few people (particularly the youth) would dare to embrace, or endure it even if they did. It is one in which there is a near complete alignment of the mind, heart, body and action. Naveen had grown from a nationalist into an internationalist, from a sociologist into a gentle revolutionary, and from a son, nephew, friend and comrade into a martyr. While he is no more with us, his martyrdom is. So are his ideas.

This work by a young Marxist scholar is marked by the character of youthfulness — rough-edged wisdom, inconsistencies, tensions and narrative fractures. But it also carries many messages that should be of practical use to any young person who want to take his/her life in a sincere and meaningful direction. Naveen seems to say:

- a. address the most primary and pervasive institutional reality in trying to understand and to fundamentally change society,
- b. change should not only be structural but also theoretical,
- c. explain a local reality with categories produced within that reality,
- d. act not only at the level of politics but also at the level of the theoretical and the emotional,
- e. adopt a clear cognitive strategy and tactic.
- f. theoretically engage with not the weakest opposing conception or theoretical narrative but with the strongest,
- g. engage theoretically without losing sight of the potential for praxis.

Naveen’s work needs follow up. Between the covers of this volume are ideas that have a career in the struggle for a democratic and just India. If he worked on “From Varna to Jati,” then we may want to ask ourselves the question “From Jati to What? And How?” Any comprehensive response to these queries will comprise emotional, theoretical and political aspects. If he has taken the first few steps for us, can we continue them from him?

I

**Academic Contribution
of
Naveen Babu**

Reinterpreting Caste and Social Change: A Review

Ramesh Babu and M. Nandarajan

One of the most distinctive developments in ancient India with settlement of Aryan tribes around 1600 BC was the much debated “caste system,” or *jati*, that originally started as *chatur*Varna or four Varnas. The Rg Veda, by far the most archaic testimony of pastoral or nomadic culture of migrating Aryans, first describes the four Varnas. Rg Veda is the earliest of the Vedas, a large corpus of texts originating in ancient India, that form the oldest and sacred texts of Hindus. It is this pervasive and enigmatic Indian reality that Naveen, the author of this volume, set his eyes upon to critically examine and understand.

The caste system essentially forms a social hierarchy. Caste status is acquired by birth and castes are maintained as endogamous groups, i.e., members of a caste can marry only within that caste. There are more than 2000 such castes in contemporary Indian society. Modern 21st century India still embraces caste and it forms the basis or is part of the cultural, political and social events across the India. In fact, caste has reinvented itself and is very much part of the consciousness of all the Indian classes. It will not be an exaggeration to say that no conversation or discussion in the everyday life of an average Indian go as beyond the second sentence without the phrase “which caste is s/he from?” In a sense, perpetuation of the caste system is promoted by the upper echelon of the Indian society to bring order and to directly or indirectly control it.

Naveen explains that the four Varnas are sustained through an ideology that presents the superiority of upper castes by introducing a se-

ries of notions such as *dvija*, or twice born, i.e., the wearing of a “sacred thread” diagonally across the body. *But his important observation is that Varna and jati belong to two different modes of production.* He defends this observation by tracing and locating their origins in the respective social formations spanning the Rg Veda to the Mauryan period in Indian history. He explains that influences such as endogamy of Aryans of the pastoral society led to the formation of *jati*. There were many rituals and practices introduced as part of religion, but which functionally acted to maintain the social hierarchies and status quo, such as encouraging child marriages, discouraging widow-marriage and the practice of *sati*. Many religious rituals actually concealed the underlying exploitation of lower castes but gave the impression that they were important for the normal functioning of society.

In the first chapter of the book, Naveen disproves assumptions of some Western scholars that India is a stagnant society with self-sufficient isolated communities completely governed by religious practices. These scholars show the existence of the chaturVarna and *jati* from Rg Veda time. Some scholars think that the Asiatic Mode of Production is the reason for the static nature of the Indian society. Naveen supports the views of one of his teachers, Dipankar Gupta, who argued that Varna and *jati* belong to two different modes of production. Initially, there were only two Varnas, that is, Aryans, the invaders, and *dasas*, the local people, and these categories belonged to the pastoral mode of production. He showed that internal differentiation within the Aryan tribes contributed to the development of *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas*. Further transformation of pastoral economy to agrarian economy led to the development of various *Jatis* from the four Varnas. This development also saw the emergence of the state and village community, contributing to the consolidation of the new form of social differentiation.

Marx analyzed that Aryan incursion into India had led to relations between lighter-skinned Aryans and darker-skinned locals or *dasas*. These racial types contributed to the initial formation of Varna. Marx’s contention of caste as a form of division of labor connected with the Asiatic mode of production is supported by the author, just like masters and slaves in the slave mode of production, feudal lords and serfs in the feudal mode of production and bourgeoisie and proletariat in the capitalist mode of production. Marx believed that the caste would wither

away under the impact of industrialization, modern transport and communications. Naveen points out that all pre-capitalistic societies have abstract classes and the social groups with specific names peculiar to a given society. In Europe, the social classes were referred to as landed gentry, landlords, serfs, free peasants and artisans but in the Indian context, the abstract classes have manifested in terms of *jatis* as pastoral mode of production changed to agrarian mode of production. It is believed that class-consciousness will eventually lead to dissolution of *jatis* into two “pure” classes of oppressed and oppressor. But in the Indian context, these various social classes, or *jatis*, maintained their separate identities by associating either with the exploiters or with the exploited.

In the second chapter, Naveen discusses the existing theories on Varna and *Jati*, as well as their relevance in terms of modes of production at that period. The Rg Veda indicated Varna in relation to skin colour — the invading Aryans as lighter skinned and native people as darker skinned, showing only two Varnas. The *ChaturVarna* or four Varnas concept was first mentioned in the *Purusha Sukta* text that explains the origin of four Varnas from “Purusha’s body: *Brahmanas* came out of the mouth, *kshatriyas* out of the hands, *vaisyas* out of the thighs and *sudras* out of the feet. It is argued by various scholars that mixed unions of four Varnas resulted in various *jatis* (or castes). According to prevailing views, Varna represents a universal framework and all the *jatis* (or castes) can be fitted into one of these four Varnas. This is a view that Naveen challenged.

Later Vedic texts divide the society into four social orders on the basis of occupation — priests, warriors, peasants and servile groups which are *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya* and *sudra* respectively. By the end of the Rg Vedic period, the defeated tribes of the Aryans as well as locals were reduced to the position of *sudras*, making them the single largest of the four Varnas with no resources, excluded from Vedic ritual sacrifices and the sacred thread, separating three Varnas from the fourth, the *sudras*. These wealth inequalities were justified on the basis of their mythical origin from the feet of the *purusha* (or creator). By the time of the Mauryan period, the *sudras* were completely reduced to the position of slaves, forced to work, which resulted in social conflicts. But, by the time of the Gupta period, the *sudras* gained some religious and civic rights. Even though they were respected at many levels on par with the *vaisyas*,

they still remained as a servile class. As settlement progressed through the Vedic period from pastoral society to agrarian society, *vaisya* turned from peasants to traders while *sudras* turned from servile group to peasants. At this time, a hitherto unknown fifth Varna developed, to replace the *Sudras* for doing menial jobs and referred thereafter as “untouchables.” Scholars like Ambedkar were not concerned about the relation or differences of Varna or *jati* but address them as one and the same. Ambedkar attempted to show the origin of *sudras* from the warrior or *kshatriya* group. The animosities between *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* led to the refusal of the former to perform “*upanayana*” (initiation rites) for the latter, thus eventually downgrading them to *sudras*.

In the final chapters, Naveen explains the differences between Aryans and *Dasas* and the subsequent internal differentiation of Aryan tribes at the time of pastoral social formation and the appropriation of wealth by *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas*. Varna is a functional hierarchical system proposed by the post-Rg Vedic and pre-Yajurvedic period texts to supposedly organize the society. Later, the differences in the Aryan tribes contributed to various *jatis* due to unequal distribution of wealth and specialized occupations. Aryans were a semi-nomadic pastoral people, who subjugated the local tribes, whom they called *dasas* or *dasyus*. Unlike agrarian society, pastoral society does not need much labor force, except for the protection of cattle. But when agriculture emerged as the major economic activity, *dasas* were used as forced laborers like slaves (in the later Vedic period).

It is worth keeping in mind Naveen’s observation that initially Varna was based on social classes and not always on birth. For example, Valmiki, the composer of the one of the Hindu epics *Ramayana*, was a hunter by profession and Veda Vyasa, the composer of another Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*, and the compiler of the Vedas, was born into a fisherman family and not born into the priestly class.

The chief contribution of the Aryan settlers was the introduction of new relations of production on a bigger scale, forced labor with new and improved methods of cultivation into new territories. Archeological evidences suggest that they used copper and bronze for agriculture and also in small or quantities for weapons. In spite of all this vastly improved large-scale cultivation, Rg Vedic society was still predominantly pastoral and cattle was the main wealth. The *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas* claimed a

substantial part of the spoils of the war. As pointed out earlier, in many cases, *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* come from the same family and only in the later Vedic period, the entry into these groups became restricted. It seemed the primary wealth, the cattle, was collectively owned by the tribe. The evidence for this is the word “*gotra*”, which meant cowpen, which later became clan. Also in the later Vedic period, collective ownership by clan was giving way to individual family ownership, due to the transformation of semi-nomadic tribes into increased settlement with agriculture. This resulted in the development of specialized occupations like carpentry, pottery and weaving, which slowly led to diversification of *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* Varnas to various *jatis* (or castes). The assumption by many scholars that the production of surplus will lead to, the emergence of classes due to unequal distribution was refuted by Naveen, showing the existence of classes in the form of diversified Varnas in the Rg Vedic period.

To conclude, the abolition of the caste system has to be a fundamental goal of the Indian democratic revolution. Any mass movement to abolish classes, which does not engage in a direct fight the against the caste system will not achieve its objectives. The reverse is also true. As B.T. Ranadive pointed out, “All variants which sought to fight the anti-caste struggle in isolation from the main class struggles of our times have failed and produced pitiful results.” It is basically a class approach which recognizes the need for forging a unity of all oppressed sections. It is an expression of what Lenin stated as the basic duty of the working class, championing the fight against all oppressions, which in India includes the most heinous type of oppression of the scheduled castes. Naveen’s work gives some starting points to address these concerns and a pathway to a more democratic future.

Conceptual and Methodological Issues

Yogendra Singh

Discourse on *jati* or caste remains ever-relevant for understanding the basic aspects of social and economic transformation of contemporary India. It is for this reason that studies of Varna and *jati* have attracted scholars of humanities and social sciences drawn from a variety of specialized fields. As a social phenomenon too, *jati* has demonstrated an acute resilience of its own, persisting in many forms and functions and yet slowly changing many of its structural and cultural features in the course of time. It is, apart from other factors, a reason why studies of caste/*jati* continue to engage our attention.

From Varna to Jati: Transformation from Pastoral to Agrarian Social Formation by Yalavarthi Naveen Babu draws our attention to *jati*'s past, which has enormous contemporary relevance. He traces its history in the social, cultural and economic aspects of the formation of "Varna into *jati*" from the Rg Vedic period to the present day and analytically demonstrates how these changes were grounded into the changing modes of production and its accompanying social formation. His discourse is drawn heavily from the Marxist theory and its conceptual categories. Yet, his work demonstrates sensitivity to non-Marxist and neo-Marxist formulations of issues of caste, power-structure and class formations. His view that in India, *jati* has existed as a structural-cultural equivalent to class has already found support from a variety of scholars. Nevertheless, he recognizes the specific historicity of caste or *jati* in India, when viewed from its regional and ethnic variations. Some of the conceptual categories used by the author to illustrate this historicity rest on concepts like "the Asiatic mode of production" and its historical variations implicit in

Marx's formulations such as the "material mode of production," the "social mode of production" and the "mixed mode of production."

Indeed, the theoretical and methodological power of the concepts of mode of production to study social formations and their continual historical changes has assumed new relevance in the contemporary discourse of sociology, social anthropology and other social sciences in India and abroad. Naveen Babu refers to the works of several authors to support his thesis. In this context, he critiques the totalistic cultural construction of caste by Louis Dumont in his uses of the notion of "hierarchy" and Dumont's discomfort in reconciling it with the phenomenon of power. We may note how the variations on the conceptual improvization of "mode of production" have made innovative uses in the subsequent studies of class and culture in many countries, including India. Apart from the writings of neo-Marxist anthropologists such as M. Godelier whom the author refers to, one may also bring in the contributions of P. Bourdieu, whose major publications in the later period have made new innovative uses of the concepts of mode of production. Bourdieu refers to production not only of the material goods but also cultural products, which are manifested through symbolic forms. Thus, the structure of domination incorporates in its discourse, not only the domination and conflicts arising out of access to material productions such as property and power, but also its reflections on the symbolic domination by a few classes on the process of production of culture, its products and their legitimation.

When we review the relevance of the category of mode of production as an analytical and methodological tool for the study of contemporary Indian social realities, we readily come across its affirmation in several aspects of our social to economic and political life. The growth of Dalit consciousness and its symbolic expression, not only in politics and protests, but also in literature and autobiographies, resonates with the fervour that is unprecedented. It deeply impacts upon the notion of "domination," and leads to ever new arenas of social and economic conflicts and its symbolic representation. Similarly, the eruption of subalternity and protest movements, both violent and non-violent, which have gained momentum in many parts of the country, may be understood and analysed with greater empathy and objectivity through studies with the uses of the "mode of production" methodology, provided, how-

ever, the researchers are sensitive to formulations and operationalization of the this concept with all its multifaceted attributes, both material and symbolic. In this respect, Naveen Babu's contribution has to be seen in the backdrop of his access to publications and historical records which are circumscribed to a certain period of time. But his insights into the analytical uses of the theoretical categories remains relevant till date and offers insights into the processes of social formations and changes in the Indian society.

The Indian democratic path of development has created some enclaves of empowerment of the deprived *jatis* and has also generated new areas of social conflict. The structure of the past caste domination, which only favoured the upper castes (*Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, etc.) has yielded power to the backward and lower scheduled castes. How far the nature of this transition is impacted by the modes of production and its social, economic and cultural manifestations in the structure of castes or *jatis* in present day India, might offer clearer insights into the emerging space of consensus and conflict in the Indian society. This publication represents a conceptual and historical treatment of this process from our past. It does not, however, foreclose its contemporary relevance, since innovative and creative uses of this methodology may offer us sound insights in the understanding of most of the contradictions of change and continuity in contemporary India.

This title also brings out memories of my close and sustained interactions with Naveen Babu in the course of the preparation of his research proposal and the submission of his M.Phil dissertation to JNU under my supervision. I am glad that it finally resulted in the form of this book. It is reflective of the autonomy and innovativeness of his critical perspective on research on relevant themes of social concern in India.

From Varna to Jati:
Transformation from
Pastoral to Agrarian Social Formation

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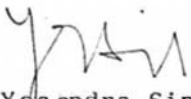
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21st July 1989

DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled "From Varna to *Jati* : Transformation from Pastoral to Agrarian Social Formation," submitted by Mr. Y. Naveen Babu in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University and is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


(Prof. Yogendra Singh)
Supervisor


(Prof. R.K. Jain)
Chairperson

To
Mama, Dadda,
&
Nat

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Y. Naveen Babu

Introduction

Most of the Western scholars who worked on Indian Society in the early decades of this century have presented it as a stagnant society with unchanging self-sufficient isolated village communities ruled by a despot. In this society, it is religion, which is considered to govern the people. Important institutions like *jati*¹ are a direct consequence of the Hindu religion. They believed that India provides the proper case study to understand the evolutionary process through which they thought all European societies have passed through. In this process, they contrasted Indian institutions, like *jati*, village community, religion, culture, etc., while characterizing these as static, with that of European institutions, which, according to them are dynamic. Despite many later scholars, both Indian and Western, disproving this view of Indian society, we still have a substantial number of scholars who consciously or unconsciously subscribe to this point of view. Even after India has attained Independence and shown its potential for change, time and again, efforts are being made to depict Indian society as a static one.

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1. Throughout this work, the indigenous term “*jati*” is used to refer to the endogamous occupational groups, instead of the prevailing English term “caste.” The term “caste” is ambiguous in many ways. It is often interchangeably used for Varna, *jati* and “sub-caste”. It is our contention that this confusion has arisen because of our use of an alien word “caste” to represent the Indian word *jati*, which is supposed to be a peculiar institution to be found mainly in the Indian sub-continent.

Jati is a classificatory category used not only to classify human groups but also animals, trees, objects, etc. It is used to differentiate between the good quality and the bad quality of various objects. In fact, many words we find in Indian society have different connotations.

Those who argue for the static nature of Indian society do this on two grounds:

1. Those of them who argue that Indian society is divided into four Varnas from the Vedic period onwards are implicitly saying that the Indian society is static. They argue that the four Varnas have remained the same. These scholars realize the complex nature of the Indian reality, which is evident in the *jati* system, and the inadequacy of the Varna model to explain this reality. However, they refuse to discard the Varna model. For some, the symbolic and the ideological aspects, which they trace in the Varna system, are more important than the empirical reality (*jati*) to understand Indian society. For others, empirical facts are important, but at the same time, Varna has some relevance in understanding Indian society. The underlying assumption of these writers is that Varna and *jati* both exist in the present-day society. However, there is a dispute as to which concept has to be given more weightage.
2. Another group of scholars argue for the staticness of the Indian society on the basis of Oriental Despotism and Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP).

It is to be kept in mind that not all the scholars who use these categories (Varna and AMP) have intentions to show Indian society as static. In fact, some of them have efficiently shown the changes that have been taking place in different time periods of Indian history. Nevertheless, as we will show later, the use of these categories to show the dynamic nature of the Indian society is self-defeating and distorts the understanding of Indian society.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

An attempt is made in this work to re-emphasize the view that Indian society is not static. After analysing the material basis of Varna and *jati*, these two categories are located in their respective social formations. Following Dipankar Gupta,² it is argued that Varna and *jati* belong to

2. Gupta, Dipankar. 1980. 'From Varna to Jati: The Indian caste system, from the Asiatic to the Feudal Mode of Production,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.

two different modes of production. It is argued that Varnas are only two (Aryans and *dasas*) and these categories belong to the pastoral mode of production. A distinction is made between two types of social differentiation in the Rg Vedic period, one indicating the differentiation between the Aryan tribes and the non-Aryan tribes (*dasas*) and the other indicating the internal differentiation of the Aryan tribe— *brahmanas*³, *kshatriyas* and *viz* (commoners). It is this later differentiation, which played an important role in the transformation of society from pastoral to agrarian economy. When the society transformed from pastoral (tribal) to agrarian (*jati*) social formation, the distinction between the Aryan tribes and the non-Aryan tribes (*dasas*) had become redundant, because the agrarian society is based on *jatis* and not on tribes. With the increase in population and rising inequalities within the Aryan tribes (*dasas* were already subjugated) which resulted in large sections of the society being reduced to subordinate position, the existing pastoral economy failed to provide subsistence and necessitated the search for alternative means of production. This led to the development of agriculture. With the transformation of the society from pastoral to agrarian economy, the old form of social differentiation (Varna) gave way to the new form of social differentiation, i.e., *jati*. With the transformation, also emerged, new institutions like the state, village community, etc., which consolidated the new form of social differentiation. Because of the very nature of transformation, tribal institutions and values played a prominent role in shaping the new institutions.

The changed notion of the word Varna from “colour”, indicating the fair-skinned Aryans and color-skinned *dasas* or *dasyus* to the four-fold division of *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisya* and *sudras* is traced out. The ideological implications of this change are pointed out. It is our contention that *brahmanas* have consciously developed this four Varna theory which places them permanently at the top. It is shown how the *brahmana* scholars in later periods were faced with difficulties in relating this theory with the empirical reality (*jati*). It is argued that in order to prove the relevance of the theory of four Varnas, the later brahminical writers have invented other theories like the theory of mixed unions. They have

10(3).

3. The words *brahman*, *brahman* and *brahmanas* are used interchangeably.

also developed the notions of *dvija* (twice-born) and once born, where *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas* are entitled to wear the “sacred” thread after upanyana (initiation ceremony). This enabled them to show something “concrete” about the existence of Varnas.

The present work broadly deals with the developments that have taken place in Indian society from Rg Veda to the end of the Mauryan period. It basically deals with north-India, but references are also made to other parts of India to explain the absence of *kshatriya* and *vaisya* Varnas in those regions. This work is mainly based on limited secondary sources. This is not an exhaustive work dealing with the developments in ancient India. It tries to provide a framework with which ancient Indian social history may be studied with new insights.

In the following pages of this chapter, some of the essential concepts that have been used in this work are discussed. The second chapter deals with the review of literature. The pastoral social formation and the transition to agrarian social formation are dealt with in chapters III and IV respectively. In conclusion, the question of how the theory of four Varnas continues till date is dealt with in addition to hints for the further prospects of this study.

1.2 SOCIAL CATEGORIES AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

There is a tendency to use the same social categories to analyze different modes of production. Little distinction is made between social categories, which belong to two different modes of production. For example, Varna is used to analyze both pastoral and agrarian social formations. As a result of this, ambiguities continue to prevail in locating a particular social category in its material conditions. Each social category represents a particular social formation. When this social formation changes, the social categories, which represent it, also undergo a change simultaneously. In other words, the relations of production manifest themselves in some social categories, which are characteristic of that particular mode of production. Whenever the mode of production changes, the relations of production also change. This means a change in the social categories. When the mode of production changes, the population, which is hitherto grouped into social classes on the basis of the earlier production relations, regroup themselves into new social classes representing the

changed relations of production. Thus, we have masters and slaves in the slave mode of production, feudal lords and serfs in the feudal mode of production and bourgeoisie and proletariat in the capitalist mode of production. Even though classes exist in all these modes of production, they change from one mode to another. Similarly, we can argue that Varna and *jati* are two distinct social categories, which belong to two different modes of production. It is quite possible that some aspects of the earlier social formation might continue in the later social formation, but one has to see on what basis this continuation is taking place and the consequences of this continuation. Some of the earlier elements might be used as ideological aspects in the later social formation, but what is more important is to see whether this has any material basis or not.⁴

1.3 CONCEPT OF CLASS

Marx's notion of class has been adopted here. According to him, class is a group of people who are placed in the similar position in relation to the means⁵ of production. The concept of class is used in two senses:

- a) in the abstract sense, where it refers to two antagonistic groups, the owners and the non-owners of the means of production,⁶ and
- b) in its specific sense where it is applied to study the social classes in a particular given society.⁷

Class in its abstract sense refers to two antagonistic groups, divided on the basis of the owners and the non-owners of the means of

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4. As we have mentioned earlier, Varna is used as an ideology in later periods. Similarly, *jati*, which is characteristic of agrarian social formation, is used as an ideology in the modern period.
 5. Marx, Karl. 1967. Capital III, pp.94–42, in T.B. Bottomore and M. Rubel (eds), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*. London, pp. 186–7.
 6. This corresponds to the “pure” classes of Marx.
 7. In this work, abstract class and class are used interchangeably to indicate the two antagonistic groups, the owners and the non-owners of the means of production. Social class(es) is used to indicate the further divisions within each abstract class.

production. This definition of class enables us to understand the basic classes in a given society. But, in reality, we have more than two groups.⁸ This is because the two abstract classes, in reality, are divided into further groups. We may call these groups as social classes. Thus, we have many social classes in each abstract class. The society as we see consists of many social classes but in principle they can be divided into two abstract classes, representing the underlying structure of the society.⁹ These social classes can be arranged hierarchically, whereas the abstract classes are dialectical in nature. The notion of social class has come into usage only in the capitalist societies. Eventhough all earlier pre-capitalistic societies have abstract classes, the social groups, which form part of these abstract classes, are not referred to as social classes. These groups are referred to with their specific names, which are peculiar to a given society. For example, in medieval Europe, the social classes are referred to as landed gentry,

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8. Marx, Karl. 1961. 'Capital III VA (III}/2), pp.941-2,' in T.B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, London. Even though Marx thought that in the capitalist society classes are coming closer to their "pure" form, he mentions about the existence of other groups. Thus he writes: "The economic structure of modern society is indisputably most highly and classically developed in England. But even here the class structure does not appear in a pure form. Intermediate and transitional strata obscure the class boundaries even in this case, though very much less in the country than in the town." At another place Marx writes: "What [Ricardo] forgets to mention is the continual increase in numbers of the middle classes,... situated midway between the workers on one side and the capitalists and landowners on the other. The middle classes rest with all their weight upon the working class and at the same time increase the social security and power of the upper class". op.cit, p.198.
9. Wright, Erik Olin. 1985. *Classes*. London, pp. 9–10. Wright talks about the same thing in different terms. Nevertheless there is a difference between his approach and the approach adopted here. He talks in terms of "class structure" and "class formation." "Class structure refers to the structure of social relations into which individuals (or, in some cases, families) enter which determine their class interests... Class formation, on the other hand, refers to the formation of organized collectives within that class structure on the basis of the interests shaped by that class structure... If class structure is defined by social relations *between* classes, class formation is defined by social relations *within* classes, social relations which forge collectivities engaged in struggle."

landlords, serfs, free peasants, artisans, etc. Thus, the abstract classes manifest themselves in various social categories, which are particular to a given society. In the Indian context, the abstract classes have manifested in reality in terms of *jati* categories in the agrarian social formation.

Jatis are talked in terms of high and low, thus broadly indicating the owners and the non-owners of the means of production. At the same time *jatis* are arranged hierarchically. It is relatively easy to rank *jatis* at the top and *jatis* at the bottom without much dispute. But there is a lot of ambiguity in ranking the middle *jatis*. This is obvious because there is an element of subjectivity involved in placing a particular group either in the upper *jatis* or in the lower *jatis*.¹⁰ Because of this very reason, the ambiguity remains at the middle level. This brings us to another distinction of class made by Marx — Class-in-itself and class-for-itself.¹¹ The ambiguities regarding the ranking of the middle groups remain as long as class is in a state of class-in-itself. Once class-consciousness develops and class-in-itself becomes the class-for-itself, these ambiguities will be resolved and the various social classes will identify themselves with one class or another, i.e., either with the exploiters or with the exploited.

It has been assumed that development of class-consciousness automatically dissolves the social classes and the society will be reduced to two “pure” classes. Our understanding of the past and the contemporary societies shows that class-consciousness need not always necessarily lead to the dissolution of the social classes into two “pure” classes. In fact, social classes maintain their separate identities while identifying themselves either with the exploiters or with the exploited. It has to be remembered

10. The criteria of ranking varies very often and from place to place. Whenever the criteria changes, a *jati*'s placing in the hierarchy also undergoes a change. However, ranking of the social classes is not the prime concern of historical materialism. It is more concerned with the nature of abstract classes and the relationship between various social classes.

11. Quoted in Bottomore and Rubel (ed.), op.cit, p.196. Talking about the small-holding peasants in *18th Brumaire* Marx writes: “... In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class.”

that the abstract classes have emerged out of the inequalities in society whereas the social classes have emerged out of the division of labour.

1.4 CHARACTERIZATION OF VEDIC SOCIETY

Rg Vedic and later Vedic societies are characterized by some scholars as stratified, rank, chiefdom, etc., societies.¹² According to them, class differentiations have not emerged in this period. Only in the post-Vedic period, with the development of agriculture and state, classes have emerged. Rg Vedic society is based on gift-economy, where the members of the tribe give presentations to the chief, who in turn gives it in the form of gifts to *brahmanas* and other *rajanyas*. At the sacrificial ritual, the chief also gives gifts to commoners. It is said that this gift economy was initially enforced by custom and later with the use of force. One of the reasons given for the nonexistence of classes in Rg Vedic and later Vedic period is that surplus production is not possible in a pastoral economy.

Not enough attention has been paid to study how the gift economy came into existence, what are the factors that are responsible for it and other related questions. It is our contention that misinterpretation of “gift economy” will lead one to characterize Rg Vedic and later Vedic society as rank-based and stratified society rather than as a class society.

In a tribal society, which is in a stage of food gathering or hunting, all the members of the tribe give whatever they have collected to the tribal collectivity, which in turn is redistributed among all the members of the tribe. This practice is a natural necessity at this stage where man has not developed the techniques of food storage. So, whatever is collected is to be consumed in a short period of time.¹³ The chief or an elder, with the assistance of either a council or a group of elders, represent the tribal collectivity and undertake the responsibility of pooling together the food gathered/produced by the tribal members and its redistribution. This kind of an arrangement is necessary for the survival of the tribe

12. Kosambi, D.D. 1975. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*. Bombay (2nd ed); Sharma, R.S. 1983. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. Delhi; Thapar, Romila. 1984. *From Lineage to State*. Delhi.

13. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*. Delhi, p.31.

when the food producing techniques are very primitive. As the society developed into higher stages of food production, this institution has also continued.

In these kind of societies, inequalities develop when those people who are in-charge of the food or surplus distribution, instead of distributing it equally appropriate it for themselves or distribute it inequally, thus benefitting some and affecting others. In the initial stages, the appropriation of surplus might have been by cheating and corruption by those who are in-charge of redistribution, but in the later stages magic, religion and other super structural elements are used to justify and rationalize the inequal distribution. Whenever religion failed to justify exploitation and convince the exploited of their subordinate position, force was used to subjugate the people and to extract the surplus. This initial accumulation enables some sections of the society to own or control the means of production. From then onwards, those who own the means of production appropriate the surplus from those who do not own the means of production and are dependent on others for their survival. The means of production might be owned collectively by the tribe or the class or individually by the family or an individual.

Because of the very nature of food production, inequalities are not as sharp as in the later stages of development. In fact, as the society progresses from one stage of development to another, inequalities also increase and more and more people are subjected to suppression. These inequalities will cease to exist only when a classless society is established. The nature of exploitation varies from society to society and from one stage of development to another. In primitive food gathering societies, inequalities might have existed but may not be as severe and sharp as in later food producing societies. This does not, however, mean that classes do not exist in these societies. They may not be as sharply visible but they nevertheless existed. *All those societies where the redistribution does not take place equally may be characterized as class societies.*

From these primitive food-gathering societies, two aspects of the social organization, which are essential for all societies, become very clear. They are the *appropriation* of the food or surplus and the *redistribution* of this food or surplus. Every society depending on its stage of development develops its own way of doing these two essential functions. In a food gathering society, it takes the form of prestation or “gift-economy”

whereas in a food producing society it takes the form of taxes and public works by the state (some aspects of gift-economy might continue here). Individuals might give whatever they have collected/produced to the collective or give only the surplus after satisfying ones own basic needs. A tribe, a clan, a family or an individual, depending on the nature of society, might be the unit of food collection/production and consumption.

1.5 RELEVANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF MODE OF PRODUCTION

While there is an increasing use of Marxist theory and concepts to study various stages or time periods of Indian society, differences continue to persist on the question of mode of production in India. This debate continues at various levels. Questions have been raised regarding the character of Indian society: Whether it was Asiatic or feudal, or non-feudal before colonialism; and whether it is semi-feudal or colonial or capitalist or dual mode from the colonial period. While the debate has been conducted with the help of historical data and empirical evidences, the very concept of “mode of production” was not clearly defined by the scholars concerned. In this section, an attempt is made to indicate what is mode of production and this section studies the relevance of this concept to study Indian society with specific reference to ancient India. This section addresses the following question: If the general concept of mode of production is useful in studying Indian society, then is it necessary to have another concept like Asiatic Mode of Production (here onwards, AMP) to study Indian society? The differences between the general concept of mode of production and AMP are stated. In the end, it is upheld that the general concept of mode of production is sufficient to study Indian society and that the concepts like AMP, which are methodologically defective, only mislead us in our task of understanding Indian society. In the first part of this section, the general concept of mode of production is defined; in the second part, the notion of AMP as perceived by Marx and its critique is stated; and in the final part the revival of the concept of AMP is dealt with.

1.5.1 The General Concept of Mode of Production

A precise definition of the mode of production may be found in Marx’s Preface to the *Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will and relations of production, which correspond to definite stages of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis, on which raises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto... In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois mode of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society.¹⁴

Two terms are important in the definition of mode of production: relations of production and forces of production. G.A. Cohen defines relations of production as follows: “persons and productive forces are the terms of production relations... Production relations are EITHER relations of ownership by persons of productive forces or persons OR relations presupposing such relations of ownership. By *ownership* is here meant not a legal relationship but one of effective control.”¹⁵ According to Hindess and Hirst, “the relations of production define a specific mode of appropriation of surplus labour and the specific form of social distribution of the means of production corresponding to that mode of appropriation of surplus labour.”¹⁶ Forces of production consist of means of production (instruments of production and raw material) and labour power (that is, the productive faculties of producing agents: strength, skill knowledge, inventiveness).¹⁷

Marx used mode of production in three senses in his writings:

- i) the material mode,
- ii) the social mode, and
- iii) the mixed mode.

14. Quoted in Cohen, G. A. 1978. *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*. Oxford, p.20

15. Cohen, 1987: 34.

16. Hindess, B. and Paul Q. Hirst. 1975. *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production*. London, pp. 9–10.

17. Cohen, op. cit., p. 32.

The material mode is used by Marx in the sense of technique. “This is the way men work with their productive forces, the kinds of material process they set in train, the forms of specialization and division of labour among them.”¹⁸

The social properties of the production process is referred by Marx as the social mode. “Three dimensions of production are relevant here: its purpose, the form of the producers’ surplus labour, and the means of exploiting producers (or mode of exploitation).”¹⁹ The mixed mode is used in a “comprehensive fashion, to denote both material and social properties of the way production proceeds, its entire technical and social configuration.”²⁰

The concept of mode of production can be used only along with other concepts like class and exploitation. “We cannot talk of relations of production and modes of production without at the same time talking of social classes and of exploitation and vice-versa.”²¹ The concept of mode of production is not applicable to study both pre-class societies and Communist societies, where classes are theoretically non-existent.

1.5.2 The Notion of Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP)

Marx has written on Asiatic societies between the years 1853–1881. He expressed his views on Asiatic societies in his private communications with others and in the articles he has written in *New York Daily Tribune* on India. Sparse references can also be found in *Capital I* and *Grundrisse*. Marx has not developed his analysis of Asiatic societies as rigorously as he has done in the case of the capitalist societies in Europe. He expressed his views over a period of time while he contrasted Europe with non-European societies (or capitalist societies with pre-capitalist societies).

18. Cohen, op.cit., pp. 79–80.

19. Cohen, op.cit., p.80. The purpose of production may be either for use or for exchange. Marx thought the form taken by the surplus labour is an important factor in identifying the specific social formation. Exploitation takes mainly two forms: a) non-economic coercion (in Pre-capitalist societies) and b) economic coercion (in Capitalist societies).

20. Cohen, op cit., p.84.

21. Rey, P.P. ‘Class contradiction in Lineage societies,’ *Critique of Anthropology*, 4(13–14): 84.

He maintained silence²² on the issue at many points and, in fact, in his last writings on the subject he has not expressed determined views on the subject. Marx was highly influenced by the writings of European scholars on Orient and echoed their feelings in his own idiom.²³

Before Marx, thinkers like Bodin, Bacon, Bernier, Harrinton, Montesquieu, Machiavelli, Hegel, Smith, Mill, and Jones have written on Oriental societies. Montesquieu felt that there is no private property in Asiatic states and moreover these states are despotic. Adam Smith has written about the hydraulic works in Asiatic societies. Hegel propounded the idea of isolated, self-sufficient village communities as the oasis for Oriental despotism. Jones emphasized the point that king is the sole proprietor of land in Asiatic societies. J.S. Mill re-emphasized Smith's view of hydraulic society. Thus, each of these scholars has propounded that one or more than one of the following characteristics as the basis of Oriental despotism. The characteristics of Oriental despotism as viewed by scholars earlier to Marx are: a) state property of land, b) lack of juridical restraints, c) religious substitution for law, d) absence of hereditary nobility, e) servile social equality, f) isolated village communities, g) agrarian predominance over industry, h) public hydraulic works, i) torrid climatic environment, and j) historical immutability.²⁴ Besides these thinkers, British administrators and travellers have written on India and Asiatic societies. The writings of Marx and Engels on Asiatic societies are based on the above-mentioned sources.

The basic characteristics of Asiatic Mode of Production as mentioned in the writings of Marx are: 1) no private property (or the ownership of all land by the state), 2) despotic state, 3) the presence of large-scale

22. Anderson, P. 1974. "The Asiatic Mode of Production," in *Lineage of the Absolutist State*, London: p. 484; Thorner, D. 'Marx on India and the Asiatic Mode of Production,' *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. (IX): p. 66; Habib, I. 1969. 'Problems of Marxist Historical Analysis,' *Enquiry*. p.57.

23. Most of the European social thinkers who had written on Orient before Marx have expressed Eurocentric views. They depicted Europe as the dynamic and moving society, and non-European societies as static. Even in Marx's writings on Orient, these tendencies persist. We see this Euro-centricism in Max Weber also.

24 Anderson, op.cit., pp. 464–72.

irrigation, 4) self-sufficient and isolated village communities (communal property), 5) stagnant system, and 6) no classes.

Marx in a letter written to Engels on 2nd June 1853 has written that: “Bernier rightly considered the basis of all phenomena in the East — he refers to Turkey, Persia, Hindustan — to be the *absence of private property in land*. This is the real key, even to the Oriental heaven²⁵. Engels, besides supporting Marx’s view, felt that “it is mainly due to the climate, taken in connection with the nature of the soil, especially with the great stretches of desert which extend from the Sahara straight across Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary up to the highest Asiatic plateau. Artificial irrigation is here the first condition of agriculture and this is a matter either for the communes, the provinces or the central government²⁶. In his reply, Marx has written that

the stationary character of this part of Asia — despite all the aimless movement on the political surface — is fully explained by two circumstances which supplement each other: 1) the public works which were the business of the central government; 2) besides this the whole empire, not counting the few larger towns, was divided into villages, each of which possessed a completely separate organization and formed a little world in itself... I do not think anyone could imagine a more, solid foundation for stagnant Asiatic despotism²⁷.

In his public writings, Marx asserted the views exchanged between Engels and him. On the village communities he writes:

... these idyllic village “communities . . . had always been the solid foundation of oriental despotism... We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjected man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social State into never-changing natural destiny...²⁸.

25. Quoted in Anderson, op.cit., p.475.

26. Quoted in Anderson, op.cit., p.474.

27. Quoted in Anderson, op.cit., pp.474–75.

28. Quoted in Thorner, op.cit., p.41. In Marx’s writings on India we see two

The emphasis on different characteristics of AMP has changed in the writings of Marx over a period. By 1881, he no longer strongly felt that there is no private property in land in India and Oriental societies.²⁹ Likewise, he did not give much importance to irrigation in his later writings. He increasingly felt that the village communities are the basic foundation of Oriental despotism.

... its foundation is tribal or common property, in most cases created through a combination of manufacture and agriculture within the small community which thus becomes entirely self-sustaining and contains within itself all conditions of production and surplus production.³⁰

After considering the change of views by Marx, there remains, at the end of his writings on Asiatic societies, the following elements which constitute the Asiatic Mode of Production:

- 1) despotic state
- 2) self-sufficient, isolated village communities,³¹

meanings of stagnation. At times he says that Asiatic society is “never-changing” and at some other points he writes it “necessarily survives the longest and most stubbornly.” Nevertheless, it is changelessness which is given more stress and we consider Marx only in this sense. Changelessness should be distinguished from slow-change. Indian society is characterized by “slow-change” but not by “changelessness.” It is the task of the Marxist scholars to find out the factors responsible for slow-change in Indian society.

29. Marx has written to Engels that among the English writers of India, the question of property was a highly disputed one. Gunawardan says “that Marx recognized several forms of land tenure in Asia: i) communal property, the ‘original form’ of tenure which had survived in certain Indian villages; ii) ‘private property’ in the region south of the Krishna which had not come under Muslim rule; iii) ‘feudal property’ in areas like Oudh where tax-collectors had made use the weakness in the central government to develop into feudal landlords; and IV) ‘developed feudal property’ in Japan which was comparable with medieval European forms of property.” (Gunawardan, 1976: 377).
30. Quoted in Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 477.
31. Marx’s comments on Indian village communities are very significant. It is true that the structure of the village communities in India enabled the system to continue for long periods with little change. Marx felt that these village communities are the foundation of AMP. While it is true that the slow change is due to the structure of the village communities, one should not (as Marx has done) immediately conclude that this leads to AMP. Except saying that manufacture and agriculture are combined in Indian village

- 3) stagnant system, and
- 4) no-classes.

In the following pages, we see some of the methodological weaknesses of the concept of AMP.

There are many paradoxes and contradictions in the concept of AMP as conceptualized by Marx. Marx brings the despotic state “above” and the autarchic village “below” into a single unit called AMP³². Can the despotic state and common property go together? If the society is organized on the basis of common property into village communities, then there is no need for a “despot.” Anderson writes that

for the presence of a powerful, centralized State presupposes a developed class stratification, according to the most elementary tenets of historical materialism, while the prevalence of communal village property implies a virtually pre-class or classless social structure. How could the two in fact be combined? Likewise, the original insistence by Marx and Engels on the importance of public irrigation works by the despotic state was quite incompatible with their later emphasis on the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the village communities: for the former precisely involves the direct intervention of the central state in the local productive cycle of the villages—the extreme antithesis of their economic isolation and independence. The combination of a strong, despotic state and egalitarian village communes is thus intrinsically improbable; politically, socially and economically they virtually exclude one another.³³

Bipan Chandra points out that Marx has written that when India is not under the power of the foreign “conqueror’s sword” (it) often gets “dissolved into as many independent and conflicting states as it numbered towns or even villages” ...In other words, centralization of state power springs not from the inner needs of the economy, when it should lead to the rise of an internal centralizing power, but from the need of the foreigner to conquer. It is thus imposed from outside for reasons that pertain

communities, Marx had not further said anything on the structure of village communities. Instead of upholding AMP, because of its foundation on the village communities, one should look at the internal structure of the village communities, and find out the factors that are causing slow change. As we have seen, the concept of AMP negates the fundamental principles of historical materialism. It is for this reason we reject the very concept of AMP.

32. Anderson, op. cit., p.477.

33. Anderson, op.cit., p.490.

to the foreigner's need and not the internal needs of the peasant. In fact, Marx's remark that the village communities do not care at all whether empires rose or fell would also lead to the conclusion that the peasant was not benefited from centralization. If the centralization had an essential function in the economy of the village or rather a function that alone enabled them to exist and function, they could hardly have been so unconcerned about the fate of the centralizing empires.³⁴

Thorner points out yet another contradiction: Marx believed Indian communal ownership to be the most ancient form of rural property in the world, which provided the starting-point and key to all later types of development, and yet also maintained that the Indian villages were quintessentially stagnant and non-evolutionary, thereby squaring the circle.³⁵

The general concept of mode of production as used in European context (with adjectives ancient, feudal and capitalistic, indicating specific mode of production) is coexistent with classes. In fact, every mode of production is the articulation of antagonistic classes in a specific way. Thus, Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* writes: "The History of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman — in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes³⁶. But in the case of AMP, Marx did not find any antagonistic classes. In fact, Marx goes to the extent of saying that India has no history.

Besides, the problems of methodology and facts, political factors³⁷ also played an important role in rejecting the concept of AMP. In India,

34. Chandra, Bipan. 1979. (Mimeograph) *Karl Marx, His theories of Asian societies and colonial India*. p.79.

35. Thorner, op. cit., p.66.

36. Marx, 1848. Also see Thorner, op.cit., p.56; Habib, op.cit., p.54–7.

37. Habib, op. cit., p.58. Russian Marxist scholars were the first to reject AMP for political reasons. In the first phase of the debate that took place between 1929–34, the concept of AMP was officially removed. It was felt that the concept of AMP denies the societies other than European, the revolutionary character. AMP presumes that these societies are static. In India also similar feelings were expressed. Habib writes: "The essential purpose in the attempted restoration of the Asiatic Mode is to deny the role of class-

(scholars like) D. Thorner, S. Naqvi, I. Habib, Gunawardana, R. Thapar, H. Mukhia and Bipan Chandra are some of the scholars who rejected the concept of AMP.

1.5.3 The Revival of Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP)

But, unfortunately in the 1960s the concept of AMP was revived.

The notion has been extended in two different directions. On the one hand, it has been cast far backwards to include Ancient societies of the Middle East and Mediterranean prior to the classical epoch: Sumerain Mesopotamia, Pharaohic Egypt. Hittite Anatolia, Mycenaean Greece or Etruscan Italy. This use of the notion retains its original emphasis on a powerful centralized state, often-hydraulic agriculture, and focuses on “generalized slavery” in the presence of arbitrary and unskilled labour drafts levied from primitive rural populations by a superior bureaucratic power above them. At the same time, a second extension has occurred in another direction. For the “Asiatic mode of production” has also been enlarged to embrace the first state organizations of tribal or semi-tribal social formations, with a level of civilizations far below those of pre-classical Antiquity: Polynesian islands. African chieftainries, Amerindian settlements. This usage normally discards any emphasis on large-scale irrigation works or a particularly despotic state: it focuses essentially on the survival of kin relationships, communal rural property and cohesively self-sufficient villages. It deems this whole mode of production “transitional” between a classless and a class society preserving many pre-class features.³⁸

In this section, we consider Godeleir who revived the concept of AMP (in the second sense), and Dipankar Gupta who applied this concept in the Indian context. Godelier applied the concept of AMP to the societies, which are in transition from pre-class to class society. In this process, he deviates from the original concept of AMP as described by Marx.³⁹

contradictions and class struggles in Asian societies, and to emphasize the existence of all authoritarian and anti-individualistic traditions in Asia, so as to establish that the entire past history of social progress belongs to Europe alone; and so in effect to belittle the universal value of the lessons which may be drawn from the recent revolutionary changes in Asia.”

38. Anderson, *op.cit.*, pp.485–486.

39. According to Habib, Godelier “constructs a definite scheme for the Asiatic Mode which is quite unreal and deceptive”. Habib, *op.cit.*, p.58. Also see Thorner, *op.cit.*, p.63.

According to Godelier, the power of the despot takes “root in functions of common interest (religious, political, and economic) and, without ceasing to be a functional power gradually transforms itself into an exploitative one... The special advantages accruing to this minority, nominally as a result of services rendered to the communities, *becomes obligations with no counterpart, i.e. exploitation.*”⁴⁰ (emphasis added). It implies from the above account that the communities (majority) give surplus to the despot (minority) not because of his coercive power, but because he is functional, and serves the common interest. Then, why should this despot “gradually transform itself into an exploitative one”? Even if we assume that the transformation takes place, the question remains: what necessitates the transformation? How does it transform? Godelier did not specify these aspects. The notion of “function” as used by Godelier implies mutual exchange of services rather than coercion. Ironically, elsewhere, Godelier himself says that all pre-capitalist societies are based on non-economic coercion.

In the general concept of mode of production we have antagonistic classes, but in Godelier’s AMP we have “contradictory structures.” Godelier says that this society “presents simultaneously as a final form of classless society (village community) and an initial form of class (a minority exercising state power, a higher community).”⁴¹ This shows that class exists not in the community, but outside the community. In the concept of AMP, which Godelier tries to construct, there is only one class represented by higher community. Its counterpart is not the class but village communities (classless). It is clear that Godelier’s construction of AMP does not fit into the Marx’s original concept of mode of production. This raises a further question: *Can there be a transitory mode of production?*

Dipankar Gupta applies the concept of AMP to ancient Indian society to the period “beginning from the YajurVedic age to the fall of the Mauryan Empire”⁴². This was the period where the four Varna (*brahmanas*,

40. Godelier, M. 1981. ‘The Asiatic Mode of production’ in Anne M. Bailey and Joseph R. Llobera (eds.), *The Asiatic Mode of production: Science and Politics*, London, p.264.

41. Ibid., p.264.

42. Gupta, Dipankar. 1980. ‘From Varna to *Jati*: The Indian Caste System, from the Asiatic to the Feudal Mode of Production,’ *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. 10 (3): 258.

Kshatriyas, vaishyas and sudras) system existed. Dipankar Gupta intends to place “Varna in the material history of the period in which it was manifest, i.e., in the Vedic age, and then to trace the course of its fate through history”⁴³.

For Dipankar Gupta, the “*general exploitation* of the people directly by the superior community or the state is the crucial feature of the Asiatic Mode of Production.⁴⁴ If we recollect, for Marx despot or the state is a person, whereas for Godelier and Gupta the despot is a ‘superior community.’” Dipankar Gupta further writes that ‘stratification and differentiation among the exploited, as we shall see, in no way militates against the concept of Asiatic Mode of Production, nor does it contradict the principle of general exploitation.’⁴⁵

There is a major contradiction in Dipankar Gupta’s arguments. On the one hand, he agrees that there existed “extensive differentiation and division of labour,” and, on the other hand, he says that generalized exploitation “precludes any relationship of dependence and exchange at the lower levels.⁴⁶ The existence of division of labour indicates interdependence and exchange. Stratification itself develops when the division of labour increases.

Dipankar Gupta further writes: “It was this system of generalized exploitation that brought about the Varna order of differentiation wherein the various distinctions between the artisans and peasants had not yet

43. Gupta, op.cit., p.249.

44. Gupta, 1980:250.

45. Gupta, op.cit., p.251. On the same lines he continues: “There is nothing inherently contradictory between the existence of extensive differentiation and division of labour and a simple four-tiered stratification system, such as the Varna system, the two can be reconciled, as it is here hypothesized they were in the Mauryan period, if the logic of generalized exploitation is followed through” (1980:256).

46. Gupta, op.cit., p.250. Dipankar Gupta translates Marx’s village communities into his Varna community. According to Marx, these village communities are self-sufficient, isolated and are directly related to despot (“higher unity”). Dipankar Gupta applies this principle to Varnas. He writes: “... each community (Varna) was largely self-sufficient, because agriculture was still open to all communities, and as exploitation was *general*, hardly any economic interaction among different groups and communities at the local level” exists (Gupta, 1980:258).

developed. This was because each community was largely self-sufficient, as agriculture was open to all, and secondly, because *they were all exploited by the superior community or the state*⁴⁷ (emphasis added). He believes that “the priestking/warrior groups combined to form a composite ruling class...”⁴⁸

There is yet another contradiction here. According to Dipankar Gupta all Varnas were subjected to generalized exploitation by the state. Then he goes on to say that priest-king combination forms the ruling class. Even though, Varnas existed before YajurVedic period, which Dipankar Gupta himself mentions,⁴⁹ his concept of AMP is applicable only from YajurVedic period. He did not give any specific reasons for this arbitrary selection of time period.⁵⁰

We have indicated what is the general concept of the mode of production and shown how this concept is different from AMP. It is clear from our discussion that the concept of AMP does not follow the fundamental principles of historical materialism. Marxist historians in India, after rejecting AMP, have been successfully applying the general concept of mode of production in Indian context.⁵¹ But, very little is talked about the character of mode of production prior to the “feudal” or “agrarian economy”. Dipankar Gupta rightly perceives that Varna and *jati* belong to two different epochs or modes of production.⁵² This aspect has to be further studied from the perspective of the general concept of mode of production.

47. Gupta, 1980: 258.

48. Gupta, 1980:254.

49. Gupta, op.cit., pp.252–53.

50. Gupta presents AMP with the elements—powerful state, self-sufficient communities, unity of agriculture and industry, stagnant economy—drawn from Marx and uses it to transitory mode of production, taking this aspect from Godelier. In this process of applying AMP to transitory mode of production, Dipankar Gupta attributes to Marx things he did not say.

51. Even here there is no single view on the nature of mode of production at various time periods. As we indicated already, the debate continues.

52. Gupta, 1980: 249.

Varna and Jati:

A Review of Literature

The relationship between Varna and *jati* is an important aspect for understanding the changes in ancient Indian society. Most of the writings that deal with this relationship are ambiguous and full of contradictions. As we will see later, many scholars hold different perspectives on Varna and *jati* simultaneously. The different perspectives in understanding Varna and the relationship between Varna and *jati* may be broadly classified as follows:¹

1. The Theory of Mixed Unions: According to this theory the society was originally divided into four Varnas and the numerous *jatis* emerged out of the inter-mixing of various Varnas or *varnasamkara*.
2. The Theory of Dual Reality: According to this theory Varna provides a universal framework and *jati* refers to empirical phenomenon (reality).
3. No difference between Varna and *jati*, both are one and the same.
4. Varna is an irrelevant and confusing category, *jati* is the only relevant category.

1. This classification is not an exhaustive one. An alternative way of studying the relationship between Varna and *jati* is to see how Indologists, sociologists, historians and others understand this relationship. This alternative is not adopted in the present study because it was felt that Indologists, sociologists and historians heavily rely on each other for their study of this problem. Moreover there is a lot of intermixing of their views. The approach adopted here tries to highlight how different scholars (to whichever discipline they might belong to) understand the relationship between Varna and *jati*.

5. *Varna* and *jati* are different categories and belong to two different modes of production.

2.1 THE THEORY OF MIXED UNIONS

For the first time the word *Varna* was mentioned in the *Rg Veda*. Throughout *Rg Veda* (except in the *Purusha Sukta*) it was used in the sense of colour and referred to Aryans (fair in complexion) and *dasas* or *dasyus* (dark in complexion). It is in the *Purusha Sukta* that a mention is made of the origins of *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras* from different parts of the *Purusha*'s body. *Brahmanas* came out of the mouth, *kshatriyas* out of the hands, *vaisyas* out of the thighs and *sudras* out of the feet.² Interestingly, *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras* are not referred to as *Varnas* in the *Purusha Sukta*. The *Purusha Sukta* only mentions about the origin of these four groups but not of four *Varnas*.³

It is in the later writings (that) these four groups are referred to as four *Varnas*. With this the application of the word *Varna* has changed from colour — referring to Aryans and *dasas* or *dasyus* — to the division of society into four groups. Henceforth, the word *Varna* is used in the latter sense by all later writers. The post-*Rg Vedic* writers unanimously talk of the Indian society in terms of four *Varnas*. These *Varnas* are arranged hierarchically: *brahmanas* are at the top, followed by *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* are below *kshatriyas* and *sudras* are at the bottom. The law books prescribe functions, privileges and duties to the four *Varnas*. But in the later-*Vedic* society, there were groups other than the four *Varnas*. Moreover, new groups were emerging either by incorporating tribal communities into the mainstream society or by the internal divisions of the old society. The law makers of the time were faced with uneasiness to account for the theory of four *Varnas* in reality. In order to link the 'sacred' theory of *Varnas* with the existing reality (i.e., *jati*), they developed another theory — the theory of mixed unions or *varnasamkara*. According to this theory, there were originally only four *varnas*, but due to the intermixing of various *varnas* in the later period (*kali* age) the intermediary and lower *jatis*

2. P.V. Kane. 1941. *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol.2. Poona. p.28.

3. *Ibid.* p.27.

came into existence. The status of these *jatis* depended upon the status and the nature of mixture between the father and the mother.

We find many proponents of this view among contemporary scholars. According to Kane, the criticism against the theory of mixed unions 'is true only partially... The element of hypothesis and speculation lies only in the theory of a particular sub-caste having sprung from the union of two persons belonging to two particular *varnas* or castes.'⁴ Tambiah goes further and upholds the theory of mixed-unions or *varnasamkara* by using taxonomical classificatory concept of 'key'. He feels that the theory of mixed unions, based on approved or disapproved unions, enables us 'to comprehend a whole universe of numerous castes, all in principle capable of being ranked and interrelated into a single scheme.'⁵ Tambiah begins by showing how Varna and *jati* are interrelated through the mixed-unions but ironically ends up saying that the theory of mixed-unions is 'fictional and non-historical.'⁶ Dumont while maintaining that Varna and *jati* are two distinct categories, implicitly agrees with the theory of mixed unions.⁷ According to Risley, 'a man may marry a woman of another tribe, but the offspring of such unions do not become members of either the paternal or maternal groups, but belong to a distinct endogamous aggregate, the name of which often denotes the precise cross by which it was started.'⁸ Nevertheless, Risley argues that the classical writers have clubbed all other processes of *jati* formation into the theory of mixed-unions.⁹ For R.S. Sharma, *varnasamkara* indicates *kali* age where *vaisyas* and *sudras* refused to pay taxes and perform the functions allotted to them. As a result of this, a crisis has emerged and the functioning of the society has become difficult. This resulted in the formation

4. Ibid. p.51.

5. S.J. Tambiah. 1973. 'From Varna to Caste through Mixed Unions,' in J. Goody (ed.) *Character of Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.207.

6. Ibid. p.223.

7. L. Dumont. 1970. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. Delhi. pp.71-73.

8. H. Risley. 1915. *The People of India*, tr. W. Crooke. Delhi. p.83.

9. Risley. 1915. pp.82-83. Risley mentions seven types of "castes." They are: (1) Tribal castes, (2) Functional castes, (3) Sectarian castes, (4) Castes formed by crossing, (5) National castes, (6) Castes formed by migration, and (7) Castes formed by change of customs (Risley 1915: 75-92).

of feudalism.¹⁰ N.K. Dutt, Bougle, Ketkar, Ghurye, Karve, Suvira Jaiswal and V.N. Jha are some of the scholars who accepted the theory of mixed-unions.¹¹

Now let us see whether the theory of mixed-unions is logically and empirically valid or not. Scholars like Senart¹² and Trautmann¹³ rejected the theory of mixed-unions as ‘unconvincing’. Fick believes that *brahmanas*, in order to further their interests, have introduced the theory of mixed-unions. He points out that the names of these mixed-unions suggests the names of lands or peoples (for example, Magadha, Nisada, Vaideha, Ambashtha, Malla, Licchavi, etc.) or professions (*suta* or cart-

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10. R.S. Sharma. 1983a. *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*. Delhi. p.31. According to Sharma the “crisis” is solved by land grants given to *brahmanas*. One fails to understand how a crisis — where *vaisyas* and *sudras* refused to perform their duties and pay taxes — which seems to be of very important consequence can be solved by just giving land grants to *brahmanas*. How *brahmanas*, who did not have any army at their disposal, can make the *vaisyas* and *sudras* perform their duties and pay their taxes, when the king with all the armed forces at his disposal could not make them do the same? Even if we have to grant that *brahmanas* used religion to bring under control these agitating *vaisyas* and *sudras*. one fails to understand why the *brahmanas* failed to do the same earlier, or without land grants. Sharma’s explanations are too simplistic and does not provide the correct answers for the questions he raises.
 11. N.K. Dutt. 1968 (2nd edition). *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, Vol.1. Calcutta. pp.7-11; C. Bougie. 1971. *Essays on the Caste System*, tr. D.F. Pocock. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.25; S.V. Ketkar. 1979 (1909). *History of Caste in India*. Jaipur. p.19; G.S. Ghurye. 1969 (5th edition). *Caste and Race in India*. Bombay. pp. 54-55; I. Karve. 1968 (2nd edition). *Hindu Society: An Interpretation*. Poona. pp.52–53; Suvira Jaiswal. 1980. ‘Changes in the Status and Concept of the *Sudra* Varna in Early Middle Ages.’ *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*. p.117. Elsewhere talking about the contemporary urban women, Jaiswal points out that “inter-caste marriages are not uncommon, and these are not leading to the formation of new castes as conceived in the *Varnasamkara* theory.” (1986: 44); V.N. Jha. 1974. ‘*Varnasamkara* in the Dharma Sutras: Theory and Practice.’ *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*.
 12. E. Senart. 1930. *Caste in India: The Facts and the System*. Tr. E. Denison Ross. London. p.101.
 13. T.R. Trautmann. 1964. ‘On the Translation of the Term Varna,’ *Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol.7: 198.

driver, *vena* or maker of reeds, *nata* or dancer, *kaivarta* or fishermen, etc.) they followed.¹⁴

A *jati* needs a certain minimum number of members to continue as a group. To say that a *jati* is formed out of the mixed-unions of two *varnas* or groups means that: a) the offspring of this union are substantial in number to form a *jati*; b) the offspring are not accepted either by the father's Varna/group or by the mother's Varna/group, but are grown up independently as suggested by Risley.

If a substantial number of offspring arise out of the mixed-unions, then it suggests that the two *varnas* or groups are in continuous conjugal interaction. This goes against the basic principle that Varna is an endogamous group.¹⁵ If the governing principle of any institution is violated on a large scale continuously, then we cannot uphold that principle as the governing principle.

Kane mentions 62 occupational groups 'which had probably become castes or were in the process of becoming castes, before the close of the Vedic period.'¹⁶ The number of mixed *jatis* or *samkarajatis* mentioned by *Dharma Sutra* writers varies from one writer to another.

Ap.Dh.S. mentions only *candala*, *paulkasa* and *vaina*. Gautama names five *anuloma* castes, six *pratiloma*, one and eight others according to the view of some. Baudhayana adds to those mentioned by Gautama a few more viz. *rathakara*, *svapaka*, *vaina* and *kukkuta*. Vasistha names even a smaller number than Gautama and Baudhayana. It is Manu (X) and Visnu Dh.S (XVI) that for the first time dilate upon the vocations of the mixed castes. Manu refers to 6 *anuloma*, 6 *pratiloma* and 20 doubly mixed castes and states the avocations of about 23; Yaj. names only 13 castes (other than the four *varnas*). Usana names about 40 and gives their peculiar vocations.¹⁷

Kane further adds:

A Smṛti verse quoted by Visvarupa on Yaj. I. 95 says that there are six *anulomas*, 24 doubly mixed castes (due to the union of the six *anulomas* with

14. R. Fick. 1920. *The Social Organization in North-East India in Buddha's Time*. Calcutta. p.3.

15. Some modern scholars consider *Varna* as representing a particular function rather than a closed endogamous group. But the *dharma sutra* writers consider *Varna* as an endogamous group.

16. Fick. 1920. p.49.

17. Kane. 1941. p.57.

the four varnas), 6 pratilomas and 24 doubly mixed castes (due to the unions of 6 pratilomas with four varnas) i.e., in all 60 and further mixtures of these among themselves give rise to innumerable sub-castes. Similarly, Visnu Dh. S. 16.7 says that the further mixed castes arising from the union of mixed castes are numberless. This shows that before the time of the Vis-nudharmasutra (i.e., at least about 2000 years ago) numberless castes and sub-castes had been formed and the writers of dharmasastra practically gave up in despair the task of deriving them, even though mediately, from the primary varnas.¹⁸

The theory of mixed unions suggests that an innumerable number of *jatis* have emerged out of the mixed-unions, starting with the four *varnas* and continuing with the groups (*jatis*) formed out of these unions. If this is the case, it clearly violates the principle of endogamy, to the fullest extent possible, on which both *jati* and Varna are supposed to be based. This also suggests that instead of endogamy, the mixed-unions should have become the norm. But the *Dharma Sutra* writers are particular about maintaining endogamy strictly. "The smrtis ordain that it is one of the principal duties of the king to punish people if they transgress the rules prescribed for *varnas* and to punish men and women if guilty of *varnasamkara*."¹⁹ Thus, the *Dharma Sutra* writers are faced with a contradiction in dealing with the theory of mixed unions. On the one hand, they condemn the *varnasamkara*, while on the other hand they go into the minute details of ranking the *jatis* emerging out of mixed unions. Moreover, they suggest that upward mobility of one's own *jati* position is possible by continuously marrying into higher *jati* for five generations or more.²⁰

Empirical evidence might provide some insight into the validity of the theory of mixed unions. The north Indian kinship system is characterized by hypergamy. That means, a woman of low status marries a man of high status. As a consequence of hypergamy, especially those who are at the bottom of a particular *jati* which practices hypergamy do not strictly follow endogamy. These men marry women belonging to lower *jatis* usually next to them in the hierarchy. In this case, mixed unions are taking place. But this has not necessarily resulted in the formation of new

18. Ibid. p.58.

19. Ibid. p. 60; Jha1974. p.275.

20. Kane, 1941. p.61.

jatis. Both the women and the offspring(s) are taken into the man's *jati* and the offspring gets the status of the father.²¹

Another case where mixed unions have been taking place without leading to the formation of new *jatis* is that of Nayars. The offspring of Nayar women (considered as *sudras*) and Nambudiri men (*brahmanas*) belong to Nayars and get the status of the mother. These two cases show that mixed unions need not necessarily lead to the formation of new *jatis*. As we have stated earlier, the theory of mixed unions is adopted by classical writers only to account for the relationship between Varna and *jati*. This also shows that even though the theory of four *varnas* did not represent reality, the *Dharma Sutra* writers did not do away with it (which has attained a mythical status by now), but tried to somehow explain the existing reality in terms of Varna divisions. It further indicates the ideological aspects involved in the theory of four *varnas* and the theory of mixed unions.²² It is ironical that this view is continued in the contemporary period by so many scholars.

2.2 THE THEORY OF DUAL REALITY

There is a widely prevalent viewpoint among the social scientists that Varna represents a universal framework, whereas *jati* indicates the empirical phenomenon.²³ According to this view the Indian society is

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21. When compared with the offspring whose parents belong to the same *jati*, the status of the offspring of the union of two *jatis* is comparatively low. Nevertheless, what is important here is whether the offspring is incorporated into either father's or mother's group or formed into a separate *jati*.
 22. We will deal with this aspect more elaborately in a later section.
 23. Some scholars suggest that Varna should be considered as representing "functions" rather than birth which is represented by *jati*. Even if one accepts this argument it is difficult to explain the clubbing of various occupational groups—ranging from peasants to artisans and menial workers—into a single Varna called *sudras*, where as all other *varnas*, *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas*, represent a single function each, that is, priests, warriors and traders respectively. We have already pointed out (note 15 above) that dharma sutra writers considered *varnas* as a closed endogamous groups; the theory of mixed unions suggests this. Throughout this work, Varna is considered as an endogamous group.

divided into four *varnas* and all the numerous *jatis* we encounter in our day-to-day life can be fitted into one of these four *varnas*.

The main proponent of this viewpoint, Srinivas points out a number of difficulties that arise by accepting Varna as a model to understand Indian society. He rightly points out that 'the caste system of even a small region is extraordinarily complex and it does not fit into the Varna-frame except at one or two points.'²⁴ He further adds,

The Varna-frame is too rigid to fit the points of inter-caste relations today, and it may be assumed that it was always so rigid. According to Varna, caste appears as an immutable system where the place of each caste is clearly fixed for all time. But if the system as it actually operates is taken into consideration, the position of several castes is far from clear. This is due to the fact that the caste system always permitted a certain amount of mobility... Varna also conceals the considerable diversity, which exists between the caste system of one region and another.²⁵

Besides this, Varna also results in pre-occupation with attributional or ritual factors in caste ranking at the expense of economic and political factors.²⁶ Despite so many inadequacies of the Varna-model to explain Indian reality, which Srinivas himself points out, he accepts Varna as a theoretical framework. 'Varna has provided a common social language which holds good, or is thought to hold good, for India as a whole.'²⁷ He also uses Varna categories to explain the process of Sanskritization.

Mandelbaum also points out the shortcomings of Varna framework but upholds it on the basis that most villagers are familiar with Varna and adopt the Varna model for Sanskritization. Moreover, *varnas* provide a neat outline of social relations, which enables the villager to place any new *jati* within this scheme of hierarchy.²⁸ K.N. Sharma argues that Varna

24. M.N. Srinivas. 1962. *Caste in Modern India*. New Delhi. p.7.

25. *Ibid.*, p.8.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-28, 69.

27. M.N. Srinivas. 1966. *Social change in Modern India*. New Delhi. p.7.

28. David G. Mandelbaum. 1972. *Society in India*. Bombay. p.22. There are two points to be noted here. a) In the traditional India, the villager hardly travels beyond his/her own local region which is geographically very limited. Further, the villager has the knowledge of all the *jatis*, their occupations and their ranking (not in Varna terms) in his/her region. Given this, there is no need of Varna model for the villager in his/her day-to-day activities. Even if a traveller passes through the village, the traveller's position is ascertained

and *jati* belong to two levels of reality, Varna denotes ‘*guna*’ or ‘style of life’, and *jati* denotes birth. He feels that there is nothing new in the field-work experience of two realities because even the ancient scholars were faced with the same problem and accepted Varna and *jati* as two layers of reality.²⁹ According to Trautmann, the relation of ‘Varna to caste is that of the sacred and enduring to the empirical and ephemeral.’³⁰ Dumont agrees with Srinivas’ views on Varna as a universal model. Dumont maintains that Varna and *jati* are two distinct systems but traces the homology between these two systems, both of which are structural and culminate in the *brahmanas*. He goes further and says that ‘far from being completely heterogeneous, the concepts of Varna and *jati* have interacted, and certain features of the osmosis between the two may be noticed.’³¹ In fact, Varna

on the basis of his/her occupation, b) In a recent visit to a Haryana village with a senior colleague, who incidentally hails from south India (but knows very good Hindi), he asked one villager about the “dominant Varna” in the village. The villager failed to understand the query. My senior colleague had to explain him that he was asking about *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras*. The villager responded by saying that Jats are dominant but Chamars are numerically more in that village. This tempts us to ask whether Varna is the villager’s theory or the imposition of it on villagers by theorists.

29. K.N. Sharma. 1975. ‘For a Sociology of India: On the Word “Varna”’, in *Contributions to Indian sociology* (New Series), 9(2): 293–297. To say that Varna and *jati* represent two layers of reality is to avoid considering the inconsistencies and difficulties emerging out of this scheme. One cannot legitimize this view of two layers of reality by saying that even the classical writers faced this problem. The task of the social scientist is not to legitimize one’s viewpoint by referring to classical works but to establish the validity of that framework. One of the major drawbacks of writings on Indian society is the unquestioning acceptance of every word written by classical writers as authentic and reliable.
30. Trautmann. 1964. p.?.
31. Dumont. 1970. p.73. Thapar prefers the term “lineage society” to “tribal society.” The explanation given for this preference is that “tribal society in the Indian context is ambiguous and includes a range of cultures from stone-age hunters and gatherers to peasant cultivators” (Thapar 1984: 18). It is precisely this character of Indian society (the existence of stone-age hunters and gatherers and the tribes at different stages of development living side by side with the *jatis*) that D.D. Kosambi highlights in his *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*. Because of the very nature of Indian society, tribes exist at various stages of development. Assimilation of tribes into the

model is so important for Dumont, it is from this model he develops the notions of the subordination of power to priesthood, and then applies this notion to *jati* system. He writes, 'the theory of castes resorts implicitly or obliquely to the *varnas* to complete its treatment of power.'³²

Khare, following the footsteps of Dumont and Tambiah, looks into the interrelationship between Varna and *jati* from a 'symbolic' view point. He starts with the single aim of proving the importance of Varna in understanding contemporary Indian society. The result is the imposition of his scheme of Varna on the empirical facts, even though there are many 'complications' and 'logical strains.' He writes: 'proceed towards a contemporary *jati*, with its constituent social groups and their interrelationships, and the concrete and the factual receive increasing attention. However, once the *Varnas* are given (emphasis added) primary attention, the ideal and the symbolic take over.'³³ He further writes that 'the *Kanya-Kubja Brahman* confronts *jati* as concretely as he handles goods and services in a marketplace classified by money.'³⁴ Nevertheless, 'A *Kanya-Kubja Brahman*... requires both *jati* (practical) and Varna (symbolic) specifications of his status.'³⁵ He further feels that,

Varna is a culturally necessary "key" for a *jati* to find its place within the system, but one which does not fulfil all the empirical conditions an overarching taxon should have within a perfect taxonomy. Hence, *beyond a point, jatis themselves must carry all major clinching classifiers...* The Varna system set up what taxonomists call a *tree*, but *it is not a perfect tree* (where all derivative nodes are labelled), *much less a perfect paradigm or a perfect taxonomy.*³⁶

mainstream society is a continuous process which started in the later Vedic period (even earlier) and continues till date. The different kinds of tribes ("from stone age hunters and gatherers to peasant cultivators") indicate the extent of assimilation into the mainstream society.

32. Ibid. pp.73-74. If it is proved that power is not subordinate to priesthood, Dumont's whole thesis of *Homo-Hierarchicus* collapses. We shall deal with this in a later section.
33. R.S. Khare. 1978. 'The One and the Many: Varna and *Jati* as a Symbolic Classification,' in Sylvia Vatuk (ed.). 1978. *American studies in Anthropology of India*, New Delhi. p.40.
34. Ibid., p.44.
35. Ibid., p. 44.
36. Ibid., p.45. Emphasis added.

Further, 'Complications in the *jati*-Varna classification thus appear, among other reasons, because of incomplete but necessary classifiers...' ³⁷ Necessary for whom? Khare himself points out that Varna is necessary for those who occupy the top position. ³⁸ Despite so many complications encountered by him to bring together Varna and *jati*, Khare insists that *varnas* 'must help *jatis* find their relative significance.' ³⁹

Jaiswal says that in modern times 'Varnas are broad categories subsuming within them a large number of *jatis* in a rather loose fashion.' ⁴⁰ Nevertheless she argues that in ancient period both Varna and *jati* signified the same thing. Romila Thapar also considers Varna as a theoretical framework and *jati* as a more evident and concrete phenomenon. ⁴¹ She argues that in the Vedic society, which she characterizes as a lineage society, Varna developed with the emergence of stratification. Thapar suggests that *Kshatriya* and *vaishya* emerged out of the *Jana*, whereas *brahman* and *sudra* were derived from the earlier Harappan culture. The integration of these two sets of dichotomous groups gives rise to four Varnas in which terms the later Vedic society was sought to explain. ⁴² When the Vedic society has transformed from lineage to state, Varna has also undergone a change. This change is reflected in the duality between

37. *Ibid.*, p.46.

38. 'For the higher (varnas), the shudra Varna is indispensable as a classified referent, for it keeps them in their place ...The reverse, however, is logically found true with the shudra's situation, where he "wants to be left alone."'
Ibid., pp.46-47.

39. *Ibid.*, p.48.

40. Suvira Jaiswal. 1986. 'Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities,' in R.S. Sharma (ed). 1986. *Survey of Research in Economic and Social History of India*. New Delhi. p.47.

41. Romila Thapar. 1984. *From Lineage to State*. Bombay.

42. *Ibid.*, p.53. One wonders why the dichotomy between *brahmanas* and *sudras* did not show up distinctly during Rg Vedic period but has come up in later Vedic period. If *brahman* and *sudra* dichotomy is derived from Harappan culture, they would have certainly played an important role in the Rg Vedic period. Thapar's arguments also go against the prevailing idea (which she herself points out elsewhere) that Aryans, who are later also called *dvijas*, constitute of *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vis*. It is clear from this that *brahamans* are a part of the Aryan community but not a residue of Harappan culture. Nevertheless, as suggested by Kosambi, the *brahman* priesthood might have adopted some elements of the Harappan priesthood.

ritual status (Varna) and actual status (*jati*).⁴³ Thapar thinks that in the transition from lineage to state, Varna as a theory helped this process by integrating the old with the new elements. In this sense, Varna takes up an intermediate position between stratified (lineage) society and class (state) society. Nevertheless, Varna has continued in state society as a theoretical framework.⁴⁴ Besides these scholars, Kano, Ketkar, Ghurye, Risley, Pocock, R.S. Sharma and many others support the view that Varna is a theoretical framework and *jati* is an empirical phenomenon.⁴⁵

Is it logically possible for a number of *jatis* to constitute a Varna? If we accept that both Varna and *jati* are characterized by endogamy, then it is not possible to say that a number of *jatis* constitute a Varna, because we cannot have an endogamous group within another endogamous group. An endogamous group is constituted by many exogamous groups. A person can marry outside his/her exogamous group into any one of the exogamous groups within the endogamous group. When we say that a group is endogamous it means marrying outside this group is not possible unless one violates the norm. Thus, it is not possible to have an endogamous group within another endogamous group.⁴⁶

Secondly, we do not have these four Varnas throughout India.⁴⁷ In all the four states of South India, in Maharastra and in eastern India the *Kshatriya* and *vaisya* Varnas are conspicuous by their absence. A theory which is logically inconsistent and which fails to take into account the absence of some of its basic categories in the major parts of the country cannot be said to be a convenient theory to understand Indian society. It seems that the scholars who support the four Varna theory, presuppose the necessity of this theory rather than looking for a viable alternative.

43. Ibid., p.18.

44. Ibid., p.170.

45. R.S. Sharma 1983a; Kane 1941; Ketkar 1979 (1909); Ghurye 1969; Risley 1915; D.F. Pocock. 1960. 'Caste and "Varna"'. *Man*, 183; L. Dumont and D.F. Pocock, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, II S III.

46. The same thing can be explained in another way. Let us assume that Varna is an endogamous group 'V' and *jati* is another endogamous group 'J'. If Varna constitutes many *jatis*, then it implies that J is a sub-set of V. According to the principle of endogamy the members of J cannot marry outside J. But V is also an endogamous group.

47. Mandelbaum. 1972. p.23; Dumont. 1970. p.73.

2.3. ONENESS OF VARNA AND JATI

Sharma divides the ancient Indian society into four phases: tribal society (*Rg Vedic* period, c.1500 B.C.–c.1000 B.C.; characterized by pastoral economy), Chiefdom (later Vedic period, c.1000 B.C.–c.500 B.C.; characterized by small-scale non-monetary peasant society), *vaisya-sudra* social formation (post-Vedic period, c.500 B.C.–c.300 A.D.; characterized by classes) and feudalism (beginning from c.300 A.D.).⁴⁸

In the *Rg Vedic* period, the society was not organized either ‘along Varna lines or class lines but along tribal lines.’⁴⁹ Sharma feels that in a predominantly pastoral society the surplus accumulation is not possible at a large scale. Thus, *Rg Vedic* society was a ‘tribal, pastoral, semi-nomadic and largely egalitarian society.’⁵⁰ *Rg Vedic* society was based on ‘gift economy respected by custom in the beginning and sanctioned by force at a later stage.’⁵¹ Fellow tribesmen made offerings to the king in cattle, dairy products and foodgrains, which were later redistributed at periodical sacrifices organized by the tribal princes.⁵²

The major source of wealth in *Rg Vedic* society was cattle, and a wealthy person was called *gomat*. The king was referred to as *gopa* or *gopati*.⁵³ Agricultural activities were less in Vedic period. Barley was produced in some quantity. Nevertheless, *Rg Vedic* society was mainly a pastoral society. Another very important source of wealth in the *Rg Vedic* society was spoils of war. ‘War in a predominantly tribal society of the *Rg Veda* was a logical and natural economic function...’⁵⁴

Rg Vedic tribes were constantly at war with each other and spoils of the war were distributed among the tribesmen. The distribution was of

48. Sharma’s outline of the stages in the development of Indian society raises more questions than it resolves. If we follow Sharma’s arguments, interestingly we have four stages of development before capitalism or semi-capitalism in India. Whereas in the classical European case, with which Sharma draws a parallel, we have only two modes of production: slavery and feudalism.

49. R.S. Sharma. 1983a. p.27.

50. R.S. Sharma. 1983b. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, Delhi. pp.1-59.

51. *Ibid.*, p.31.

52. *Ibid.*, p.32.

53. *Ibid.*, p.24.

54. *Ibid.*, p.38.

course not equal. Priestly and warrior groups managed to corner the major share of the booty, since the surplus given to the chiefs by tribesmen as gifts, which is supposed to be redistributed on religious occasions, was not redistributed equally. As a consequence of this, the chiefs and priests accumulated large amount of wealth, creating inequalities in the society. Even though Sharma finds that some sections of the Rg Vedic society were in possession of more wealth than others: the distribution of the spoils was unequal thus benefiting priests and warriors more than others. He prefers to characterize the Rg Vedic society as a rank society rather than a class society.

In the Rg Vedic society, he finds the presence of domestic slaves mainly consisting of women. Besides this we do not find slaves on a large scale in this period. Rg Vedic society was divided into two main groups — Aryans and *dasyus* or *dasas*. 'Although the word *Varna* is applied to the Aryan and *Dasa* in the Rg Veda, it does not indicate any division of labour, which becomes the basis of the broad social classes of later times. *Arya*- and *Dasa*-*Varnas* represent two large tribal groups which were in the process of disintegration into social classes.'⁵⁵ Sharma feels that *dasyu* and *dasa* represent two tribal names, which were later used indiscriminately to refer to the pre-Aryan people and the earlier wave of Indo-Aryan tribes.⁵⁶ According to Sharma, both *dasyus* and *dasas* were part of the Indo-Aryan people. The Indo-Aryans came to India in successive waves and *dasyus* (Iranian Dahyus) were one of the earliest waves to reach India. Their way of life has undergone a major change by interacting with aboriginals and when the later wave of Aryans came, whom *dasyus* opposed, they were treated as low. The same is true with *dasas* (Iranian Dahaes tribe) who came after *dasyus* but still retained contacts with the original Aryan groups and thus were more acceptable to Aryans.

Sharma elsewhere refers to *dasyus* as the people with a different language and life-style from Aryans.⁵⁷ If *dasyus* were an earlier wave of Indo-Aryans, one fails to understand how their language is different from the later wave of Indo-Aryans. We know that Aryans came as destroyers of the earlier Indus civilization and established their hegemony over here.

55. Ibid., p.20.

56. R.S. Sharma. 1980. p.27

57. Ibid., p.10.

If we accept the proposition that *dasyus* were an earlier wave of Indo-Aryans, then it means that *dasyus* were completely assimilated by the natives to such an extent that *dasyus* changed not only their life-style but also their language. This goes against the established view about Aryan invaders. Sharma's proposition that *dasas* were also an earlier wave of Indo-Aryans is also fraught with similar flaws. In Rg Veda, *dasyus* and *dasas* were used as synonyms and interchangeably at many places. If we follow Sharma's arguments, this is highly improbable because *dasas* were close and friendly with Aryans, whereas *dasyus* were enemies of Aryans. How can both enemies and friends be clubbed together and referred as one? Moreover, the distinction between Aryans and *dasas* or *dasyus* continued throughout Rg Vedic period. This is significant because, whereas the social differentiation within the Aryan tribes has not clearly distinguished, the distinction between Aryans and/or *dasyus* was strictly maintained throughout Rg Veda. This distinction becomes even more important if we accept Sharma's proposition that *dasas* and *dasyus* were part of Indo-Aryans.

The later Vedic texts divide the society into four social orders or statuses based on occupation — *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya* and *sudra*. 'These cannot be regarded as four social classes in the sense that some of them owned land, cattle, pasture grounds and implements and the others were deprived of them.'⁵⁸ Nevertheless, there are clear indications of the rising inequalities. 'In a way, the first two orders constituted the ruling class, and tried to establish their authority over the *vaisyas* who formed the producing peasant class with the *sudras* as a servile domestic adjunct, which was small in number at this stage.'⁵⁹ By the end of Atharva veda, *sudras* had become a servile class. Sharma considers *sudras* as a tribe having close affinities with Aryans.⁶⁰ According to him, *sudras* are a later wave of Aryans who came to India at the end of the Rg Vedic period and were defeated by the Vedic Aryans.⁶¹ In later times, *sudras* refer to both degraded Aryans and aboriginal tribes.⁶² The origin myth (that the

58. R.S. Sharma. 1983b. p.74.

59. Ibid., p.74.

60. R.S. Sharma. 1980. pp.35-38.

61. Ibid., p.40.

62. Ibid., p.33.

four *varnas* originated from various parts of *Purusha's* body) served as a useful fiction to assimilate the heterogeneous elements into the Aryan fold.⁶³

By the end of the Rg Vedic period, the defeated and dispossessed sections of the Aryan and non-Aryan communities were reduced to the position of *sudras*. *Sudras* at this period enjoyed several religious rights enjoyed by other upper *Varnas*. Sharma thinks that this has something to do with the nature of the economy. At this stage, 'the peasants did not produce much over and above the needs of their daily subsistence' to pay taxes and maintain a non-producing class.⁶⁴ In the post-Vedic period, when the middle Gangetic basin was cleared, when iron was used for agriculture, agriculture has become the main activity of the society. At this stage, *sudras* were clearly distinguished from others and made into a servile group. 'The *sudras* were excluded from Vedic sacrifices and investiture with the sacred thread, which were considered to be the ritualistic hallmark of an *arya* or twice born. The *sudra* was saddled with economic, politico-legal, social and religious disabilities. All this could be justified on the basis of his mythical origin from the feet of the creator.'⁶⁵ It is in the Mauryan period that the condition of *sudras* has completely reduced to that of slaves. *Sudras* were forced to work on agricultural land under the direct control of the state. The post-Mauryan period was faced with the bitter 'social conflicts and tensions, which was perhaps aggravated by the intervention of the non-brahminical foreign elements and the increasing importance of artisans. Probably as a result of this conflict, the disappearance of the strong state power of the Mauryas, and the rise of new arts and crafts, we notice signs of change in the position of *sudras*.⁶⁶ The development of crafts and the refusal of the two lower *varnas* to perform their functions in the *kali* age have necessitated new changes. As a result, in the "Gupta period the *sudras* gained some religious and civic rights, and in many respects were placed at par with the *vaisyas*.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, *sudras* remained as a servile class with some changes in

63. Ibid., p.33.

64. Ibid., p.315.

65. Ibid., p.316.

66. Ibid., p.318.

67. Ibid., p.318.

their position by paying some part of their produce as peasants and artisans to the state.

The Rg Vedic Aryans have transformed into later Vedic *brahmana*, *kshatriya* and *vaisya varvas*. But what happened to the Rg Vedic *dasas* or *dasyus*? Sharma fails to account for the conspicuous absence of *dasas* and *dasyus* in later Vedic texts. Even if we assume that *dasas* or *dasyus* were converted to *sudras*, one fails to understand why they were called *sudras* but not *dasas* or *dasyus*, since *dasas* or *dasyus* also consist of defeated and dispossessed people. The non-continuation of these categories in the later Vedic texts becomes significant. Sharma's arguments on the development of *sudras* shows that in the later Vedic period, they enjoyed religious rights, but lost them in the post-Vedic period and ultimately gained them again in Gupta and post-Gupta period. Another interesting development is that the *vaisyas* who enjoyed *dvija* status and who were treated on par with *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* in religious matters were slowly, in later periods, degraded to the position of *sudras*. This is an interesting aspect, considering the fact that the *vaisyas*, who were peasants and numerically more, were reduced to the status of the servile group; and *sudras*, the servile group was elevated to the position of *vaisyas*. No serious explanation is provided by Sharma on what were the factors that necessitated this kind of change. Sharma failed to give due consideration to the changing notions of Varna categories while talking about the position of various *varnas* in different time periods.

Vaisya in the inter-Vedic period denotes a peasant whereas in the post-Vedic period refers to a trader. Likewise, *sudra* in the later-Vedic period refers to all servile groups below the three *dvija varnas*, whereas in the post-Vedic period it refers exclusively to peasants and artisans. In the post-Vedic period, an unnamed 'fifth Varna' developed, consisting of all the menial workers. This shows that the position of peasants remained more or less the same in both later-Vedic and post-Vedic periods and the same is true with menial workers. The only change was in the names used to refer these groups at different time periods. This further shows that overemphasis on the Varna categories (which no longer refer to the real groups in the society) rather than on the real position of the groups in the production process leads to the misinterpretation of the reality. Sharma also fails to explain how these Varna categories continued in different stages of development.

Suvira Jaiswal argues that Varna and *jati* signify the same phenomenon and can be used interchangeably. They constitute a single system.⁶⁸ She agrees with R.S. Sharma's view that Rg Vedic society had differentiations of ranks but not of classes.⁶⁹ As the later Vedic society expanded, differentiations grew within each Varna. Jaiswal considers the *brahma ksatra* phenomenon (brahmanas becoming kings) as a transitional category where more preference is given to *kshatriya* status.⁷⁰ Jaiswal agrees with the view that the non-emergence of *Kshatriya* and *vaisya varnas* in south and other parts of India is

due to the fact that in these areas there was "no conquering elite which might seek to preserve its identity through putative *kshatriya* status" and by forging kinship relations horizontally through widespread marriage networks, rather than vertically in the absence of traditional local roots... In the north, the four-tired Varna system has developed through the fission and fusion of later Vedic tribes in which the *brahmana*, the *kshatriya* and the defeated *sudra* were clearly identifiable and the *vaisya* was a residual category including artisans, herdsmen, peasant, etc., that is independent producers.⁷¹

Jaiswal supports R.S. Sharma's views on the development of *sudras* in various periods of ancient Indian history. She however feels that the change in attitude towards peasant communities in the Gupta period and post-Gupta period needs elaboration. Jaiswal shows that the occupation of *vaisyas* has changed from agriculture and crafts to trade and commerce from the beginning of the Christian era. 'This shift in the concept of the *vaisya* Varna was primarily responsible for the characterization of the peasant communities in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods as *sudras*. At the root of this change lay the contempt for manual labour and the depression of the peasantry.'⁷²

Vaisya Varna did not develop in the southern and other parts of India because in these areas the spread of brahminical culture has taken

68. Suvira Jaiswal. 1986. 'Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities', in R.S. Sharma (ed). 1986. *Survey of Research in Economic and Social History of India*, New Delhi. p.47.

69. *Ibid.*, p.52.

70. *Ibid.*, p.54.

71. *Ibid.*, pp.67-68.

72. *Ibid.*, pp.69-70.

place when trade was declining.⁷³ Jaiswal characterizes the early medieval India as consisting of three broad strata — the *brahmana*, the *kshatriya* or Rajput and the *sudra* in the north and the *brahmana*, the *sat-sudra* and the *asat-sudra* in the south and the east.⁷⁴ The ranking of groups was no longer on ‘twice-born’ and ‘once-born’ but on the basis of the groups ‘which were created by the approved unions and hence were “pure” and those, which originated from disapproved unions hence were “impure”’. In the former category were included not only the four principal Varnas but all those non-*brahmana* castes of high social status, which castes were described as *sat-sudra* or *uttamasamkaras*.⁷⁵ The regional variations in the Varna system during the feudal age shows that ‘secular factors had placed the Varna theory under a severe strain and four-Varna hierarchy was transformed into a hierarchy of numerous endogamous groups coming from diverse sources. But the basic principle, the intertwining of the pure and the dominant, remained unchanged.’⁷⁶ Jaiswal, while upholding the Varna model in principle, discards *vaisyavarna* on the pretext that it is a ‘residual’ category. It is surprising to note that Jaiswal characterizes peasants, artisans, herdsman, etc., as a ‘residual’ category.

2.4 RELEVANCE OF JATI

Both Senart and Bougie reject the theory of four *varnas* as an ideological creation of *brahmanas*. Senart cautions the reader about the brahminical bias of the classical texts. He points out the self-interest of *brahmanas* in maintaining the theory of four Varnas.⁷⁷

Senart distinguishes between Varna and *jati*. He feels that *jati* alone is relevant in understanding the reality and rejects Varna as an artificial system which was carefully thought out and adopted to the conditions in which it does not have any roots.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, he suggests that these two orders ‘may combine and complete one another.’ Varna model by

73. Does this mean there was no trading community in the south and the east India?

74. *Ibid.*, p.70.

75. *Ibid.*, p.70.

76. *Ibid.*, p.73.

77. *Ibid.*, pp.105-106.

78. *Ibid.*, p.126.

claiming domination to *brahman* class preserved a rigidity concerning religious scruples and further provided legitimacy to the notions of hierarchy and purity.⁷⁹ According to Bougie, the ‘contemporary observations tend to show that the theory of four castes, the *chaturvarna* has never been more than an ideal, blending a simplified and as it were, shortened picture of the reality with a reiteration of frequently violated prescriptions. It would be useless to look at the caste of the present as the descendants of the four traditional castes...’⁸⁰

2.5 VARNA, JATI AND MODE OF PRODUCTION

We have already discussed Dipankar Gupta’s views on Varna and *jati* in the Introduction. We agree with him on two points: that Varna and *jati* belong to two different modes of production; and there is a necessity to study the material bases of both Varna and *jati*. But we disagree with his periodization and characterization of Varna and *jati* social formations.

There are other scholars like Ambedkar who are not concerned about the relationship between Varna and *jati*, but deal with either one of them. By pointing to the inconsistencies in the classical texts, Ambedkar tries to prove that *sudras* were originally *kshatriyas* but later reduced to the low position because of their antagonism with brahmanas.⁸¹ He argued that *brahmanas* refused to perform *upanayana* (initiation ceremony) to ‘*sudras*’ thus reducing them to the low position.⁸² Ambedkar proves the *kshatriya* origin of *sudras* by tracing their genealogy to Sudas, a *Rg Vedic kshatriya*.⁸³ The paradox in Ambedkar’s work is that while criticizing that *brahmanas* are biased and enemies of *sudras* and thus suggesting that one cannot rely on their works, he proves the *kshatriya* origins of *sudras* mainly based on brahminical writings. Nevertheless, Ambedkar provides some very beautiful insights into the ideological aspects of the theory of four Varnas. He points out that even though there are more than one Cosmogony in *Rg Vedic* dealing with the origin of man, the lat-

79. Ibid., p.197.

80. Ibid., p.26.

81. B. R. Ambedkar. 1946. *Who were the Sudras?* Bombay. pp.iv-v, 121.

82. Ibid., p.177.

83. Ibid., p.127.

er Vedic (*brahman*) writers have consciously adopted only *Purushasukta* where the origin of four groups or *varnas* was mentioned.⁸⁴ Even in the *Purushasukta*, Ambedkar argues, where the origin of different species is dealt with, when it comes to the origin of man it mentions the origin of social groups or classes.⁸⁵ He also contrasts the ‘unique’ nature of *Purushasukta* with the ancient European Cosmogonies and points out that no other system has encouraged rigid class structure as that of the *Purushasukta*.⁸⁶

84. *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

85. *Ibid.*, p.10.

86. *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

Varna and the Pastoral Social Formation

3.1 TWO KINDS OF DIFFERENTIATION

Etymologically, the word Varna means 'colour'. Throughout Rg Veda (except in the *Purusha Sukta*), Varna is used in this sense only. There were two Varnas in the Rg Vedic period — Aryans (fair coloured) and *dasas* or *dasyus* (dark coloured). These Varna distinctions are maintained throughout Rg Veda period. In order to understand how the word Varna developed, to understand its application to different sections of the Rg Vedic society, and to ascertain its importance in the later development of the society it is necessary to understand the socio-economic conditions that gave rise to the emergence of Varna.

There are two kinds of social differentiation during the Rg Vedic period. The first is the differentiation between Aryan and *Dasa* or *Dasyu* tribes; the second is the differentiation within the Aryan tribe — *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vis* (commoners). It is important to distinguish between these two types of differentiation for understanding ancient Indian social history. The mixing of these two kinds of differentiations result in the four Varna theory which has obscured the reality to an irreparable extent. These two kinds of differentiation arose out of a particular historical context and they played a significant role in shaping the later history of India.

The distinctions of Varna arose when two cultural and linguistic groups with different skin colour, following different ways of living came into violent contact, where one group of tribes subjugated the other group of tribes. The differentiations within the Aryan tribe arose because of unequal distribution of wealth and specialization of occupations. It is

this later differentiation (i.e., the differentiation within the Aryan tribes), which sets forward the development of society enabling the transformation from pastoral to agrarian social formation. As the society transforms from pastoral to agrarian economy, the distinctions of Varna (i.e., the distinctions between Aryans and *Dasas* or *Dasyus*) become redundant and a new kind of social differentiation begins, based on the internal differentiation of Aryan tribes.¹

3.2 ARYAN SETTLEMENT

Aryans, a cultural and linguistic group, who migrated to India from central Asia in two waves, the first in the beginning of the second millennium B.C. and the second at the end, destroyed the Indus cities which were agrarian-based and settled down in Punjab, the land of five rivers. Aryans were a semi-nomadic pastoral people. Aryans subjugated the local tribes, whom they called *Dasas* or *Dasyus*. In a pastoral society, where war booty was one of the main sources of acquiring wealth, different tribal groups fought with each other for cattle and other wealth. In the process, the winners subjugated those tribes — Aryans and non-Aryans, which were defeated. Probably these defeated tribes were not used as labour force because the pastoral society does not need so much of labour force. Protection of cattle is the task of the warriors and there were women domestic slaves to do the household work, which included milking, cleaning and feeding cows.² It is only at a later stage, when agriculture became a major economic activity, that the necessity arose for labour force on a large scale and the tribes, which were subjugated earlier, were used as a labour force.³ This is clearly shown by the post-Vedic usage of the word *dasa* in the sense of slave.

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1. It is interesting to note that *varna* refers to two sets of tribal groups. With the dissolution of tribes and the formation of *jatis* it is inevitable for the *varna* distinctions, which refer to tribes, to become redundant. However, it might continue as an ideology in the new social formation.
 2. Romila Thapar. 1984. *From Lineage to State*. Delhi. p.24; R.S. Sharma. 1983b. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. Delhi. p.74.
 3. R.S. Sharma. 1980. *Sudras in Ancient India*. Delhi. p. 45.

3.3 DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN ARYANS AND DASAS

It has been suggested that *dasas* and *dasyus* were earlier waves of Aryans who were degraded for not following Vedic rituals.⁴ The Rg Vedic hymns make it clear that the Aryans and *dasas* are two opposing camps fighting each other.⁵ Prayers are offered to India by Aryans to subdue and destroy *dasas*. In Rg Veda (1.51.8), Indra is requested to differentiate between Aryans and *dasas*.⁶ ‘This does not mean that there was difference between the two in bodily appearance only; on the contrary, the antithesis between the *arya* who is referred to as *barhismat* and the *dasyu* who is styled *avrata* clearly shows that ‘the emphasis was rather on the difference of their cults.’⁷ The *dasyus* are described as *avrata* (not obeying the ordinances of the gods), or *akratu* (who perform no sacrifice), *mr̥dharvacah* (whose speech is indistinct or soft), *anash* (snub-nosed or dumb).⁸ This clearly indicates that Aryans and *dasas* or *dasyus* are two distinct cultural and linguistic groups with differences in skin colour. The interchanging use of *dasas* and *dasyus* in various passages of Rg Veda indicate enmity from the Aryans.⁹ Even though the Aryan tribes fought amongst themselves, they maintained a distinction between Aryan tribes and *dasa* tribes.¹⁰ This distinction continued throughout the Rg Vedic period, and we can find the traces of this distinction also in later-Vedic and post-Vedic periods where *dasas* become ‘slaves’. In the later part of Rg Veda, *dasas* were brought into friendly relations. Not all the *dasa* or *dasyu* tribes were defeated or subjugated. There were some powerful *dasa* tribes for whom *brahamans* performed Vedic sacrifices. For example, in Rg Veda (Vol III. 46.32) we read, ‘the singer took a hundred (cows or other gifts) from the *dasa* Balbutta and from Taruksa.’¹¹ In Rg Veda, there is no religious discrimination of *dasas* because they are not yet part of the Aryan tribes and as we have stated earlier *dasas* form a different cult.¹²

4. R.S. Sharma. 1980. p.27; R.S. Sharma. 1983b. p.37.

5. P.V. Kane. 1941. *History of Dharmasastra*. Poona. p.25.

6. *Ibid.*, p.26.

7. *Ibid.*, p.26.

8. *Ibid.*, p.26.

9. *Ibid.*, p.26.

10. *Ibid.*, p.27.

11. *Ibid.*, p.33.

12. R.S. Sharma. 1980. p.44; P.V. Kane. 1941. p.26. Thus, ‘in the earliest period

Therefore, in the earliest period we find the word Varna associated only with *dasa* and with *arya*. Though the words *brahmana* and *kshatriya* occur frequently in the Rg Veda, the word Varna is not used in connection with them. Even where the words *brahma*, *rajanya*, *vaisya* and *sudra* occur, the word Varna is not used. Hence, one may reasonably say that the only watertight groups that are positively or expressly vouchsafed by the Rg Veda are *arya* and *dasa* or *dasyu*.¹³

3.4 INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION OF ARYAN TRIBES

This brings us to the internal differentiation of Aryans tribes. When they came to India, Aryans were broadly divided into priests, warriors and commoners. This is evident from the existence of such divisions among the Iranian Aryans. Vedic Aryans migrated from Iran. But the division of Aryans into *brahmana*, *kshatriya* and *vis* (commoners) had not crystallized into closed endogamous groups or *jatis* at this stage.¹⁴ They indicate the broad divisions of society based on certain specializations. In Rg Veda, there are references to other occupations, but the main functional groups at this period were priests and warriors. All other occupations were of secondary importance. Intermarriages between different divisions of Aryans were common and there was no restrictions regarding partaking of food amongst the divisions.¹⁵

There are number of citations in Rg Veda which prove that the divisions — *brahmana*, *kshatriya* and *vis* — have not become closed endogamous groups or *jatis*. In fact, in many cases, both *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* hail from the same family. Vasistha is addressed as *brahman* whereas

we find the word *varna* associated only with *dasa* and with *arya*. Though the words *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* occur frequently in the Rg Veda, the word *varna* is not used in connection with them. Even in the *Purusha Sukta* (Rg Veda X.90) where the words *brama*, *rajanya*, *vaisya* and *sudra* occur, the word *varna* is not used. Hence, one may reasonably say that the only watertight groups that are positively or expressly vouchsafed by the Rg Veda are *arya* and *dasa* or *dasyu*.’

13. P.V. Kane. 1941. p.27.

14. Ibid., p.28.

15. R.S. Sharma. 1980. p.44.

'he is said to have born of Urvasi from Mitra and Varuna.'¹⁶ Similarly, in Rg. IX.96.6 (*Brahma Devanam*), the word *brahma* does not certainly mean 'brahmana by birth' nor does *Vipranam* mean 'brahmanas by birth'. In that verse, one who is supereminent among a group is specified, just as the buffalo among animals, the hawk among carnivorous birds.¹⁷ In the story of Devapi and Santanu, the sons of Rstisena, the younger brother Santanu became king as Devapi was not willing to become king. The result was a famine due to Santanu's transgression and so Devapi performed a sacrifice to induce rainfall. This shows that out of the two brothers one became a king and the other a *purohita*, so king and *purohita* did not depend on birth. In Rg IX.112.3, a poet exclaims, 'I am a reciter of hymns. My father is a physician and my mother grinds (coin) with stones. We desire to obtain wealth in various actions.' In Rg. III 44.5, the poet wistfully asks Indra, 'O, Indra, fond of Soma, would you make me the protector of people, or would you make me a king, would you make me sage, that has drunk of Soma, would you impart to me endless wealth?' This shows that the same person could be a *rishi* or a noble or a king.¹⁸

In Rg Veda, the word *brahmana* generally means 'prayer' or 'hymn'. But in Atharva Veda (II.15.4.), *brahma* seems to mean 'the class of Brahmanas'¹⁹. The word *kshatriyas* in Rg. Veda means 'valour' or 'power' but in the later-Vedic period it implied 'a class of warriors'. But at this period they have not formed a closed hereditary group. The word *vis* frequently occurs in Rg Veda referring to 'people or group of people'.²⁰ The word *vis* is sometimes contra-distinguished with *jana*. Kane feels that since *vis* is qualified as *Panchajanya*, there is hardly any difference between *jana* and *vis*.²¹ As the text indicates, it is preferable to distinguish between *jana* and *vis* because the *jana* is a wider group which includes *brahmana*, *kshatriya* and *vis* (commoners). 'It is possible that sometimes *vis* is loosely used to refer to all people as in the case of *Panchajanya*.'

16. P.V. Kane. 1941. p.28.

17. Ibid., p.28-29.

18. Ibid., p.31.

19. Ibid., p.30.

20. Ibid., p.32.

21. Ibid., p.31.

3.5 MATERIAL BACKGROUND OF PASTORAL SOCIAL FORMATION

D.D. Kosambi assesses the impact of Aryans on the development of ancient Indian society in the following terms:

The Aryans trampled down so many isolated primitive groups, and their beliefs, so as to create the pre-conditions for the formation of a new type of society from the remains. They were not themselves consciously nor magnanimously bent upon the creation of that society. They acted in their own destructive rapacious manner, for immediate gain. The chief contribution of the Aryans is, therefore the introduction of new relations of production, on a scale vast enough to make a substantial difference of quality. Many people previously separated were involved by force in new types of social organization. The basis was a new availability to all of skills, tools, production techniques that had remained local secrets till then. This meant flexibility in adoption, universality of improvisation. It meant new barter, hence new commodity production. The result was the opening up of new regions to cultivation by methods, which the more or less ingrown local populations had not dreamt, of using... The violent methods whereby these innovations were introduced effected more and greater improvements than did trade, warfare, or ritual killing.²²

He further writes that ‘the barriers so torn down could never be effectively re-erected because the Aryans left a priceless means of intercourse, a simpler language distributed over a vast region.’²³ Moreover the continuous shifting of the Aryan settlements enabled a wider region to come under the Aryan influence.²⁴

Archaeological evidence from the Rg Veda period shows that people did not know iron, but copper and bronze were used in small quantities mainly for weapons.²⁵ Rg Vedic society was predominantly pastoral. Cattle was the main source of wealth, so much so that cattle were considered to be synonymous with wealth (*rayi*), and a wealthy person was called *gomat*.²⁶ Agricultural activities were less in Rg Vedic period. There are twenty-one references to agricultural activities in the Rg Veda, most of them occurring in the latter part of the Rg Veda. Barley (*yava*)

22. D.D. Kosambi. 1975 (2nd edition). *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*. Bombay. pp.84-85.

23. *Ibid.*, p.85.

24. *Ibid.*, p.85.

25. R.S. Sharma. 1983b. p.23.

26. *Ibid.*, p.24.

was produced during this period.²⁷ Thapar suggests that in the Rg Vedic period the pastoralists may well have controlled the agricultural niches without being economically dependent on them, particularly if the cultivated areas were worked by people other than those who belonged to 'the pastoral clans'.²⁸

Accumulation of cattle was done by breeding as well as by capturing other herds. Cattle raids, thus, formed one of the basic economic activities in pastoral societies. The winner of the cows is called *gojit*, an epithet for hero.²⁹ War in a predominantly tribal society of the Rg Veda was a logical and natural economic function. ...The Rg Vedic tribes, being primarily herdsmen who lived on beef and dairy products, fought one another and outsiders for the sake of cattle... Other animals such as horses, goats and sheep were also prized, particularly horses, which may have been mainly in possession of princes, tribal chiefs and elders. The spoils may also have consisted of the personal effects of the defeated parties, e.g., the dresses, weapons, etc. Land and crops did not form the bone of contention. Women, who are rightly called the producers of producers in a tribal context, were of course an important object for which wars were fought.³⁰

In Rg Vedic period, the domestic slaves were mostly women. Slaves formed a part of the property. Nevertheless, chattel slavery did not develop in India. As we have stated earlier, this might be because the pastoral society did not need a large labour force.

3.6 APPROPRIATION OF WEALTH BY KSHATRIYAS AND BRAHMANAS

How did the appropriation and distribution of surplus take place in Rg Vedic society? Who had the ownership rights? What was the social organization of the Rg Vedic society? The appropriation of wealth takes place in two ways. War spoils was one of the main sources of appropriating wealth. Rg Vedic tribes fought each other for cattle. Indra was prayed to retrieve and recover the cattle of his patron from adversaries. We find

27. Ibid., p.26.

28. Romila Thapar.1984. p.23.

29. Ibid., p.24.

30. R.S. Sharma. 1983b. p.38.

frequent references like ‘protectors of the good! You (two) killed Arya foes and *dasa* foes’ (Rg. VI.60.6), ‘Oh Indra and Varuna! You killed *dasa* foes and also Aryan foes and helped Sudas with your protection’ (Rg. VII.83.1).³¹ The spoils belonged to the tribal members but the redistribution was not necessarily equal. Another way of appropriating wealth was through the presentations or gifts given by the tribal members to the chief. We have discussed how this gift economy had come into existence in the introductory chapter. The chief and the warrior groups as the fighters and winners of the war retained the major part of the booty. Priests also claimed a substantial part of the booty, for it is they who performed the sacrifices for success in the war. The remaining part was redistributed to the common people at a sacrificial ceremony. One of the main duties of the chief is giving gift (*dana*) which indicates the redistributive function of the chief. The surplus, which was collected as war booty and in the form of gifts and presentations to the chief were similarly redistributed to the warrior groups and *brahmanas*. These sacrifices were used to reinforce the dominant position of the chiefs, warriors and the priests.³²

Thapar suggests that the Vedic *jana* (tribe) consisted of a number of *vis* (clans). These clans in the beginning may have been more egalitarian but by the time of Rg Veda they were bifurcated into the *vis* and the *rajanya*. The *rajanya* constituted of ruling families or senior lineages and it was from this group that the *raja* was chosen. Thus, the Vedic society was bifurcated into senior lineages, from which the *raja* hailed; and the junior lineages that worked on the lands settled by *raja* and gave presentations to *rajanyas*, who then redistributed them among a limited group consisting of the *rajanyas*, *brahmanas* and bards, and spent part of the presentations at the *Yajna* rituals.³³

3.7 SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE Rg VEDIC SOCIETY

Thapar considers *vis* as a clan. She refutes Sharma’s connotation of *vis* as a peasant.³⁴ As we have already mentioned earlier, the word *vis* refers to

31. P.V. Kane. 1941. p.27.

32. D.D. Kosambi. 1975 (2nd edition). p.100.

33. Romila Thapar. 1984. pp.30–31.

34. Ibid., p.30.

'people or group of people'.³⁵ We cannot translate the word *vis* as a peasant because in the Rg Vedic society agriculture has not developed to the extent where peasant becomes a separate and independent identity. It is quite possible that in some tribal societies, some lineages or clans become dominant and control the process of production as well as administrative functions of the tribe. But the Rg Vedic society has not developed on these lines. We have seen that Aryans, before they came to India, were divided broadly into *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vis* (commoners not clans or peasants).³⁶

But according to Thapar's account the *Vedic jana* (tribe) is bifurcated into *rajanya* and *vis*. She suggests that *branmana-sudra* dichotomy, which has its origins in the Harappan Culture, is fused into the dual division of *kshatriya* and *vis*, thus forming the four Varnas.³⁷

If one accepts Thapar's arguments that the Rg Vedic society is a lineage society then it follows that *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vis* represent different lineages, whether senior or junior. But the evidence we gather from Rg Veda shows that even though the society is broadly divided into these groups, there is no closed formation of these groups and every member of the tribe could take up any of the specializations, provided he has the skills. In fact, in many cases, *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* come from the same family. It is true that in the later period these groups, i.e., the *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas*, became closed groups. Entry into these groups became restricted. This did not mean that in the beginning they were so. The differentiation within the Aryan tribes during the Rg Vedic period took place on the line of specialized functions like priests (*brahmanas*) and warriors (*kshatriyas*) rather than on the lines of lineages. Kinship might have played the same role in the social organization of the Rg Vedic society, but certainly not into arrangement of groups, senior and junior lineages, as Thapar suggests.

Because of lack of historical material, it is very difficult to talk about the social organization of feted Aryan tribes during Rg Vedic period with

35. The word *gotra*, which means a cow pen in Rg Veda, also means clan. One wonders when there is a word for clan (*gotra*) in later Vedic period, why does Thapar translates *vis* as clan. She does not even mention that *gotra* and *vis* signify the same thing.

36. Ironically, Thapar herself elsewhere points out this fact.

37. Romila Thapar. 1984. p.53.

certainty. Nevertheless, with whatever minimum references we have to social organization in Rg Veda we can construct a fair picture of the social organization. This is very important because our understanding of the social organization of the Aryan tribes in this period is going to affect not only the characterization of Rg Vedic society but also post-Vedic societies. Two facts are important to our understanding of the social organization of Aryan tribes in the early Rg Vedic period. First, the functional groups *brahmana* and *kshatriya* were not closed groups; any person from the tribe could become either a *brahmana* or a *kshatriya*. Secondly, clan as a unit owned the cattle or other property. This is evident from the etymological meaning of the word *gotra* — a “cowpen,” which later came to be known as a clan.³⁸

Aryan tribes consisted of clans, *gotras*, and owned cattle and other property collectively. Some members of the clan had become priests who conducted sacrifices for the success in war and for the welfare of the tribe. When a tribe was at war with another tribe, all the able and valorous persons participated in the war. Initially, the booty of war might have been distributed equally among all the clans of the tribe. But in the later period, the booty of the war was distributed differentially according to individuals/‘groups’ participation in the war. Thus, the warriors got the major share. Next came the priests who performed sacrifices for the success in war. The shares that each warrior and priest got from the booty belonged to his clan. All the members of the clan had rights over it, or in other words, it became the collective property of the clan.³⁹

As the society developed and the functions of the priest and the warrior became specialized, the priest had to undergo the training of how to perform sacrifices and the warrior had to master the craft of fighting. These groups became distinct (but not closed) and the old arrangement of clan ownership, when only few members of the clan became either

38. D.D. Kosambi. ‘On the Origin of *Brahman Gotras*’, *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New Series.

39. The position of various clans is not drastically different from their earlier position (in the sense that some clans owned more than others) because the warriors and priests came from various clans thus the distribution of the booty takes place more or less equally. Nevertheless, the significant point is the beginning of the distribution on different lines which will ultimately lead to inequalities.

priests or warriors, was not in the interest of these specialized groups. This led to the breakdown of the clan ownership and the rise of individual family ownership. This process started by the end of the Rg Vedic period but it had clearly emerged only in the later-Vedic period. This is evident because: (a) even though *gotra* has remained as an exogamous clan, it no longer implied a cowpen, thus suggesting that the collective ownership of cattle by the clan had declined, and (b) we have references to poor *brahmanas* in the late Rg Vedic period. This is significant because, if the collective ownership had continued, as a member of the clan, the *brahmana* would have had some property. Thus, at the end of the Rg Vedic period, collective ownership by clan was giving way to individual family ownership and the *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* were becoming independent groups. This breakdown of collective ownership by clan was facilitated with the increase of settled agriculture. Had the society remained semi-nomadic and pastoral, the individual family ownership would have become difficult, because a single family, without slaves, cannot look after the huge herds. With the development of agriculture, specialized occupations like carpentry, pottery, etc., have also developed. The development of *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* as specialized groups corresponds to this period.

3.8 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE RG VEDIC SOCIETY

The *Rg Vedic* society is characterized by rank and stratified society instead of a class society.⁴⁰ The absence of surplus in a pastoral economy, tribal society did not create conditions for class differentiation. There could be differentiation of rank, as can be inferred from the titles of tribal chiefs such as *jansya*, *gopa*, *vispati*, *visampati*, *ganasya raja*, *ganatan ganapati*, *gramani* and probably *grhopati*. Certain *vipras* were considered worthy of attending the *sabha* (*sabheya*), but the phenomenon of the upper classes living on the labour of tribesmen was just beginning to emerge; it did not prevail to any considerable degree.⁴¹

It is implicitly assumed here that the production of surplus was possible only in an agrarian society and classes could emerge only in a so-

40. R.S. Sharma. 1983b. p.38; Romila Thapar. 1984. p.9.

41. R.S. Sharma. 1983b. p.51.

ciety where state and agriculture have developed. However, even in the Rg Vedic period, we find the existence of inequalities, the unequal redistribution of booty and presentations, and the fact that *kshatriyas* and *brahamans* were accumulating more wealth than others. These factors/conditions were not considered by scholars like Sharma, Thapar and others as necessary conditions of a class society. They fail to consider the fact that spoils of war indicates the extraction of surplus from the defeated groups, who are subjugated and forced to look for alternative means of subsistence. It is this factor, which has played an important role in the transformation of the pastoral society into an agrarian one. Those tribes who lost their cattle and pasture lands in the wars had to look for alternative means of subsistence. These defeated tribes migrated towards the east and slowly took up agriculture. On the other hand, internal accumulation of wealth by some groups among the victors forced other powerless groups among them to conditions of servitude. These people, like the defeated tribes, were also forced to look for alternative means of subsistence. Thus, a set of favourable conditions for the development of agriculture was set forth by the end of the Rg Vedic period.

From Varna to Jati

Transformation from Pastoral to Agrarian Social Formation

The transformation period is characterized by the dissolution of the old economic base and institutions and the emergence of new ones. During the transition period, both the old and the new institutions coexist. Tension exists between the old institutions (which try to preserve themselves) and the new institutions (which are emerging as dominant by condemning and weakening the social base of the old institutions). In India, the transition from pastoral to agrarian society was a long process extending over more than five centuries. In this work, the transition is assumed to be completed when the main institutions that are characteristic of the new social formation have become dominant institutions, i.e., the end of the Mauryan period by which time the basic institutions like state, village community, *jati*, etc., have emerged as the dominant institutions. The transition has its roots in the later Rg Vedic period, where we find the increasing references to agriculture, but it has progressed more rapidly in the later Vedic period. Even though agriculture was increasing in the later Vedic period, pastoralism has still retained its importance and Vedic rituals still had their prominence. The post-Vedic period saw the decline of pastoralism and Vedic rituals and institutions like tribe, etc., and the strengthening of agricultural activities along with state, *jati*, and other institutions.

4.1 DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The change of river courses¹, increase in population, conflicts between tribes which resulted in the subjugation of the defeated tribes, and the

1. Thapar, Romila. 1984. *From Lineage to State*, Delhi, p.22.

increasing inequalities within the Aryan tribes necessitated the migration of people towards east — the land of *Kurus* and *panchalias*, covering the major part of the western U.P. Haryana, and the neighbouring parts of Punjab and Rajasthan². The later Vedic texts were composed here and refer to the changing social conditions in this region. The later Vedic period signifies settled agriculture in this region and the seeds of the new society are sown in this period. Both pastoralism and agriculture coexisted during this period. Painted Grey Ware (PGW) shreds were found in this region along with other wares such as black-and-red ware, black-slipped ware, red ware, and plain grey ware³. This signifies the existence of non-Aryan cultures in this region and also tallies with the later Vedic accounts. Small quantities of iron are found in PGW layers but during this period it is used mainly for spearheads, arrowheads, hooks, etc. Even these iron artefacts existed only in small numbers. These iron weapons were in the possession of a limited group of people — the chiefs and the warriors. The use of iron in agriculture had not yet started.⁴ It is only in the post-Vedic period in the middle Ganga Valley iron implements were used for agricultural purposes. In the later Vedic period, wooden plough-share was used in agriculture on a considerable scale. “The ploughshare made of *Khadira* was asked in prayer to confer cows, goats, children and grain to the people.”⁵ The texts refer to four, six, eight, twelve and even twenty-four oxen being yoked to the plough to break the soil. The later Vedic society has produced barley, rice, bean-pulse, sesamum and millet.⁶ Beef has remained as the main item of food during this period.

Even though non-Aryan people had been practicing agriculture from pre-Rg Vedic period onwards, it is with the involvement of Aryan people agriculture has increased and slowly became the main form of economic activity in the post-Vedic period replacing pastoralism. As we have mentioned earlier, it is the migrant warrior groups who have first taken up agriculture with the help of *dasa* labour force. The fact that

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2. Sharma, R. S. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. Delhi, p.56.
 3. Sharma, R. S. op.cit., p.57.
 4. Sharma, R. S. op.cit., pp.59–60.
 5. Sharma, R. S. op.cit., pp.60–61. *Khadira* Ploughshare is very hard and compared with bones in the *Satapatha Brahmana*.
 6. Sharma, R. S. op.cit., pp.60–61.

agriculture pays better than pastoralism quickly influenced other tribes, which have immediately followed suit. Nevertheless, in the initial stages of settled agriculture, pastoralism retained its importance. Agriculture could not be developed on a large scale during this period because of two reasons. Firstly, iron has not yet come into usage for agricultural purposes, without which it is not possible to clear the marsh forests; and secondly, labour force at this stage is not available in large scale.

4.2 SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

Before we discuss the social organization of the later Vedic period, it is necessary to clarify a few points about the theory of four Varnas. This theory of four Varnas refers to the broad divisions of the society in the later Vedic period.⁷ But this theory did not take into consideration the rising specializations and the changes that have been taking place in the later Vedic period. It was given a mythical status by incorporating it in the Purusasukta of Rg Veda. This theory was consciously furthered and used as an ideology by *brahmanas* to further their interests. Because of the ideological implications, we cannot take for granted whatever this theory says. But, at the same time, we cannot altogether overrule the significance of this theory (even though it is an ideological construction and distorts the reality) because this theory reacted powerfully upon facts.⁸ Moreover, brahminical writings of this period are the main sources, which provide information about the social conditions during later Vedic period.

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7. This tradition of characterizing the society in broad terms is prevalent in Buddhist sources also. Pali sources divide the society broadly into *brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas* and *gahapatis*. Nevertheless there is a major difference between these two sources. Pali sources have never provided a mythical status to the divisions in which they described the society and further, unlike brahminical sources, they have never coloured the empirical reality with their framework. They mentioned about the existence of *Jatis*, etc. They recorded the reality more objectively than brahminical writers who have always consciously eliminated those parts which do not fit into their framework (of four Varnas).
 8. Fick, R. 1920. *The Social Organisation in North-East India in Buddha's Time*, Calcutta. p.10. This is evident from the later development of the theory of mixed unions and the notion of *dvija* (twice-born) to relate *jati* with Varna.

For these reasons, we have to carefully choose the facts presented in this theory by tallying them with other sources (even if they belong to later periods) as well as with the archaeological evidence available.

Land was mainly owned or controlled by the warrior groups who cleared it with the help of *dasas* and non-warrior Aryan tribal members (except *brahmanas*). During this period agriculture has been developed on two lines: some warriors or *Kshatriyas* have taken up agriculture but at the same time participated in the tribal wars. These are mainly the earlier defeated warriors who have migrated to new areas in search of alternative means of production. These “warrior-peasants” or “*kshatriya-peasants*” have also used *dasas* as labour force in agricultural activities.⁹ There are other warriors who only cleared land and settled non-warrior (non-*brahman* and non-craftsmen) Aryan tribal members on these lands as agriculturalists. Even here *dasas* served as the labour force. It is this later division, which might have given rise to the four Varna theory. Based on this, in the four Varna theory, the society was divided into *brahmanas* (priests), *kshatriyas* (warriors), *vaisyas* (traced to the earlier *vis* who were settled in agriculture by the warriors) and *sudras* (all servile groups). But this arrangement of the society has not remained permanent as we tried to show in the theory of four Varnas. A number of other occupational groups were emerging at this period, which the theory fails to take into account. The theory also fails to take into account the other line of development where warriors or *kshatriyas* themselves have taken up agriculture. It is our contention that this later line of development (i.e., *kshatriya-peasant* or proto-*gana-samgha* formation) has continued throughout later Vedic period and ultimately manifested in *gana-samghas* of the middle Ganga Valley where *kshatriya-peasants* engaged in agriculture with *dasa* workers.

The brahminical sources of the later Vedic period did not mention anything about the existence of proto-*gana-samgha* formations.¹⁰ It is

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9. The use of the word peasant might not be appropriate to this period. The word “Warrior-peasant” or “*Kshatriya-peasant*” is used here only to distinguish him from the warrior or *Kshatriya* who has not directly participated in the agricultural activities.
 10. Interestingly, both Panini and Kautilya mention about the existence of *gana-samghas* in the western Ganga valley. But both these writers belong to post-Vedic period by which time Pali sources have widely mentioned about

only in the Pali sources the *gana-samghas* are prominently mentioned. Pali sources mention *gana-samghas* as powerful oligarchies existing along with the emerging monarchies. This suggests that *gana-samghas* had a history before post-Vedic period, because they would not have become dominant only in the post-Vedic period. Pali sources did not mention anything suggesting that *gana-samghas* have newly emerged in the post-Vedic period. This shows that in the later Vedic period the *brahminical* writings have consciously avoided any reference to other systems that existed along with the system that was described in four Varna theory.¹¹ This is also evident from the fact that while Buddhist and Jain sources mention about the existence of 62 major philosophical sects in post-Vedic period, brahminical sources consciously avoid mentioning of others as far as possible.¹²

Since later Vedic brahminical sources do not talk of *kshatriya*-peasant or proto-*gana-samgha* formation, the account that follows here is of the social organization mentioned in the theory of four Varnas or proto-monarchical system. Initially, following the tribal tradition, the *kshatriya* group had collective rights over the land (or rather the produce of this land) cleared by it or under its supervision. This is evident from the fact that the chief can grant the land or settle others on the land only with the prior permission of the clan.¹³ But the peasant settlements have taken place on the family basis. Each family was given a particular piece of land to cultivate with its own family labour and that of *dasa* labourers. Thus, in these new settlements, where agriculture has become a major economic activity, clan was giving way to the family. *Kshatriyas* as the settlers of the Aryan members on agricultural land extracted surplus from them.

gana-samghas.

11. We shall call the system that was referred to by four Varna theory as “proto-monarchy” system, because, as we have stated earlier, the four Varna theory is misleading and this system has ultimately become the monarchy in post-Vedic period. The word “proto-monarchy” suggests the continuity between the later Vedic and post-Vedic periods. Similarly, the word “proto-*gana-samgha*” is used to refer to the “*kshatriya*-peasant” formation in later Vedic period.
12. Kosambi, D. D. 1975. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*. Second edition. Bombay p.16; Also Chakravarti, Uma. 1983. ‘Renouncer and Householder in Early Buddhism,’ *Social Analysis*. May (13):71.
13. Sharma, R. S. op.cit., p.73; Thapar, Romila. op.cit., p.30.

This surplus extraction in the beginning was on the earlier lines of presentations. But new terms like *bali* have emerged, indicating the changing nature of surplus extraction from that of presentations or gifts to that of taxes.¹⁴ In addition to *bali*, *sulka* tax was levied from the peasants. “It is stated that in heaven the strong do not collect *sulka* from the weak. This shows that this type of tax was collected by means of force and those who paid it were considered weak.”¹⁵ “There was a particular official known only at this transitional period, the ‘King’s apportioner’ (*bhaga-dugha*). His job seems to have been the proper sharing out of the *bali* gifts among the tribal King’s immediate followers, and perhaps assessment of taxes as well.”¹⁶

4.3 EMERGENCE OF KINGSHIP AND TERRITORY

The office of *raja* has its origins in this period. To begin with the office of *raja* was not hereditary and the choice and the consecration of the *raja* would have occurred with every vacancy.¹⁷ “With the TS (*Taittiriya Samhita*) and *Brahmana* literature, however, various types of consecration developed, each intended to free the chief in some way from tribal control. The tribal *sabha* assembly is not mentioned at all, though we know that it continued to function.”¹⁸ The later Vedic sources mention the existence of *ratnins* (a gift) signifying “the emergence of a group of non-kinsmen who ultimately took on the character of retainers of the *raja* and who could contribute to the accumulation of power in the office of the *raja*.”¹⁹ The words like *sena*, *senani* and *senapati* are mentioned at several places in the later Vedic sources indicating the emergence of new institutions.²⁰ This however does not indicate the emergence of professional army in this period; it is only in the post-Vedic period the king had a professional army.

14. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Delhi, p.87; Sharma, R.S op.cit, p.76.

15. Sharma, R.S op.cit, p.76.

16. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.87.

17. Thapar, Romila. op.cit., p.35.

18. Kosambi, D.D. 1975. op.cit., p.122.

19. Thapar, Romila. op.cit., p.61

20. Sharma, R.S op.cit, p. 83.

The emergence of these various institutions has a major effect on the *kshatriyas* as a group. Till then *kshatriyas* or warriors collectively held the rights for the appropriation of the surplus. With the development of the office of the *raja*, the *raja* claimed the surplus from peasants. As a result of this, the old *kshatriyas* divided into two sections; one section formed the ruling group and the other section remained as warriors. These warriors “grew into mercenary groups ready to fight in anyone’s service for hire.”²¹ In the beginning of the later Vedic period, tribal army was replaced by the peasant army which later with the development of the state in the post-Vedic period became professional army. Professional army indicates the non-kin nature of the recruitment. The warriors are recruited from various groups but not necessarily from a single group. The basic criteria for the recruitment in the army is not birth, it is strength and the capacity to fight in war. Moreover, the size of the army varies from time to time depending on the needs of the state. Because of these reasons, it is not possible to have a closed warrior group. On the other hand, the *raja* also need not be from a particular group all the time. The whole political history of ancient India shows the divergent origins of the kings. The monarchs of Magadha and Kosala were not of *Kshatriya* origin but were of low birth.²² Thus, the category *kshatriya* which represents a warrior group (in transition) in the later Vedic period ceases to continue as a group in the post-Vedic period, by which time both the state and the professional army have come into existence. This is evident from the Pali sources, which do not mention the existence of *kshatriyas* in the monarchies.

The notion of territoriality has been emerging during this period. The word *grama* came into existence indicating “a kinship group (*sajata*), generally on the move with its cattle and *sudras*, led by its own *gramani* who ranked as an officer of the tribe responsible to the chief.”²³ This *grama* has developed into a “village” in the post-Vedic period. “The later Vedic society had territorial Kingdoms in the sense that the people led a settled food producing life under their princes; several sites show continuous

21. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.86

22. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.127.

23. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., pp.87-88.

habitation for two or three centuries. But the element of kinship was still strong and the territorial idea did not submerge tribal ties.²⁴

4.4 BRAHMANAS IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

*Brahmanas*²⁵ played an important role in this period by assimilating many non-Aryan tribal groups into the Aryan fold. *Brahmanas* role in the assimilation process was not just a “deliberate conscious action, but the result of hunger. The sole aim was to make a livelihood.”²⁶ As the performer of sacrifices and as learned men, *brahmanas* commanded respect from all sections of the society. Their poor conditions became an added advantage for them. *Brahmanas* were isolated from the tribe to study Vedas at a very young age. This isolation freed them from the tribal bonds and enabled them to slip into any tribe freely.²⁷ *Brahmanas* performed sacrifices for non-Aryan groups, which paid them well and at the same time brought the non-Aryan groups into the Aryan fold. “A few *brahmanas* had begun to officiate for more than one clan or tribe, which implied some type of relationship between several groups.”²⁸ “Special *brahman* clans like the *Kasyapa* and *Bhrgus* took prominent part in the process of assimilation, but *brahmanas* in general followed suit.”²⁹ Tribal priestly groups were assimilated into the *brahman* group. This is evident from the fact that some *brahmanas* were called sons of their mothers.³⁰

It is clear that sacrifices retained their prominence and with the generation of more surplus in agriculture, sacrifices have also become more elaborate and were celebrated with pomp. An important development during this period is the extension of sacrifices and rituals, which were hitherto only communal affairs, to the peasant households. These house-

24. Sharma, R.S. op.cit, p.84.

25. Kosambi, D.D. 1975. op.cit., p.102. Kosambi believes that “the first *brahmanas* were a result of interaction between the Aryan priesthood, and ritually superior priesthood of the Indus Culture”.

26. Kosambi, D.D. 1975. op.cit., p.134.

27. This very isolation gave them flexibility and solidarity beyond the tribe which helped them to survive as a group in times of crisis.

28. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.86.

29. Kosambi, D.D. 1975. op.cit., p.132

30. Ibid. p.132.

hold rituals and sacrifices were elaborately discussed in the *grhya-sutras*. The person who performed the sacrifice at the household level is called *Yajamana* (or *grhapati*). *Grhapati* as the head of the family performed sacrifices for the welfare of family and for acquiring more wealth. As in the earlier Rg Vedic sacrifices, animals were slaughtered and other items were burned even at the household rituals. Performance of household rituals enhanced the status of the *Yajamana* but at the same time acted as a subtle means of preventing the *Yajamana* from amassing excessive wealth.³¹

“The major sacrificial rituals such as the *rajasuya*, *asvamedha*, *vajapeya*, became occasions for the consumptions of wealth in lengthy ceremonies, some extending over many months. These were accompanied by lavish libations of milk and *ghi*, offerings of grain in various forms and the sacrifice of the choicest animals of the herd... Spectacular sacrifices involving the resources of the *raja* were not the only occasions for gifting or redistributing wealth. Periodic sacrifices relating to changing calendar or to phases of the moon were part of the regular calendar of observances among those of high status. Social obligations were also sources of economic distribution. The *samskara* rituals of the *Grhya-sutras*, and the domestic rituals enjoined upon every *grhapati*, were to be counted among such occasions both in expending wealth as part of the ritual and in presentations to the *brahmanas*.”³²

Brahmanas were paid well for the sacrifices. Sometimes whole villages were given as gift or ritual fee to the *brahmanas*.³³ This, however, does not mean that all the *brahmanas* were rich. For the household rituals the fees was obviously less and, as stated earlier, many *brahmanas* were poor.

4.5 CONFLICT BETWEEN BRAHMANAS AND KSHATRIYAS

The later Vedic period signifies the beginning of new institutions; the emergence of new groups like peasants or *grhapatis*, artisans such as smiths, carpenters, chariot-makers, potters, etc.; and the changing nature of old groups like *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas*.

31. Thapar, Romila. op.cit., p.58.

32. Thapar, Romila. op.cit., pp.63-65.

33. Kosambi, D.D. 1975. op.cit., p.132.

The later Vedic period also signifies the conflict between the *kshatriyas* and the *brahmanas*. What does it signify? We have seen that in the later Vedic period the two groups of people, *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas*, claimed the surplus produced by the peasants. The *kshatriyas* as the settlers and protectors of the peasants; the *brahmanas* as the performer of the sacrifice and the ritual for the welfare and prosperity of the tribe and the household, extracted surplus from the peasants. On the question of sharing and further increasing the accumulation of surplus, these two groups came in conflict with each other. *Kshatriyas* could accumulate more surpluses by increasing agriculture, whereas the *brahmanas* could accumulate more wealth through the sacrifices where gifts were given to them as sacrificial fees.

Before we elaborate on the conflict between *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas*, it is necessary to know how the surplus generated till now was spent. In some primitive tribal societies, some tribal members burn the surplus occasionally in ceremonies, thus controlling the accumulation of surplus. In some other tribes, the surplus is redistributed in some rituals to all members of the tribe. In some tribes, these two ways are combined together. The Vedic society belongs to this latter type. In sacrifices, some part of the surplus is burnt and the other part is redistributed (of course, unequally)³⁴. If this kind of system continues, it is not possible to transfer the surplus for developing new tools of production, which is essential for the large-scale expansion of agriculture.³⁵

This is the basis of the crisis between the *kshatriyas*, who were in favour of the expansion of agriculture (because it paid them well) and the *brahmanas* who derived their wealth from sacrifices and rituals. Expansion of the agriculture at this stage mean cutting down of the expenditure on sacrifices and rituals, i.e., the surplus hitherto spent on sacrifices and rituals have to be diverted to develop new tools of production. This affected the *brahmanas*. *Brahmanas* were not against agriculture as long as it paid them well. In fact, they have taken active part in assimilating new tribes and promoted agriculture, but when the situation came

34. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.85. Kosambi mentions that some of the Punjab tribes of Alexandria's time divided the grain among the tribal households according to need and burned the surplus rather than barter it in trade.

35. Thapar, Romila. op.cit., pp.66-67.

where the surplus spent on sacrifices and rituals had to be diverted for some other purposes, they resisted change.

This led to the questioning of the very basis of Vedic rituals by *Kshatriyas* or by those who wanted to expand agriculture. The *brahmanas* who at one stage actively helped in assimilating new groups into the society and contributed for the strengthening of the Aryan system became the fetters for further development of the same system. *Brahmanas* also failed on another count. Even though they were successful in assimilating the aboriginal tribal groups into the Aryan system, they failed to incorporate the *kshatriya* peasant formation into their system. This incorporation of *gana-samghas* within the monarchy is necessary because the continuation of *gana-samghas* restricts the accumulation of surplus and the development of state. If the state has to emerge as a powerful institution, which can take up the task of expanding agriculture on a large scale and of appropriating “the surplus for itself, all other systems that exist outside its influence are to be either incorporated or subjugated. Then and then only it will emerge as the dominant formation.

This gave rise to the development of Buddhism, which criticized sacrifices and rituals, killing of animals, etc., or, in other words, it criticized the continuing pastoral values and provided an alternative set of values, which were to shape the emerging agrarian society. The notions of Karma, Dharma, and transmigration, which are central to the agrarian value system, are the contributions of Buddhism.

4.6 SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MONARCHIES

The first migrants came to middle Ganga valley through two routes. The northern route followed the foothills of Himalayas and the southern route followed the south bank of the Yamuna and the Ganga at the base of the Vindyan outcrops. The clearing of land was still possible in these places by burning forests. It is evident from the findings of painted Grey Ware in these places that people settled here earlier to the post-Vedic period. In the plains, the land was more marshy — and here iron technology would have been of greater use in cutting trees.³⁶

36. Thapar, Romila. op.cit., p.70.

The post-Vedic period saw the rapid expansion of agriculture in the middle Ganga valley with the use of iron; the strengthening of the new institutions and the state system, which completed the process of transformation. Iron was extensively used in agriculture as is evident from the archaeological findings of NBP, North Black Polished Ware. Iron ore was available in large quantities in the middle Ganga valley. Iron mines were located at Singbhum and Mayurbhanj.³⁷ One of the main factors that contributed for the emergence of Magadha as a powerful Kingdom was its possession of metals.³⁸ “Agriculture in general had become so important that special attention was given to the types of fields in early Buddhist teachings. One *Sutta* classifies the field as (i) best, (ii) middling and (iii) inferior, forested and infertile”³⁹. Irrigation was known in this period.

Towns and trade started developing in the post-Vedic period. The richest *grhapatis* were called *sethis* who might have also participated in trade. “The change in society is manifested by a new set of institutions: mortgage, interest, usury.”⁴⁰ Professional guilds existed in post-Vedic period. Except in the theoretical debates, the words *vaisya* and *sudra* were not mentioned in the Buddhist sources.⁴¹ No reference to *Kshatriyas* was made in the monarchies, suggesting the dissolution of this group. Fick suggests that in the post-Vedic period, *Kshatriyas* did not form a *jati* but they refer to the ruling class.⁴² Pali sources talk about the social organization of the monarchies in terms of *jatis*.

Social categories even in Panini are more often discussed in terms of *jati* rather than Varna, the currency of the former being in any case post-Vedic. The etymology of the two terms is distinct and separate and *jatis* are described as having evolved out of the common bonds of mutual kinship. Buddhist sources rank *jatis* into a high and a low category, a dual division that is commonly adopted in Buddhist classifications. The frequency of reference to *jati* as compared to Varna would suggest that the *jati* became the more evident category of social perception and Varna the more theoretical.⁴³

37. Sharma, R. S. op.cit., pp.95-96.

38. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.123.

39. Sharma, R. S. op.cit., p.99.

40. Kosambi, D.D. 1975. op.cit., p.147.

41. Fick, R. op. cit., pp.252-314.

42. Fick, R. op. cit., pp.79.

43. Thapar, Romila. op.cit., p.166.

4.7 SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE GANA-SANGHAS

We have mentioned earlier that in the later Vedic period described by brahminical sources there is another system characterized by *Kshatriya*-peasants developing along with the brahminical system. The social organization of *Kshatriya*-peasant formation, which came to be called as *gana-samghas* in post-Vedic period, was described in some detail in the Pali sources. There were no *brahmanas* in *gana-samghas*, neither they followed Vedic rituals.⁴⁴ The two major groups in *gana-samghas* were *kshatriya*, peasants, and *dasa*, labourers. *Khattiyas* owned the land collectively. This is indicated by the non-usage of *grhapati*, an individual householder, for *Khattiya*.⁴⁵ *Gana-samghas* have assemblies and they elected the chief by rotation. The only differentiation that existed in *gana-samghas* was between *khattiyas* and *dasas*. For *Khattiyas*, *gana-samgha* system provided an egalitarian set up when compared with monarchical system. For *dasas*, it is an oppressive set up where their labour was exploited. *Gana-samghas* like *Millas* and *Licchavis* were very powerful and “over them no external King had any authority...”⁴⁶ The smaller *gana-samghas* like *Sakyans* accepted the suzerainty of the Kosalan monarch but generally managed all their own affairs.⁴⁷

The incorporation or subjugation of *gana-samghas* into the monarchical system is necessary, if the latter has to emerge as the dominant formation. The continuation of *gana-samgha* means that the King or monarch will not be able to extract as much surplus from them as he extracts from the peasants within the monarchical system. Moreover, *gana-samghas* provide an alternative form of social organization based on egalitarian values (at least for *Khattiya* peasants) when compared with the monarchical system. If this parallel system continues, it will become difficult to bring more people — aboriginal tribes, etc., under its influ-

44. It will be interesting to study whether *Khattiyas* in *gana-samghas* followed any rituals or not. If they followed any rituals what kind of rituals they have followed! From the Buddhist reaction to rituals it seems that *gana-samghas* are (most peculiarly) against any kind of rituals.

45. Chakravarti, Uma. 1987. *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*. Delhi, p.87.

46. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.109.

47. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.108.

ence, which in turn will curtail the surplus appropriation by King and nobles in the monarchical system. For these reasons it is necessary to either incorporate or subjugate the *gana-samghas* into the monarchical system. Since the *gana-samghas* during the post-Vedic period are powerful, it is not easy to subjugate them by using force. The better way would be to incorporate them into the monarchical system peacefully as far as possible. This does not mean that force was not used at all against *gana-samghas*; bitter wars were fought between *gana-samghas* and the monarchies but at the same time peaceful conciliation was given preference.

4.8 DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM

Many heretical sects (Buddhist and Jaina sources mention about 62 sects) have emerged in the post-Vedic period, signifying the growing need for alternative values.⁴⁸ The common aspect of all these sects was that they were against the Vedic sacrifices. That is, against the pastoral way of life. All these sects used the institution of renouncer to influence people. We have already seen how *brahmanas* were respected and acceptable to all sections of society because of their knowledge, sacrificial function etc. The renouncers have also, similarly, commanded respect from all sections for various reasons. Firstly, they provided alternative knowledge by denying Vedic knowledge. Thapar sums up the charisma of the renouncers in the following words:

The authority of the ascetic is not only of parallel stature but often exceeds that of Kings, for the ascetic is associated with powers beyond the ordinary, symbolized as magical powers. It is this, which attracts the respect and awe of the lay community. Here the achievements of the individual isolated ascetic imbued with mystical powers rub off onto the renouncer in the monastery and add to the prestige of the latter. The charisma is seen at the simplest level in the fact that the renouncer is able to detach himself from material possessions. Furthermore, he is celibate and yet, at the same time, the most virile of men.⁴⁹

Out of all the sects, Buddhism was more successful in influencing the people. Buddhism had before it two major tasks. (1) To refute Vedic

48. Kosambi, D.D. 1975. op.cit., p.164.

49. Thapar, Romila. 1978. 'Renouncer A counter Culture?' in Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, Hyderabad. p.94.

sacrifices and rituals or, in other words, pastoral mode of life, and provide an alternative value system which corresponds to the needs of the emerging agrarian social formation. (2) To incorporate the *gana-samghas* and contribute for the emergence of the state as the dominant formation.

Buddha preached against animal killings for sacrifices. Buddha preached that “cattle are our friends, just like parents and other relatives, for cultivation depends upon them. They give food, strength, freshness of complexion and happiness. Knowing this, *brahmanas* of old did not kill cattle.”⁵⁰ Buddha’s philosophy of non-violence has many facets. It is directed against the tribal wars as well as individual violence. Even the King was asked to restrain from using force.⁵¹ This has serious implications for the development of the state system. The Khattiyas in the *gana-samghas* were fighters and opposed the encroachment of the monarch on their territories. As long as the peasant bears arms, it becomes difficult for the king to extract surplus from him. The peasant who belongs to a *jati* might revolt against the King along with his *jati* fellows and refuse to pay taxes. So it is necessary to disarm the peasant. Throughout the later Indian history, the peasant remained disarmed. Another fact of non-violence at this period is that it discouraged tribal wars.⁵² Wars not only affect the general development of the society but mainly affect the trade. Nevertheless, even the Buddhist monarchs never hesitated to go for wars in order to expand their territory and influence. Asoka led a campaign against Kalingas after which his authority was accepted everywhere. Thus, the Buddhist notion of *ahimsa* was mainly used to condemn Vedic sacrifices; discourage inter-tribal wars and ultimately disarm the peasant. From this it is evident that the ruling class in order to strengthen agriculture, trade and the state used the notion of *ahimsa*.

Buddhist sources divide the society on the lines of occupational groups or *jatis*. These occupational groups are classified as *ukkatta jati* (high *jati*) and *hina jati* (low *jati*). “Thus *ukkatta jati* is defined as Khattiya and *brahmana*, while *hina jati* is defined as *candala*, *vena*, *nesa-*

50. Quoted in Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.103.

51. Thapar, Romila. 1978. ‘Ethics, Religion and Social protest in the first Millennium B.C. in Northern India,’ in Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*. Hyderabad. p.55.

52. Thapar, Romila. 1978. op.cit., p.55.

da, *rathakara* and *pukkusa*.⁵³ While Buddha says that *jati* considerations are not important for joining the *samgha* or for attaining *moksa*, he did not, however, condemn the existing *jati* system. He felt that *jati* is important only in marriages.⁵⁴ In fact, the classification of *jatis* into high and low by Buddhists show that they accepted the system. The remedy to *jati* system was sought to be provided in *samgha* where *jati* distinctions does not matter. Interestingly, Buddhist notions of Karma, Dharma and transmigration provide the justification and rationale for the *jati* system.

Buddhist transmigration depended upon Karma, the man's action throughout his life. Karma as merit would correspond not only to a store of acquired money or harvested grain, but would also come to fruition at the proper time as a seed bore fruit or a loan matured. Every living creature could perform some Karma, which would raise it after death to rebirth in a suitable body; a better body if the Karma were good, a mean and vile one, say of an insect or animal, if the Karma were evil. Even the gods were subject to Karma. Indra himself might fall from his particular heaven after the course of his Karma was fully run; an ordinary man could be reborn in the world of the gods, even as an Indra, to enjoy a life of heavenly pleasure for aeons — but not forever.⁵⁵

This shows how the notion of Karma justifies the division of the society into high or low. A significant aspect in the notion of Karma is that no one will remain in the same position permanently. The present life is only a transitional one; many lives before have passed and many will come after the present life. One can increase one's Karma by following Dharma, i.e., if you follow your duties properly you will gain Karma and will be born into a high position. This provided a strong ideological justification for exploitation. Dharma has another facet. Each *jati* had its own religious observances. The notion of Dharma preserves these religious differentiations.⁵⁶

Another important contribution of Buddhism for the transformation process was that it condemned the spending of surplus in sacrifices and rituals and encouraged the conservation of wealth, investment and

53. Chakravarti, Uma. 1987. op.cit., p.101.

54. Chakravarti, Uma. 1987. op.cit., p.110.

55. Quoted in Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., pp.107-108.

56. Thapar, Romila. 1978. op.cit., p.87.

commercial activity. As we have mentioned earlier, conservation of wealth is necessary to develop new tools of production. The Sigalovada Sutta

not only stresses the importance of support to the renouncers (*Samana-brahmana*) as one of the central duties of the *ariyasavaka*, but also indicates the ideal layman as one who works hard, does not dissipate his wealth but makes the maximum use of it; preserves and expands his property, and saves a portion of his wealth for times of need. The idler is condemned as one who finds reasons to avoid work and complains of the cold, heat and on, resulting in a dissipation of such wealth, as he already possesses, and an inability to acquire new wealth.⁵⁷

The Buddhist *sanga* encouraged commercial wealth and investment. The procedure for amassing wealth is described as, spending a quarter of one's income on daily living, keeping another quarter in reserve and investing the remaining half in an enterprise which will result in monetary profit.⁵⁸ The King was suggested of how to solve the social evils.

The root of social evil was poverty and unemployment. This was not to be bribed away by charity and donations, which would only reward and further stimulate evil action. The correct way was to supply seed and food to those who lived by agriculture and cattle breeding. Those who lived by trade should be furnished with the necessary capital. Servants of the state should be paid properly and regularly so that they would not then find ways to squeeze the *janapadas*. New wealth would thus be generated, the *janapadas* liberated from robbers and cheats. A citizen could bring up his children in comfort and happiness, free from want and fear. In such a productive and contented environment, the best way of spending surplus accumulation, whether in the treasury or from voluntary private donations, would be in public works such as digging wells and water ponds and planting groves along the trade routes.⁵⁹

An important part of the Buddhist religion is the *sangha* or monastery, which is organized on the lines of *gana-sanghas* with a specific purpose. The Sangha is opposed to the society. They represent two opposing values. Sangha represents equality whereas society is full of inequalities. Similarly, the *bhikkhu* or renouncer is opposed to the *grhapati*. The *bhikkhu*

57. Chakravarti, Uma. 1987. op.cit., p.179.

58. Thapar, Romila. 1981. 'The householder and the renouncer in the Brahminical and Buddhist traditions,' *Contribution to Indian Sociology* (New Series) 15 (1-2):285.

59. Quoted in Kosambi, D.D. 1987. op.cit., p.113.

renounced the material world, wears few rags; eats food given by others, observes celibacy and wanders without a place to stay. In contrast to this, the *grhapati* represents wealth, settled family, sexual life or in a single phrase enjoys the pleasures of life. The distinction between *bhikku* and *grhapati* was always maintained. Most of the rules mentioned in the *patimokkha* regarding the behavior of *bhikku* emphasize this point.⁶⁰ Buddhism emphasized that salvation could be obtained only by renunciation of the material world. The creation of *upasakha* for the lay followers tries to relate the followers with the *sangha*. By giving *dana* or gift one gains merit. Thus, there is a dialectical relationship between the *bhikku* and the *grhapati*.

As we have shown earlier, at the time of Buddha there were two parallel systems: the egalitarian (at least for Khattiyas) *gana-sangha* and the non-egalitarian monarchical system. Buddhism combines these two into a single system by organizing *sangha* on the *gana-sangha* lines within the monarchical system. The initial spread of Buddhism was in monarchies. Buddha gave his first sermon at Sarnath near Banaras. Most of the sermons were delivered at the Kosalan capital city Savathi than in any other place.⁶¹ Thus, Buddhism provided a space for *gana-sangha* values within the monarchical system. Buddhist *sangha* ensured a peaceful conversion of *gana-sangha* systems into monarchies. The most important and powerful people of the *gana-sangha* were incorporated into the ruling class of the monarchy. Buddha himself was offered command of the army by King Bimbisara, which he refused⁶². The other members of the *gana-sangha* can either lead a normal peasant life in the monarchical system and pay taxes to the King or join Buddhist *sangha*. But the strict life of Buddhist *sangha* has discouraged many from joining the *sangha*. Nevertheless, Khattiyas were more in Buddhist *sanghas* at this period indicating that those who are unwilling to join monarchical system have joined the Buddhist *sangha*. In *gana-sanghas*, Khattiyas not only enjoyed equal rights but also enjoyed material benefits and the pleasures of life. But in the Buddhist *sangha*, the notion of equality is maintained but without material incentives and pleasures. This also discouraged

60. Chakravarti, Uma. 1983. 'Early Buddhism,' *Social Analysis*. May, (13):73.

61. Kosambi, D.D. 1987. *op.cit.*, p.110.

62. *Ibid.* p.110.

the Khattiyas who were wealthy and were unwilling to give up material things joining the *sangha*. Buddhist *sangha* also absorbed dissent from the monarchical system. As many tribes were absorbed into the society and as the society was transforming, dissent was inevitable. Buddhist *sangha* provided an outlet for this dissent within the given structural arrangement. *Sangha* also encouraged trade. In the later periods (when its social function of incorporating *gana-sanghas* and contributing for the transformation process was over) Buddhism mainly associated with the trading communities.

Buddhism, which had significantly contributed for the transformation process and provided an alternative value system, had certain limitations, which resulted in its decline. Firstly, Buddhism has effectively incorporated the *gana-sanghas* into the monarchical system but failed to assimilate the tribals into the mainstream society. Thapar suggests that the heretical sects of this period carefully avoided tribal belts in their expansion to other regions.⁶³ Secondly, Buddhism is completely opposed to the rituals. But the society in this period has not reached the stage where they can completely do away with the rituals. Ancient Indian history shows the preservation of diverse rituals, adopted from tribals who were assimilated into the society. Finally, Buddhist monks were not allowed to become administrators. It was Buddha's suggestion not to let state officials into the monastery. All these limitations reduced the role of Buddhism in the day-to-day life and the functioning of the society in later periods.

The limitations of Buddhism, which resulted in its decline, have contributed for the strengthening of *brahmanas*. *Brahmanas* fulfilled the limitations of Buddhism: they have been assimilating tribals into the mainstream society from late Vedic period onwards, they performed rituals and, lastly, they have taken up administrative tasks. This enabled *brahmanas* to continue in the new society. The word *brahman* in the agrarian society is used in the generic sense. Many endogamous groups following different occupations have claimed themselves as *brahmanas*. This might be because in the later and post-Vedic period the original group of *brahmanas* has taken up various occupations for livelihood. But because of their consciousness as belonging to one group, they continued to

63. Thapar, Romila. 1978. op.cit., p.72.

call themselves as *brahmanas*. Their flexibility to adapt to new situations, their feeling of belonging to one generic group, enabled them to survive. At every stage, they incorporated the new values into their system (of course, grudgingly). The Buddhist scheme of renouncer and *grhapati* was developed into the *asrama* system: they made their own the notions of *karma*, *dharma* and transmigration. They even incorporated Buddha into their system by saying that he is one of the incarnations of Vishnu. Once the transformation is completed, rituals gained prominence, which brought back the *brahman* into prominence. Thus, the *brahmanas* survived the transformation.

Once the *gana-sanghas* are assimilated and the new value system is accepted by the people, the foundations of the new society are nearly completed. But the new society has to consolidate its position; otherwise it might fall back into the old systems. This consolidation was completed under the Magadhan state, which monopolized the production process and expanded agriculture on a large scale.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters we have shown how Varna and *jati* belong to two different modes of production. We have traced out the material bases of both Varna and *jati*, and located them in their respective social formations. Regarding the theory of four Varnas, we indicated that the four divisions — *brahmanas* (priests), *kshatriyas* (warriors), *vaisyas* (peasants), and *sudras* (servile groups) — can be located in the later-Vedic period. We have suggested that these categories are historically specific and thus cannot be found in later periods. But the theory of four Varnas asserts their relevance even today. In the Introduction, we have indicated how this theory continues as an ideology in post-Vedic periods. This needs little elaboration.

The *Purushasukta* where for the first time the four groups — *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras* — are mentioned is a late addition to Rg veda.¹ In *Purushasukta*, these four groups are not referred to as Varnas. The division of society in terms of four Varnas was developed in the later-Vedic period. In the *Atharvaveda*, these divisions are mentioned as Varnas.² This corresponds to the reality of the later-Vedic period, where the major groups were priests, warriors, peasants, and workers. Nevertheless, even in this period other emerging occupational groups are not included in the theory.

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1. D.D. Kosambi. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan (2nd edition), p.108.
 2. It is suggested that *Purushasukta* might have been added into Rg Veda book X during this period.

5.1 VARNA AS AN IDEOLOGY

There are more than two cosmologies explaining the origin of Man in Rg Veda. Only the *Purushasukta*, where the origin of four groups is mentioned was developed in the later periods.³ In this theory, the *brahmanas* are placed at the top followed by *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas*, and *sudras*. If we agree that this theory was formulated in its full details in the later-Vedic period, then the particular placing of groups in a hierarchy is intelligible. We have seen that in the later-Vedic period, *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas* were in conflict with each other. It is quite possible that *brahmanas* who were priests and philosophers and who had control over the Vedic literature (all *Vedas* were composed by *brahmanas* and preserved among them by inter-generational transmission. They had, therefore, a virtual monopoly over the *Vedas*), formulated the four Varna theory (based on the major divisions in society of that time) and placed themselves at the top. In order to give legitimacy to this theory, the origin formulation was added to the Rg Veda. This enabled them to claim that the society was created by *brahma* and arranged into four groups in the following order *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras*.

This becomes evident from the non-brahminical sources, which questioned the superiority of the *brahmanas*. Even in the post-Vedic period, where the reality was talked in terms of *jati* (Pali sources divide society on the basis of *jatis*; even in Panini and Manu, *jati* occurs more frequently than Varna), *brahmanas* tried to manipulate the reality in terms of Varna. They developed the theory of mixed-unions to incorporate *jatis* into their scheme and thus upheld the theory of four Varnas. Another interesting thing they developed in post-Vedic period was the notion of *dvija*. According to this, some groups are ‘twice born’ and so they are entitled to wear a ‘sacred thread’. By this they tried to show that some groups are superior to others. Moreover, as the performers of the *upanayana* (initiation ceremony), where the ‘sacred thread’ is given to a person, they claimed higher status.

Despite the *brahmanas*’ effort to prove the relevance of Varna in day-to-day life, it remained as a theory with little empirical relevance. The Pali sources talked of Varnas but it is confined only to the theoretical

3. B. R. Ambedkar. *Who were the Sudras?*, Bombay: Thacker & Co. Ltd.

debates. When they talked about social reality it was in terms of *jati*. It is interesting to note that the brahminical sources are silent about the absence of *kshatriya* and *vaisya* Varnas in south-India and other parts of India. According to them, the four Varnas are universal, but they did not make any effort to show why some Varnas are not present in some areas. This absence of *kshatriya* and *vaisya* Varnas becomes even more interesting when we consider the fact that the *brahminical* influence is more in south-India.

We have shown that Varna is specific to pastoral social formation. *Varna* ('colour') distinctions developed in India when the invading Aryans subjugated the aboriginal tribes (*dasas*) and discriminated against them. Since South India and other parts of India did not experience anything of this sort, there is no question of Varna as a category existing in these regions.

By the time when north-Indians invaded/colonized South India and other parts, North India has already transformed into agrarian social formation and the Varna distinctions were replaced by *jati* distinctions. So we find only *jati*, which represents agrarian social formation in South India.

One aspect of the ideology of four Varnas is that it tries to show the superior position of certain groups (especially the *brahmanas*). This is shown by the notion of *dvija* where the bearers of the 'sacred thread' are considered superior to others. There are many other similar practices, which show the superior status of a group or a person. Some of them may be mentioned as followed: (a) observance of purity and pollution, (b) non-acceptance of food from the low *jatis*, (c) observance of child marriage, (d) disallowing widow marriage, (e) practice of sati, (f) practice of infanticide, (g) practice of hypergamy, (h) control of female sexuality, (i) observance of certain specific rituals, etc. All these ideological aspects conceal the underlying structure of the society and give us the impression that they are important for the functioning of society. All these aspects play an important role in moulding the consciousness of the people. It is our contention that these ideological aspects, though important in their own cultural respects, do not tell us about the underlying structure of the society, which is the basis for the functioning of the society.

All those theories and concepts, which consider only cultural and ideological aspects to explain the nature of a particular society, fail to

bring out the underlying structure of the society. On the other hand, historical materialism brings out the underlying structure of society into focus. It explains, therefore, the importance of relations and forces of production in understanding a society. While doing this, it takes into consideration the superstructural aspects like culture and consciousness and their role in shaping society.

5.2 A CRITICAL REVIEW OF DUMONT'S HOMO HIERARCHICUS

While reviewing the literature on Varna and *jati* in the second Chapter, we have pointed out the inconsistencies of some of the writers. There we could not take any particular perspective in totality for critical examination. In the following pages, we will consider Dumont's thesis on Indian society because he is one scholar who has powerfully presented the cultural view of Indian society by combining both Indology and ethnology.⁴

Like many Western scholars before him, Dumont wanted to understand Indian society in contrast to his own. This is his starting point. He tries to understand the basic nature of human society. He believes that 'caste teaches us a fundamental social principle, hierarchy.'⁵ He contrasts Indian society, which is based on the principle of hierarchy with that of the Western society which is based on equality. Dumont adopts the definition of caste from Bougie as his starting point. According to Bougie, caste system has three characteristics: separation, division, and hierarchy.

The 'three principles' (of Bougie) rest on one fundamental conception and are reducible to a single true principle, namely the opposition of the pure and the impure. This opposition underlines hierarchy, which is the superiority of the pure to the impure, underlies separation because the pure and impure must be kept separate, and underlies the division of labour because pure and impure occupations must likewise be kept separate. The whole is founded on the necessary hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites.⁶

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4. L. Dumont. 1988 (1980 edition). *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, Delhi.
 5. *Ibid.*, p.2.
 6. *Ibid.*, p.43.

For Dumont, ideology is central with respect to the social reality as a whole.⁷ But ideology is not everything. ‘Any concrete, localized whole, when actually observed, is found to be decisively oriented by its ideology, and also to extend far beyond that... In our case, in every concrete whole we find the formal principle at work, but we also find something else, a raw material that *it orders and logically encompasses but which it did not explain, at least not immediately and for us*.⁸ He explains the idea of encompassing with the help of Varna theory. According to him, ‘one cannot speak of caste without mentioning the Varnas.’⁹ It is here in the Varna theory that Dumont finds that power and status are differentiated and moreover, power is subordinate to status. He writes that ‘some eight centuries perhaps before Christ, tradition established an absolute distinction between power and hierarchical status...’¹⁰ He maintains, ‘that the theory of caste resorts implicitly or obliquely to the Varnas in order to complete its treatment of power.’¹¹ According to him, ‘it is only once this differentiation (between status and power) has been made that hierarchy can manifest itself in a pure form.’¹²

This theory of four Varnas is very crucial to Dumont. His basic assumption that status encompasses power is based on the theory of four Varnas. We have already said that Varnas were only two and we cannot use Varna for later social formations. Even if we consider that the theory of Varna has continued as an ideology, how can Dumont derive a principle from one system and apply the same without qualifications to another system. If we observe, Dumont fails to derive the same principle wholly based on the principles of *jatis*. He has to resort to Varna system for this.

Dumont criticizes those scholars who give importance to economic and political aspects in understanding the position of *jatis* in the middle level. He says that they are missing the essential characteristic of the Indian system by neglecting the extremes. For him, ‘what happens at the extreme is essential.’¹³ But can he neglect the empirical findings of other

7. Ibid., p.43.

8. Ibid., pp.37–38. Emphasis added.

9. Ibid., p.38.

10. Ibid., p.37.

11. Ibid., p.75.

12. Ibid., p.72.

13. Ibid., p.76.

scholars? It is here his thesis of subordination of power to status comes under strain. He tries to give a sort of concession to the empirical facts without modifying his earlier hypothesis.¹⁴ He writes:

power exists in the society, and the Brahman who thinks in terms of hierarchy knows this perfectly well; yet hierarchy cannot give a place to power as such without contradicting its own principle. Therefore it must give a place to power without saying so, and it is obliged to close its eyes to this point on pain of destroying itself.¹⁵

He further writes that ‘power in some way counterbalances purity at secondary levels, while remaining subordinate to it at the primary or non-segmented level.’¹⁶

This above passage shows that whenever power is encountered in society, status or hierarchy must ‘close its eyes’. That means whichever group or *jati* in the society controls power, makes status ‘close its eyes’. If a low *jati* through some means acquires power then status has to ‘close its eyes’. That means control of power is important in a society. This goes against Dumont’s thesis that power is subordinate to status. Only those groups that do not have power come under the purview of Dumont’s ideology. Dumont’s argument that power at the primary or non-segmented level remains subordinate to status is not valid, because the lowest *jatis* (whom he includes in the primary level) do not have any power. When they do not have any power, there is no question of power becoming subordinate to status at the primary level. Moreover, the middle *jatis* numerically form the majority of the population. The extremes — *brahmanas* and ‘untouchables’ — form only a small fraction of the total population. If a particular principle or ideology leaves out the major section of society from its influence, can we call it as the ‘underlying principle’?

Dumont suggests that when *brahmanas* take up other functions ‘they lose their caste characteristics with respect to other Brahmanas who serve

14. This was what the classical brahminical writers had also done. When the theory of four *varnas* was under strain, they invented the theory of mixed-unions where they have given a lot of concessions to the empirical reality. To uphold *varna*, Dumont has just done what in brahminical writers have done centuries back.

15. *Ibid.*, p.77.

16. *Ibid.*, p.78. Here the primary level means the extremes and the secondary level means the middle strata.

them as priests.¹⁷ If purity and impurity is the underlying principle of *jati* system, where *brahmanas* are placed at the top and only they have the chance to be placed at the top, if status is more important than economy, and if ideology is a conscious phenomenon, why do *brahmanas* prefer occupations other than priestly occupation, which is the purest of all occupations? Madan found that among Kashmiri Pandits, *Karkuns* ('workers') are higher in status to *gor* ('priests').¹⁸ Dumont fails to take this into considerations and his theory has no answer.

The ethnographic notes of Barth about Swats of Western Pakistan, which Dumont uses to show us that the Muslims are influenced by the Hindu ideology, in fact tell us some other story besides Dumont's. Dumont writes:

There are no Hindus in this remote valley of the High Indus (formerly 'north-west Frontier'), except for certain unimportant elements. Yet the population is divided into groups, which strongly resemble castes. These groups are linked together by something equivalent to a *jajmani* system, they are ranked by status and a high proportion of marriages are endogamous¹⁹

Dumont also points out 'that it is not a question of a caste system but of a system of patronage and clientele which has assimilated caste-like and Hocartian "liturgies"... In other words, in the Indian environment, the ideological features may be missing at certain points or in certain regions, although other features constitutive of caste are present.'²⁰

If ideology is the basis on which 'caste' depends, then, how come other features of 'caste' show up their presence but not ideology, which is central to the system? This shows that caste can exist without ideology. This also shows that there is something else, which is central to the *jati* system, which influences even the other religious groups. This is indicated by Barth, but has gone unnoticed because of Dumont's preoccupation with ideology. It is mentioned that 'something equivalent to a *jajmani* system' exists among the Swats. It is to be seen that the same *jaj-*

17. Ibid., p.163.

18. T.N. Madan (*et al*). 1971. 'Review Symposium on *Homo Hierarchicus*'. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series. p.23.

19. L. Dumont. 1988 (1980 edition). p.208.

20. Ibid., p.209-210.

mani system exists in other religious groups in India. This indicates that the *jajmani* system (not the way Dumont explains it) is the underlying structure, which arranges different groups irrespective of their religious affiliations into the production relations.

Coming to the question of change, Dumont argues that 'caste society managed to digest what was thought must make it burst asunder.'²¹ For Dumont, 'a form of organization does not change, it is replaced by another; a structure is present or absent, it does not change.'²² Nevertheless Dumont was forced to recognize the changes that have been taking place in Indian society.

Central to Dumont's thesis is that: a) Indian society is based on ideology; b) religion encompasses politico-economic aspects. There is great inconsistency when Dumont applies his principles in reality. Wherever it is possible he argues that religion encompasses politico-economic aspects. When he confronts with empirical reality he compromises and says that for its own survival ideology has to close its eyes to power.

His thesis of ideology is ahistorical; it does not explain how this particular ideology or set of values came into existence and under what conditions they might change. Since ideology is a conscious thing for Dumont there is no possibility of changing the present Indian society. A theory which cannot explain how the institutions and the society with which it is dealing have come into existence, a theory which 'closes its eyes' whenever there is a difficulty, a theory which 'encompasses but which it does not explain', cannot provide us a better understanding of the Indian society.²³

We made an effort to show that Varna and *jati* belong to two different modes of production. We have traced out the material bases of both Varna and *jati* and located them in their respective social formations. In the process of transformation, some elements of the pastoral society influenced the shaping of new institutions. For example, the basic aspect of *jati*, i.e., endogamy, was influenced by two factors. Firstly, in the notion

21. Ibid., p.218.

22. Ibid., p.219.

23. At the most, as it happened, Dumont's theory says what the classical brahminical writers have said about Varna and *jati* with the help of modern ethnological and sociological methods.

of Varna, a distinction is maintained between Aryans and *dasas*. Aryans preferred to marry amongst themselves. Secondly, Indian society had assimilated lot of tribal elements. Tribes were assimilated into the main society as a group and in the process some tribal aspects were incorporated into the society. One such aspect is endogamy. Thus, the notion of endogamy was influenced by notions of Varna distinctions and the new tribal absorption.

5.3 PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

We have given only an outline of the present framework. A number of aspects are to be studied systematically. For example, the existence of 'kshatriya-peasant' formation in later-Vedic period has to be properly studied and brought into focus. Many scholars have mentioned the role of Buddhism in the transformation process. This aspect has to be restudied from the present point of view, i.e., the role of Buddhism in assimilating *gana-sanghas* into the monarchical system. Lastly, the same approach could be pursued to study the medieval Indian society. Only recently have historians and other social scientists have started studying *jati* and village community in the medieval period. Our perspective emphasizes the importance of these kinds of studies and provides proper tools of analysis to study the medieval Indian society in its historical context.

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II

Commemoration of Naveen Babu

A Biography of Y. Naveen Babu

B. Ramesh Babu

(A compilation with inputs from friends and family members)

Yalavarthi Naveen Babu, fondly known to his friends as Naveen, was born in a middle caste, middle peasant family on 29 May 1964 in Guddikayalanka village, Repalle Mandal, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh (AP), India. His parents are, Sri Ram Mohan Rao and Smt. Satyavati. After his childhood, his family migrated to Vijayarai village in West Godavari District, AP. Naveen was close to his grand parents who brought him up since the age of six. He also had very a special respect and attachment towards his maternal uncle, Sri Meka Ravindra Babu who mentored and often financed his education.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

After schooling, Naveen moved to the state capital, Hyderabad, where he completed his intermediate and B.Sc. from Babu Jagjivan Ram College, with distinction. On the advice of his uncle Sri Ravindra Babu, Naveen opted for a Master's degree in sociology, initially from Meerut University but subsequently moved to New Delhi in 1985 to rejoin MA sociology in the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) School of Social Sciences (SSS), Centre for the Study of Social Systems (CSSS). His uncle advised him to simultaneously study for the Union Public Service Commission examinations to pursue a career in the Indian Civil Services, but his priorities soon changed in favour of higher academics and student activism. He did very well in his MA, qualified the UGC national test for obtaining the Junior Research Fellowship and went on to pursue research on caste

under the guidance of Prof. Yogendra Singh. His M.Phil dissertation, for which he was awarded his degree in 1989, is published as such in the initial part of this book. Most of the theoretical, conceptual and methodological aspects of his work still remain relevant, as stated earlier in this book by his guide, Prof. Yogendra Singh. Naveen enrolled with him subsequently for Ph.D. in sociology, but discontinued later as he could not devote enough time for his thesis work due to his increasing commitment for political activism.

EARLY EXPOSURE TO STUDENT POLITICS

Naveen's political affiliations have always been of Marxist orientation, but JNU offered him a platform to explore different shades of Left politics and make more informed choices. Like many other students of his time, he was initially associated with the predominant 'Students Federation of India' or the SFI, the student wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) that usually had majority of seats in the elected JNU students' Union (JNUSU). However, he soon became its critic and distanced himself from it.

LITERARY AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM

For some time, he sought succor in reviving "Pragati Sahiti," a decade-old progressive Telugu literary and cultural organization that was once quite active in JNU but was dwindling due to the lack of activists committed to its cause. Telugu language has a rich tradition of progressive poetry, literature, theatre and culture that not only inspired people's movements but also provided a platform for discourse of dissent among intellectuals, especially between various shades of the Left. Pragati Sahiti brought this rich tradition within the reach of JNU students through a circulating library of progressive Telugu books, publishing their translations to Hindi, as well as by conducting lectures, exhibitions, cultural events and street plays within and outside JNU. Some activities that deserve mention here include 1) two literary books, "Jalapatham" (collection of poems) and "Kodavatiganti" (compilation of articles in the memory of Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao); 2) street plays, adopted from the stories "Temporary Labour" by Com. Cherabanda Raju, "Aaru Sara Kathalu" by Raavi Shastri) and performed many shows in and outside JNU.

FOUNDER OF STUDENTS FORUM

Naveen's revival of Pragati Sahiti radicalized him and many others disillusioned with mainstream Left politics, to reinvent themselves and their role in campus politics and beyond. With the help of his close friends Samuel Asir Raj and Chelli Hari Kumar, he founded the 'students Forum' in 1986, as a watchdog of campus politics, JNUSU and a critic of the role of SFI and AISF in it. More details regarding this period are available in the article of Samuel Asir Raj elsewhere in this book. While Students Forum was successful in its campus level objectives and became popular among JNU students, it did not have a larger political agenda or role outside the campus. Therefore, in 1988, Naveen joined the Delhi Radical Students Organisation (DRSO), founded in 1986 as a Left-of-Left student organization with a political agenda based on Marxist-Leninist ideology and to link up student activities of the campus with revolutionary peoples movements elsewhere in the country and around the world. Even though this did not affect his affiliation and fraternal relations with Pragati Sahiti and Students Forum, he could not devote much time for them and both these organizations declined in the later years due to the absence of committed workers. Nevertheless, he preserved the Pragati Sahiti book collection for a long time.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO DELHI RADICAL STUDENTS ORGANISATION

Naveen's involvement with the Delhi Radical Students' Organization (DRSO) throughout the period of its existence had a profound influence on him as well as on the organization. His readings, interactions with other organizations and practical experiences from his participation in student movements had decisively crystallized his commitment to radical, revolutionary Left politics inspired by the Maoist ideological line. As a research scholar working towards his M.Phil dissertation on the complex issue of caste during this period, his choice of the topic, his transition from Weberian to Marxist school of sociological thought, the choice of *Jati* as the conceptual framework and mode of production as a methodology, the need for reconciliation of caste and class in any revolutionary social transformation, all reflected the growing synergy between the scholar and activist in him, as Nadarajah describes elsewhere in this

book. He sought to bring a similar level of ideological consistency and synergy in DRSO as a student organization and sought to link it up with workers and peoples movements.

Naveen never imposed himself as a leader or office bearer of DRSO or any other organization he worked with. He encouraged others, including those from dalits, minorities and women to play the lead role and did all the supportive organizational work with a smile. At the same time, he patiently argued for socially inclusive politics, ideological consistency, uncompromising leadership and organizational discipline and strictly followed it himself. As a result, even though DRSO was never a very large organization, it soon came to be recognized as an uncompromising student body that stood up for the rights of students and a force to reckon with in JNU. With his help, DRSO also took up the cause of contractual workers, scavengers and construction workers in the campus to settle their wage disputes and improve their working conditions. Naveen worked tirelessly to extend the reach of DRSO to other institutions in Delhi, as well as to fraternal student bodies, trade unions and youth organizations around Delhi and beyond. But given the highly fragmented nature of Marxist-Leninist (ML) political parties and movements in the country at that time, DRSO had to choose between remaining a broad-based ML organization sympathetic to all of them, or define its own ideological framework more sharply and accordingly choose its specific affiliations and links with other organizations. For some of the DRSO activists and sympathizers who saw or did little beyond campus-based activism and had no ambition of joining revolutionary movements, making such ideological choices and seeking off-campus affiliations made little sense. However, Naveen convinced them that with the entry of All India Students Association (AISA) into the JNU campus representing electorally oriented ML politics, and the growing fraternal relations of DRSO with other revolutionary organizations that were seeking consolidation, a non-aligned approach was no longer sustainable.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEMOCRATIC STUDENTS UNION AND KALAM MAGAZINE

Thus, he steered DRSO through a very difficult period and affiliated it with the All-India Revolutionary Students Federation (AIRSF), which exclusively represented the revolutionary ML movements that rejected the

present system of parliamentary democracy. Later, when he discontinued his UGC fellowship and doctoral research in JNU midway to join Delhi University as a student of Law, he worked for enhancing the ML support base under the Democratic Students' Union (DSU), another pro-ML student organization affiliated to the AIRSF. He was later instrumental in the merger of DRSO and DSU into a single entity (DSU) that still represents AIRSF throughout Delhi. He was actively associated with the publication of the AIRSF magazine, "Kalam" as its editor for sometime. In order to be able to carry out his tasks efficiently, he spent special effort to systematically learn typewriting, wordprocessing and desktop publishing. As the editor of *Kalam*, he had interactions with a range of contributors and their organizations across the country.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

He was an active campaigner for civil liberties, and also worked for PUDR (People's Union for Democratic Rights) for sometime, apart from maintaining links with other democratic rights organizations across the country. He often sought to confront the thorniest issues of civil liberties movements head on, at times to the discomfort of others. For example, his contributions to the PUDR debates that are remembered by both sides to the argument include — whether to differentiate between different types of violence (state violence, private violence and revolutionary violence), or whether PUDR should remain a fact-finding and disseminating body or become a movement by itself, etc. His experimental publication "*Democratic Voice*," a newspaper meant exclusively for the cause of democratic rights and civil liberties, received wide applause but had to be discontinued due to lack of manpower and resources. His interest in democratic rights and civil liberties, especially in the case of nationality movements of Kashmir, northeast, etc., were often reflected in DRSO's public meetings in JNU on such issues, or Naveen's frequent interactions with the representatives of such movements. In fact, when Shahabuddin, a JNU research scholar and democratic rights activist, was arrested under the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) for his alleged involvement in the *hawala* scam, DRSO led a protracted struggle with the help of other fraternal organizations to secure his constitutional rights, and dared other organizations to take a stand. Naveen's leadership

during this period expanded the awareness in JNU and elsewhere on the nationality struggles and the violation of their democratic rights.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO BRIDGING MOVEMENTS AND THE NATIONALITY SEMINAR

Thus, apart from being in the forefront of many uncompromising student struggles, Naveen established a close nationwide network between DRSO and several other students' organizations, trade unions and other mass organizations. He maintained active contact with workers' movements and other social movements, and arranged several seminars, conferences and campaigns in support of revolutionary politics in New Delhi and elsewhere. Many scholars and activists from India and abroad remember him fondly for his outstanding contributions during the International Seminar he organized in Delhi on the nationality question in Feb 1996 under the All India Peoples Resistance Forum, as elaborated by Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty and Dr. Vara Vara Rao in their articles elsewhere in this book. He is credited to have been the main bridge between nationality movements and revolutionary movements.

REVOLUTIONARY MILITANCY AND MARTYRDOM

No one knew that since early 1990s, he became a full-time activist of CPI-ML (Peoples' War), now known as CPI (Maoist), and grew up fast in its ranks to the Central Committee level through his scholarly understanding of issues, pleasant personality and revolutionary fervour. Through the late 1990s, his withdrawal from public life indicated that he was probably making some intellectual and organizational contributions for revolutionary movements, but no one could ever imagine that he would participate in their military activities. He was martyred on 18th February 2000 during the raid on a police camp in Darakonda, a village near Visakhapatnam, AP. He was apparently working for his party's military magazine, *Jung*, and one would like to think that he may have participated in a rare exercise to report on it from first hand knowledge and lost his life in the process. It does not matter whether he volunteered himself for such a role or he was assigned to participate, as long as he was allowed to be in that vulnerable situation. According to an obituary report on a maoist blog, "Though the raid was a major success, giving a large stock

of weaponry, two revolutionaries laid their lives.” For most people who knew him even briefly, as a scholar, revolutionary organizer or even just as an exceptionally nice human being, his life was worth much more than all the weaponry on both sides of the battle line, whatever may be the justification for it on either side.

But then, revolution is revolution and martyrdom is martyrdom. If not Naveen and his unsung associate, some others would have had to lose their lives — if not in a successful military operation, perhaps in a false encounter or just a cold-blooded murder. For that matter, one doesn’t even have to be a militant revolutionary to be martyred. The broad-daylight murder of Com. Chandrasekhar (AISA leader, JNUSU President and a good friend of Naveen) during a public meeting in Bihar, or that of Dr. Ramanadham (of APCLC) in his clinic during a police procession, and the night-time murder of Com. Shankar Guha Niyogi in his sleep by the opponents of the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha, have nothing to do with their participation in any armed militancy. Yet, they became martyrs and one has heard similar, albeit pertinent questions as to why they were allowed to be in that vulnerable situation. In any exploitative, oppressive society, no matter what is its official description as a democracy etc., anyone and everyone who opposes it systematically in any manner is vulnerable, some way or the other. The point, however, is to change it.

DEFYING CARICATURES

For all those who are often fed with dominant portrayals of revolutionary militants as inherently violent, deprived, trapped, trigger-happy, intimidating, blood-thirsty, revengeful, scary, irresponsible, irreparable, unnegotiable, mindless and deserve nothing but death (even if it is an extrajudicial killing), here is the best example of the exact opposite of any such caricature. Naveen was the most genuine, sensitive, well-informed, well-behaved and soft spoken human being that one can ever come across. He came from a humble economic background but was by no means deprived by the time he chose his politics. He obtained his higher education and research exposure from one of the best universities in the country, a national fellowship and a good start for a reasonably assured career as accomplished by most of his peers. No one ever heard him even raise his voice in an argument, let alone quarrel, beat or kill or even threaten to do

so. In fact, many people fondly called him “Gandhi” or used nicknames for elderly wisdom, knowing fully well that his politics had nothing to do with Gandhi, but truly meaning that he had a Gandhian personality, lifestyle and approach. He was not trapped or tricked into revolutionary politics. He tried other approaches and consciously chose revolutionary path.

He had an unwavering dedication to the exploited classes, castes, minorities and nationalities and willingly gave his life to the wider purpose of bringing about an egalitarian society. It requires tremendous inner strength, courage, perseverance and endurance to place oneself completely at the service of other human beings. Naveen Babu’s strength came from his incredible love and sensitivity for the suffering people he witnessed everywhere. He never cared for his health or treated himself with life’s little pleasures. He walked around Delhi in the hot summers with single-minded determination towards the tasks on hand.

His pleasant personality and gentle mannerism ensured that everyone liked him and even his detractors could not dislike him. Every one who knew him even briefly felt that they had a great personal rapport with him. Yet, hardly anybody knew his family background, native place, date of birth, likes and dislikes or bad habits, even though they may have told him all about themselves. He did not seem particularly secretive about such things, but somehow they never figured in his interactions with people. He was always the least important factor in any interaction. He was simple, but by no means a simpleton. He was well-read and well-connected in his circuit but never flaunted them or dropped names. He may have pulled off the biggest ideological coups in DRSO but never showed off his leadership skills. He looked frail but carried a steely inner strength and endless capacity for physical work. He was very loyal to his friends and was always there for them (except when there were organizational priorities) but never depended entirely on any friend for anything. If you thought that he could trick a youngster into revolution with his charms, many will tell you that even their parents or relatives who met Naveen very briefly on very few occasions remembered him fondly and were shocked to hear about his death, even if they hated revolutionary politics for whatever reasons. His exceptional sense of gender-sensitivity deserves a special mention, as he could easily practice what most men could not, however gender sensitive they may intend or pretend to be.

He always interacted with women at an equal level, regardless of whether they had any interest in activism or politics. Even though he never had any particular interest or aptitude for cooking or household work, he always ensured that he was there to give company and help to the women in any house he visited, even as other men in the house were busy with intellectual or political discussion, completely unmindful of the fact that their women were being deprived of participating in them due to household chores. Naveen figured in everyone's hearts but nobody ever realized that he did not figure prominently in their photo album, till they looked for it when they heard of his death.

He, like the example of great people (if at all he emulated any of them), made everyone believe that his life and actions are nothing but ordinary and there was nothing special about him. He always listened to what others had to say, but never insisted that he must be heard. For his level of ideological, intellectual and political accomplishment at his age, he never had any ego. He readily offered himself for criticism even if he tried to defend his position, and never shied away from self-criticism. He is an inspiration for every human being who loves freedom. Naveen Babu was most complete human being of our age in whom we found the quintessential qualities of greatness that we attribute to great souls.

Some of us had continuous interaction with him during a campaign for the literacy and primary health of construction workers and their children in JNU between 1989 and 1992. His main advice to us at the school programme was to try to make them run their own affairs, generate leaders in them and not make them dependent on us. Workers were often cheated by contractors who used to manipulate accounts. Under his leadership, DRSO mobilized students and forced contractors to pay the unpaid wages to the workers. DRSO also helped organize a mass drive to get ration cards for *jhuggi* dwellers and vaccination programme for their kids. Our small efforts in the *jhuggi* programme led to big gains to the constructions workers when the time came for them to relocate from the JNU campus. Delhi Development Authority and JNU administration had to provide plots near Kashmiri gate for everyone who got the ration cards. Our most memorable moments with Naveen Babu are when we shared a cup of tea in the workers' *jhuggi* after teaching the classes. At that time, when we all got agitated and argued about various things, Naveen Babu had a calm and collective attitude to any problem.

Our other memories were from the students' general body meetings in which once again we saw him put his perspective in soft but firm voice. In 1989, Naveen and many others from DRSO and other organizations participated in a 14-day hunger strike to press for the demands related to admission policy and other issues under the 'solidarity' leadership of JNUSU. As hunger strike by a few became the main rallying point in the agitation which was otherwise losing its steam, the JNUSU leadership wanted to retreat from the agitation by accepting a partial fulfilment of the demands agreed by the administration. Naveen Babu opposed that move and wanted to continue the struggle. Standing in the open under the sun in front of a mike on a hot afternoon after a 14-day hunger strike, he spoke non-stop for an hour, drawing parallels from peasants struggle and other struggles, to drive home the point that students movements should be linked to a long-term social transformation, and that we should be able to distinguish it from getting discounts and concessions for ourselves. Even though his proposal was defeated by a strange coalition of various forces that involved in the agitation, Naveen and DRSO grew tremendously in stature among those who understood the dynamics at that time.

Naveen's purpose in life was to serve the underprivileged and work for a society that assured justice and opportunity for everyone. Once he told his mother that he will serve the poor and exploited all his life without expecting any returns. This was a promise he kept till his death. To this day, his father rides Naveen's bicycle to his farmland 6 miles away everyday, in remembrance of Naveen Babu. Realizing that his father had to spend hard earned money from agriculture for his college education, Naveen Babu took up tuition classes to earn some money so that he could support his own education, for his graduation and beyond.

After he left JNU to organize various struggles, he occasionally visited his sister and grand parents. During one such visits, Naveen's sister prepared his favorite menu with fish and sambar. Noticing his unusual appetite, she asked him when was the last time he ate a decent meal. He did not answer, but it seemed like he had not done that for a month. His sister offered to drop him to the railway station by their car, but he preferred to walk. He never took assistance of the workers in the house for his personal work, including washing his clothes. Once, he traveled a long distance to reach home and his legs were badly swollen. As soon as he re-

covered, he left again for his work. His grand mother persuaded him hard to marry anyone of his choice without any bar. Naveen told her that he could not afford any “attachments” that will hinder his commitment. On one occasion, he found his grandfather grew a beard and was waiting for a barber to visit him at home for a shave. Naveen took the task to himself. He told his sister that even she could do it and that one should not use others’ services for such personal work. He refused to take the money his sister offered and told her that it was people’s money and he could not use it for himself. His sister, brother-in-law and parents begged him to get some new clothes and shoes. They tried to convince him that it is their hard-earned money. For Naveen though, the money that he did not earn but spent on needs he could not justify was not acceptable. He used to take discarded shoes and clothes of his uncle and get them re-sized to fit him. At a time when most of us struggle to resist capitalist consumerism and are unable to live up to our own cherished ideological values imbibed in JNU, Naveen Babu easily and so naturally and effortlessly embraced a simple lifestyle, giving up unnecessary expenditure. The man had no doubts or confusions on the path he has chosen for himself. In his sister’s words, “Those kinds of people will not be born again.”

Often many of us fail to see what kind of a man we witnessed in our lives and had the opportunity to be with him, eat with him, laugh with him and share innumerable moments with him. He touched our hearts and lives so much, both in his life as well as in his death. People like Naveen are yardsticks to measure the goodness in human beings and remind us of the unlimited potential of a human being. Any inability to share his life and works would be a disservice, not to him, but to the rest of the world. We are fortunate to have witnessed such a great person in our own lifetime.



A view of the International Seminar on the Nationality Question, which Naveen helped organize in February 1996 in Delhi

Remembering Naveen Babu

Manorajan Mohanty,

I cannot forget Naveen's sensitive eyes and the constant smile on his face. The sensitivity and the confidence constituted his being that was imbued with determination and hope. That took him on the path of martyrdom fighting for his values till the end.

He was one of the main organizers of the historic event — International Seminar on the Nationality Question in the Contemporary World — held in Delhi in February 1996. During the year-long preparation towards it, I saw the astounding organizational capacity of this young student of JNU. As the Chairperson of the Reception Committee for this seminar, I had to make some arrangements. But it was Naveen and a few others who had to plan and pursue every specific detail ranging from getting stalwarts like William Hinton Noam chomsky and Ngugi wa Thiongo to the seminar to organizing cultural programme by Gaddar, from arranging food and lodging for the thousand or more delegates to producing press releases and reports. That the nationality discourse had been opened up in our time, stressing the need to integrate the class question with nationality as well as with gender and caste and stressing the need to affirm the democratic character of the nationality struggles was the focal theme of this event. When the volume of papers came out with the title *Symphony of Freedom*, it embodied the dedication of people like Naveen.

Naveen belonged to the new generation of Marxists who wanted to have a grasp of the Indian reality with a thorough study that would be a part of the commitment to interpret the world and change it. His M. Phil dissertation on the caste question is an example of the seriousness

with which he delved deep into research and thinking on the problem. In this work, Naveen analyses the process of transformation of the pastoral society characterized by the Varnas into the agrarian society where multiple social formations described as *Jati* emerge. He reviews the body of writings on this subject from history to anthropology and presents a proposition on the nature of this transformation. He argues that the Aryan subjugation of the *Dasas* gave rise to the justification by the victors which put forth the four Varnas. In South India, this process took place later and somewhat differently, hence it has its specificity.

The important point that emerges from Naveen's study is that caste is both an ideology as well as a social structure with a material base. The *Brahmanic* ideological order rested upon the pastoral society which gets adjusted with the coming of the agrarian society where the *sudras* perform the manual labour that is devalued. In the industrial society, we see a process of further adjustment through which *Brahmanism* tries to maintain its dominance. But with the emergence of a different material base in terms of expanding realms of freedom of labour, the older form of caste order gets challenged. But this process is full of contradictions as we witness in India. Despite the commitment to abolishing untouchability and discrimination on the basis of caste under the Indian Constitution, there is a persistence of atrocities on dalits and widespread deprivation among the lower castes. The scheme of reservation through which caste domination was to be curbed to a large extent has hardly achieved that. Thus, it has become clear that as caste exists both at the base and the superstructure, unless there are comprehensive measures both at the level of economic structure and at the political and cultural level the discriminatory system will not disappear. This is what Naveen's study leads us to. His critique of the anthropologists who locate it only in the ideological sphere is a powerful reminder of this point. It also implies that class transformation without the necessary measures to specifically address caste issues will be inadequate. Therefore, this publication is a very worthwhile effort, not only as a tribute to a young revolutionary but also for its intellectual and political value.

When the news of Naveen's martyrdom reached us, we were shocked and angry. Many amongst us wondered whether it was right for him to be in that arena and face the bullet. Would it have been better for the revolution if he played the role of the theoretician and the analyst. He

had already answered that debate: Theory without practice is armchair humbug. Is it that the fearful and the timid are the ones who stay safe and philosophise? Naveen's challenge will haunt the rest of us all our life. So will his feeling look and the disarming smile.

A Life Dedicated to the People's Cause

Vara Vara Rao

I remembered comrade Naveen yet again recently, when I read an article by Srinivas Denchanala that began with a mention of noted theatre personality Habib Tanvir. The article titled “The play goes on” appeared in a Telugu newsdaily, “*Andhra Jyothi*.” It reminded me that it was Naveen who hosted Srinivas in Delhi for sometime, introduced him to Habib Tanvir and helped him to get trained in theatre.

Naveen touched many people in many ways and is remembered for many things. His contemporaries who worked on issues like the caste and nationality problems and movements in India remember him as a researcher and intellectual with scholarly depth and insights on such complex topics. His contemporaries from JNU, Delhi University and other institutions in Delhi may also remember him as a student activist who participated in a whole range of democratic movements.

The revolutionary movement may remember him as a martyr who did invaluable service to the All India Revolutionary Students Federation (AIRSF) and to its students’ magazine, “*Kalam*” (of which he was editor for sometime) and later in his underground phase, for the key responsibilities he shouldered in the Peoples War and its military journal, “*Jung*,” and for his martyrdom while working in its Eastern Division.

In his multifarious life, anyone who knew him even briefly would remember him for his enthusiasm to serve others. Legend has it that when Mao Tse Tung was once asked to define the duty of a communist in one phrase, he replied, “to serve people.” Naveen fits perfectly into this

classical definition, not only for helping many people in many ways, but also for laying down his life during class struggle, which is the highest form of service to the people.

Naveen was a unique friend gifted to me when Tankasala Ashok was passing out from JNU to pursue a career in journalism. Of course, he introduced him to me indirectly much earlier, as it was to his address in Kaveri hostel, JNU, to which we posted '*srujana*' and other progressive literature and poetry for Pragati Sahiti and the Delhi Unit of *Virasam* (Revolutionary Writers Association). My whole family knew his name and address in Delhi for this reason. Though I cannot recollect his hostel room number after so many years, it was literally my *adda* whenever I visited Delhi, as long as he was a JNU student. After completing his M.Phil., he discontinued his Ph.D. from JNU and joined Delhi University as a student of law, solely to reorganize revolutionary student movements in Delhi. I heard that during this period, instead of staying on the campus, he stayed in a rented room in the compound of a firewood shop.

Since then, my *adda* changed to the residence of Kanchan Kumar, a rented quarter near Gurudwara Bangla Saheb in Connaught Place. I used to visit Delhi often, in connection with the activities of AILRC (All India League for Revolutionary Culture), "*Amukh*" journal and the meetings of students organizations. To relieve Kanchan of the added burden of cooking and attending to my needs, Naveen stayed with us as long as I was there. Paying special attention to my health and diet, he made porridge and boiled vegetable preparations, and also did advance shopping and brought all the required items as he arrived. From receiving me at the New Delhi railway station to seeing me off till I boarded my return train, his keen observation, grasp of depth, sensitivity and attention to detail were simply superb — whether in his discussions about contemporary movements, literature and political perspectives, or in his caring attitude to the health, diet and other needs of myself and Kanchan Kumar. Coming from Warangal and so used to its attire, I never had the habit of wearing shoes. When I visited Delhi in winters, Naveen insisted that I wore woolen socks with my sandals, and in fact introduced me for the first time to the fascinating concept of socks that had a thumb toe provision to suit their use with sandals. He also made advance arrangements for hand gloves, monkey cap, sweater and shawl before my arrival in Delhi and never allowed me to go out without all this protective winter

gear. He introduced simple means to prevent spectacles from slipping off from the ears to me and other friends. All of us still follow those means and remember him every morning while wearing the spectacles.

The irony is that, when the side-view photo of one of those killed in the Darakonda encounter appeared in the newspapers wearing similar spectacles, many of us saw the photo but none of us recognized that it was Naveen. The news reports did not mention the name of the person killed. It was only after we heard of his martyrdom much later that we looked at the photo again and cursed ourselves. We felt so guilty that I cannot pardon myself even now. We had no idea that he was working in the Eastern Division, that he was a part of the team of the “*Jung*” magazine that went to report about the raid on Addatigala police station by a hundred-strong team led by K. Satyanarayana. Not only we didn’t know about it, we couldn’t even imagine it, so we did not have Naveen in mind at all when we looked at the photos published in newspapers. Nevertheless, I did ask some friends at Visakhapatnam to go to the King George Hospital mortuary and find out who it was, but they could not identify the body, as they did not know Naveen. It is a great tragedy that the dead body of Naveen, who was known to all the contemporary admirers of revolutionary movements not just in India but world over, had no claimants and was handed over to the Visakhapatnam municipality after a week by the King George Hospital mortuary. Chalasani Prasad could have identified him, but he was not there. Naveen’s maternal uncle cannot excuse us, especially Chalasani Prasad, for our failure to inform him about Naveen’s encounter and for depriving his family an opportunity to claim his body and bid him farewell.

Naveen was meticulous about documentation. He used to suggest that we must always carry a small voice recorder in order to informally document the knowledge and experiences of very senior or busy people who otherwise may not find time to write. It is particularly handy when we travel long distances with such people, as we can drag them into some discussion, record it and transcribe it later when we find time, he used to say.

With Kanchan Kumar, the problem of caste was usually the main point of discussion. Kanchan Kumar is a Charu Majumdari and often made some passing remarks. Naveen used start a discussion with him patiently, using Marxist classics and Kosambi as the basis for his argument.

I had the opportunity to work closely with Naveen from September 1995 to February 1996 on the issue of nationalities. When the All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF) decided to hold an international seminar in Delhi on the nationalities issue, an initial organizing team of five was formed. It included myself, Darshan Pal (Punjab), Arjun Prasad (Bihar), Kulbir (Delhi) and Naveen. From that date till the end of the seminar, Naveen was the convenor, not just for the five of us, but for the entire organization of the conference. Of course, others joined to share the responsibilities, including Kanchan at one stage and later Stephen Rego (Bombay), Siva Sundar (Bangalore) and B.N. Saibaba (AP). But Naveen was the key person and central coordinating point throughout.

After a press conference with the chairman of the reception committee, Prof Manoranjan Mohanty, myself, Naveen, Kanchan Kumar, Darshan Pal and Kulbir went to Jammu Kashmir on 10 September to personally meet and invite Yasin Malik, Chairman, JKLF. Of the five of us, Naveen and Kulbir were the youngest. Both volunteered enthusiastically to handle difficult tasks. Kulbir is an active and competent worker. The way Naveen mingled with him without showing off his knowledge made them very good friends. Their frank political discussion, unpretentious attitude and the ability to keep friendship above all differences of opinion was a very pleasant sight to watch. Kulbir collapsed when he learnt about the martyrdom of Naveen.

In all our discussions on the nationalities issue — with Yasin Malik and Andrabi in Srinagar, Balraj Puri and Ved Basin in Jammu and later with intellectuals in Ambala, Chandigarh, Jalandhar, Ludhiana etc. during our tour of Punjab — it was Naveen who always gave detailed and patient answers to very critical questions.

Andrabi asked quite emotionally, "Why should we come to your seminar? Yours is an All-India organization; we are outsiders. You may want to talk about our autonomy within the Indian territory. We treat you (India) as illegal occupants and will speak about our war of independence. Yasin Malik told Andrabi, "You attend the seminar and say the same thing." An editor said, "We feel that our relationship with India is like that of Vietnam with America. If you agree with this feeling, we will attend your seminar." Naveen neither changed his tack to please them nor expressed his differences to hurt them. He patiently explained how he views the problem of nationalities as a Marxist-Leninist. I wish I had

a voice recorder at that time to document that discussion, as well as our discussions with other intellectuals we met throughout our tour of Kashmir, Punjab and Delhi, to enhance our collective understanding on the nationalities issue.

Because of his personal acquaintances with students from different states in JNU and also with the various state communities in Delhi, he could easily galvanize representatives from different nationalities — especially from the north-eastern states like Nagaland, Manipur and Assam and those fighting for Jharkhand, Chattisharh and Bodoland, for the International Seminar on the nationalities issue.

Naveen took great personal interest, not only in inviting William Hinton to inaugurate the seminar, but also in having prolonged discussions with him and accompanying him in his tour around the country. William Hinton continued his relationship and corresponded with Naveen till the end. When we wrote to Ngugi wa Thiongo that Naveen was martyred, he wrote back. “For every youth who falls while carrying the flag of revolution in your country, more youth are coming forward to pick up those flags and march on. Naveen must be very much alive among them.”

I shall limit my memories of Naveen with the comment made by Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, Chairman of the reception committee of the International Seminar on the nationality issue. On the last day of the seminar, Mohanty invited sixteen of us for dinner at his residence. They included Hinton, Ngugi and delegates from Belgium, Philippines and Turkey, apart from Naveen and the rest of us who organized the seminar. He said, “This seminar has given me the hope that revolutionary movements will liberate the nationalities in our country, just as the Bolshevik revolution led to the liberation of Soviet nationalities during Lenin’s time. You have an excellent team now; people with excellent capabilities for work and analytical understanding; sincere, honest, and highly competent youth. You continue to work seriously on the Nationality issue like this with Naveen as your convenor in Delhi.”

But revolutionary movement and Naveen did not stop there.

It is said that Naveen consciously chose and insisted on underground life, that too in forests, even into the war fronts and into “*Jung*” magazine on his own. Quite possible. Revolutionary fervour is in his nature. His attraction for it is as natural as that of fish for water.

Even now I repent for my inability to continue to bring out ‘*srujana*’ after the 200th issue in May 1992. I always feel that it is one of my unfinished duties. Once Naveen took me to task on this issue in Vijayawada with his characteristic politeness. He said, “Just as you feel that you left your job in Delhi and moved to AP for publishing ‘*srujana*,’ you think that you moved to Hyderabad for a different task of greater necessity. I would rather suggest that you move back to Delhi and get involved with the publication of ‘*Amukh*.’”

Unlike Naveen, until and unless some such tasks or migrations are demanded of me, I never chose an activity by myself and carried it out. So I cannot comment on Naveen’s decisions or judge them in terms of good or bad.

Before we comment on the decisions of Naveen, Saket Rajan and Anuradha Gandhi to join the revolutionary ranks, I think we need to ask ourselves whether those who stayed within democratic limits are any safer — be it Dr. Ramanatham, Andrabi and other intellectuals and democrats in our public life. We also need to ask what is the amount of space available for a true democrat and intellectual dedicated to selfless service under a fascist state, when we consider Dr. Binayak Sen languishing in solitary confinement for over a year!

The solution to our wishful thinking that competent young intellectuals like Naveen should live a full life and work at the grassroots level may be found in the answers to the above questions.

Naveen, Friendship's Gift to Me

M. Nadarajah

In life's many gifts to me, Naveen was certainly an important one.

I met Naveen Babu in 1985 when I joined the MA course in sociology at CSSS, JNU. I was allotted a room in Ganga Hostel. Naveen too joined the sociology course and was assigned to Ganga Hostel in the same year. Time and history threw us — Naveen from rural Andhra Pradesh and I, from then a small town in Malaysia — together to be classmates, both aspiring to become sociologists. We soon became good friends.

In Ganga Hostel, I had two dear friends. One was Tridib Sharma (probably in Mexico now) who was my neighbour and the other was Naveen Babu, who was allotted a room a floor below mine. Three of us met often. Because we were doing the same course and because I liked Naveen's mild manners and simple lifestyle, I spent a lot of time with him sharing many unforgettable and wonderful moments of a journey together....Life's priceless gifts to me.

As our course progressed and as we were being disciplined into sociologists, we were exposed to many ideas, particularly in the courses covering sociological thinkers and theories. Naveen and I had friendly quarrels because of the stand we took. In my theoretical pantheon, I had lodged Marx as god and Naveen vehemently argued in favour of Max Weber. In 1985 and 86, Naveen was "more" of a Weberian than a Marxist in his analysis. We continuously "clashed" — he with a "club that carried Weber" and I with a "club that carried Marx." Understanding class was one of the many areas we "quarrelled" about. But we remained close friends.

In the winter of 1985, Naveen and I discovered the non-vegetarian Punjabi dhabas in Connaught Place and the pleasures of eating spicy

Punjabi food. So on Sunday afternoons, we would take the 615 bus straight from JNU to CP, walk to our favourite Punjabi dhaba in the outer circle, order one plate of biryani and one full tandoori chicken each and silently devoured them. We simply enjoyed this routine almost all winter weekends through our MA days.

Naveen and I also probably shared our initial exposure to campus politics. We talked much about it. We attended meetings and talks of people like EP Thompson, Bertell Ollman and many local political activists together. We attended private gatherings of political activists who had gone “underground” in their state but surfaced in JNU, like Gadder. And we regularly met up at the Ganga Dhaba for all kinds of discussions.

In principle, we supported Left politics in JNU. We discussed about the complex articulation of Left politics in JNU, covering the “rightist left,” the “centrist Left” and “extreme Left.” At the initial phase of our political life in JNU, I like to believe that both of us, highly influenced by JNU’s progressive culture and the contribution of SFI to that culture, supported Student Federation of India (SFI) and many SFI candidates. Of course, by the second (MA) and third year (M.Phil) at JNU, our opinions about SFI began to change.

As Naveen was getting disenchanted with SFI politics on the campus, he was also searching for a direction in his life. Probably, he was looking for a meaning in life. I also realised that he was showing interest in girls. There was one common friend, one of our warm, friendly and pretty junior, whom he was infatuated with. He talked much about her to me. This infatuation did not develop into a settled relationship. Later (while he was doing his M.Phil), he informed me that he was intending to get married, have a family and settle down. At that time, I was really happy for him. Also, in his plans he wanted me to settle down with him in rural Andhra Pradesh, particularly if I grew older and had no family of my own to be with. His sense of community touched me. We, in a way, had plans to share our lives and grow old together.

Many things changed after that phase in his life. He had dropped the idea of marriage. By the time Naveen completed his M. Phil in 1989, he had moved to participating in “extreme Left” politics. He had also given up his Weberian analysis. He began to find “extreme Left” politics most relevant to problems faced by the poor and the working peoples of India. It offered him a methodology — even if it was a violent one — in which

he found a pathway to a better future for all people. The famous Italian film director Michelangelo Antonioni once said in an interview about violence in his films: “The violence of the oppressor is bad; the violence of the oppressed is necessary. And fuck ethics.” This is perhaps applicable to understanding Naveen and his involvement with the military arm of the political formation he was working with.

Both of us went on to do Ph.D. after 1989. I was in Periyar and he in Kaveri Hostel. While researching for his M.Phil., we worked closely on many of the ideas related to the notion of mode of production and social formation. Many a time I stayed in his room in Kaveri to discuss his research on “from Varna to *jati*.” But after his M.Phil, Naveen’s political interest and activities moved from the JNU campus and he began to spend more time in Delhi University. This relocation was also for him the transition from theory to praxis. And in the tradition of Marxist revolutionaries all over the world, he pushed his praxis from the political to the realm of the military.

Subsequently, I only heard that he had left JNU and had moved to Delhi University to do law and to continue his full participation in “extreme Left” politics. I was informed that he had become a “chief political organiser.” By then my friend Naveen only figured to me in people’s discussion. I received news about him in bits and pieces from people.

By early 1990s, our ways completely parted. Though wanting the same future Naveen aspired for, we moved in different worlds. I hardly saw him. When once I wanted to see him and know what was going on in his life, I sent out “feelers” to some common friends in Delhi University. But I was told that he had gone “underground.” He could not be reached and I could not see him.

Something told me at that time that our worlds had changed so very drastically and that I would never see him again. By mid-1990s, though he was in my thoughts, I had “lost” Naveen, to a good cause though, a cause that animated so many young people in India, all aspiring to build a free and just society for all of us.

The next significant news that came was a call to me in early 2000 (February, if my memory is correct) from a friend in Hyderabad informing me that Naveen had been killed in an “encounter.” I did not know what really happened to Naveen until many months later. I also read more about his involvement in the military arm.

I was a teacher of sociology and organization theory in a private college in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia when I heard Naveen had been killed. I was teaching class theory and had the occasion to share with my students about Marxian notion of the State and the “repressive apparatuses of the State.” In that lecture, I made a reference (and to me, a homage) to Naveen to a group of young Malaysians who may never know or appreciate the realities of India or my dear friend and such young people who sacrifice their lives to make the world a better place. When progressive politics become critically self-conscious through citizens like Naveen who light up pathways to a better future, the state works day and night to remove these ‘sites’ and push us into darkness. My reference to Naveen helped me air my emotions.

When I think of Naveen, I am gripped by a sense of loss. It is a feeling that seems to have no avenue for closure. It is one of those things in a person's life that is incomplete and without any opportunity for closure.

About a year after Naveen's death, I was in New Delhi in 2001. Avijit Pathak of CSSS, JNU and I talked about bringing out an edited volume that would pay homage to Naveen and “immortalize” his concerns through a collection of essays on social conditions in India, left youth activism, the future of youth in India and the future of India as a nation. It was a project that captured the enthusiasm of a number of persons in and outside JNU. Unfortunately, it did not take off and has since remained in my mind. Perhaps, the only way I can find closure about Naveen is to make sure this project is finally done. It is the least I think all of us for whom Naveen mattered as a person, a friend and a political/naxal activist can do. It is for a dear friend whose death is still a nagging pain of a life terminated so young but one that could have meant a world of difference to the communities and individuals that he had fought for and to all of us, whose lives he had touched.

I am 55 today. Naveen would have probably been 45 years old or younger. I am quite sure he would have visited me in Malaysia and spent time with me. I would have visited him too. We would have still “quarrelled” — he strong on his “naxal politics” and I now on the “politics of sustainability.” But these are fleeting melancholic thoughts, unrealizable... As I grow older and see the great value of some of my friends and what they mean to me and society in general, I do miss Naveen dearly.

How do we make sense of such a loss?

My Friend, Naveen Babu

S. Samuel Asir Raj

Throughout history, courageous voices raised against unjust policies have advanced the cause of democracy and freedom. Naveen, my mild mannered friend was one such voice, but who could have guessed that Naveen had it in him to raise such a challenge to the Indian State?

Naveen, I last heard that he died fighting a rearguard action to protect his comrades.

I had first met Naveen as a fellow hosteller in Ganga hostel as a IInd year M.A. Sociology student in 1986 when I had joined CSSS in JNU. Naveen and I were a world apart — I came from a city in Tamil Nadu and more comfortable with Tamil, English and Western music and was like any other Tamilian — anti-Hindi. Whereas, Naveen was from a village in Andhra Pradesh but I guess that our “Dravidian” background pulled us together in the strange place of JNU.

If I am right, in 1986 September, veteran communist (CPM) leader EMS NamboodariPad had visited JNU on the invitation of the Students Federation of India (SFI) to address a student meeting. During the questioning session, Abraham Samuel, a student from Kerala, demanded to know the CPM’s stand on cultural rights and in particular about the banning of the play “*The Last Temptation of Christ*” and the arrest of the director on trumped up charges. EMS refused to answer and Abraham persisted with the question. SFI cadres attacked Abraham as he raised slogans against CPM and its brand of leftism. I was behind Abraham Samuel as an observer and witnessed the attack. That evening SFI came out with a pamphlet condemning Abraham Samuel claiming he violated every code of behaviour in JNU by questioning a senior national leader and indulged

in an unprovoked attack on the SFI cadres. Since I was a witness, I knew that the SFI was deliberately giving a wrong version. I wanted to bring out my version as a witness. It was at this time that I first met P.D. Singh, who had just formed the Delhi Radical Students Organisation (DRSO), to write the pamphlet. It was the point in time that Naveen was moving out from SFI and was also in the process of attempting to clear his confusion regarding mainstream “Left politics.” Joining hands with Naveen, Chelli Hari Kumar and I, started the “Students Forum” — to expose the politics of compromise of SFI that dominated the JNU Students Union. Naveen was able to mobilize a mass of students to support Students Forum and many times we were able to challenge SFI domination in the campus in 1987–1988. But, by this period, Naveen’s direction in life was changing and he was becoming more radical and was questioning the insulated JNU student life, while India was boiling with regard to scandals such as Bofors, big dams, displacement and rehabilitation, Naxalite movements, Jharkhand, Punjab, Kashmir and North-Eastern movements, etc.

In 1988, Naveen joined DRSO and participated in a historic eleven-day hunger strike of JNUSU against the harassment of students and other issues, which tested his resoluteness in the face of challenges and strengthened him as an activist. In 1989, the student protests in China’s Tiananmen Square that were crushed by the Chinese government brought a new awakening in JNU. The “solidarity” was born, supported by many student organizations in JNU, including DRSO. Solidarity contested and won the 1989 JNU students union elections questioning the direction of student politics in India as conceptualized by the then dominant Left student organizations like SFI and AISE. DRSO, led by Naveen, participated in many uncompromising student struggles during this period, including the 14-day hunger strike on admission policy and other issues. The year 1989 was also a watershed in Naveen’s life as he had by now decided to leave the insulated life of JNU to participate in programmes organized by mass organizations of ML parties and was more often seen in Jantar Mantar or in Delhi University. Around this time, Naveen met a few of us and told that we had to organize a seminar in support of the right to self-determination and on the question of nationality struggles — a significant attempt to provide a platform for leaders of various struggle movements and students who supported it to meet. A seminar was successfully organized at the JNU City Center and it paved the way

for creating a link between various revolutionary organizations in India. This seminar further radicalized Naveen as he started organizing the *jhuggi* dwellers for getting their entitlements and as a representative of the DRSO, started more earnestly participating and organizing mass protests in Delhi.

The Mandal Commission protest period was one of the last times that I met Naveen. In 1989, Delhi was rocked by protests by anti-reservationists who were against the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report that recommended reservations for “other backward castes” (OBCs). Except DRSO, all other student organizations were against reservations for the OBCs. When a debate erupted among some sympathizers of DRSO, Naveen patiently explained the necessity for DRSO to oppose the anti-Mandal movement and support reservations, thereby drawing it closer to the deprived students and sections for future revolutionary politics. Becoming a key organizer of the pro-Mandalites in Delhi, Naveen tirelessly worked to unite the forces in Delhi University, JNU and among all other sections. After this period, Naveen joined Delhi University for the law course and we lost touch. When I wanted to see him or know what he was doing, some common friends in Delhi University were contacted but I was told that he had gone “underground” and I never saw him again.

Pleasant Radical: Yalavarthi Naveen Babu

Bhupendra Yadav

The late 1980s was a world without cell phones, computers and automobiles. In JNU, walking down was the usual mode of transport and slipping written messages through locked doors was the normal means of communication between students. In the “Republic of Brahmputra,” a Men’s Hostel far from the centre of JNU, we felt like Robinson Crusoe marooned on an island. After dusk it was difficult to go out from or reach this Republic, not because one feared being waylaid but because there was practically no means of transport. If JNU is known for its night life, not of the usual ‘shake your body tonight” drama but, weighty discussions on meaty topics after dinner, our Republic was sadly uneventful at nights. We were a poor bunch of young men, living in small cubicles that had no balconies, scratching paper with pens during the day and discussing the world late through the night in small groups. Pleasures were few and sipping tea on hard benches was one of the most popular ones. Yalavarthi Naveen Babu was a part of this world.

My association with Naveen was brief. I noticed that he was a very simple person, polite in conduct and rather genial in appearance. His bright eyes shone through his big frame spectacles and were very communicative. His smile was infectious and I don”t remember ever seen him laugh boisterously. Immaculate about his dress, Naveen combed his jet-black hair perfectly and kept his beard nicely trimmed. As hostellers on campus, we lived practically the same life. Immersed in our own work during the day, surrounded with our own friends during the evenings

and engaged with our favourite topics of discussion after dinner amongst our own groups.

Our groups were similar and different at the same time. Friends of mine were past Stalinist Left politics. But we were not as infected by radicalism as to consider the mainstream Left our main or sole adversary. We were present at all the ultra radical meetings in JNU. Coming from Punjab University, some of the people we knew and adored like Professor Randhir Singh or the dramatist Gursharan Singh, were all there in the radical Left camp. We were more attentive to the voices in the Radical Left but voted mainstream Left on the “lesser evil” principle. We did not want to splinter the Left vote and let some ABVP Hindu communalist or even NSUI faded nationalist win in JNU. When we knew that the Radicals would win, we voted them but this happened only once. Naveen may have not have liked this ambivalence and we were, therefore, never great friends.

I remember having justified to Naveen my ambivalence about being a private critic but public defendant of mainstream Left. My attitude on this issue, I told Naveen, was similar to what the English historian, E.P. Thompson, displayed towards the Polish dissident Leszek Kolawski. Kolawski was dismissed from his job at Warsaw University in 1968 by the socialist government in Poland and this garnished Kolawski’s ideological disagreements with personal bitterness against socialism. He used his leisure to write his classic three-volume book called *Main Currents in Marxism*. Kolawski relocated himself and got a job at All Souls’ College, Oxford. He found eager audiences of socialism-baiters all over the Western world and played to the gallery. Thompson did not like this frank sharing of judgment about domestic problems of socialism openly with anti-socialists. Thompson told Kolawski that he was no less disturbed by “really existing socialisms” but he did not criticize them brazenly everywhere and before everyone. Thompson said he criticized “really existing socialism” before socialists. You may do what you like, said Thompson, but “I critique really existing socialism at conventions to attend which I have paid my own fare and in journals run on the subscription of fellow socialists.” I asked Naveen, “Why can we not do the same?” He said something that I cannot recollect now.

Naveen was not the kind of person who leaves you with indelible impressions. He was good in a general sort of way and was committed

to “the cause” of change more solidly than any of us is. This remarkable characteristic of being great but not flaunting greatness was last seen in Gandhiji, among others. The day the news of Naveen’s martyrdom reached us, I found friends frantically looking for a snap of Naveen for pasting it with obituaries in newspapers. He had friends by the dozen and lives in their hallowed memories but none had a usable photo of Naveen on that day. A snap was finally pulled out from where it was mandatory to have one, viz. on Naveen’s admission form in JNU. This was the essence of Naveen’s life — he walked this earth very lightly, not leaving behind anything that was more than necessary. He touched us intimately, we remember him fondly but we did not have any photo of him on the day of his glorious martyrdom.

