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The Social Bases of Obedience of the Untouchables in India

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THE SOCIAL BASES OF OBEDIENCE OF
THE UNTOUCHABLES IN INDIA

BY

P.M.J. ANTONY RAJ S.J.,

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Loyola University of
Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the
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1987

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heroism inspired me in so many ways.

VITA

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PART I

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

India's 105 million Untouchables¹ form 18 percent of the total population of the subcontinent (1981 Census). Every sixth Indian is an Untouchable. They make up a little over two percent of the total world population. The very size of this minority group highlights the importance of the present study. Indian society places the Untouchables at the bottom of the caste system for reasons of purity and pollution; a position which leaves them with little or no property, income, education, power, authority, prestige, or even human dignity. Social analysts have often puzzled over why Untouchables have so long put up with being victims of their society. The purpose of this study is to address the following questions: Why are the Untouchables still in the situation of exchange exploitation in which they have existed for centuries? Why have they not attempted to change those conditions which keep them subservient?

¹ A word about terminology. Traditionally, Untouchables were known as Antyaja, Panchama and Chandala. These names refer to their status. The British colonizers called them Depressed castes, Outcasts, Scheduled castes and Untouchables in order to improve their socio-economic conditions through legislations. Mahatma Gandhi called them Harijans (children of god). Today the terms Harijans, Scheduled Castes and Untouchables are used interchangeably.

VICTIMIZATION OF THE UNTOUCHABLES

The Problem of Untouchability

The world of the Untouchables stands in clear contradiction to India's constitutional guarantee of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. In addition to the problem of poverty, this group faces the social problems associated with untouchability. The belief that the Untouchables are beyond the pale of Hinduism and caste on grounds of birth has subjected them to a number of disabilities and discriminations. These include (Galanter, 1984:15)

Denial or restriction of access to public facilities, such as wells, schools, roads, post offices, and courts.

Denial or restriction of access to temples where their presence might pollute the deity as well as the higher-caste worshippers, and from resthouses, tanks, and shrines connected to temples. Untouchables and Sudras were ineligible to become sanyasis (holy men) and forbidden to learn the Vedas (the earliest and most sacred books of orthodox Hinduism).

Exclusion from any honorable, and most profitable, employment and relegation to dirty or menial occupations.

Residential segregation, typically in a more extreme form than the segregation of other groups, by requiring them to remain outside the village.

Denial of access to services such as those provided by barbers, laundrymen, restaurants, shops, and theaters or requiring the use of separate utensils and facilities within such places.

Restrictions on style of life, especially in the use of goods indicating comfort or luxury.

Riding on horseback, use of bicycles, umbrellas, footwear, the wearing of gold and silver ornaments, the use of palanquins to carry bridegrooms - all of these were forbidden in many areas.

Requirements of deference in forms of address, language, sitting and standing in presence of higher castes.

Restrictions on movement. Untouchables might not be allowed on roads and streets within prescribed distance of the houses or persons of higher castes.

Liability to unremunerated labor for the higher castes and to the performance of menial services for them.

All this continues despite the fact that Article 17 of the 1950 Indian constitution abolished the practices of untouchability in any form. The untouchability offense Act of 1955 made any discrimination against Untouchables a criminal offence. However the Elayaperumal Commission (1969) reported that the law-enforcing authorities were weak in enforcing any legislation which abolished the practice of untouchability. To quote the Commission,

We are constrained to point out that during the course of our tours, we came to know that copies of the Act were not even available at many of the district offices and that many Government officials had no knowledge of the provisions of the act. Even the villagers complained that the guardians of law who are expected to take cognizance of the offenses under the Act were mostly ignorant of it (Elayaperumal Commission, 1969:44).

The practice of Untouchability and atrocities against Untouchables continue unabated in rural India even today.

The Problem of Poverty

The problem of untouchability is closely associated with material deprivation. Historically the Untouchables were agrestic slaves² (Kumar, 1965:3). "The land-owner can sell them along with the soil, and can dispose of them when and how he pleases. This proprietary right and the system of serfdom have existed from the remotest times" (Dubois, 1968:56). Like slaves elsewhere, Untouchables could not own any land. In fact Berreman (1963:40) claims that the low castes did not own land and house sites until after independence in 1947. Landlessness has been an attribute of the Untouchables all along.

Untouchables today rarely own land, and when they do they own less than others. In the State of Tamil Nadu, which reflects the general situation in other parts of India, only 18 percent of the Untouchables own any land while 29 percent of the total population own at least some property. Sixtysix percent of the Untouchable cultivators own less than 2.50 acres. The plots are not only small and marginal, but usually unproductive, and far removed from the irrigational tanks and canals. Increased costs of cultivation have forced the marginal farmers to abandon cultivation and join the landless. Today, 63 percent of

² Agrestic slaves are those recruited from the untouchable castes and tied to the soil and to the high caste landlords. The landlords own the serfs as much as they own their land.

the untouchable working population are landless laborers while only one third of the total population is. Mostly the Untouchables are unfree laborers who are attached to a landlord by debt, caste custom, or force of circumstances. The tenants are mostly service tenants, that is, tenants who offer their labor for whatever returns they can get at the time of harvest.

The Untouchables are poor and dependent. Wages are very low. They accept a daily wage as low as Rs 3 (\$0.30) for a male and Rs 2 (\$0.20) for a female. Seventy percent of the Untouchables are illiterate compared to 59 percent for the general population. The low literacy rate makes it hard for them to compete with others in the job market. Politically, they are reduced to a mere vote bank, casting their vote for the candidate sponsored by their landlords. Their housing conditions are very poor. The Tamil word "cherri,"³ which is used to describe their habitat, is highly indicative of their squalor and misery.

Powerlessness

The problems of untouchability and poverty make Untouchables easy victims of the landlords' fury. The

³ Traditionally the word cherri was applicable to any cluster of huts where an endogamous caste lived. For example 'papanacherri' meant the Brahmin habitat. Today cherri refers to those cluster of huts which are far removed from the main village in which only Untouchables live. They are also come to be known as "Harijan Colonies."

police and the judiciary do not provide much help. In 1978 alone, the newspapers reported 15,070 cases of atrocities against Untouchables. The police, however, filed only 7,704 (51 percent) cases. The court did not pass any judgement on 5,217 cases (68 percent of the cases filed), acquitted 2,002 cases (26 percent), and convicted 490 (6 percent) offenders. Such action by the police and courts indicates systematic class bias. For example, in 1969 a group of landlords set fire to the huts of the Harijan landless laborers in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu. Their houses were gutted, their property destroyed and 42 people were roasted to death. The Madras High Court dismissed this case for lack of evidence.

There was something astonishing about the fact that all the 23 persons implicated in this case should be Mirasdars [landlords]. Most of them were rich men, owning vast extent of lands and Gopala Krishna Naidu possessed a car. However much they might have been eager to wreak vengeance on the Kisans [landless laborers], it was difficult to believe they would walk bodily to the scene and set fire to the houses unaided by any of their servants. They were more likely to play safe, unlike desperate hungry laborers. One would expect that the Mirasdars, keeping themselves in the background, should send their servants to commit the several offenses ...The evidence did not enable their lordship to identify and punish the guilty (Economic and Political Weekly, 1973:926).

This, then, is a fair and accurate description of the life of Untouchables all over India. One would expect that these dehumanizing conditions would stimulate the Untouchables to revolt against such an oppressive struc-

ture. Since we do not find them revolting, we need to hypothesize the existence of societal mechanisms at work which keep them obedient.

Obedience is compliance with a legitimate social order and authority. Wherever human beings decide to live together and reproduce their kind they create a minimum of social stratification, social organization, authority, and a system of meaning that provides legitimacy for their ongoing social existence. These socially constructed realities demand compliance from the various classes. The demand for obedience and compliance with authority varies not only among different stratification systems but also varies by people's position within the social system.

In any closed system of stratification, such as that of slavery, feudalism, and the caste system, an extreme form of obedience is demanded from the bottom groups. For example, a complete subordination of slaves to the will of the master defines a slave system of stratification. When the master takes possession of his slave legally and socially, a slave has little choice but suspend his own judgement and be at the disposal of his master. In the same way the feudal system entails the rigorous economic subjection of a host of humble folks to a few powerful men such as the nobles, clergy, and administrators (Bloch, 1970:102). This study aims to examine the material and ideational bases that sustain hierarchical submission from

the Untouchables to the caste system. We shall first examine the force of the traditional explanatory models.

TRADITIONAL EXPLANATIONS

Belief and Behavior

The most common explanations for the submission of the Untouchables have pointed to the nature of their belief system. Indologists attribute the obedience of the Untouchables to their acceptance of the dominant Hindu beliefs about fate (karma), the transmigration of souls, and Hindu beliefs about pollution which is the basis of the caste system. In a parallel argument the Marxists say that the Untouchables are not aware that the existing mode of production and its concomitant social relations are exploitative. They have, in other words, "false consciousness." I shall argue that such explanations, though they may have partial validity, are inadequate and that the obedience of the Untouchables are not the result of the Hindu belief system or of false consciousness but due to economic dependency.

The Hindu belief system revolves around the caste system. There are numerous endogamous caste categories. One linguistic area alone - and there are 14 such areas - has 200 subcastes, which gives us some idea of the total number of subcastes in the Indian subcontinent. They are conveniently summarized into five status groups known as Varnas and arranged in an order of hierarchy. The five

status groups are: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras, and Untouchables. The ritually pure Brahmins occupy the top of this fivefold hierarchy followed in order by the others. The Untouchables at the bottom are the quint-essence of impurity.

The concepts of purity and pollution are central to the understanding of Hinduism and caste. The social system built on these concepts can be theoretically explained as follows. Just as gods are essentially pure, those Brahmins who serve them ought to be holy. In order for the Brahmins to attain and maintain a state of high ritual purity, they need other castes to perform defiling occupations and thus absorb pollution. The Kshatriyas, who are mostly kings and warriors, protect the Brahmins from foreign aggression and internal civil war. The Vaisyas till the soil and trade with neighboring states in order to feed all. The Shudras are servants. The Untouchables do the most defiling jobs which put them in contact with blood, death and decay.

All are impure in comparison with the Hindu gods. But as one moves farther away from the center of holiness to the periphery, the less pure one becomes. The Untouchables, who are at the bottom of the Hindu hierarchy, are very impure. They transmit this ritual pollution to their progeny. Since purity and pollution are transferred through kinship, the total society is divided into kinship

based ritual status groups.

No self-respecting person in any society will accept such definition of the situation. But to make the Untouchables internalize their low social status and concomitant roles within the caste system the Hindu theology has linked the social order to a system of beliefs. To an Indian mind the individual psychic self (Atman) is not an image of God, but part of the Ultimate (Brahmin). The unity that exists between man and God can never be destroyed, but can always be perfected.

The principle that maintains the unity between man and God is Karma which means action. Every action has a reaction and the nature of the reaction depends upon the morality of the action. In the context of human life this means that if an individual performs a good deed in this life he will be born to a higher caste at his next birth; alternatively, if his actions were bad he will be born in a lower caste. Driven on by the force of Karma, an individual moves from one status to another till he realizes his identity with God. Only man's union with God is real, not his earthly sojourn. This religio-ethical imperative creates a moral despotism which, it is argued, makes the Untouchables accept their life situation. Any alternative dispensation remains unthinkable. Max Weber writes,

Estranged castes might stand beside one another with bitter hatred - for the idea that everybody

had "deserved" his own fate, did make the good fortune of the privileged more enjoyable to the underprivileged. So long as the karma doctrine was unshaken, revolutionary ideas or progressivism were inconceivable (1958:122-123).

Do the Untouchables accept this logic or do they only appear to do so? The integration theorists argue that the caste system organizes a highly fragmented society and provides a unified world view for the Hindus. It has brought religion, culture, politics, and economics into one single organization and thus has established a village community with a balanced reciprocity (Wiser, 1939). This equilibrium, they argue, motivates the Untouchables not only to accept the hierarchical values but to become supporters of the system (Moffatt 1968). This is a very questionable formulation and does not agree with empirical findings.

A number of studies of individual villages reveal that the beliefs of the lower castes are quite different from those of the "great tradition" of Hinduism. The world of the "little tradition" is filled with spirits which reside in trees, rocks, and dead ancestors. Marriott (1955) and Srinivas (1955), who have significantly contributed to our understanding of Indian villages, do not find evidence of any Hindu theological concepts such as Karma or Samskara and Moksha among the villagers. In his study on the Chamars of Utter Pradesh, Cohn (1959) observed that these people did not have any idea of Karma

and rebirth in their world-view. Even Naik (1958) and Opler (1959), who specifically deal with rural religion, do not find any evidence of the beliefs about purity and Karma or of their effect in the lives of the Untouchables.

Gough (1983:302) narrates an anecdote which depicts the prevailing mood of the Untouchables and their cynicism on Karma and rebirth:

One day while sitting in Middle Pallar Street I asked a group of older Pallars (one of the Untouchable castes) their views about death, duty, destiny, and rebirth of the soul. Where did they think the soul went after death? One old man nudged another and said "She wants to know where we go when we die! "The whole group then collapsed in merriment, wiping his eyes, the old man replied, "Mother, we don't know! do you know? Have you been there? I said, No, but the Brahmins say that if people do their duty well in this life, their soul will be born next time in a higher caste. "Brahmins say!" scoffed another elder, "brahmans say anything! Their heads go round and round."

This narrative suggests that Untouchables attribute the Hindu belief system to the trickery of the Brahmins.

These empirical studies show that, while beliefs in Karma and rebirth belong to the great sankrit tradition, they are not part of the belief system of the little tradition of the Untouchables. It is therefore inaccurate to conclude that the social obedience of the Untouchables reflects their acceptance of these belief system. When we say that Untouchables are free from the world-view of the great tradition we are not denying their fatalism. The Untouchables, like any other poor peasants, may have the

moral equivalents of Karma in their little tradition, which make them fatalistic. Even so, their fatalism has strong economic roots which most Indologists have neglected. It has been left to the Marxists to explore the economic bases of Untouchables' obedience.

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

The Material Bases of Obedience

The marxists provide a materialistic interpretation of the social obedience of the Untouchables. They hold that the agrarian structure has a material and ideational basis. Land tenure, the mode of production, the productive forces, the division of labor, and the social relations form the infrastructure. The kings, the Brahmins, the landlords and other members of the ruling class have evolved the caste and Hindu religious belief systems. These reflect their efforts to legitimize the agrarian hierarchy and justify their exploitation. According to the Marxists, the Untouchable laborers fail to see the magnitude of their exploitation. They suffer from a false consciousness and that keeps them passive.

By exploring the material bases of obedience, the Indian Marxists have provided a corrective to the Indologists and cultural anthropologists who see hierarchical submission in terms of caste and Hinduism. But some of the Marxists' assumptions and claims are questionable;

specifically, their assumption that social relations changes along with changes in the mode of production does not apply to the Indian agrarian context. The emerging capitalist mode of production in India has not corroded the patron-client relation. Like any other newly independent country India has chosen a path of planned social change. A new Constitution (1950), several Five Year Plans, the process of modernization, mechanization of agriculture, and the improvement of productive forces have changed a precapitalist agrarian society into an incipient capitalist society. These changes, contrary to the Marxists' claims, have not altered the agrarian relational matrix, which continues to be one of patron and client characteristic of any pre-capitalist society.

Incipient Capitalism and Unchanging Social Relations

The Indian agrarian mode of production evinces all the indices of an in-coming capitalism. For example, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture estimated in the 1960s that 46 percent of the total crop production was marketed. Sinha (1980:22) has claimed that,

during the last 30 years virtually the entire rural economy has been drawn into the vortex of money-commodity relationships and almost 100 per cent of commercial crops and 40 to 60 percent of the food crops are brought to the market and sold as commodities.

There is also a clear evidence of a substantial growth in the use of capital inputs in agriculture, such

as fertilizers, tractors, irrigation, pumpsets etc. These are indicators of incipient development of agricultural capitalism in India (Economic and Political Weekly, 1981:A(143-145)). However, I will argue in this study that change in the mode of production does not necessarily alter the principle of hierarchy which regulates social relations.

The Marxist's idea of false consciousness as an explanatory model for the social behavior of the Untouchables is also untenable. No one denies the fact that false consciousness is a state of mind that may prevent workers from recognizing an exploitative situation. However, the social obedience of the Untouchables cannot automatically be attributed to their misperception of objective conditions. They have their own rational calculus of equity and exploitation which the urban elites or social scientists of different theoretical persuasions cannot understand. In an agrarian economy the individual Untouchables have no alternate means of survival than their dependency on land. For them stability and security of subsistence income are more critical to their evaluation of the patron/client relationship than benefits they might gain by breaking away from their landlord patrons. Even if they were fully aware of their objective conditions, they may see no alternatives to submission other than starvation or revolt.

The Marxists' structural metaphors of infra- and super structures can serve as heuristic devices for analysis and may accurately locate the roots of exploitation and inequality. But to reduce caste to a mere class is monocausal reductionism. Both the class structure and the belief system shape the social character of the Untouchables. Any explanatory model of the social obedience of the Untouchables has to take into consideration both the material and ideational bases that shape their social character.

In brief, I hold that a crude Marxist model in which change in the mode of production directly alters social relations is not applicable to the agrarian structure in India. Changes in the mode of production have not, at this point at least, produced major changes in the social relations in which the Untouchables are embedded. Moreover, the obedience of the Untouchables cannot be attributed only to a state of false consciousness because there may be other repressive factors, subjective (internal) and objective (external), that may inhibit agrarian radicalism.⁴

THE REASON FOR OBEDIENCE

⁴ Marx did not have much faith in the ability of the poor peasants to revolt. He compared them to a sack of potatoes incapable of agrarian radicalism. He was talking mainly of peasantry in European feudalism. But the twentieth century has seen more peasant revolutions than any other period in history (Wolf, 1969).

The traditional interpretations based on Hindu world-view and the economic mode of production and false consciousness offer only partial explanations to the problem of obedience of the Untouchables. Given the complexity of the agrarian social structure and the values of hierarchy integral to that structure we may better explain the social bases of obedience of Untouchables through "cumulative causation" (Myrdal, 1968). I argue that such an explanation needs to be centered around three broad critical factors - land, caste and the belief and practice of untouchability.

Elements of Social Coordination

In the process of building up a permanent resident work force and safeguarding their religious purity and socio-economic status, landlords have used the Untouchables as a class and untouchability as an institution to insure a continuous supply of cheap labor. The essential condition for creating such a class was to deprive the untouchable laborers of access to the land and its resources and to maintain a negative religious status for the Untouchables through institutional arrangements.

All agrarian classes willing to live together, cultivate the soil, and reproduce their kind have to solve the problem of land ownership (who is to own, control, and use the land), the division of labor (who is going to do

what, when and how), and the distribution of goods and services (who gets what from the collectively produced goods). No agrarian society has hitherto solved these problems in a way satisfactory to all its groups or classes. On the contrary, as Moore (1978:10) has rightly pointed out, each society has solved these problems "by working out rough and ready principles of social inequality and teaching each other with widely varying degrees of success to accept and obey these principles. They create, as they go along, an implicit and sometimes explicit social contract". Eventually a system of ideology grows around such contract, legitimizing the social system.

Jajmani, a Form of Social Coordination

The people of India have solved the problem of social coordination by bringing land, the division of labor, and the distribution of goods into a stable economic relationship without devaluing the ritual purity of the high castes. This socio-economic arrangement has come to be known as the JAJMANI SYSTEM. It is defined as an "institution or social system within Indian villages made up of a network of roles and of norms integrated into the roles and into the system as a whole, and legitimized and supported by general cultural values" (Kolenda, 1963:13).

In Polanyi's term it is "substantive economy" .⁵ In order to comprehend how they have achieved such role-integration where kinship, sacred and secular, and politics are blended in perfect harmony, we have to start with the socio-cultural and political meaning of these three critical concepts: land, division of labor, and distribution of goods.

The Meaning of Land

In any agrarian society governed by a substantive economy like the Jajmani system, land is the single most important source of survival and those who control it dominate the society. The Indian peasants, like traditional peasants elsewhere, agree on the economic meaning and utility of land, but the meaning of land goes far beyond the mere economic function of land. They "regard the earth, as Mother Earth, a deity, and the crops and manure are regarded as Lakshimi, the goddess of wealth, the domestic lamp, granary, a heap of grain, grain-measure, etc. are all objects of ritual respect" (Srinivas, 1950:30). Like any other element such as the sun and moon, air, water, and other cosmic forces the land

⁵ I use substantive economics as understood by Polanyi: "The substantive meaning of economic derives from man's dependence for his living upon nature and his fellows. It refers to the interchange with his natural and social environment, in so far as this results in supplying him with the material means of want satisfaction" (1957:243).

goddess has SAKTI (power) to create and recreate, to build and destroy, and to produce and reproduce. Sakti encompasses not merely the Weberian idea of power, but also "carries the concepts of strength, energy, and vigor but strength based on a spiritual embodied force not merely on physical force" (Wadley, 1977:138). It is because of the spiritual connotation attached to land, that landowners think of themselves as God's chosen and privileged ones. The flow of such spiritual and material blessings judiciously follow the usual hierarchical order. People at the bottom get neither the spiritual nor the material blessings. This idea runs through most of the writings of the Hindu sacred scriptures.

Land as political power, that is, as a real or potential ability to make another person to do one's will, has been equally important to the Indian peasants. Neale (1969:7) says that for a traditional Indian peasant land-to-rule has been an anterior idea to land-to-own. In fact, Neale contends that land-to-own is a late differentiation of a more general concept, land-to-rule (Neale, 1969:7). This view had already been expressed by Sir Henry Maine:

Land in Pre-British Indian society was one of the aspects of rulership, whether viewed in the person of a rajah, in the body corporate of a bhaichara (brotherhood) village, or in the person of the Zamindar, the closest approximation to pater familias. Thus, the Indian view of land was also political (1969:7).

Today, with the advent of democracy in India, the ownership of land has become the surest access to economic and political citizenship and to a share in the sovereign power of the state. It is because of the growing socio-political importance of land that political sociologists equate land tenure with domination - a domination by virtue of constellation of interests, and of a position of monopoly (Weber, 1986:30).

This spiritual and political dimension of land puts the landlords not only at a vantage point in the power equation, but makes them deeply attached to their land. The psychological attachment to land, however small the plot may be, is common to all traditional Indian peasants. If for reasons of bad luck they have to sell part of it, that day becomes a day of mourning for the household.

The hour of transfer is indeed a sad one, and the farmer will complete the necessary formalities with a heavy heart. For several days the family atmosphere remains overcast with gloom. The womenfolk may even wail and shed tears of real grief. In the sentiments of an Indian peasant, the Earth occupies a mother's position and parting with a fragment of it is nearly tantamount to separation from the mother (Dube, 1967:75).

The peasants of Ramapura attribute loss of land to "non-virtuous life involving gambling, drinking, women or marijuana" (Srinivas, 1976:109). These and other ethnographic observations reveal that, to a traditional Indian peasant land is not like any other commodity to be bought and sold but "Sakti", which no one wants to part with.

The Hindus believe that all land belongs to Gopal (God) but de facto, of course, it is individuals who own it. There are three theories on the original system of land tenure system in India. Smith (1914) argues that the soil was originally the property of the king. Maine (1890) argues for the existence of communal ownership of land, while a theory of individual ownership has been advocated by Baden-Powell (1957). Though these authors disagree on the origin of the ownership of land, they concur on two things, (a) land in practice is always owned and controlled by the high castes, and (b) the landowning class made use of the Untouchable laborers to till their soil.

Division of Labor

The high caste landlords cannot realize income from land without labor. At the same time they avoid work in their fields for religious and social reasons. Thus the book of Manu (X. 84) forbids them to do any agricultural operations because to touch a plough and engage in other arduous works pollute them. Second, any landowner who wants to be called a MIRASDAR (landlord) must show that he has the prestige corresponding to his mirasi-status and that some families work in his field on a permanent basis. Rights to land have, therefore, been accompanied by a caste-based division of labor which assures the landlords

a continuing and compliant supply of labor. Village studies speak of a permanent reservoir of landless Untouchables who supply cheap labor to the landlords- (Beteille, 1965; Fuchs, 1981; Gough, 1983). Fuchs (1981:- 248-249) writes,

Permanent field labourers were required also because certain landowning castes, like Brahmins and various Rajput clans of higher rank were prohibited to do manual work. They would be degraded if they put their hand to the plough. Nor could their womenfolk help in field work as they were often secluded and not permitted to leave the house.

Such land-owning classes could in the past employ slaves and serfs. Thus they were assured of a permanent labour supply, even during the harvest and other busy seasons because slaves and serfs could be and were often ended out by their masters for work

The caste system assured the landlords such a permanent supply of labor. Any typical village in India has ten to fifteen castes. These castes are grouped into four occupational categories: priestly castes, agricultural castes, artisan castes, and the Untouchables. The agrarian relational matrix is centered around Jajmans (landlords) who control land and land-related institutions. They supply land for cultivation. Those dependent on the Jajmans are called Kamins (clients), and they range from the highest Brahmins to the lowest Untouchables. The Jajmans employ Brahmin priests to offer daily or weekly worship in the village temple and invite them to officiate at marriages and other ceremonial functions in their home. The priest's position as a mediator between gods and men

gives him the highest status in the Hindu society because the Hindus believe that the Brahmin priests can avert or cause danger. The artisan castes, such as carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, washermen, barbers, sweepers and water-carriers, offer their services and products to the jajman. The Untouchables, to whom is attributed the capacity to absorb pollution, are mostly agricultural laborers. Some of them are appointed as village servants to do all menial and defiling occupations for the village community. This division of labor guarantees a permanent supply of labor to the landlords and at the same time allow the landlords and Brahmins judiciously and scrupulously to observe rules of pollution and purity.

Distribution of Rewards

Traditional agriculture was based on barter rather than monetary economy. In such an economic system the jajman pays his clients in kind. In his "The Social System of a Mysore village" Srinivas (1955:11) outlined the features of a village distributive system which can be recognized in almost every part of India. The kinds of payment the jajmans make is arranged in a hierarchy of prestige (Nagaswamy, 1978:106-111). The land gift is at the top and is the most permanent form of payment. Still the payment holds only as long as a particular office is held, thus indicating the impermanence of land ownership.

Payment in grain is less prestigious than land. Grain payment also implies enduring and valued relationships. The distributive system does not create any affectual bond between the Jajmans and Kamins but provide a safety and defensive perimeter around subsistence.

Jajmani: Colaborative or Exploitative?

An uncritical and distanced look at the Jajmani system may give the impression that it is based on the principle of balanced reciprocity as described by Wiser (1939:10). He writes,

These service relationships reveal that the priest, bard, accountant, goldsmith, florist, vegetable grower, etc. are the jajmans of these other castes. In turn each of these castes has a form of service to perform for the others. In this manner the various castes of a Hindu Village in North India are interrelated in a service capacity. Each serves the others. Each in turn is master. Each in turn is servant, each has his own clientele comprising members of different service within the Hindu community is called the Hindu Jajmani system

Wiser underlines the mutual interdependence and interrelatedness which implies "a cohesive system with great equality" (Beidelman, 1959:4-5). But this seemingly balanced reciprocity of the system and the self-sufficiency of a village community under the system masks a social closure, an underlying domination, a division of labor, a hierarchical structure inherent in the caste system, and a system of meaning which legitimizes such domination. It is through these structures of domination

and systems of beliefs and values that landlords are able to maintain the Untouchables as a permanent labor force. We need to look at the types of domination in the jajmani system a little more closely because the obedience of the Untouchables is a response to such a system of domination.

Forms of Domination

Domination over the landless under the Jajmani system is mostly direct and personal. The villages in India lack mediating structures such as self-regulating markets, judicial systems, educational systems, and an advanced polity. In the absence of such mediating structures, and in the presence of wide-ranging socio-cultural customs, institutions, and obligations, the domination is very personal, especially in the sphere of labor (Bourdieu, 1977: 183-197; Beteille, 1974:57).

The most elementary form of personal domination is the direct domination of one person by another. Ultimate personal domination involves the appropriation of one person by another as in the case of slavery, and other forms of unfree laborers like attached and bonded laborers. From the despatches of Cornwallis, the governor-general of India, and his despatches to the Board of Directors we know such personal appropriation existed under the Mirasi system, a variant of the Jajmani system, in pre-British India. He writes,

A large portion of our most industrious subjects, (says the Madras Revenue Board), are at present totally deprived of a free market for their labour, restricted by inheritance to a mere subsistence, and sold and transferred with the land which they till - confined to a condition scarcely superior to that of the cattle which they follow at the plough (quoted in Saintsbury, 1829:10).

Even today the landlords cannot ensure a permanent supply of labor unless they win the landless personally and tie them to their land and to themselves. Land and caste play decisive roles in the process of direct dominations.

The landlords maintained their domination through physical and symbolic dominations. Indian history is replete with the use of coercive power and other excessive and oppressive discipline to make Untouchables comply with landlords' demands. The masters beat the Untouchable serfs at pleasure, "bound to pillars for a whole day, or to their limbs are fastened iron weights which the poor creatures are unable to carry" (Pandian, 1899:46). Their masters kept them on starvation rations and did not give them any free time except on religious feast days (Fuchs, 1981: 249). Some of the landlords were rural despots who maintain a small private army equipped with guns, spears, lathis and other weapons in order to intimidate the landless. The more "genteel" ones preferred gifts and other forms of generosity to physical violence because they knew physical violence tends to have a spiralling effect. Such direct domination continues today.

The landlords also exercise symbolic domination through exchange of gifts, loans and similar acts of generosity and philanthropy. Landlords provide the landless with their basic means of subsistence (the granting of steady employment or land for cultivation), subsistence crisis insurance (loan in time of crisis or sickness), protection (from private and public dangers), brokerage and influence (to extract rewards from the outside) and collective patron services (subsidizing local charity and relief, donation of land for communal use, support to local public services). Through these favors, gifts, loans and other acts of generosity, the landlords communicate to their client a strong message of lasting bondage. Every traditional society adopts such symbolic domination because it is a way of maintaining structures of dominance and ensuring a constant supply of labor.

Social Closure

This domination has created a social closure. It is a process by which dominant castes, Brahmin and non-Brahmin⁶ landlords, seek to maximize land and land related resources. Thus they restrict access to these resources and other economic and political opportunities to them-

⁶ Sociologists tend to classify a village population into Brahmins, non-Brahmins and the Adi-Dravidas (Untouchables). Brahmins and the Adi-Dravidas are the pure and impure respectively and the non-Brahmins occupy the middle tier in this three way classification.

sleves (Parkin, 1979:44). This entails the juxtaposition of the "we," the eligible landlords, and the "they," the negatively privileged landless Untouchables. The privileged "we" enjoy status, land, power, and quasi-control over the police force and other institutional resources. The negatively privileged Untouchable landless are deprived of status and denied any access to land and what it can buy for them, such as education, political power, quality health care etc. There have been some attempts on the part of the Untouchables to improve their status and remove their socio-economic disabilities, but the orthodox Hindus vigorously opposed any such attempts from below (O'Malley, 1932:152-155), and for the most part the Untouchables remained passive and obedient:

However, notwithstanding the miserable condition of these wretched Pariahs, they are never heard to murmur, or to complain of their low estate. Still less do they ever dream of trying to improve their lot, by combining together, and forcing the other classes to treat them with that common respect which one man owes to another .. Nothing will ever persuade him that men are all made of the same clay, or that he has the right to insist on better treatment than that which is meted out to him (Dubois, 1968: 50).

Based on the traditional agrarian relational matrix we can hypothesize that the caste system with its practice of untouchability is an effective form of social closure which denies the Untouchables not only access to status, but also to land, power and education. The monopoly of resources makes the landlords dominant and the

Untouchables powerless and dependent. The Untouchables, who interact with the caste Hindu landlords as tenants and landless laborers, can only improve their life chances through deference, obedience and loyalty to their landlords.

Social Change and Unchanging Social Bases

So far we have shown that the traditional agrarian structure and social institutions are centered around the ownership of land, the division of labor, distribution of goods and services, and the ideology of pollution that hovers around them. We also have argued that the Untouchables' obedience is due to their poverty and their economic dependency upon the landlords. In other words, if poverty were eradicated and the practice of untouchability abolished then the Untouchables would not be subservient to the landlords, and the patron-client dyad would be changed into a capital-labor relationship.

Social scientists have predicted that social change, such as sanskritization⁷, secularization, social reforms, planning and legislations, particularly land reform legislations, will restore the human dignity to the Untouchables and remove poverty and its consequences. Their prediction was based on the assumption that these changes would create new power-brokers such as teachers,

⁷ For explanation, see Chapter 4

lawyers, judges, politicians, government officials, union leaders and other intelligensia who, with a new pattern of system linkages and communications, would radicalize the poor peasantry to circumvent the traditional bureaucracy for an equitable distribution of existing resources and a humane treatment of the Untouchables. As we shall see in Chapter 4, this did not happen because the new institutions and organizations created their own hierarchy which reinforced hierarchical caste values. Beteille writes (1974:65)

The predominance of hierarchical values in the largest sector of a society has implications for the society as a whole. When new organizations are created they are frequently pervaded by these traditional values. Thus, in India it is remarkable how quickly co-operatives, Block offices and even school boards become involved in hierarchical patterns. In the first place, recruitment is highly selective partly because of existing inequalities in training and ability and partly on account of prejudices against the "culturally backward". Secondly, these organizations develop their own hierarchies and concerns for status which often distort the very ends which they are designed to achieve.

The hierarchization of organizational structures more assures the presence of hierarchical domination in Indian society than makes equality a possibility.

The omnipresence and multiplication of the caste hierarchy raise the question of whether the government has the credibility and ability to pass meaningful legislations and implement them effectively. The answer, as we shall see, is negative. The Indian State at both the

national and regional levels are dominated by the high caste land owning classes. A government dominated or strongly influenced by the landholding group is unlikely to effectively implement any legislation which will reduce the power and status of this group. If such a government passes radical legislation, it will be either to legitimize its rule or will be an act of grace. We know too well that grace and politics are antithetical.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we can see that the caste system is a rigid form of social stratification which denies the Untouchables not only status but also land and other economic and political opportunities. Modernization, instead of restoring power, has modernized domination and increased cases of atrocities against the Untouchables (Sachchidananda, 1978:25-34). Given their powerlessness and dependency, the Untouchables, who interact with the landlords as tenants and landless laborers, subject themselves to the arbitrary and exploitative reciprocity set by the landlords. Their only way of getting access to sustenance is through obedience and loyalty to their landlords. The institutions of caste and untouchability are instrumental in maintaining such unequal reciprocity. In the final analysis, I will argue, their obedience is a response motivated more by expediency

in a structure of domination than a voluntary compliance, as the Indologists would assume, or due to false consciousness, as the Marxists claim. This will be the focus of my study.

The study is diachronic, attempting to understand the changes in the obedience behavior of the Untouchables against the backdrop of their traditional obedience behavior. Archival material, historical records, and travel records by foreign visitors and missionaries can give us a sense of the past, but they do not tell us much about the current behavior of the Untouchables. What has been depicted in the records has over the years undergone change, and to know the changing social bases of obedience, we need empirical research. I chose a village in Chengalpattu district, Tamil Nadu State to conduct for field work on which this study is based.

There were number of reasons for selecting this location. First, I have been familiar with this district since 1975. Such a familiarity with the place and people, particularly with the formal and informal authorities, not only saved time but also facilitated data collection enormously. People who intially mistook me for an army recruiting officer started offering coffee once they recollected my precious stay with them. It was the same with the government officials, most of whom had been in their position for a considerable period of time.

The issue of whether such a village is typical and whether findings can be generalized is crucial for research of this type. However, persons familiar with India will recognize that all administrative districts are similar to one another in the distribution of caste groups, practice of untouchability, ownership of land, division of labor and distribution of goods and services. If there are any variations at all they are minor.

Another criterion for selection of a site is the numerical preponderance of Untouchables in Chengalpattu district. This district has the largest concentration of Untouchables (32 percent) among the sixteen districts of Tamil Nadu. Though this district has the highest concentration of Untouchables, there has not been any movement toward their mobilization and revolt. Data for the present study are drawn from Malligapuram, a cherri, in this district. Mostly Paraiyans, who form 95 per cent of the total population, live in the cherris so that the terms Cherri and Paraiyans are used interchangeably in Chengalpattu district.

The study has two parts. Part I focuses on a broader theoretical, literary and historical understanding of the problem of the Untouchables. In chapter 1, I have already delineated the research problem in a broader theoretical perspective. I shall show in chapter 2, that the existing literature on caste and untouchability gives the reader an

establishment bias and reveals the academician's penchant for a partisan sociology rather than an accurate description of caste and untouchability. So far, no serious attempt has been made to provide a view from below. In chapter 3, I focus on the social history of Paraiyans, one of the untouchable castes mainly found in South India. The basic thrust in this chapter is to show historically that Paraiyans were slaves attached to land and the practice of untouchability reiterated their slave conditions. Chapter 4 deals with various attempts, and their impacts, at abolishing the practice of untouchability and eradicating poverty.

Part II focuses on the social bases of obedience of the Untouchables at a micro level. Chapter 5 provides a socio-economic and political profile of Malligapuram, an Untouchable habitat, in its relation to Uthiramerur. In chapters 6 and 7 I shall marshal evidence to argue that the obedience of the Untouchables is not due to their belief in Karma or pollution or due to false consciousness, but that their subordination is due to economic dependency. In chapter 8, I shall argue that the Untouchables at Malligapuram are so preoccupied with subsistence minimum that they will not do anything that will jeopardize the guarantee of such subsistence. Finally in chapter 9, I conclude that accomodation and submission are more expedient for the Untouchables than revolt under the

given circumstances. This expediency is based on the fear of losing the subsistence minimum which the present system guarantees.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In chapter 1, I argued that the dependency of the Untouchables on a caste based social order has made them subordinate to the structures of domination in India. Their behavior is not a voluntary internalized response, but a collective response (collective conscience) to an inevitable social order which they want to destabilize but cannot do by force of circumstances. This thesis, that the cumulative impact of material and ideational factors shapes the social character of Untouchables, does not, however, emerge in the currently existing sociological and anthropological literature. A review of the existing literature on caste and untouchability suggests an establishment bias and reveals the academicians' penchant for a partisan sociology rather than for providing an accurate description of the caste system.

In this chapter I shall first explore the scriptural understanding of caste, the description of caste roles and statuses, and their interactional patterns. Second, I shall present the various scholarly interpretations and observations on the scriptural understanding of the caste system. Finally, I shall review the sociological and anthropological literature and examine whether caste, as

presented in those studies, truly reflects the literary model. It is the literary model which has set the tone for most field work in India. These scholars have made important methodological and theoretical contributions to the development of sociology in India. Their works shape our current understanding of caste and untouchability in India.

THE CLASSICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CASTE

Caste in the Hindu Scriptures

Vedic and post-vedic Hindu sacred literatures provide us with a literary basis for the caste system in India. The Rig Veda mentions three classes of people, namely, Brahmins (priests and theologians), Kshatriyas (kings and warriors), and Vaisyas (commerce). Later, the ninetieth Hymn of the Tenth Mandala of the Rg Veda, also known as Purusha Sukta, was the first scripture to mention the existence of four status groups including Sudras. The hymn says:

When the gods divided Purusha, into how many parts did they cut him? What was his mouth? What arms had he? What two objects are said to have been his thighs and feet?

The Brahmana was his mouth, the Rajanya¹ was made his arms; the being called Vaishya, he was his thighs; the Shudra sprang from his feet.

Later the authors of Taittiriya Samhita, Satapatha

¹ Rajanya is another name for Kshatriya.

Brahmana, Aitareya Brahmana and other writings take for granted the existence of these four classes. The Vedas does not mention anywhere the existence of Untouchables. It is this absence that caused Gandhi to conclude that the Untouchables are a later accretion to Hinduism.

As the Indian social structure can be described in terms of arrangements of roles and statuses of these four Varnas in a hierarchical order, the scriptures and those who interpreted them have defined the nature and function of these status groups in occupational and religious terms. We shall attempt presently a short description of these Varnas. Varna means color but today it stands for division of Hindu society into four orders, viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. The first three are known as twice-born, as they are entitled to wear the sacred thread at the initiation ceremony known as Upanayana, while the Shudra are not permitted to wear the sacred thread. The Untouchables are totally outside the pale of Hinduism. Hindu religion has provided an ideology to integrate these elements into a functional whole.

Brahmins

The Brahmins, who are assumed to have come from the mouth of god, occupy the highest rank in the hierarchy. They are ordained to preach the word of god and perform the sacrifices. Such a priestly role involves necessary

training in the sacred scriptures and in the art of priest craft under a "guru" (a learned man). "The social and economic privileges of the Brahmins were unsurpassed by those of any other priesthood. Even the excrement of a Brahmin could have religious meaning as a divination means" (Weber, 1958:60). The Atharava Veda demands that princes should appoint only Brahmin priests as chaplains in their court. This provides the scriptural foundations for a blending of ritual and secular power.

In the course of time it is reasonable to suppose that the Brahmin priests became conscious of their social and ritual importance and came to expect influence and power to be theirs. "It is a normal tendency for the priesthood in a highly integrated, ritualistic society to become more worldly, more ambitious; the sacred domain is secularized from within" (Lannoy, 1971:216). There has always been tension between the Brahmins and Kshatriyas who wielded spiritual and secular power respectively. But when the Brahmins' spiritual power encroached on the boundaries of the secular power of the king they always reached a compromise. The tension between the sacred and the secular always produced a new synthesis.

Kshatriyas

The kshatriyas, who are of the warrior class, come

from the arms of God. The Laws of Manu describe a Kshatriya king as great deity in human form. The kshatriya kings are empowered with power and authority to protect the population politically and militarily. The king used his power to bring unity, peace, and harmony to the kingdom. The king who does not protect his subjects from thieves and robbers is held liable for damages done to them. To win a war the king relies heavily on the mediation of Brahmin priests who intercede gods blessings on the king and his kingdom. Such a mediation is central in any theocratic society.

At the beginning of every war the king was expected to order the Brahmins to offer sacrifices for the success of his warfare. If he lost a war, the defeat was attributed to his sins and the sins of his subjects. "That king is good whose subjects are prosperous and experience no famine. Famine was always a sign of magical offense or the charismatic insufficiency of the ruler. In case of need, the king does penance. The people may and should get rid of a king found permanently divested of his charisma" (Weber, 1958:64).

Vaisyas

The Vaisyas, who come from the stomach of god, are the commoners. Viewed negatively they lack the ritua-

listic, social, and economic privileges of a priestly and lay nobility. Viewed from below, in contrast to the Shudra, the Vaisyas are entitled to own land. In classical sources the Vaisyas are peasants and traders. The Vaisyas long ago gave up farming but continue to be traders.

Shudras

The Shudras, who come from the feet of God, are the servants of all those above them. The law books enjoin the shudra to dutiful service. The Manu Smriti says, "Merely to serve the Brahmins is declared to be the most excellent occupation of a Shudra; for if he does anything other than this it profits him nothing." Only when he can find no service is he permitted to become an independent trader or craftsman.

To integrate these four status groups, which are basically a social division of labor, into a harmonious whole, Bhagavad Gita, the Bible for the Hindus, provides a religious ideology. The Gita says (Book 18:45-48):

They all attain perfection when they find joy in their work. Hear how a man attains perfection and finds joy in his work.

A man attains perfection when his work is worship of God, from whom all things come and who is in all.

Greater is thine own work, even if this be humble, than the work of another, even if this be great. When a man does the work God gives him, no sin can touch him.

A man should not abandon his work, even if this be humble, than the work of another even if this be great. When a man does the work God gives him, no sin can touch this man.

These scriptural texts are not merely an account of creation but were easily used by the dominant class to justify their privileged positions in the hierarchy.

What is unique about these scriptural texts is that they present caste as a hierarchical system and immutable. Hierarchy is the

principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole, it being understood that in the majority of societies it is religion which provides the view of the whole, and that the ranking will thus be religious in nature (Dumont, 1970:66).

This dimension of hierarchy, with its religious overtones, runs into every aspect of Indian life. Opler (1972:4-5) writes about the pervasiveness of hierarchy in India,

The varna, castes, and subcastes are not only distinct -they are graded. In fact, there is very little in Indian life and thought which is not placed in some hierarchical series. The great division of time decline in merit throughout their progression. The holy men, or sadhus, who are supposed to be casteless and unworldly, nevertheless belong to ranked groups jealous of their prerogatives and sensitive concerning their rightful place in the religious processions. Interpretations pertaining to age, sex, food, work, and even the parts of the human body are all colored progression from high gods to the humblest of local spirits.

The status and roles are irreversibly fixed within the hierarchy. There is no possibility of change.

CASTE IN THE EYES OF THE FOREIGNERS

This literary account of caste and its vibrant presence in India have influenced foreign visitors, administrators and missionaries from earliest times. Megasthenes (180), a greek traveller, recorded seven endogamous classes, and described how each class was assigned to do a particular occupation. There was no occupational mobility among them. He uses the word "division" in reference to these groups, not caste, and there is no mention of Varna theory in his writings. Al-Biruni (973-1030) mentions the four-varna theory of the caste system. Adu'l Fazl 'Allami (1786), an administrative officer in Akbar's court, notes the origin of the Varnas from the limbs of God. According to Cohn, Fazl follows Brahminic theory in attributing these divisions to the mixture of the original Varnas through intermarriage (Cohn, 1968:4-11).

The early European travelers, such as Tavanier (1667) and Barbosa (1866), also remarked on the caste system as a sui generis institution. Tavanier reported on various Hindu beliefs, rituals, and customs through his Brahmin informants. Cohn (1968:5) says,

Striking in Barbosa's description is his matter-of-fact and objective approach in trying to describe what he saw and that he was told; he presents his description of the caste system organized as a hierarchy with Brahmans on top and Untouchables on the bottom. There is no reference to the Hindu theory of the varnas and no moralizing about the benefits or evils of the

system.

Brahmins, the literati in ancient India, introduced foreign visitors into Indian culture, and therefore the visitors were mostly reflecting, and often uncritically repeating, the views of the Brahmins on the Indian culture and social system. Barbosa, one of the Portuguese visitors, spoke of the Brahmins in glorious terms.

They are learned in religion, possess many books on religious subjects, believe and respect many truths, and have powers of excommunication and absolution. For their learning and piety, they are held in the highest esteem by everyone, even the kings (Lach, 1968: 362).

Such admiration blunted the foreign visitors' critical sense.

Much later the British colonizers and the Christian missionaries started studying caste. Their writings indicate a change from initial wonderment to later accommodation to caste. The British administrators' initial motto was "administration with a minimum of government" (Bougle, 1971:80). Minimum administration also produced minimum understanding of indigenous customs, beliefs and laws. But when the British took control over the country at the Queen's pleasure they took pain to study the various problems of the people. The British administrators, most of them academicians, maintained personal diaries and official records on the culture and civilization of Indian. The works of Baines (1912), Risley (1915), and Thurston (1909) on castes and tribes

have become a mine of information for researchers working on caste and tribes in India. The district directory, prepared by the British officials, provide us with a socio-economic profile of every district. These works are more descriptive than analytical.

The British administrators looked at caste from an administrative perspective and as far as possible they refrained from interfering with caste. The missionaries, however, viewed caste as a barrier to conversion. They faced both an ethical dilemma and opposition from the Hindu masses. The ethical dilemma consisted of the incompatibility of Christian egalitarianism and structured caste inequality. The Catholic and Protestant responses to this dilemma were different. The Catholic response has been one of accommodation (Dubois, 1906; Nobili, 1971). This is the leitmotif in the writings of Robert De Nobili, the founder of Madurai Mission, and of other Christian missionaries. De Nobili writes,

By becoming a Christian one does not renounce his caste, nobility or usages. The idea that Christianity interfered with them has been impressed upon the people by the devil, and is the great obstacle to Christianity (cited in Forrester, 1980:15).

Such accommodation has saved the converts, particularly of the higher castes, from social dislocation (Forrester, 1980:16).

Along the same lines Dubois, a French Catholic missionary, expressed supreme contempt for the low caste

converts. He wrote,

one is bound to confess that the evil reputation which is borne by this class is in many respects well deserved, by reason of the low conduct and habits of its members.....

Pariahs, being thus convinced that they have nothing to lose or gain in public estimation, abandon themselves without shame or restraint to vice of all kinds, and the greatest lawlessness prevails amongst them, for which they do not feel the least shame. (1968:54-55).

The author suggests that these low castes might have been decimated but for the support they received from the caste system (Dubois, 1968: 28-29).

The posture of accomodation among Catholics has not changed since then. Whenever faced with such an ethical dilemma the Catholic Church has been ambivalent. In 1978 there was a dispute in the diocese of Trichinopoly over whether there should be a wall separating the cemetery of the high caste from the low caste. The Untouchable Christians broke the barrier but the bishop permitted the high caste Christians to build the wall of separation again. Some bishops do not see any contradiction in separating the high caste Christians from the Untouchable Christians in the precincts of the churches. The Protestant missionaries at first were willing to tolerate a degree of caste distinction both in their schools and among their converts. But later, when they realized the vissicitudes of caste system and the vested interests of Brahmin hegemony, they denounced it as a value system in

direct opposition to Christian egalitarianism. Maynard wrote that caste and Christianity are incompatible:

Caste is rigid; Christianity is responsive and adaptable. Caste is a system; Christianity is life. Caste is of the law; Christianity is of faith.. Caste is of the dead past; Christianity of the eternal future. Caste rests on a conception of the ultimate reality of the distinctions between men, accepts and fixes these, and gives no hope of a change. Christianity rests on a conception of the equal value of all men before God, and the temporary character of all earthly distinctions. The two are incompatible (quoted in Forrester, 1980: 143).

As this incompatible value system destroyed the notion of Christian community, the Protestant missionaries insisted that their converts renounce caste either at baptism or at confirmation.²

In brief, visitors to India, British administrators and Christian missionaries found in India a society built on hereditary specialization, a sacred hierarchy, and mutual repulsion which was different from theirs. They also observed the centrality of Brahmins in the social order. Bougle (1971) writes,

It is remarkable that in their broad lines, the hierarchies which have been obtained in this way coincide with the hierarchy consecrated by Brahmanic tradition. The Brahman's prestige is still the magnetic centre of the system from which emanate the lines of force coordinating the mass of castes. The esteem in which the Brahman holds it is the measure of a caste's dignity.

More than anything else the Europeans realized that the

² For an elaborate treatment of this subject refer Forrester's (1980) work on Caste and Christianity.

caste system was an institution having infinite resilience to absorb any western values and yet maintain a bramin-centered identity. Bougle (1971:93) warns his western colleagues,

India in its own way recalls what Japan has violently taught us. The ancient civilizations of the east learn to use all the apparatus of European civilization, but it is to defend themselves: if they change their bodies it is to protect their souls.

The mystique of caste system made the curious ones look into its origin.

ORIGIN OF CASTE

Along with foreign and missionary efforts to understand caste there was another group of scholars trying to trace out the origin of caste. The authors who sought to understand the origin of caste first grappled with the use of the word caste and then its definition. The Eurocentrists preferred to call the original population of Australia primitive hordes; the population of Africa, Asia and South America advanced tribes; they reserved the use of state or nation for "civilized Europe" (Fried, 1975: 88-98). But they soon discovered that the Indian social system was more than a tribal one. The Portuguese used the term CASTA to describe the population in India. Philologically the word Casta comes from the Latin root castus, meaning chaste or purity. Then analogically caste (an anglisized version of casta) means preservation of

purity of one group from the other.

From the choice of the word we can recognize how the foreign observers tried to bring in their own perceptions and assumptions in describing a social reality alien to them. The mediterranean civilization was preoccupied with ethnic purity in order to establish the purity of lineage of the nobles and aristocrats. The classical case in point is the genealogical tree found in Matthew (1:1-17). One of the purposes of this was to establish the fact that Jesus belonged to the Davidic royal lineage. Similarly in medieval Europe the nobles carefully avoided any intermarriage with the other social classes.

The key phrase for the scholars who traced the origin of caste was purity of descent. The idea of separation of the pure from the impure surfaces in every definition of caste. Dumont, a French structuralist, defines caste as follows:

The society is divided into a large number of permanent groups which are at once specialised, hierarchised and separated (in matter of marriage, food, physical contact) in relation to each other. The common basis of these three features is opposition of pure and impure, and opposition of its hierarchical nature which implies separation and, on the professional level, specialisation of the occupations relevant to the opposition. This basic opposition can segment itself without limit. The religious scale of hierarchy is related to the secular scale of power and wealth (1961:34-35).

Once caste had been defined in terms of purity of descent then the scholarly search for the origin of caste was to

find a correlation between purity of descent and occupation. Hutton (1963:170-182) and Klass (1980), for example, deal extensively with the major hypotheses dealing with origin of caste. Klass ridicules the hypothesis that God is the architect of caste system. He vehemently denounces the racial hypothesis of Risley (1908), and the occupational hypotheses of Ibbetson (1883, 1916), Maine (1887), Senart (1930), and Weber (1956). It is his contention that the caste structure has evolved from a totemic equalitarian group system by means of improved technology and rewards of agricultural production. He contends that ideological manifestations, such as purity and pollution, are later additions to the mode of production.

All the literatures on the origin of caste must grapple with the ideas of occupation and purity. The authors debate whether it is purity of descent that determines a group's occupation or occupation that makes one impure. Even scholars like Klass (1980), who advocate an economic hypothesis, have to make room for the concept of purity later in their analysis as it is one of the key factors in the whole drama of the caste system in India. Consequently, the Indologists approach the problem textually and sociologists and anthropologists approach the problem empirically.

Some Indologists believe that what is written in the

Hindu scriptures is real. They understand the caste system through its past and explore the vast store of traditional scriptures and their subsequent interpretation. Indological sociology has sought to bring into synthesis a body of knowledge on all phases of India's age-old civilization and culture. It has been marked by a strong emphasis on sociological traditionalism.

The Indologists hold that caste is not merely a social institution but part of Hinduism. Weber writes, "Caste, that is, the ritual rights and duties it gives and imposes, and the position of the Brahmins, is the fundamental institutions of Hinduism. Before everything else, without caste there is no Hindu" (1958:29). Caste is so integral to Hinduism that a Hindu without a caste will be a contradiction in terms (O'Malley, 1932:190). Indologists also hold that caste is the primordial reality which conditions economic and social institutions after its image. Therefore caste is an irreducible and immutable given.

Dumont (1970), the chief exponent of this model, propounds his theory on caste in his book Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System. Sociologists, according to Dumont, must examine the ideas and values which orient the whole. "Any concrete, localized, whole, when actually observed, is found to be decisively oriented by its ideology, and also to extend far beyond it"

(1970:37). The central value that determines the behavior of the people is the binary opposition between purity and pollution which is the foundation of hierarchy. Dumont writes (1970:

The three principles [hierarchy, separation and division of labor] rest on one fundamental conception and are reducible to a single true principle, namely the opposition of the pure and the impure. This opposition underlies 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 and hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites.

The values of purity and pollution are intimately related to the notion of untouchability, and without these values the caste system would lose its legitimacy. If caste is a socio-religious system independent of material conditions and political power, then as Dumont (1970) suggests, the Untouchables can overcome caste only by a willful, conscious abnegation of the principle of hierarchy beginning with a radical devaluation of the status of the Brahmin. This means that the Untouchables can wrench themselves from the caste system only through caste action, not through class action.

This type of literary approach has exercised a decisive influence on the analysis of Indian sociological problems, not only on caste problems, but also those of kin relations, family and marriage. But some of the Indo-

logists (Aurobindo, 1946; Mueller, 1925) seem to assume that what is written is real, "and the older a manuscript, the more true its contents."

Learning is almost synonymous with pouring over palm leaf manuscripts. This bias in favour of literary and antiquarian material is most clearly seen in the syllabuses of indological studies in our universities. Indology has come to be regarded as knowledge about India's past. Any suggestion that Indology should include the study of tribes and villages which are in existence today would be regarded as too absurd to merit consideration (Srinivas, 1962:130)

Indian social institutions, however, are not as static as have been presumed by both Indian and Western scholars. They have undergone tremendous changes, and a scriptural understanding can not adequately explain the changing realities. For example, the idea of Varna as found in the scriptures is too rigid to explain the present development and proliferation of castes. The Varna scheme, for example, is assumed to prevent any upward mobility, but there have been numerous cases of upward mobility. Srinivas says that such misrepresentation would not have happened if educated Indians had not assumed that the idea of Varna adequately explained the factors of the caste system.

The only cure for this marked literary bias lies in doing field-research. The field worker, confronted by the bewildering variety and complexity of facts as they actually are, is forced to relate what he sees to what he has assumed it to be, and the lack of correspondence between the two results in his attempting to reassess the written material (Srinivas, 1962:130)

Srinivas (1952, 1962, 1966) strongly advocated the field study method as a proper tool for the study of Indian villages.

VILLAGE STUDIES

The early village studies were attempts to find out how close the villages were to the Metcalfean idea of a "little republic" and Maine's "primitive communism." Baden-Powell (1892) exposed the myth of primitive communism in The Land Systems of British India. He convincingly argued that land was privately owned and administered in South India. The works of Mann (1915), Slater (1918), Malavia (1956), and Mukherjee (1957) demythologized the idea of village communities as little republics. They observed that village markets, communication and transportation had made villages interdependent and that happy isolationism did not exist. Unfortunately the earlier scholars were economists who were mainly focusing on economic variables, such as market mechanisms, and the means of production. In 1955, Majumdar decried the fact that anthropologists and sociologists had so far had been content to leave the business of study and evaluation of rural life and its multifarious problems in the hands of economists.

In the same year the challenge of Majumdar coincided with the gathering of sociologists and anthropologists in

Madras under Karve and Redfield to discuss problems of village studies. The conference created a new enthusiasm among sociologists and anthropologists for producing new monograph studies which would explain various aspects of Indian culture and civilization. It would be impossible for me to review all the works produced since then. But I shall try to analyze the major works as they relate to social change and social mobility.

Dube (1955), Marriott (1955) and Srinivas (1955) who produce the first three studies of villages, dealt with two issues, the inter-relationships between different dimensions of rural organizations and institutions, and methodological problems. The authors start with a few basic observations on regional background, ecology, and physical structure. Though each studied a different village there are many portions of their work which can be compared with other villages, especially their data on the number of castes, the balance of caste separation and intercaste dependence, the relations of land tenure to social structure, the importance of maintaining status relationships between castes and between individuals, the possibilities of change in status of groups or individuals, and caste and subcaste factions. Most of these researchers have touched on key elements of social changes, such as the disintegration of the social system, the decline of caste-based occupations, the increasing use

of money, political factionalism, changes in the interdependence of castes, and economic opportunities for the depressed classes.

These authors also dealt with certain methodological issues in their studies. Mariott (1955:ix) wrote in the forward to his book,

Indeed, the primary interest that brought about this volume is not the effort to understand India and her changes. It is the effort to understand how to seek understanding of any great civilization and its enormously complex changes through anthropological studies of villages.

The authors faced two methodological issues. One was the choice of the unit of analysis and the other the decision to stay in a particular locality for participant observation. A major controversy focused on whether caste or village should be the unit of analysis. Their decision to use the village as a unit of analysis is based on the assumption of village solidarity. This made the researchers look for solidarity everywhere; even where none existed.

Dumont and Pocock (1957) questioned the use of the village as a unit of study on the ground that the assumed village solidarity and harmony among castes are largely an artificial creation and a myth. They say that such unity and harmony did not exist even in the early times. On the contrary, what actually did exist was commensual and connubial ties between villages on the basis of their

kinship. Srinivas summarizes their view as follows,

Caste is even today an institution of great strength, and as marriage and dining are forbidden with members of other castes, the members of a caste living in a village have many important ties with their fellow caste living in neighboring villages. These ties are so powerful that a few anthropologists have been led into asserting that the unity of the village is a myth that the only thing which counts is caste (1955:6).

Only when researchers saw caste as a possible unit of analysis did they start to explore the process of subordination from a voluntary and/or forced perspective. But none of these scholars have tried to merge caste, village, and economic organization into one theoretical framework.

The second methodological issue was a problem involved in the field method itself. The decision to stay in a particular locality for participant observation has its own bias. Srinivas stayed at the Brahmin Agraharam³ during his field work which constrained his movement to collect necessary and relevant data. He (1976:24) writes,

While collecting genealogies and household censuses, I deliberately excluded the Harijan ward as I thought that I should approach the Harijans through the headman both as a gesture of respect to him and also to make sure that I got the maximum co-operation from them.

Such discomfiture is very common among researchers. Beteille (1965:9) in his introduction to Caste, Class and Power writes:

I did my field work in Sripuram while living

³ Agraharam is a Brahmin settlement.

with the people as one among them. I was permitted to live in the agraharam, in a Brahmin house - a privilege, as I was often told, never before extended to an outsider and a Non-Brahmin. I dined with the Brahmins and had access to most of their houses. I was perhaps the only Non-Brahmins ever to have sat and eaten with Brahmins in Sripuram on ceremonial occasions. I was identified with the Brahmins by my dress, my appearance, and the fact that I lived in one of their houses.

The stay at the Agraharam limits the researcher's interaction with other castes, particularly with Untouchables. This restricts the choice of the informants. Most of these researchers had Brahmin informants who provided their own point of view on caste and untouchability. When Berreman asked Untouchables about caste and Karma, the respondents replied that the researchers had stayed too long with the Brahmins. Gough (1981:ix) says,

The village's Harijans [untouchable agricultural laborers] lived outside the main village sit, as is usual in Tamil Nadu. Many of them passed by my house on their way home from work and stopped to chat, although the Brahmins prevented them from entering, in accordance with the caste custom.... My greatest difficulty was in persuading the landlords to let me visit the Harijan streets, an act strictly forbidden to Brahmins and avoided by Non-Brahmins.

Other researchers have had similar experiences. It is hard, therefore, to see much difference between the foreign visitors who were guided by Brahmin literati and the modern researchers who stay at an Agraharam. In the final analysis, sociologists and anthropologists have presented a top-down view of caste system (Mencher, 1974:-469). Despite such a bias scholars have contributed a

great deal to the understanding of Indian villages.

Most of the village studies have certain themes. Damle (1961) and Sinha (1974) enumerate 28 and 17 themes respectively dealt with in rural studies. The most common themes are social change and social mobility. The direction of social change and social mobility depends on the scholars' understanding of caste as a system of stratification. Students of caste propose three models of stratification and hence three types of social change and mobility.

The classical model sees caste as a closed system (Dumont and Pocock, 1957). A closed system is one in which different components are combined in a proportionate way in order to form a perfect whole in which religious ideas and values determine the social behavior of the people. These scholars hold that the caste system has reached such a state of near perfect integration that stability and individual immobility prevailed for endless centuries, even millennia (Barber, 1968). "To the Hindu... social mobility is both impossible and immoral in this worldly life" (Barber, 1957:342).

Srinivas (1955), Marriott (1955), and Singer (1959) have observed mobility in the caste system. To explain change within the caste hierarchy they develop a number of sensitizing concepts and theories. I shall deal with some of the basic concepts and their relevance to the study of

Indian society. Using *Gemeinschaft* and *Gessellschaft* (Tonnies, 1887) and mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim 1968) Redfield (1950) coined the terms "great tradition" and "little tradition" to study the urban-folk continuum in the Yukatan. He wrote (1950:70):

In a civilization there is a great tradition of the reflective few, and there is a little tradition of the largely unreflective many. The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities. The tradition of the philosopher, the theologian, and literary man is a tradition consciously cultivated and handed down; that of the little people is for the most part taken for granted and not submitted to much scrutiny or considered refinement and improvement.

These two traditions develop independently (orthogenetic process) "in terms of its own creative urge," but they confront each other through political domination and war. The dialectics between the great and little traditions create a new synthesis. Such synthesis is more visible in cities than in villages.

Redfield's frame of analysis influenced Srinivas (1955), Singer (1971), and Marriott (1955) in different ways. Basing his work on Redfield's conceptual model Srinivas coined the word "sanskritization." Today this is the most comprehensive and widely accepted anthropological concept of social and cultural change in Indian civilization. Whereas caste was traditionally thought of as a rigid and closed social order wherein no upward mobility

was possible, Srinivas observed in his Ramapura village a fluid middle tier whose members seek higher status than the one assigned to them. The process of such mobility he called sanskritization. It is a process by which people of lower strata, but not the Untouchables, change their customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of high and twice born castes. The Coorgs in Mysore, the Vanniyars in Tamil Nadu, the Bhils and Oraons of Central India have achieved social mobility through sanskritization. The claim is made over a period of time, a generation or two. The higher caste may or may not accept the claimants' efforts towards mobility (Srinivas, 1966:6).

Basically sanskritization is emulation. The process of emulation involves two groups, a high caste whose ways are emulated, which Srinivas calls the dominant caste, and a group that emulates. A dominant caste is a positive reference group.

For a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizable amount of the arable land locally available, have strength of numbers, and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy. When a caste has all the attributes of dominance, it may be said to enjoy decisive dominance (Srinivas, 1966:10).

Srinivas observes that usually it is only one caste that emerges as the dominant caste in a village, or in a region. The Sadgop is a dominant caste in West Bengal; Patidar and Rajput in Gujarat; Maratha in Maharashtra;

Kamma and Reddy in Andhra; Okkaliga and Lingayat in Mysore; Vellala in Tamil Nadu; and Nayar and Syrian Christians in Kerala. Dube (1968) disavows the corporate nature of the concept of dominant caste and argues that individuals dominate a rural society not a particular caste.

When there are pronounced inequalities of wealth, prestige, and power between different individuals in a so-called dominant caste, and where dominant individuals exploit the weaker elements in their own castes as well as non-dominant castes, it will be inappropriate to think of it as a dominant caste (Dube, 1968: 59).

Oommen (1966) speaks of a power pool shared by many dominant castes. The concepts of sanskritization and dominant caste have been used extensively to study social change in India, but in the process they have mostly lost their analytical and explanatory force.

Singer says, "My own observation in India.... have led me to join the ranks of those disaffected with the classical theory of modern and traditional societies" (1971:161). He attributes this disenchantment with classical theory of social change to his association with Redfield. In his observation among the Brahmins of Madras city he found "the Great Tradition of Sanskritic Hinduism" undergoing change in the face of modernizing ideology, of course without Brahmins losing their identity. There is much more of an interplay between traditionalizing and modernizing trends, than a process of modernity uprooting

tradition. Singer (1971) calls the process that mediates the interplay between traditionalizing and modernizing trends "compartmentalization." By this he means that Brahmins are able to follow a modern model in a ritually neutralized work sphere and a traditional one in their domestic and social life.

Marriott, another associate of Redfield, says that Redfield's concepts of great and little traditions have to be modified in the study of little communities in an indigenous civilization. He writes,

If we would describe the small world of a village within the universe of Indian civilization, we must at some time consider two related questions of method: (1) can such a village be satisfactorily comprehended and conceived as a whole in itself, and (2) can understanding of one such village contribute to understanding of the greater culture and society in which the village is imbedded... (1955:171)

He coins the terms "parochialization" and "universalization" to describe the interaction between the great tradition and little tradition. Parochialization is a downward devolution of great-traditional elements and their integration with little-traditional elements without affecting the creative work of little communities (1955: 200). Universalization refers to the upward movement of a little community toward a great-tradition and an identification with its legitimate form.

These concepts, used to explain social and cultural changes in India, are built on the assumption of immuta-

bility of caste. Even when some form of mutability is assumed, the authors assume only the possibility of positional changes within the caste hierarchy, but not change of the system. In particular, they assume that mobility cannot take place at the extremes, that is a Brahmin cannot become less pure than what he is today and an Untouchable cannot be anyone else other than an Untouchable.

These scholars measure social change and mobility exclusively in terms of the purity and pollution continuum, and economic interests such as ownership and control of land do not surface in their analysis of social change. Gough (1955, 1959, 1981), Mencher (1974), Omvedt (1978, 1980, 1981), and Ranadave (1979), in contrast, provide an economic interpretation of social change and social mobility. Gough (1959:115) writes,

I suggest that... castes' roles in the economy, and the power-relations which these give rise to, are the prime determinants of their ritual rank-fixing relationships. Neither in the present nor the past can the ritual ranking of castes be understood without reference to the political and economic system in which they are embedded.

In this model, a change in the economically determined social relations is possible only through redistribution of the means of production, and peasants can achieve this through mobilization and class-struggle. Gough (1981: 337-338) attributes the change from an Asiatic mode of production to agrarian capitalism, the legal abolition of

slavery, the growth of tenant farming, the loss of hereditary ties between laborers and their erstwhile masters and other changes to class struggle.

The economic interpretation of social change and social mobility reduces caste to a mere occupational role, which caste is not. However much economic interests and ideas play an important role in defining caste, purity and pollution must be integral to the definition of caste. Any study of social change has to merge the ritual and economic aspects of caste into one single theoretical framework. Beteille (1965) has attempted to merge caste and class in his study of changing patterns of stratification at Sripuram village. He shows that there is both a class and caste system in Sripuram village. He groups the 42 castes at Sripuram into three broad categories, namely, Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas. Traditionally, the three major caste blocs correspond with the the three principal agrarian classes - landowners, tenants and landless laborers. Ritual power has been the basis of stratification in traditional Sripuram village, but economic development and political modernization have enlarged the bases of social stratification. Non-Brahmins are buying land and contesting for electoral offices. The Adi-Dravidas are freed from agrestic slavery to take up other occupations. This change is made possible in Sripuram, not through class conflict between landowners

and landless, but mainly through an anti-Brahmin movement (1965:212).

These three approaches provide two models of social mobility, namely, varna and caste models. Scholars have disproved the traditional conception of caste as a closed system of stratification and they have shown that caste is becoming an open system (Baber, 1969:18-35). Shudra srivaishnavas achieved upward mobility through playing a religious role at the Thiruvengadam temple at Tirupati in the fifteenth century. Oran (1959) reports on the ascendancy of the Munda tribe to kshatriyahood. Under the Moghul empire there had been upward mobility among various middle castes through military and other clerical services. Most social mobility from one caste to another is group mobility. Such mobility has occurred among all castes except the Untouchables.

The class model of social mobility interprets occupational changes as incidences of mobility (Gough, 1981). Breman (1974) says that there may be occupational mobility, but the landless laborers are still unfree. He writes, "... (A)gricultural laborers cannot escape the control of the dominant landowners. Attachment as farm servants symbolizes the dependent condition in which more or less the great majority of Dublas lives" (1974:227). But even if we concede occupational mobility, it does not automatically or necessarily give the Untouchables status

mobility. This aspect of social mobility among the Untouchables has been studied by scholars dealing with the problems of Untouchables in India.

STUDIES OF THE UNTOUCHABLES.

Sociological studies focussing specifically on the Untouchables are relatively few. Risley (1891) and Buchanan (1807) made occasional references to the depressed socio-economic conditions of the Untouchables. Buchanan recorded that the Untouchables were slaves and were paid just basic necessities of life (1807: 226-227). Thurston (1909) described individual untouchable castes, their origin, and social and religious customs in South India (1909). Later Hutton (1946) attempted to trace out the origin of caste in India. However, most of the writings in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century are descriptive accounts of the life of Untouchables. At best, they are informative, but do not provide analytical insights.

Beginning with the 1920s we get more detailed studies of the untouchables. Brigg's (1920) work on Chamar was the earliest full length monographic study. Brigg, a protestant missionary, approached the problem of Chamars from the missionary perspective. He started with the origin of chamars and then goes on with their life history. He attributed the misery of the Untouchables to

caste and Hindu religion. Being a Christian missionary, he felt that the Chamar Untouchables would be better off in Christianity.

Over the years sociologists and anthropologists have documented that the conditions in India have undergone tremendous changes due to secularization, westernisation, modernization, nationalism, democracy, industrialization, urbanization, technology, and reform movements. Scholars such as Beteille (1965), Cohn (1955), Fuchs (1969), Gough (1955), Harper (1968), Lynch (1968), Parvathama (1968), Patwardhan (1966), Silversten (1963), Singh (1969), and Zelliott (1970) have dealt with various aspects of social change among the Untouchables. These authors have identified the factors that have helped the Untouchables to attain social mobility. However, their focus on social mobility is limited to education, change of occupation (Harper, 1969; Beteille, 1965), political mobilization (Lynch 1969; Zelliott, 1970), sanskritization (Cohn, 1955), and social movement and social change (Fuchs, 1965; Gough, 1981). The aspect of status mobility is missing from their writings because intra-caste mobility has not taken place in India.

ASSESSING SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO CASTE

So far we have been looking at how different authors have dealt with various aspects of caste and untoucha-

bility. We shall now evaluate the literature from the classical sociological tradition of social order. Like any other society Indian society is also preoccupied with order and peace. The Hindu intelligentsia has worked out a socio-religious system which will hold all disparate forces into one unified whole known as the caste system. Caste stands for stability. Authors like Dubois tend to think caste provides order and stability to the Indian society. Dubois (1968:28) writes,

I believe caste division to be in many respects the chef-d'oeuvre, the happiest effort, of Hindu legislation. I am persuaded that it is simply and solely due to the distribution of the people into castes that India did not lapse into a state of barbarism, and that she preserved and perfected the arts and sciences of civilization whilst most other nations of the earth remained in a state of barbarism.

The same author says that the Untouchables might have become extinct but for the caste system.

We can picture what would become of the Hindus if they were not kept within the bounds of duty by the rules and penalties of caste, by looking at the position of the Pariahs, or outcastes, who checked by no moral restraint, abandon themselves to their natural propensities (1968:29).

Dubois is so preoccupied with the peace and order dimension of caste that he fails to see its tyranny in reducing the Untouchables to a subhuman level.

Dubois' concerns are shared by many Indian sociologists who belong to the functionalist tradition. Ghurye, trained in Ethnology and Sociology at Cambridge,

looks at society in terms of unity and stability. He is convinced that Hinduism and the Indian ethos must and does contribute to the stability of social structures. As Damle (1985:58) concludes, Ghurye "was mainly concerned with the problem of integration of the Indian society and was very apprehensive of the danger of disintegration arising out of the various threats posed by considerations of region, caste, language etc.." Srinivas, a disciple of Ghurye and Radcliffe Brown, was very impressed by functionalism and strongly advocated its method and theory to his fellow researchers. This influenced his choice of the village as the unit of study and his adoption of the holistic approach. In his studies he clearly exposed the interplay of society and religion for a societal integration.

Some of the structural functionalists see caste as a perfect system of value consensus wherein the Untouchables not only accept the values of hierarchy, but become supporters of the system. Moffatt (1979: 290) writes,

We are arguing, in common with Dumont and with the ethnologists, that at the deeper levels of Indian village culture so conceptualized, Untouchables and higher caste actors hold virtually identical cultural constructs, that they are in nearly total conceptual and evaluative consensus with one another.

These observers attribute tensions and conflicts within the system to technology and modernization ideology, but argue that those tensions are easily contained and

equilibrium established by the system (1985:43).

The overwhelming concern among functionalists for social order goes against data provided by Gough (1976, 1981) and Omvedt (1982), who claim that the landless untouchables do not accept an exploitative social order but are forced to accommodate it through the use of power. Omvedt (1982:25) writes,

A close look at the notorious "atrocities against the Harijans" that seem to be going on everywhere today will reveal the significant changes that have occurred in Indian agriculture since independence. The cases of Kilvenmani, Belcchi, Bajipur, Pipra may appear to be feudal in the violent, goonda [muscle men] nature of the onslaught, but the very ferocity of the attacks shows the growing rural tensions and the degree to which dalit [untouchable] labourers are beginning to challenge the village power holders.

Gough (1976) says there had been nearly 77 peasant struggles in Pre-British India between the landlords and the landless, and the contemporary agrarian scene is becoming very volatile. She also argues that the participation of the Untouchable laborers in the past and present peasant struggles is significant, but that their participation is thwarted by the heavily militarized state.

The data show that Untouchables have not been passively accepting of an unjust social order as presumed by structural functionalists. Gough (1983) and Omvedt (1982), coming from a Marxist tradition, even label the Untouchables "a proletariat." But mere discontent or occasional unorganized rebellion do not make the Untouc-

hables a class for itself. The absence of revolution, despite overwhelming exploitation, is a sure sign that there is no emergent class consciousness among Untouchables.

The bourgeois Marxist intellectuals in India are very dogmatic in their analysis of Indian society (Gough, 1981; Namboodiripad, 1979; Ranadive, 1979; Singh, 1979). Their internal debate over the mode of production (feudal, semi-feudal, Asiatic, or precapitalist), and their latest controversy over whether caste belongs to the infra- or super-structure (Gupta, 1981) have not enlightened anyone. They argue that only a class interpretation of caste will truly reflect the Indian reality and they relegate purity and pollution to the superstructure. This structural metaphor may explain the forces of exploitation but does not portray accurately the social reality.

Dogmatism of this type does more to salvage the theory than to allow an interplay of theory and facts which is a sine qua non for the healthy growth of any science. The Indian social structure is caste as well class. Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Untouchables are defined both in terms of purity and pollution and in terms of their relation to the means of production. Class and caste are not disjunctive but conjunctive. Purity and pollution operate effectively both at the infra- and super-structural levels.

The Marxists hold that the economic contradiction and exploitation can be overcome by class consciousness. But the data marshalled by Gough (1983) and Omvedt (1982) concern mainly struggles between high caste and Untouchables. As long as economic decisions are made on the basis of caste, class consciousness will remain an unrealized concept. Sivakumar and Sivakumar (1979) content that Marxist premises do not hold enough explanatory value to understand their data drawn from two villages. They conclude,

Notwithstanding the evolution of class structure since 1916, and notwithstanding the drastic changes in production relations since the 18th century, we find that the cognitive world is not characterised by "class consciousness." The consciousness, if we may hazard the use of such a value-loaded term, is highly complex with elements of awareness of the consequences of the distribution of income, intermixed with a reinforced awareness of ritual distinctions pertaining to jati. This element of cognitive dualism manifests itself particularly strongly among the "have-nots" (1979:283).

Particular theoretical biases provide major reasons why the structural functionalists and the Marxists both fail to provide a realistic picture of the problem of Untouchables in India. Part of the reason for the lack of articulation between village empirical realities and theoretical perspectives is that most students of Indian social reality are either foreign to Indian society and culture, or urban-based Indian scholars belonging to the upper or middle strata. They are unfamiliar with the

Indian rural tradition and culture. Such unfamiliarity leads to specious conclusions. For example, some researchers enter into the field with a battery of preconceived notions, mainly derived from incomplete literary sources about village life in India, postulating the unity of the Indian village, the presence of primitive communism in the villages, and the Vedic notion of a five-tier Varna scheme etc.

Whether a researcher is a foreigner or urban based Indian, of structural-functionalist or Marxist predisposition, the prevailing approaches to Indian rural reality have been a top-down view. By that I mean that the scholars studying the caste system draw their inspiration from the Brahmanic scheme of things and they have been looking at it from the vantage point of the upper castes. Srinivas who himself is a Brahmin by birth accepts that there has been such a bias throughout history.

In every part of India only a few castes at the top enjoyed a literary tradition while the bulk of the people did not. Under British rule the top castes applied the intelligentsia which acted as the link between the new masters and the bulk of the people. And the new intelligentsia saw the social reality through the written literature, regarding the deviations from the latter as aberrations. This group also perpetrated an upper caste view of the Hindu social system on the new masters and through them, to the outside world. Conditions prevalent among the upper castes were generalized to include all Hindus (Srinivas in Desai, 1984: 787).

As long as such a bias in perception exists we many never

get to know the story from the bottom groups. The present study tries to redress this bias by looking at the Indian society from below.

CHAPTER III

THE UNTOUCHABLES: THEN AND NOW.

To understand the patterns of obedience among the Untouchables we need to see them in their historical context. As the Vedas do not mention the existence of the Untouchables in any one of their hymns, we have to infer that they are a later accretion and stand outside Hindu-fold. The sanskritic terms of ANTYAJA (the last born), MLECHHA (a non-Aryan, an outcaste), AVARNA (outside the varna), and CHANDALA (an outcaste) are indicative of their exterior status. It is because of their low position in Hinduism that Hutton calls them an "exterior caste," connoting exclusion but not extrusion (1963:193).

MODELS OF UNTOUCHABLES

Based on their exterior position, two models of the Untouchables have emerged, namely, an outcaste model, and a consensus model. The outcaste model implies an earlier disjunction between the pure and impure. It recognizes that the untouchables are an outgrowth of the caste system, hence they do not have a separate culture of their own apart from the total Indian culture. The "outcaste" image has both negative and positive aspects. The negative image portrays the Untouchables as a group of

people given to their natural propensities, such as drunkenness, shamelessness, brutality, truthlessness, and uncleanliness. The positive image delineates them as a group free from the obsessive high caste culture. The Untouchables are the skeptics and demystifiers of caste, perhaps even its existentialists and protorevolutionaries (Berreman, 1960; Mencher, 1974).

Dumont (1970) and Marriott and Iden (1974) are the exponents of the consensus model. The former approaches unity from a structural point of view and the latter from an ethnosociological point of view. Both these variants are basically concerned with ideology. "Both models state that there is a consistent set of underlying principles that structure Indian cultural conceptions, that these principles are found universally within India, but that they are also unique to India" (Moffatt, 1979:24). For Dumont, since the Indian social structure is built on the binary opposition of purity and impurity, the Untouchables should know about their impurity as the high castes know about their purity. In substance it means that unity demands that Untouchables accept their status of impurity. Ethnosociology assumes the Untouchables "to be sharers in a deep cultural grammar common to everyone in Hindu village India" (Moffatt, 1979:30).

The unity model provides the conceptual basis for Moffatt's consensus model. He defines caste as a

structure of meaningfully as well as functionally inter-dependent elements, and he views culture "as a complex layered system of definitions, meanings, values, and attitudes." For him, the Untouchables, as part of the whole, not only accept the values of hierarchy but eventually become supporters of the system. He writes, "[T]hose persons who are, in egalitarian terms, among the most oppressed members of Indian society are also among the truest believers in the system that so oppresses them" (1979:304).

These models explain the behavior of Untouchables in terms of hierarchy and unity respectively. But none of these models view the Untouchables as a bottom group forcefully integrated into a system of exploitative reciprocity,¹ and at the same time violently excluded from the resources. Therefore, looking from below we view caste on a hierarchical integration-exclusion continuum with an built-in proclivity for domination. The obedience of the Untouchables has to be situated in this continuum. The social history of Paraiyans will reveal their forced integration and exclusion.

I am focussing on the Paraiyans because of their numerical preponderance in Tamil Nadu,² South India. It

¹ I have borrowed this expression from Moore (1978).

² Pallans, Paraiyans, and Chaklliyans are the three major Untouchable castes in Tamil Nadu. Among them, Paraiyans constitute 59 per cent of the total Untouchable

is hardly possible to provide a complete and comprehensive picture of Untouchables because of the diversity of the Untouchable population. Ninety percent live in villages, and 10 percent live in the cities. Some are fair skinned and others are dark. Nor do they speak a common language to form a homogeneous cultural entity. Each region has its characteristic component of Untouchables which are different from those of others. The Untouchables are also known by different names in each region.³ Despite their diversity, all the Untouchables have two key things in common, namely, poverty and the stigma of pollution. Therefore a study of any untouchable caste from any part of India will highlight how these two characteristics affect the Untouchables all over India.

I focus on Paraiyans in Chengalpattu district because this is the district with the highest concentration in the State. They form 26 per cent of the total population and 94 per cent of the total untouchable population in that district. Paraiyans, apart from enjoying numerical preponderance, are also one of the well documented Untouchable castes in Tamil Nadu. These factors make a

population. Two-thirds of Paraiyans are concentrated in Chengalpattu, North Arcot, and South Arcot districts.

³ The best known Untouchables are: Mala and Madiga in Andhra Pradesh, Banghu in Bihar, Holey a in Karnataka, Puleya and Cheruman in Kerala, Mahar in Maharastra, chamars in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, and Pallan and Paraiyan in Tamil Nadu.

study of the social bases of obedience of Paraiyans in Chengalpattu district feasible and useful. We shall study their history as follows: their origin; position during the Hindu and Mohametan regimes; and position during the British period up to 1947.

WHO ARE THE PARAIYANS?

I have attempt to reconstruct the history of Paraiyans mainly from ethnographic records (Pandian, 1899; Saintsbury, 1829; Tremenheere, 1891; Dubois 1906; Thurston, 1909;) and from the historical works (Nilakantasastry, 1955; Hjejle, 1967; Manickam, 1982). The semantic origin of the word Paraiyan is probably derived from the Tamil word "parai" which means to beat the drum, since drums are made of leather and persons who have contact with leather are polluting. Such a derivation associates caste with occupation. But Francis, Collector of Madras, says (1810-19) that the old Tamil sangam literature and the works of the early Christian missionaries who worked among the lowest strata of the society do not mention the word Paraiyan, nor do they associate Paraiyans with any particular occupations. Kanakasabai (1956) mentions that the ancient Tamil country was stratified into Arivar (sages), Ulavar (farmers), Ayar (shepherds), Vedduvar (huntsmen), Valayar (fishermen) and Pulayar (scavengers), but he does not make any reference to Paraiyans. Their

absence in the ancient literature supports Dubois' (1906) hypothesis that the Paraiyans are most probably composed of all the disreputable individuals from different classes of society, who, on account of various offenses, had forfeited their right to associate with "respectable" people.

However, contrary to Dubois' hypothesis, there are indications that Paraiyans once occupied a higher status and even privileged positions before successive invasions, first by Dravidians and then by Aryans, reduced them to slaves. From Pandian's (1899) account of Paraiyans we learn that the Paraiyan Pattan Samban,⁴ was one of the 63 Siva devotees and he was revered by all the castes. The Nandan, a pariah King, introduced tholkasu (leather money) during his regime. Nandan, another Paraiyan siva devotee was admired because of his devotion, asceticism and moral excellence. Thiruvalluvar, the author of the renowned Kural (200 A.D), was a Paraiyan. Thirunilakanta Yazhapanar, Kannappan and Thiruppan Alvar, the great hindu saints (700 A.D), are from the Paraiyan community. Finally, as Nagasamy (1978:100) concludes "... [F]rom inscriptions we learn that some members of their community held respectable posts and have even made gifts to temples. In an inscription from Thirumuruganpundi in

⁴ Samban or Sambavar is another name for Paraiyans.

Coimbatore district, a Vellala⁵ is called Pariah. He was called Pariah Danapala of the Mappulli sub-caste, among the Vellalas."

Stuart indicates that Valluva Paraiyans were priests to Pallava kings before the introduction of the Brahmin priests, and even some time after it (reported in Thurston 1909:82). Walhouse (1879) noted that in the great festival of Siva at Trivalur in Tanjore the headman of Paraiyans was mounted on the elephant with the god and carried the fan for the god, a rare privilege given only to the highest castes. Thurston (1909:89) writes,

The facts, taken together, seem to show that the Paraiyan priests (Valluvans), and therefore the Paraiyans as a race, are very ancient, that ten centuries ago they were a respectable community, and that many were weavers. The privileges they enjoy are relics of an exceedingly long association with the land. The institution of the Paracheri points to original independence, and even to possession of much of the land. If the account of the colonization of Tondeimandalam by Vellalans in the eighth century A.D is historic, then it is possible that at that time the Paraiyans lost the land, and that their degradation as a race began.

The question remains, therefore, as to how a group with such an illustrious past was reduced to farm slaves. The invasion-subjugation theory offers a possible explanation. The Dravidian and Aryan invasions had conquered Paraiyans and other indigenous tribes and made them their slaves long before the Christian era (Caldwell, 1875).

⁵ Vellala is a Shudra caste but now claims Kshatriyahood.

Slavery in the Tamil country was tied to a system of land tenure (Pillay, 1975:199; Nilakantasastri, 1984:567-591). Similarly, historical records on Chengalpattu district (Tremenheere, 1891; Crole, 1921) show that the Paraiyans were slaves tied to the system of land tenure known as the mirasi system.

LAND TENURE AND SLAVERY

Historical Sketch: The Hindu Periods

Ancient South India did not leave many historical records. There was no literature before the 8th century A.D., and the Dravidians had no coins. The first historical account was that upon which the epic Ramayanam was based. According to this epic, Rama, king of Ayotya, conquered the nomadic tribes and established the Hindu kingdom around the 8th century B.C. Later the Pallavas, the Hindu dynasty from North India, conquered the petty chieftains and princes and stayed in power for more than 1000 years in the ancient Tamilagam. They had their capital at Kancheepuram and a great port at Mahapalipuram. The Pallava rule came to an end with the Chola conquest in the 9th century. The emperor of Vijayanagar defeated the Chola king in 1300 and stayed in power till 1565. Subsequently, the Mohametans battled the king of Vijayanagar in 1670 and eliminated the Hindu power. The British took control of the Chengalpattu district in 1760. Both

the Hindu and Mohametan regimes maintained a land tenure system known as the MIRASI SYSTEM, a Tamil variant of the Jajmani system.

Land Tenure

According to tradition, the Chola king Adondei Chakravarti (Crole, 1921) brought the Tuluva Vellalan from the Carnatic region and entrusted them with the land of Tondaimandalam. The Vellalans found the clearance of the forest difficult, and some rejected the king's offer of the land and went back. Those who stayed behind cleared the land and brought it under cultivation. The clearance was a communal effort, and the Vellalans owned land jointly and were also jointly responsible to the king for the land tax. They managed their internal affairs themselves, including the disposal of waste land, and were able to keep all strangers from gaining access to land, except the grantees of the sovereign. The land tenure system which evolved during this period became known as the Mirasi system. Place (quoted in Crole, 1921:223) defined the Mirasi system as follows,

I think it must be admitted, that the mirassidar has an undoubted hereditary property in the soil that he derives his right originally from the sovereign, to whom he acknowledges obedience, and the renter of a stated proportion of the produce, as the tenure by which he holds it; that under this impression he uses it as the tenure by which he holds it; that under this impression he uses it as may be most for his advantage, and that by law, he considers that

right sacred, and unalienable, so long as he performs the condition annexed to it (Crole, 1921:223).

The key to the Mirasi system is inheritance and alienation.⁶ Like other forms of land tenure the Mirasi system underwent a number of modifications while maintaining the communal nature of ownership or usufructus (Kumar, 1965:15-16). There existed four types of Mirasi system simultaneously. The first was SAMUDAYAM, under which land was not only held jointly but cultivated jointly as well. Even if Mirasdars owned the land individually, they always pooled the product and redivided it according to the shares held by each of the Mirasdars. The VISABADI was a communal land ownership system under which the land was temporarily cultivated in separate shares by the co-sharers, but subject to periodic redistribution, so that the good and bad lands were distributed equally among Mirasdars. Under these two systems, Samudayam and Visabadi, the landowners were jointly liable to pay tax to the government, but they might mortgage, sell, or alienate⁷ their rights. The third communal ownership was known as ARUDIKAREI under which landownership was expressed in terms of shares and the shareholders had certain rights in common. They also had claims on village

⁶ The legal meaning of alienation is transfer property.

⁷ To alienate means to transfer property to the ownership of another.

waste lands. Finally EKABHOGAM was a system under which one individual came to hold all the lands of the village, while the product is shared by all. Whatever might be the origin and form of the Mirasi system, lands and slaves were owned communally. The slaves were excluded from the ownership of land.

CULTIVATING CLASSES

Mirasdar

Traditionally the Mirasi rights to land and produce rested with the Vellalans because they settled first. The Hindu and Mohametan dynasties broke the monopoly of the vellalans and the successive Chola kings granted huge land maniam (gifts) to the Brahmins because of their duties as custodians of the temples and teachers of the Vedic religion. Kings and other philanthropists conferred titles of land ownership and at times a whole village to Brahmins and poets⁸ (Pillai, 1975:199). Only much later (1670) did other agricultural castes, such as the Reddis, the Naidus, the Kammavan, and the Pallis, gain a share in the Mirasi rights.

Many mirasi shares had also been given away to brahmans or alienated for the support of religious establishments; others had simply been sold, and as a result, by the time the British had established their supremacy,

⁸ Every king kept a poet or poets in his court to sing the royal glories and laurels. Depending on the quality of the poems, the poets were rewarded.

proprietary rights of this sort could be found among almost all the castes with the exceptions of the untouchables" (Hjejle, 1967:78).

Brahmins, Vellalans and other high castes were like the European feudal lords who rarely worked on their farms but lived a luxurious living by exploiting the serfs. The Hindu dharma (ethics) forbade the high castes to touch a plough for cultivation because such work was polluting. In order to compensate the Brahmins and Vellalans for the extra expense caused by their religious disabilities, it was customary to make a deduction from the produce, called BRAHMANAMINAHHA, a form of tax.

Tenants

Two types of tenancies existed. The Ulkudi tenants were those who had resided for long periods of time in the villages and had acquired a right of occupancy, but not ownership. The Purakudi tenants were granted only short leases and had no occupancy right. The Vanniyars served as both types of tenants and they in turn employed Paraiyan agrestic slaves.

Agrestic Slaves

Paraiyans were mostly agricultural serfs. "In times prior to British Rule, the whole of the Pariah community without exception, were the slaves of the superior castes" (Manual of Administration, 1855: 232). Ellis (1798)

recorded Paraiyans, Pallans, and Pallis as a slave class (adscripti glebae), which he called villeinage for a lack of better word. Nilakantasastri (1984:569), one of the major authorities on the history of the Chola period, wrote, "Workers of this class were indeed in a condition of serfdom, adscripti glebai, with no freedom of movement."

The sale of slaves from one landlord to another was an accepted custom.

In Tondaimandalam [Chingleput, North Arcot and south Arcot] they could not be sold separately from the land which they cultivated, neither could the land be sold separately from them. They were held in joint property by the villages, and among the privileges attached to the mirasi was a share in the labour of these people. They worked for the mirasidars in rotation according to the share which each of them held in the village (Hjejle, 1967:79).

These land tenure and land tax systems continued under the Mahometan dynasty. Brahmin and non-Brahmin Mirasidars continued to own the land. The Ulkudi and Purakudi forms of tenancy remained unaffected. The lower castes continued to be slaves attached to the soil. As Crole (1921:228) concludes, "The same system seems to have been adhered to - renters, and octroi duties... Moreover, the Mahometans must be allowed the credit of respecting the ancient rights of the mirassidars." The Paraiyan slaves were subject to more hardships under Mohometan regime in the 18th century because the Mohometan rulers demanded more revenue from the Mirasidars.

Thus Paraiyan were slaves tied to the land during both the Hindu and Mohametan periods. Education was the monopoly of Brahmins and a few privileged higher castes. Political power was the prerogatives of the king and the land owning Mirasdar class. Brahmins continued to enjoy their ritual power and some of them started acquiring land. Untouchables were slaves tied to land who could be sold along with the land.

PARAIYANS UNDER THE BRITISH

The British obtained the greater part of the district as a Jaghir or estate in 1760. But they did not actually administer it for 25 years. By acquiring the land with its specific system of land tenure they inherited the system of slavery from the Hindus and Mohametans along with the land. There is no evidence that they encouraged slavery during their rule, but they were forced to deal with the problem of slavery.

In 1795, when Place took charge of the district, he found the Mirasi system prevailed throughout the district. Place and his successors, Helburn and Treemenheere, though basically administrators of land, collected information not only on land revenue but also on various Hindu manners and customs. It is from their accounts that we know about the lives of low caste slaves and especially the exploitative nature of the Mirasi system. The report prepared

by the Madras Board of Revenue (1918) provides a wealth of information on the conditions of agricultural labor and slavery in the Madras Presidency.

Discrimination

As described by the British administrators, the quality of life of these slaves was in no way different from slaves elsewhere in terms of how they were looked upon by the high castes, what they ate, where they lived, and what they wore. Hindu society viewed the Paraiyan agrestic slaves as a group with whom all contacts were to be avoided. Forbes (1834:253-4) writes about the lives of the Pulaiyan and Pariah slaves:

The Pooleahs are not permitted to breathe the same air with the other castes nor to travel on the public road; if by accident they should be there and perceive a Brahmin or Nair at a distance, they must instantly make a loud howling, to warn him from approaching until they have retired or climbed up the nearest tree. Yet debased and oppressed as the Pooleahs are, there exists a caste, called Pariars, still more abject and wretched.

In south India the practice of untouchability was carried to an absurd length. A Paraiyan had to stay thirty-two yards away from Brahmins so that the Brahmin may not be polluted. In rural area a Paraiyan might be required to keep further away and was prevented during the day from using the roads in quarters inhabited by the Brahmins.

His right of way along other roads is so far

limited that, like a leper in the medieval ages in Europe, he should call out to give notice of his unclear presence, and when he comes within the prescribed distance, leave the road and get also, as best he can in the fields, even if they are under water. The time required to go from one place to another consequently depends, not merely on distance, but on the number of Brahmans using the road. Unapproachability of this kind is almost unknown elsewhere (O'Malley, 1932:142).

These accounts show the degradation to which the Untouchables were reduced.

Prescribed behavior

In most cases the high caste landlords prescribed the behavior of the Untouchables. In December 1930, the Kallars of Ramnad proposed eight prohibitions against the Untouchable slaves in Ramnad district: The Adi-Dravidas⁹ shall not wear ornament of gold and silver; The Adidravida males should not be allowed to wear their clothes below their knees or above the hips; Their males should not wear coats or shirts or banyans; No Adi-Dravida shall be allowed to have his hair cropped; The Adi-Dravidas should not use other than earthenware vessels in their homes; Their women should not be allowed to cover the upper portion of their bodies by clothes or blouses or thavannies (half saree used to cover their breasts); Their women should not be allowed to use flowers or saffron paste; And the men should not use umbrellas for protection

⁹ Adi-Dravida is another name for Untouchables.

against sun and rain nor should they wear sandals.

These prescribed behavior represents the imposition of the landlords' will upon the slaves: "transforming the consciousness of the man prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor" (Freire, 1981:31). When the Adi-dravidas refused to submit themselves to these stringent social controls the landlords came with harsher regulations and implemented them by force (Hutton, 1951:205-206).

Quality of life

The Paraiyans led a very miserable life. They lived in hopeless poverty, and most of them lacked sufficient means to procure even the coarsest clothing. They went about almost naked, or at best clothed in the most hideous rags. They lived from hand to mouth the whole year round, and rarely knew one day how they would procure food for the next (Dubois, 1946:50). Dubois made the following observation about the life of Paraiyans in Chengalpattu:

In order to obtain a true idea of their abject misery one must live amongst them, as I have been obliged to do. About half of my various congregations consisted of Pariah Christians. Wherever I went I was constantly called in to administer the last consolations of religion to people of this class. On reaching the hut to which my duty led me, I was often obliged to creep in on my knees, so low was the entrance door to the wretched hovel. When once inside, I

could only partially avoid the sickening smell by holding to my nose a handkerchief soaked in the strongest vinegar. I would find there a mere skeleton, perhaps lying on the bare ground, though more often crouching on a rotten piece of matting, with a stone or a block of wood as a pillow. The miserable creature would have for clothing a rag tied round the loins, and for covering a coarse and tattered blanket that left half the body naked (1968:59).

Their houses were, and still are, simple and inexpensive. The rudest form is a hut made by tying a few leaves of the palmyra palm on to a framework of poles or bamboos. The better class of houses are a series of rooms with low mud walls and thatched roof, but generally without doors, surrounding a small courtyard, in which the family goats, buffaloes, and fowls have their homes. The cooking is done anywhere where it is convenient either indoors or outdoors. Very occasionally the walls of the house, especially those facing the street, are whitewashed, or decorated with variegated patterns or figures in red and white. They dry the left-over beef in front of their house and are ridiculed by higher castes who consider such beef-exposure very indecent.

Exclusion from land

The reason for their poor quality of life, apart from the attribution of hereditary impurity, was exclusion from land and the existence of low wage. The Mirasdars made every effort to keep the Paraiyans away from the land in order to make sure of a continuous and permanent supply of

labor. They were able to accomplish this through the Mirasi rights of land closure. As we have indicated earlier Mirasi rights traditionally rested with the Vellalans and the Brahmins. Only under the Hindu and Mohametan rules was land transferred to the Kammavan, Naidus, Reddis and Pallis. But land was never transferred to the low castes.

Theoretically, according to the Secretary of State, there was no bar of law or of practice to low caste people obtaining and cultivating waste lands on the same terms as any of the high caste people. However, Tremenhære (1891:6) wondered what meaning should be given to the word practice.

If the statement means that a pariah can in fact obtain waste land as freely as other classes, it is incorrect. He may apply for it, but he has to run the gauntlet of first the Mirasidars, and secondly the non-Mirasi Pattadars, both of which classes abhor the thought of his acquiring land, and one of which cannot get enough for itself.

If some well-to-do Paraiyans returning from Natal or from the salt factories on the coast plan wanted to buy a small patch of ground for cultivation, chicanery often sets in, and the Paraiyans are not able to get any land. Pandian (1899) provided an interesting case of a Paraiyan trying to buy land. The village accountant, the KARNAM, made a Paraiyan believe that the government waste land could be monopolized without the consent of the government. Through hard work the poor Paraiyan brought the

land under cultivation. Once the land was ready for cultivation, the karnam asked the Paraiyan to apply for patta (legal right for the land).

But he finds that no sooner is an application made for a 'patta' than the Karnam opposes the application, or, in other words, he turns out to be the most inveterate foe of the man whom he pretended to protect. The Karnam, in his evidence, informs the authorities concerned, that the Pariah occupied the land of his own sweet will, and without his permission. The decision then is, that the land should be made over to the Karnam, since the Patta was sub rosa made in his name. This is what the Karnam wished to obtain; that is, waste land, well cleared of its refuse by the brow writhing labours of the poor Pariah, who under dupe-ry boiled hard to benefit himself, but in the long run was ousted, and was destined not to enjoy the fruit of his labours (1891:44).

Through such practices landlords kept the Untouchables landless in order to ensure themselves a continuous supply of cheap labor.

The landless paraiyans expected a great deal from the British government. The British abolished the collective land tenure and introduced the ryotwari system of land revenue settlements between the government and individual ryots (peasants) or cultivators. Under these settlements the peasants were granted permanent heritable rights in land, including the rights to sublet and mortgage, sell or gift, in return for the payment of the regular land revenue assessment. But the British became victims of their own policy. For example, the British government found nearly 19,000 acres not under Mirasi rights which

they could have thrown open to resident Pariahs, but instead they assigned ownership rights to chieftains who already had large estates. Such behavior fitted with the British policy of developing India as a country of large estates. Because of this policy, the Paraiyans lost even the small holdings they had and all were reduced to working as subtenants and agricultural laborers. The British policy towards slavery in India was governed by pragmatism and expediency. The British authorities knew and understood the caste system, the practice of untouchability, and that land closure was the roots of slavery in India, but none of their policies were effective in abolishing these oppressive institutions.

EXCLUSION FROM EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The Paraiyans' status as slaves, their exclusion from land, and their low wages had its impact on other areas of their life. In particular, it affected their education and participation in village politics. The ancient Tamils valued education and knowledge very highly. As the Kural (393), the book of natural ethics of Tamils, says, "Only the educated may say they have eyes; the eyes of the unlettered are mere sores." Or, the Kural (400) says that education is the only lasting wealth, and other forms of wealth are perishable. But although the importance of education is so elegantly praised by the literati,

education has always been limited to Brahmins and other twice born castes.

Education has almost become an attribute of every Brahmin. An uneducated Brahmin is a contradiction in terms. "Without education any Brahmana would have been looked down by his caste-fellows. It is this high regard for education which raised them above all and maintained them so" (Ketkar, 1979:162). The Hindu society valued highly a Brahmin's esoteric knowledge of Sanskrit and of Hindu theology. It is because of their erudition others call them "superman." "The prayer of the Brahman procured victory for the king. Like a tower the Brahman overshadowed the king. He was not only a ritualistic "superman", but his own power equalled that of the gods, and a king without a Brahman is simply said to be "without guidance" for guidance by the purohita was self-understood (Weber, 1962:125).

Education was long been the monopoly of the Brahmins. Only when education was democratized with the advent of the British rule did the other twice born castes, such as the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, have the opportunity to participate in the vedic system of education. But there is very little evidence of the participation of other than Brahmin castes as teachers or students. While the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas had access to Vedic education at least in theory, the Untouchables were prevented from

learning or even listening to the vedic teachings.

According to the Gautama Dharma Sutra, if he (sudra) listens intentionally to (a recitation of) the Veda, his ears shall be filled with (molten) tin of lac. If he recites vedic texts, his tongue shall be cut out. If he remembers them his body shall be split in twain (Ambedkar, 1946,38)

The caste Hindus barred the Untouchables from participating in educational institutions for economic reasons. As the Bombay Provincial committee writes on the question of education of the untouchables:

The great majority of the influential classes are not only indifferent to the extension of elementary knowledge to every class of society, but most of them would discourage, and not a few would oppose efforts for the spread of education among the agricultural and low castes. The reasons are: 1) the old conservative views which teach that knowledge should be confined to certain classes; 2) the fear that it will cause the influential classes to lose their prestige, and free the lower classes from their present subserviency. Some Brahmins urge that studying will injure the health of the boys of the cultivator class, and that few boys will ever follow farming, if they get a knowledge even of reading and writing. the cultivators, as well as the Brahmins say, 'if the low-castes get an education, who will do the coarse and low work of society?' (quoted in Radhakrishnan, 1986:23).

The impact of such policies can be seen in the lives of the Paraiyans at Chengalpattu district who were barred from the educational institutions. In 1888, out of 11,490 students studying in Chengalpattu district only 1443 (13 percent) were Paraiyans.

Tremenheere (1891) said that the education of the Paraiyans was neglected because the Mirasdars and other

masters of the Paraiyans set their face against their education. Parents of the caste children objected to their children sitting with the Pariah children in the school. School-masters shared the same prejudice and made the Pariayan children sit outside the school and taught them from a distance. At least as important, Paraiyan Children had to tend cattle or otherwise work during the day and Paraiyan parents were often too poor to pay fees or buy books. There were no trained Pariah teachers; even untrained masters could hardly be obtained. And if Paraiyan masters could be obtained, they could not live on the low government pay.

Tremenheere (1891) suggested that the government should start special day and night schools at every Paracheri and provide scholarship for the Pariah students. He also suggested that the provincial administration, which could stand the financial strain and maintain a sympathetic policy in favor of the low castes much more consistently than the local boards, should assume the control of the special Paraiyan schools.

These recommendations indicate the good intentions of the British government to give Paraiyans "a stepping stone to success in entering Government employ," but the caste-ridden society spurned such suggestions. None of Tremeneheere's recommendations worked because most of the schools were located on the porch of temples from which the

Untouchables were excluded. Only the mission schools were educating the Untouchables. The missionaries, however, were warned of dire consequences by the caste Hindus and by the government if they converted any Paraiyans (Tremenheere, 1891).

The British educators and the missionaries thought that even a low standard of instruction would to some extent safeguard Paraiyans from becoming victims of fraud and oppression and teach them to make the most of their opportunities. But Paraiyans whose families were tied to the landlord were not able to make use of these opportunities for they lacked financial support. The penurious wage received from the land did not permit them to avail themselves of the subsidized education offered by the missionaries. The result was exclusion from education which reinforced their ties to the soil.

EXCLUSION FROM RURAL POLITY

Without ownership of land and without education, political participation of the untouchables in the village assembly or panchayat was not possible. Besides these assemblies, there were in existence many other groups and corporations of a social, religious or economic character which were also governed by the high caste Hindus and also all governed by the Hindu code of ethics. It is hardly possible for the Paraiyans to participate in the rural

polity since the structure of the organizational and administrative body of a village assembly reflects the hierarchy of caste and particularly the rules of purity and pollution.

A village was primarily a settlement of peasants, while the village assembly was an association of landlords (Nilakantasastrī, 1984:567). The members of the assembly were elected by the people but under stringent eligibility requirements. For example, the Uthiramerur inscription says that a member should have more than a quarter veli (2 acres) of tax-paying land, live in a house built on his own site, not be older than 70 or younger than 35, know the Mantrabrahmana (a Sanskrit prayer), be conversant with business, virtuous, and possess honest earnings. These qualifications presuppose higher ritual status, ownership of land and education, and clearly excluded the Paraiyans from the village governing body.

The elected members appointed various officials who would govern the village. Usually Brahmins and Vellalans were appointed as magistrates and land registrars, while Talaiary (village watchmen), Tottee (village scavengers), and Neergatti (one who allocates the tank water to the fields) were from Paraiyans, as these occupations involved contact with dirt and death.

The pattern of administrative structure was similar for all traditional villages. Modernization, incipient

capitalism with its market economy, and even the introduction of local government in the villages have not changed these administrative structures. Vellalan and other high castes continue to be village Judges, Karnams, and other respected offices, and Paraiyans and other untouchable castes continue to be Talaiaries, Tottees, and Neergatties.

The British administrators were not mere spectators to this human tragedy. They passed a number of laws to change the social structure throughout Indian. First they introduced permanent land settlement. The Zamindari and Ryotwari systems replaced the old Mirasi system, but although these two systems were mainly intended to improve collecting land revenue, they were also meant to improve the conditions of the slaves working in the fields for the landlords. These actions were followed by the abolition of slavery in 1840. The introduction of a new legal system reduced the power of the caste-based village courts where the slaves were tried. There were other reforms that aimed to to integrate the Untouchable slaves into the mainstream of Indian life. Galanter writes,

There was a scatter of undertakings by government to provide land, housing, schooling, and government posts to the Depressed Classes. The illegality of denying access to schools, wells, and roads was declared in legislative resolutions and administrative orders - which were honored largely in the breach. Special government officers were appointed to look after their welfare. There were fee concessions and scholarships and some pressure on schools to be

accessible (1983: 27-28).

What emerged from these reforms was a national interest in the problem of the Untouchables. The Congress Party leaders hated to be told by the British that India had neglected their Untouchables. Stung by a sense of shame the Congress Party committed itself to the removal of disabilities suffered by the Untouchables. However, as I shall show later, there was more rhetoric in the Congress Party's commitment to the Untouchables than any meaningful action.

CONCLUSION

Caste is a system of integration as well as a system of closure. As a system warped by purity and pollution, the caste system needs the Untouchables to absorb pollution. It is metaphysically impossible to integrate two contrary elements - the pure and the impure - into a whole. Therefore, the impure is ritually excluded from the pure but functionally integrated so that the Untouchables can do all the polluting jobs to safeguard the purity of the high caste.

Excluded ritually, they are also excluded from primary and secondary resources such as land, education, and political power. The Untouchables are excluded, yet their life depends on their oppressors. That is why I call the relation between the high and low castes exploitative reciprocity. "It is exploitative because the main

burden of the obligations fell upon the lower castes, especially the Untouchables, and the main benefits of the rights flowed to the dominant caste. Nevertheless, it was a system of rights and duties that was regarded as legitimate by its victims" (Moore, 1978:60).

The Untouchables feel there is no way out from this system and they obey the structures of domination. Tremenheere writes about the Paraiyans in Chengalpattu district, "The wretch cut off from the land, bound frequently by iniquitous contracts, and holding his very hut at the mercy of his masters, is obedient as a dog, and works for a rack-rent or for starvation wages" (1891:8). Some of the Paraiyans have taken obedience as a form of existence. "The idea that he was born to be in subjection to the other castes is so ingrained in his mind that it never occurs to the Pariah to think that his fate is anything but irrevocable" (Dubois, 1968:50).

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE UNTOUCHABLES

Given a closed system of hierarchical integration and exclusion there are a limited number of possibilities for changes in this system of exploitative reciprocity. We shall classify such possibilities for changes as: social evolution, social reforms, constitutional and legislative measures, and revolution. In this chapter I shall evaluate the extent to which such changes have occurred and affected caste and untouchability, and I contend that these changes have not affected the lives of the Untouchables, and that there is a historical continuity in their marginality.

Before undertaking a detailed analysis of the factors of social change we need to define it. Lockwood defines social change as "change in the institutional structure of a social system; more particularly, a transformation of the core institutional order of a society such that we can speak of a change in type of society" (1964:370). The core institutional order varies from one social type to another. I argued in the previous chapter that the caste hierarchy, based on the conception of purity and pollution, and the land tenure system are the core institutions which shape the social character of the Indian people. We

shall explore whether social change has occurred in these core institutions and thereby changed the social position of Untouchables since India's Independence in 1947.

EVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL CHANGE

The evolutionary approach to social change argues that certain endogenous and exogenous factors, such as sanskritization, secularization and modernization, have affected family, caste and village community. We shall study the impact of these factors on caste and untouchability.

Sanskritization

Sanskritization is an emulative process by which low Hindu castes, tribal or other groups, change their customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, "twice-born" caste' (Srinivas, 1966:6). It is mainly non-Brahmin castes, who occupy the middle tier in the caste hierarchy, that have moved up through sanskritization. Srinivas (1952) has observed such a process among the Coorgs at Ramapura village in Karnataka state, but he himself admits that there has not been any case of upward mobility among the Untouchables through sanskritization.

There is, however, some incidences of individual mobility via the process of asceticism and renunciation.

Indian society honors those who reject and isolate themselves from the world. Some Untouchables, like Nandanar (12th Century A.D) and Ravidas (15th century), adopted asceticism and renunciation as a way of life, with the latent consequence that all castes respected and venerated them. The case of Ravidas illustrates my point. As an Untouchable he rejected the Brahmin-centered social order, their god, and their holy books. Although rejecting formalized Hinduism, he accepted the core of Hinduism, that is, he became an ascetic and renouncer. Khare writes about Ravidas, "Simultaneously, under the ascetic model, this very feature stamps Ravidas as superior as an ascetic can become: He is the ultimate Indian representation of the triumph of spirit over physical body, and of the perfect 'unbounded' ascetic over social order" (1984:42). Ravidas is now a temple-enshrined deity, a saint who is spiritual yet humane and venerated by Brahmins and other high caste Hindus.

Hindu society does confer higher status on an ascetic and a renouncer. But we cannot expect every Untouchable to be an world renouncer. If all social mobility for the Untouchables has to occur through asceticism and renunciation the liberation of the Untouchables from the practice of untouchability and poverty will take millennia.

Secularization

Secularization refers to the process whereby institutions that were previously accepted as religious are now ceasing to be such. An essential element of secularization is rationalization. "Rationalism involves, among other things, the replacement of traditional beliefs and ideas by modern knowledge" (Srinivas, 1966:119). Concretely, then, the importance of secularization relates to the question of whether rationalization has devalued the idea of purity and pollution in order to make the society more egalitarian than before. Srinivas (1966:128) says it has not happened. "Freedom from pollution does not go so far that educated Brahmin women eat in the homes of all other castes, let alone Harijans." Secularization has, however, revolutionized the expectations of the Untouchables for greater social economic equality. Heightened expectations and the relative deprivations suffered by them have created tensions in the villages. Gough (1955) and Beteille (1965) have observed in Kumpapettai and Sripuram that despite secularization the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins still adhere to the values of purity and pollution, whereas the Adi-Dravidas (Untouchables) are denouncing such values. These conflicting values have caused tensions and loss of life in India. The victims of such conflicts are usually the Untouchables.

Modernization

Modernization in India does not mean that caste replaced class, but that caste-based culture gets modernized. (Singer, 1968). Though India has been subject to colonization, and experienced industrialization, urbanization and the development of market economy, there has not much occupational and status mobility. Weber (1958) and Moore (1966) attribute such failure to the caste system. Similarly, democracy and electoral politics in India are charged with a "tendency of ascriptive associations to formulate political identities" (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967:67). Kothari supports this argument. "Castes and communities constitute effective bases of political organization and mobilization" (Weiner and Kothari, 1962:24). Briefly, modernization has not affected the hierarchical order of caste.

SOCIAL REFORMERS

Social reformers are agents who translate ideology into actions. Typically they confronted hierarchy with an egalitarian ideology. Social reformers have taken an evangelical approach to caste and untouchability. By evangelical approach Galanter means "the uplift of untouchables to higher Hindu standards and the penance of caste Hindus for the injustices of untouchability, which is seen as an integral part of Hinduism" (1984:28).

Rebellious Prophets

The first reformers were rebellious prophets who were disenchanted with Hinduism and Hindu social order. Such disenchantment was the source of sect-formation in India. Long before the Christian era, Jainism and Buddhism denounced vedic sacrifices and Brahmanic supremacy. Vaishnavism and Shaivism sought to abolish the Brahmin intermediary between god and man. Veerasaivism (12th Century) was started as a movement against the practice of caste system and untouchability. Kabir's (1440-1518) sectarian movement denounced the caste system and the traditional priestly order. Unfortunately, these well-intentioned sectarian movements underwent a process of institutionalization leading to the emergence of a codified ideology, hierarchical organization and religious bureaucracy. As a result, the movements came to take a compromising and reconciling attitude rather than an oppositional one towards Hindu orthodoxy. This eroded their vitality and they ended up as sects. None of these movements helped Untouchables gain upward mobility because the high castes were not willing to accept the impure into their fold.

Conversion and the Practice of Untouchability

Many Untouchables have also converted to Christianity (Forrester, 1980) and Buddhism (Zelliot, 1972). However,

such conversions are more an attempt to develop a negative identity than a search for a new faith. The religious ostracism accompanied by social segregation suffered by the Untouchables in Hinduism encourage them to embrace Christianity or Buddhism. Soon, however, the untouchable converts realize they are not Christians like the rest of the fold but "Untouchable christians"¹. The adjective indicates that they are forced to maintain their "untouchableness." Perinbam (1962), a convert to Christianity from Hinduism, expressed just before his death his deep regret at having embraced Christianity because he was discriminated against in the Catholic Church. Rev Jans (n.d.) has chronicled the discriminations suffered by Untouchables in the Catholic church in his The Depressed Classes: A Chronological Documentation.

There was a mass conversion to Buddhism in the late 1950s. Ambedkar, known as the savior of Untouchables, embraced Buddhism in Nagpur on October 14, 1956 because of his hatred of Hinduism and his search for equality. Ambedkar (1945:70) once wrote,

If you wish to bring about a breach in the [caste] system, then you have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the Shastras, which deny any part to reason, to Vedas and Shastras, which deny any part to morality. You must destroy the Religion of the Smritis.

¹ In chengalpattu, North Arcot and South Arcot the low caste Christians are known by their caste name such as 'Parai Christian'. Parai is an adjective of Paraiyan.

As early as 1927 he burnt the Manu Smrti which advocates a caste based social order. Being freed from Hinduism he was looking for a religion where all men would be treated as equals. He found Christianity and Islam foreign and he knew too well that those religions maintained the hierarchical social order. Finally, he decided to become a Buddhist. Lynch writes of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism:

[T]he basic teaching of Ambedkar was that Buddhism is an indigenous Indian religion of equality; a religion which was anti-caste and anti-Brahman. In ancient buddhist India, according to the myth, there were no oppressing, upper caste Brahmins and there were no oppressed lower caste Untouchables; all men were equal Buddhists. The root cause of untouchability and the miserable condition of the Untouchables lay in the Brahmanical teaching of Hinduism and the superior position it legitimized for the oppressing Brahmins (1972:99).

Following his example the Untouchables all over India embraced Buddhism in order to repudiate Hinduism and the caste system.

As these examples show, caste is resilient and adaptive. Its resiliency consists in its ability to expand infinitely without doing any damage to its basic structures and values. Secularization and westernization do not destroy the values of hierarchy and purity and pollution. Caste as an adaptive structure absorbs western ideologies and religions but mould them in its own image. To give an analogy from biology, caste is like a starfish or earthworm. When these species are incised, every

incised particle becomes a separate living entity. The process is called regeneration. It is the same with caste. Every new sect or religious group that tears away from the system becomes another caste or creates the caste system among its followers. It regenerates itself. Thus the hierarchical domination is always maintained.

CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEE AND RESERVATIONS

Fundamental Rights

The Constitution deals with both the problem of untouchability and the eradication of poverty. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution and the Fundamental Rights (Article 15) promises justice, equality of opportunity and liberty. These constitutional guarantees challenge the age-old hierarchical inequality. Further, Article 17 of the Constitution abolishes untouchability, and the Untouchability Offences Act in 1955 makes the practice of untouchability criminal.

The Untouchability Offences Act

The Constitutional guarantee and the Untouchability Offences Act of 1955, though commendable, have not been enforced. Though the Constitution has formally abolished untouchability it has nowhere attempted to define it. In the absence of such a clear definition the burden of proof of whether an act is committed on the ground only of

untouchability is left with the presiding judge and the accuser. The accuser, often unable to combat the cumbersome and expensive legal proceedings, does not take cases against untouchability to the court. Dushkin (1961:1695) writes,

Persons working against untouchability prefer not to use the law except as a last resort, partly on principle, partly because that the law works better as an unvoiced threat than when it is actually enforced. Offenses are cognisable but enforcement is lax. Punishments are often ludicrously mild. Cases drag on interminably, nobody takes much interest in them, witnesses seldom turn up and are unwilling to depose, and the Harijans can rarely last as long as their opponents.

The Government of India appointed the Elayaperumal Commission in 1969 to evaluate the implementation and the impact of the Untouchability Offenses Act throughout India. The findings of the commission were not encouraging. As Elayaperumal, the chairman of the commission, told me, the findings were so disgusting that the government was not eager to make them known to the public. Finally the government of India permitted him to publish the report after deleting some appalling cases of cruelties against Untouchables.

The practice of untouchability goes unabated throughout India. The Hindu news paper (19 May 1976) reports,

Reports of the increased atrocities, naturally, have evoked strong feelings of the commissioner who says that members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continue to be subjected to assault, rape, arson and other forms of brutality. The Government, it adds, owes a constitu-

tional responsibility in this respect and till it is fulfilled, there will remain a wide gap between the promise and performance.

The police, charged with enforcing the law, also shows callousness and complicity in these crimes. The Commission on Scheduled Caste and Tribe (1979-1980:324) says, "[it] has also been observed that some time even the police personnel commit atrocities on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in collusion with the landlords or otherwise."

The reason for the failure to honor the constitutional guarantee and the failure to implement The Untouchability Offenses Act lies in the very structure of Indian society itself. The very social structure of Indian society is so shaped by hierarchy that it is incapable of promoting constitutional equality. The promotion of equality through parliamentary democracy implies the creation of new organizations and institutions free from hierarchy. So far no new organization or institution has been free from caste hierarchy. As long as caste and caste communities constitute the effective bases of democracy in India, the constitutional abolition of untouchability will remain a dead letter. In brief, the plight of the Untouchables remain very much the same.

THE RESERVATION POLICY

The framers of the constitution were aware that

untouchability and poverty reinforce each other to keep Untouchables at the bottom of the Indian society. Therefore, the Constitution, along with the abolition of untouchability, guaranteed certain protective discrimination through reservations in education, government jobs, and political representation to uplift the Untouchables economically. Article 46 of the Indian Constitution recommends the state to promote with special care the educational and economic interest of Untouchables. The Constitution (Article 29) also makes further recommendation that no one should be denied admission into any educational institution on the basis of caste, sex, or religion.

In pursuance of the safeguards provided in the Constitution, the central government of India has not only outlined general educational policies for the State governments, but has also allocated funds in all the Five Year Plans in order to educate the Scheduled Castes. The government has increased the amount from Rs. 300 million in the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) to Rs 3,269 million in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1979). The central government spends this amount on post metric scholarships, pre-metric scholarships for the children of those engaged in unclean occupations, book banks for Scheduled Caste students in the engineering colleges and medical colleges, girls' hostels, and research and training for the Sche-

duled Caste students. These facilities have further been supplemented by a policy of reserving admissions at all levels of high education.

The purpose of such reservations in educational facilities is to prepare the Untouchable boys and girls to compete in the job market. Such goals, though well reasoned, assume that the facilities provided would be optimally and equitably used; that given the opportunity for school and college education members of the Scheduled Castes would measure up on par with those who are backed by a tradition of formal education; and that the policy of reservations would best serve the attainment of equality for the Scheduled Castes (Chitnis, 1972:1676).

These assumptions proved untenable and the policy has become counter-productive. First, the educational reservations have created a class of elites among Untouchables who are today alienated from their community. Second, it has enkindled the wrath and jealousy of the high caste Hindus, one result of which has been of several clashes which resulted in the loss of lives among the Utouchables in Gujarat and Marathawada States. Abraham writes on the Marathawada tragedy, "(t)he campaign against reservations is in full swing in Marathawada and, as more than one person says ominously, the battle lines are being drawn for 1980 when the reservations issue will be reopened again in Parliament" (1978:

1537). The Parliament has guaranteed the system of reservations until 1990. This means continued tension and agitation between the high castes and the Untouchables.

Job Reservation Policy

The recognition that a minority group, like the Untouchables, will not be able to compete with the rest in the job market has also made the government reserve a quota of jobs from each grade of jobs. The history of job reservation goes back to 1934, when the British administration issued instructions to give fair representation in government jobs for the backward classes. The policy was reviewed in 1943 and the government directed the ministries, departments and offices to reserve 8.33 percent of the jobs for the Untouchables. Finally in 1970, the central government raised the quota to 15 percent for the Scheduled castes. Occasionally, the central and state governments review their policies and increase the quota for the Scheduled Castes. The progression in the government quotas can be seen from table 1.

However, these quotas have not produced the desired effects. The Directorate General of the Bureau of Public Enterprises shows the actual representation of Scheduled Caste employees in 177 out of 184 Public Enterprises.

TABLE 1.
JOB RESERVATION FOR THE SCHEDULED CASTES

Year	Cl.I	Cl.II	Cl.III	Cl.IV
1965	2	3	9	18
1970	2	4	9	18
1975	3	5	11	19
1979	5	7	13	19
1980	5	8	12	19

Source: Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1979-80:228.

Class I: Higher Administrative.

Class II: Lower Administrative.

Class III: Clerical.

Class IV: Menial.

Table 2 below reveals that the Scheduled Castes were able to take advantage of only half of the quota for 1979-80 in Classes I and II. But the government has recruited more Scheduled Caste employees into Class IV than the reserved quota (19 percent). The reason is not generosity, but because Class IV jobs are menial jobs, such as cleaning lavatory and cleaning the garbage, which the high castes will not do for reasons of purity and pollution. It also should be mentioned that the Class I, II, III, and two sub-groups of IV and IV duly reflect the five divisions of society, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras, and Untouchables. Though these divisions may not be conscious, the bureaucracy cannot avoid the replication of hierarchical order.

TABLE 2
 REPRESENTATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN 177
 GOVERNMENTAL SECTORS IN 1980

Class	Total No. of employees	Representation of Scheduled Castes.	
		No	percent
Class I	97,987	2,726	3
Class II	97,756	5,003	5
Table 2 (cont.)			
Class III	1,274,581	230,505	18
Class IV (excluding sweepers)	353,981	79,167	22
Class IV	36,030	23,309	64
Total	1,856,332	340,710	18

Source: Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes, 1979-80:230

Political Reservation

Electoral politics in India have become a means of power sharing, but a minority group like the untouchables is not able to participate in electoral politics along with the powerful landlords. Therefore, the Constitution has given important concession to the Untouchables. Article 330 (1) says that "Seats shall be reserved in the house of the people for - (a) the Scheduled Castes" ; Article 334 says, "Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of the Part, the provisions of this constitution relating to - (a) the reservation of seats

for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies of the States."

The reservation of seats to the Parliament and Legislative Assembly has a long history. When the British introduced representative government in India, Ambedkar, the leader of the Untouchables, was fighting for a separate electorate to allow the Untouchables to elect their own representatives for the Parliament and State Legislative Assembly. But Gandhi was against separate electorate because

Separate electorates and reserved seats create a division in Hinduism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever....I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are those two divisions set up in every village. Those who speak of political rights of "untouchables" do not know India and do not know how Indian society is today constructed. Therefore, I want to say with all the emphasis I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing, I will resist it with my life (quoted in Dushkin, 1972:173).

After this, Mahatma Gandhi declared a fast unto death if Ambedkar did not give up the idea of separate electorate. Finally under pressure from the leaders of Indian Nationalist Movement and from a personal request from Mrs Kasturbha Gandhi, Ambedkar accepted a joint electorate. It is a system in which a high caste candidate and a Scheduled caste candidate were elected from the same constituency. The general seat went to the high caste

candidate and the reserved seat to the Scheduled caste candidate. It is because of such reservation that there were 78 (14.4 per cent) Members of Parliament from the Scheduled castes out of 542 in the Indian Parliament. Out of 3,997 seats in the State Legislative Assembly 540 seats (13.5 per cent) were for the Scheduled Castes. Though this figure is for 1976, the extent of representation of Scheduled Caste has remained the same.

The elected leaders of the Untouchables have two options (Saberwal, 1972:79) either to enter into patron-client ties with high caste patrons or to act in solidarity with their fellow Untouchables. Saberwal says that their actual choices seem to be influenced strongly by the arenas in which they operate. So far experience shows that the elected leaders from the Untouchable caste have entered into a patron-client relationship with the party bosses who are, for the most part, from the landowning class. When their community interest was at stake in Kilavenmani (1968) and Villupuram (1978) the leaders of the Untouchables did not fight for their caste but toed the party line. Their acceptance of a subordinate role reflects their caste role in the society.

The indifference of the Untouchable elected leaders to their own community is also due to their newly acquired wealth, status and power. Narayana (1978:1608) says that the gap in education and wealth between the high caste

elected members and Untouchable members was very wide in the third election to the parliament in 1962, but there emerged a greater homogeneity among the political elites by the time of the 1972 election. This newly acquired power and wealth keeps them away from their own caste. The leaders have distanced themselves from the problems of Untouchables by either ignoring them or by allowing themselves to be coopted into the mainstream.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTAL SCHEME

Community Development Program

The constitutional abolition of the practice of untouchability and the reservations were supplemented by a number of economic developmental programs to alleviate the poverty of the Untouchables. However, various evaluations of these programs (Desai, 1969; Dube, 1958; Metha, 1984) show they have helped the rich rather than the poor.

For example, the government of India launched the Community Development Project (CDP) and Panchayat Raj (PR) to make it possible for people at grass-root levels to participate in the economic development and democratic process of the nation. The goals of the CDP are to provide for a substantial increase in the country's agricultural production, improvements in the system of communications, rural health and hygiene, and village education; and to initiate and direct a process of inte-

grated culture change aimed at transforming the social and economic life of the village, particularly the weaker section. Concretely these goals mean providing agricultural facilities to the farmers, communication, education, health, employment opportunities, and housing for all.

The government set up a new administrative organization in 1950 to implement these multi-faced programs. The Community Projects Administration comes under the Ministry of Planning and the Planning Commission of the Central Government. The Community Project Administrator is assisted by technical experts in the fields of finance, agriculture and other areas. At the level of the State, the Development Commissioner is in charge of the operations. A Committee helps the commissioner in framing the general policies of the CDP. Usually the Commissioner functions under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister of the State. The same pattern applies to the District and Project levels also. The state government appoints a Block Development Officer to run the Community Development Project and he is assisted by an advisory committee to implement the various programs. There are officials and volunteers who carry out these projects. Every project has nearly fifty officials connected with it.

Panchayati Raj

Along with CDP the Government of India introduced the

Panchayat Raj for rural reconstruction. It is a grass-root democratic political apparatus which aims to bring the masses into active political participation and establish genuine political control from below (Desai, 1969:533). The Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) formulated the objectives of PR as follows: (1) increasing agricultural production; (2) development of rural industry; (2) fostering co-operative institutions; (4) full utilization of local manpower and other resources; (5) progressive dispersal of authority and initiative, with special emphasis on the role of voluntary organizations; and (6) fostering cohesion and encouraging the spirit of self-help within the community.

PR has a three-tier organization. The Tamil Nadu State has taken as its top and bottom tiers the district and the village, and the Block as the middle tier. The top tier consists of the chairmen of all the local Block Development units, plus some ex-officio members such as local Members of the Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament. The middle tier, the Block, is composed of presidents of the Village Panchayat, plus some ex-officio members and members of the Legislative Assembly in whose constituency the Block is situated. The third tier is the village panchayat. The village panchayat president and the representatives from various wards are directly elected by the villagers by secret ballots. The Panchayat president

is helped by financial and other technical experts in his day to day administration.

Scholars evaluating the working of CDP and PR in various part of India (Opler, 1954; Dube, 1958; Desai, 1969; and Metha, 1984) are very critical of the program. Basically the two programs assume that the individuals, sections, groups and strata forming the village community have a large number of common interests, sufficiently strong to bind them together. They assume that the interests of the various groups and classes within the village are both sufficiently, like and common to create a general enthusiasm as well as a feeling of development for all; that the interests of the different sections of the community are not irreconcilably conflicting; that the State is a super-class, impartial, non-partisan association, and that the major policies of the government are of such a nature that they do not further sharpen the inequalities between the existing social groups. They assume, therefore, that people's initiative and enthusiasm and active participation is possible in the village communities because they have common interests.

However, Indian villages are anything but true communities and their needs and interests vary considerably from each other. When the newly created organizations and their officers are strongly aligned along caste lines, it is not possible to get the cooperation of

all. In the final analysis these programs are managed by a group of officials not by the people.

One of the objectives of these programs is to help the weaker section in a village. However, Dube says the major beneficiaries of these projects are the existing rural elites:

Although the ideal of the Community Development Project was to work for the many-sided development of the entire community,a closer analysis of the agricultural extension work itself reveals that nearly 70 per cent of its benefits went to the elite group and to the more affluent and influential agriculturists. The gains to poorer agriculturists were considerably smaller. Being suspicious of government officials they did not seek help from the Project as often. As this group had little influence in the village and outside, and was in no position to offer any material help in the furtherance of Project objectives, the officials largely ignored it. For the economic development of this group, as well as for that of the artisans and agricultural labourers, no programmes were initiated by the Project. some programmes for the welfare of women, younger people, and the untouchables were undertaken, but their organization lacked imagination, and consequently they failed to make the desired impact (Dube, 1958:82-83).

It is Dube's contention that CDP and PR, instead of improving the quality of life of the weaker section, have set in motion an anti-developmental process in rural Indian.

The administrative structure of CDP and PR has also developed a hierarchy within a hierarchical social order.

Beteille writes (1974:65):

When new organizations are created they are frequently pervaded by these traditional values.

Thus, in India it is remarkable how quickly co-operatives, Block offices and even school boards become involved in hierarchical patterns. In the first place, recruitment is highly selective partly because of existing inequalities in training and ability and partly on account of prejudices against the culturally backward. Secondly, these organizations develop their own hierarchies and concerns for status which often distort the very ends which they are designed to achieve.

These programs are well intentioned but the administrative structures quickly became victims of the universal process of hierarchization, and came to reflect the central value system of the society. These institutions, instead of eradicating structured inequality become conscious or unconscious promoters or approvers of hierarchy.

LAND REFORM

Perhaps the single most important legislation that is expected to change a status society into a class society in the countryside is land reform. The many definitions of land reform usually carry two things in common: (1) greater social justice to be achieved by a direct and publicly controlled change in the existing ways of land ownership (i.e., a changing of the agrarian status quo), and (2) redistribution of political power through "diffusion" or "spreading" of wealth, income productive capacity" (Carroll, 1954:35). Broadly viewed, these objectives imply the redistribution of land to the landless, the creation of individual proprietorships, security of

tenure, and controlled rents.

State Intervention and Land Reform

Appropriation and redistribution of land are cataclysmic changes which can be achieved either through political decision or through agrarian radicalism. Wolf (1969) and Zagoria (1973, 1976) have described in great details how certain countries have effected land reform through agrarian radicalism. But most of the Asian countries, with the exception of Cambodia, China, and Vietnam, have tried to achieve land reform through state intervention.

State intervention necessarily involves politics. Any analysis of land reform has to bear in mind both the economic and political implications. Since 1950, the Indian government has introduced a number of measures to change the present tenurial system to favor the weaker sections. Oommen writes, "India earned the distinction of introducing numerous land reform measures in a relatively short period. Radical measures relating to the uplift of Harijans were also introduced" (1978:80).

After independence, land reform became the major concern of the Indian government because the landless were claiming that land should go to the tiller. There were too many people but too little land. Even the little available land is concentrated in the hands of a few. The

farmers keep their land underutilized for lack of capital. For lack of inadequate irrigation facilities the farmers depend upon the mercy of nature for a little water for cultivation. The pressure of population is reducing the already small holdings into still smaller ones. Tools for cultivation are primitive. Indebtedness, usury, malnutrition and illiteracy add to the misery of the landless.

Tenancy as an institution is exploitative. Rents are paid in cash or in kind. It is not uncommon for a tenant to pay a rent as high as 60 to 70 per cent of the crop. In many cases the landlord just pays the land taxes to show his right over the land, whereas the tenants are meeting the cost of cultivation. The landlord's participation is more to collect the rent than anything else. The leases are mostly oral, but even written contracts do not give the tenants security of tenancy.

This depressing rural scenario is the context of land reform in India. The Congress Agrarian Committee has suggested a broad spectrum of changes ranging from abolition of intermediaries to security of tenancy. With the recommendations of the Congress Party the central government of India has launched far-reaching land reform programs. The principal elements of land reform are: the abolition of intermediaries, the fixing of a maximum ceiling, fixity of tenure, fair rentals, compensation for improvements made by the tenant, and a minimum wage. The

central government has left the details and implementations of land reform to the state government.

Land reform, however, has proved a dismal failure in India. Ladejinsky has summarized the reasons for this failure.

Agrarian reforms are difficult to attain. In most cases land redistribution or putting land securely under the control of a nonowner are acts by a government imposing upon the landowners economic and legal terms unpalatable to them. In effect, such policies if carried out are revolutionary acts which pass property and redistribute income, political power, and social status from one group of society to another. To the extent that legislative assemblies are still dominated by land-proprietary classes, it is not difficult to see why both the enactment of appropriate legislation and its enforcement present formidable problems (1977:371).

Thus the class character of the legislature thwarts meaningful, effective land reform legislation. Because the legislative body is dominated or strongly influenced by the landholding group, it is unlikely to introduce any legislation which will reduce their power and status. Along with the class character of the state, governments in the third world countries suffer from an inefficiency of administration, which Myrdal calls softness of the state (Myrdal, 1970:208). The essence of a soft state is that it is ineffective and corrupt.

An example of the "soft state" is my experience with the land revenue department at Uthiramerur, the site of my study. The government relies heavily on the local revenue administration for the implementation of land reforms.

But the local revenue administration is trained just to collect revenue. When I interviewed the two land revenue collecting officers and their assistants, none of them showed any knowledge of land reform. They claimed that they did not know that it was part of their duty to assess the surplus land for redistribution. The Thasildar, who supervises these two revenue officers, has never informed them of their role and responsibility in implementing the land reform policies. The whole administrative mechanism may show ignorance of law, but on enquiry it appears that the whole mechanism is deliberately orchestrated in favor of the landlords. Ladejinsky makes a poignant observation on the trickery of these officials: "The enforcement of land law in particular faced the other immense difficulty, the character of the ...record keeper.....the method of dishonesty pursued by the various occupants of this office differ as widely as their habits of thought" (1977:399). When the Thasildar is not able to provide proper information on surplus land and other issues, it is not possible for the district collector and the revenue minister to implement the reforms.

As long as the legislative body and the implementing machinery are dominated by high castes, land reform will not be a success because the high castes realize that the beneficiaries of these scheme are mostly untouchables. They also know that if the Untouchables get arable land,

they will not work for the landlords as tenants and laborers.

REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES

The Naxalite Movement

The process of change in India has not always been orderly and non-violent. In the 1960s, the Naxalite movement, based on the ideology of Mao, aimed to destabilize Indian society violently in order to usher in a classless society. The Naxalites characterized the state power of India as semi-colonial and semi-feudal. According to them, the Congress Party represented the interests of the Indian feudal princes, big landlords and bureaucratic "compradore capitalists." The Naxalites argued that there was no choice between Parliamentary elections and armed struggle. They called Parliament a "pigsty" and a historical obsolescence. The Naxalites were convinced that armed struggle was the only solution for the liberation of the poor in India. "Only by relying on violent revolution and taking the road of armed struggle can India be saved and the Indian people achieve complete liberation" (quoted in Dasgupta, 1975:126).

The Naxalite movement attracted the radical students of India. Many, in fact, gave up their class rooms and careers and dedicated themselves to organizing the bottom groups, most of whom are Untouchables. Obviously, these

efforts appealed to the Untouchables. They hoped to get some land for cultivation. The Indian government accused the Naxalite students of "conspiracy to overthrow the government, collection of arms and ammunition, preaching of violence, waging war against the government, and committing murders and banditry" (Gough, 1976:2) and completely liquidated the movement. The number of Untouchables who fought against the landlords, and lost their lives, exceeded the number who inherited any land as a result of these revolutions. The landlords, in collaboration with the military and other oppressive state institutions, dealt with the problems severely.

The Dalit² Movement.

The Dalit movement was more clearly an Untouchable movement and it owed its inspiration to Ambedkar. He was a Mahar, an Untouchable caste, from Maharashtra, had a Ph.D from Columbia University in New York, and was admitted to the Bar at Grey's Inn, London. He used his intellectual ability and political acumen to liberate Untouchables. His writings on Caste in India (1917), Annihilation of Caste (1936), What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables (1945), and The Untouchables (1948) exposed the myths and reality of caste. On the political front he founded the Republican Party of India, a party to mobilize

² Dalit means Untouchables.

the Untouchables. However, the educated Untouchables did not find the Republican Party radical enough because it eschewed violence. Instead, they founded the Dalit Movement with the clear objective of winning social and economic freedom for the Untouchables. These political parties are kept alive in memory of Ambedkar, but they have never been a force in electoral politics.

How do these changes affect the life of the Untouchables? Neither the revolutionary ideology nor the evangeligal approach touched the core institutional order. As sanskritization brings change in the system, but not of the system, conversion and the ideology of the new religion is impotent to combat the value of hierarchy. Radical ideologies have not broken the links of exploitative reciprocity on the caste system. As long as the core institutions remain unassailed, the hierarchical domination and subordination will continue. This suggests that only a government with absolute power will be able to break the core institutions.

CONCLUSION

The core structural features of Indian society, untouchability and poverty, have shaped the social character of the Untouchables. The consitutional guarantee of liberty, justice and fraternity and the Untouchability Offenses Act have not abolished the practice of

untouchability in the villages of India. The various welfare programs, development programs and land reform measures have not eradicated the poverty of the bottom groups. These legislations have remained more symbolic than real. As long as these two problems - the practice of untouchability and poverty - remain unsolved, the Untouchables will remain subservient. In Part II, I shall examine the case of Paraiyans, an Untouchable caste, in Chengalpattu district, and try uncover the social mechanism that keep them subservient to the structures of domination.

PART II

CHAPTER V

RURAL LIFE AT UTHIRAMERUR-MALLIGAPURAM

In Part I, I discussed three issues. First I formulated the theoretical problem of the social bases of obedience by Untouchables. I argued that obedience of the Untouchables is not due to Karmic belief or to false consciousness but due to the practice of untouchability and the close link between poverty and the caste system. Second, I described the historical treatment of Untouchables and how scholars have understood caste, Untouchables and the problem of untouchability. Third, I reviewed the legislation and development measures designed to eradicate the practice of untouchability and the poverty of the Untouchables, and I concluded that the legislation is more symbolic and non-committal than effective. In part II, I shall try to show empirically that Paraiyans, one of the Untouchable castes in the State of Tamil Nadu, obey the structures of domination not because of their belief in Karma or false consciousness, but because of economic dependence. I shall begin by describing the social geography of Uthiramerur-Malligapuram and how it influences the social relations between castes.

I studied the obedience of the Paraiyans at Malligapuram, a Cherri in chengalpattu district, Tamil Nadu in

South India. Though Malligapuram has its own distinct physical and social character, its history is part of the general history of the large village Uthiramerur into which it has been economically and politically integrated. The spatial isolation of Malligapuram, its social, political, and economic integration into Uthiramerur, and the interaction between castes isolated from each other is social geography in action (Mukerjee, 1980:13). The socio-economic and political history of Malligapuram becomes intelligible only in the light of that of Uthiramerur because of social symbiosis of the two.

History of Uthiramerur

Uthiramerur is a Brahmin village very similar to Kumpapettai (Gough, 1955) and Sripuram (Beteille, 1965) in its social, economic and political arrangements. All these villages were founded by the same Chola kings around 1000 A.D. Rajaraja and Rajendra I, the Chola kings, founded several Brahmin villages in their territory in order "to maintain the homogeneity of the brahmadeya¹ villages by excluding all other classes from owning land in them" (Nilakanatasastri, 1984:578). This homogeneity was helpful for the kings in ruling the kingdom and collecting land tax. Unlike non-Brahmin villages, where the interaction is limited to non-Brahmins and Adi-

¹ Brahmadeya is another name for a Brahmin village.

Dravidas, the Brahmin villages provide the researcher an opportunity to study the social interaction between Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Untouchables in the context of a contiguous social configuration.

The recorded history of Uthiramerur goes back to the Pallava King Uthira, Varman. He had built a large fort and also constructed Vairamekan Thatagam (a large irrigation project) in 826 A.D to irrigate the rice field. After the village had fallen into decay, Rajendran, another Chola King, restored it again in 1064. The king brought 1,000 Brahmin families to this area and made them land grants so that they might teach the Hindu sacred scriptures, perform sacrifices, and take care of Sundara Varadaraja Perumal (Vishnu) and Sri Balasubramaniaswamy (Siva) temples.² After the restoration of the village, it bore the name of the king "Rajendra Chola Sattarveda Mangalam." A duly elected Grahma Sabha governed the village during the Hindu periods. The Mohametan period is not well recorded.

Uthiramerur came under British rule in 1752 after the battle of Caveripak in which Lord Clive defeated the French. The British used it as one of their local administrative centers. However, contact with the west has not affected the value placed on hierarchy at Uthira-

² Brahman (creator), Siva (destroyer) and Vishnu (preserver) are the Hindu Trinity. The Brahmins are divided into Siva and Vishnu devotees.

merur. The population still adheres to caste distinctions and insignia. Today, it has developed into a small township. It has a Deputy Thasildar, Sub-magistrate, land Registration Officer, a police station, a large bus stand, a post and telegraph office, an English speaking nursery school, a public High School, and a government hospital. It has a busy market where the merchants and farmers sell their produce. Since this is the only market for the people living within a radius of 20 miles, the market is always crowded. All the sellers are high caste and buyers are from all the castes, this makes the market a partially caste free zone. Modernization, although present, has touched Uthiramerur, but not its core institutions, such as the practice of untouchability and the land tenure system.

The climate in Uthiramerur is tropical as is the case throughout the district. The average rain fall is 10 inches per year, mainly due the north east monsoon between August and December. The average temperature is 81 F, and during the summer it goes up to 110 F. The soil is sandy, rocky and very unfertile except in the irrigated areas. The hard rock and scorching sun make cultivation physically very demanding and therefore antithetical to the soft-natured and ritual-conscious landlords.

Agriculture is the major industry. Arable land is of three sorts: wet, dry and totakal (garden). The farmers

cultivate rice, sugar-cane and betel in the wet land. In the dry land they cultivate varagu, raggy, cumboo, maize, samai and other crops. Farmers cultivate vegetables in totakal areas for family consumption. The landlords mostly cultivate rice, which is the staple food among the South Indians.

Settukal and Puluthikal are the two types of cultivation in this district. In Settukal, the land is irrigated by water from tanks and channels, ploughed four or five times both lengthwise and breadthwise, and thus reduced to a puddle. The soil is then mixed with leaves and plants, cow-dung, and ashes. The land is ploughed again four or five times. The clods of earth are thereby broken up, and the land turned into regular mire. Also, the leaves and the manure rot. A harrow is then drawn over the surface in order to smooth the land. Then the seeds are sown. Settukal needs a continuous flow of water. The principal difference between Settukal and Puluthikal is that the latter does not require additional water for two months after sowing, but both are strenuous and difficult.

The agricultural operation is not only physically strenuous but demands contact with "impure" objects such as cow-dung, processed leather, rotten plants, and mud. Brahmin and non-Brahmin landlords, conscious of their ritual status and prestige, never undertake such hard and "demeaning" operations, but leave it to Paraiyans. The

ecology, the hardship, and the ritual impurity of the work account for the concentration of Paraiyan settlement in this area.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN AT UTHIRAMERUR

There are 24 castes groups at Uthiramerur, divided into three broad divisions: Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas (another name for the Untouchables in Tamil Nadu). These status groups are residentially segregated from each other for reasons of purity. The residential segregation reflects a more or less conscious plan as well as traditional social values.

People who are close to each other in the social system tend to live side-by-side; people whose social positions are widely different live apart. Other things being equal, physical distance can be seen as a function of structural distance (Beteille, 1965:19).

Based on the principles of hierarchy, the village is divided into three well-defined physical segments, the AGRAHARAM (the Brahmin cluster), METTUTHERU (Non-Brahmin street), and CHERRI (the residential area of Adi-Dravidas). The very names of the settlement indicate their social identity.

Agraharam

The Agraharam is the center of the socio-religious and cultural life of the Brahmins. It lies between the Vaikunta Perumal and the Subramania Samy temples. There are nine streets running East to West. These streets are

named after prominent local Brahmins (C.K.Iyengar Street), the temples (V.P.Koil Street), or a deity (Parvathi Street). Being sandwiched between the two temples and naming their streets after gods and goddesses indicates the Brahmin belief that the god and goddesses will protect them from all evils and give them a prosperous life.

The two traditional priestly castes at Uthiramerur are the Iyers and Iyengars. Belonging to a priestly caste does not mean that every family depends on priestly work for a living. There are only two families who officiate at the temple and perform initiation, marriage and death ceremonies for families. The residents of the Agraharam use these priestly families as a symbol of their ritual power and prestige because that has been the basis of hierarchical domination. In Brahmin villages, the Brahmins who enjoy ritual status control the land and the various political institutions. The houses in the Agraharam are very close to each other which makes possible a fairly intense social life. They exchange food and flowers³ between houses. The old men and women sit around and chew betel and nuts.⁴ The Brahmins allow non-

³ Indian women love to adorn their hair long hair with flowers. When a women buys some flowers she always share them with her neighbors.

⁴ Many people at Uthiramerur chew the seed of the fruit of the betel palm together with betel leaves and lime. Though it is used to prevent mouth odor, it is also a social activity among kin groups.

Brahmins to enter into their living room but never into the kitchen and dining rooms. The Brahmins believe that the presence of an Untouchable in their house pollutes food more easily than even such objects as a dirty spoon, or a dog. All social contacts with the Untouchables are made outside the house. Older people still judiciously avoid the sight of a "beef-eating Paraiyan." The younger generation of Brahmins are less purity conscious, eat in restaurants, and sit with others in buses.

The streets and houses in the Agraharam are very clean. Unlike non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas, Brahmins do not fill their streets with trash and garbage. Neither do they dry their washed clothes in front of their houses. Each Brahmin house has a veranda, known as "payal", facing the street. Traditionally the elders used the payal as a school to teach the Hindu sacred scriptures to the initiated Brahmin children, but today it is a place for gossip. Usually a group of people gather together around 8.00 P.M at the payal after supper to gossip about the latest happenings in the village. The topic varies from the latest scandals at the Agraharam to the newly arrived movie at the cinema. The Brahmins allowed me to participate in their gossips. The older generation feels that the domination of the Brahmin is coming to an end at Uthiramerur and such a decline is attributed to the age of "kali yuga," where the evil dominates over good. For

example, when a Vanniyar, an impure Shudra defeated a Brahmin in an election for Panchayat Presidency in 1967, the Brahmins resented the Vanniyars' ascendancy to power.

Out of the 150 households in the Agraharam only two families buy an English daily newspaper and another four families buy Tamil news papers. Though there is a small community reading room in the Agraharam, people rarely frequent them. Some of those who read newspapers also listen to All India Radio and see TV and instruct others on the regional and national events. Brahmins are keen followers of political developments, since the ruling party ADMK is avowedly based on anti-Brahmin ideology and came to power by arousing the anti-Brahmin sentiments. The Brahmins are more informed on economical and political issues than other groups.

Though the bases of stratification is enlarging from mere ritual status to economic and political power, ritual purity still remains the underpinning of the hierarchical arrangement. Every Brahmin at Uthiramerur is conscious of his ritual power and dominance. I witnessed their ritual power not only in terms of their superior rank in the caste hierarchy, but also in their accouterment. The accouterment is seen in the degree of discrimination they practice against the lower castes in connubial and commensal practices. There has been only one case of intercaste marriage at the Agraharam and it involved social ostracism

for the married couple. Brahmins may give food to non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas, but may never receive food from them since there is a direct correlation between exchange of food and status. Their consciousness of their superiority is seen in their attitudes towards the lower castes to be explained in the next chapter.

Brahmins dominate the economical and political life of the people. Although they continue to own a great amount of land, the Brahmins have recently lost their monopoly over land. The partition of land among siblings, indifference towards cultivation among the landowning Brahmins, large ceremonial expenses involved in marriages, and a high level of conspicuous consumption are some of the factors that have contributed to the break-down of the Brahmin monopoly over land. The Brahmin elders claim that Vanniyars, at one time the slaves and then tenants of the Brahmins, have falsified land accounts, cheated them and taken away the land from them. The 1950 land record shows that Brahmins owned nearly 2,500 acres over and above the 335 acres of temple land. Today they are left with just slightly under 513 acres. Some of them invested in the education of their children and moved to cities in search of white collar jobs.

Slowly Brahmins have lost political control over the village. When the Panchayat Raj, a local form of government, was introduced in 1950 at Uthiramerur, Brahmins took

power and ruled the village until 1967. At the dawn of "Tamil Cultural Nationalism," an anti-Brahmin and anti-Sanskrit movement started in the late 1940s, the non-Brahmins took control of the Panchayat administration and thus of the patronage system. The non-Brahmin political domination reached new heights in 1984 when a Vanniyar was elected to represent the area as a member at the Legislative Assembly of the state. Currently there is no representative at the Panchayat from the Agraharam.

During my interviews, the Brahmin elders were saying that within the past thirty years nearly 200 families have migrated to Chengalpattu, Kancheepuram and Madras cities. This geographical mobility is made possible by their higher level of education and access to occupational mobility. Every household has at least one family member working as a doctor, engineer, lawyer, teacher, or clerk in the cities. This migration is also largely due to the collapse of Brahmin domination in the village and the fear of being engulfed by the non-Brahmins. The Brahmins foresee that another 150 households may migrate to the city within a decade. De-brahmanization is a factor to be reckoned with in the Brahmin villages of Tamil Nadu (Beteille, 1965; Gough, 1983). One of the major consequences of de-Brahmanization is the emergence of new dominant castes from the non-Brahmin castes, some of whom, particularly the Vanniyars, are becoming very militant.

The physical separation and insulation of the Agraharam as a community from the rest, and the intense interaction among the Brahmins, make it possible for them to be an exclusive community. This exclusion has given them an opportunity to develop a "we-feeling." The core of their "we-feeling" is "brahminness." To others brahminness means having a trickery character. Going beyond the popular conception, we can infer that the essence of Brahminness is their historical consciousness that they have been at the center of the social order. Their consciousness that power - spiritual, political and economic - has flowed from the center to the periphery makes them feel they were the center of the microcosm at Uthiramerur. When they realize that they are no more the center of social gravity, they predict the collapse of the moral and social order. But their loss, of course, has been the gains of non-Brahmins.

Non-Brahmins

There are 22 non-Brahmin castes in Uthiramerur.⁵ The Non-Brahmins at Uthiramerur are also known as KUDIYA-

⁵ Vellalan, Reddy, Naidu, MUDuliyar, Marwadi, Chetiyar, Nadar, Kiramani, Thambirar, Konar, Vanniyars, Sengunthar, Kammalar, Poosari, Vannar, Ambattar, Parathavar, Villi, Ottar, Navithar, and Narrikuravan are the Non-Brahmins. The non-Brahmins are mostly Shudras who are internally stratified into pure and impure Shudras and I have listed them in the order of descending order of purity and pollution.

NAVAR.⁶ They range from the once aristocratic Vellalans caste to nomadic gypsies known as "Narikoravan." The non-Brahmins⁷ mostly are Shudra who are classified into pure and impure Shudras. The non-Brahmin castes, with their many subcastes, do not live in one contiguous area, but are dispersed all over Uthiramerur in 46 streets and small lanes. The Non-Brahmins do not have the same intense social life as the Brahmins, because they are socially more heterogeneous, more numerous, and have fewer occasions on which they all come together at one place. The Reddy and Naidu, two non-Brahmin castes, speak the Telungu language which gives them a linguistic identity in contrast to other non-Brahmins. The Muslims keep their religious identity. The lack of definition in the middle makes them vie with each other for a ritually higher rank than the one allotted to them.

The Non-Brahmins live in houses made of bricks and mortar. The Vellalans, Reddy, Naidus, Muddaliyar, Udayar, Marwadi, and Chettiyar have built beautiful houses. Architecturally some of their houses look more artistic

⁶ Kudiyanavar literally means an authentic citizen of a village. From that we infer Brahmins are Aryan invaders and therefore they are foreign to the soil, and the Untouchables are not part of their society. It is a way of establishing the "sons of the soil" thesis.

⁷ There is a lack of precise definition about non-Brahmins because it is composed of so many clean and unclean Shudra castes. Most of them claim to Kshatriyahood, second in rank to the Brahmins, as there is no Kshatriya caste in the Tamil region.

than those of the Brahmins as their houses were built very recently. The pure Shudras are very careful about their personal and domestic cleanliness, while the impure Shudras such as Konars, Vanniyars, Sengunthar, Villi, Ottar, and Navithar live in huts made of mud and thatched roofs. This latter type of structure is completely absent in the Agraharam. Their streets are very untidy. Some of them have a certain notoriety for rowdyism, thievery, and immoral traffic. The police crime rate shows these impure Shudras have the highest crime records among the non-Brahmins.

The Mudaliyars, Naidus, Reddiyars, and Vanniyars are emerging as the four most dominant castes and share a power pool. These four Shudra castes, who form 54 percent of the total population, own 70.4 percent of the total land in the village. The Naidus control the financial credit institution. Seven out of nine members of the board of directors of the Cooperative Agricultural Society, the key financial agricultural credit institution, are from the Naidu caste. The Vanniyars, forming 35 percent of the population, enjoy political dominance. They captured the Panchayat Presidency in 1967 and the seat at the Legislative Assembly in 1984, and dominate the political apparatus and patronage. Their ascendancy to dominance reflects a general trend among the Vanniyars to a higher social status (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967:49-63)

throughout the State of Tamil Nadu. Srinivas attributes their mobility to the "system's political fluidity" (1966:93) which makes power-sharing possible for all.

Today the non-Brahmin dominance is a force to be reckoned with. The Vanniyars at Uthiramerur are turning out to be very militant. The Vanniyar landlords and tenants insist that Pariah Neerkatties should irrigate their land first, and if the Neerkatties fail to do so, they are beaten up. Under some pretext or other Vanniyar boys enter into the Cherries and beat the Untouchables up. They also intimidate the Brahmins. We have to understand such militancy in the context of their hierarchical location in history. Traditionally, Vanniyars were impure Shudras, and the Manu defined their function as follows:

The Shudra belong to the fourth caste, which has one birth (only).
 And Serves the higher (castes)
 From them he shall seek to obtain his livelihood.
 He shall use their caste-off shoes.
 And eat the remnants of their food (chapter XII: 1,7)

During the Hindu, Mohametan and British periods, the Vanniyars were farm slaves, and not until the 1901 Census did they begin to claim the status of Kshatriyahood, a rank next to the Brahmin. The Brahmins and pure Shudras' such as Mudaliyars, Naidus, Reddiyars, and Vellalans, do not agree to the Vanniyars claims. The Paraiyans ridicule their claim because Vanniyars were coequal with them as farm slaves. Thus the Vanniyars have made themselves the

center of conflict. Since they are numerous at Uthiramerur, they intimidate those who are above and below them. The Vanniyars have gained a little higher status and respectability at the middle tier by collective assertion.

The changing patterns of dominance at Uthiramerur has not made any difference in the life of Paraiyans in the Cherries. They view this development only as the multiplication of oppressors. It has, however, necessitated an adjustment in their social relations because their new masters are more militant than their old masters.

Adi-Dravidas and Cherris

The Adi-Dravidas and their Cherries have a distinct physical and social character. The hindu belief, that Paraiyans are exterior to Hinduism and the caste system as a whole is seen in the system of residential segregation. The Cherris are far removed -- one or two miles -- from the residential areas of the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. This spatial distance has made it possible for them to create an internal structure of their own, with specific modes of social relations and means of communications. For example, no orthodox Brahmin or non-Brahmin ever visits a Cherri. Therefore the members of high caste have to create caste-free zones to carry out their social interactions. Streets, market places and fields are such caste-free zones where social intercourse takes place.

There are five Cherris - Kallanmanagar, Kuppayannallur, Malligapuram, Nallur, and Vedapalayam - integrated into Uthiramerur socially, politically and economically. They are separated from each other by half a mile to one mile but each is settled in the midst of the rice fields. Traditionally Paraiyans at Uthiramerur were not only landless laborers but watchmen for the rice field. The Paraiyans of Kallanmanagar consider themselves superior to their counterparts in the other Cherris because they do not eat beef and do not do some of the caste based occupations such as beating drums and Neerkatti.⁸ Kallanmanagar has a rigid caste Panchayat⁹ which regulates the social, political and economic life of the people. Paraiyans in other Cherris do not take the decisions of their caste panchayat so seriously.

The houses in the Cherris are built wholly of mud and thatch and bear a general appearance of squalor and misery. The streets are rugged. The misery of the people is more visible on a rainy day. Then the roofs leak, the streets are muddy, people have no place to sleep, and each member of the house takes a corner of the house to escape from the rain. There is a great shortage of space to

⁸ Neerkatti is a group recruited among Paraiyans to do menial occupations for the ritually pure castes.

⁹ Each cherri has its own caste panchayat serving as local court for the people. The caste panchayat judge is called Nattanmai. The Nattanmai is empowered to punish any one violating the rules and regulations of the cherri.

build more houses so that often two to three families, mostly families of brothers, live in the same house which destroys all privacy. They are not able to expand horizontally because the village has limited "patta" land¹⁰ on which to build houses. Those who do not care for the government rules and regulations build their houses on the government lands. However, such bold moves lead to endless litigations. Those who have built their huts on the unauthorized land have met the district collector many times to try to obtain legal title their house-sites, but they have not been successful so far.

Socially every Cherri is homogeneous and has a corporate character. The social composition of each Cherri is even more homogeneous than that of the Brahmin streets. Within the Cherri people move about freely from one house to another and form a very informal network of social relationship. Everyday they gather around the temple or church to discuss their daily chores. It is through the informal communication network that they come to know the job opportunities for the following day, wage levels, and other things connected with their life situation.

MALLIGAPURAM

I carried out my study at Malligapuram, one of the

¹⁰ Patta is a legal title to own land.

five Cherris. Formerly Paraiyans of Malligapuram lived at Pazham Paracherri,¹¹ which was situated some two miles away from its present location. It was struck by cholera around the beginning of the 19th century and most of the population was wiped out. Rev. Gabriel, a French missionary, forced the people to move to the present location. The missionary realized that the name Pazham Para Cherri had a demeaning caste connotation to it, and therefore he changed it into Kizha Cherri. In order to avoid the social opprobrium attached to the name Cherri, the villagers named their village Malligapuram in 1950.

Malligapuram lies on the main road between Kancheepuram and Uthiramerur. The road divides the Cherri into two halves. The earlier settlement at Malligapuram had only a handful of households built on the patta land, but within the past two decades this multiplied into 127 households. There are some 50 homes built on government land, but because they are illegal occupants they can be evacuated at any time. Since the financial worth of any home is between Rs 500 to Rs 1,000, they are prepared to meet the loss, even if their homes are destroyed by government vigilantes. It is a calculated risk on their part.

Of the 127 households 106 are Christians and 21 are

¹¹ Pazham Paracherri means old settlement of Paraiyans.

Hindus. The total population at Malligapuram is 701 and the average family size is 5.5. Nearly a half of the households have seven members, while 20 households have 14 member. The family size might at first suggest that they are mostly joint or extended families, but there are only 14 joint families at Malligapuram, the rest are nuclear families. Only the landed class can afford to support an extended or a joint family not the landless Paraiyans (Mayer, 1966:181-182). A high fertility rate and related population explosion contribute significantly to their poverty and misery.

The oldest economically active male is the head of the household. This person can be a grandfather, father or eldest brother. He makes the important decisions on the education of the children, cultivation if they have land, marriage, worship, and other household activities. Some are very authoritarian. For example, when one young man fell in love with a girl, his father warned him to give up the girl. The tussle between father and son went on for two years, and finally the boy committed suicide. Such authoritarianism is most visible in some cases of arranged marriage. Usually the oldest male is so conservative that he socializes the younger males into traditional occupations. Authoritarianism at home to a large extent reflects the authoritarianism of the dominant castes. A man socialized to be very obedient at home

easily carries over such mentality in his relation to the landlords and vice versa.

The 127 households are divided into 11 KOTHUS.¹² There is an invisible stratification among these kothus. The Pukka and Kazhi kothus still strongly adhere to caste-based occupations¹³ and because of this they are always looked down by others. Boys and girls from other kothus hesitate to marry people from the Pukka and Kazhi kothus. The Pukka Kothu are aware they are treated badly because they have not given up caste-based occupations, but they are not prepared to give up such occupations because they are lucrative. At the same time they resent the avoidance behavior of other kothus. The Thenneri kothu, whose members have a little education and land, usually distances itself from village life. Those Kothus who continue to do caste-based occupations are more submissive to the landlords than other kothus.

The Paraiyans of Malligapuram are mostly landless laborers as shown in Table 3. Only 8 per cent are owner cultivators. Fifty-two per cent are unemployed at

¹² Kothu is a lineage composed of persons related through the male-line, usually residing together in one part of the cherri. The Christians have nine kothus, namely, Adi, Gnanam, Kazhi, Kambboran, Kozhi, Kullarayan, Pukka, Thenneri, Vabho, and the hindus have two kothus, namely, Munusamy and Muthusamy.

¹³ Caste based occupations are beating the drum, removing the dead cattle from the landlords' houses and guarding the cremation ground.

Malligapuram. The unemployed, most of whom (45 percent) are below 15 years, makes the employed more dependent upon the landlords.

TABLE 3.
OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN.

Occupational Categories	Total No. of perscons	%
Neerkatti	4	1
Agricultural laborers	206	61
Tenant cultivators	37	11
Owner cultivators	26	8
Self-employed	23	7
Government employees	42	12
Total	338	

Neerkatties, also known as Kambukutti, work in a caste-based occupation. They as a group have been appointed by the village to perform impure duties for the caste Hindus at Uthiramerur. The landless laborers are internally differentiated among themselves into bonded laborers, attached laborers and casual laborers. Though the casual laborers are free, that is they can sell their labor to whomsoever they want, they are de facto unfree because they are not sure of getting any work during the non-cultivation period unless they tie themselves voluntarily to landlords. This leads to voluntary clientalism.

There are two types of tenancies at Uthiramerur, "Kuthakai" and "Varam." Kuthakai is a form of tenancy

where the landless rent the land from the landlords and pay them annually whether they cultivate the land or not. The 336 acres of temple land are under Kuthakai cultivation. Varam means share-cropping and the amount of share varies from place to place. There is also a group of self-employed people who have invested up to Rs 500 in a tailoring machine or a rickchaw to carry passengers to nearby places. Those who are employed by some private and government agencies are assured of continuous work and income.

This description of the class structure of the landless at Malligapuram shows that most of them are unfree and placed at the bottom of the agrarian hierarchy. Their class position thus corresponds to their location in the social hierarchy. Sociologically we can describe this process as "negative status summation," that is, a class placed lowest in the hierarchy stays there economically and politically.

Political System

Malligapuram has its own political structure. Every kothu has its headman, the oldest active male in that lineage. The headman of a kothu advises members of their lineage, arbitrates disputes among them, but he has no jurisdiction over intra-lineage disputes. The kothu leaders elect the Cherri NATTANMAI (leader) and CHINNA

NATTANMAI (deputy leader) who are empowered to settle village disputes over charges of stealing, street-fighting, marriage irregularities, adultery, and other petty crimes. Whenever a serious crime is perpetrated the victim brings the case to the Nattanmai who summons his Chinna Nattanmai to convene the village panchayat. After a thorough investigation the Nattanmai punishes the culprit. Usually the culprit is asked to pay a fine of cash. Formerly they used to take the case to a Brahmin or a non-Brahmin landlord, but they stopped doing it after 1975 because they wanted to solve their problems by themselves. If the elected leaders are found corrupt and partial the Kothu leaders call for a new election.

The caste panchayat at Malligapuram does not make any effort to create caste-associations with other Paraiyan caste councils in order to create a class consciousness. This lack of class consciousness and general inability to exercise a joint political will is due to the geographic isolation of the Cherris from each other and reflects also their economic dependency. The highest a Paraiyan has gone politically is to represent his Cherri in the local panchayat.

Religious system

The religious beliefs of the people, both Christians and Hindus, have their roots in popular religiosity. Before the Paraiyans at Malligapuram embraced Christianity

they worshipped their ancestors, not only to perpetuate their memory but begging them to intercede for a prosperous life. Even today most are animists worshipping demons and ghosts such as Sudalaimadan, Ankalamman, Patrakali and Mariammal. The purpose of worshipping these "outrageous deities" is to show their sense of gratitude to those heroes who saved them from miseries.

There has always been a process of divinization of humans and humanization of gods. These dual processes have to be understood in the context of the poor people's cultures. Paraiyans are a victimized community and as such tend to elevate their protectors to a divine status. Madasamy, Sodalimadan, and Karupasamy are men of valor who protected the Untouchables and now are divinized. By the same token they also humanize their gods. This should not be seen as a form of man-god continuum but as a longing for divine protection in human form.

The belief system found among Paraiyans is entirely different from Hindu orthodoxy. Their myths, rites and rituals have one theme, that is, preservation of themselves and their progeny. All that they ask from their gods and goddesses are bountiful rains, a good harvest, a world free from famine and other calamities. They perceive famines and pestilences as indications of divine wrath. To placate their deities they go on pilgrimages, let their hair and beards grow, and arrange for an elabo-

rate festival in honor of the village presiding deity, Mariammal. The forms of these religious practices suggest that their religion is more pragmatic than moralistic or normative.

The Catholic religious beliefs of the Paraiyan Christians take their origin both from Hindu and Catholic traditions. The Paraiyans of Malligapuram were converted to Christianity from their brand of Hinduism around 1930. Their conversion was a protest against Hinduism and expressed a hope of brotherhood and economic prosperity. But the conversion was only partial and they have carried over their Hindu practices to their new religion. This can be seen in their form of worship and rituals which center on their village patron, St Anthony, rather than on the person of Jesus Christ or on any well developed dogmas.

Both the Christian and Hindu devotions have to be interpreted as a system of reciprocity and relationship between god and man. The faithful offer prayers and offerings and in return expect material benefits from the deity. Khare writes,

The argumentis that prayers essentially follow a logical paradigm that is characteristic of social prestations, and that this is particularly true for the devotional prayers of Hinduism so widely circulated in contemporary India. These prayers, it is further proposed, are essentially based on the premise of give-and-take, with an explicit idea of both the 'quality and quantity of exchange' between the deity and the devotee. The point that the

'deities practice exchange' should hardly surprise those who, being acquainted with modern legal practice, know that the deities can formally fight court cases either to retain or to augment the property that their temples hold (1977:105).

Both the Christian and Hindu Paraiyans think that the greater the quantity and quality of the gifts and prayers offered to gods the greater will be the quantity and quality of gifts received from gods. This expectation induces them to make greater sacrifices, including silver and gold offerings. This religious aspiration of the oppressed differs from the more orthodox orientation which tends to be much more dogmatic and ritualistic.

In brief, the Paraiyans, both Hindus and Christians, associate religion with a transcendental being. They expect more material benefits than spiritual favors from their gods and goddesses. Their religion is this-worldly, not other-worldly. We shall deal with the relationship between religion and man's basic needs in Chapter 8.

Seasons of Life and their Significance

One of the characteristic features of a Cherri is that the beliefs of its residents are more interwoven with the seasons of nature and life than with the ultimate, as it is generally understood by the religious specialists. The Paraiyans at Malligapuram mark the four important stages of life, namely, birth, adulthood, marriage and death, with great ceremonies. The birth rituals announce

to the village the arrival of a new life and the family's responsibility to sustain and socialize the child. The primary socializing agents, such as parents, priests and the teachers, provide a code of behavior to a growing child. By the age of ten or so the children in a Cherri learn the ritual pattern of avoidance and association. They know they cannot go freely to the Agraharam or Mettutheru or associate freely with the children of high castes.

Puberty is a passage to adulthood. This biological change is accompanied by some changes in status and role:

The person who makes the passage is officially empowered by the ritual to fit the pattern of action, and the society gives notice that it will expect that pattern. It is a part of the common value system that just those statuses should exist, and that this person should occupy them or it (Goode, 1951:183).

The new adult has to make adjustments to her family and to the society. After her puberty the girl relates more to her mother and sisters than to her father and brothers. Her life is monitored by the family and her maternal uncles. A male adult is expected to take more responsibility in the household duties.

Marriage is not merely a license for sexual union but a creation of a complete family. The marital alliances take place between these five Cherris. Both the Christian and Hindu rituals emphasize fidelity to each other, enormous progeny, and responsible parenthood. Through

marriage the society validates and accepts future parents who will give continuity to their society. One of the striking moral values in Paraiyan marriage is the idea of fatherhood. Every child must have not only a biological but also a legal father. Sociological fatherhood is equally important as sociological motherhood. If there is no one to assume the responsibility of sociological fatherhood the women may choose abortion or commit suicide. The concept "bastard child" does not exist at Malligapuram.

Death in this Cherri brings intense sorrow to all the members. The corporate support varies by the age and role of the deceased. When a baby dies the ritual is very simple and the villagers treat the death of a baby as uneventful. But when a head of the family dies there is great dislocation and disorganization in that family. On those occasions no one from the Cherri goes to work and all gather around the house of the deceased. Individually and collectively they offer support to the family. Goode says that at death, [T]he solidarity of the family has been temporarily broken by the removal of an integral part, and the collective mourning and ritual serve to realign the unity in an emotionally satisfactory and socially approved manner" (1951:187). Every one at Malligapuram contributes something or other to lessen the pain and sorrow. Some villagers, particularly the nearest

relatives, cook food and feed the members of the diseased. Others just sit with them throughout the night to share their sorrows.

We have dealt with the four seasons of life of a person at Malligapuram in order to show that life in a Cherri is not the chaos described by Dubois (1964) and other earlier ethnographers and anthropologists, but a well ordered and regulated social system. Malligapuram is a miniature model of how a supportive system functions at a micro level. It has a well-knit kinship organization, regulated religious customs based on "pre-Aryan and non-Brahmanical elements" (Cohn, 1955:56), and a social status of its own. Living in isolation from the rest, and being freed from the sanskritic tradition of Brahmins, they have evolved a culture of their own which protects them from anomie when faced with a continuous loss of humanity and starvation.

CONCLUSION

Uthiramerur-Malligapuram contains three status grouping in one contiguous geographical area. The very physical structure manifests the hierarchy of domination. As we proceed from the Agraharam-center to the Cherri-periphery we witness a decrease in ritual, economic, and political power. Traditionally the Brahmins at Uthiramerur have been an encompassing status group, that is,

possessing ritual purity they have an encompassing domination over the rest. Westernization, an incipient market economy, and political modernization changed the bases of power and thus broke brahmanic domination. This paved the way for the emergence of non-Brahmin domination at Uthiramerur and the creation of multiple dominant castes. But Paraiyans are still subject to the domination of the multiple dominant castes. Most of them still continue to be unfree laborers. The effect of the double discrimination -- ritual and economic -- has made them powerless. This is the socio-economic and political context of their obedience to the landlords.

CHAPTER VI

CASTE AND KARMA

The basic sociological issue that awaits an answer in this study is why the Untouchables have not revolted against their caste-ridden oppression. I already argued in Chapter 1 that both Indologists and Marxists have focussed on the Hindu belief system in explaining the obedience of the Untouchables. The former views the belief system as pivotal to the salvation of the Hindus, and the latter as false consciousness. My field observations, however, revealed that Paraiyans at Malligapuram neither share the orthodox Hindu world-view nor are unaware of the dynamics of the caste system as an oppressive structure. At best these models, therefore, offer partial explanations (Moore, 1978:56), but we have to look for a more convincing argument based on the nature and composition of the different classes, and the rights, duties and obligations which bind them together in a relation of domination and subordination (Beteille, 1965:102).

In this chapter I shall first argue that belief in Karma and related concepts, both in theory and praxis, varies from class to class. Secondly, I show that Brahmins, non-Brahmins, and Untouchables, irrespective of

any class affiliation, use Karma as "a theory of causation that supplies reason" for human fortune, good or bad (Babb, 1983:167). Third, I argue that if false consciousness means that workers fail to perceive an exploitative situation as such, then my field observation shows that the landless Paraiyans do not have false consciousness, since they are fully aware that they are exploited. Finally, I shall argue that an analysis of Paraiyans' subculture reveals that their judgement to obey or revolt against the social order does not depend on Karma or false consciousness but on a rational calculus of stability and security of their individual subsistence. They will opt for the present social order, if it guarantees them the basic necessities of life rather than an utopian social order which is to come. First I shall deal with the question of Karma.

KARMA, WHOSE BELIEF SYSTEM?

Like any other religious world-view Hindu theology provides an ideal scriptural world-view. The belief system of the faithful, however, does not always reflect the ethical imperatives of their religious teachers. Hinduism is no exception to such a universal trend. My findings indicate that the awareness of hindu theological ideas such as SAMSARA (reincarnation), KARMA (duty), DHARMA (morality), and MOKCHA (heaven) depend on the

degree to which a caste is exposed to Hindu orthodoxy. The Brahmins living in the Agraharam (brahmin cluster) have the strongest level of Hindu orthodoxy. As we move away from the Agraharam to the periphery (the Cherri of Paraiyans) we see a dilution of hindu orthodoxy. Aiyappan writes,

The Upanishads and mythologies... of the Hindus are works of the elite, mostly Brahmans, and they are in the Sanskrit language. Through Brahman propagandists and through translations into other languages the ideas concerning their ancestor cults, gods, avatar, and yogic practices have spread widely among the upper non-Brahmin castes, but only in an extremely vague, diluted form among the lower castes and least among the tribal communities of India (1977:96).

I found the Brahmins at Uthiramerur very orthodox and dogmatic in their beliefs and ritual practices. The non-Brahmins, insulated in a brahmanic milieu, tend to imitate Brahmin life style in order to gain respectability from Brahmins and low castes. Thus, although non-Brahmins resent Brahmin domination, they "sanskritize" their ways to gain social mobility. Some of the non-Brahmin pure Shudras castes are adopting vegetarianism, wearing sacred thread,¹ and other brahmanic practices. The Paraiyans of Malligapuram, professing a popular religiosity vis-a-vis Hindu orthodoxy, are the least sanskritized of all the caste groups. Such a religious differentiation is built in the very hierarchy of caste system. The coexistence of

¹ Sacred thread is donned by the initiated.

Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Paraiyans in one geographical continuous area at Uthiramerur provides us an opportunity to observe and measure the impact of hindu theology in shaping the social behavior of the interacting categories.

Traditionally, Uthiramerur was called Sattur Veda Mangalam (Sattur = four; Veda = vedas; Mangalam = a village). Literally it meant a place where the four vedas were taught. Uthiramerur has been a Brahmin dominated village from 1000 A.D. Brahmins at Uthiramerur are a highly sanskritized group. An elderly Brahmin, who always sits at the village bus stand, said that as Brahma (God) is the center of the cosmos, Brahmins are the center of the social order. To prove his point the master story teller narrated the following anecdote:

The social order is like a coconut. The outer shell with its rough edges are Untouchables. They are not sophisticated, very rough in their ways and manners, and very unclean. When we break the shell we find a brown integument covering the white kernel. The brown film like substance is lower Shudras and the white kernel is higher Shudras. The sweet nectar is Brahmins. Just as each substance in a coconut has its own identity so too different classes.

This is not an isolated view of an ultra-orthodox Brahmin, but his comments reflect the general Brahmin mentality at the Agraharam. The Agraharam as a settlement, and the institution of the KURUKAL (the priesthood) preaching Hindu orthodoxy and performing orthodox rituals, give the Brahmins the socio-centricity they are so conscious of. The Agraharam is built around the Vishnu

and Shiva temples and the relationship between the temples and the Agraharam is symbiotic. The Kurukal acts as a liaison between gods, temples and the Agraharam. He is a "guru"² as well as a prohita.³ Kurukal as a guru conducts discourses on the Hindu sacred scriptures in the temple every day in the evening. With great sagacity and animation he propounds on the relation between the individual soul and his god, the morality of actions, transmigration of the soul, and the unity between the concepts samsara, Karma, and dharma. To add credibility to his discourse he brings other learned gurus from Kancheepuram, a bastion of Hindu orthodoxy in South India.

The guru gets two types of audiences, the sitting and standing. Some Brahmins sit in front of their guru in rapt attention, clarify issues, and debate with their guru. All do not show the same earnestness. Others participate in the discourse because of their brahminness. The standing audience are mostly non-Brahmins, mainly the clear Shudras. It is not mere curiosity that brings non-

² The word guru means master or guide. Guru is also used to designate persons of distinguished rank who are raised to a high position and invested with a character for sanctity, which confers both spiritual and temporal power upon them.

³ Purohitas are Brahmin priests. They perform rituals, offer sacrifices, and publish Hindu almanac. The gurus and purohitas share the duty of preserving intact the ancient customs, and they in one voice condemn any one violating the Hindu orthodoxy.

brahmins daily to the temple, but some of them attend the discourses with an earnest desire to know their religion and obtain mokcha (heaven).

Paraiyans do not participate in the discourses because (1) they are not allowed to enter into the temples, (2) the religion propounded by the Brahmin guru is not only beyond their comprehension, but it does not belong to their religious tradition, and (3) they do not have the leisure to attend these discourses as they work from dawn to dusk. Non-participation in such orthodox discussion is a sufficient reason for their lack of theoretical knowledge of hindu orthodoxy.

This differential participation in the discourses accounts for the variation in understanding of Hindu theology and consequently the impact of Hinduism on the lives of these three groups. Brahmins living in the Agraharam believe that their socio-centricity is a positive sanction for their exemplary living in their previous life. Brahmins constantly speak of "Karma palan" and "piraya chittham" which means that ones own action will follow one in the next incarnation.⁴ They strongly hold the view that the caste hierarchy is a god-given social order. Some of them can quote any number of passages from the hindu scriptures, from Vedas, Agamas,

⁴ Karma palan and piraya chittham literally mean the fruit of labor.

and Puranas, to prove their point. Based on their theological conviction and practical expediency they will never concede equal status to any non-Brahmin castes. They are bold in asserting that "the beef eating and drum beating Paraiyans" can never dream of equality with any one who is ritually above him.

When we move from the Agraharam to the non-Brahmin (Shudras) settlement we see a decrease in the practice of Hindu orthodoxy. The pure shudra castes, such as Chettiyars, Marwadi, Mudaliyar, Naidus, Reddiyars, and Vellalars, show greater propensity towards sanskritization as a device for upward social mobility. This aspiration makes them attend the discourse and learn some of the theological concepts. Some send their children to Kancheepuram to learn Sanskrit, the language of the gods. The unclean shudra castes do not have the leisure nor aspiration to be sanskritized. Generally all the non-Brahmins believe in the caste system and its immutability, in the values of purity and pollution, and Karma and reincarnation. When I carried on my socio-economic survey I stayed a few days in a house at the Reddiyar street at Uthiramerur. When four Paraiyans were carrying a dead cattle on their shoulders, one of the Reddiyars seeing the sight, commented to me that these Paraiyans can never escape their "Karma palan" (the fruit of ones own Karma).

We would expect that the Paraiyans of Malligapuram,

who live close to Uthiramerur, although psychologically and socially far removed from the pale of Hinduism, to have some notion of these fundamental theological concepts. However, the older generation of Paraiyans, while saturated in Hindu popular religiosity, do not have any idea of hindu theology, and the younger generation, who have had a little schooling, have some idea of these theological tenets but do not have any respect for these ideas. It is rare to find a Paraiyan who will be able to weave together these abstract concepts cogently in order to give us a unified idea of hindu world-view. No one from the Cherri knows any sanskrit. Obviously, those esoteric dogmas do not belong to their cultural tradition. And my observations show that few Paraiyans at Malligapuram participate in such belief systems.

Chellam is a devout Untouchable with little education. He has eight years of schooling. He worships Mariamma, the goddess who brings rain and who protects against diseases. When I asked him about "aduthe janmam" (a tamil expression for transmigration of the soul), Chellam told me the following:

I have enough of misery (poverty and starvation) in this life and I will not look forward for another rebirth. All that I hope in life is to die in peace. Was He (god) not satisfied with my present suffering? Why did he want me to suffer starvation and humiliation again and again? Enough was enough.

Arumugam works in a cotton mill. He is a Hindu fanatic

who relentlessly argues for the superiority of Hinduism over Christianity and Islam. When I asked him about his belief on rebirth, he replied:

I believe in the goddess Mariamma. Every year we celebrate her feast around the month of Markazhi (December-January). She is the one who protects us from all pestilence, particularly chicken pox and small pox. I have a great devotion to her because she is our kula thevathai (family goddess). This is my religious belief and I am not interested in knowing about other things.

When I pressed him further for specificities about his belief on rebirth he was sarcastic.

I would like to give you an answer but it is a pity that those who have gone ahead of us to moksha (next life) have not informed us how they are getting on, and those who are reborn do not tell us anything about their new birth. Can't they, if not anyone else at least my grandparents, write a postcard about their whereabouts in their next birth. Swami (a way of addressing a catholic priest), who cares for the next birth when we are not able to take care of ourselves in the present one?

These examples reflect the sullen cynicism of Paraiyans at Malligapuram. They are not only cynical about rebirth, but they also make it very clear that they believe God has punished them enough in this life. Behind such cynicism lies a desperate concern with the basic necessities of life. It suggests an inverse correlation between empty stomachs and advanced theology.

The Paraiyans at Malligapuram have no idea of Karma⁵

⁵ The Tamil words for Karma are karumam, viti, and yokam.

either. No one is willing to accept the idea that their present low socio-economic and ritual status as Paraiyans is a negative sanction for their evil deeds of previous birth. The statement of "Periyavar" (a nickname of one of the elderly persons) on Karma is worth quoting.

Swami, I don't know and I can't recollect what I was in my previous birth. I don't think I might have been such a worst wretch to be born in the most degrading of castes. I don't think my "kula theivam" (family god) will subject me to all these present miseries. I don't have anyone to take care of me. I have just this loin cloth to wear, not much to eat, and no place to sleep. Do you think my God, unless he closes his eyes altogether to my present misery, will test me beyond my endurance? If at all anybody deserves such a punishment the Brahmins and other high castes who thrive in fraud and exploitation should get it, not me.

Muthu's comments on Karma are more cryptic:

Swami, I don't know anything about Karma and other stuff. I get up early morning, go to work, come back at 5 P.M, eat my supper and go to bed. That is my life. The Hindu sastra says that you are a Paraiyan because you did something bad in your previous life, I queried him. He gave a big grin and retorted, "Do you remember your previous birth?" I said "no". If you an educated man don't know, then how you can expect me an illiterate person to know all about my previous birth. I too don't know. I asked him whether he believes in Karma. His impatient reply was he didn't care about those things. He said all that he was worried about in life is his wife and children and how to feed them.

Paraiyans at Malligapuram communicate three basic ideas through their comments on hindu theological concepts. First, they, particularly the elders, are not generally aware of such concepts. Second, the youngsters who are aware of them, reject these ideas because of the

historical implication of these concepts. Third, they are so preoccupied with the basic necessities of life, that they do not worry about eternal salvation and other eschatological things. Therefore, propositions such as "the desire of India is to be freed from the cycle of rebirths, and the dread of India is reincarnation" (Stenvenson, 1970:1) has little empirical reference (Gough, 1981).

The same thing cannot be said of caste. Every one in the Cherri knows about the caste system and they reject it. When they go to different places they are constantly asked about their "varna". Paraiyans at Malligapuram equivocate on the word varna because the term refers to both caste and color, and evade the question. The illiterates ridicule the idea of caste. They say that there are two jatis, namely, onjati (male) and pennjati (female). The literate say that the charitable and uncharitable are the two broad divisions of castes.⁶ Paraiyans at Malligapuram are not naive enough to believe the theology that their present degrading position is a sanction for their evil life in their previous life.

There are some who argue that Paraiyans' respect for Brahmins and non-Brahmins is a sign of acceptance of the value of hierarchy. Here one has to differentiate between

⁶ The Tamil saying runs as follows: ittar periyor ittathar izhikulathar, pattangil ullapadi.

appearance and reality. Survival does require them to show respect. Paraiyan tenants and landless laborers stand at a distance from their landlords with folded hands and bent knees. But we have to take into consideration what goes on behind the scenes. Paraiyans sleep with landlords' wives, urinate on the high caste's drinking well, and tease their young girls. These are not signs of respect. When Paraiyans gather in front of St Antony's church for their evening gossip, they use the filthiest language to abuse their landlords. Pragasam, one of the elementary school teachers, told me he would never eat in a Vanniyar house and sleep with a Vanniyar girl because they are very unclean and uncouth. To use his own phrase they smell like corpses.

Neither do Paraiyans at Malligapuram believe in the origin myth which says that Brahmins emanate from the mouth of god, Kshatriyas from the arms, Vaisyas from the stomach, Sudras from the feet, and Untouchables from illegal union of Shudra men with Brahmin women. Paraiyans at Malligapuram have two indigenous version of the origin myth which repudiate the classical version. One version says that Rama, a hindu god, gave the name Paraiyan as an honorary title to one Sambavan (another name for Paraiyan) for his valor in leading an army. The second tradition says they are descended from the Brahmin priest Sala Sambavan. It is said that Sala Sambavan turned into a

Paraiyan for stealing meat which was meant to be offered to Lord Shiva. It is customary among the lower castes to trace out their origin to a deity or to a miraculous birth. Such practices suggest that Paraiyans do not accept their lowest status as a sanction for their evil deeds in the past.

Paraiyans at Malligapuram express their resentment at the prescribed superiority and inferiority of different castes through pithy sayings such as "all shit smell the same" and "all blood is of the same color." If we look beyond the vulgarity of the phrases, we can see their righteous indignation against the system that oppresses them. There are thus several indications that Paraiyans at Malligapuram do not accept the caste system and its concomitant belief system.

How do we account for this variation in the belief system between the Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Paraiyans though they live in the same spatio-temporal configuration? First, it is Hindu theology that provides a system of justification for the continuance of the caste system. Only those high castes who owe their superior status, directly or indirectly, to such theology, will take a keen interest in caste concepts and use them to try to reinforce those values among the lower castes. Second, any caste group aspiring to a higher status learn these esoteric concepts as a part of the process of sanskritiza-

tion. Paraiyans do not learn this theology because (1) some of the educated Paraiyans recognize that these concepts have been the cause of their dehumanization and hence reject the theology, (2) such learning and other esoteric practices do not improve the Paraiyans' status in the way they may help non-Brahmin castes, (3) the orthodox hindu theology does not belong to the "little tradition" of the Paraiyans at all, and (4) they are more concerned with the basic necessities of life than with eternal salvation.

THE IDEA OF KARMA IN HINDU RITES AND RITUALS

A study of Hindu religious practices also lead us to the same conclusions. The initiation, marriage and death rites and rituals, and prayers used in the ceremonies at Uthiramerur indicate that Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Paraiyans hold different religious traditions and ideologies. The Hindus call their initiation ceremony "Upanayana." The literal meaning is initiation into knowledge. The Hindus have divided their life span into four stages - the Brahmachari (life of a pupil), Grahasta (family life), Vanaprastha (dweller in the forest), and Sannyasa (renouncer). The passage through these stages of life is the sole prerogative of the twice-born.⁷ The

⁷ The twice born refers to the initiated who wear sacred thread to differentiate themselves from the lower castes. Initiation is similar to Christian baptism.

prayers and the rituals used at Upanayana show supplication for the remission of sins and prosperity in this and the next life. Paraiyans, the non-twice-born, are excluded from the upanayana ceremony. This exclusion is an exclusion from the Hindu way of life and grace. This drives home the fact that Untouchables are not only outcasts, but are denied salvation. Though liberal exponents of Hinduism, such as Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan, disown such interpretation of Hinduism, they cannot deny that the Hindu scriptures and practices easily lead to such interpretations. Paraiyan, at Malligapuram appear to be not at all worried about such exclusion and partiality in divine retribution.

The marriage ceremonies of the Brahmins at Uthiramerur are highly ritualistic and sacramental. A brahmin marriage circle at Uthiramerur is carried out over five days. The prohita offers puja⁸ and neiveddya⁹ on the first day. On the second day, nine close relatives are invited to perform the sacrifice of "hamam" (desire) in honor of the nine planets. The "prohita" performs the

⁸ Literally means sacrifice.

⁹ Women prepares various dishes and place them on a metal dish and along with the prohita offer them to the gods and goddesses. Literally neiveddya offering of sweets which are boiled in ghee (melted butter).

most important ceremony known as nalangu.¹⁰ On the fourth day, the prohita performs the "ama-kalpa" and intercedes with all the gods and goddesses to come to the marriage feast and bless the couples. The prohita blesses the "thali"¹¹ and hands it over to the groom to be tied around the bride's neck. All who participate in the marriage rituals live in constant and nagging fear that gods may punish them in this and next birth for an unconscious omission of any rituals and prayers and for any other irregularities.

Marriages of the Shudras can be solemn, if they can financially afford it, but are less ritualistic than a Brahmin wedding. Well-to-do Shudra families invite a Brahmin prohita (priest) to officiate at their marriage. A Shudra landlord considers the presence of a prohita and his Sanskritic mantra a major blessing for the groom and his family. Here again, every rite and ritual is performed meticulously to ward off the god's wrath in this life and the next. A prohita never officiates at a paraiyan marriage.

Paraiyans have their marriages in a temple in the

¹⁰ Nalangu consists in smearing the naked parts of men's bodies with powdered saffron, and immediately after pouring a great quantity of warm water over their heads.

¹¹ Thali is a little gold ornament which all married women wear round their necks as a sign they are married.

presence of elders to witness their marriage without any ritualistic fanfare. The Christian Paraiyan has his marriage blessed by a priest. The grooms and the parents do not notice if an officiating priest changes or even omits some prayers. For Paraiyans, marriage is more of a social event than a religious one.

The rituals and the prayers used in a Brahmin and a Shudra marriage show a direct relationship between life in this world and the next. Its religious significance is that marriage "is a prerequisite for the son who will propitiate agnatic ascendant and so prevent their being denied the world beyond, as well as marking major changes in the ritual status of the partner" (Mayer, 1960:227-228). The newly wed are instructed to uphold the vedic teachings, to lead a virtuous life so as to merit a better social status in the next birth, to initiate their children into vedic teachings, and to do everything an auspicious time and day. Paraiyans neither have the resources for, nor faith in, these elaborate marriage rituals. Thus marriage becomes functional rather than sacramental. We can say this even in reference to Christian marriage, because the sacramental character of the marriage is beyond their world-view and comprehension.

The last rite of a dying Brahmin at Uthiramerur is filled with symbolism. The closing moment of a Brahmin's life, and ceremonies after death, are closely tied to

Hindu theology. Brahmins are concerned about the soul's safe journey from this life to the next. When the relatives realize that the symptoms of death are manifest, the sick is placed on a white piece of cloth. Then with the permission of the dying man, if he is conscious, or from the next close relative who will act as the chief mourner, the prohita obtains permission to perform a ceremony called sarva prayaschitta (perfect expiation). After the sarva prayachitta the prohita pours a few drops of the pancha-gavia¹² into the mouth of the dying Brahmin to purify him. The prohita chants certain mantras¹³ which deliver the dying from all his sins. Then a relative leads a cow and calf to the dying man and the prohita instructs him to catch hold of the tail of the cow. They believe that a cow facilitates the soul's journey to mokcha (heaven). Brahmins at Uthiramerur believe that a Brahmin must not be allowed to die on a bed or a mat, because they believe the soul after the separation from the body would be carrying the bed or mat wherever it goes, or until it enters into another body.

The relatives give "dasa-dana" (giving away gifts) to the prohita, the guards of the cremation ground, beggars,

¹² Pancha-gavia is a mixture of five substances derived from the body of a cow such as milk, curds, ghee (clarified butter), dung and urine. Cow's urine is thought of the most efficacious of all for purification.

¹³ Mantras means prayers.

and other fellow Brahmins. Some Brahmins spend as much as Rs 20,000 on a funeral. The reason for dasa-dana is the belief that these charities will speed up the liberation of the soul from its journey to heaven. They also believe that whatever has been given to the dying at the last minute, particularly food, will be available to the spirit as it moves from this world to the next. To prevent the spirit from starving in its next life they present many gifts of food to the person as he or she is dying.

The most sanskritized higher sudras have adopted some of the last rites of the Brahmins, such as having the prohita officiating at the last rites and giving out dasa-dana. The prohita recites sanskrit mantras begging all the gods to make the passage to the next world easy for the deceased. Some Shudra households feed the poor for a week and on every anniversary hereafter, so that the soul of the deceased may have a smooth passage into heaven.

The Paraiyans' funeral service is unceremonial but very colorful. No prohita is invited because he will not step into the Cherri. They do not have the means to feed the poor or the beggars for a week, but they have their own tradition. The womenfolk will beat their breast and weep, not for the deceased, but for the dead in their own families. The men will be fully drunk. The important

focus of the ceremony is "molam"¹⁴ and "oppari".¹⁵ No one talks of the soul's journey and its reincarnation.

To understand the Paraiyans' understanding of Karma, and mokcha I attended three Hindu and three Christian funerals in the hope the Paraiyans would discuss these ideas at least on that day. But no one discussed the soul's journey into SWARKAM (heaven). To pursue this I asked the bystanders, "What will happen to this soul after its death?". One of them, a mill worker with an elementary education, gave me the following answer:

After a person's death we moan to express our grief. Some of us play molam to attract the crowd and provide them some entertainment. We men get drunk and dance. Around five in the evening we bury him in a six feet deep ground. When I asked him specifically what happens to the soul. He replied in unmistakable terms the body would be eaten by the worms and get integrated.

However we rephrase the question, the Paraiyans' answer is that they do not know where the man goes after his death. They make it clear they are more concerned about the living than the dead. The symbolic elements used in these rituals are also significant. Fire plays a very central role in the rites, rituals, and sacrifices of the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Fire represents the god Agni who serves as a conveyor belt between this world and

¹⁴ Molam is a leather instrument. A group of young men play these leather instruments and dance till the bury the body.

¹⁵ Oppari is official mourning.

the next world. The prohita tells Agni to intercede with Brahman (god) and convey the message so that the person initiated, married, or dead has a better life in this world and world to come. In contrast, Paraiyans do not use fire in their rituals.

Both the literary knowledge of Karma and the practice of rites and rituals at important moments in life, have a class character. Brahmins are the most sanskritized, non-Brahmins less, and Paraiyans the least. We cannot conclude that the subordinate strata regard their position as legitimate and unalterable because of the belief system they hold since there is no empirical evidence, either at the theoretical or practical level, to show that the Hindu world view command compliance from Paraiyans. Such a belief system is present among the higher castes as a justifying mechanism, but not with the lower strata.

POPULAR UNDERSTANDING OF KARMA

Paraiyans' ignorance and/or rejection of brahmanic world-view in theory and in praxis does not mean they do not have their own moral equivalents in their "little tradition".¹⁶ They may not look at Karma as providing

¹⁶ The distinction between little and great traditions owes its origin to Redfield (1956). This distinction helped Srinivas (1956) to study the Coorgs who were once marginal to the Hindu society but attempted social mobility through sanskritization. Marriott, another student of village India, has argued that there is constant interchange between little and great traditions

meaning or explanation for the transmigration of their souls, but they do look to it as a cause, either final or efficient, of their experiences in life. Paraiyans, as we have repeatedly maintained, are subject to many socio-economic, political, and cultural disabilities. Faced with subhuman existence they turn to supernatural forces for explanations "and find in them assertions that provide a bedrock of ultimate meaning upon which all other meaning rests" (Keys, 1983:3). Karma, or its local equivalents such as "thalai ezhuthu", (head writing), "viti" (fate), "yogam" (luck), or "karumam" (deed), provides such system of meaning.

My search for and analysis of the little tradition of Paraiyans at Malligapuram was guided by the work of Keys and Daniel (1983). I approached the problem phenomenologically to discover the operative forces in the moral order of the little tradition of Paraiyans. References to Paraiyans' world view are found in their repertoire of rituals, caste councils, conversations, quarrels, complaints, folklore, harvest songs and jokes. It is hard to codify their variegated repertoire, ranging from animism to advanced religious rituals. The leitmotif in their experience is a search for a transcendental cause for their experiences. I shall cite a number of cases from

(1955).

which I can draw some conclusions.¹⁷

1. When I asked Kallimuthu why he had given birth to eight children, his gleeful reply is God has given him those children and he cannot change his 'thalai ezhuthu'.¹⁸ Kallimuthu feels more comfortable in putting the blame on God.

2. Annamalai had a twenty year old son who was working in the cotton mill. His son had eleven years of education and was very promising. The young man liked one of the young girls in the village. Since his father objected to his marriage he committed suicide. Annamalai, though drowned in sorrow, said that "no one can change my thalai ezhuthu. It has been written that my son should fall in love with that wretch and take his life." "Thalai vittiyai yerusami matte mudiyum" (Father, no one can change ones fate).

3. Selvi has been married to a nice young man for the past twelve years. They do not have any children. Both Selvi and her husband have gone to many temples begging gods and goddesses to give them a baby and remove the social shame attached to a barren woman.¹⁹ Finally they are resigned that no one can change their "karumam".

4. Chockalingam is a military officer. His first baby was a girl. He wanted the second child to be a boy since only a boy would be able to perform the last rites for him. Unfortunately the second baby happened to be a girl. He gave a third trial and the third baby was also a girl. Finally he said it is his "thalai ezhuthu," he will never get a boy and he gave up.

¹⁷ Paraiyans at Malligapuram use "thalai ezhuthu" or "thalai viti" for malevolent happenings and "yogam" for benevolent happenings.

¹⁸ Talai ezhuthu is a tamil word which literally means head writing. The theological meaning is that each ones destiny is determined at his birth and no one can change it.

¹⁹ A barren women is called a maladi. Any married woman loathes to be called maladi because that is one the most degrading titles.

5. There was a terrible famine in 1982. There was no rain and no harvest. People were starving and the young ones were dying. They were selling their copper vessels, gold ear rings and other valuables. The farmers sold their oxen as they could not feed them. Cattle were dying. They say it was their "thalai ezhuthu" they had to undergo such a famine.

6. Doss, a highly talented young man in music and other theatrics, became blind at the age of seven on account of small-pox. According to the villagers his parents might have saved his sight if they had taken him to the hospital, but on religious grounds they refused to do so. The parents feel that it is Doss' thalai ezhuthu that he should be blind.

7. Paraiyans attribute the choice of a good husband or wife, good rain and harvest, first male child, building a new house, successful and safe trip to the city, success of their children in education, success in small business etc.. to their "yogam".²⁰

"Karumam," "thalai ezhuthu," and "viti" are the frequently used concepts to explain misfortunes in life. More often, the same person uses all three concepts interchangeably. Paraiyans believe that there is a preexisting divine script which directs the life of every individual. They also believe that gods and goddesses use cosmic forces, planets, good and evil spirits as agents to implement the already existing scripts. These spirits, they believe, reside in trees, forests, wells, dilapidated houses, graveyards, and fields. Mariamma causes small-pox, Patirakali fire, Cholamadan famines and Kutichathan

²⁰ Yogam like "thalai ezhuthu" is also determined at one's birth.

kills human beings and cattle in the field, and aborts pregnant women. For the Christians it is St Anthony who causes prosperity as well as famine. The villagers strongly believe that no one can go against these pre-determined "scripts." It is this belief that makes them go to a fortune teller to find out their script.

This deterministic belief is strongly advocated by the elders of Malligapuram. This view gives a victim of misfortune solace "by depicting him as the helpless victim of an unalterable fate" (Daniel, 1983:44). This approach to misfortune in life also has a therapeutic function in that the victim draws solace by putting the blame for his fate on an unknown spirit. The youngsters, who have the privilege of schooling, contend that ones "thalai ezhuthu" can be changed by willpower. They feel that every individual has the intelligence and willpower to alter and control one's thalai ezhuthu. The following episode and discussion by the village council bring out the deterministic and free will perspectives on the question of thalai ezhuthu.²¹

Murugan married Valli. He was a hard working boy and had a loving disposition. Unfortunately he was very ugly and some of his manners were very repulsive. He rarely

²¹ This episode happened in 1976. I was an associate pastor at that time at Malligapuram. The village leaders were consulting me at every major turn in this event.

took a bath, did not wash his clothes for months and did not comb his hair. He had the habit of chewing betel nuts and spitting all over. He also used snuff. In contrast, his wife was an attractive girl, very punctilious about her cleanliness and bearing. Murugan's repugnant manners were so forbidding she refused to sleep with him. Eventually, Valli fell in love with a driver of a locomotive at Uthiramerur. One day the driver eloped with her to Kancheepuram, a neighboring city. Some youngsters of Malligapuram, overwhelmed with a sense of social shame, brought her back from Kancheepuram and compelled her to live with Murugan. Again she ran away with the same driver to Madras, a far away city.

The village discussion of this case throws enormous light on Karma as a predetermined script. When Valli was brought back from Kancheepuram, the elders convened the village council meeting on the same night. Murugan and Valli fell at the feet of the elders and begged for justice from the elders. The village headman opened the case for discussion. The elders of Malligapuram were not making either of them culpable for the mistakes. They were wondering how such a misfortune could befall Murugan and Valli and their parents, who were all known for their honesty and integrity. When they could not find any rational explanation for Valli's behavior, they took shelter in the traditional transcendental explanation of

"THALAI EZHUTHU"²². It was their belief that no human wit and wisdom can alter this "divine script" written on ones forehead at birth. The elders concluded that Murugan and Valli could not be forced to live together when their thalai ezhuthu is otherwise. Their judgement was based on "thalai ezhuthai yarum matte mudiyathu" (no one can change what god had written).

The judgement of the elders was not quite palatable to the young generation of rationalists. They argued that Murugan had paid a heavy price for his own mistakes. They abused him for his uncleanliness and uncouth behavior. Some youngsters put the blame on the girl. According to them she had no excuse to run away with the driver because the tamil culture did not permit such bold action on the part of a woman. One of them said that their culture expected the girls to accept even a stone or a blade of grass as their husbands if they were asked to marry them. They contended that it was a disgrace that Valli had taken a different course of action. This pattern of argument rang a familiar tone by suggesting that both Murugan and

²² Thalai ezhuthu stands for determinism. Daniel (1983) offers the best explanation for thalai ezhuthu. Villagers in Tamil Nadu believe that Lord Shiva has created all living beings after his own bodily substance. When he created them he wrote upon the head of each entity its thalai ezhuthu which, Daniel translated as "head writing." Thalai ezhuthu is an exact and very detailed specification of every act it will perform, of all the thoughts it will have in its life, and of every event, good or bad, that will befall it.

Valli could have overcome their problem through willpower and determination. One can hear the Tamil aphorism "vitiyai matiyai Vellalam" (We can conquer fate by strong willpower). The younger generation does not believe in Karma being passed from one to another through any physical substance.

The central issue in the Murugan-Valli episode is whether individuals are responsible for their own destiny in life. The elders feel that one's own destiny is predetermined and human machination does not alter it. The rationalist approach of the younger generation expresses an opposite view point, that rational human beings can change their destiny through their use of free will. The elders' view is closer to the fatalism found in many cultures, primitive and advanced, and to the classical belief in Karma. This fatalism is seen as impersonal social constraints or unintended consequences of latent functions (Lockwood, 1982:102). The elders have learnt to accommodate themselves to these invisible forces because they have failed to combat them. The younger generation, though they agree to some extent with the elders on the invincibility of fatalism, feel that all misfortunes cannot be attributed to the divine script.²³

²³ Such a tension between the older and younger generation exists on many issues. The older generation dismisses the youngsters' opinion with an *ad hominem* argument. The youngsters are called "ariyatha paiyan" - (little boy without any experience).

The deterministic and free will interpretations of Karma as a search for an ultimate or efficient cause are entirely different from the scriptural understanding of Karma in terms of transmigration of the soul as espoused by Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The deterministic and freewill interpretations are not only prevalent among Paraiyans, but Brahmins and non-Brahmins also share such interpretations. But we argue again, that Paraiyans do not think that their present Karma will determine their next birth. Instead, they view Karma as "a theory of causation that supplies reasons for human fortune, good or bad, and that at least in theory it can provide convincing explanations for human misfortune" (Babb, 1983:167).

One final argument is that if the Paraiyans of today fully accept new ideologies, such as Christianity and Marxism, then we can conclude that they had rejected caste hierarchy. Some among the Paraiyans of Malligapuram have relinquished their Hindu identity and sought a negative identity in Christianity. Theoretically, Christianity and Hinduism cherish contradictory values, the former equality and the later hierarchy. The conversion, therefore signifies denial of the caste system in the adoption of the new ideology. This is demonstrated by the enthusiasm with which Paraiyans embraced leftist ideology and egalitarian slogans emphasizing human dignity and equality, when a group of Jesuit seminarians came to the area

and began to organize them.

To conclude the argument on Hindu world-view and Karma, the Hindu belief system has a class bias. As one moves from the Agraharam-center to the Cherri-periphery, the Hindu belief system increasingly weakens. The Hindu world-view and belief in Karma are part of the belief system of the Brahmins, not of the Paraiyans. Although Paraiyans believe in certain aspects of Karma in their attempts to find the final or efficient cause of their experiences in life, they do not accept the caste system or their present station in life as a sanction for their evil deeds in their previous birth. Such beliefs are not part of their tradition.

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

While the Indologists build their explanatory model for the social obedience of the Untouchables on a Hindu world-view and on the theory of Karma, Marxists lay the blame on false consciousness. They argue that the landless are unaware that they are being exploited by the landlords. In contrast, my argument is that the landless are fully aware of their exploitation. In the Indian agrarian context, exploitation means that landlords benefit unjustly and unfairly from the labor of the landless. Scott (1975:489) says that exploitation implies a relationship (between the exploiter and exploited) and

an unfair distribution of efforts and rewards.

Land is the material link between the landlords and landless Paraiyans. Table 4 shows the distribution of population and land ownership.

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND LAND OWNERSHIP

Land owned by Caste	Total Population in %	% of land each caste
Brahmins	3 %	11 %
Non-Brahmins	69	84
Paraiyans	28	5
Total	100	100

The Brahmin and non-Brahmin landlords, the legal owners of 95 percent of the land, do not cultivate the land themselves but allow the landless Paraiyans to use the land in return for some form of payment, a share of the crop in the case of tenants, and wage in the case of laborers.

The way in which exploitation takes place is best illustrated by life histories of the landless. For example, Kanni is a neergatti (one who irrigates the common land). He spends a crop year (ninety days) in the field. In rain or sun, day or night, he has to be on his feet in the field to allocate water from the tank equally to all the fields.²⁴ Although Kanni would not benefit materially by favoring some fields more than others, some

²⁴ Neergatties sleep in the field throughout the crop year.

landlords accuse him of doing it. He has often been beaten by landlords and cried when he told me about it. He has no warm clothes to protect himself during the winter and rarely is able to come home to eat. Instead, his wife or one of his children carry food to him in the field. Although he is often sick, he hangs on to his work because he fears he cannot find other work. At the end of the harvest the landlord pays Kanni 15 measures of rice per acre. On the average every neerkatti gets Rs 400 (\$ 40) worth of rice for a crop year.

When I interviewed him he complained that the payment was too low for the physical hardship he endures. He recollected the nights he had confronted snakes and scorpions, the nights he had gone without food, the cold nights he had spent on the field, and the days he had been taken ill. He said that the landlord never suffered any of the hardship which he and 16 other neergattis underwent everyday. Kanni said, "Just as the landlord's mother carried him for ten months in her womb, my mother also did the same; why he should enjoy life and I should suffer all through my life". Pointing to his stomach he said, "It is all because of this stomach." During the interview he was repeating the word "ANİYAYAM" (injustice) at least 20 times.²⁵

²⁵ When I was interviewing Kanni the other neergattis who were working close by joined us. Each one had horrid story to tell us. Some of them, particularly when

The word "Aniyayam" is very central to our understanding of the subculture of Paraiyans and the repetitious use of the word "Aniyayam" was also a form of reaction to his situation. Arock is a bonded laborer. When his wife died in 1973, he borrowed Rs 300 from one of the landlords for the funeral at an interest rate of 120 per cent. He had no means of repaying the debt. The landlord asked Arock to work in his field and his son to take care of the landlord's cattle to pay off the debt. Arock's day starts at 4.00 A.M and ends at 8.00 P.M. and is filled with agricultural and non-agricultural work for the landlord. Although both father and son have worked for the landlord for the past eleven years, the principal amount remains unpaid. Similar patterns of bonded labor operates throughout India.

I interviewed Arock in February 1984. He was aware that the bonded labor system was abolished in 1976, because he collaborated with me, when I tried to file a law suit in 1978 against the landlords who refused to free the bonded laborers even after the legislation. He was not able to accept the fact that he and his son have not paid off the principal amount after working eleven years for the landlord. He wonders when he would be freed from the clutches of the landlord. During the interview he

they are beaten by landlords, harp murderous tendencies, but they have to contain everything for the sake of their "vairu" (stomach).

told me that since there was no escape from, this he had to accommodate himself to the situation.

These two cases suggest that ultimately the situation of the landless is the same whatever the specific nature of the exploitation. The landless at Malligapuram are aware that they are exploited. As they say: The Britishers ruled us yesterday and the local thieves are ruling us today (Annaiki Andan Vellakaran, inniki alukiran kollakaran); We are the people who plough the land and we are the people who weep at the time of harvest (Uzhukirathum nangal, alukirathum nangal); Land to the tiller (uzhukiravennuke nilam); All land belongs to god (ella nilamum Kanthapan²⁶ nilam); We too want some land from Kanthappa (kani nilam venum kanthappa). These sayings are alive and frequently heard among Paraiyans. They set forth in popular language and with studied brevity, a truth acknowledged by all. The truth is, "they" have the land and "we" do not have it. The landless are aware they are exploited.

Some Marxist's argue that false consciousness, that is, a lack of understanding of being exploited, causes the absence of rebellion. If that were true, the landless, who are aware of being exploited should revolt against the structures of domination. On the contrary, the landless have a rational calculus for not revolting, although they

²⁶ Kanthappan is one of the gods names.

know they are exploited. We shall explore the basis for the rational calculus at Malligapuram in Chapter 8.

From the data available at Malligapuram and other neighboring Cherries I conclude that the reasons the Paraiyans accept the structures of domination is not because of their Hindu world-view or their belief in Karma. The Hindu world-view and belief system belong to the Great Sanskritic traditions. Paraiyans do believe in a version of Karma, but only to the extent that they search for a transcendental explanation for their experiences. They do not show any acceptance of their station in life. We also do not find any evidence to attribute Paraiyans' passivity to false consciousness. They are fully aware that they are exploited. If their awareness has not made them revolt against the oppressive structures, then we have to find an alternate explanation in their economic dependency.

CHAPTER VII

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY OF THE UNTOUCHABLES

If the obedience of the Untouchables is not due to karma, or false consciousness, then we have to look for an explanation by more closely examining the relationship among different classes embedded in the agrarian economy of the village. Beteille (1965:103) writes,

The economy of the village is based primarily upon agriculture, and hence the relations of production consist essentially of relations between categories of persons contributing in different ways to the process of agriculture. Such categories include landowners, tenants, and agricultural labourers. These together with their interrelations, constitute the agrarian class structure of the village.

The relationship between landowners, tenants and agricultural laborers in rural India is not only governed by inequalities in the material conditions of existence, but also by the hierarchical structures of domination. Beteille writes (1974:39).

The hierarchical idiom plays an important part in all agrarian societies where considerations of status reach into virtually every sphere of life.....Indian society went further in this regard than perhaps any other society. It is in this context that the study of caste acquires a particular significance. For caste is not merely an arrangement of groups which are ranked high and low; it is also a system of values in which the idea of hierarchy occupies a pivotal position.

Generally, students of India's agrarian social

structure characterize the relationship between the high caste landlords and the low caste landless agricultural laborers as one of patron and client, or a variant of it. In a patron client dyad, where the patron is in control of vital resources and services which a client can not get elsewhere, the client chooses obedience and deference in order to have access to those resources. This deference, then, is born of expediency not of loyalty. My field data show that Paraiyans at Malligapuram obey Brahmin and non-Brahmin landlords, because they depend upon them for their livelihood, and because there is no other way of getting the means of subsistence. Protective discrimination, economic development measures, welfare programs, and land reform have strengthened the hands of the rural elites instead of reducing the dependency of Paraiyan clients upon the landlords. In this chapter, I shall show that these attempts at planned social change have not given Paraiyans at Malligapuram any economic freedom, and as a result they remain subservient and loyal to the landlords at Uthiramerur.

My concern is with collective dependency. The Paraiyans' dependency on the dominant caste can be understood to the degree to which their alternative means of survival are restricted. Private, government, and voluntary efforts have not succeeded in replacing the landlord as a means of obtaining food and other basic

necessities of life. In other words, to the degree to which the landlords are the only ones who can offer Paraiyans their basic needs, the oppressors become their patrons. This is the basis of our discussion.

THE IMPACT OF PROTECTIVE DISCRIMINATION

The Constitutional guarantees of educational, job, and political reservations are designed to reduced the level of poverty among Paraiyans. However, the impact of these reservations at Malligapuram has been negligible.

Educational Reservation

Educational reservations are useful only if people can obtain primary education. But the literacy rate at Malligapuram is very low despite a primary school and a high school nearby.

TABLE 5

MALLIGAPURAM LITERACY RATE BY SEX

	Male %	Female %	Total
Illiterates	75 %	84 %	78 %
Literate	25 %	16 %	22 %
Total	100 %	100 %	100 %

As table 5 shows, less than one quarter of the adults at

Malligapuram are literates,¹ slightly below the Tamil Nadu State averages of 27 percent for Untouchables. The literacy rate of the general population for the State is 47 percent, much higher than the population we are studying.

The low literacy rate is due to a high rate of school drop-outs. Many poor children drop out because their parents need them to work in domestic services, baby sitting, collecting fire-wood, and other gainful employment that may provide subsidiary income for the family. In addition, most parents are not able to meet the educational expenses of the children, such as the cost of clothing, or books. Moreover, parents doubt whether education will help their children to obtain a job since unemployment has been increasing among the educated. Lazar, a landless labor, tells his story:

I have seven children. My wife, my first son, and I work in the fields of the landlords. We make Rs 7.00 daily. There are days we do not have any work. On those days the family goes hungry. The last girl is just eighteen months old and the sixth child is three years old. Our fifth son baby-sits for his younger brother and sister. Our eldest daughter takes out our two cows for grazing and collects some fire-wood. The third son and fourth daughter are going to school. I don't know which grade they are studying. All I know is every day they take their bags and go to school. They are not going to become collectors (Indian Administrative

¹ When Paraiyans at Malligapuram say they are literate they mean they have two to five years of primary education, but they are not able to read and write. Their definition of literacy is questionable.

Service) and help me. I really wanted my first son Antony to finish his school final and send him to the city for a clerical job, but I could not afford because of poverty at home. When the other son and daughter at school grow, they also have to help me with coolie work in order to keep the family going.

Lazar and many more like him see education as a ladder to occupational mobility, but because of their poverty are not able to exploit the reservational policies of the government.

Job Reservation

Job reservation for the Untouchables is based on the assumption that they will be able to get quality education from the educational reservation policies. Since they do not benefit from the educational reservations neither can they benefit from the job reservation. Table 6 shows, that Paraiyans at Malligapuram are disproportionately employed at the lowest level. They cannot get Grade I, II, and III jobs because there is not even one at Malligapuram who has the necessary academic qualification to enter into a Class I or II position. Even when they have the necessary qualification they cannot get Class III occupations, because they are not able to bribe the authorities to get a job commensurate with their education.

TABLE 6

NON-AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE AT MALLIGAPURAM

Class	Number of Persons the Government	Employed by Private
I	-	-
II	-	-
III	1	-
IV	8	22

I= Senior Administrative; II= Other Administrative
 III Clerical, stenographical; IV= Attendants and peons

When we divide Class IV into different types of occupation, we find that few educated Paraiyans at Malligapuram obtain good jobs. Table 7 shows how people are employed in different types of jobs.

TABLE 7

GRADE IV OCCUPATIONS AT MALLIGAPURAM

Job Description	No of Persons
Teacher (private Schools)	2
Teller in a bank (government)	1
Clerk (private)	1
Textile mill workers (private)	15
Tamil Nadu Electrical Board line men	4
Mechanics (private)	2
Peons (government)	1
Telephone Exchange operator	1
Thalaiyari (government)	2
Watchmen (private)	2
Total	30

As example of this is the case of two boys who got degrees as auto-mechanics in 1982 from a technical school in Madurai. They applied to various government owned bus

transport services but did not even get a reply to their application, and both of them remain unemployed. Almost every small government post is filled through the political patronage system to which Paraiyans lack access. Some of the local Pariah boys, who graduated or nearly graduated from high school, applied for Grade IV jobs, such as attenders, clerks, and postmen, but none got an interview card. In short, the system is corrupt and there is no way of redressing grievances.

Just as a Pariah tenant is expected to do household duties for his master in addition to field work, so the pariah attenders in government offices are expected to do household duties for the officers. Arumugam is an attender in the Block Development Office, a government machinery for rural development. Before the office opens at 9.00 A.M. he has to report to the Block Development Officer's house at 8.00 A.M and take the children to the school in a three wheeler. He has to bring them back from the school at 4.00 P.M. Though the office closes at 5.00 P.M. he can go home only at 8.00 P.M. because he has to be at the beck and call of the officer's family. Every one, including the small children in the officer's family, give Arumugam chores to do. In brief, Paraiyans are not able to make use of the job reservations in the absence of proper educational qualifications.

Access to education is a ladder of social mobility

for the weaker sections of the society. However, mobility is thwarted because of the high drop-out rates from school. Unless the Government makes genuine efforts to improve the primary education of Paraiyans at Malligapuram, they will never benefit from the reservation policies.

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
AND PANCHAYAT RAJ

The Community Development Program was started at Uthiramerur in October 1960. Today the CDP at Uthiramerur sponsors 46 different social and economic projects. An analysis of the administrative structure, the allocation of resources, and the beneficiaries of the programs at Uthiramerur clearly demonstrates that the very purpose of the CDP, that is, development through community participation and development of the weaker section has not been achieved.

The CDP at Uthiramerur has a dual administrative structure, with a Block Development Officer or Commissioner, one appointed by the government who has executive power, and various panchayat representatives who have an advisory role. However, the elected representatives use their political power base to influence the decision of the commissioner. For example, the Paraiyans at Malligapuram submitted a petition to the CDP authorities to build

a bridge so that they could transport cow dung, the major fertilizer, to their fields. Their petition, though approved by the Commissioner, had been rejected by the elected representative.

The major projects undertaken by the CDP at Uthiramerur relate to agriculture, communication, education, health, social welfare, and housing. There is a project advisory committee for each of these projects, consisting of official and voluntary members. Each project is headed by an officer who in turn is assisted by a group of technical men with knowledge in the respective fields. The project officer and the technical men are assisted by village level workers who carry out these programs in the village. There are two office attendants at the lowest rung of the bureaucracy who stand and wait on others who are above them. As is the case throughout Indian villages, the structure of the bureaucracy of CDP at Uthiramerur reflects the existing social caste hierarchy. The Commissioner at the top has always been either a Brahmin or a clean Shudra, and the attendants at the bottom have been Untouchables. The project officers, the technical men, and the village level workers are from one of the Hindu high castes.

When I interviewed the Commissioner I asked him why there had not been any adequate representation from the Untouchables at the office cadre level at Uthiramerur. He

replied that he had nothing to do with the appointment as the officers were appointed by the government. But he also mentioned that the Untouchables did not have the academic qualifications to occupy any official position, and even when they were appointed they did not do a good job.²

The Commissioner and the Project Advisory Committee decide on the allocation of resources to various projects. Table 8 shows that most of the expenditures are for programs that have an agricultural bias and hence the programs are tailored to benefit mainly the landlords.

TABLE 8

CDP SCHEMES AT UTHIRAMERUR

Schemes	1961-62	1971-72	1982-83
	(amount in Rupees)		
AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION			
1. Agriculture	--	40,141	--
2. Local roads grant	35,315	39,724	208,207
3. Matching grant	35,150	34,456	941,323
4. Link road	99,673	29,333	28,543
5. Water supply	19,947	--	--
6. Minor irrigation	15,415	27,989	--
8. Piped Water supply	--	41,602	13,636

² There has been a trend at the national level to dismiss for inefficiency the Untouchable officers who are recruited on the basis of job reservation allotted to them. The Madras Cultural Association, an organization for the development of the officers of untouchable community, has been discussing in their monthly meeting how to protect their officers from unjust dismissal.

TABLE 8 - continued

Schemes	1961-62	1971-72	1983-83
	(amount in Rupees)		
EDUCATION			
9. Social Education	1,423	5630	2,066
10 School building	7,413	--	107,589
HEALTH			
11. women's and children's welfare	--	3,740	4,440
12. Kuzhanthaigal kappagam	--	--	23,125
SELF EMPLOYMENT SCHEME			
13. I.R.D.P ³	--	--	74,954
14. Self sufficiency scheme	--	--	207,648
15. N.R.E.P ⁴			
(a) cash	--	--	600,000
(b) Rice	--	--	138,844
16. Minimum Needs Program	--	--	4,250
17. Drought Relief	--	--	5,000
18. Animal husbandry	35,087	6,595	--
19. Fisheries	--	1,030	--
Total	249,423	230,240	2,359,625

(Source: From Uthiramerur CDP annual report 1982-83).

The table indicates that 82 percent of all expenditures in 1961-62, 75 percent in 1971-72, and 49 percent in 1982-83 were spent on agricultural development. Consequently, the Brahmins and non-Brahmins who own 95 percent of the total land have benefitted the most from these programs. The poor farmers and the landless laborers from Malligapuram are not able to make use these facilities

³ Integrated Rural Development Program

⁴ National Rural Employment Program

because their landholding is marginal. In addition, the bureaucratic procedures makes it difficult for them to approach the officials for any help. The officers also rarely pay any attention to Paraiyans coming for help. This may be seen in the example of Arul who cultivates 0.50 of his own land and 1.50 acres for Pathivaram. As the CDP agricultural wing supplies urea chemical fertilizer at a subsidized rate for marginal farmers, Arul approached the person in charge of agriculture to request help, but were kept waiting for four hours before he managed to see the officer. However, the fertilizer is supplied through one of the local banks, and Arul could neither pay the initial premium nor produce a collateral security to the bank in order to get the fertilizer. Even though Arul was begging every one to loan him Rs 50 to pay the premium he could not make it. Paraiyans generally are prepared to overcome such hazards, provided they get an assurance of help from CDP. Most of the time they do not.

The Integrated Rural Development Program, the self-sufficiency program, and the National Rural Employment Program are specifically designed to uplift the weaker section socially and economically. The government has allotted Rs 1,019,447, that is, 43 percent of the total budget for 1982-83, to implement them. However, no one from Malligapuram has benefitted from these programs. Still worse, no one from Malligapuram even knows of the

existence of these schemes, not even the elementary school teachers who act as spokesmen for the villagers.

The reason for the failure of these projects to reach the people is lack of interest on the part of the officials. The Project Officer and his assistants, the village level workers, and the project trainers, have not visited Malligapuram since 1977. The villagers said that these officials visited their Cherri in 1976 in connection with a village function.

In brief, it appears that only some government officials and the local landlords have benefitted from the most important CDP schemes at Uthiramerur. The only program, from which the people from Malligapuram draw some benefit is the mid-day meal scheme introduced in 1980 because Malligapuram is one of the centers for such scheme. But the program accounts for only 0.3 percent of the total expenditure.

Along with these projects the government of India has entrusted CDP with responsibility for integrating the Green Revolution⁵ as part of the general scheme in order to improve farming and increase productivity. The Uthiramerur Community Block Development provides number of agricultural services such as soil reclamation, rural electrification, irrigation facilities, provision of

⁵ The Green Revolution was started in the early 1960s to increase agricultural productivity of wheat and rice through improved seeds, fertilizers, and technology.

fertilizers and quality seeds, provision of agricultural implements, and model farming.

CDP depends on the local credit institutions such as the Agricultural Developmental Bank and Uthiramerur Agricultural Cooperative Banks, to finance agricultural modernization. The banks' credit policy demands personal and collateral securities. Only those landlords who own a maximum of five acres will be able to produce these securities and take advantage of the bank loans. Since only one farmer at Malligapuram has two acres and 66 percent of them have no land, Paraiyans at Malligapuram are not able to get credit facilities. This is confirmed by analyzing the credit issued by the agricultural banks (see Table 9).

TABLE 9

CREDIT FROM AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE BANK AND THE LAND DEVELOPMENT BANK IN UTHIRAMERUR(1982-83).

Castes	Ag. Co-op Bank (amount in Rs)		Land Develop. Bank (amount in Rs)	
	Rs	%	Rs	%
Brahmins	183,915	6 %	19,200	1 %
Non-Brahmins	2,949,064	94	1,993,690	98
Adi-Dravidas	23,338	1	10,900	1
Total	3,156,317	100	2,023,700	100

(Source: Agricultural Cooperative Bank and Land Development Bank ledgers for 1982-83).

The Paraiyans from all five Cherries combined got

less than one percent either from the Agricultural Cooperative Bank or from the Land Development Bank. The marginal farmers from Malligapuram have obtained only Rs 12,560 from both the banks combined, of which 75 percent was used to buy milk cows. This lack of access to loans has thwarted the poor farmers' chances of exploiting the advantages of Green Revolution. Since the poor peasants are not able to cope with the increased cost of cultivation, they must sell their lands to the landlords. In fact, 55 percent of the land at Malligapuram has been sold after the Green Revolution was introduced at Uthiramerur. Therefore the change to modernized agricultural farming through the Green Revolution at Malligapuram has meant an increase in the number of landless peasants.

The town of Uthiramerur has the choice of operating a Panchayat, a local government, along with the Community Development Program. The people at Uthiramerur elect the Panchayat president, vice-president and their sixteen ward representatives from The National Congress Party, the Communist Party of India, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AMDK), both regional parties. When the social background of elected members are analyzed, all, except the four members from the reserved wards of the Untouchables, come from the dominant landowning class. Therefore, the Panchayat Raj has given the landlords another power source.

Panchayat Raj has provided a new framework for political and caste struggles between rival landlords (by this I don't mean feudal landlords but substantial landowners), jealous of their prestige and determined to maintain and, if possible, strengthen their district power networks (Gray, quoted in Metha, 1969:591-592).

One of the major stated objectives of PR is to encourage people's participation in developmental activities. The panchayat collects various utility taxes from the people and along with a matching grant from the State is able to sponsor several developmental projects. The Uthiramerur Panchayat had an annual budget of Rs 1,582,112 in 1970-71, 10,957,785 in 1971-72 but only 685,082 in 1972-73. As these figures show, the Panchayat was put in cold storage from 1973 onwards. The reasons were political. The Anna Dravida Munnetra khazhakam, the ruling party at the State level, was not sure of winning the Panchayat elections in Tamil Nadu and therefore did not conduct fresh election till 1985 nor prepare any proper budgetary statement from 1973, though funds were available.

The economic benefits of these programs have gone more to the high caste living at Uthiramerur than to the Cherries. For example, office management, communication and road maintenance, consumed 85 percent of the total budget for 1970-71 (see Table 10), but Paraiyans from the Cherries do not benefit from these expenses. The communication and road maintenance are very helpful for the business community and the farmers to transport their

commodities from one place to another, or to bring home their harvested crops. The poor Paraiyans have not benefitted much from the other Panchayat programs. Table 11 shows the material benefits received by Paraiyans as a community at Malligapuram from Panchayat.

TABLE 10

UTHIRAMERUR PANCHAYAT BUDGETARY STATEMENT FROM 1970-73

Titles of expenditure	1970-71	1971-72	1972-1973
	(amounts in rupees)		
Management	31,701	44,053	33,554
Communication	57,324	24,592	44,542
Education	4,164	3,898	4,692
Public health	10,723	7,119	7,073
Water supply	4,371	4,073	4,818
Market bus stand maintenance	9,676	6,527	6,829
Total	117,959	90,262	101,508

(Source: from Uthiramerur panchayat record office)

There are two Paraiyans from Malligapuram employed as village watchmen. Their duty is to collect the utility bills from the villagers. They are the lowest paid workers in the Panchayat. The two water pipes are not enough for 701 people whereas Uthiramerur has two water pipes for every street. The Panchayat has sanctioned only one community radio to each Cherri but there are two radios for every ward at Uthiramerur. The "community radio" at Malligapuram has not been working for the past three years. The six street lights were not burning when I was collecting my data, while there are more street lights at Uthiramerur and all are in working condition.

The people at Malligapuram were tired of complaining to get new electric bulbs from the officials.

TABLE 11

SERVICES RECEIVED AT MALLIGAPURAM FROM PANCHAYAT

Name of the Services	No of items
Number of employees in CDP and Panchayat	2
Roads	-
community hall	-
Reading room	-
Public Radio	1
Public library	-
Mid-day meal scheme for the children	1
Dispensary	-
Scavenger service	-
Water supply pipe	2
Street electric light	6

In brief, the objectives of CDP and PR have been to give power and economic development to the weaker section of Indian society. The experience at Uthiramerur-Malligapuram has been very disappointing. Since the government chose to implement these programs through the traditional elites, the programs have further consolidated the already powerful dominant castes. Panchayati institutions have become instruments in the hands of the privileged sections in the countryside for their own advancement (Metha, 1962: 596). Looking at these programs from below, instead of improving the quality of life of Paraiyans at Malligapuram they contributed to an anti-developmental process by consolidating the positions of Brahmins and non-Brahmin elites. The failure of these programs means continued

dependency upon the landlords.

There are other supplementary welfare programs, such as rural electrification, housing, primary health centers, Child Development Services, Nutrition Programs, Woman Welfare, Family and Child Welfare, and Welfare for the Handicapped, to improve the quality of life of the people in and around Uthiramerur. Though the thrust of these programs is to develop the weaker section, no Paraiyan from any one of the Cherries has benefitted from these programs. For example, the nurses from the Family and Child Welfare programs are expected to look after pregnant women and the new born babies, but no nurse has ever visited these Cherries to administer these services. The nurses and most of the officials are recruited from the high caste communities and are not willing to enter the Cherries for reasons of purity and pollution. By allowing such practices to occur, it appears that the government is not serious about the implementation of these programs.

LAND REFORM

Land reform, a radical structural change in land-ownership, did not materialize at Uthiramerur either. The Taluk Office (the local land revenue department) and the Land Registration Department were expected to gather information on the extent of surplus land, conditions of

tenants, the wage policy of the landlords, and implement those policies, but so far they have neither gathered information nor implemented land reform measures. I shall deal with land redistribution, tenancy reform and minimum wage separately in order to demonstrate the dependency of the landless on the landlords.

Land is concentrated in the hands of Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The 127 Paraiyan households of Malligapuram own just 56 acres of cultivatable land. The average holding is 0.44 acres. As Table 12 shows, most Paraiyans at Malligapuram are landless or near landless.

TABLE 12

LANDOWNERSHIP AMONG PARAIYANS AT MALLIGAPURAM.

Area owned (in acres)	No of households	%
Nil	84	66 %
upto 0.50	14	11
0.51 -1.00	12	9
1.01 -1.50	10	8
1.51 -2.00	5	3
2.01 and above	2	2
Total	127	100

In order to survive in a rural society like Uthiramerur Paraiyans at Malligapuram must either own land or indirectly depend on land for survival. Acquisition of land is possible either through inheritance, purchase, redistribution, or through land reform. As Table 13 shows, Paraiyans did not get any land through land reform measures. Whatever land they own, they either inherited

or purchased.

TABLE 13
LAND ACQUISITION AMONG PARAIYANS: 1950-80

Year	Inheritance	Purchase	Redistribution
1950	16.50	NA	-
1951-1955	-	1.00	-
1956-1960	2.20	3.60	-
1961-1965	5.70	-	-
1966-1970	-	.85	-
1971-1975	9.40	1.68	-
1976-1980	2.00	9.00	-
Total	35.80	16.13	-

Acquisition through inheritance, however, fragments already uneconomic holdings and some Paraiyans own just 0.05 acres of land. The Paraiyans working in the cotton mills who have had a stable income after 1975, have purchased 12.13 acres of wet land and 4 acres of dry land between 1950 and 1980. Given the scarcity of land and severe competition among the landlords, it is hardly possible for a Paraiyan to buy any land. But for the rest, as there are few opportunities for acquiring new land, Paraiyans have to become either tenants or landless laborers in order to survive.

Tenancy

There are 34 households who as tenants cultivate

124.89 acres for the landlords at Uthiramerur. Crop-sharing is the principal form of tenancy, although the ratio of sharing depends on the nature of tenancy, namely, Pathivaram or Alvaram. A pathivaram tenant meets 50 percent of the cost of cultivation and gets 50 percent of the share, while an alvaram tenant meets one-quarter of the cost of cultivation and get 25 percent of the produce.

TABLE 14
COST AND CROP SHARE BY THE TENANTS

Various agricultural operations	Expenses in Rs	Income in Rs
Seedling	128	
Transplanting	230	
Fertilizers	310	
Pesticides	36	
Weeding	40	
Harvesting	285	
Total Expenses	1,029	
Total Income		2,000
50 % cost & 50% crop share	515	1,000
Net gain for the tenant		486

Source: I made this calculation in collaboration with three landlords and five pathivaram tenants from Malligapuram.

As Table 14 shows, the nature of agricultural operations and the corresponding expenses for one acre leave tenants with a very low rate of return and little income. The calculations are based on the following assumptions: the Pathivaram is a family-size tenancy where the tenant and his family members work 60 days of one crop

year (90 days). If their wages for 60 days of labor (Male Rs 3 per day for 60 days; Female Rs 1.50 per day X for 60 days, or a total of Rs 270) were to be subtracted, then the net profit for a pathivaram tenant is Rs 215.00.

Most frequently, a pathivaram tenant at Malligapuram is not able to meet 50 per cent of the cost of cultivation. As he does not have any personal or collateral security to borrow money from the banks, he can not get a loan from the banks, and his other options are either to borrow from the money lender or from the landlord himself. Usually a tenant borrows from his own landlord to meet his share of the cost of cultivation and the latter takes away from the tenant Rs 514.50 worth of paddy at an arbitrary price level. It is not uncommon that in the countryside the landlord is also a money lender.

The situation of an alvaram tenant is the same except the tenant meets only one fourth of total cost of cultivation and but also gets only one fourth of the total produce. A tenant's share in monetary value is therefore Rs 242.75, excluding his family labor. When we subtract the family wage from his share an alvaram tenant actually incurs a loss of Rs 27.25.

Despite such exploitation, Paraiyans compete among themselves for tenancy for two reasons. First, they are assured of daily work, their share of rice at the end of the harvest, and some other perquisites from the land-

lords. Second, it is more prestigious to be a tenant than to be a coolie.⁶ People at Malligapuram make a sharp distinction between coolie and KUZHATHU VELAI.⁷ A coolie occupies the lowest rung in the agrarian stratification system and a "tenant Paraiyan" looks down on "coolie Paraiyan".

The above description gives an idea of the degree of exploitation of tenants at Uthiramerur. The tenancy reform has not regulated the terms of tenancy. According to the law, the rent payable for wet land is supposed to be 25 percent of the gross produce, and it does not mention anything about cost-sharing. In reality, the pathivaram tenant at Uthiramerur meets 50 percent of the cultivating costs and gets 50 percent of the share. Such high rent is illegal, but the landlords have sufficient land-based power to keep the tenants working at this illegal level. Competition reduces the tenants' capacity to bargain, and tenants at Malligapuram are not aware of the existence of laws regulating tenancy.

The tenancy system at Malligapuram raises a serious problem for students dealing with rural class structure. The relationship between the tenant and landlord looks contractual but de facto it is bonded. The Pathivaram and

⁶ Coolie or Kooliyal are casual laborers who are hired on daily basis. Most coolies are Untouchables.

⁷ Kuzhathu velai is another word for tenants.

Alvaram tenants are not tenants in the strict sense of the word. They are not only used for agricultural operations, but most are asked to do household work as well. The tenants supply water for the cattle, and firewood to the landlord's household. On festive occasions, such as a marriage or UTSAVAM (village temple feast), the tenants have to be at the landlord's house at his beck and call. This type of service arrangement indicates that the relation between the tenant and the landlord is not contractual but one of patron and client.

In brief, we can conclude from the foregoing discussion that the tenancy system at Uthiramerur is exploitative. The landlords use their superior bargaining capacity to exploit the tenants, while legislation to regulate tenancy has neither given the Paraiyans security of tenancy, nor regulated the terms of cost and crop share. Paraiyans have learnt to live with such exploitative situation.

Agricultural laborers

We have divided the landless laborers at Malligapuram into free and unfree laborers. The free laborers are either contractual laborers, or casual laborers. There are three types of bonded laborers, namely, attached laborers, debt bonded laborers and Neergatti. Contractual labor is a kind of agrarian labor in which the owner hires

workers through a contractor during the busy agricultural season such as transplanting and harvesting. The agreement is exploitative and convenient for the landlord, and beneficial to the contractor who mediates between the landlords and the laborers. The casual laborer is also called daily laborer because he is hired on a daily basis. The employers and the employee are free to discontinue the arrangement when they so desire. Table 15 shows the wage structure of the bonded laborers.

TABLE 15
WAGE STRUCTURE OF THE FREE MALE LABORERS

Agricultural operations	No of days in a crop yr	daily wage in Rs	Total
<u>MALE</u>			
Cutting bunds	7 days	3	21.00
Carting manure	5 days	3	15.00
Ploughing, leveling, sowing and transplanting.	35 days	4	140.00
Harvesting	30 days	5	150.00
Total			326.00
<u>FEMALE</u>			
weeding	15 days	1.50	22.00
transplanting	15 days	2.00	30.00
Harvesting	30 days	3.00	90.00
Total			142.00
Male+Female Total			468.00

N.B. In case of double crop a family where the husband and wife work as free laborers will get Rs 936.

However, the wage structure of the unfree laborers varies considerably from type to type. For example, the

wage of a debt bonded laborer is different from that of Neergatti. There are 20 percent of the households who work as bonded laborers at Malligapuram itself. As all the cases of a specific type of bonded labor are similar, one case will illustrate the typical situation of bonded laborer in Malligapuram.

Samy is 54 years old. When he was 20 years old his father borrowed Rs 350 for his marriage from a landlord at an interest rate of 125 percent. The landlord agreed to pay the amount on the condition that Samy works for the landlord till he paid his debt. He has been working for 34 years to pay the interest alone while the principal amount remains unpaid even today.

Samy gets up 4.a.m. and is at the masters house at 5. He starts his day with cleaning the cowshed, followed by feeding the cattle, cleaning the house etc..He works till 8 in the morning at the master's house. From 8 to 6 in the evening he works in the field and comes home at 8 in the night. He has been doing this 7 days a week for the past 34 years. As Table 16 shows, Samy's annual wage amounts to only Rs 500 while he and more often the whole family, works for the landlords.

TABLE 16
ESTIMATED ANNUAL WAGE OF A BONDED LABORER

Wages and perquisites	Value in Rs
Man's annual wage in kind (125 measures of unhusked rice)	240.00
daily meal at noon (1 bowl of gruel)	109.50
Clothing on Deepavali	20.00
Pongal festivals	
Food and gifts for the family at festivals	30.00
Annual average gifts for births, marriages and funerals	50.00
Miscellaneous payments	50.00
Total	499.50

N.B. We have worked out these figure in collaboration with nine bonded laborers from Malligapuram.

A wage comparison between a bonded laborer and coolie shows that a bonded laborer gets Rs 173.50 more than a coolie. And bonded laborer is also sure of one meal a day and continued work, either on either on the farm or at the home of the landlord. However, a coolie stands higher in terms of social status.

Attached Laborer

Locally the attached laborers are known as KOTHAL. The kothal system is a type of social security for the landless laborers. It is hard for an unattached laborer to find regular work in the field, and a male laborer gets only 77 days and a female laborer 60 days of work in a crop year. If they have the good fortune of working a double crop, and such fortunes are rather rare, they may

get a double harvest. It is because of these uncertainties of employment that landless laborers try to get attached to a landlord. This has been a prevalent practice throughout the Tamil country.⁸ The wage structure of an attached laborer is the same as the bonded laborer, except that he has no standing debt to be cleared. Legislation to increase the wage of the landless has not been taken seriously and properly implemented.

This detailed description of the life of the agricultural laborers at Malligapuram shows that they live precariously. So far, the Minimum Wage Act has not been implemented and the agricultural laborers continue to work for an arbitrary wage. Men get Rs 3-5 and women Rs 1.50-2.00 for eight hours of work. But if they refuse to work for this arbitrary low wage, then the family has to go hungry. Therefore, dependency becomes a necessary condition for survival. When people are convinced that no other help is forthcoming, it is logical for them, a logic born of survival instinct, to tie themselves to the landlords.

CONCLUSION

There is a wide gap between policies and practices. The rulers seek first their own legitimacy and then the welfare of the people who put them in power. To do so,

⁸ The attached labor system is known as Panniyal system in Tanjore and Oolavadam in Tinnelvely districts.

they use various symbolic legislations, policies and programs. Since the landed gentry put the rulers in power, the legislators serve the landlords' need first (Beteille, 1974; Galbraith, 1951; Tai, 1974; Warriner, 1969). The implementing mechanism also reflects the will of those in power.

The officials, who are supposed to implement the legislation, have class bias and their own vested interests. Every new organization - the Land Registration Office, the Taluk Office, the Panchayat Office, Agricultural Cooperative Bank, and the Block Development Office is pervaded by traditional hierarchical values. There is not even a single Untouchable in the official cadre in any of these departments, although there was one officer at the Agricultural Cooperative Bank, but he was dismissed by the governing body in 1979 for inefficiency. When these organizations recreate their own hierarchies and concern for status they become self defeating (Beteille, 1974:65). Beteille writes,

In this kind of society the privileged and the deprived have not only different resources and skills but different expectations. The respect for privilege runs through every level of the social system and pervades the very organizations which are created to bring it to an end. When social reform measures are introduced the benefits are often syphoned off at the top. It is difficult for such measures to strike roots in a society where both the privileged and the underprivileged believe that men are born unequal and where to exercise the rights created by law is often to challenge the existing order of relations.

It is because of the class bias and the pervasiveness of hierarchical values in these organizations that the upper castes benefit from these programs. The development of these programs carries within itself the subordination of the Untouchables.

Paraiyans at Malligapuram hear the talk about uplifting the weaker section, and they see the CDP and PR buildings situated at the heart of the Brahmin and non-Brahmin settlements. They also read or hear from others that these institutions are there to help the weaker section. They have waited 40 years since India's independence, and 37 years after the inception of these programs to get something from the government. So far, they have not got any substantial help, certainly not what they hoped for most, land to cultivate. So far, no one from Malligapuram, or for that matter from any of the other Cherries has got a single plot of land through land reform. As long as Brahmins and non-Brahmins continue to monopolize land and land-related institutions, the result will continue to be a situation of dependency for Paraiyans. And as long as they are dependent, they will be forced to obey.

CHAPTER VIII

CAN THE UNTOUCHABLES REVOLT?

Paraiyans at Malligapuram want to break away from Brahmin and non-Brahmin domination because they know that their labor is not adequately rewarded. But objective, and subjective conditions do not permit them to damage a relationship on which they are dependent, however exploitative it may be. Objectively, the direct and indirect dominations are so unmitigated, that Paraiyans are not able to combat them physically and psychologically. Subjectively, they operate from the vantage point of security of subsistence, and they will revolt or obey depending whether obedience or revolt will assure them of their basic minimum.

OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS OF OBEDIENCE

Direct Social Domination

Uthiramerur-Malligapuram is neither a static nor modern society, but a transitional society which maintains the tension between tradition and modernity. Such a tension is seen in the mode of domination. Though there are signs of incipient capitalism, such as improvement in the means of production and productive forces, such changes have not altered the hierarchical domination of

the Paraiyans. One of the characteristic features of hierarchical domination is its pervasiveness and directness. The Brahmin and non-Brahmin landlords are not only satisfied with appropriating Paraiyans' labor, service, and goods, but they want to keep them at starvation or near starvation levels. One of the constantly repeated phrase among the landlords is as follows: "Paraiyannukku ithuvum vanum, ithuku melayum venum" (Paraiyans deserve all the misfortunes of the world).

One of the means of direct domination is the maintenance of the age-old practice of untouchability which is built on the assumption of superiority of the pure over the impure. The Brahmins and non-Brahmins do discriminate against the Untouchables for reasons of purity and pollution, although they refuse to admit it openly. One Iyengar, a member of a Brahmin subcaste, told the researcher, "We live like brothers and sisters; untouchability is a thing of the past. Only you people [referring to me] coming from the city try to create problems where there are none." Other caste Hindus also express similar sentiments of love and fraternity. The sincerity in their tone will make any one unfamiliar with rural India believe that the Brahmins and other high castes do not discriminate against the Paraiyans.¹

¹ A common practice among the high caste is to deny the existence of the practice of Untouchability. They would say that was a thing of the past. By this

However, discriminatory practices are widespread. There are twelve temples at Uthiramerur and no Paraiyan has ever been permitted to enter into any one of them to offer sacrifices or even to see the shrines. Since they are not permitted to enter into the temples of caste Hindus, Paraiyans have built their own temples and literally "created" their own gods and goddesses out of bandits and tribal heroes. The gods of the Untouchables rank lower in status than the Brahmin gods.

The Untouchables are not freely permitted into public places such as the police station, Panchayat office, Block Development Office, Taluk office, etc. as are the high castes. For example, Mr. Rayyappan, elected to be member of the Panchayat from Malligapuram (a local government) for the last fifteen years from Malligapuram, has never been offered a seat during the Panchayat proceedings during those fifteen years of tenure of office. Throughout the proceedings, at times for a full day, Mr. Rayyappan has to stand. Similarly, any Paraiyan who comes to see the government officials are kept waiting for many hours.

For example, Mr. Irudayam wanted to get his twelve year old daughter admitted into a nearby high school but

some of them, particularly the educated, mean that the practice of untouchability is legally abolished. But most of them deny such practice to gain respectability from others. No Indian will ever admit the practice of untouchability with foreigners.

was kept waiting for more than six hours. The Tashildar, a local revenue officer, had to certify that Mr Irudayam had an income below Rs 1,500. But many Brahmins and non-Brahmins who came after him went directly to the Tashildar and got their business done. After asking many irrelevant questions the Tashildar formally certified that Irudayam's income was below Rs 1,500. Such procedures are common when Untouchables want to get favors from the government officials.

Since 1960, the practice of Untouchability has also taken a violent form known as the "Harijan atrocities" as the following cases show:

Case 1

A high caste cyclist ran over a Pariah boy. Since the boy was bruised all over, the father of the boy beat the cyclist. The latter went to Uthiramerur and came back with nearly forty musclemen to beat up the Paraiyans. Women and children ran to the field to hide themselves. But when the victims wanted to file a case against the offenders, the police refused to prepare the report.

Case 2

A twelve year old Pariah boy stole some fruits from a tamarind tree (*tamarindus indica*). The monetary worth of the fruit might be a dime. The landlord beat the boy badly in the presence of nearly forty men and women. The

boy was bleeding from his nose. As he was beating the boy he was using all slurs against Paraiyan. No one dared to question the landlord.

Case 3

Mr Raman was a Kambukutti (a menial village servant). One of his jobs was to remove the carcasses of cattle from the landlord's house when they die. Because of fatigue and sickness he could not do his job, and the landlord beat him up for dereliction of duty.

Case 4

A son of a landlord raped a Paraiyan tenant's wife in the presence of her husband. The irate husband ran to complain to the headman of the Cherri. But no one dared question the culprit for fear of further violence and economic consequence.

Case 5

There is a small cinema theater at Uthiramerur. It is an unwritten law that the Paraiyans sit separately from the high castes. One of the Paraiyans, a bus conductor, living in Madras city, came to see his folks at Malligapuram. When he went for a movie he took the liberty of sitting along with the high caste people. At the intermission when the lights were on, the high caste people found a Paraiyan sitting along with them, so they beat him badly.

The high castes' claim to fraternity is not seen in

their actual relationship with Paraiyans. Though the practice of untouchability is criminal, the offenders go free because of their close relationship with the law enforcement authorities. The fear of economic sanctions, particularly eviction from tenancy and denial of daily work for the laborers, prevent the Untouchables from filing law suits against the perpetrators of crimes. The Nattanmai and kothu leaders discourage victims from taking any legal action, and usually they enter into a compromise with the perpetrators of crime.

The 1975 cyclist episode will elucidate the point. Every one at Malligapuram felt that the victims were unjustly beaten by the high caste Hindus. Since they were unable to retaliate physically, they sought legal help. The village leaders from Malligapuram collected money from every household to file a case against the high caste people based on the Untouchability Offenses Act. The constables, head constable, and the sub-inspector were not aware of the existence of such as Act nor of its possible use in filing case against high caste. When the high caste came to know that Paraiyans from Malligapuram were taking the matter to the court, they convinced the leaders of Malligapuram to enter into a compromise. As a result, the culprits went unpunished and the practice of untouchability unabated.

This pattern is repeated throughout India. Whenever

there is a conflict between the high caste and Untouchables, the police and other law enforcing authority visit the scene after the riot and prepare their First Information Report (FIR) which is the sole legal document for further legal proceedings. The police always seeks the help of the local leaders, who are mostly from the high caste, in preparing the FIR. Usually the police advises both parties to compromise. Generally the Paraiyans give in. If the case is taken to the courts, the Untouchables invariably lose the case. There are cases where the police perpetrate crimes, and their complicity against Untouchables is very common in India (Kishwar and Vanitha, 1984: 186-202).

Every high caste person thinks that to be a Paraiyan is to be subservient. Paraiyans have been forced to be submissive in the past, and they want them to be submissive in the future. Any affirmation of Paraiyans' self respect and human dignity is taken as arrogance, and the caste Hindus deal with them severely for any act of self-affirmation. The practice of Untouchability is reason enough to revolt against the landlords, but they can do so only at the risk of starvation and loss of life.² This

² Whenever I discussed with them the idea of revolt against the practice of untouchability, they recollect the 48 untouchables killed at Kilavenmani in Tanjore district in 1968, and twelve untouchables killed in Villupuram in Cuddalore district in 1978, because they fought against such practices. These losses of lives prevent them from revolting against the practice of untouchability.

ritual domination is compounded by direct and indirect economic domination.

DIRECT ECONOMIC DOMINATION

The direct economic domination is the result of the monopolistic control of land and land-related institutions. I have already shown that the Brahmins and non-Brahmins control 95 percent of land and also control over land-related institutions such as water, finance, and local business. The landlords at Uthiramerur use their official and non-official power to demand obedience and keep Paraiyans at the verge of starvation. In the absence of alternate means of survival Paraiyans at Malligapuram obey their oppressors for reasons of economic expediency.

Subsistence Income and wage

Poverty at Malligapuram is ruthless, when we gauge it in terms of the quality of life of the people and as measured in terms of income, food, housing, and health. The quality of life of any class is tied to its real income, as differentiated from wealth. I documented the low level of land and wealth at Malligapuram in Chapter 5, but the 127 households have few other durable possessions as well: 20 bullocks used to plough the soil, 25 milk cows, four goats, 135 poultry, and ten cycles. No one owns any TV sets, automobiles, refrigerators, stereo sets,

stoves, sewing machines or cupboards. These are considered luxury items.

The main source of the Paraiyans' income is the wage they get for their labor as tenants or laborers. Presuming there is always a double crop, I estimated the per capita income at Rs 672 per year. But more often there is only a single crop, which reduces the per capita income considerably. Table 17 shows that almost two-thirds of the Paraiyans earn less than Rs 3,000 per year. The mean household income is Rs 3,700 but 92 households (72 percent) have incomes below the mean household. The mean is bloated, because the household incomes range from Rs 420 to Rs 21,180. Twelve households, mainly teachers and some of the cotton milk workers, earn more than Rs 10,000 per year.

TABLE 17

INCOME BY HOUSEHOLD AT MALLIGAPURAM

Income (in Rs)	percent
-1500	29.9
1501-3000	34.6
3001-4500	11.8
4501-6000	6.3
6000-above	17.3
Total	100.0

The average family size at Malligapuram is 5.2 and must spend Rs 3,700 for basic items such as food, clothings and housing. The average household at Malligapuram

spends 91 per cent of that income on food items. Their staple food is raghi, rice, and some vegetables, which provide only minimally sufficient calories as shown in Table 18.

TABLE 18
FOOD INTAKE AND CALORIES

Type of food	calorie
<u>Breakfast</u>	
Raghi gruel	332
<u>Lunch</u>	
Raghi gruel	332
<u>Dinner</u>	
Rice	372
Vegetables + dhal	116
<u>Total</u>	<u>1152</u>

(Source: U.S Department of Health, Education and Welfare 1972)

Once a month the family eat beef. Usually they sell eggs and milk to make a little more income. Although fish is a rarity in this place, they occasionally use dry salted fish. However, the Planning Commission declares that any one getting less than 2,400 calories lives below the poverty line. According to this calculation, 105 households (83 percent) at Malligapuram live below the

poverty line.³ They own minimum clothing. Since food takes 91 percent of their income they are able to spend just 1.4 percent of income to buy clothes. A family of six members can afford only Rs 51.8 annually to buy clothes. The men have two shirts and two dothi.⁴ They rarely send them to the washerman because they are afraid he would tear it. Women buy two blouses and two sarees every year. The school going boys own one set of shirts and shorts, and the girls two blouses and two skirts. The clothing lasts, for a year and every year almost all at Malligapuram buy new clothes for the village feast. When they get wet during the monsoon season most do not have another set of clothes to change into. On those days they literally go in rags in the street.

The housing is very poor. Only three families have brick houses. Others live behind the mud walls and under thatched roofs. These houses are semi-permanent. The flooring is mud and when it rains, the roof leaks and the floor gets soaked with rainwater. Most house have only one room (20 by 15 feet) where all the household chores are done. In 65 households married brothers live in the same house and even marital privacy is a big problem.

³ However, one has to admit that during harvest people eat rice instead of raghi. The difference in calorie between rice and raghi is 40.

⁴ Dothi is a piece of two yard long white cloth which men wrap around their waist.

Paraiyans can not afford to buy brass vessels and silver wares. They use earthen wares to cook food, and carry water. No household has any sofa, chair, table or any other furniture. Although every house has a small hurricane lamp lit in the corner of the house, only four households have electrified their houses. No one has the legal right over his house site.

The people at Malligapuram do not enjoy good health. They are victims of tuberculosis, diarrhea, bronchitis, and other infectious diseases related to malnutrition. The government has started a primary health center at Uthiramerur in order to serve the neighboring villages. The hospital record shows an average of 450 patients per day of which 70 percent are Paraiyans from various Cherries who can not afford to see the private physicians. The hospital has two doctors and three nurses, but Dr. Paramasivam told me there is no adequate staff to take care of the patients. The well-to-do go to one of the six private doctors.

The average life expectancy is 45 years as opposed to 54 years at the national level. Many infants show signs of malnutrition, pot-bellies, and slim legs and the average birth weight is 3.3 lbs.

Debt and Dependency

The penurious wage further accentuates the Paraiyans' dependency on the landlords because they borrow from the landlords for their livelihood. How else they can survive if they do not borrow? People with low income often need to borrow money to meet their needs. The total debt at Malligapuram is Rs 181,500 and the average household debt is Rs 1,429. Table 19 shows that they borrow more for consumption and ceremonial purposes than for production.

TABLE 19

INDEBTEDNESS AT MALLIGAPURAM: PURPOSE AND AMOUNT

Purpose of borrowing	Amount borrowed (in Rs)	%
Production		
agriculture	52,740	29 %
Milk cows	9,420	5
consumption	82,690	45
ceremonies	36,400	20
Total	181,250	100

The table shows that the Paraiyans from Malligapuram have borrowed 47 percent of their debt for consumption and 20 percent for ceremonies, such as celebration of puberty, marriage, death, and the village feast. Every family borrows heavily on the occasion of the village feast. They cannot get such loans from the bank because they do not have personal and collateral securities. Instead, they borrow either from unlicensed money lenders, landlords, or friends. They have obtained their production

loans mainly from the landlords and the banks as shown in table 20.

TABLE 20
SOURCE AND AMOUNT BORROWED BY THE PARAIYANS
AT MALLIGAPURAM

Source	Amount borrowed	
	Rs	%
Bank	12,560	7 %
Money lenders	75,970	42
Land lords	65,380	36
Friends and relatives	27,340	15
Total	181,250	100

Borrowing heavily from the landlords and the money lenders has serious economic consequences. The money lenders do not maintain proper accounts and they charge interest rates varying from 35 percent to 85 percent. Whatever little property they may possess, the Paraiyans at Malligapuram sell it in order to repay the loans. Borrowing is particularly necessary during times of crisis. There was an acute famine for three consecutive years from 1980-83 because the monsoon failed, and the people from Malligapuram borrowed heavily from the money lenders during those years.

When a tenant borrows from the landlord, the latter subtract the loan payment from the produce. If the borrower is a landless, then he becomes a bonded laborer till he repays the loan. Some of them can never repay

their debts and live and die in debt. Borrowing from the landlords ties Paraiyans at Malligapuram to their masters and further deteriorates their quality of life.

Indirect domination

Brahmin and non-Brahmin landlords exercise indirect domination through a system of divide and rule and manipulation. Dividing the oppressed against each other is an age-old strategy to maintain the status quo. The geo-politics of the five Cherries, isolated yet orbiting like satellites around Uthiramerur, provides the natural setting for the landlords to divide and rule the oppressed. The landlords always help to maintain conflicts between Cherries in order to keep them disunited. They do so by offering more job opportunities for the very submissive. The Paraiyans from Kuppayanallur are the most favored. Similarly, the Hindu Brahmin and non-Brahmin landlords divide the Hindu Paraiyans⁵ from the Christian Paraiyans. The tension between the Hindu and Christian Paraiyans, particularly at Malligapuram, is kept alive by the high castes.

Through such manipulation the dominant castes try to conform the landless Paraiyans to their objectives. The political immaturity of Paraiyans makes them vulnerable,

⁵ Officially Paraiyans are outside Hinduism. But since they do not have an official religion of their own, today Hinduism recognizes them as part of the Hindu fold.

and the rural elites and therefore manipulate Paraiyans through their leaders. Rayyappan was been the Nattanmai (leader of the caste Panchayat) and ward representative from Malligapuram from 1962 upto 1975. Whenever the landlords beat up Paraiyans at Malligapuram, they convinced Rayyappan to mediate between them and the Paraiyans. The landlords also make use of Rayyappan to get votes for their candidates during the election. The landlords follow a similar strategy in other Cherries.

Symbolic Domination

There is yet another, more benign form of domination, known as symbolic domination. The landlords give gifts to the landless Paraiyans, particularly the bonded and attached laborers, on the occasions of marriage and death in their family. The gifts are usually rice, clothes and a little cash. These gifts are communicative actions, that is, through the gift the landlords communicate a message of lasting bond between themselves and the landless. The landless Paraiyans at Malligapuram reciprocate those gifts in the form of loyal labor, particularly during the busy seasons of transplanting and harvest.

The agrarian relational matrix is based on direct and indirect domination from above. It is exploitative, because the main burden of the obligations has fallen on Paraiyans at Malligapuram and other Cherries, while the

benefits have gone to the landlords.

These indirect and direct dominations would provide sufficient reasons for Paraiyans at Malligapuram to revolt against the power structure at Uthiramerur. I have already pointed out in Chapter 6 that Paraiyans at Malligapuram are fully aware that they are exploited. I also argued that they have their own rational calculus for choosing obedience over revolt. They foresee that if they revolt, they may lose the bare minimum which the present system guarantees. It is that fear of losing the minimum that is making them adhere to the system. During my stay with Paraiyans at Malligapuram I found that they are very much preoccupied with ways and means of getting food. It is that overwhelming concern for food, the gain or loss of it, that makes them passive. This takes us to the subjective conditions that inhibit the Paraiyans from revolting.

SUBJECTIVE CONDITIONS OF OBEDIENCE

The most primordial need is food and it is the theme that runs through every aspect of their life for Paraiyans. The following are some of their chorus on food: "Swami, kodi kodiya rupa vendam, vaiyiru nirainthal pothum" (we do not want millions of rupees, but we want food for our stomach)". "Vaiyiru kaluva valiyilleye" (no way of finding food for our empty stomach)". "Inniki

velaiki pokati rah pattini" (If I do not work today, the whole family will to bed on an empty stomach). They do not send their children to school because an additional hand means more food. They do not want to bury the dead cattle, because that would deprive them of some meat. They do not want to stop drum-beating, a socially demeaning job, because that would deprive them of their means of subsistence. So food is their central concern, and therefore it affects every aspect of their life and thought.

Politics and Food

The Paraiyans' concern for food and other basic needs affects their decisions and shape their social behavior to a large extent. For example, the political behavior of the people at Malligapuram is very much conditioned by their material needs. When I asked them which political party they voted in the 1980 election, I got the responses listed in Table 21.

TABLE 21,

POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION

Name of the Party	percent
Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam (ADMK)	49 %
Indira Congress	27 %
Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam (DMK)	10 %
Communist Party of India (CPI)	14 %
Total	100 %
The political manifesto of these parties range from	

mere populism (ADMK and DMK) to radical reform (CPI). The CPI plans to bring about an agrarian revolution through a horizontal mobilization of working class and poor peasantry from the countryside. They have succeeded in bringing such changes to Kerala and West Bengal. The Congress Party of India is a centrist party, which promises democratic socialism to the masses of India. Nationalization of Banks, land reforms, planning, and other socio-economic programs are seen as the means towards democratic socialism, but the Congress Party is known more for its rhetoric than accomplishments. Its failure has given birth to regional parties like the Akali Dal in Punjab and DMK in Madras.

DMK emerged as the major opposition party in the State of Tamil Nadu in 1962. It is very negative and parochial in its programs and approach. It is opposed to Brahmin domination, anti-Northern domination in politics, and is anti-establishment. Positively, it worked on the primordial sentiment of Tamilians' love for their language in order to establish Tamil Nationalism. As Hardgrave (1965:80) writes:

Tamil nationalism in formulating a wider sense of personal identity, has drawn increasing numbers into the political culture. In accommodating primordial sentiment, the government has given the village rustic a stake in the system in terms which he understands.

But on the economic front the DMK have not come out with clear economic programs. An analysis of the election

manifesto reveals that their economic programs are tailored after the Congress Party and CPI. When M.G. Ramachandran, the president of ADMK, was asked to spell out the economic policies of his party, he just summarized it in one word "ANNAISM," a phrase coined after C.N. Annadurai, one of the founders of the Dravidian Movement. The word is more of a slogan than an economic program, and it has no meaning. Despite this lack of clear economic policies the Tamil masses voted the DMK to power in 1967, although now they vote for the ADMK party, a break-away party from DMK.

Given the background and programs of these various parties, one might expect the people at Malligapuram to vote for the Communist party of India, since it has a better record on land reform than DMK, ADMK, and Congress Party of India. But 49 percent from Malligapuram voted for ADMK in the 1984 election because they felt that ADMK provided the mid-day meal to their school going-children, and sarees and pension to the widows. It is their immediate concern for food that determines the exercise of their franchise. People told me that the one who gives food is a life-giver (undi koduthor uyir koduthore). They are not willing to sacrifice their present gratifications for future expectations. The ADMK works on that vulnerability of the people. This is one of the reasons why no leftist party emphasizing a protracted struggle to achieve

justice has taken strong roots in Tamil Nadu.

Religion and Food

There is a similar gap between expectation and reality in the religious life. The religious beliefs of the people at Malligapuram are basically utilitarian and pragmatic. This is contrary to the ethical and eschatological expectations of the religious experts. The people of Malligapuram expect from their saints and God their daily bread. They pray for rain, good crops, good health, good wage, crop share and good health for the bread winner. If the Christian God fails to fulfil their wishes and desires, they pray to the Hindu pantheons.

People do not care which God gives what, provided they get what they want. It is the local Catholic pastor and Hindu theologians who try hard to provide a link between the people's variant of religion and the total religious structure of the society. In their attempt to link the people's expectations from religion with the tenets of Christianity or Hinduism, the religious experts fail to see the basic needs of the people and the struggle they wage to get bread and butter. The priest is worried about their salvation of soul, and they are worried about keeping their body and soul together.

Eric Wolf brings out the levels of tensions between the peasants and their religious experts:

The two sets of explanations and attendant ritual necessarily intersect at points of common interest. Where peasant religion focuses on the individual and his passage through a series of crucial episodes such as birth, circumcision, passage to adulthood, marriage, death, the higher-order interpretations fasten on these events of the life-cycle in abstract terms, regarding them as way stations on the human path through life and fate. Where peasant religion concerns itself with the regenerative cycle of cultivation and the protection of the crop against the random attacks of nature, the higher-order interpretation speaks of regenerative cycles in general, of the recurrence of life and death. Where the peasant religion must cope with disorder and suffering among specified individuals belonging to a concrete social group "on the round," the higher-order interpretation reads these misfortunes as revelations of evil in the world.

The differential expectations of religion from the laity and clergy make religion meaningless for the people. This was shown by an interesting interlude between June 1984 and June 1986 in the life of the people at Malligapuram. Under the leadership of a young priest, a group of young jesuit seminarians wanted to bring structural changes to Malligapuram. Pity for the poor and oppressed inspired them to take a radical posture to human development. Their aim was the creation of a new world at Malligapuram through structural changes. They stopped the regular supply of wheat, old clothes, and other charities from the diocese, because they saw these old programs as "developmentalism" and creating a servile and dependency mentality among the people at Malligapuram. They told the people to fight for their rights and not to accept any

doling out of money or grains. They animated the people through their revolutionary ideas. However, the seminarians, along with their leader, left the village in 1986. A new pastor was appointed in July 1986. He wrote to me on 23 September 1986 as follows:

As regards Malligapuram I am not exactly in a comfortable position. I am like Aaron facing the people after Moses left for the top of the mountain. People want wheat, want to get back to their older practices and bury all the talk about 'Puthiya Samuthayam' (creation of a new world). To add to the problem of restlessness, the rain has failed. So people are having difficult time. I find it difficult to communicate with the people at a level in which they can understand.

It is clear that the people have more faith in their old ways, which guarantees them the minimum, than the new ways, which promises utopia. No one can bring any change at Malligapuram without first assuring food and basic needs. They are not prepared to forgo this security for a future prosperity for progeny.

Defiance of Village Council for Food

The need for food not only affects the Paraiyans' political and religious decisions, but also shapes their social character. The village leaders adopted two resolutions to stop three traditional caste-based occupations, but were unsuccessful in enforcing them. Normally, it is the duty of the Kambukkuti at Malligapuram to remove and eat the dead cattle from the landlord. As this is consi-

dered very demeaning by the high castes, the Malligapuram caste Panchayat passed a resolution that no one from their village should remove the dead cattle and eat them, and that those who defy would be fined. The kambukutis defied the resolution, because they feared they would lose their job if they did not remove the deal cattle. In addition, this is one of the very few occasions in which they get some meat to eat, as they cannot afford to buy meat from the market. The recalcitrants secretly got support from some of the people. Even today they continue with the same old occupations.

The community passed another resolution, requesting the drum beating Paraiyans to stop that occupation as it is considered demeaning by others.⁶ The drummers retorted to the council, that they were not prepared to forfeit Rs 15, two meals, and the country liquor, which they get on those occasions. So they have gone against the wishes of the community.

The caste panchayat also passed a third resolution, requesting the people to stop collecting "Mariatha Koozhu." The Hindus believe that the irate goddess

⁶ The late Bishop Caldwell derived the name Paraiyan from the Tamil word "parai" a drum, as certain Paraiyans act as drummers at marriages, funerals, village festivals, and on occasions when government or commercial announcements are proclaimed. This occupation is considered polluting, because the drummer comes into contact with leather. The other castes denigrate drummers for doing this type of work.

Mariatha causes small-box in the village. To appease her anger, the caste Hindus celebrate her feast annually and distribute gruel to all. Usually only the Paraiyans collect this gruel. But the resolution did not stop them from collecting gruel, because their material interests took precedence over social control, however stringent it may be.

These cases clearly indicate, that the Paraiyans will rebel against their caste Panchayat in order to procure food for their families. In brief, we can say that the Paraiyans at Malligapuram will cultivate or adopt those behaviors, that will assure them of their basic needs. That means their standard of living, high or low, will determine the nature of their relationship with their landlords and others who assure of them food. Because the Paraiyans at Malligapuram are so concerned about their immediate needs, they are not willing to forego them for a future of uncertain and unknown promises.

The foregoing chapters suggest, that the Paraiyans at Malligapuram have sufficient reasons to revolt against the social structures, that have kept them subservient so long. Revolt in this context means they would have to break away from the landlords. If they break away from the landlord, then the question remains as to who will provide food in the place of landlords.

They do not have any faith in the government welfare

programs, because those programs have not done much for them (Chapter 7). Nor has land reform given them any land (Chapter 7). Voluntary agencies, like the Catholic church, offer some intermittent but undependable relief during famine and other moments of crisis. There is no opportunity for any alternate employment to generate income and give them a modicum of respectability and independence.

Those who migrated to the cities in search of a good job invariably come back after a couple years. Some embraced Christianity as a search for a negative identity, but their socio-economic status is no different than as Hindu Paraiyans. When the alternate means of survival are closed, the landlord exploiter becomes their protector.

From the data available to us, we can conclude that most of the Paraiyans at Malligapuram live below the absolute poverty line. People living below the poverty line clamor for food and other basic necessities of life such as shelter and cloths. Given the economic and political structures at Uthiramerur, and the integration of Malligapuram into the economic activities of Uthiramerur, Paraiyans can survive only by depending upon the landlords.

They are also aware, that they cannot get food and basic necessities of life from anyone other than the landlords. The agrarian relational matrix is structured

in such a way that the Untouchables cannot escape from the landlords. This is the sine qua non of their obedience.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER IX

I began my study with two questions: Why are the Untouchables still subjected to the social stigma of pollution, and why do they continue to live in poverty? Why have they not attempted to change those conditions which keep them subservient? I argued in Chapter one, that traditional Indian society with its material and ideational bases have a form of social coordination in which religion and society have reinforced each other to create a closed system of social stratification, namely the caste system. In the traditional caste system, the ritually pure monopolized the economic and political resources of the country and thus created a system of exclusion and social closure. Such closure has helped them to maximize rewards and keep the resources for themselves.

Modernization, with its multifaceted developments has created multiple dominant castes, but power -- ritual, economic and political -- has stayed with the upper strata. The Untouchables, then and now, have remained powerless. The Untouchables, because they are excluded from the resources, can exert power from below only in the form of protests, strikes, demonstrations, sit-ins,

marches, and picketing. Only then may they get access to the resources. Parkin calls this exercise of power from below "usurpation." "What usurpationary actions have in common is the aim of biting into the resources and benefits accruing to dominant groups in society -- a range of possibilities extending from marginal redistribution to complete expropriation" (1979:75).

Exclusion and social closure have always had at least the backing of the dominant castes. In practice, the rural elites are helped by the public bureaucracy and the manner in which it operates. The inability or unwillingness of public officials to act fairly allows the dominant castes to continue their dominance over the landless Untouchables. Dhar and others (1982:111), after studying various conflicts between the landlords and landless in Bihar State, observe:

When put together the ensemble makes the totality clear. When the landlords confront his labourers of sharecroppers he is not bothered by their castes. He treats them with all the vengeance of a landlord. Also, the caste of landlord does not make any difference in their vengeance to labouring classes. The state and the police backs them. But here the caste links are more useful. If the landed gentry and the bureaucracy and the police, have correct caste alignments the police crackdowns are faster. The bureaucratic help is more assured.

The alignment between caste and bureaucracy has made dominance very effective, and attempts to change it difficult.

Using Malligapuram as a case study, I have demon-

strated how first one dominant caste (Brahmins) and then multiple dominant castes (Brahmins and non-Brahmins) use the purity-pollution continuum to control land and land-related resources. I have also shown the alignment between the dominant castes and the local bureaucracy. My findings indicate, that the dominant castes are able to tie Paraiyans to a system of exploitative reciprocity through use of ritual status, monopolization of resources and cooperation from the public bureaucracy. The close link between public administration and high caste dominance presents a major obstacle to social change.

The Limits of the State

One of the ways of changing the system would be through state intervention. I have already discussed the Indian state's constitutional guarantee of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The directive principles of the Constitution bar any discrimination on the basis of sex, creed and caste. The state has also enacted affirmative action known as protective discrimination, to rectify past discrimination and allow the Untouchables to obtain education, jobs and political participation. In addition to constitutional guarantees and legislative acts, the state has also established economic development programs. However, as I have shown, all these governmental actions have been ineffective and have had only symbolic value.

As Myrdal says, the state in India is so soft that it has lost the moral fibre to bring about any meaningful change in the state of affairs for the Untouchables. One of the characteristic features of a soft state, according to Myrdal, is rampant corruption which inhibits and raises serious obstacles to all efforts to increase social discipline (Myrdal, 1970: 236-237). Corruption is universal (Scott, 1972) and it is institutionalized in India (Frankel, 1978). Frankel writes (1978:203):

..[A]ttempts to service growing demands from static resources strained the stability of the one-party dominant political system, standard of honest and efficient administration precipitously declined. Officers of the police, the judiciary, the state and local revenue and development services, and even the vaunted Indian Administrative Service, were all engaged in selling influence (often at fixed prices and graded fees) to individuals ranging from industrialists, contractors and suppliers, traders and ministers of the state and central governments. As corruption became institutionalized into a distributive device, those who could not afford to pay found themselves at the bottom of the list in the allocation of access to "public" goods and services.

The blame for institutionalized corruption should be born by the political parties which encourage corruption.

Scott writes (1972:2):

If the study of corruption teaches us anything at all, it teaches us not to take a political system or a particular regime at its face value. Corruption, after all, may be seen as an informal political system. Whereas party manifestos, general legislation, and policy declarations are the formal facade of the political structure, corruption stands in sharp contrast to these features as an informal political system in its own right.

I can illustrate the extent of corruption at the local level with an example. In 1976, I was trying to help the people at Malligapuram to avail themselves of the milk cow projects introduced by the government. The government guaranteed Rs 1,500 through the Agricultural Cooperative Bank of Uthiramerur to buy milk cows. One of the clerks, who scrutinized applications for the milk project, told a Paraiyan from Malligapuram, "application does not move automatically, only I have to move it; only when you oil the machine will the motor start functioning."

However, each of the many intermediaries between the Bank and the beneficiary has to be bribed with an amount reflecting the person's position in the Bank. Few Untouchables have sufficient resources to pay such bribes. As the quote indicates, if an applicant does not bribe the officials, the application will never reach the Bank Manager for approval. People also have to bribe the Tashildar in order to get an income certificate, so that they can get their sons and daughters admitted in schools, or get other government benefits meant for low income groups. To get fertilizer, they have to bribe the Commissioner of the Block Development Office. To get an attender position, they have to pay Rs 5,000, and to get a teaching position in an elementary school, they have to pay Rs 10,000.

Corruption has become so pervasive in India that some critics perceive it as constituting the milieu of the Indian polity (Frankel, 1978:475). Perhaps a single phrase that can summarize corruption in India is "Democratic Kleptocracy."

The extent of corruption would account for why planned change has not worked in India. People from the bottom have long given up the hope of expecting many economic favors from the government. Paraiyans at Malligapuram often repeat, "Raman antal enna, Ravanam antal enne" [It matters very little for us whether Raman (symbol of goodness) or Ravanam (the symbol of evil) rule us; all are equally corrupt].

Leadership from outside

If usurpation is not possible through the intervention of the state, then the victims have to start a program of self-help. Unless the Paraiyans around Uthiramerur, and the Untouchables at large, become in the Marxian phrase "a class for itself" and revolt against the landlords, they cannot obtain access to resources. Revolt against the powers of domination in a village is a serious business. To revolt against the landlords, the Untouchable community at Malligapuram needs to promote four basic social processes: cooperation, unity of liberation, organization, and cultural synthesis (Freire, 1984:164-

186). Organization and mobilization of the masses is possible only through committed leadership either from outside the village or internally.

The outside leadership has come to this area mainly from Christian religious men (as a majority of the households, 85 percent, are Christians). There are two types of intellectuals among churchmen, "traditional" and "organic" (Gramsci, 1971). The traditional intellectuals are church-centered theologian-priests who exhort their flock: "Slaves be obedient to your master." Such exhortation is in the tradition of classical missiology. The early Catholic missionaries considered caste as a civil institution and therefore advocated accommodation to the value of hierarchy. They did not recognize the incompatibility of the structured inequality of caste with the egalitarianism of the gospel values. Other traditional elites also maintain an accommodative posture to the challenges of the caste system.

The "organic" intellectuals among the churchmen are ideologically divided into developmentalists and liberationists. The developmentalists act to supplement the income of the landless through subsidiary work programs. In this case, the local pastor gets wheat, milk powder, soya beans and old clothes from the diocese and distributes the commodities among the landless during lean periods, from March to July, when most of them at Malliga-

puram remain unemployed. Such programs have operated at Malligapuram since 1965 and people depend on and look forward to their ration of wheat and milk powder.

The liberationist perspective was promoted by a young priest, who was appointed pastor of Malligapuram. He had a little grounding in liberation theology and a little knowledge of Marxism. A group of eight young seminarians assisted him in his attempt to "liberate" the Untouchables from the "clutches of the landlords." Their objective was to create a class consciousness among the landless laborers. To do so, they stopped the church distribution of food items and clothes, because, they argued, such programs reinforced Paraiyans' dependency. Slogans, revolutionary songs, marches, and sit-ins replaced the distribution of wheat and milk powder. The seminarians left Malligapuram after six months, and the pastor after two years to complete higher studies, leaving the people to face their own destiny. In the process, the Paraiyans lost the wheat and local patronage from the landlords.

This particular instance at Malligapuram and other cases elsewhere raises questions of whether the outside leadership is capable of creating revolutionary consciousness among the landless laborers. Mostly, the outside leadership inflicts its conception of justice and exploitation on the landless, whose sense of justice is dictated very much by their existential conditions.

Both the seminarians and the people saw exploitation as appropriation of surplus labor by the landlords. But they did not agree on the ways and means of redressing injustice. The seminarians expected the Paraiyans to forgo their immediate needs for food and instead protest for a better, but uncertain future. In contrast, the landless want both and cannot survive without food. It is the same with the revolutionary parties like the Communist Party of India. Class struggle is part of the belief system of the communist party, but it is not the belief system of the people. People at Malligapuram detest the idea of taking up arms against the landlords, because they are aware they will suffer extreme hardship if they do.

Another critical factor for the people is the dependability of leadership. The leader who come from the outside want to accomplish a lot within a short time. The seminarians stayed just six months and then left, although the fate of the people remain unchanged. The volunteers belonging to various Communist Parties of India stay with the landless in a village for a couple of years and expect them to take up arms against the landlords, which they did in many places. But when the landless took arms, many landless were killed. Such Marxist inspired rebellions are rare and sporadic. Forty-eight landless were killed, at Kilavenmani in 1968 and 263 landless from January 1 to July 31, 1978 in seven Northern States of India. It is

important to note that no leader was killed nor were any present when the landless were fighting their landlords.¹

Leadership from within

In view of these weaknesses of outside leadership, leadership from within would be an alternate ideal. In fact, the purpose of affirmative action is to create leadership among the Untouchables. However, as shown in chapter 7 few people at Malligapuram have benefitted from protective discrimination, and those who did have generally migrated to the city.

Moreover, the migrants thus deprive the villagers of their leadership capacities, while those who remain behind do not look kindly to their own kind. They have become party loyalists rather than champions of their community. Thus, although affirmative action policies did pave the way for some Untouchables to advance, the newly created elites among the Untouchables were easily coopted into the mainstream of Indian life.

In fact, some of the Untouchable elites have so internalized the values of the higher castes, that they

¹ Shivaraman (1973), a member of the Communist Party of India (Russian version), interprets the Kila-venmani episode as a class struggle inspired by Marxist ideology. Her claim is repudiated by the Communist Party of India, Marxist Leninist (Chinese version), and the people themselves. Similarly, academicians turned Marxists such as Gough (1981) and Omvedt (1981), interpret every rural rumbling as a class struggle.

despise their own kind. Some of these elites have their residences in cognito in the Madras city along with Brahmins and non-Brahmins, and they instruct their rustic looking relatives from the villages not to come to their home. Leadership does not emerge from the anonymous city dwellers. After Ambedkar (1956), the Untouchables in India do not have a national leader to fight for their cause.

Accommodation, an Inevitable Social Process

When I stayed with Paraiyans at Malligapuram, I felt they were very much preoccupied with food and basic necessities of life. The idea, that the State would eradicate their poverty and social oppression, was totally foreign to them. They hope for outside leadership to help them, but their recent experiment with radicalism has disillusioned them. Their only recourse remain the landlords, hence the necessity to accommodate and obey them. Galbraith writes (1979:62),

People who have lived for centuries in poverty in the relative isolation of the rural village have come to terms with this existence. It would be astonishing were it otherwise. People do not strive, generation after generation, century after century, against circumstances that are so constituted as to defeat them. They accept. Nor is such acceptance a sign of weakness of character. Rather, it is a profoundly rational response. Given the formidable hold of the equilibrium of poverty within which they live, accommodation is the optimal solution. Poverty is cruel. A continuing struggle to escape that is continuously more intelligent,

as well as more plausible, that people, out of the experience of centuries, should reconcile themselves to what has for so long been the inevitable.

Poverty is cruel. Untouchability is inhuman. The Untouchables who are subjected to both have chosen obedience as an art of survival. They can do nothing else when, in their calculation, individual needs outweigh collective benefits.

A Contrasting Image of Peasants

My findings at Uthiramerur-Malligapuram suggest, that the world view and cognitive structure of the Untouchables are far more complex and sophisticated, than they are usually credited with by Indologists and Marxists. It is a world view that emerges from a "culture of silence." A people craving for food are bound to view the world differently than those who are fed well. They defy most of the predictions on agrarian radicalism, because these predictions fail to consider their experience of hunger and total insecurity.

Liberals of the democratic persuasion and Marxists offer two different theoretical perspectives on agrarian radicalism. Gurr (1973), Huntington (1968), and Tilly (1979), the liberals whose names are associated with political development metatheory, argue that modernization breeds revolution. Gurr looks at the psychological relationship between modernization and revolution. He

stresses the psychic impact of large-scale change: disorientation, rising expectations, relative deprivations, and the diffusion of new ideologies. Huntington attributes revolution to rapid social change, mobilization, and political institutionalization. Tilly says that population growth, industrialization, urbanization, and other large-scale changes are only necessary conditions for revolution but not sufficient conditions. For him, the structure of power, alternate conceptions of justice, the organization of coercion, the formation of coalitions and the legitimacy of the state provide the explanations of revolution.

Modernization has not bred revolution in India because the pattern in India has been to form a caste-based political organization. The major goals of the political power structure is to access the benefits of development, not revolt against the system (Hardgrave, 1969). The Untouchables, who enter into voluntary and forced clientalism with the landowning class support, are forced to support the ideology of the ruling class. They cannot, therefore, give any sustained support to radical movements that will liberate them from the hegemony of the landlords.

Obviously, anger born out of exploitation cannot be a sufficient cause to spark a revolution. Otherwise, the whole of India, along with the rest of the Third World,

would be in flames (Scott, 1976). To translate individual anger into a collective consciousness involves a rational calculus of individual cost and collective benefits which is calculated in terms of his immediate material security. If he feels that his immediate material security is threatened, then he prefers to accept the authority of the landlord, however oppressive it may be.

From my field experience, I feel that Uthiramerur is undergoing a transformation from a traditional subsistence agrarian economy to a market economy. It has a well developed infrastructure, which in principle can contain the "structural strains" caused by modernization. But modernization has not helped the landless Untouchables to become a class-for-itself. That is because the landless are preoccupied with their individual material needs rather than the formation of class consciousness.

Marxists provide two contradictory images of the peasantry. Marx and Lenin have denied the peasants the ideological capability to conceive and the organizational ability to construct a revolution. This image of the peasantry echoes in the writings of Gramsci (1971), an Italian Marxist, and Hobsbawm (1959), a British Marxist. Gramsci says, that the poor peasantry is a mass, incapable of providing a centralized expression for their aspiration and need (1971). I shall argue that the Untouchables are not the Gramscian inarticulate mass, nor a Hobsbawmian pre-

political group. They are rational peasants and they have a rational calculus of their own for their social behavior.

Fanon (1963) provides an opposite image of the poor peasantry than that of the traditional Marxists. For him, the peasantry is the revolutionary proletariat of our times and a crucial political force. The peasant wars of the 20th century are a proof of Fanon's prophesy. Moore (1966), Wolf (1969), Griffin (1974), Midgal (1974), Paige (1975), Popkin (1979), Scott (1976), Stinchcombe (1961), Zagoria (1974), and others have analyzed the causes of peasant revolution in the Third World. They pay considerable attention to the nature of the agrarian structure, to the role of agriculture in economic development, to agrarian socio-economic change, and to the significance of peasant-based revolution in political development.

These authors have advanced two basic theories on peasant rebellion. Moore (1966), Wolf (1969), and Scott (1976) advocate a historical explanation in which colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism have destabilized the economic security of the traditional peasantry, thereby stimulating rebellion and revolt. Wolf says,

It is significant, however, that before the advent of capitalism and the new economic order based on it, social equilibrium depended in both the long and short run on a balance of transfer of peasant surpluses to the rulers and the provision of a minimal security... What is significant is that capitalism cut through the integument of custom, severing people from their

accustomed social matrix in order to transform them into economic actors, independent of prior social commitments to kin and neighbors (1969:-279).

According to Wolf, capitalism necessarily produces a revolution of its own.

Stinchcombe (1961), Zagoria (1974), and Paige (1975) argue that certain structural variables, such as family-size tenancy and different system of class relationship in combination with population density and literacy, set the stage for agrarian radicalism in the Third World countries.

There is also a technological explanation of agrarian radicalism forwarded by Frankel (1971) and Griffin (1974). They argue that the landless are prone to horizontal mobilization, when they are relatively deprived of the benefits of Green Revolution. Frankel says that the impact of technological change on the agrarian relation is the same as capitalism. Bouton adds an ecological dimension to the arguments on agrarian radicalism. He argues that different geophysical conditions create different agro-economic structures, which in turn cause agrarian rebellion.

Individual Material Needs is the Basis of Obedience

When I look at Uthiramerur, I recognize the limited impact of capitalism and imperialism on the agrarian relation between the landlords and landless. These are

distant historical variables which influence a village structure only indirectly and very remotely. But while the structural, technological and ecological variables are present at Uthiramerur, there is no attempt toward an agrarian radicalism so far. I shall argue that the above mentioned factors are only necessary, but not sufficient conditions to cause agrarian unrest at Uthiramerur.

When we arrange the needs of the landless Untouchables in a hierarchical order, their individual material needs stand at the top, followed by affectual needs, dignity needs, and self-actualization. I have shown in Chapter 7 that the Paraiyans at Malligapuram have to depend upon the landlords for their sustenance. I also have described in Chapter 8 how the primary concern of the Untouchables is how to procure food in order to keep body and soul together. As long as they are preoccupied with their individual material needs, the landless Paraiyans as a class-in-itself cannot become a class-for-itself. Since such a transformation is a sine qua non for any agrarian radicalism, I conclude that mere modernization does not necessarily cause agrarian radicalism.

The key question is why the landless pursue their individual material interests rather than their collective ones. In order to answer this question, I would like to make a distinction between the public and hidden transcripts (beliefs and values) of the Paraiyans (Scott,

1987). Publicly, every landless Paraiyan embraces a revolutionary ideology and even opts to join a peasant organization for radical change in an agrarian structures (Chapter 8). But his hidden transcript may not necessarily tally with his public transcript. The hidden transcript is filled with a world of fear: the fear of eviction from land, the fear of being beaten up, and above all the fear of starvation to death. It is this hidden transcript that defines the social character and world view of the landless.

The world view of a people is their characteristic outlook. It is the inside view, the ways in which a person of the group typically sees himself in relation to his world, It includes his mapping of that world, that is to say, the categories he uses in his perception of the familiar and of the strange. It includes the emphasis he places on what he sees, the choices he makes from among the alternatives he knows (Mandelbaum, 1955:223).

Living in a culture of silence, a world of continuous oppression and fear, the Untouchables at Malligapuram chose to obey, though they are aware of the existence various alternatives.

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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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