Introduction

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The prevailing dichotomy between tradition and modernity has created a curious cognitive hiatus — in ideological thinking as well as in much of social science theorising — between society on the one hand and polity on the other. The former is conceived, as if by definition, as 'traditional', the latter as 'modern' and 'developmental'. In reality, however, this is a false approach to the phenomenon of modernisation; it is especially misleading when the phenomenon takes place in the context of democratic politics. Political and developmental institutions do not anywhere function in a vacuum. They tend, of necessity, to find bases in society either through existing organisational forms or by invoking new structures that cut across these forms. Moreover, a society that cares for legitimacy on a wide basis — and a democratic society is preminently· such a society — can proceed only by a conversation between the old and the new, a fusion of elements, and a readiness on the part of both the moderns and the ancients to be flexible and accommodative. In the process, no doubt, elements that prove dysfunctional to the realisation of social purpose and the growth of a national consensus may need to be subdued; and this is the function of a determined leadership. The grounds for these, however, are not a priori but pragmatic and developmental.

The overall point of departure of the authors in this volume is that not until the institutional changes introduced in a particular society become part of the working relationships of that society, can they hope to gain stability and legitimacy. A 'modernising' society is

neither modern nor traditional. It simply moves from one threshold of integration and performance to another, in the process transforming both the indigenous structures and attitudes and the newly introduced institutions and ideas. This is a point that needs to be emphasised. The doctrinaire orientation of much recent thinking on development in India and in the West has produced an unhelpful dichotomy in conceptualisation that stands in the way of a realistic appraisal of the development process. Fortunately, however, the processes of social change transcend the inhibitions of intellectuals and social scientists. This is especially true in an open and competitive polity. India was perhaps particularly fortunate in starting with a social system that had traditionally been flexible and capable of absorbing large shifts in the balance of social and political arrangements. It was further fortunate in having adopted a political framework which, among other things, involved a free expression of interests, made competition the great medium of change through adaptation and integration, and thus avoided sharp discontinuities and disruption in the process of political modernisation.

Everyone recognises that the traditional social system in India was organised around caste structures and caste identities. In dealing with the relationship between caste and politics, however, the doctrinaire moderniser suffers from a serious xenophobia. He begins with the question: is caste disappearing? Now, surely, no social system disappears like that. A more useful point of departure would be: what form is caste taking under the impact of modern politics, and what form is politics taking in a caste-oriented society? Those in India who complain of 'casteism in politics' are really looking for a sort of politics which has no basis in society. They also probably lack any clear conception of either the nature of politics or the nature of the caste system. (Many of them would want to throw out both politics and the caste system.) Politics is a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for the realisation of certain goals, and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging allegiances in order to mobilise and consolidate positions. The important thing is organisation and articulation of support, and where politics is mass-based the point is to articulate support through the organisations in which the masses are to be found. It follows that where the caste structure provides one of the principal organisational clusters along which the bulk of the population is found to live, politics must strive

to organise through such a structure. The alleged 'casteism in politics' is thus no more and no less than *politicisation* of caste. It is something in which both the forms of caste and the forms of politics are brought nearer each other, in the process changing both. By drawing the caste system into its web of organisation, politics finds material for its articulation and moulds it into its own design. In making politics their sphere of activity, caste and kin groups on the other hand, get a chance to assert their identity and to strive for positions. Drawing upon both the interacting structures are the real actors, the new contestants for power. Politicians mobilise caste groupings and identities in order to organise their power. They find in it an extremely well articulated and flexible basis for organisation, something that may have been structured in terms of a status hierarchy, but something that is also available for political manipulation — and one that has a basis in consciousness. Where there are other types of groups and other bases of association, politicians approach them as well. And as they everywhere change the form of such organisations, they change the form of caste as well.

The few who are free from the ideological compulsions of the doctrinaire modernists and are prepared to look into precise empirical relations suffer from another preconception and often a contrary theoretical construct. Reflecting the style of much social science theorising, these writers display an instrumental view of political activity. According to them, political relationships are no more than projections of social relationships — of systems of social and economic dominance — and have no independent capacity to influence the latter. Politics, in this view, is an instrument wielded by a particular stratum in society to consolidate or raise its position: it simply reproduces patterns of social dominance without itself affecting the prevailing or changing structure of society. Such an approach blurs understanding of the developmental reality which consists not in any approximation to a pre-conceived framework of antecedent society but in the changing interactions of the constituent elements in a dynamic situation. But in the particular case of caste and politics, even this is only partly relevant. Where caste itself becomes a political category it is futile to argue as to whether caste uses politics or politics uses caste. Such a controversy may help in strengthening individual or professional prejudices, but they do not contribute towards understanding. In many ways it is a sterile controversy.

There are still others who, while they do not suffer from such a reductionist compulsion and on the whole show a realistic under-

standing of the changes taking place in contemporary Indian society, have not been fully able to get rid of their professional rigidities into which their training seems to have pushed them. Essentially definitionist in their approaches, they feel compelled by an urge to simplify developmental realities into a neat model. As should be expected, there are great variations among them; what unites them is a compulsion to proclaim the autonomy of either caste or politics or both. There are among these the 'progressive' economists who seem committed to brand anything to do with caste as reactionary, and conceive change as essentially change *from caste to class relationships.* There are, on the other extreme, those 'experts' on caste who consider it their duty to protect caste from any pollution of politics. In order to do this they resort to neat logical arguments regarding the 'essence' of the caste system and then proceed to define away all other aspects as not properly belonging to the operation of the caste system. Most of the latter are Indologists and cultural anthropologists. Other social anthropologists, who are more sophisticated in their tools of analysis, and who clearly realise the importance of political forms, still feel compelled to protect the pedagogy of the caste system by proclaiming the autonomy of both caste and politics. When castes behave 'segmentally' and according to a system of hierarchy and 'closed stratification', they belong to the caste system; when they operate as political entities or as parts of a political entity, however, they belong to the political system and are not really part of the caste system.[1] There are, finally, slowly coming into the picture, the political scientists who, fascinated as they are by the importance of the caste system in politics, cannot, however, escape the compulsion to reduce the interactions between caste and politics to a neat model. Although they have given up the traditional political scientist's aversion to caste, and have also mercifully given up the erstwhile dichotomy between voluntary and political forms as belonging to the 'modern' secular order and caste forms as belonging to the 'traditional' order, they fall in the same trap again by imagining a total transformation of the caste system through their involvement in politics, 'the democratic incarnation of caste' as an American author calls it.[2] In the process such analysts tend to go over to the other extreme and to rarefy caste as *the* political force in contemporary India. Their approach once again is essentially one of explaining empirical phenomena in terms of a unified conceptual model that enables neat generalisations to be imposed on a complex reality.

All these approaches are basically dichotomous, oriented towards an ideal type 'contradiction' between caste and politics, and representing different variants of professional rigidity. What they all fail to see is that there never was a complete polarisation between the caste system and the political system, and that what is involved in the contemporary processes of change is neither a game of vested interests nor a total shift from one system to another but really a change in the context and level of political operation, a shift in social priorities, and a somewhat different picking and choosing between the variety of elements that in any case, at all times, have entered into the functioning of the social and political system in India. Thus a relative decline in the importance of pollution as a factor in determining caste hierarchy, and the diminishing emphasis on the summation of roles as involved in the *Jajmani* system, do not by themselves involve any basic destruction of the caste system, but only a shift in the critical criteria of social awareness and the structural differentiations through which such an awareness is mobilised and organised. It is the virtue of a sophisticated social system such as that found in India that a reorientation of this kind is possible without damaging the overall stability of the system and without giving rise to a widespread feeling of alienation and dissonance. The caste-politics problem in India is not a problem of definition but clearly one of empirical understanding of a competitive and mobile system which could give us a reasonable model of social dynamics.

In what follows, we examine the relationship between caste and politics as basically a relationship *for the specific purpose of organising public activity.* We shall do this by first examining the nature of this interaction and secondly its product, that is, the type of changes that have taken place in the political system as a result of differential involvement of caste organisations at different points in time and at different levels of the polity. Our focus is not so much on what happens to the caste system as a whole as a result of its involvement in the political process but rather what structures and networks of relationships enter into the political process and how. We cannot wholly avoid the question of what politics does to the caste system — for certain forms adopted by the caste system in the wake of a wider secular ordering of relationships such as the caste association or the caste federation, or even the more traditional inter-caste networks of

patron-client ties, become very much the stuff of politics. But it still needs to be stressed that it is as political sociologists interested in studying the pursuit of collective interests and purposes that the authors in this volume have approached their subject. Thus, for instance, a number of authors were interested in how different parties or movements, or even different groups within a single party, mobilise different social strata as resources for their political objectives. It is from this perspective that social reform movements, caste associations and federations, and other networks and relationships in the social and economic sub-systems become relevant data for analysis. Or again the authors are interested in how a sense of discontent or exploitation prevailing within the caste order provide a viable basis for the mobilisation of masses; for their own reform in the first instance and ultimately for assertion of their rights vis-a-vis others. Once again the organisational and psychological conditions of caste organisation are turned into a resource for politics and hence relevant material for political analysis.

Keeping in mind the focus of our inquiry, namely the organisation of public activity and politics in a society articulated along caste lines, three aspects of the caste system call for special attention. The first is what may be called the *secular aspect*. In emphasising caste as a stratification system in which distances are rigidly maintained through endogamy, pollution and the legitimacy of rituals, caste as a system of conflict and interaction has received sparse attention. Yet the fact is that factionalism and caste cleavages, patterns of alignment and realignment among the various strata, and a continuous striving for social mobility have always been prominent features of the caste system. At any rate, they are highly relevant from the point of view of secular development.

Traditionally there were two aspects to the secular organisation of caste — the *governmental* aspect (caste councils, village arbitration procedures, and so on) and the *political* aspect (within caste and inter-caste authority and status alignments and cleavages). These were buttressed or dissipated by the authority relationships of local elites with the central political system or systems. Religion, occupation and territory provided the bases for secular mobility. These are still relevant for the generalised process of secularisation that characterises the major changes coming over caste society; only the emphases and proportions have changed. Instead of allegiance to a

monarch or the justification of a new monarchy through the rise of a new sect or the elevation of certain caste or territorial groupings, and instead of management of the civil aspects of society at a variety of levels, we now have more participatory and aggregative modes of mobility and a greater coordination between *levels* through the agency of electoral and party politics. What has changed is the context because of the rise of the nation-state and political democracy and the organisational structure inherent in these. But the change is not as radical as it appears at first sight; it is incremental and continuous as found in the gradual involvement and co-optation of more and more strata in the political decision-making processes. Thus in many regions it was the Brahminic section that first responded to English education and was the first to benefit from political and administrative power, and with the slow expansion of the franchise and the party system, others came in. In some other regions, especially where the Brahmins were never so dominant and certain agricultural upper castes wielded social power, vertical inter-caste ties provided an ongoing structure of political recruitment in which by initiating these upper castes into politics almost the whole social structure got mobilised and precluded any strong formation of horizontal solidarities.

In still other regions the spread of new religious sects and the financial power wielded by the communities that responded to these (such as Jains and Vaishnavas in Gujarat and Marwar) made for a different model of sequence in regard to accession to political power. New solidarities in the middle castes were evident in many regions even before the advent of British influence and the phenomenon of hypergamy was an outcome of the influx of the new and 'lower' sections of society from pastoral and tribal elements into the agricultural mainstream of the social economy. This is an instance of occupational mobility transforming itself in terms of both a modification of kinship patterns and an expansion of the secular-associational aspects of traditional society. Thus the process of secularisation so dominant in recent decades also owes considerably to the multi-caste society, its *varna* hierarchy and politheic religions which preceded the onslaught of more contemporary modernising forces. Yet another process was the breaking through the territorial restraints and thus widening the base of occupational mobilisation. The pastoral caste of Rabaris in Saurashtra turned into the agricultural low caste of Kanbis

in Gujarat which later rose in status through their hypergamous affiliation with the regional dominant caste of Patidars. Similarly the shoemaker caste (mochis) of Saurashtra turned into the tailor caste (darjis) of Gujarat. Or again, to take another pattern, a new sub-caste of Deshmukhs got differentiated from the Patil sub-caste of the Marathas on their accession to special land rights, out of which developed a new hypergamous relationship which continued until the further development of a non-Brahmin political movement and latter-day land legislation led to a re-identification between the two sub-castes. Thus the formation of new monogamous and hypergamous sub-castes led to both greater differention and a blurring of the sharp traditional disinctions. Even the concept of man-woman relationship in terms of a superior-subsidiary affair that was peculiar to Indian society played its role in developing distinctive hierarchical relationships in the caste system and enabled special types of mobility and differentiation which later proved instrumental in facilitating political identities and secular associational urges.

Second, there is the *integration aspect.* The caste system not only determines the individual's social station on the basis of the group to which he is born but also differentiates and assigns occupational and economic roles. It thus gives a place to every individual from the highest to the lowest and makes for a high degree of identification and integration. At the same time it is an integration structure of a specific type, namely one that is more intense in its small group orientation and particularistic loyalties, and where wider loyalties operate only when they are structured through the prevailing differentiations. This aspect is important in understanding the structural impact of democratic nation-building. For the competitive style of democratic politics involves not only distributive and conflictual aspects but also aspects of group action and cohesion: democratic politics is as much a process of fusion and aggregation as of fission and segmentation. Similarly, the traditional emphasis in studies of the caste system on differentiation and affirmed segmentation has neglected the 'agglomerative' dimension.[3] The political age, however, emphasises both, sharpens the aggregative aspect, and at the same time widens the conflict potential of aggregative processes on to a broader context. Differentiation has all along been an essential ingredient in the Indian approach to aggregation, and it has now become an important variable in the development of democratic politics.

It has been rightly pointed out that in actual operation caste affiliations take not the vertical homogeneous class and status form of *varna* but the horizontal heterogeneous and segmental form of *jati.* And yet a system that has survived for so long creates a powerful symbolism, rationale and mythology of its own. The *varna* referent represents a 'scale of values' which provides both a spur to integrative behavioural patterns and a symbol of competition that enables the aspiring and mobile groups to lay claim to high status still affirming widely prevalent values. It 'furnishes an all-India frame into which myriad *jatis* in any single linguistic area can be fitted'. Furthermore, certain *varnas* also provide symbols of high status and at the same time symbols of 'opposition', as for example, the Kshatriyas against the Brahmins; 'disputes as to relative status are an essential feature of the caste system'. It thus enables the low-placed castes to affirm widely prevalent values in Indian society at the same time as laying claim to high status. Thus *varna* and *jati* are intimately connected in the Indian system which has made for a high degree of integration and containment of structural and psychological strains inherent in the process of technological and political change.[4]

Third, there is the *aspect of consciousness.* Again, in their concern with stratification, sociologists have generally neglected the ideational underpinning that is inevitably associated with any social system. Thus the contest for positions between various *jatis* often follows some variation of *varna,* either by approximating to the reality as in the case of Brahmins or by invoking a label as in the case of the claim of certain castes to be Kshatriyas. Indeed the very fluidity and nebulousness of the concept of Kshatriya, and yet its historically compelling symbolism for social mobility, has been an important lever in the secular struggles that have from time to time ensued in the various regions, following real shifts in the social and economic positions of different groups. The same holds true though in a lesser degree for the Brahminic symbol as well as the symbol of certain middle range castes. While *varna* has all the appearance of a neat and logical structure, *jati* on the other hand is characteristically ambiguous. It has several meanings, refers to *varna* at one level and to other meanings of segmentation at other levels. By shifting from one referent to another, it demonstrates the basic continuity between the various referents — doctrinal, territorial, economic and occupational, ritual, and associational-federal (political). It also shows the

difficulty of describing caste by any single set of attributes. Indeed by being different things at different points in social interactions, it provides for immense flexibility, continuity and tension management capabilities. It thus enables people to draw themselves and others at different orders of existence; and in different contexts as the situation demands. It follows that the system can also withstand the decline of certain features (considered 'essential' by some) such as the *Jajmani* system of role differentiation and summation; or the importance of pollution as a system of hierarchical determination. Both functions can now be performed by other elements in the secularised setting of interrelationships.

All of this also brings out the importance of the manner in which traditional status urges such as 'sanskritisation' get intertwined with modern urges like 'westernisation' and 'secularisation'.[5] Under the impact of universalised aspirations (economic well-being; rationality urge; political integration) the Brahminised urges may be simply repudiated by the advance guard of a caste which, ironically, re-establishes its original (non-Brahminic) identity to foster solidarities and legitimise its contemporary strivings in the modernist sectors, as in the case of the various new industrial classes. Alternatively, a caste may sometimes reinterpret its traditional status in society to buttress its contemporary aspirations and develop a mythology about the same. Examples are to be found in the case of Patidars of Gujarat, Mahisyas of Bengal and Jats of Rajasthan. Yet another approach is found in regions where the Brahmins did not dominate the modernising process which was led by powerful peasant castes who were in turn closely associated in vertical ties with other castes. This enabled a cutting short of both the sanskritisation and the caste solidarity phases and led straight to inter-caste factional politics as an avenue of social mobility. Andhra Pradesh and Bihar provide good examples of a rapid succession of various caste groups into factional networks of politics which provided the best channels of mobility.

By itself the 'sanskritisation' urge produces some very basic psychological strains in the group that is trying to acquire a new identity in its search for status, as in the process its status becomes *subjectively* ambivalent and thus insecure: as with Jews, Negroes and other minority groups, it is a 'negative assertion', a mood of 'submitting yet opposing' the emulated group. Hence the tension, especially for the more conscious sections. Also, so long as they do not succeed

in raising the status of the group — and this is always a long period — their infirm status necessarily creates an insecure and unsettled position in society — leading either to compensatory devices for social recognition or real withdrawal into something else. As it is, the status urge in Hindu society is an intensely frustrating and painful process. To this is added a further edge by resorting to a mechanism of status rise which starts from negating the original existence and striving for something which may turn out to be a mirage and may indeed lead to reprisal (as in the case of the smiths of South India)

It is a tribute to the subtle dynamics of Hindu society that in spite of this psychological cost, the adjustments of *sanskritisation* go on all the time; and one of the many reasons is that the structural distance that is sought to be jumped can often be related to the achievement of other indices of power and position in the modernist segments of society (as perceived both by the striving group as well as by a majority, of other groups), thus facilitating the transition to a consensus on the new status of the striving group. Important in this respect is the crucial role that the distribution of secular power has always played in status ranking in Hindu society; and the consequent capacity of the system to keep adjusting to its changing hierarchical balance.

Altogether, then, the secular, integrative and ideological aspects of caste have provided a sophisticated and differentiated cultural background for receiving the modernist impacts and responding to them without either great disruption or great withdrawal or hostility.

On such a society came the impact of 'westernisation' and democratic secularism. Of interest here is the slow pace with which these influences penetrated Indian society and the positive manner in which it has on the whole responded to these changes. There is no need here to go into the details of recent history. Liberal education, governmental patronage and a slowly expanding franchise have been the three influences that have penetrated the caste system and involved it by stages. The involvement came as a result of a mutual give and take. Economic opportunity, administrative patronage and positions of power offered by the new institutions and the new leadership drew the articulate sections of society into the modernist network. In return, the leadership was provided with a basis of support that kept expanding from urban centres into the interior, and from one caste to another.

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difficulty of describing caste by any single set of attributes. Indeed by being different things at different points in social interactions, it provides for immense flexibility, continuity and tension management capabilities. It thus enables people to draw themselves and others at different orders of existence; and in different contexts as the situation demands. It follows that the system can also withstand the decline of certain features (considered 'essential' by some) such as the *Jajmani* system of role differentiation and summation; or the importance of pollution as a system of hierarchical determination. Both functions can now be performed by other elements in the secularised setting of interrelationships.

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traditional structure and its leadership. Two results follow. The caste system made available to the leadership structural and ideological bases for political mobilisation, providing it with both a segmental organisation and an identification system on which support could be crystallised. Second, the leadership was forced to make concessions to local opinion, take its cue from the consensus that existed as regards claims to power, articulate political competition on traditional lines and, in turn, organise castes for economic and political purposes. With this came into being a new species of political organisation, articulated around particularistic divisions, yet giving to these a secular and associational orientation. Politics and society began moving nearer and a new infrastructure started coming into being.

The actual process of interaction between caste and modern institutions was necessarily selective: it impinged on certain aspects of caste more than on others. The first to be drawn into the modernisation stream was the power structure of the caste system. The second was the distribution of economic benefits. These two were closely related: the distribution of divisible benefits was interlinked with the nature of the power system that operated. A third factor that tied in with these was what may be called caste consciousness and perceptions. All of these were traditional components of the caste system that got drawn into the new processes of change.

Three stages can be noted in this process. The struggle for power and for benefits was at first limited to the entrenched castes in the social hierarchy.[6] Leadership and access to governmental patronage came from a limited group of individuals who were the first to respond to new educational opportunities and were also traditionally endowed with pedagogic and sophistic skills that mattered most in the days of limited politics. This group consisted of individuals from certain 'higher' castes, was not yet based on any militant caste consciousness, and was united more by a common social and intellectual endowment and idiom than through any organisational or political mobilisation. However, whenever this took place mainly on the basis of one higher caste (or sub-caste), it soon gave rise to a feeling of deprivation and antagonism in other high castes, especially among those that had earlier enjoyed social or economic power, and resulted in the emergence of another political group, still drawn largely from the higher castes. The domination of an *entrenched* caste (when it took a caste form) thus produced a new response in the form of an *ascendant* caste, one that was not satisfied to simply function in the context of inter-dependence and complementarity in the social sphere that characterised the social and economic system for so long. The caste structure thus got polarised in its first encounter with the new secularism and gave rise to a bilateral structure of caste politics, very often between two castes or sub-castes, one entrenched, the other ascendant, but sometimes the latter including more than one caste or sub-caste.[7] Such a polarisation was avoided either where the one entrenched caste was greatly separated in social power and ritual status from all others or where the different 'higher' castes were entrenched at different power points, either regional or institutional, thus involving them in a legitimised coalitional pattern.

This bilateralism was followed by a second stage in which power strivings and demands for benefits exceeded the availability of resources, competing groups had to develop more numerous bases of support, and there started a process of competition *within* the entrenched and more articulate sections of society. This may be termed as the stage of caste fragmentation or of 'factionalism'.[8] Inter-caste competition — between the entrenched caste and the ascendant caste — was now supplemented by *intra-caste* competition and the process of politicisation. Again the process first started within the entrenched caste (or castes) which got factionalised and there followed a new structuring of political organisation. Leadership cleavages were created, political attitudes began to condition symbols of solidarity and consensus, and there came into being multi-caste and multi-factional alignments. Mobilisation of further support for each of the contending factions gave rise to a process of 'co-optation' from other castes that were till now kept out of the power system. A similar process took place within the 'ascendant caste' which was now as good a part of the system as the 'entrenched caste' and got similarly factionalised. The power structure of the caste system now became more complex and entered into a more sophisticated network of relationships, involving such other bases of support as economic patronage, patron-client loyalties, bond groups, and new organisational forms such as caste associations and caste federations.

Once again the process took a slightly different form in regions where there already existed vertical inter-caste ties by reason of agricultural and other economic bonds, traditional hypergamic rela-

tionships, or regional variations in dominant-dependent relationships. In such cases what took place during this stage was a further articulation of vertical factional networks of mobilisation and competition. Wherever vertical chains of relationship already existed, politics found a ready-made ground and the need for evoking new solidarities and forging new alignments in the form of caste associations and caste federations was less pressing. The upper tiers of each of the rival chains simply got recruited in politics and in the process carried the whole network with them. The process of further co-optation of elites from other castes became easy as traditions for such co-optation already existed. In other words, the expanding mobilisation of politics either found an ongoing vertical network or created one through its factionalising tendencies, and in both cases made the social structure of caste an important vehicle of political organisation and extended it to include other forms of patronage and socio-economic relationships.

The vertical framework of political organisation also enabled different entrenched (or 'dominant') castes at one level to come face to face with each other at the higher levels (as for example the *Kammas and Reddis in Andhra, the Patidars and Annavils in Gujarat,* the Lingayats and Okkalingas in Mysore, the various district and regional 'dominant' castes of Madras and 'entrenched' castes of Bihar regrouped at the State level). And at each level within this hierarchy there took place a new mode of segmentation of the caste in which 'associational' and 'federal' forms on the one hand and 'factional' chains on the other hand played an increasing part and cut across segmentation based on ascriptive and lineage groups, although frequently also taking advantage of the latter. With this the importance of individuals and of personalised networks increased and leadership took on a more positive role.

All of this, however, was limited to the leading two or three castes —well-to-do, educated, and generally upper castes. The lower castes were still found to be in a dependent relationship with the entrenched and the dominant castes. However, during the second stage itself there started a process of mobilisation of lower castes into politics for the purpose of adding to the factionalised support base of rival leaders. Caste identities, which were still strong and articulate, provided the principal media of political participation. This was true even where vertical inter-caste ties existed for long, for even this was

always based at the sub-unit level on the norms and structures of a caste society.

The process was one of expanding the support base of rival leaders from the entrenched sections either by the simple process of co-opting leaders from hitherto dormant sections of society by providing them with junior positions and a part of the divisible benefits in return for electoral support; or, where it was not possible to tackle the problem on the basis of simple co-optation, by entering into a more organised process of mobilisation through coalitions of sub-caste groups, alignment with a large number of leaders, bargaining with 'link men', appeal to wider identities and animosities, and on these bases, a secure basis of support. Where the simple co-optation device worked, the task was of inducing critical leaders into the power elite and not worrying about the backward 'masses'; where it did not work and the masses were more enlightened, they had to be themselves organised into the new schemes of mobilisation. In the latter case, it was also likely that in course of time the new entrants to politics may themselves be able to forge a coalition strong enough to pose a challenge to the leaders from the 'entrenched castes'. This would depend upon their numerical strength, degree of economic independence and the nature of leadership. It would also depend on the extent to which the consciousness of caste in these sections took on the form of a *political class,* self-assertive and indignant against 'exploitation' from the upper castes, and eager to taste political power themselves.

It is also important to stress here that different stages in the social organisation of politics call for somewhat different leadership and organisational skills and the movement from one stage to another may entail displacement of one kind of leadership by another; and consequently of one social group endowed with one type of skills by another endowed with another type of skills. Thus in the early stages of intellectual awakening and urban-style political organisation, the need was for people able to deal with western and westernised administrators, well versed in fine points of debate and ideological disputation, possessing legal acumen, and capable of founding and sustaining small associations of public-minded persons that would agitate for specific causes. Such men were mainly provided by Brahminic and traditional administrative classes who not only took to the new education but had also been endowed by a long tradition of

scholastic knowledge and formal brilliance. With the movement into a more diversified and 'mass' oriented politics, however, not only was there need for a wider base of support articulation but also new types of managerial and organisational skills were needed. With this happening, the Brahminic and administrative castes began to be outnumbered by men from commercial and peasant-proprietor occupations that had always called for a high level of interpersonal skills, a pragmatic and bargaining approach to problems, and an ability to marshal a new type of solidarity among their own castes, often times based on a reinterpretation of their traditional status and a 'populist' and anti-elitist ideology.   .

These were the new entrepreneurs, the new innovators, of politics. However they are called, what is important to grasp is that they were not more but less 'modern' than the elites they replaced, they were often less educated and more rural-based, and operated through an idiom that was decidedly more populist and traditional. But even more important is the fact that the innovativeness with which they are credited — their ability to organise, to show a pragmatic evaluation of things, to take risks, and to utilise 'modern' means of technology and organisation — came more from inherited characteristics and early socialisation in prevailing life styles than from any conscious adoption of a new culture. This is most important in analysing the course of political modernisation in India which is far less explained by the tradition-modernity dichotomy than a conceptual framework that assigns due status to antecedent traditions and skills in the articulation of the emerging political culture. Once such political and organisational skills came to the fore, and the corresponding displacement in the social base of politics took place, Indian politics not only achieved a new dimension but also got markedly differentiated from other social activities, and took on a life and character of its own, and its own internal structure and process. Of course, the full articulation of this comes in the third stage (to be discussed presently), with the still greater diversification of the base of politics, and with factors other than caste entering into the picture.

The process of factionalism within the entrenched castes, a similar structuring of other ascendant castes, the system of co-optations and caste coalitions — all of these, though they brought about a fragmentation of the caste system, were in reality still very much caste-oriented and sought their bases in caste identities, in the process, of course, also

generating politicised values and impulses for personal power. We enter a third stage of development when the weakening of older identities and the introduction of politicised values coincide with other changes taking place in society through the impact of education, technology, changing status symbols, and urbanisation. New and more expanded networks of relationship come into being, new criteria of self-fulfilment are created, the craving for material benefits becomes all-pervasive and family and migration systems undergo drastic changes. With these, the structure of particularistic loyalties gets overlaid by a more sophisticated system of social and political participation, with cross-cutting allegiances, a greater awareness of individual self-interest, and forms of involvement and alienation that are pre-eminently the products of modern education and the modern system of social communications. An essential feature of modernisation is the development of new and sharp differentiations. Political, economic, educational and communications functions, traditionally performed by the same social structure, are now differentiated and get established in terms of their own purposes, structures, and dynamics.

Politics, of course, is still a big enough influence but it is better understood as an active partner in the modernisation process, more as providing schemes of integration and division to the developing social system than as either destroying or replacing caste as a secular social entity. What does take place is a widening base of institutional organisation in which, on the one hand, caste identities themselves take to new forms of articulation thus changing the very ethics of the social system and diminishing the importance of its ritualistic and ascriptive bases; and, on the other hand, more diverse forms of organisation and interest identification enter the political system and give rise to a highly mobile and cross-cutting loyalty structure in politics. Caste on one side ceases to be an exclusive political support base and on the other side lends itself to increasing political articulation, both of which contribute to its participation in a broader network of relationships and a shift of its emphasis from a static system of stratification to a dynamic base of competition and integration. In its traditional form, the caste system integrated society through ordering primary identities along a legitimised hierarchy of status positions and occupational roles, including the 'political' roles of arbitration and adjudication. By participating in the modern political system, it is at first exposed to divisive influences and later to a new form of

integration resulting from a new scheme of universalist-particularist relationships. This is, however, as already noted, no simple replacement of one system by another. In the transition, caste provides to politics on the one hand an ongoing structure of divisions and accommodations and on the other hand a cohesive element which absorbs tensions and frustrations through its intimate, particularistic, channels. Such an interactional scheme of change, while it does not suppress strata differences and individual interests, and gives rise to relatively abrupt shifts in power relations, also provides a system of containment of conflicts and angularities that facilitates the process of transition to a modern society.

Secular involvement in the modern period has not only fostered new attitudes and offered new rewards; it has also exposed caste and communal ties as by themselves patently inadequate and often prejudicial for the building of stable support. For one thing castes, where they are large, are not homogeneous and where they are small, not enough of a numerical force. Second, too close an identification with one caste alienates other castes. Third, political parties gain stability only by involving all major sections of the community. Finally, the politicisation of caste makes for outward-looking, upward-moving orientations and as this results in the phenomenon of multiple memberships and overlapping identities, the result is highly secular for the polity as well as the society at large.

This 'development in depth' of the system calls for closer analysis. Widespread confusion characterises the discussion of 'casteism' and 'communalism' in politics, including in the leadership who should know better. An impression prevails that whereas things like education, urbanisation and industrialisation were making inroads into traditional sectarian loyalties, electoral politics have resuscitated them and re-established their legitimacy, and that this has given rise to disintegrative tendencies that will disrupt the democratic and secular framework of the Indian polity. Evidence is cited from the behaviour of political parties all of whom invoke primordial sentiments and organise their support on the basis of pockets of caste influence. Now much of the evidence cited, though exaggerated, is often true; what is not true is the inference drawn from it. For in reality the consequences of caste-politics interactions are just the reverse of what is usually stated. It is not politics that gets caste-ridden; it is caste that gets politicised. Dialectical as it might sound, it is precisely because the

operation of competitive politics has drawn caste out of its apolitical context and given it a new status that the 'caste system' as hitherto known has got eroded and has begun to disintegrate. And the same is happening, though more gradually, to communal and religious loyalties and even to minority group sentiments such as among the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.[9]

It is an extremely involved process of adjustment that we have tried to describe here. The process gets crystallised in three distinct but related forms. First, there emerges what can be called a *dominant elite,* which is drawn from different groups but shares a common outlook and a secular orientation, which is structured into a diffuse network of relationships that stretches across social boundaries but yet continues to induct leaders from each important segment, which is homogeneous in terms of some of the values and rules of the game but is at the same time divided into so many special groups and various elite and sub-elite positions. Such an elite structure articulates special interests and meaningfully represents the more organised segments of society, while at the same time allowing the mass of society to have its own pace of change and make its own adjustments with the modern world.

Second, castes take on an openly secular form for new organisational purposes. There are several such forms such as (a) 'associations' of caste members ranging from simple hostels and recreational bodies to reform clubs and pressure groups, (b) caste 'institutions' or 'conferences' that are more broad-based and cover districts or even States, and (c) caste 'federations' composed of not one but several castes which may sometimes be socially homogeneous but which may at other times simply have some specific interest or political objective in common. It is this specificity of purpose that distinguishes these new organisational forms — caste associations and caste federations — from the more inclusive and ascriptive bodies traditionally known as caste. Generally speaking they are oriented to the securing of economic benefits, jobs or special concessions, or for the more clearly political purpose of uniting to fight the hegemony of the 'upper castes' or the 'ruling castes', or for bargaining with a political party or the government, but in all cases for one or more specific purposes. The interesting thing about the caste federation is that, once formed on the basis of caste identities, it goes on to acquire non-caste functions, becomes more flexible in organisation as time passes, even

begins to accept members and leaders from castes other than those with which it started, stretches out to new regions, and also makes common cause with other voluntary organisations, interest groups and political parties. In course of time, the federation becomes a distinctly political group, wielding considerable bargaining strength and numerical power, but still able to appeal to caste sentiments and consciousness, by adopting a common label (such as 'non-Brahmin' or 'Kshatriya'), claiming high status in the past and fostering a sense of deprivation in the present, and out of all this forging a strong and cohesive political group. It has gone far beyond the earlier caste associations in articulating group interests along political channels. The 'dominant elite' talked of above either includes leaders drawn from such organisations or is in close touch with them.

Third, alongside these new organisations, there has developed a vertical structure of factions along which the elite groups and their various support bases have got politically organised and through which channels of communication have been established between social and political forms. We have seen that such a factional structure is either fashioned along ongoing interrelationships that characterise areas dominated by peasant castes, or evolved through the operation of the political and electoral systems on the antecedent social structure thus resulting in a new polarisation of solidarities and alignments. The resulting system of factions is such that it divides not only political groups but also social groups, both the traditional caste forms and the newly formed caste associations and other interest group organisations. It thus facilitates the process of cross-cutting identifications and provides an expanding network of political support for a leadership that is engaged in a competitive structure of power relationships. Factions thus provide common media of participation for both the traditional and the modernist sectors and make for their mutual accommodation and ultimate fusion.

We have seen how a process of exposure on both sides leads to new forms of integration between society and politics. It is an integration which, while it involves traditional social forms into modern political associations, does not seek to destroy their bases of allegiance, though it undoubtedly changes them by making their identity part of a larger system of participation. Indeed, to repeat a point made earlier, the fusion that takes place here is a fusion of different *systems* of organisation and integration. Caste in its tradi-

tional form also provided a system of integration, but it did this by stabilising localistic and particularistic identities and fixing respective positions of groups, and of invididuals within groups. At the same time, the segmental and factional manifestations of the caste system and the consciousness and identifications to which it gave rise allowed scope for secular organisation and struggle from time to time.

Politics, on the other hand, is intrinsically a system of division and conflict and seeks material for the same. But at the same time it too is an integrative system based upon its own logic and mode of organisation. When these two systems interact, what develops through various stages is a new mode of integration as well as a new mode of division. The process can be described as secularisation of the social system and it is this process that holds the key to the tremendous shift that politics has brought about in Indian society. Whereas sanskritisation brought submerged caste groups out into the mainstream of society, and westernisation drew the sanskritised castes into the framework of modernisation, it is secularisation of both kinds of groups through their political involvement that is leading to a breakup of the old order and is gradually forging a *reintegration* on secular-associational grounds.[10] During the transition, such a reintegrative process inevitably highlights parochial symbolism as providing reference points of identity and cohesion.[11] But the same process also builds up new mixes of universalist-particularist orientations, renders the primordial basis of secular ties inefficient in itself and often prejudicial to individual and group interests, initiates the formally untutored masses into a slow awareness of the political community, and develops in them a stake in the latter.

On the other hand, for any political system to get stabilised it is necessary that its procedures and symbols are both internalised and *traditionalised*; they should not be accepted just for their utility but should be valued as such, as intrinsically meritorious and valuable, endowed with inherent goodness: in other words, the new procedures and values must themselves be turned into 'tradition', something that must be nurtured with care, developed further and made strong. No society lives without traditions and the essential challenge of modernity is not the destruction of tradition but the traditionalisation of modernity itself. In the context of caste and politics, this means two things. First, those elements in the caste system that have a secular and integrational potential should get strengthened at the expense of the more obscurantist and dysfunctional elements. This, we have seen, is

already happening. Second, the new dimensions that secular demo-cratic politics has provided to the social system must themselves become enduring parts of India's traditions. This has yet to take place. The essential test of India's strategy of social change lies in this criterion of traditionalisation of modernity. And the rest of the great social system of India with its proverbial capabilities of absorption and tolerance also lies in the same criterion: will it prove pliable enough to imbibe the new system of values and institutions as vital traditions of Hindu society? It is a criterion that replaces the old dichotomy in which the old is sought to be wholly replaced by the new. The rejection of such a dichotomy forms the point of departure of the collection of papers presented in this volume.

NOTES

1. F.G. Bailey, 'Closed Social Stratification', *Archives Europeennes De Sociologie*, Vol. IV (1963).

2. Lloyd I. Rudolph, 'The Modernity of Tradition : The Democratic Incarna-tion of Caste in India', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. LIX, No. 4, December 1965. The dichotomy between 'voluntary' and caste forms of organisation alluded to in the text was also drawn by Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph in their 'The Political Role of India's Caste Associations', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, March 1960.

3. See, however, the illuminating essay of Irawati Karve, *Hindu Society—An Interpretation* (Poona : Deccan College, 1961).

4. On the integrating role of *varna*, see M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1952).

5. The concepts of 'sanskritisation' and 'westernisation' have been made familiar by M.N. Srinivas. For his most recent statements on the subject see his *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1966) and 'The Cohesive Role of Sanskritisation' (mimeograph, University of Delhi, 1966).

6. The term 'entrenched caste' is to be distinguished from 'dominant caste' as used by M.N. Srinivas. According to Srinivas' criteria, a dominant caste not only exercises preponderant influence economically and politically but is also 'numerically the strongest in the village or local area'. ('The Dominant Caste in Rampura', *American Anthropologist*, February, 1959.) The entrenched caste, on the other hand, while it fulfils the chief criterion of economic and political power and is usually ritually 'high', may be numerically quite small, and usually is small. On the other hand, in regions where large peasant castes are found in 'entrenched' positions at different power points as indicated later in the same para, there may be considerable overlap between 'dominant' and 'entrenched' castes, though all of Srinivas' criteria may not yet be fulfilled.

7. Examples are Brahmin versus non-Brahmin in Madras and Maharashtra, Rajput versus Jat in Rajasthan, Baniya-Brahmin versus Patidar in Gujarat, Kayasthas versus Rajputs in Bihar, Kammas versus Reddis in Andhra, Nairs versus Ezhavas in Kerala, and so on. Often in the development of this process, as one polarisation is resolved in favour of one caste or caste category, new polarisations emerge such as between Patidars and Kshatriyas in Gujarat or Marathas and Mahars in Maharashtra. At other times, however, more complicated and fragmented constellations of power have emerged.

8. This factionalism must be distinguished from the traditional factionalism prevalent in caste society which is more on lines of kin-group and lineage. The factionalism discussed here is one that grows out of political

competition in which more than one personalised network   of support contend for secular power.

9.   For trend analysis on these points, see Gopal Krishna, 'Electoral Partici-
     pation and Political Integration', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual
     Number, Vol. II, Nos. 3, 4 & 5, February 1967. For an earlier attempt
     towards a statistical measure of cross-communal voting behaviour, see
     Rajni Kothari and Tarun Sheth, 'Extent and Limits of Communal Voting:
     The Case of Baroda East' in Myron Weiner and Rajni Kothari (eds.),
     Indian Voting Behaviour(Calcutta : Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1965).

10. For a development of the concept of 'reintegration' and a fuller descrip-
     tion of the process of, and transition to, such a reintegration, see D.L.
     Sheth and Rajni Kothari, 'Social Change, Political Integration and the
     Value Process', paper presented to the *International Roundtable on
     Values in Politics*, Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia. The theme has also been
     developed, in the author's 'Tradition and Modernity Revisited', *Govern-
     ment and Opposition*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Summer 1968.

11. We have already noticed the contention that the electoral system has
     given a new lease of life to caste identifications. This is a correct
     observation but should lead to an opposite conclusion from what is
     usually made out: it is precisely because the *legitimacy* of caste as the
     only basis of political power has been eroded that caste *calculations*
     have increased. Such things as respective numerical strength of different
     castes, choice of candidate, factions within castes, and economic ties
     between castes are calculated as variable in the situation. This is natural
     in any political system and applies equally to other types of social
     organisation and ethnic groups. What is important to grasp is that caste
     calculations were *not* needed when only persons belonging to some
     castes had a right to office: caste was irrelevant because it was omnipo-
     tent. Today with the breakdown of these barriers and the pragmatic
     pursuit of power caste has turned into just another variable in politics
     along with many other variables. As Harold A. Gould has put it, it has
     come down from being a 'determinant' of politics to an 'ethnic variable'.
     See his 'Changing Political Behaviour in Rural Indian Society', *Economic
     and Political Weekly*, Vol. II, Nos. 33-35, Special Number, August 1967.