

## **Positive discrimination and the transformation of caste in India**

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The domination of Congress has been marked by the institutionalisation of a conservative democracy. No attempt at reforming society could succeed so long as the ruling party relied on local notables or/and was directed by populist leaders who were not really interested in promoting social justice. After the failure of Indira Gandhi at being true to her socialist discourse, the egalitarian agenda seemed to have reached a deadlock.

The communists – even though they represented the second largest political force in the 1950s-1970s - were not in a position to give much hope to the poor of the Hindi belt. Their influence remained basically confined in Kerala and in West Bengal, where they introduced substantial land reforms and education programmes<sup>1</sup>. In the North, they peaked at about 4.5 % of the valid votes in UP in 1967 and 10.7% in Bihar in 1971. The growing marginalisation of the two communist parties, which have lost their status of national parties after the 1999 elections, largely results from the little attention they pay to the lower castes *qua* castes. True to their marxist genealogy, they interpret social struggles in terms of class conflicts and have not made any effort to accommodate low caste leaders in the party apparatus<sup>2</sup>. Now, as Ambedkar have perceptively shown, class cannot be the basic unit of Indian society to the same extent as caste.

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<sup>1</sup> On West Bengal, see A. Kohli, The State and poverty in India – The politics of reform. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, chap. 3.

<sup>2</sup> . Interview with D. Raja in Paris, 28 March 2000. The appointment of Raja a Dalit as Secretary of the National Council of the CPI, however, suggests that the party has realised the need for promoting low caste people in the party apparatus. In fact, the party became aware of this necessity in 1992, in the post-Mandal context when Inderjit Gupta pointed out that caste had to be taken more seriously. It may be too late in North India. In a very stimulating argument, Dilip Menon has recently pointed out that the CPI included its opposition to discrimination based on caste in its «Programme of the Democratic Revolution» in 1948 only. For him, Kerala Brahmins such as E.M.S Namboodiripad found in marxism an ideology that allowed them to rehabilitate the Brahmins against the Dravidian anti-Brahmin ideology. Indeed, Namboodiripad referred to the caste system, monitored by the Brahmins, as a scientific division of labour and a necessary stage in the transition towards a modern

The second part of this book is based on such premises. It tries to show that the development of an egalitarian programme could only prosper in India correlatively to the erosion of caste hierarchy. In addition to the ambedkarites, the political forces which were first responsible for bringing forward such an agenda came from socialist groups. However, their anti\_caste discourse was for a long time in competition with those of peasant leaders who tried to mobilise the Indian plebe along still other lines, by activating the rural/urban cleavage. These two perspectives were not mutually exclusive \_ in a way they even exerted a cumulative effect on the conscientisation of subaltern groups, but the former, eventually proved to be more efficient. Paradoxically, Indian democracy democratised itself through the transformation of caste into interest groups.

## Chapter 6

### The uneven transformation of caste

The caste system has been traditionally analysed as based on the notion of ritual purity. In this view, its holistic character - to use the terminology of Louis Dumont<sup>3</sup> - implies that the dominant values that of the Brahmins, are regarded by the whole society as providing universal references, role models. Hence the central role played by Sanskritisation, a practice that M.N. Srinivas has defined as 'the process in which a «low» Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, «twice-born» caste» that is the Brahmins, but also the Kshatriyas or even the Vaishyas<sup>4</sup>. Low castes may for instance adopt the most prestigious features of the Brahmins' diet and therefore emulate vegetarianism. Such a process reflects a special coherence in society, all the groups admitting the values of the upper castes as *the* legitimate value system. Such coherence is not synonymous with cohesion. In fact, sanskritisation itself bears witness of an aspiration to social mobility and therefore tensions :

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mode of production. (D.M. Menon, «Being a Brahmin the Marxist Way: E.M.S. Namboodiripad and the Past of Kerala», in Daud Ali(ed.), Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 199?, pp. 55-87).

<sup>3</sup> . L. Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> . M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, op. cit., p. 6.

low castes constantly try to improve their social status by imitating the high castes and contest the position, which has been assigned to them in the system. Moreover, the myths of origin of the low castes are always centered around the idea of an initial decline: even Untouchable castes claim to descend from Brahmin castes and that they have fallen from this rank often because of the malicious intent of upper caste people. The myth of origin of the Chamars is very telling in this aspect : their original ancestor was the youngest of four Brahmans brethren who went to bathe in a river and found a cow struggling in a quicksand. They sent the youngest brother in to rescue the animal, but before he could get to the spot it had been drowned. He was compelled therefore by his brothers to remove the carcass and after he had done this they turned him out of their caste and gave him the name of Chamar<sup>5</sup>. The four brothers epitomise in this narrative the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras.

Robert Deliège points out that such a myth is very similar to that of another Untouchable caste, the Paraiyar of Tamil Nadu<sup>6</sup>. In Fact, according to him, 'the untouchable myths are quite distinct from those of higher and even middle\_range castes', so much so that one can speak of an 'intouchable myth of origin'<sup>7</sup>. However these myths do not reflect the existence of a separate, untouchable identity : 'they take caste for granted, and by stressing their brotherhood with Brahmans, they acknowledge the superiority of the latter'<sup>8</sup>. This is pure sanskritisation. For Srinivas, the mobility associated with Sanskritization results only in *positional changes* in the system and does not lead to any *structural change*. That is, a caste moves up above its neighbours and another comes down, but all this takes place in an essentially stable hierarchical order.

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<sup>5</sup> . R.V. Russel, Rai Bahadur Hiro-Lal, The tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India, New Delhi, Asian Educational services, 1993 [1916] vol.2, p. 405.

<sup>6</sup> . R.L. Hardgrave gives a similar myth about the Nadars of Tamil Nadu too ('Political participation and primordial solidarity : the Nadars of Tamil Nad', in R. Kothari (ed.), Caste in Indian politics, op. cit., pp. 102\_128).

<sup>7</sup> . R. Deliège, 'The myth of origin of Indian Untouchables', Man, 28 (3), p. 534.

<sup>8</sup> . Ibid., p. 546.

The system itself does not change<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, the values sustaining the social system remain the same.

While the Brahmins are the main objects of imitation, Srinivas points out that the sanskritisation process does not refer to them only. The Kshatriyas are often chosen as role models too. D.F. Pocock even suggests that there is a 'Kingly model of Hindu society'<sup>10</sup>. However this style of self\_promotion did not simply rely on the imitation of the superior. In fact the second *varna* has been one of the main avenues for social mobility because the Shudras could conquer power and replace Kshatriyas as rulers on the basis of their mere strength and because Brahmins then legitimised their rise by evolving the needed genealogies. Srinivas indeed points out that 'the Kshatriya category was the most open one in the caste system'<sup>11</sup>. While this openness is a very important element in the promotion of the low castes, it does not question *the system* either since it has to be sanctioned by Brahmins who retain their paramount importance and whose values remain supreme.

Historically, low caste groups have also explored avenues for upward mobility through the bhakti movements and the sectarian model. Since the Buddha, gurus have recurrently questioned the caste system on behalf of the fundamental equality of men before god. Their disciples who were initiated into monastic orders forgot about their caste to form new fraternities. Srinivas emphasised that the 'protest sects' in a way 'offered opportunities for mobility to members of the so-called low castes'<sup>12</sup>. However, this equality was otherworldly: it did not affect the social order. Ambedkar rightly pointed out that 'from the point of view of the annihilation of caste, the struggle of the saints did not have any

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<sup>9</sup> . Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> . D.F. Pocock, 'The Movement of castes', Man, May 1955, pp. 71-72. . See also D.F. Pocock, Kanbi and Patidar, A study of the Patidar Community of Gujarat, London, Oxford University Press, 1972.

<sup>11</sup> . M.N. Srinivas, 'Future of Indian caste', Economic and Political Weekly, 14 (7-8), February 1978, p. 238.

<sup>12</sup> . Ibid., p. 238.

effect on society'<sup>13</sup>. The traditional caste system was more directly challenged during the British Raj.

### **Caste associations and the resilience of sanskritisation**

The development of the means of communications in the XIXth century led to the opening up of the *jati* which, till then, was confined to a reduced territory, delimited by matrimonial relations (in North India caste endogamy and village exogamy are compelling rules). Hence the emergence of horizontal solidarities and the territorial extension of the frontiers of caste. The members of a same *jati* were enabled to migrate to find jobs or even obliged to do so, if they were transferred within the British administration for instance. The State building process played an important role since it led to the establishment of an all India bureaucracy. Transfers of bureaucrats out of their native place often generated feelings of anomie and made the finding of the suitable match for endogamous marriages more complicated; hence the idea to create associations which could link members of a same caste.

These institutions were also stirred up by the census, which was a key element in the formation of the colonial state. From 1871 onwards the British enumerated the castes (like the religious groups) and therefore these 'human groups (castes) [we]re treated to a considerable extent as abstractable from the regional and territorial contexts in which they function[ed]'<sup>14</sup>. This effect reinforced those of the state construction process but the census also raised among several castes the sentiment of having common interests since the British did not content themselves with enumerating them ; they also classified them. In 1901, the Census Commissioner, Risley, decided to give the ranking of the *jatis* in their local context and their *varna*, which was a much more delicate enterprise. Castes immediately organised themselves and, as Ghurye points out, even formed councils to take steps to see that their status was recorded in the way they thought was honourable to them<sup>15</sup>. Caste associations were therefore created also as pressure groups whose aim was to improve their rank in the census. This process was especially prominent among the low

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<sup>13</sup> . Cited in D. Keer, Dr Ambedkar. Life and Mission, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> . A. Appadurai, 'Number in the colonial imagination', in A. Appadurai, Modernity at large - Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996( ?), p. 119.

<sup>15</sup> . G.S. Ghurye, Caste and Class in India pp. 169\_170.

castes and therefore gives 'An indication of the widespread desire for mobility among the backward castes...' <sup>16</sup>. Each census provided castes with an opportunity to petition the government for getting a higher place in the order of precedence and for being recorded under new, sanskritised, names. In 1911, 16 did so and in 1921, 20 in northern India, including Kurmis, Gadariyas, Kacchi, Ladhs and Ahirswho wanted all to be recognised as Kshatriyas <sup>17</sup>. Indeed, this move was in keeping with the logic of sanskritisation since the objective was not to opt out from the system but to rise within it according to its own rules and values.

However, castes associations secularised and became gradually mutual aid structures, in charge of founding schools for the caste's children, creating co-operative movements and claiming new advantages from the state. The caste associations, from then on, tended to become interest groups. The Rudolph therefore underline their modern character – in a western sense <sup>18</sup>. They behaved like a collective enterprise with economic and political objectives, in a way, which brings to mind the image of «lobbies». They had their head office, their publications, their list of members, and their organisation chart. Generally, their leaders did not come from the most prestigious clans or families but from those of the castemen who were the most educated, able to negotiate with the state and often as ambitious as the political entrepreneurs of Joseph Schumpeter. In many cases, they came from the younger generation <sup>19</sup>. However, the transformational potentialities of caste associations must not be exaggerated since they were not conducive to social change *per se*.

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<sup>16</sup> . M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>17</sup> . E.A.H. Blunt, The Caste System of Northern India, Delhi, S. Chand, 1969 [1931], p. 227.

<sup>18</sup> . L. I. Rudolph et S. Hoeber Rudolph, 'The political role of India's caste associations' in I. Wallerstein (ed.), Social change: the colonial situation, New York, J. Wiley, 1966, p. 448.

<sup>19</sup> . Karen I. Leonard emphasises this dimension in her study of the Kayasths of Hyderabad (Social History of an Indian caste. The Kayasths of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 1994 [1978], p. 293.) She criticises the Rudolphs' reading of caste associations as 'tutorial experiences related to the modernisation of caste-based units and to their political mobilisation' because, for her, 'such associations are a defensive response to adverse administrative circumstances'. But both interpretations are not mutually exclusive. In fact, castes are more likely to form associations, which will play the role of interest groups in the political arena, when they feel threatened by changes in the state policies.

The associations representing upper castes were often very conservative, as evident from the case of the Kanya-Kubja Brahmins, a *jati* widely dispersed across Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In 1884, a Kanya-Kubja caste association was created in Lucknow. An all India association grew out from it in 1901 and established local branches all over the Hindi belt. It was founded for helping the Kanya-Kubja Brahmins to compete with Kayasths, Banyas and other Brahmins of North India in terms of education and administrative jobs<sup>20</sup>. It supported the development of educational institutions, boarding schools, sponsored grants and newspapers which were intended to foster solidarity within the caste. The number of local branches increased until the mid-1930s when then it declined, partly because of the Congress' opposition to caste movements. However, it started to rise again in the 1950s in order to protect the Kanya\_Kubja Brahmins against the «threat» that represented affirmative action measures in favour of the lower castes.<sup>21</sup>

Among the non-dvijas, caste associations often merely served as vehicles for sanskritisation in North India. The Kayasths of North India were probably the first to show the way in that direction. In late XIXth century, Munshi Kali Prasad, a Lucknow-based rich lawyer from this caste, wrote *Kayasthas Ethnology*, a book where he showed 'to which of the four great divisions of the Aryans in India [the Kshatriyas,] the Kayasthas belonged'<sup>22</sup>. Subsequently, the Kayasths claimed that they were the descendants of the Emperor Chandragupta. In 1873 Kali Prasad set up in Lucknow a fortnightly magazine *Kayastha Samachar* and a Kayasth Dharma Sabha whose main task was to educate the caste's children.<sup>23</sup> A primary school – Kayastha Pathshala – was opened in Allahabad for poor and orphan children of the caste. In 1877, it became an Anglo-Vernacular middle school, then a high school and in 1895, an intermediate college. The Kayastha Conference was founded in 1886 on the basis of the Kayasth

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<sup>20</sup> R. S. Khare, The changing Brahmins. Associations and elites among the Kanya-Kubjas of North India, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> A short account of the aims, objects, achievements and proceedings of the Kayastha Conference, Allahabad, Conference Reception Committee Muttra, 1893, p. IV.

<sup>23</sup> L. Carroll, 'Caste, social change, and the social scientist: a note on the historical approach to Indian social history', Journal of Asian Studies, 35 (1), November 1975, p. 67.

Dharma Sabha. The first resolution it passed at its first annual meeting in 1887 stressed the need 'to improve the educational and moral status of the Community' by opening new schools for which money was raised by the association. It also tried 'to encourage the community to undertake commercial and other respectable pursuits and not to rely solely on clerical or literary avocations'.<sup>24</sup> The Conference aimed at uniting the Kayasths and therefore decided 'to prepare a National Directory of the Chandraguptavanshi Kayastha community', which was intended 'to promote union and co-operation by a knowledge of their distant and scattered brethren'<sup>25</sup>. It established mutual aid programmes for the neediest Kayasth families to enable them to finance the study of their sons or the marriage of their daughters, etc. Parallel to this strong emphasis on socio-economic developments, the conference did not neglect the initial sanskritisation objectives of Kali Prasad. It had a Temperance section and repeatedly - and allegedly successfully - requested the Kayasths to give up drinking.

The Kayastha Conference is revealing for the ambivalence of caste associations: on the one hand, it endeavoured to promote the status of the Kayasths in the sanskritisation logic; on the other, it was created to fight against the restrictions of job opportunities in the administration of British India<sup>26</sup>. However, the Kayastha Conference still endeavoured in the 1920s-1930s to sanskritise caste rituals and invited its members to emulate the 'dvijas'. Certainly, this attitude stemmed from modern motives since the main reason for sanskritisation was to standardise the Kayasth culture and to create a homogenous social group<sup>27</sup>, however, sanskritisation remained the key idiom, with its emphasis on positional mobility instead of structural changes, to use Srinivas' words..

The most important social change that caste associations have achieved probably concerns the unity of the caste groups. They have successfully incited the sub-castes to adopt the same name in the Census

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<sup>24</sup> A short account of the aims, objects, achievements and proceedings of the Kayastha Conference, Allahabad, Conference Reception Committee Muttra, 1893, pp. 3-6.

<sup>25</sup> . Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> . W. L. Rowe, 'Mobility in the nineteenth century caste-system', in M. Singer and B. S. Cohn (eds) Structure and change in Indian society, New York, 1996 [1968], pp. 201-207

<sup>27</sup> . L. Carroll, 'Caste, social change and the social scientist', op. cit.

and to break the barriers of endogamy, even if, within a caste, the members of the upper class still tend to inter-marry - but then it is more economic endogamy than purely caste-based endogamy. Once again, the Kayasths are a case in point, not only because their association established a network covering several provinces, including the hindi belt and Hyderabad, but also because, in Hyderabad at least, 'the ease with which marriages across former boundaries are accommodated is striking'. For Leonard, this change 'might confirm an ideological shift from caste to ethnicity and class'<sup>28</sup>. The question I would like to investigate in this chapter is whether the ethnicisation of caste – or at least the discourse of ethnicity – developed as early among the lower castes of South India (where Leonard's Kayasths have emigrated, by the way), and in the North. The ethnicisation of caste seems to have begun first in South India. This process has been observed by Robert Hardgrave in the case of the Nadars of Tamil Nadu whose caste association, the Nadar Mahajana Sangam was founded in 1910 and promoted what he calls 'caste fusion', as 'the unit of endogamy expanded'<sup>29</sup>. S. Barnett maintains that this kind of fusion tended to transform castes into ethnic groups. His demonstration is based on another Tamil case study, the Kontaikkatti Vellalars who do not represent a large number of people but are influential since many of them are landlords. From 1920 onwards, the caste association has encouraged them to expand endogamy in new territories and to other Vellallars in order to make up for their numerical weakness. It may then be one of the first examples of caste federations – a notion to which we shall return in the next section. For Barnett these innovations confront the entire ideological field of caste hierarchy, since 'blood purity'<sup>30</sup>, on which – according to him – relies ritual purity has lost its importance. The relevant unit is not the original *jati* any more, but groups of castes, which represents the transition from caste to ethniclike regional caste blocs<sup>31</sup>. «Ethniclike» because each such unit is potentially independent of other

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<sup>28</sup> . K.I. Leonard, Social History of an Indian Caste, op. cit., p. 294.

<sup>29</sup> R. L. Hardgrave, Jr., 'Caste: Fission and Fusion', Economic and Political Weekly, July 1968, pp. 1065-1070.

<sup>30</sup> . S. Barnett, 'Identity Choice and Caste Ideology in Contemporary South India', in K. David (ed.), The New Wind - Changing Identities in South India, La Haye, Mouton, 1977, p. 401.

<sup>31</sup>. Ibid., 402.

such units, defined and characterised by a heritable substance internal to the unit itself and not affected, in terms of membership in the unit, by transactions with others outside the unit. Rather than the conceptual holism of caste, we begin to see the antecedent autonomy of its component parts. In an ethniclike situation transactional ranking no longer orders the parts of the whole, and caste interdependence is replaced by regional-caste bloc independence. However, intermarriages are only one aspect of the ethnicisation of caste which also implies a collective history - at least a golden Age - and a separate, cultural identity. The subjective representation of the collective self is most important for the issue we are dealing with. Caste is partly a mindset. It is based on beliefs in hierarchies relying on purity and impurity – what Ambedkar called ‘graded inequality’. Alternative social *imaginaries* might be conducive to the emancipation of the lower castes. As M.S.A. Rao argues: ‘The problem of identity is crucial in the formation of protest groups and for collective mobilisation’:

Deprived sections of society in different parts of the world have organised themselves into protest movements to fight against discriminations of various kinds based on colour, religion, caste and tribe. Their problem, however, has been one of establishing a new identity – the kind of image that they want to protect in order to gain self-respect, honour and status<sup>32</sup>.

Such a change in collective identity is precisely at stake in the process of ethnic identity building by lower castes. This kind of ethnicisation of castes or caste federations are much more conducive to social change than caste associations or caste fusion pure and simple. As we shall see such developments were much more prominent in western and southern India than in the North.

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<sup>32</sup> . M.S.A. Rao, ‘Social Movements among the Backward Classes and the Caste: Homology in the Sources of Identity’, in M.S.A. Rao (ed.), Social Movements in India, Delhi, Manohar, 1984, pp. 191-192.

## **The ethnicisation of caste in western and southern India**

### Phule's bahujansamaj: the lower castes as an aboriginal people

The ethnicisation process which took place in western and southern India was partly due to the impact of the European ideas, as propagated by the missionaries and the schools. (utiliser S. Bayly)

The ethnicisation process is well illustrated by the Satyashodak Movement developed by Phule in the Bombay Presidency in the late XIXth century, which was not a caste movement since it intended to represent the 'bahujan samaj', the majority of the people, the masses. Jotirao Phule (1827-1890)<sup>33</sup> was a Mali (market gardener), a cultivating caste in close contact with towns where its members sold their products. In one of these towns, Poona, Phule could attend a school of the Scottish Mission. What he learnt about the Blacks in the United States suggested to him a comparison with the lower castes - hence his book, *Slavery* (1873) that he dedicated 'to the good people of the United States as a token of admiration for their sublime disinterested and self sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro Slavery; and with an earnest desire, that my country men may take their noble example as their guide in the emancipation of their sudra Brethren from the trammels of Brahmin thraldom'<sup>34</sup>.

The writings of Thomas Paine exerted a special influence on Phule who discovered the individualist values of liberty and equality in *The Age of Reason* and *Human Rights*. This source of inspiration developed in conjunction with that of Christianity. For Phule, Jesus-Christ epitomises equality and fraternity. He also regards him as the spokesman for the poor people. However, Phule did not convert to Christianity and even translated the Christian idiom into a new discourse focused on King Bali, the subterranean god who reigns in the underground world according to Hindu mythology<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> For biographical details, see D. Keer, Mahatma Jotirao Phule - Father of Indian Social Revolution, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1974.

<sup>34</sup> . J. Phule, Slavery - Collected works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, vol. 1, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, 1991, p. XXVII.

<sup>35</sup> . J. Phule, Slavery, op. cit., pp. 36-38.

Through the vernacularisation of Christian values and symbols, Phule endowed them with a new, positive identity to his people. He even gave them a new history on the basis of some of the findings of Orientalism. In 1792, William Jones had deduced from the discovery of the Indo-European linguistic family the notion of a common, original race whose branches had migrated towards Europe and India<sup>36</sup>. This theory was developed during the nineteenth century by many German philologists such as Albrecht Weber, R. Roth, A. Kuhn and J. Möhl (whose books were published in the 1840s-1850s). In their writings appear the notions of 'Sanskritic race' or 'Vedic people'. These speculations reached India from the late 1850s onwards through Max Müller, who tended to be somewhat more cautious, and Muir who published in 1860 a study on 'The Trans-Himalayan Origin of the Hindus, and their affinity with the western branches of the Aryan race'<sup>37</sup>.

The first Hindu nationalist ideologues of the late 19th century and early 20th century \_ from Dayananda to Tilak \_ borrowed heavily from the European orientalists. Among other themes, the one they used assiduously related to the common racial origin of the European and Indian people and its corollary, the southward migration which they interpreted to prove that the Hindus were the first race and that they once dominated the whole world. This myth helped the first Hindu revivalists to regain certain self-esteem by claiming that their ancestors were the first inhabitants of the world<sup>38</sup>.

Phule used the Aryan theory to his own advantage: the fact that upper castes leaders traced their origin from Aryan conquerors could be

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<sup>36</sup> . P.J. Marshall 'Introduction' in : P.J. Marshall (ed.), The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> . I am most grateful to Bruce Graham for the information contained in this paragraph which he developed in the still unpublished first chapters of his book on the Jana Sangh where the argument is summarized in one page : B. Graham Hindu Nationalism and Indian politics - The origins and development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1990, p. 44.

<sup>38</sup> . For more details, see C. Jaffrelot, 'The Idea of the Hindu race in the writings of Hindu nationalist ideologues in the 1920s and 1930s: a concept between two cultures', in P. Robb (ed.), The Concept of Race in South Asia, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 327-354.

used to argue that they descended from foreigners and that their culture, including the caste system was alien to India's original people. Phule, therefore, portrayed the Aryans as invaders who had settled in India at a rather late period to subjugate the first inhabitants of India and destroyed their civilisation. For him, the low castes were the descendents of these people. In this reinterpretation of the past, the invaders are identified as Brahmins whereas the indigenous groups are described as descending from the original ruling class, the Kshatriyas. In Phule's ideology, this category does not refer to the second *varna* but includes all original Indians, from peasant castes to Untouchables.<sup>39</sup> For him, they formed a people, united by the bond of a common origin and of a warrior ethos:

«The Kshatriyas in India (the land of Baliraja) that is the original masters of the land here where known as Astiks, Pishachas, Rakshasas, Ahirs, Kakatas, Bhut, Kolis, Mangs, Mahars etc. They were extremely adept in fighting without the aid of arms (weapons) and were famed as brave and valiant warriors. They were of an epicurean (joyful) temperament and were given to the enjoyment of the goods things of life. The kingdoms of most of these rulers (chiefs) were in a prosperous condition, and it would be no exaggeration to say that the land of King Bali was literally flowing with milk and honey»<sup>40</sup>.

This description does not only present the original rulers of India as brave warriors but also emphasises their sense of manliness and honour while fighting (they did not use weapons) and their good nature. Such a narrative prepared the ground for the stereotype of the 'good salvage' that will be applied to the Indian aborigines. The king of these original Kshatriyas, Bali, is described by Phule as reigning over a rich country and this prosperity was the very reason for the Aryan invasions:

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<sup>39</sup> . G. Omvedt, 'Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India', Economic and Political Weekly, 11 September 1971, p. 1971. Phule's 'non-Aryan' theory 'excluded Brahmins but did positively identify the peasant majority (that is the middle level castes of Kunbis, Malis, Dhangars etc) with untouchables and tribals as one community, native inhabitants of Maharashtra' (ibid., p. 1974).

<sup>40</sup> . Collected works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule. vol. II, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, 1991, p. 8.

The extreme fertility of the soil of India, its rich productions, the proverbial wealth of the people, and the other innumerable gifts which this favourable land enjoys, and which have more recently tempted the cupidity of the Western nations, attracted the Aryans [...] The original inhabitants with whom these earth-born gods, the Brahmans, fought, were not inappropriately termed Rakshasas, that is the protectors of the land [...] The cruelties which the European settlers practised on the American Indians on their first settlement in the new world had certainly their parallel in India in the advent of the Aryans and their subjugation of the aborigines [...] They originally settled on the banks of the Ganges whence they spread gradually over the whole of India. In order, however, to keep a better hold on the people they devised that weird system of mythology, the ordination of caste, and the code of crude and inhuman laws to which we can find no parallel among the other nations<sup>41</sup>.

Phule's endeavour had a pioneering dimension since he was probably the first low caste leader who avoided the traps of sanskritisation by endowing the low caste with an alternative value system. For the first time, the low castes were presented as *ethnic groups* which had inherited the legacy of an antiquarian golden age and whose culture was therefore distinct from that of the wider Hindu society ; secondly, his efforts in favour of the low castes were not confined to his castemen only: he wanted to unite the *Shudras* and the *Atishudras (dalits)*. As early as 1853 he opened schools for Untouchables. He projected himself as the spokesman of the non-Brahmins at large and, indeed, kept targeting the Brahmins in vehement pamphlets where he presented them as rapacious moneylenders corrupts priests eager to extort as much as they could from poor and ignorant villagers<sup>42</sup>.

Phule was also the first low caste organiser. In 1875 he was attracted by the Arya Samaj<sup>43</sup>, but he kept his distance from this

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<sup>41</sup> . Cited in G. Omvedt, Dalit visions, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1995, pp. 17-18.

<sup>42</sup> . See, 'Priestcraft exposed' in J. Phule, Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 67 and 'A poem about the crafty, cunning and spurious (religious) books of the Brahmins (A contrast between the comfortable lives of the Brahmins and the miserable lives of the Shudras)' in Slavery - Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, vol. I, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> . R. O'Hanlon Caste, conflict and ideology, op. cit., p. 223.

movement because he did not trust the upper caste reformers<sup>44</sup> who pretended to fight against the social system even though they observed its rules<sup>45</sup>. Phule also remained aloof from the Congress, which he regarded as a Brahmin movement<sup>46</sup>. Nationalism, according to him, was an illusion created by upper caste manipulation to conceal the inner divisions of Indian society<sup>47</sup>. He founded the Satyashodak Samaj in 1873 in order to strengthen the sentiment of unity among the low castes. He narrated pseudo-historical episodes bearing testimony of the traditional solidarity between the Mahars and Shudras<sup>48</sup> and protested against the Brahmins' stratagems for dividing the low castes<sup>49</sup>. At least in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Satyashodak idiom embraced rich peasants as well as agricultural tenants who belonged to very different castes and in some places 'the Sathya Shodhak message seemed to have reached even the untouchable'<sup>50</sup>. A major spokesman of the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra in the 1910-1930, Mukundrao Patil, the son of Phule's colleague, Krishnarao Bhalekar, was for instance a radical defender of the Untouchables even though he was a rich peasant. He advocated 'the general Satyashodak ideology, of opposition to Sanskritisation and

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<sup>44</sup> . In 1885 Phule published a pamphlet implicitly directed against Ranade whom he criticised for his elitist conceptions and more especially for his condescending attitude vis-à-vis the peasants (J. Phule, 'A warning' in Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule vol. II, op. cit. p. 48 et suiv.).

<sup>45</sup> . J. Phule, Slavery, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

<sup>46</sup> . J. Phule, Collected works, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> . Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>48</sup> . For instance he mentioned that Mahars once had to attack 'Brahmins for liberating their Shudra brothers' (Slavery, op. cit., p. 25).

<sup>49</sup> . Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>50</sup> . M.S. Gore, Non-Brahman Movement in Maharashtra, New Delhi, Segment Books, 1989, p. 26.

assertion of the « non-Aryan » unity of Maharashtrian natives<sup>51</sup>. By that time, Phule's view of the non-brahmins as non-Aryas had made an impact on the small dalit intelligentsia. In 1909, Kisan Faguji Bansode (1870-1946), a Mahar from Nagpur, warned the upper castes in the following terms:

The Aryans - your ancestors - conquered us and gave us unbearable harassment. At that time we were your conquest, you treated us even worse than slaves and subjected us to any torture you wanted. But now we are no longer your subjects, we have no service relationship with you, we are not your slaves or serfs...<sup>52</sup>

The Satyashodak Samaj eventually attracted even Marathas such as the Jedhe family who from Poona realised 'the futility of a purely Maratha politics'<sup>53</sup>. Keshavrao Jedhe adopted 'the long-held Satyashodak view of history: Brahmins were outsiders to the country and to the ethnic community of true « Hindus »; they desired only their own caste superiority and consolidated their power through treachery, through falsification of historical records, and by weaving a web of religious slavery which set up a social hierarchy of superiority and inferiority and divided the masses'<sup>54</sup>.

Maratha princes such as the Maharajah of Baroda strongly approved of Phule's ideological commitments and donated large amounts of money to his movement<sup>55</sup>. A direct descendant of Shivaji, the Maharajah of Kolhapur, Shahu, who reigned between 1894 and 1922 and who was 'intensely proud of his Maratha lineage'<sup>56</sup>, was even more supportive.<sup>57</sup> He

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<sup>51</sup> . G. Omvedt, 'The Satyashodak Samaj and Peasant Agitation', Economic and Political Weekly, 3 November 1973, p. 1973.

<sup>52</sup> . G. Omvedt, Dalit visions, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> . G. Omvedt, 'Non-Brahmins and Nationalists in Poona', Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, February 1974, p. 207.

<sup>54</sup> . Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>55</sup> . Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, vol. II, op. cit. p. 81 et 97.

<sup>56</sup> . I. Copland, 'The Maharaja of Kolhapur and the Non-Brahmin Movement 1902-10', Modern Asian Studies, 7(2), (1973), p. 214.

recruited Maratha Satyas Satyashodaks in his administration<sup>58</sup>. In 1902 he even reserved 50% of the vacancies in the state administration for 'the members of the backward communities'<sup>59</sup>.

Shahu patronised the establishment of the Satyashodak Samaj in Kolhapur in 1911. He promoted inter-caste dining and introduced the Inter-caste Marriage Act in 1918 at Kolhapur<sup>60</sup>. In 1920 he appointed Maratha priests to circumvent the Brahmins and soon after established the Kshatriya Vedic School to train Maratha priests. The very name of this school suggests that Shahu was still acting in the framework of sanskritisation. Indeed, he tried to secure for the Marathas the status of Kshatriyas and in fact he broke with the local Brahmins in 1900 when they refused to recognise his family's claim to this status and accordingly refused to perform certain rituals. He wanted to 'kshatriyase' the Untouchables too. He used to give them symbolically swords and Maratha names<sup>61</sup>. He called them 'Suryavaunshi', pretending that they could trace their lineage to the sun God, Surya. Shahu cannot be described as a Maratha leader also because of its efforts to federate the low castes. In the communal representation scheme that he introduced in 1920 in the Kolhapur municipality 85 castes were grouped into 20 'unions of castes'. The Marathas, the Rajputs and the Kunbis formed a constituency in themselves<sup>62</sup>.

Yet, the main reason why the Sathyashodak Samaj could not become a common platform for all the non-Brahmins on the basis of a non-Aryan

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<sup>57</sup> . He had been educated by a former member of the ICS, S.M. Fraser who was also the tutor of Mysore and Bhavnagar, two other states where anti-Brahmin feelings developed early (Chandra Mudaliar, The Kolhapur Movement, Kolhapur, Shivaji Vidhyapith, n.d., p. 41).

<sup>58</sup> . Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> . Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> . Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> . Another Maratha ruler, the Maharajah of Barada tried to uplift the untouchables through education but he could not find teachers other than Muslims and Arya Samajists for his schools (Presidential Speech of His Highness the Maharajah Gackevar at the All-India Conference on the Abolition of Untouchability, Bombay, 1918, p. 10).

<sup>62</sup> . C. Mudaliar, The Kolhapur Movement, op. cit., p. 27.

identity had much to do with the attitude Marathas. Most of them refused to mix with lower castes and stuck to the sanskritisation process of other with which Shahu has still affinities. For instance, Bhaskarrao Jadhav, in *Marathe ani Tyanci Bhasha*, displayed much ambivalence: on the one hand he admits 'the prevalence of Dravidian customs and racial intermixture among Marathas, and on the other asserts, without any qualification, (that) the Marathas are definitely « Aryan Kshatriyas »'<sup>63</sup>. Therefore, even those who had followed Phule's message for some time, eventually joined hands with the Brahmins-dominated Congress, or were co-opted by it. Congress leaders such as N.V. Gadgil, who was very much aware that the nationalist movement could only acquire a mass-basis if it attracted low caste people, contacted K. Jedhe and made an alliance with him in the early 1930s<sup>64</sup>. A Maratha-dominated Satyashodak Samaj, which had remained aloof from the Congress, till then, decided to join the movement. Gradually, the Maratha rose to power within the party.

In spite of this ultimate failure, from Phule to Shahu, the low castes movement of Maharashtra was characterised by very distinctive features with long terms implications. For the first time, all non-Brahmin castes were invited to unite on the basis of a common ethnic background - as the original inhabitants of India - endowed with a Kshatriya ethos and to fight the Brahmin domination. Even though the Satyashodak idiom was imbued with the symbols of kshatriyahood, this movement escaped the sanskritisation process since the upper castes were not seen as role models but as invaders whose culture could be despised. A similar pattern developed in the South with the Dravidian movement.

### **From non-Brahminism to Dravidianism**

In Madras Presidency, the Non\_Brahmin movement was instrumental in engineering forms of caste fusion and succeeded in endowing the lower castes with an ethnic identity relied on two grounds: they were not only presented as the original inhabitants of India, as Phule had already argued, but also as former Buddhists. This twofold argument was first articulated in the first decade of the XXth century by Iyothee Thass, a Pariah converted to Buddhism<sup>65</sup>. He pointed out that ancient India had been

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<sup>63</sup> . G. Omvedt, 'Jotirao Phule and the ideology of social revolution in India', *ibid.*, pp. 1974-1975.

<sup>64</sup> ? G. Omvedt, 'Non Brahmins and Nationalists in Poona', *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>65</sup> . Cited in V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, Towards a non-brahmin millenium. From Iyothee Thass to Periyar, Calcutta, Samya, 1998, p. 43.

prosperous and most humanly governed under Buddhist kings but that they were dislodged from power by Brahmin invaders who imposed the caste system. The Buddhists were then marginalised and considered as unclean and low<sup>66</sup>. Their religion had endowed them with a specific culture that eschewed violence, forbade the taking of alcohol etc.<sup>67</sup> Thass even maintained that in the past India was called Indirar Desam, the land of Indirar, Indirar being the Buddha after he succeeded in controlling his five senses (indiriyams)<sup>68</sup>. This original civilisation was none other than the Dravidian civilisation and Thass therefore chose to call its castemates, the Pariahs, 'Dravidas'<sup>69</sup>. Therefore early as the late nineteenth century, the Non-Brahmin movement claimed that the lower castes were the original inhabitants of India<sup>70</sup>. Again, British Orientalism had prepared the ground for this development. The Reverend Caldwell (1819-1891) had already suggested that Sanskrit had been brought to South India by Aryan, Brahmin, colonists and that the original inhabitants were Dravidians speaking Tamil, Telugu etc<sup>71</sup>. Gradually, the non-Brahmin South Indian associations adopted the suffix 'Adi' - initial, primordial - in their titles. The Pariah Mahajan Sabha, which had been founded in 1890, became the Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha, which, in 1918 appealed to the government to replace the pejorative word Pariah by Adi-Dravida, denoting the original inhabitants of Dravida land<sup>72</sup>. In 1917 an Adi-Andhra Mahajan Sabha had come into existence the same way. In fact, this association was initially called Andhra Panchama Conference but the chairman of its 1917 session, M.V. Bhagya Reddy (1888-1939), in his presidential address, declared that

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<sup>66</sup> . Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> . Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>68</sup> . Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>69</sup> . Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>70</sup> . M. Ross Barnett, The Politics of Cultural Nationalism, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 315-316.

<sup>71</sup> . N. Ram, 'Dravidian Movement in its Pre-Independence Phases', Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, February 1979, p. 381.

<sup>72</sup> . R.K. Kshirsagar, Dalit Movement in India, op. cit., p. 72.

the so-called Panchamas were the original sons of the soil and they were the rulers of the country<sup>73</sup>. Hence the change of name of the Sabha. Varma was a Mala and in the 1931 census about one Ahird of the Malas and Madhigas gave their identity as Adi-Andhras<sup>74</sup>.

One of the most influential proponents of the Dravidian ideology was M.C. Rajah (1883-1947), a Pariah who became secretary of the Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha in 1916 and who presided over the All India Depressed Classes Association since in 1928. As a nominated member of the Madras Legislative Council since 1920, Rajah moved in 1922 a resolution recommending that the terms 'Panchama' and 'Parya' are deleted from the Government records and the terms Adi-Dravida and Adi-Andhra substituted instead<sup>75</sup>.

This identity-building process was led one step further by Ramaswami Naicker, alias Periyar, a religious mendicant who had been completely disillusioned by the Congress and Gandhi while he was taking part in the Vaikom satyagraha<sup>76</sup>. If Phule had drawn some of his egalitarian inspiration from Thomas Paine, Periyar was much impressed by Robert Ingersoll. Like Phule and Ambedkar, he was egalitarian in a western, individualist vein<sup>77</sup>. The notion of human dignity was so central to his thinking that after quitting Congress in the mid-1920s, he launched the Self-Respect Movement, which immediately endeavoured to pressurise the Justice Party in order to make it the true advocate of the lower castes. Another of his key words was Samadharma that referred to the general

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<sup>73</sup> . Cited in G. Omvedt, Dalit visions, op. cit., p ; 36.

<sup>74</sup> . Census of India, 1931, vol. 23, Hyderabad State, Part 1, Hyderabad, Government Central Press, 1933.

<sup>75</sup> . S.K. Gupta, The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics - Their emergence as a political power, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985, p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> . Mohan Ram, 'Ramaswami Naicker and the Dravidian Movement', Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, February 1974, p. 219.

<sup>77</sup> . He said, for instance, 'A sense of self-respect and fraternity must arise within human society. Notions of high and low amongst men should disappear'. (Cited in V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, Towards a non-brahmin millenium, op. cit., p. 283.)

principle of equality. But Periyar regarded it as a Buddhist notion<sup>78</sup>. Like Thass, he presented the lower castes as descending from the first Buddhists and endowed them with a Dravidian identity, especially after his mobilisation of the late 1930s against the attempt of the Congress government of Madras at promoting Hindi in the schools of the Presidency. The Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) that he founded in 1944, though its mouthpiece, *Viduthalai*, considered that the Congress was behind 'the exploitation of the northern bania and his Aryan [brahmin] mentor'<sup>79</sup>. Thus, 'samardharma came to stand in for a civilizational and cultural alternative: a social order based on radically different principles from the present, which needed to rest on premises derived from a non-Aryan, non-Sanskritic ethos'<sup>80</sup>. Periyar had an explicitly ethnic conception of the low castes' identity. He compared their situation to that of the blacks in South Africa<sup>81</sup>. The Non-Brahmins who all shared a Dravidian identity had therefore to get united. As a result, Periyar advocated the coming together of the Christians, Muslims and low castes Hindus<sup>82</sup>, and, within the latter, of the Untouchables and the Shudras<sup>83</sup>. Such a rapprochement took place indeed since Nadars and Adi Dravidas (Untouchables) were the mainstays of the Self-Respect movement and then of the DK. But there were also Vellalas, Mukkulathavar and even Chettis among the lieutenants of Periyar<sup>84</sup>. The scope and strength of this social coalition must not be exaggerated since old lines of cleavages persisted. As in Maharashtra, the 'non-Aryans' did not form a solid block at all. M.C. Rajah criticised the 'natural animosity' of the Justice Party towards the Untouchables and in 1922-23 his South India Adi-Dravida Congress broke ranks with the party<sup>85</sup>. However, the ethnic ground of the Non-Brahmin discourse which,

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<sup>78</sup> . Ibid., p. 421.

<sup>79</sup> . Cited in *ibid.*, p. 481.

<sup>80</sup> . Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>81</sup> . Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>82</sup> . Ibid., p. 501.

<sup>83</sup> . Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>84</sup> . Ibid., pp. 373-374.

<sup>85</sup> . N. Ram , 'Dravidian Movement in its pre-independence phases', *op. cit.*, p. 389.

from Thass to Periyar combined Buddhist and Dravidian references had enabled its leaders to unify low caste people and mobilise them against the 'twice borns'. As early as 1920, 'a non-brahmin constituency with its own distinctive political claims had emerged in Madras' and enabled the Justice Party to win the elections<sup>86</sup>.

This ethnicisation process was fostered by the political reforms since the British were much willing to recognise ethnic and/or caste groups as legitimate units for representation in the political arena.

### *The impact of compensatory discrimination*

The formation of caste federations and the ethnicisation of caste, two inter related processes, were fostered by the British policy of compensatory discrimination based on the reservation of seats in the bureaucracy and in the assemblies. The very decision to grant such or such statutory representation to such and such group in these assemblies contributed to the crystallisation of new groups which resented their non-(or their under-) representation. The State was therefore indirectly reshaping society. Caste groups, often with low status, were prominent among those, which mobilised against the state's decisions.

The Non-Brahmin movement of Madras Presidency was especially active<sup>87</sup>. In April 1920, Lord Chelmsford received a Memorandum protesting against the reservation of only 28 seats out of 65 for the Non-Brahmins in the Legislative Council of Madras. Interestingly, the signatories emphasised their caste and ethnic differences for justifying their claim:

The Brahmins differ from the non-Brahmins in caste, manners, customs and interests and even in personal law in some respects. The former is Aryans and the latter are Dravidians and thus they differ in race. In the past the Brahmins have practically monopolised all or almost all the seats in the Local and Imperial Legislative Councils. The disabilities under which the Non-Brahmins have been suffering were fully set out in

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<sup>86</sup>. V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, Towards a non-brahmin millenium, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>87</sup>. The Madava Thyagaraja Sabha even claimed that three-fourths of the seats in the Legislative Council should be reserved to Non-Brahmins (India Office Library and Records, Letter dated 19 Jan. 1920, L/P&J/924F).

the Memorandum which Rai Bahadur K.V. Reddi prepared and submitted to the joint Select Committee on Government of India Bill<sup>88</sup>.

The Non-Brahmins asked for more seats in Madras assembly because they were 'different'. During the 1920 election campaign, their leaders requested 'all non-Brahmins in this presidency to immediately organise, combine and carry on an active propaganda so as to ensure the return to the reformed Council of as many non-Brahmin as possible'<sup>89</sup>. This tactic yielded dividends since the Justice Party came first in the elections. In their plea to the British, the Non-Brahmins also emphasised their marginality in the state services and the 'disabilities' from which they were suffering. This discourse fitted well too in the British approach since the Government regarded also political representation as a means for compensatory discrimination.

This policy made a similar impact on the low caste movement in Western India. In Bombay Legislative Council the Marathas showed the way in the 1920s. Their principal patron, the Maharajah of Kolhapur, Shahu Maharaj, had circulated a memorandum 'on the necessity of separate Communal electorates for the Marathas, etc., for electing members to the new Councils under the Reforms scheme', where he wrote:

The Marathas have distinguished themselves in the [first world] war certainly not less, if not more, than the Sikhs or the Mohammedans who have been given separate electorates. They are almost given to agriculture, military service or employment as mill-hands. Being thus not a commercial or educated community, they are poor, and without resources, influence and organisation. In this respect they are even worse of than Telis, Tilaris, Goldsmiths, Sutas, Lohars and even Mahars, Mangs and other Untouchables, to whom many a business line and handicraft are open [...] Five great monsters do a lot of mischief to the village agricultural community which mostly consists of the Marathas. The Kulkarni [Brahmin] is the biggest of them all [...] Next to the Kulkarni is the Brahmin Sawkar [money-lender] who has appropriated to himself a very large portion of the village lands. The Ahird in this order is the school-master and his brother the college-professor in big cities [...] [The fourth] is the Brahmin bureaucracy watered and nourished by Government themselves [...] The village priest, securely and permanently installed by

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<sup>88</sup> . The Humble memorial of the non-Brahmins of Madras (23 April 1920); IOLR, L/P&J/9/14.

<sup>89</sup> . Justice, 29 March 1920 in IOR, L/P&J/9/14.

Hindu religious puranas invented and developed to maintain the Brahmanic supremacy is the fifth monster<sup>90</sup>.

Shahu demanded separate electorates instead of reserved seats on which, he said, he was 'sure that weak, unprincipled undesirable Marathas will be elected who would be used by Brahmins as cat's paw for them to draw the apples out of the fire'<sup>91</sup>, the same kind of argument used by Ambedkar before the Poona pact. However, the British were not prepared to grant a separate electorate to the Marathas. Some of them preferred to focus their demand on larger quotas and they had understood that to pressurise the British more efficiently they had to appear as representing more than one caste. They held, under the auspices of the People's Union, whose patron was the Maharajah of Kolhapur, a Conference of the Hindu Backward Classes in June 1920. The British, so far, designated the Marathas by their caste name but the conference considered that 'the term «Maratha and allied classes» should include all the Backward communities'<sup>92</sup>. Maratha leaders obviously aspired to play a pivotal role in the shaping of a caste federation which would adopt the official designation 'Backward classes'. Therefore, the conference made 'an emphatic protest against the misleading statement made in public to the effect that the Marathas, Malis etc. do not belong to the Backward Classes when their percentage of education is very low'<sup>93</sup>. The main demand of the conference was that the 8 seats reserved to the Marathas and allied castes in the Montagu-Chelmsford report should be extended to 15. Simultaneously, the Secretary of the Poona-based All India Maratha Mali Union made a similar representation to the British:

The word 'Maratta' [sic] means all the backward classes. As a matter of fact not only the Marattas but all other allied communities have fought in the last world war for the Empire and all such communities are

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<sup>90</sup> . 'Note by H.H. the Maharajah of Kolhapur on the necessity of separate Communal electorates for the Marathas, etc., for electing members to the new Councils under the Reforms scheme', IOLR, L/P&J/9/14.

<sup>91</sup> . Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> . 'Resolutions of the Conference of the Hindu Backward Classes', L/P&J/9/14.

<sup>93</sup> . Ibid.

anxious to get the privilege of reserved seats in the council to be hereafter elected<sup>94</sup>.

Among the allied communities of Marathas, Yadav Gavlis then opportunely discovered that they had strong affinities with the Marathas. The President of the Yadav Gavli Association, Raghunath Vithal Khedekar, was an exceptional personality whom we shall meet again while dealing with North India in the following section. Born in Bombay in 1873, his father had been Private secretary of the Maharajah of Bhavnagar, one of the most progressive states so far as the upliftment of the lower castes were concerned. After studying medicine in the United Kingdom, he started practising in 1902 in Bhavnagar and Kolhapur, where he met Shahu Maharaj<sup>95</sup>. The first Yadav association had been founded in 1903 by a relative of his father<sup>96</sup>. In the early 1920s, Khedekar protested that the Southborough Committee should consider the Yadav Gavlis as Marathas :

The Yadav Gavli community claims descent from the Great Yadav families to one which Shri Krishna the 8<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Vishnu belonged. The whole of the North India, Gujarat and Deccan were only ruled by the Kings of the Yadav families [...] They have kept up their Kshatriya caste traditions, customs and occupations [...] They have given considerable recruits to the government and have been regarded as Marathas and included in the Maratha regiments<sup>97</sup>.

In the end, the Yadav-Gavli association demanded the 'inclusion [of this caste] in the list of the Marathas and allied communities of the Deccan for franchise purpose'. Access to political power was of course the main reason for this social rapprochement. Eventually, Khedekar was

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<sup>94</sup> . Letter without any date from the Secretary of the All India Maratha Mali Union to the President of the Joint Committee (L/P&J/9/14).

<sup>95</sup> . For biographical details see, M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation - A study of two backward classes, Delhi, Manohar, 1987, p. 139.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>97</sup> . Letter from R.V. Khedekar, without any date, (L/P&J/9/14). Subsequently, Yadav leaders claimed that Shivaji's mother was a Yadav (M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, op. cit., p. 148 and R.V. Khedekar, The Divine Heritage of the Yadavas, Allahabad, Parmanand, 1959).

deputed by the People's Union, the Deccan Ryots Association and the Yadav Gavli Association for making a representation to the Joint Select Committee. He explained:

If the term 'Maratha' be defined as meaning 'anti-Brahmin' in the regulation to be framed under the Indian Act, it will remove all misunderstandings and ill feelings in the Maratha castes and it will allow Jains and Lingayat castes to share the benefit of the reserved seats<sup>98</sup>.

Marathas, who had already forged a 'backward' front with the Malis and the Yadavs were striving for shaping an even larger coalition including the Lingayats and the Jains under the all-encompassing label of 'anti-Brahmins'. Certainly, the loose structure of the Marathas lent itself to this kind of aggregative strategy. They have no clear-cut sub-castes, they are so 'amorphous' that 'it is hard to tell in some cases, whether a group is Maratha or of another affiliation called Kunbi'<sup>99</sup>. This arrangement naturally 'facilitates incorporation into Maratha caste'<sup>100</sup> of other peasant castes. But in spite of the Marathas' specificity, there is much to learn from this case study on the way state policies can indirectly refashion social groupings. The British approach of compensatory discrimination through quotas in the assemblies have accelerated the transformation of castes into interest groups and have fostered a process of amalgamation among the low castes. Leading castes such as the Marathas initiated federations whose aim was purely political. They had understood that the rules were those of the game of numbers which, alone could enhance institutional representation in the State. In Maharashtra this strategy was rather successful. Its architects could rely on the legacy of Jyotirao Phule's Satyashodak Samaj<sup>101</sup>, which had established an idiom - the Bahujan idiom - encompassing all the Non-Brahmins. Another important

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<sup>98</sup> Letter from R.V. Khedekar, dated 18 May 1920, to the Joint Select Committee (L/P&J/9/14).

<sup>99</sup> . H. Orenstein, 'Caste and the concept of « Maratha » in Maharashtra', The Eastern Anthropologist, 16(1), Jan.-Apr. 1963, p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> . Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>101</sup> . The Maharajah of Kolhapur claimed that he was inherited his views from the movement ('Note by H.H. the Maharajah of Kolhapur on the necessity of separate Communal electorates for the Marathas, etc., for electing members to the new Councils under the Reforms scheme', IOLR, L/P&J/9/14).

factor laid in the pivotal situation of the Marathas who represented 20% of the population. They were certainly not able to federate all the Non-Brahmins but the mere fact that the British designed a category called 'Marathas and allied' showed that they had been successful to a certain extent. Among these allies were the Kunbis, who have always been regarded as more backward than the Marathas<sup>102</sup> but who appeared in the same category. Now, the Kunbis accounted for 10% of the population of Maharashtra and contributed, therefore, to the irresistible rise to power of the Marathas from the late colonial period onwards.

In Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the ethnicisation of caste and the formation of caste federations, helped the non-Brahmins to get organised and to gradually assert themselves in the political arena. However, the most significant caste federations took shape in the South and in Gujarat.

#### *Caste federations and the rise to power of the low castes*

Kothari and Maru have defined caste federations in terms which would have suited well the Maharashtrian situation since they emphasise the role of individual caste associations in the shaping of such coalitions and put a stress on the political motivations:

The concept of caste federation refers to a grouping together of a number of distinct endogamous groups into a single organisation for common objectives, the realisation of which calls for a pooling together of resources or numbers or both. By and large, the objectives pursued are secular and associational, although the employment of traditional symbols for evoking a sense of solidarity and loyalty towards the new form is not uncommon. The traditional distinctions between the federating groups are on the whole retained, but the search for a new organisational identity and the pursuit of political objectives gradually lead to a shift in group orientations<sup>103</sup>.

This definition was evolved in the course of a study of the caste federation phenomenon in Gujarat where the 'Kshatriyas' indeed exemplified this phenomenon. Right from the 1910s the state Rajput

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<sup>102</sup> The Kunbis have been classified as OBCs by the Mandal Commission.

<sup>103</sup> R. Kothari and R. Maru, 'Federating of political interests : the Kshatriyas of Gujarat', in R. Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1986 [1970], p. 72.

leaders had constituted caste associations for promoting education.<sup>104</sup> In the late 1930s, the descendent of one of its leaders, Natvarsingh Solanki, wanted to extend these associations to other castes which he considered as Kshatriyas<sup>105</sup>. He tried to refashion the social identity of those groups in order to allow others to join hands with the Rajputs and in this way, to acquire more weight.

Gujarat's largest caste was the Kolis. They had been classified by the British as a 'criminal caste' but claimed that they were Kshatriyas and resorted to genealogists for being recognised aristocratic ancestors. In this, they purely imitated the Rajputs. Some Koli clans had been able to establish matrimonial alliances with Rajputs, as those castes practised hypergamy<sup>106</sup> and/or had established small principalities before the British took over. Yet, they had retained some control over land under the Raj as landowners or rather big tenants. Many of them met the necessary conditions for being enfranchised when the British established provincial legislative councils. The right to vote therefore enabled the Kolis to use their main asset, their number» : in 1931 they represented about 20% of the population, almost the double of the Patidars (12.16%), the dominant caste, the main rival of the Rajputs, who represented only 4.85% of the population. Solanki opened his caste association to the Kolis for this very reason: for transforming it into a mass organisation.

In 1947, the Kutch, Kathiawar, Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha was created after years of preparatory work. The word 'Kshatriya' was a useful umbrella label to bracket the Rajputs and the Kolis together. The Kshatriya Sabha is a good example of the way castes, with very different ritual status for defending common interests. In this case, the Kolis and the Rajputs had the same enemies, viz., the Patidars. Certainly, this alliance

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<sup>104</sup> G. Shah, Caste association and political process in Gujarat. Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1975, p. 33.

<sup>105</sup> '...I wondered why I had to work exclusively for the Rajputs. Why not work for all the members of the Kshatriya class. The Kshatriyas are a class, not a caste'. (Interview cited in M. Weiner, Party building, op. cit., p. 97). Solanki obviously plays on the relative ambiguity of the varna system since by contrast with jatis (of whom the translation is usually «castes»), varnas are generally presented as being more flexible and based on the criterion of socio-economic functions.

<sup>106</sup> L. Lobo, 'Koli Kshatriyas of North Gujarat: a shift from sanskritised mobility to politicised mobility', The Eastern Anthropologist. 42 (2). April-June 1989, pp. 176-177.

has been legitimised in the idiom of 'tradition', by pretending that its components belonged to the same *varna*, but the use of the word Kshatriya was largely tactical and the original caste identity was seriously diluted. The Rajput leaders of the Kshatriya Sabha emphasised that a *Kshatriya* is not to be defined by descent but by military values. Political calculations had therefore social implications. Several taboos were abolished. Rajputs and Kolis of the Kshatriya Sabha shared meals<sup>107</sup> and the Kolis elite married their daughters to lower Rajputs –who practised hypergamy anyway – and this process fostered the rajputisation of the upper Kolis. Kshatriyas tended to form a new caste. The use of terms like Koli Kshatriyas and Rajput Kshatriyas certainly show that the merger was far from complete.<sup>108</sup> But important dimensions of the caste system were eroded by the after-effects of basically socio-economic and political strategies. In fact, the main demands of the Kshatriya Sabha after independence reflected a relative indifference to ritual issues in comparison to material objectives. For instance, the association claimed that the Kshatriyas were part of the «Backward Classes» and therefore should benefit from reservations in the educational system and in the administration. This claim was the exact opposite of sanskritisation.<sup>109</sup> The Kolis benefited more than the Rajputs from the Sabha, which created boarding schools, grants, loan systems etc. in favour of the poorest of their community. This development contributed to the emergence of a Koli intelligentsia of Kolis which, even though it remained small gave the Koli masses a new confidence and self-esteem as a caste<sup>110</sup>. The members of this elite 'interact[ed] frequently and chart[ed] out common political strategies'.<sup>111</sup> Right from the 1950s, the Kshatriya Sabha tended to capitalise its electoral support to the Congress in exchange of tickets for a number of its members as party candidates. The party was not fully responsive, especially because of the Patidars who were very influential in the Congress. The Patidars disapproved of the Kshatriyas demand

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<sup>107</sup> R. Kothari and R. Maru, 'Federating for political interests: the Kshatriyas of Gujarat', op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>108</sup> L. Lobo, 'Koli Kshatriyas of North Gujarat', op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>109</sup> G. Shah, Caste Association, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>110</sup> L. Lobo, 'Koli Kshatriyas of North Gujarat', op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

regarding land reform<sup>112</sup>. The Kshatriya Sabha therefore kept its distance with the Congress before the 1962 elections and the party underwent a setback. Instead, the association gave its support, against large concessions, to the Swatantra Party, which became the leading opposition party in the state. This situation persuaded the Congress to change its strategy and to give tickets to Kshatriya candidates before the 1967 elections. The Kshatriya Sabha then supported the Congress, which regained a more comfortable majority than in 1962<sup>113</sup>.

Caste federations turned out to be political interest groups with more leverage than caste associations, simply because they represented more people. In Gujarat, after the Congress split of 1969, a majority of the party conservative notables remained with the Congress (O) while a larger number of Kshatriyas joined the Congress (R). They gradually gained control over the state Congress. Madhavsingh Solanki, a Kshatriya of low birth, became Chief minister in 1976 and appointed a majority of ministers with the same background<sup>114</sup>. During the electoral campaign of 1977 he initiated a new caste alliance regrouping the Kshatriyas, the Harijans (Untouchables), the Adivasis (tribals) and the Muslims (hence the acronym «KHAM»). This KHAM alliance was largely responsible for the Congress success during the 1980 elections. Between 1957 and 1990 the number of upper caste Congress MLAs decreased from 33 to 6%, those with a Patidar background remained stable at about one fourth of the total, whereas the Kshatriyas increased from 12 to 25% and the KHAM MLAs at large from 39 to 55%.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>. In addition, Congress leadership feared 'communalisation' of the party, and therefore declared that dual membership to a caste-association and to Congress were incompatible.

<sup>113</sup> G. Shah, Caste Association, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>114</sup> One Ahird were Kshatriyas, one was tribal and two were Scheduled Castes. (G. Shah, 'Gujarat Politics in the Post-Emergency Period', The Indian Journal of Political Science, 55(3), July-Sept. 1994, p. 237).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 237. See also S. Mitra, 'The perils of promoting equality: the latent significance of the anti-reservation movement in India', The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics 25 (3), November 1987, pp. 298-301 and J. R. Wood, 'Reservations in doubt: the backlash against affirmative action in Gujarat, India', Pacific Affairs 60 (3), Autumn 1987, pp. 418-419.

While the 'Kshatriyas' of Gujarat represent the best example of caste federation, other instances occurred in South India. In the early 1960s, the Kallan, the Maravar and the Agamudiar, three lower castes who had already close ties with each other (especially ritual ones since they claimed that they descended from the same ancestors), decided to adopt the same name, Mukkulator (lit. three castes), in order to merge and to influence local politics.<sup>116</sup>

The search for new forms of caste activity did not contribute to social change and to the rise of the low castes in the same way in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat but the above case studies suggest a western and southern pattern. In these areas, the development of communications, the impact of western ideas-ranging from missionaries' propaganda and school teaching, the establishment of a pan-Indian administration and census operations, fostered the formation of caste associations. These institutions had sometimes a very conservative overtone and confined their discourse into the sanskritisation framework. However, they prepared the ground for two major developments, namely the ethnicisation of castes, of which the ideology of the 'bahujan samaj' evolved by Phule and the Dravidian movement were the best examples, and the federation of castes which was epitomised by the 'Kshatriyas' of Gujarat. Both phenomena were influenced by the orientalist discourse and responses to the British policy of compensatory discrimination. They were intended to help the low castes to reach power and they were successful to a large extent<sup>117</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> L. I. Rudolph, 'The modernity of tradition: the democratic incarnation of caste in India', The American Political Science Review, LIX (4), Dec. 1965, p. 984.

<sup>117</sup> However, caste federations or caste alliances did not always reach their objective, as is evident from the process which took place with the Vaniyars, the largest caste of Tamil Nadu with about 12% of the population in 1931. At the turn of 19th century, they were known as Pallis, they tilled the land and occupied a rather low rank (though above the pollution line). In 1871, after the first census was published, Pallis who had already protested against their low ranking, had a petition signed in which they claimed the status of Kshatriya. The caste got sanskritised by abandoning practices considered as unclean like the remarriage of widows, non-vegetarian diet, etc. From 1901 onwards this process was co-ordinated by a caste association, the Vanya Kula Kshatriya Sangham (VKKS – Association of the Kshatriya of the fire clan), which put pressure on the British administration. In 1921 the agricultural activity – considered as degrading – of the Pallis, was omitted in the census and in 1931 the name Pallis itself was replaced by Vanniya Kula Kshatriyas, Christophe Jaffrelot - Positive discrimination and the transformation of caste in India 31

In North India, none of these processes reached their logical conclusion even though the British Raj had generated the same context as in the South and in the West. Caste associations often followed the sanskritisation path and neither prepared the group for an ethnic discourse nor developed into caste federations.

### **What low caste movement in the Hindi belt ?**

In North India also British policies had changed the social and political context in such a way as castes could have felt the same strong incentive to get organised. Efforts were made in this direction but they did not bear the same fruits as in the South and in the West. While caste associations took shape at an early date, they did not join hands into federations and they operated within the logic sanskritisation. For instance, in 1928, the Indian Statutory Commission received an avalanche of petitions and memoranda from caste associations, which demanded larger quotas in the assembly. The Government was petitioned by the All India Kushwaha Kshatriya Mahasabha, 'on behalf of the kori, kachchi and muraos castes'<sup>118</sup>. The fact that the Kushwaha label stood for three sub-castes of castes of market gardeners shows that this caste association promoted the fusion process, but not to a very large extent : this process cannot be compared with caste federations in Gujarat. Secondly, the Kushwahas claimed the rank of Kshatriya, and another association of middle caste of peasants,

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which became Vanniyars in common parlance (L. I. Rudolph et S. H. Rudolph. «The political role of India's caste associations» op. cit. pp. 454-461). After 1947, the VKKS tried to get posts in the administration and a number of electoral tickets, in exchange of its support to the Congress. As the party was not responsive, Vanniyars decided to 'contest the elections in cooperation with the toiling masses' and therefore formed the Tamilnad Toilers' Party. 25 of them were elected MLAs. The Congress, which could not secure a majority of seats in Madras Assembly, sought the Vanniyars' support. The 'independent' Vanniyars and then the TTP MLAs accepted to support its government in return of ministerial seats. Finally, the TTP dissolved later and its members joined the Congress and the VKKS became dormant. The Vanniyar movement gained momentum again in the 1980s but its decline, from the 1950s onwards, typified the way the Congress party could defuse caste mobilisations by coopting their leaders (P. Radhakrishnan, 'Backward Class Movements in Tamil Nadu', in M.N. Srinivas (ed.), Caste Its Twentieth Century Avatar, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>118</sup>. **Report on the working of the system of government - United Provinces**, op. cit., p. 160.

which sent also a petition, the Kurmi Kshatriya Parishad Sabha, did the same. Sanskritisation continued to play a major role among the low caste associations. In the following pages we shall examine this issue through the case of the Yadavs and the Kurmis on the one hand and through that of the Untouchables on the other hand.

*Sanskritisation and lack of unity among the Yadavs and the Kurmis*

The 'Yadav' label covers a great number of castes, which had different names, initially: Ahir in the Hindi belt, Punjab and Gujarat, Gavli in Maharashtra, Gola in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka etc. However, traditionally their common function, all over India, was to take care of bovines cattle as herdsmen, cowherds and milksellers.<sup>119</sup> In their 'Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India', Russell and Hira Lal note that 'In former times the Ahirs had the exclusive right of milking the cow, so that on all occasions on their must be hired for this purpose even by the lowest castes'<sup>120</sup> In practice, the Yadavs today spend most their time tilling the land. In the Central Provinces, in the first decade of the last century, already two kinds of the Ahirs were cultivators and labourers and less than one Ahird were still occupied in breeding cattle and in dealing with milk and milk products.

While the Yadavs are speared our several regions, as noticed above, they are more specially concentrated in the Ganges plain where they represent about 10% of the population. They form one of the largest castes in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh with respectively 11 and 8.7% of the population. The 'casteregious' maped by J. Schwartzberg show that the Yadavs were the largest caste in almost all the districts of northern Bihar and in much of eastern UP in 1931<sup>121</sup> But the Yadavs are not a dominant caste, as pastoral activity did not go usually hand in hand with land possession and from the ritual point of view, the Yadavs are traditionally regarded as low caste peasants:

The very mention of the community invokes, in Bihar, the image of dull, miserly and loud-mouthed people lacking in grace and culture. Besides,

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<sup>119</sup> M. S. A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, New Delhi, Manohar, 1987, p. 130.

<sup>120</sup> . R.V. Russell and Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India, vol. 2, New Delhi, Asian Education Services, 1993 [1916], pp. 35-36.

<sup>121</sup> . J. Schwartzberg, 'The distribution of selected castes in the Northern Indian plain', The Geographical Review, Oct. 1965, p. 490.

the Yadavs are considered as to be unusually prone to casteism and violence<sup>122</sup>.

In the central Provinces, a proverb says ‘ A Gaoli’s quarrel: drunk at night and friends in the morning’. Russell and Hira Lal note that in this region too, ‘The Ahirs are also hot-tempered, and their propensity for drinking often results in affrays, when they break each other’s head with their cattle-staffs’<sup>123</sup>. However, their association with another image, that of placidity and peace. One of the proverbs cited by Schwartzberg says: ‘The cow is in league with the milkman and lets him milk water into the pail’<sup>124</sup>. Hence an ambivalent stereotype – if this phrase is not a contradiction in terms. The Yadavs reportedly descend from immigrants from Central Asia, the Abhiras, who established kingdoms in North India, the most recent of which was built in Rewari, in Haryana in the XVIIth century<sup>125</sup>. The scion of the dynasty, Rao Bahadur Balbir Singh, established the Ahir Yadav Kshatriya Mahasabha in 1910. This association claimed that the Ahirs descended from the Yadu dynasty (hence the term Yadav) to which Krishna - the cowherd god - belonged, and that, therefore, they were Kshatriyas<sup>126</sup>. To promote a warrior ethos and the caste unity, the association leaders could easily rely on the caste history since Ahirs were easily presented as coming from the same ethnic stock and were known for their martial valour - the prince of Rewari took part in the 1857 Mutiny for instance. This is probably why M.S.A. Rao considers that the ‘term Yadava refers to both an ethnic category and an ideology’<sup>127</sup>. Certainly,

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<sup>122</sup> Tilak D. Gupta, ‘Yadav ascendancy in Bihar politics’, Economic and Political Weekly, 27 June 1992, p. 1304.

<sup>123</sup> . R.V. Russell and Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>124</sup> . J. Schwartzberg, ‘The distribution of selected castes’, op. cit., p. 490.

<sup>125</sup> M.S.A. Rao, Social movements, op. cit., pp. 124-125.

<sup>126</sup> . This claim was already made by one of the principal subcastes of the Ahirs in Northern India, the Jadwansi (R.V. Russell and Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, The Tribes and the Castes of the central Provinces of India, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 24.)

<sup>127</sup> . M.S.A. Rao, Social movements, op. cit., p. 123.

the Yadav leaders succeeded in their fusion project since they persuaded their caste fellows to downplay the endogamous units into which they were divided. There have even been some inter-regional marriages. Fusion was made easier from the 1930s onwards when North Indian Yadavs started to migrate from their villages to towns and especially to Delhi. But this project did not incorporate a more ambitious ethnicisation process through which other Kshatriya castes would have been merged. So far as ideology is concerned, it was dominated by sanskritisation.

The Yadavs lent themselves for such sanskritisation because they had 'a special relation to the Hindu religion, owing to their association with the sacred cow' (and with Krishna, the cowherd God)<sup>128</sup>. And the Arya Samaj also exerted a strong influence over the Yadav movement. As early as 1895, the ruler of Rewari, Rao Yudhishter Singh (the father of Rao Bahadur Balbir Singh) invited Swami Dayananda in his State. Branches of the Arya Samaj flourished soon after and Rewari provided a base from which Arya Samaj updeshaks (itinerant preachers) operated in neighbouring areas. The Arya Samaj was a reform movement, which has been too often regarded as purely Punjabi and confined to the urban middle class<sup>129</sup>. In fact, it made inroads in the adjacent states at a quite early date and attracted then large numbers of low caste people. Dayananda even started his 'campaign against heresy and orthodoxy' - to use the words of an Arya Samajist - in the Kumbha Mela held in Haridwar<sup>130</sup>. Subsequently, he toured in the United Provinces, in particular in the western part of the province. He stayed eight times in Meerut, for instance, between 1866 and 1880 - the Meerut City Arya Samaj was established as early as 1877 and others followed in Farrukabad (1879), Kanpur (1879), Benares (1880), Lucknow (1880). Eventually, the Srimati Arya Pratinidhi Sabha for the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh was founded in 1886<sup>131</sup>. These local branches gradually extended their

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<sup>128</sup> . R.V. Russell and Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, The Tribes and the Castes of the central Provinces of India, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>129</sup> . This is the main limitation of the other wise path breaking book by Kenneth Jones, Arya Dharm - Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976.

<sup>130</sup> . The Arya Samaj: A Renaissance - Svami Satya Prakash Sarasvati Speeches and Addresses, vol. 2, Delhi, Vijay Kumar, 1987, p. 103.

<sup>131</sup> . Ibid., pp. 105-106.

influence in the countryside. The anti-Brahmin stance of the Arya Samaj was especially appreciated by the low castes of the United Provinces. In *Sathyarth Prakash* (The Light of Truth), Dayananda has very strong words against 'the sectarian and selfish Brahmins'<sup>132</sup>, 'these ignorant, sensual, hypocritical, irresponsible and vicious people'<sup>133</sup> who 'often dissuade persons from learning and ensnare them into their evil ways with the result that they lose health, peace of mind and wealth'<sup>134</sup>. Dayananda reproached the Brahmans with exploiting the superstition of the Hindus by projecting themselves as the only intermediary between man and god, a monopoly he compares to that of the Catholic Pope and which according to him was evident from the brahminical invention of idol worship: 'These Popes fill their pockets by playing fraud upon you. In the Vedas there is not even a word to sanction idol-worship or invoking invitation and dismissals'<sup>135</sup>.

Dayananda eulogised the Jats for forcefully resisting the Brahmins' 'popish' attitudes. He narrates the story of a Jat whose father was dying and who was asked to give his only cow to the priest as a 'dying gift'<sup>136</sup>, allegedly for helping the dying man to cross the river. The Jat had to agree since the priest had already talked to his relatives who put pressure on him. But he went to the priest's house soon after and boldly accused him of being 'a great liar' since he had not taken the cow to the river bank but was milking it<sup>137</sup>. He then contested the authority of the Garuda Purana, the book the priest mentioned as dictating his conduct: 'This book has been written by your forefathers to secure livelihood for you...'<sup>138</sup>. The Jat took the cow back to his home and Dayananda concludes, 'If other persons

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<sup>132</sup> . Ibid., p.98.

<sup>133</sup> . Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>134</sup> Swami Dayananda, The Light of Truth, Allahabad, Dr. Ratna Kumari Svadhyaya Sansthana, 1981, p. 98.

<sup>135</sup> . Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>136</sup> .Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>137</sup> . Ibid., p. 438.

<sup>138</sup> . Ibid., p. 439.

also behave like the Jat, then alone can the popish fraud be stopped'<sup>139</sup>. **Jats were very pleased by the way Dayananda praised one of them and they naturally shared his indictment of the Brahmins.**

However, Dayananda's indictment of the Brahmins did not amount to a complete rejection of the caste system. What he condemned was the hereditary caste. He contended that in the initial *varna vyavastha* children were placed in each *varna* according to their individual 'merits, actions and temperaments'<sup>140</sup>. He specifically recommended that the 'fixturing of the *varnas* according to merits and actions should take place at the sixteenth year of girls and twenty-fifth year of boys'<sup>141</sup>. Like Gandhi later on, Dayananda was not against caste as such since, according to him, provided it was not a hereditary system, the castes endowed society with a virtually harmonious structure. Moreover, he considered that marriages should 'take place in the same *varnas* (classes) and the *varna* should be based on merits, profession and temperament'<sup>142</sup>. It means that not only Dayananda adds one more criterion to the definition of castes - the profession - but also that endogamy, which is a pillar of the caste system, needed to be enforced. Dayananda did not fight caste taboos either. For instance, he considered that a Brahmin needed only to eat food prepared by caste fellows because 'The nature of genital fluids made in a Brahman's body due to special kind of fooding is different from that made in chandalas body on account of bad diet. The body of the chandalas is full of rotten particles due to rotten diet'<sup>143</sup>. Dayananda, therefore, maintained also the hierarchy in diets which is part of the caste system. He was obviously a clear proponent of sanskritisation and the Arya Samaj exerted a strong influence in this direction over the lower castes of North India. The first anti-Brahmin movement of North India was probably the Arya Samaj. But in contrast to what happened in Western and Southern India, this movement made a very ambivalent impact since it promoted

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<sup>139</sup> . Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> . Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>141</sup> . Ibid., p. 115. He adds that this task should be handled by 'a syndicate of learned persons' who would 'decide after examination as to which is Brahman, which Kshatriya, which Vaishya and Which Shudra'. (Ibid., p. 483).

<sup>142</sup> . Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>143</sup> . Ibid., p. 334.

sanskritisation. The activities of the arya samajists among the Yadavs of the Gangetic plains are a case in point.

**Logically enough, the most obvious implication of the Arya Samaj in the North Indian countryside lay in the sanskritisation of the Jats, as evident from the ideology of the All India Jat Mahasabha which was founded in 1905 as ‘an offshoot of the Arya Samaj’<sup>144</sup>. On the one hand this caste association, as so many others, asked for a special treatment from the Government<sup>145</sup>; on the other hand it claimed that Jats were Kshatriyas. Arya Samajists exhorted the Jats to give up the consumption of alcohol and meat and recommended that severe restriction should be ‘imposed on the movement of women’<sup>146</sup>. The schools established with the association’s support had often telling names - such as the Jat Vedic School founded in Rohtak in 1913 - and generally taught Sanskrit in order to enable the Jats to teach Sanskrit and therefore occupy ‘a profession which for centuries was the exclusive monopoly of the Brahmin’<sup>147</sup>. The Arya Samajists propagated the same kind of ideology among the Yadavs.**

The Arya Samaj *upadeshaks* continuously canvassed for the adoption of the sacred thread by the Yadavs. Their campaigns were especially successful in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar<sup>148</sup>. The Yadav rulers of Rewari, Rao Yudhishter Singh, true to his role as protector of the cows founded a Goraksha Sabha (association for cow protection) in conjunction with the Arya Samaj – which had started to create such *sabhas* all over North India. The arya samajists also enrolled the Yadavs in the cow protection movement. This movement, initiated in 1893 and relaunched at different points of time in the first two decades of the century, attracted many

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<sup>144</sup> . N. Datta, ‘Arya Samaj and the Making of Jat Identity’, *Studies in History*, 13(1), 1997, p. 107.

<sup>145</sup> . In 1916 it sent a memorandum to the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab asking for the employment of more Hindu Jats in the administration (ibid., p. 108).

<sup>146</sup> . Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>147</sup> . Cited in ibid., p. 117.

<sup>148</sup> Some of them did it ostensibly and Rajputs as well as Bhumihars retaliated violently in these states (*Census of India*, 1921).

Yadavs who were anxious to emulate the upper castes. In the Bhojpuri region, Gyan Pandey, who emphasised 'the special role of the Ahirs' in this movement points out that 'we have evidence here of a relatively independent force that added a good deal of power to cow-protection activities [...] - marginally « clean » castes who aspired to full « cleanliness » by emphasising the purity of their faith and the strictness of ritual adherence to it on the issue of cow-slaughter'<sup>149</sup>. Such a process can hardly be presented as 'a relatively independent force'. Obsessed with an imitation of the upper castes, the Ahirs could not develop an alternative value system. Both phenomena may not be mutually exclusive, however. The same Ahirs who took part in the cow-protection movement and could also petition the Bihar Census Commissioner for being recognised a Kshatriya origin also refused to do *begari* (forced labour) for the upper castes<sup>150</sup>. Revisiting the notion of sanskritisation, Srinivas himself points out that it 'embodies a strong element of protest against the high castes: «We dare you to stop us emulating you» seems to be the spirit underlying emulation'<sup>151</sup>. A specialist of the Yadavs, M.S.A. Rao also questions the opposition between sanskritised movements and egalitarian movements:

«... the backward classes attempt to acquire, simultaneously goods and services belonging to religious, educational, economic and political fields. That is, they claim higher ritual status, right of entry into caste Hindu temples, or establish a set of institutions parallel to the Brahmanical ones. They claim higher educational benefits, employment opportunities and political representation. From the point of view of the social movement approach all these demands belong to the same structural (conceptual) plane as expressions of egalitarianism<sup>152</sup>.

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<sup>149</sup> . G. Pandey, 'Rallying round the cow - Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region, c. 1888-1917', in R. Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies II, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 104.

<sup>150</sup> . Bihar Census 1921. H. Jha, 'Lower-Caste Peasants and Upper-Caste Zamindars in Bihar 1921-25', Indian Economic and Social History Review, 14(4), 1977.

<sup>151</sup> . M.N. Srinivas, 'Introduction', in M.N. Srinivas (ed.), Caste - Its twentieth century avatar, op. cit., p. XV.

<sup>152</sup> . M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, op. cit., p. 236.

While the difference between sanskritisation and other low castes' movements needs not to be exaggerated, there are still differences and it is very difficult to follow Rao when he pretends that 'the Yadavs were not imitating the «twice-born castes» when they were donning the sacred thread, but were challenging their monopoly over this privilege'<sup>153</sup>. They tried to upgrade themselves while recognising the symbols of the Brahmins as superior-thesis the sanskritisation perspective. This approach does not necessarily imply a sense of equality since the caste in question may try to be recognised as higher in order to look down at the others which were on the same level. (The propensity of the Yadavs towards sanskritisation is evident from their attempt at «aryanising» their history. The first «history» of the Yadavs was written by R.V. Khedekar's father, Kithal Krishna Khedekar in the late XIXth century. This work was taken up by his son and published in 1959 under the title *The Divine Heritage of the Yadavs*. The book situates the origins of the Yadavs in the Abhiras and then the ruling dynasties mentioned as Yadavs in the Mahabharata and the Puranas. The descendants of Krishna naturally form the core group of this heritage. But dynasties regarded as Jats and Marathas, like those of Kolhapur, Barada and Bharatpur are also included in this historical reconstitution. This openness could have been part of an attempt at federating different castes but in fact, the Yadav 'historians' admit that these groups have succeeded and try to highlight the superiority of *their* caste. The ethnic dimension of their 'narrative' is therefore narrower than that of Phule or Dravidians. They try to demonstrate that Abhiras were Aryan origin. Lucio Michelutti shows that in the wake of Khedekar, K.C. Yadav and then J.N.S. Yadav – two of the most prolific Yadav intellectuals – base their claim on inscriptions which may suggest that the Ahiras were the main ruling dynasty of North India as early as the second century Before Christ<sup>154</sup>. Rewari was generally presented as the last representative of the Ahira kingdoms.

This largely mythical history enabled Yadav intellectuals to invent a golden age.

Khedekar pretends that 'Even in the vedic age the Yadavs were upholders of the Republican ideals of Government', under the aegis of

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<sup>153</sup> . Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>154</sup> . L. Michelutti, 'Ahirs-Yadavs Between Society and Politics', Paper presented at the th Conference of Association for Modern South Asian Studies, Copenhagen, Sept. 1996, p. 16.

Krishna himself<sup>155</sup>. More importantly, he stresses the Aryan origins of his caste:

The Yadavs were those 'ancient Aryans who were the custodians of this Bharat Varsha and who possessed the highest virtues which attracted God to be incarnated amongst them, to play with them, to sing the sweet melody of the Bhagavad Gita in order to bring peace and prosperity in the world. Without the help of the Yadav, Shri-Krishna could not have done anything'<sup>156</sup>.

This narrative certainly aims at giving the Yadavs an ethnic identity, but this ethnicisation process is embedded in the sanskritisation logic. In contrast to the lower castes leaders of Maharashtra and South India who tried to invent a Bahujan or a Dravidian identity which presented the Shudras and Untouchables as the originals inhabitants of the country *against* the Aryans, the Yadavs claim that they *are* Aryans in order to exhaue their status *within* caste society. W.R. Pinch cites 'Yadav-Kshatriya historians who, in the 1930s, held that Yadavs were 'the ancient citizens of the land of the Aryans' - they did not pre-date the Aryan invasions. On the contrary, they were described as having 'their origins in the main Chandravamsh [lunar line] branch of kshatriyas'<sup>157</sup>.

The All India Yadav Mahasabha, through which Khedekar federated regional associations based in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in followed the sanskritisation path under the guidance of Rao Balbir Singh, the ruler of Rewari who still played a prominent role in the Yadav movement. Interestingly, he was elected to the Punjab assembly in 1937 on a Hindu Mahasabha ticket<sup>158</sup>. The programme of the AIYM is easy to summarise. It advocated vegetarianism and teetotalism. It militated in favour of the adoption of the name 'Yadav' all over India<sup>159</sup> and so far as material interests were concerned, it incited the Yadavs to embrace new

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<sup>155</sup> . Cited in *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>156</sup> . Cited in *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>157</sup> . W.R. Pinch, Peasants and Monks in British India, Delhi, Oxford University Press, p. 90.

<sup>158</sup> . K.C. Yadav, Elections in Punjab - 1920-1947, Delhi, Manohar, 1987, p. 85.

<sup>159</sup> . M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, op. cit., p. 141.

professional careers and put pressure on the British to make the army recruit Yadavs as officers.<sup>160</sup>

While the AIYM helped the Yadavs to get united, in 1945 dissidents founded a rival caste association, the All India Yadav Sangh whose activities were even more sanskritised – it took part in the 1966 anti-cow slaughter movement for instance<sup>161</sup>. The main weakness of the Yadavs was their incapacity to make alliances with other castes of similar rank, like the Kurmis, who suffered from the same problem themselves!

The Kurmis are also concentrated in Bihar and UP where they represented respectively 3.6 and 3.5% of the population in 1931. The Kurmis generally work as cultivators and are looked at as middle caste peasants but they claim to be Kshatriyas<sup>162</sup>. The ground for this 'kshatriyaisation' process was prepared by the Ramanandi *sampraday* which, as other sectarian movements, 'welcomed shudras as equal members of the monastic community'<sup>163</sup>. The Ramanandis exerted a strong ideological influence over the Kurmis. Monks codified caste myths, established for them 'genealogical ties to either Ram or Krishna' and inculcate them 'a pure lifestyle' based on vegetarianism, teetotalism etc.<sup>164</sup>. By the last decades of the XIXth century, Kurmi leaders were the first among the low castes to fashion caste stories emphasising 'an ancient past of kshatriya distinction that had long since deteriorated into present-day shudra dishonour'<sup>165</sup>. These stories, which were gradually propagated by printed bulletins, relied on the Vaishnava mythology as spelled out by the Ramanandi order. Kurmis were presented as descending from Ram's two sons, Kush and Lav - the Kushwahas (Koeris, Kachhis and

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<sup>160</sup> . *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>161</sup> . *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>162</sup> . William Pinch emphasises that the Kurmis 'thought of themselves not as cosmically created servants (shudra) devoid of any history, but as the descendants of divine warrior clans (kshatriya) firmly rooted in the Indian past' (W.R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, op. cit., 1996, p. 6).

<sup>163</sup> . *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>164</sup> . *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>165</sup> . *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Muraos) also claim that Kush was their ancestor but interestingly not attempt at merging these two groups ever took shape<sup>166</sup>.

The first Kurmi caste association was founded in 1894 in Lucknow to protest against the British decision to reduce the recruitment of Kurmis in the police. The Kurmis of Awadh then created a Kurmi Sabha and declared that other castes like the Patidars (from Gujarat), the Kapus (from Andhra Pradesh), the Vokkaligas (from Karnataka), the Reddys, the Naidus (from Madras Presidency) and the Marathas (from Maharashtra), were also Kurmis.<sup>167</sup> The association gained momentum in 1901, during the census operations when it claimed that Kurmis were Kshatriyas. The All India Kurmi Kshatriya Mahasabha, which was officially registered in Patna in 1910, combined the defence of the caste secular interests and sanskritisation. On the one hand it canvassed for the use of the sacred thread among Kurmis<sup>168</sup>. On the other hand, it started to ask for quotas in the administration as 'backward classes'<sup>169</sup> but its action met a faint response.

Kurmis and Yadavs, even though they occupied similar social positions failed to get united. The first attempt was made in Bihar in the 1930s. It involved the Yadavs, the Kurmis and the Koeris, a caste of agriculturists representing 4.1% of the state population<sup>170</sup>. Members of those three castes joined hands in 1930 to contest the local district board elections. They lost badly but in 1934 formed the Triveni Sangh, a political party named after the confluence of three rivers, (the Ganges, the Yamuna and the Saraswati, now disappeared) in Allahabad. In 1936 about one million members had allegedly paid the four-anna (one-quarter of a rupee) fee<sup>171</sup>. However, at the same time, in 1935, the Congress formed

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<sup>166</sup> . Ibid., pp. 90-91.

<sup>167</sup> K.K. Verma, Changing role of caste associations, New Delhi, National, 1979, p. 14.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>170</sup>. According to a pre-independence official account, 'Amongst all the cultivating classes in Bihar, the most advanced are the Koeries or Kushwaha Kshatriyas. Simple in habits, thrifty to a degree and a master in the art of market-gardening, the Koeri is amongst the best of the tillers of the soil to be found anywhere in India' (D. R. Sethi, "The Bihar cultivator" in W. Burns (ed.) Sons of the soil, Delhi, Government of India, 1944 [1941], pp. 72-73).

<sup>171</sup> . W. Pinch, Peasants and Monks in British India, op. cit., p. 134.

the Backward Class Federation 'to counter what they viewed as the dangerous class features of the Triveni Sangh and Kisan Sabha movements'<sup>172</sup>. Congressmen deprived the low caste movement from some of its leaders by co-opting Kurmi leaders (such as Birchand Patel) and Yadavs (such as Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav). And then they refused to give tickets to Triveni Sangh candidates<sup>173</sup>. The party suffered from a serious setback during the 1937 elections but in the few places where it won - like Arrah and Piro - Shahabad district - upper caste landlords retaliated violently<sup>174</sup>. The Triveni Sangh and the Kisan Sabha also failed to make an alliance because of the traditional antagonism between the low castes represented by the former and the Bhumihars who dominated the latter<sup>175</sup>.

Many years later, the Kurmis tried to play a pivotal role in a similar arrangement. During the 30<sup>th</sup> session of the All India Kurmi Kshatriya Sabha, some of the delegates suggested that the word 'Kshatriya' should be removed from the name of the association and a resolution was passed to discourage the sanskritisation process. In the same way, it was decided to constitute a caste federation with the Koeris. The Kurmis leaders were not planning to create a new caste through intermarriages, but a union they called 'Raghav Samaj' - after one of the names of the Lord Ram -, a choice they justified by presenting the Kurmis and the Koeris as descending respectively from Lav and Kush, two sons of Ram. This attempt reflected the weight of the Biharis within the association. While the sessions of the Sabha were often presided over by Marathas, Patidars etc., in the 1970s about 30% of the executive bureau members were from Bihar (and 17-18% from Uttar Pradesh). The attempt to federate the Koeris and Kurmis was rather inconclusive, no doubt because of difference in their status and economic activities ; the Kurmis were cultivators who produced staples like cereals whereas the Koeris were traditionally market gardeners.

The failure of the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris to form caste federations in North India can be explained from different points of view. One explanation lay in the fact that the Yadavas 'consider themselves to

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<sup>172</sup> . Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>173</sup> . Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>174</sup> . Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> . Ibid.

be natural leaders of backward classes'<sup>176</sup>; their leaders even argued that their caste fought against injustice during the Dwapara Yug under the leadership of Krishna and that they should now show the way in the battle against the upper castes exploitation. This approach did not enable them to forge stable caste federations. According to me the division of the lower castes are more resulting from the influence of the Arya Samaj and its ideology of sanskritisation. This ethos prevented the low castes from developing a common, ethnic as well as 'federated' identity like in the West or in the South. The same kind of reasoning can be made about the untouchables' movement.

*The North Indian Untouchables and the limited ethnicisation of caste*

The Untouchables of North India were also exposed to the influence of the Arya Samaj at the turn of the XXth century.

Briggs emphasises that 'During 1911, preceding the Census enumeration, both the Arya Samaj and the Mohammedan communities made special efforts to enrol Chamars, especially those who were Christians'<sup>177</sup>. This competition was part of the politics of numbers. It concerned a small minority since in 1911 there were only 1,551 Arya Samajist Chamars in the United Provinces, but most of the Jatav leaders were exposed to it. Their name, in itself is very revealing. Jatavs are Chamars, untouchable leather workers, who claim descent from the Yadu race, which, allegedly, entitled them to be known as Kshatriyas. The Arya Samaj missions were responsible for propagating these views. They were especially successful through their schools among the sons of Agra Chamars who had become rich thanks to leather trade<sup>178</sup>. Manikchand Jatavaveer (1897-1956), one of the founders of the Jatav Mahasabha in 1917 was a teacher in a school of Agra run by the Arya Samaj<sup>179</sup>.

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<sup>176</sup> . M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>177</sup> . Geo. W. Briggs, The Chamars, Calcutta, Association Press, 1920, p. 238.

<sup>178</sup> . O. Lynch, The Politics of Untouchability - Social Mobility and Social Change in a city of India, New York, Columbia University Press, 1969, pp. 68-69.

<sup>179</sup> . R.K. Kshirsagar, Dalit Movement in India and Its Leaders, New Delhi, MD Publications, 1994, p. 230.

Sunderlal Sagar (1886-1952), another co-founder of the Sabha in Agra was even versed in Sanskrit - so much so that he was called Pandit<sup>180</sup>. A Ahir co-founder of the caste association, Swami Prabhutanand Vyas (1877-1950) was an Arya Samaj monk<sup>181</sup>. They all preached moral reform, vegetarianism, teetotalism and temperance for achieving a cleaner status<sup>182</sup>. That was also the first inclination of Swami Achhutanand (1879-1933) who was to become the most important Scheduled Caste leader of the United Provinces in the 1920s-1930s.

A Chamar, Swami Achutanand was born in a village of Farukkabad district in the United Provinces. His father was a foot soldier and his uncle a subedar in the army of British India – like Ambedkar's, his family benefited from the government's policy of recruiting untouchables in the military personnel<sup>183</sup>. He was attracted by the itinerant life of Hindu ascetics while he was still very young. He followed his guru in Bengal and Gujarat till he was 24 and then joined the Arya Samaj. He worked as an *updeshak* of the movement, under the name of Hariharnanda, from 1905 till 1912, mainly in Shuddi Sabhas which were in charge of 'purifying' untouchables<sup>184</sup>. But then he revolted against the Arya Samaj and spends five years working at exposing the organisation under his new name, Swami Achutanand (deriving from 'Achut', Untouchable). In a violent indictment of the Arya Samaj, he declared once : 'This sect has been constructed in order to save the Brahmin religion from the attacks of the Christians and Muslims. [...] Its profession of purification are a fraud and a clever verbal gimmick of the *varna* system'<sup>185</sup>. He ridiculed the Arya Samaj schemes of inter caste marriages, asking the leaders of the organisation why they do not arrange for such marriages also with twice-borns if they were true

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<sup>180</sup> . Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>181</sup> . Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>182</sup> . Kshirsagar mentions many other Jatav leaders with Arya Samajist background such as Pandit Patramsingh (1900-1972) in Delhi (ibid., p. 290), Puranchand (1900-1970) in Agra (ibid., p. 301) and Ramnarayan Yadavendu (1909-1951) also from Agra (ibid., p. 374).

<sup>183</sup> Chandrika Prasad Jigyansu, *Swami Achutanand*, Lucknow, Bahujan Kalyan Prakashak, 1960, p. 7 (Hindi).

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

reformers. In a conference he organised in Allahabad in 1930 he attacked the Arya Samajist reinterpretation of the *varna* system in the following terms :

Earlier, caste and *varna* were based on birth. Now, they are being said to be derived from the talents and achievements of a person as preached by the Arya Samaj. If this is true then left the *dwij* [twice-born] marry their sons with our simple and homely daughters for the next generation as to vindicate this truth.<sup>186</sup>

Swami Achutanand enunciated the outlines of his Adi-Hindu philosophy for the first time in 1917 twenty years after Thass in a collection of poems and couplets. According to him, the Untouchables were the first inhabitants of India and the rightful owners of this land. The Aryans came from outside, 'as refugees' who, by resorting to tactics and strategies, captured power and subordinated the autochthonous people : 'They did not win over our own ruler by their good and noble deeds but by clever manoeuvres and later called them demons and Asuru and Satan. They destroyed our culture and civilisation and made us untouchables and outcastes in the heart of our own society.'<sup>187</sup>

Swami Achutanand maintains that the Adi-Hindus had their roots in the Indus Valley civilisation in the region of Harrapa and Mohendjo Daro. He explained the difference between Shudras and Untouchables by arguing that with the coming of the Aryans those sections of the defeated people who accepted the *varna* system became *Shudras* and those who did not became Untouchables. There were also those who ran away and began to live in the forest and in the mountains to become tribals or Advasis<sup>188</sup>. The Adi-Hindu philosophy was well designed for promoting the unity of the Shudras, the Untouchables and the Tribals since it endowed those three groups with a common-cultural and ethnic background : once upon a time, they were parts and parcels of the same people. Swami Achutanand – like Ambedkar – did not pay any real attention to the Advasis but he did try to unite the two other groups in a political perspective : 'If these two categories were to come together and make an organisation then they would count for 20 crores [200 millions] and become the most important majority group – the Bahujan Samaj – in society and could make a

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

government of their own...'<sup>189</sup> [VERIFIER QUE C'EST UNE CITATION] Swami Achutanand adopted the same expression – Bahujan Samaj – as Phule. However, the organisation he launched in 1919 was called the All India Achut Caste Reform Sabha. According to his biographer, the first Adi-Hindu council was started in Andhra, then in Delhi in 1922, in Madras (the Adi-Dravid Sabha) and in Punjab (the Adi-Dharma Mandal). In Lucknow and in Poona, a journal named *Adi-Hindu* was started and, in Punjab, another newspaper *Adidas* was also launched for publicising the ideas of Swami Achutanand<sup>190</sup>.

The Adi-Hindu movement gained momentum in 1922, when Swami Achutanand protested against Gandhi's Non Cooperation Movement and especially his boycott of the Prince of Wales' visit. Swami Achutanand emphasised that the Congress was an organisation of 'twice born Brahmans who are as foreign to India as are the British'<sup>191</sup>. He argued that the Untouchables should not oppose the British, on the contrary, it was an opportune time for demanding them basic rights. He said he was favourable to the visit of the Prince of Wales and the British appreciated : when Lothian Committee organised its hearings in Lucknow, he was called upon to give a testimony about the Untouchables' conditions. Later on, in the early 1930s, he asked the British for the introduction of separate electorates.

The Congress leaders took exception of his pro-British stands. He was accused of being a Christian in disguise and an agent of the British paid for dividing the Hindu community. But in fact, the (upper caste) congressmen's hostility came from his emancipatory discourse and the way he was mobilising the Untouchables against the caste system. His strong criticism of the Manusmriti was especially resented. A poem called « Manusmriti is burning us » was read at the end of the UP Adi-Sabha Conference in 1927, the very same year when Ambedkar had the text actually burnt in Mahad. In reaction, the Arya Samaj started an All India Shradhdhanand Dalitodwar Sabha whose objective was to break up the Adi-

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>190</sup> He started also a newspaper in Kanpur, called initially *Achut* but whose name was changed later in *Adi-Hindu* (Ibid., p. 100-101). In addition to these periodicals, he published books propagating his ideas. But they came out after he died in 1933 under revealing titles, *The Creation and the Progress of Humanities* and *The Civilisation of the Aborigenes in India*.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

Hindu movement<sup>192</sup>. With the help of G.D. Birla, M. M. Malaviya also started an All India Achutodwar Sabha, which organised meetings between 1924 and 1927. Later on it merged with the Congress – backed All India Dalit Varg Sabha.

There were direct confrontations between Swami Achutanand and Congress leaders in several occasions. Once, during the Mahakumbh Mela of Allahabad, the Arya Samaj organised an All India Dalit Liberation Conference under the auspices of Purushottamdas Tandon, a conservative Congressman, one of Malaviya's lieutenants in UP politics. In this forum, Tandon spoke about the Hindu mythology and how the Nishads found liberation by washing the feet of Ram and worshipped him. This discourse infuriated Swami Achutanand whose reaction radicalised the Conference, so much so that two resolutions were passed. One stated that all dalits can sell food items at the railways stations. The other one that the washing clothes and making shoes was the vocational task of the Adi-Hindus and that any twice-born Hindu engaging in this matter should marry his children amongst these castes and share their food<sup>193</sup>. The later resolution amounted at consolidating the caste system.

Swami Achutanand's attitude towards the caste system remained ambivalent indeed. For instance, in the Adi-Hindu Sabhas the caste and sub-castes were all represented : instead of trying to eradicate them, Swami Achutanand recognised castes amongst the Untouchables. More importantly, his egalitarian discourse was largely framed in a religious mould drawing its inspiration from the *bhakti* tradition. Swami Achutanand, even after leaving the Arya Samaj remained a sadhu. He was given his official name, 108<sup>th</sup> Swami Achutanand in revealing circumstances. In the late 1920s he organised in Delhi, outside the Red Fort, the foundation meeting of a Jati Sudhar Achut Sabha (Dalit Sabha for Caste Reform) when he challenged any Brahmin to *shastrarth* for the interpretation of the classical Hindu text and epics. He was opposed by a well-known Pandit, Akhilanand Kaviratan but declared the winner and conferred the title of 108<sup>th</sup> Swami Achutanand by an assembly of 'high class Brahmins and leading Arya Samaji leaders of Delhi and northern India'<sup>194</sup>. It was certainly on their part a shrewd way to coopt him. He obviously resisted this attempt but did adopt the style of many Dalit saints before him. He draw

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

his inspiration partly from the *bhakti* idiom. According to C.P. Jigyansu, 'His style of address was poetic and musical, similar to the Bhakti leaders of the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century, but his discourse was radical and biting'<sup>195</sup>. This is a very apt way at describing the ambivalence of Swami Achutanand. His biographer pertinently emphasised that the 'Adi-Hindu agitation had started in a religious mould'. Indeed, after severing his links with the Arya Samaj, Swami Achutanand studied the writings of the Sikh Gurus, Kabir, Dadudayal, Namdev and Redam Sahib. He borrowed from them a very particular method of exposition since he 'relied a lot on the discourse of the Bhakti movement. Singing, chanting formed an essential part of his meetings. This old style of discourse is very particular to the cultures of the oral tradition where songs, poems and other narratives formed an essential ideological component of the preachings'<sup>196</sup>. This *modus operandi* stood in stark contrast with Ambedkar's westernized style. While Swami Achutanand supported Ambedkar – for instance during his conflict with Gandhi over the separate electoral issue – he might have been uneasy by his condemnation of the *bhakti*. Furthermore, Swami Achutanand organised some of his meetings during religious functions. In 1931, he held a conference on the preachings of Kabir in the heart of brahmanical orthodoxy, the Allahabad Maherkumbha Mela. Basically, Swami Achutanand discovered social equality in religion :

'Our religion is not Brahminism but Sant Dharma or Sufi way of life. Our religion does not believe in discrimination or differences between humans. For all humans are equal and have equal rights'<sup>197</sup>.

He also said :

We are outside the Brahmin religion. As we are not allowed to go to the temples, that proves the fact that we do not belong to Brahmin religion. Our religion is the way of the *saints* or the *sufi* way. This has been our religion since centuries or even longer. Our religion has produced hundreds of saints and their preachings constitute our religion. Our mothers and sisters since centuries have been praying to the mother earth because this land is the land of our forefathers and their forefathers. We do not need any other religion ; our religion is already with us. We do not need any purification. Ours is the oldest religion, even older than the sufis of Palestine. Gautam

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-76.

<sup>197</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

Buddha propagated this religion. There is no discrimination or inequality or untouchability in it, as it is practised by the Brahmins. There is no high caste or low caste persons there is only the human race and all are equal before God<sup>198</sup>.

This quotation is a good summary of the thought of Swami Achutanand. He emphasises that the Untouchables are the original inhabitants of India and that, correlatively, they are the torchbearers of the most ancient religion. This creed, however, recalls the *bhakti* cults since it emphasises the worship of saints and equality before God. Ambedkar always criticised the *bhakti* cults because they delinked equality before God from social equality – and he accused Gandhi to do the same.

Nandini Gooptu convincingly argues that the Adi Hindu movement arose in the wake of the resurgence of *bhakti* cults among the Untouchables in the late XIXth century – early XXth century<sup>199</sup>. Worshipping Kabir and Ravidas then became widespread among urban untouchables migrants in U.P , and ceased to be practised only by insular religious orders<sup>200</sup> : new temples and statues were built, festivals and pilgrimages organised. However, such a promotion of what was after all a form of Hinduism was not likely to imbue the Untouchables with a separate identity like in Dravidian India. If '*bhakti* was resurrected as a caste-based religious expression solely of the untouchables', it could not be practised 'as a form of denial of caste distinctions'<sup>201</sup>.

Indeed, N. Gooptu admits that 'the criticism of the caste system by the Adi Hindu leaders was rather limited and had a narrow focus on the lack of rights or opportunities for the untouchables. The leaders did jettison the notions of «low» or «impure», but concentrated on proving that such stigma and disabilities should not be attached to them due to caste status. Nor did they attempt to question the concept that work was inherited. Instead they claimed that «low» work was not the true

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<sup>198</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> N. Gooptu, 'Caste and labour: Untouchable social Movements in Urban Uttar Pradesh in the Early Twentieth Century', in P. Robb (ed.), *Dalit Movements and the Meaning of Labour in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* p. 278.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.* p.284.

inheritance of the Untouchables. It was largely to buttress this claim that they asserted their pre-Aryan ancestry as the original rulers of India, for it enabled them to argue that they should re-inherit the ancient rights of which they had been deprived'<sup>202</sup>.

Far from establishing a separate identity that would situate the Untouchables out of the caste system, the Adi Hindu movement used their so-called original identity as a means for promoting their status *within* the system. And correlatively, the *bhakti* resurgence did not imply a radical questioning of their belonging to Hinduism. They questioned Brahminism by adhering to a rather popular tradition but their practise of this religious cult recalls the *modus operandi* of the Hindu sects – which precisely derived from *bhakti* – whose egalitarian impact has always been otherworldly. While in Pundjab the Ad-Dharm movement was projected as a *quaum*, or independent community, rather than a *panth*, or religious path<sup>203</sup>, in the Hindi belt – the Adi Hindu movement could not achieve so much.

The movement also suffered from organisational weaknesses. While the 'informal nature of links between apex Adi Hindu organisations in the towns and local caste-groups in neighbourhoods contributed to the strength and breadth of the movement'<sup>204</sup>, by 1924 local Adi Hindu Sabhas had been set up in only four cities of U.P. ( Kanpur, Lucknow, Benares and Allahabad). In fact the Adi-Hindu movement remained chiefly confined to Agra and Kanpur. Out of the 23 main Dalit leaders of the United Provinces in the first half of the century, almost 50% were from these two cities (eight from Agra and two from Kanpur)<sup>205</sup>.

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 291. In her conclusion, N. Gooptu further argues that 'The Adi Hindu leaders thus did not pose a direct threat to the caste system, even though their conception of it as an instrument for imposing social inequalities implied a critique of ritual hierarchy' ( Ibid., p. 298).

<sup>203</sup> M. Jurgensmeyer, Religious as Social Vision : the Movement against Untouchability in 20 th century Punjab, Berkeley, 1982, pp. 45\_55.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>205</sup> . In both places, the social reform work had been prepared by sectarian movements such as the Radha Soami Satsang established by Radha Soami (1818-1878) in Agra and the Dev Samaj, founded in 1887 by Siva Narayan Agnihotri of Kanpur. S.K. Gupta, The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics. Their emergence as a political power, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985, p. 403.

In addition to these limitations, the movement also failed to unite the Untouchables, in terms of commensality or otherwise. Its leaders tried to organise inter\_dining ceremonies but did not meet very enthusiastic responses<sup>206</sup>. Untouchables leaders of North India could not agree either about the strategy that was to be implemented vis-à-vis the British. The Yatavs are a case in point. In the late 1920s, the All India Shri Jatav Mahasabha submitted a very telling memorandum to the Simon Commission:

Our Mahasabha is fully alive to the fact that there can be no advancement so long as there is no real improvement in the political status of a community. It is idle to attribute the depression of the depressed classes to the religious and social system of the Hindus. If Government were to improve their political status by giving them honorary offices, adequate representation on local bodies and legislatures and in public services commensurate with their numerical strength, their social position would automatically improve and social injustice would become a thing of the past. For social position of the depressed classes would rise *pari passu* with the rise in their economic condition - a thing which is inconceivable in the case of any community without advancement of its political status<sup>207</sup>.

Such a discourse foreshadows – or echoes - one of Ambedkar's main intuitions, namely that only power could enable his caste-mates to emancipate themselves<sup>208</sup>. However, all the Jatavs did not share these views. For instance, a special meeting of the United Provinces Depressed Classes Conference was held on 14-15 April 1928 at Agra to protest against the participation of the Adi-Hindu movement to the work of the Simon Commission<sup>209</sup>. In fact this movement was impeded by the activism of the Dalit leaders who stuck to the sanskritisation approach. It was especially affected by the competition of the Depressed Classes League

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>207</sup> . Cited in S.K. Gupta, The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics, op. cit., p. 243.

<sup>208</sup> . Ambedkar once even said that 'the problem of the Depressed Classes will never be solved unless they get political power in their own hands' (R.K. Kshirsagar, Dalit Movement in India, op. cit., p. 403).

<sup>209</sup> . R.K. Kshirsagar, Dalit Movement in India, op. cit., p. 144.

that was founded at Lucknow in 1935 by R.L. Biswas with Jagjivan Ram as General Secretary and P.N. Rajbhoj as Secretary. The moving spirit behind this association - at least one of its chief architects - Dharam Prakash, was a staunch arya samajist who opposed Ambedkar's moves in favour of conversion and was elected to the Constituent Assembly, and then to the Rajya Sabha, on a Congress ticket<sup>210</sup>.

In the 1930s, a similar division opposed the proponents of joint electorates with reserved seats, such as Bohre Khem Chand the president of the All India Shri Jatava Mahasabha (and the vice president of the All India Depressed Classes Association) and those who supported Ambedkar's demand regarding separate electorates, such as the United Provinces Adi-Hindu (Depressed Classes) Association<sup>211</sup>. This cleavage more or less coincided with the one opposing the proponents of sankritisation and those who were more favourably inclined towards an egalitarian, ambedkarite strategy, the important point being here that the former tended to dominate the Jatav movement till the 1930s. After the publication of the White Paper which was to be the basis (?) of the 1935 Government of India Act, the Agra based Jatav Conference sent a memorandum to the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India where it was said :

The Jatavs are the descendents of Yadu, the founder of Jadav [sic] tribe, from which the great Hero of Maha Bharat, Lord Krishna, came. But this position of superiority could not remain intact. Our community fell down from that great height to this degraded status in the Hindu fold [...] our present position is the outcome of the age-long inhumane oppressions of Brahminism or the Kshatriyas. We, Kshatriyas of the past, are labouring under various sorts of disabilities, restrictions and religious injunctions imposed on us by the Orthodox Hindus [...] But we are at loss to understand the exclusion of our (Yadav) Jatav community from the list of the Scheduled Castes given in the White Paper. The result of this horrible negligence would, no doubt, be the sacrifice of the interests of our community.<sup>212</sup>

Such a discourse suggests that the Jatav movement was still under the influence of sanskritisation. Owen Lynch points out that 'The Jatavs

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<sup>210</sup> . Ibid., pp. 208-209.

<sup>211</sup> . S.K. Gupta, The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics, op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>212</sup> . Memorandum of Jatav Conference of Agra, in IOR. L/P&J/9/108.

were not attempting to destroy the caste system; rather they were attempting to rise within it in a valid, though not licit, way<sup>213</sup>.

The influence of Ambedkar made a strong impact on the Jatav movement in the 1940s so much so that the Maharashtrian scenario – with Dalit acquiring a separate Buddhist identity could be used to avoid the trap of sanskritisation. Even those who did not convert themselves to Buddhism regarded the Untouchables as descending from the original Buddhists and, therefore, prided themselves of being the original Indians: ‘Buddhist identity has replaced Sanskritic Kshatriya identity’<sup>214</sup>. The Jatav movement could therefore rely on the same ethnic ground as the Bahujan movement in Maharashtra and the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. Also, for the Jatavs, ‘political participation’ became a ‘functional alternative’ to sanskritisation<sup>215</sup>, in the sense that they tried to achieve social mobility through access to power. This empowerment process was fostered by the British policies of positive discrimination and gradual democratisation since they both incited the caste to transform itself into a pressure group and to assert itself as a collective body. However, such a change was confined to the Jatavs of Agra. Except the president of the Scheduled Caste Federation of the United Provinces, Piarelall Kureel (1916-1984), who was a Kureel from Unnao district, most of the supporters of Ambedkar were Jatav’s from Agra movement. A similar evolution only took place with the Noniya (salt makers) who abandoned the Arya Samaj for political action and the Mallahs (fishermen, boatmen) Babu Ramcharanji (1889-1935) who had founded the All India Nishad Maha Sabha in 1920 joined the Adi-Hindu movement in 1925 and became president of the Adi-Hindu Sabha in 1927<sup>216</sup>. In 1933 the All India Nishada Sabha claimed that ‘the Mallahs are the descendants of the ancient Nishadas and Chandalas of the Vedic age and they themselves and the Hindus in general regard them as such up to the present time’<sup>217</sup>.

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<sup>213</sup> . O. Lynch, The Politics of Untouchability, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>214</sup> . O. Lynch, The Politics of Untouchability, op. cit., p. 206. See also p. 93.

<sup>215</sup> . Ibid ;, p. 7.

<sup>216</sup> . R.K. Kshirsagar, Dalit Movement in India, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>217</sup> . Letter from the President of the All India Nishada Sabha to the Home Member (Government of the United Provinces), dated 27 March 1933, in IOR. L/P&J/9/108.

In many cases sanskritisation - on the basis of arya samajist influences or not - remained prevalent. In the 1911 and 1921 censuses, some 26 low castes claimed the status of the twice-born castes<sup>218</sup>. Certainly, sanskritisation and social mobility were not mutually exclusive but the former reflected the pervasiveness of the value system of the caste hierarchy anyway. In 1935, after the publicisation of the government of India Act, the All India Dhobi [washermen, launder] Association protested against the exclusion of their caste from the Scheduled Castes which had been decided under pressures from other associations such as the Arya Samaj oriented United Provinces Razak (Dhobi) Association which pursued the sanskritisation path. The President of the latter organisation, for whom Dhobis were Kshatriyas, considered that giving his caste fellows the status of Untouchables would be 'a stigma on character and ability, an obstruction to self-advancement and improvement'<sup>219</sup>. Similar conflicts happened in the case of the Khatiks, an Untouchable caste of meat cutters<sup>220</sup>. The Dusadh Mahasabha also claimed that Dusadhs were Kshatriyas<sup>221</sup>. The Bundelkhand Prantia Kori Sabha, which claimed 20,000 members passed a resolution in 1936 to support the view that 'the Koris of India have always been classified amongst the touchable castes with the right to Samskaras' and that in the Manusmriti they are 'held to be born of a Kshatriya in a Vaishya mother'. Interestingly, the association referred to resolutions passed by caste panchayats in a dozen of districts distributed between Lahore and Jhansi, its headquarters<sup>222</sup>.

Similarly, the salt manufacturers of North India, the Noniyas, who belong to the lower orders of the shudras, did not emancipate themselves

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<sup>218</sup> . S.K. Gupta, The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>219</sup> . Letter from the President of the United Provinces Razak (Dhobi) Association, 22 June 1936, IOR. L/P&J/9/108.

<sup>220</sup> . Letter from the Government the United Provinces, dated 3 July 1934, IOR. L/P&J/9/108.

<sup>221</sup> . R.K. Kshirsagar, Dalit Movement in India, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>222</sup> . Memorandum to the Secretary of State for India, through the Reforms Commissioner U.P., Naini Tal, 10 Oct. 1936, IOR. L/P&J/9/108.

from the sanskritisation pattern till the 1960s-70s. In 1898 rich notable of the caste established an association claiming for the Noniyas the status of Cauhan Rajputs. The 'New Cauhans' undertook to ritually don the sacred thread, something the upper castes strongly objected for sometimes. For William Rowe, the 'Cauhan Movement' provided the Noniyas 'a mechanism which allowed them to reduce the discrepancy between their contrasting positions in the ritual and economic hierarchies' but this movement 'does not challenge but rather upholds the traditional stratification system'<sup>223</sup>. Interestingly, in the early 1960s, the 'new Cauhans' still considered the RPI 'as «the dirtiest party in India» (i.e., in its opposition to caste it encourages interdining of castes and intercaste marriage...'<sup>224</sup>. However, the youngest generation was dissociating itself from sanskritisation and get more politicised. Like in Madras and Bombay twenty years ago when the Montagu – Chennmsford reforms had fostered the organisation and politicisation of the lower castes, the Untouchables mobilised in the context of the 1935 Government of India Acts. However, too major differences remained. The above examples suggest that the proponents of sanskritisation remained strong and hindered the efforts made by others for uniting the caste against the brahminical order. Secondly, when castes reached this kind of unity they did not succeed in forging federations. The Jatavs organised a mere section of the Chamars for instance.

### Conclusion

In his typology of the low caste movements, M.S.A. Rao distinguish five categories<sup>225</sup>. The first one is characterised by 'withdrawal and self-organisation'. It is epitomised by the Izhavas movement which has many common features with the traditional bhakti way of contesting caste by resorting to sectarian arrangements (a Guru leads his group 'out of society' to promote his self-esteem). The second one, illustrated by the Yadavs is based on the claim of 'higher *varna* status' and to my mind fits in the sanskritisation pattern. The Ahird one extols 'the virtues of the non-Aryan (Dravidian) culture'. It took shape in South India and in Maharashtra to a lesser extent. The fourth one negates Hinduism for

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<sup>223</sup> . W.L. Rowe, 'The New Cauhans: a caste mobility movement in North India', in J. Silverberg (ed.), Social Mobility in the Caste System in India, The Hague/Paris, Mouton, 1968, p. 74.

<sup>224</sup> . Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>225</sup> . M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, op. cit., p. 211ff.

embracing Buddhism, this is the Ambedkar movement. The last one relies on the Marxist ideology. For Rao, except in the latter, in all these movements 'the religious element forms an essential part of protest ideology'<sup>226</sup>. I would argue that religion is not an essential feature of the Dravidian movement, compared to ethnicity and that the same thing can be said about the Maharashtrian movements, not only the Satyashodak Samaj, that Rao ignores, but also, to a large extent, the Ambedkar movement.

I would rather argue that the low caste movements can be regrouped in two broad categories: on the one hand, the reform movements situating themselves within the caste system and relying on the mechanisms of sanskritisation; on the other hand those which are based on an ethnic or a western ideology with a strong egalitarian overtone. The Yadav movement - and the Izhavas to a lesser extent - can be classified in the first group whereas all the other ones belong to the second category. Interestingly, none of the latter ones has a North Indian origin.

To explain the difference between the Hindi belt movements and those which emerged beyond the Deccan, M.S.A. Rao emphasised that in North India Brahmins were 'generally backward with regard to modern education and government employment'<sup>227</sup>, compared to the Kayasths and the Banyas and that, therefore, a non-Brahmin movement could not crystallise like in the South where the Brahmins attracted general resentment because they monopolised the élite functions. This is probably not the only reason. The influence that the value system of caste continued to exert over North India is certainly a key factor of the prevailing pattern of sanskritisation and the correlative divisions as well as apathy of the lower castes. The resilience of this hierarchical mindset is well illustrated by the attitude of the North Indian princes. Whereas the rulers of Kolhapur, Baroda, Bhavnagar and Mysore gave a determining support to the non-Brahmin movements, those of Rewari (cf. Yadav), Bharatpur (cf. Jat), Gwalior (cf. Maratha) and Dholpur (cf. Jat)- to cite only some of the non-upper caste Maharajahs - tended to support the caste system. All of them entertained close links with the Hindu nationalist movement at one stage or another. As noticed above, the ruler of Rewari joined the Hindu Mahasabha in the 1930s. The Maharajah of Dholpur presided over the Jat Mahasabha, whose sanskritising Hinduism has been

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<sup>226</sup> . M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, op. cit., p. 217

<sup>227</sup> . M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation, op. cit., p. 11.

noticed above<sup>228</sup>. The Maharajah of Bharatpur supported the RSS<sup>229</sup>. In Gwalior, the Maharajah Jivaji Rao - who got married with a Rajput - supported the Hindu Sabha and his main lieutenant, the Sardar C.S. Angre - also a Maratha - became one of its 'zonal organiser' for the 1951-52 elections<sup>230</sup>.

The resilience of the sanskritisation pattern in North India, which was largely due to the fact that the upper castes were in large numbers and had a strong grasp over land and government services, greatly affected the low caste movements since it prevented them from establishing their claim on ethnic grounds and from shaping large coalitions like the non-Brahmin groupings or at least from forging caste federations. By contrast with the situation prevailing in the southern and western India, their mobilisation stopped with caste associations. They started to move towards the formation of larger fronts when the State extended its compensatory discrimination policy to what became known as the 'Other Backward Classes'.

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<sup>228</sup> . N. Datta, 'Arya samaj and the Making of Jat Identity', op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>229</sup> . S. Mayaram, Resisting regimes. Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 171.

<sup>230</sup> . For more details, see C. Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, London, Hurst, 1996, p. 109-110.