PERSISTENCE OF CASTE IN SOUTH INDIA -
AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE HINDU AND CHRISTIAN NADARS

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The subject matter of this thesis lies within the field of caste in India, with special reference to the Nadar caste of South India. The Hindu Nadar caste has been in existence for centuries. Some of its members were converted to Christianity by Roman Catholic missionaries in the seventeenth century, and later. Their descendants form an exclusive group, living mostly in South India. A Protestant group came into being in the nineteenth century, in the Tinnevelly district, as a result of evangelisation by missionaries from England. Members of the Nadar caste, Hindu and Christian, are now found in large numbers in the southern districts of Tinnevelly, Rammad, Madura, and in the southern districts of Travancore.[1] Besides spreading to other parts of India, many families have migrated to Ceylon, Burma and Malaya. An account of caste in India will be given as a background to a study of the Nadars, with certain objectives in view.

The title of the thesis is Persistence of Caste

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[1] The London Missionary Society has been working in the Travancore State since 1806. Conversions from the Nadar caste are referred to in Bishop Waskom Pickett's Christian Mass Movements in India. New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: The Abingdon Press, 1933.

in South India - an analytical study of the Hindu and
Christian Nadars. The problem is the persistence of caste
in the Protestant group, whose members are the descend-
ants of the converts of the Tinnevelly district. The
latter group was selected for study rather than the Roman
Catholic group,[2] and the basis for the selection is ex-
plained below.

The early European Protestant missionaries, espec-
ially those who came from England, condemned as "heathen"
the caste customs which the converts persisted in prac-
tising. The missionaries thought that there was "func-
tional inconsistency" between belief and practice when
the Nadar converts differentiated between their own caste
group and Christians drawn from other castes, purely on
the basis of caste. The Protestant Nadar group,[3] in spite
of all opposition from their Church authorities, con-
tinued to preserve their caste identity by using the
caste label and by following caste customs, in trying to

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[2] See Chapter III, Caste and Religion, for toler-
ance of caste practices by Roman Catholic missionaries,
and the example set by Robert de Nobili who reached South
India in 1605.

[3] The Protestant group analyzed in this thesis
does not include the descendants of Nadars of Travancore
State that were converted by the London Missionary Society.
They belong to another linguistic (Malayalam) area, and
to a different political state. Some of them now belong
to the Tamil linguistic area of the Madras State after
the recent reorganization of states, when a newly formed
district of Kanyakumari was added to Madras.

maintain themselves as an exclusive social group. The ancestors of this group, the early converts, had been rejected by the Hindu Nadars. Gradually the gulf of separation has been bridged, and the two groups have got closer together through various cultural links.[4] The Tinnevelly Gazetteer (1917) reported about the Nadar caste that, "Converts from the caste to Christianity live on friendly terms with their Hindu brethren, and the fact that some members of a family may be Hindus and others Christian does not give rise to dissension. If a Hindu wishes to marry a Christian, one or the other must change his or her religion."[5]

The objectives of the thesis are related to the problem stated above. They are: firstly to see what aspects of caste exist in the Christian Nadar group selected for study, in order to justify the use of the term sub-caste in reference to that group. Secondly, to seek an explanation for the persistence of caste in that group, for which it is necessary to see what significance the existing aspects of caste have for the members of

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[4] The Roman Catholic group, which originated in the Tinnevelly district, is very exclusive - its members may marry only within that part of the Nadar caste that belongs to the Roman Church.

[5] Madras District Gazetteers-Tinnevelly, Vol. I. Madras: Government Press, 1917, p. 131.

the group. The reasons for choosing these objectives
are:

1. The Christian Nadar has not been studied as
a sub-caste of the Nadar caste. Nor has any satisfactory
explanation been sought for the persistence of caste in
a non-Hindu group.

2. There has been no study to find out whether
the Hindu and the Christian have come to value caste
apart from their respective religious affiliation.

3. An inquiry into the relative importance of
religious beliefs and practices in the context of social
behavior, as prescribed by caste tradition, can show how
caste may be studied apart from religion - a procedure
adopted in this thesis.

4. When caste-observing Hindus like the Nadars
were converted to Christianity by Christian missionaries,
belonging to a casteless society, there were two levels
of integration possible: social and religious. It would
be interesting to know the degree of integration achieved
on each level between the Western European Christian and
the Christian Nadar.[6]

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[6] The Christian Nadar henceforth may be taken to
mean only that group of Nadars converted to Christianity
by the Anglican Missionary Societies in the Tinnevelly
district, and their descendants.

Sources of information were sought through the following channels: library studies and field work in South India. Much of the background reading was done in the Library of Congress where both primary and secondary sources were available. Some spade work had been done, earlier, in the Government Secretariat Library in New Delhi. During December 1956 and January 1957 some sources not available here were found in the Connemara Public Library at Madras, and in the Library of the Theological Seminary of the Church of South India at Thirumaraiyur, near Nazareth[7] in Tinnevelly.[8]

First hand information on the Nadar caste has been available to the writer as a participant observer. In the summer of 1952 a field trip to the districts of Tinnevelly, Ramnad and Madura, including towns and villages, was undertaken specially for collecting data on the social importance of the maternal uncle among the Nadars and other castes.[9] In December 1956 another visit to the area brought in more data, especially life-history

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[7] See Map of the Tinnevelly district in the Appendix.

[8] Tinnevelly by itself may be taken to refer to the district of Tinnevelly.

[9] The data were later included in a paper, "The Maternal Uncle in South India," which was read before the Anthropology section of the Indian Science Congress that met at Lucknow in January 1953.

material in the form of autobiography and answers to a questionnaire (see Appendix for form) which had been prepared in Washington, before leaving for India.

One hundred and fifty forms of a self-administering questionnaire were given to friends and relatives of the writer for distribution to Christian Nadars living in Tinnevelly, Tanjore, Madras, Delhi and Bombay. Of these only thirty have been completed and returned by the respondents. One hundred forms, identical with the form given to Christians, excepting for the omission of the item regarding the choice of religion, were given for distribution to Hindu Nadars in Tuticorin, Palamcottah, Virudhunagar and Bombay. Of these only eighteen forms have been completed. A few of the forms were completed in the presence of the writer, but most of them were mailed to Washington. Ten autobiographies also were received, eight from Christians and two from Hindus. In the covering note to the questionnaire, the object of the inquiry was explained, and the respondents were asked to feel free to withhold their names. Excepting for one, every single person has given his or her full name. The completed forms and the autobiographies, while emphasizing the social structure, cultural milieu and importance of social solidarity, also convey the changing attitudes towards caste in theory and practice.

In making a study of the Nadar Caste one has to

be aware of the terms used with reference to the caste.
Most of the sources refer to the Nadar caste as _Shanan_
and _Shanar_. The members of the caste prefer to use the
terms _Nadan_ and _Nadar_, reserving the other two terms for
designating the actual climbers of the palmyra palm, or
at times they use them in a derogatory manner. In _Some
South Indian Villages_ (1918), Gilbert Slater defines the
term _Shanars_ in the Glossary thus:

> _Shanars_ the great toddy drawing caste of the Tamil
> country, specially numerous in the extreme south of
> the Peninsula, where there is a considerable area
> where the palmyra is the sole means of subsistence.
> They call themselves _Nadars_, and claim to be by origin
> a landowning and soldier caste worsted in war by the
> Madura monarchs. They have been regarded by some
> other castes as Panchamas[10] and their right to enter
> Hindu temples disputed; and there is a bitter feud
> between them and the Maravas[11]. Great numbers have
> become Christians, and they are rapidly rising in
> education, wealth and social status.[12]

There has been some controversy over the term
Shanan and _Shanar_; and in official reports like the Cen-
sus of India, District Gazetteers and Manuals, the name
Shanan has been used to designate the caste, though there
is also the addition of _Nadan_ mentioned as a title. In
The Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. VI (1909),

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[10] See Glossary.

[11] See Glossary.

[12] Gilbert Slater (ed.), _Some South Indian Vil-
lages._ University of Madras Economics Series, Vol. I,
Oxford University Press, 1918, p. 255.

Edgar Thurston states that the caste name is Shanan, but
that the terms Nadan and Gramani are used as caste titles.
He quotes from the Census Report:

>   Regarding the derivation of the words Shanan,
> Nadan, Gramani, much ingenuity has been exercised.
> Shanan is not found in earlier Tamil literature at
> all . . . . The Shanans say that Shanan is derived
> from the Tamil word Sanrar or Sanror, which means
> the learned or the noble. But it does not appear
> that the Shanans were ever called Sanrar or Sanror
> in any of the Tamil works. The two words Nadan and
> Gramani mean the same thing, namely ruler of a coun-
> try or of a village, the former being a Tamil and
> the latter a Sanskrit word. Nadan, on the other
> hand, means a man who lives in the country, as op-
> posed to Uran, the man who resides in a village.13

Whatever the meaning of the derivation, the rele-
vance lies in recognizing the use of the terms, Nadan,
Nadar, Shanan and Shanar. Nadan is singular masculine,
equivalent to Shanan (the feminine singular is Nadachee
and Shanathee respectively), Shanar is plural in Tamil
for the group. Shanars and Nadars are plural terms in
English, but when Nadar is used in Tamil it is a title
like, Esquire at the end of an English name, or Aiyer or
Aiyengar, among Brahmans in South India. The significance
of the terms will be inferred, in actual use, from the
following sentences in Tamil: Avan Shanan, Avan Nadan
(he is a Shanan, he is a Nadan); Avar Nadar (he is a
Nadar), but the word avar is plural, used for respect.

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13 Edgar Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern
India. Vol. VI. Madras: Government Press, 1909, p. 368.

Similarly _Avaragal_ _Nadargal_ means they are Nadars, the
word, _Nadargal_ conveying the plurality. It will be seen
that the suffix "-gal" indicates the plural use. (In
common parlance the term _Nadakkal_ is used for _Nadargal_.)
In English the use of _Nadars_ for the plural is preferable
to _Nadans_, which is used in some of the English references.

Henceforth in this thesis the Shanar caste will be
referred to only as the Nadar caste, and its members will
be called Nadars in plural, and Nadar in singular, as the
necessity may be.

There are no statistics to indicate the total
number of the Nadar caste. The last Census did not re-
cord population caste-wise, and the policy of the Indian
Government is to disregard all caste labels. Census of
India reports relating to Madras, since 1881[14] have been
giving figures for the various caste groups. The figures
for the Nadar caste, given under the category, _Shanan_,
do not include the Christians, whose number got merged
with the general category for Christians of all denomin-
ations. For instance, in the 1901 Census of India the
figure for _Shanan_ is given as 759,351, and the caste is

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[14] The Imperial Census of 1881 gives the distri-
bution of the caste _Shanan_ throughout the Madras Presi-
dency. No distinction is clearly indicated between
tappers of the different kinds of palms. _Imperial Cen-_
sus of 1881. Vol. II, Final Census Tables. Madras:
Government Press, 1883.

said to be "chiefly found in Southern India."[15] The Census figure for 1911 is given as 641,976,[16] and for 1921, it is 655,252.[17] The decrease could be accounted for by factors like emigration and conversion.

In the Census Report for 1901 there is a map which gives the proportions of Christians in the Madras Presidency, and the computation is "over a million".[18] This number covers Roman Catholics (including some from the Nadar caste), and all the Protestant denominations, Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, etc. These facts serve to show how very difficult it is to arrive at any figures for the Nadar caste at present, either totally or separately under the categories, Hindu and Christian. Caldwell's Lecture (1869) on Tinnevelly and the Tinnevelly Mission refers to the number of converts in Tinnevelly district:

> The total number of Christian converts in Tinnevelly, that is, of persons who have abandoned the worship of the demons . . . is upwards of

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[15]   Census of India, Vol. I, Part I, 1901. Madras: Government Press, 1902.

[16]   Census of India, Vol. XII, Part II, 1911. Madras: Government Press, 1912.

[17] Census of India, Vol. XIII, Part II, 1921. Madras: Government Press, 1922.

[18]   Census of India, Vol. I, Part I, 1921. Madras: Government Press, 1922.

58,000. This is the number of souls, that is, as in all population records, it includes men, women and children.19

The records of the Tinnevelly Mission indicate that conversion to Christianity from the ranks of the Hindu Nadar had been going on continuously even after 1869, when the number, according to Caldwell, was 58,000. Supposing no more were converted, by natural increase the Tinnevelly Nadar Christians should now number about 130,000. And the Hindu Nadars' number, calculated on the basis of the first reporting of the 1901 Census, 759,351, by natural increase, should now be about 1,237,000.[20] But this estimation has no value since in the absence of reliable and specific information of the relative numbers of the Tinnevelly Protestant Christians and the Hindu Nadars, it is not possible to suggest any approximations. On the basis of subjective impressions, the present

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[19] Rev. Robert Caldwell (later Bishop), Tinnevelly and the Tinnevelly Mission. London: Printed for the S.P.G., Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1857, p. 15.

[20] The calculations were made on the basis of population growth on the All-India decennial rate for the decades 1891, 1901 and 1911; and on the Madras growth rate for the next four decades. The references used are: Kingsley Davis, The Population of India and Pakistan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, p. 27; Statistical Abstract for India for 1933-1954. Published by Central Statistical Organization, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, Delhi, 1956; p. 31; India, a Reference Manual. Published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi, 1955, p. 10.

Christian group appears to be more numerous than 130,000,
and the proportion to the Hindus is inferred to be lar-
ger accordingly. Besides the Christians, and to some ex-
tent the Hindus also, have many relatives employed in
Ceylon, Burma and Malaya, let alone the other parts of
India. Since the Nadar caste of Tinnevelly is confined
to South India, those who have moved out of the area
would not be shown in the official census reports of the
Madras State.

This chapter has so far outlined the subject, the
problem, and objectives of the research design. Sources
of information, terms referring to the Nadar caste, and
the difficulty of arriving at correct population figures
for the Hindu and Christian Nadars have been explained.
The next chapter will give a formal discussion of the
caste system of India. In the third chapter the rela-
tion between caste and religion will be discussed, as
well as the attitude of Christian missionaries, both
Roman Catholic and Protestant, to caste observances on
the part of the Christian converts. In the next chap-
ter the position of the Hindu Nadar will be considered
against the background of Hindu society. His life, tak-
ing into consideration only the essential aspects, will
be presented, emphasizing "the vital link between socio-
cultural activity and basic structural principle."[21]

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[21] Raymond Firth, "Function," in _Current_

Chapter five will give a historical account, supported by references to published materials, of the conversion of a section of the Nadar caste to Christianity, during the first part of the nineteenth century, by Anglican missionaries. The chapter will also describe the later developments of the Christian group in achieving social solidarity and in maintaining group identity. The same group, the Christian Nadar, will be presented in the next chapter as a sub-caste, a new social group, with a special culture compounded of old and new cultural elements. In the new set-up the old "socio-cultural activity" and the "basic structural principle" are found to have been exposed to the influences of Western European culture that brought a new faith. The basic structural principle, inherited from the parent caste group, was left intact in the newly-formed sub-caste, though the adoption of new religious beliefs led to modifications in its socio-cultural activities.

The method of development of the subject is first to give the necessary background information for the Hindu Nadar group, and then for the Christian group. In the last chapter, which is concerned with analysis and conclusions, a theoretical frame of reference will be

Anthropology edited by William L. Thomas, Jr. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 239.

set up for analyzing the two segments of the Nadar caste
in terms of social structure and culture. The empirical
data given in the earlier chapters will be used for the
analysis in order to determine the existence of caste in
the Christian Nadar group. The main problem of the re-
search design, the persistence of caste in this group,
will be considered and explained in the context of socio-
cultural activities, especially with reference to the
values that the individual finds in his caste group and
in its culture.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to evaluate
caste as such. It is also not the purpose of this thesis
to describe the Nadar caste in detail, or to compare the
two segments of the Nadar caste. The writer has had to
be selective with reference to the material, so that
only whatever is relevant to the problem and objectives,
indicated above, will be found emphasized in the follow-
ing chapters. The accounts of the two segments of the
Nadar caste are not comprehensive in the sense that a
monograph, for instance, on a tribe or social group should
be comprehensive. The ethnographic accounts, not very
detailed, are in the nature of outline sketches that are
intended to convey the social structure and cultural
identity of the two groups concerned. From the broad
background of caste in India, the survey is directed to

the Nadar caste of Tinnevelly, and the study is further
narrowed to a closer scrutiny of the Christian Nadar.

The final argument is that caste persists because
the cultural milieu of caste provides not only designs
for living, but also generates values for the group as
well as for the individual who lives within the caste.
The culture is imbedded in a social system called caste,
and the retention of the cultural values contributes to
the continuity of that social system. This is illustrated
by the persistence of caste in the Christian Nadar group
which is a sub-caste of the Nadar caste of Tinnevelly.

CHAPTER II

CASTE IN INDIA

The frame of reference for the subject matter of this thesis is the Indian caste system as it functions in South India. The focus of the study is the Nadar caste with its segments of Hindu and Christian Nadars. In this chapter a survey of caste in India will be made under the following topics: caste studies with reference to theory and practice; differences in caste in North India and in South India, and its background in the South; caste as a social system with cultural accumulation; caste and social change; caste continuity as maintained in group life; disintegrating forces that are sapping the foundation of the caste system of India, and general observations.

Until recent years caste studies were based on the interest in the traditional origin of the complex social system that caste represents, the plurality of castes with their functions, and the general features that the caste system has developed during the many centuries it has served the people of India. The results of the studies have led to a number of theories. J. H. Hutton in _Caste in India_ (1951 edition) lists twenty-four authorities and their theories, bringing out at the

same time the many aspects of the caste system.[1] By way

of conclusion he recapitulates the more obvious factors

"as probably contributing to the emergence and develop-

ment of the caste system."[2] These factors are given in

a separate foot-note.[3] Even after enumerating the factors

Hutton is not at all sure that he has included all the

factors.

Corresponding to the theories there are many

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[1] J. H. Hutton, Caste in India. Geoffrey
Cumberlege: Oxford University Press, 1951 ed., chapters
X and XI, pp. 148-181.

[2] Ibid., p. 189.

[3] Ibid., pp. 189-190. "The geographical isolation
of the Indian peninsula as a whole and of individual areas
within it.
Primitive ideas about the power of food to transmit
qualities.
Similar ideas of totemism, taboo, mana, and soul-stuff,
or life-matters.
Ideas of pollution, ablution, purification, and ceremonial
purity with associations of ritual sacrifice.
Ideas of the exclusive family, ancestor worship, and the
sacramental meal.
Beliefs in reincarnation, and in the doctrine of karma.
Belief in magic associated with crafts and functions.
Hereditary occupations, and trade and craft secrets.
Guilds and associations of that character and various
factors in the development of economic life.
Clash of antagonistic cultures, particularly between cul-
tures with matrilineal and patrilineal modes of descent.
Clash of races, colour prejudice, and conquest.
The development of classes with exclusive religious and
social privileges.
Individual isolation of tribes and polities, and their
inclusion without absorption in larger administrative
units.
Deliberate economic and administrative policies.
Exploitation by a highly intelligent but by no means en-
tirely altruistic heirarchy which had evolved a religious
philosophy too subtle for the mass of the people.

definitions of caste. Hutton selects a few of the latter
by Risley, Ketkar, Dutt and Senart. Risley mentions the
common name borne by the caste group (a collection of
families or groups of families), common descent, here-
ditary calling and homogeneity. Ketkar defines caste
as a social group having two characteristics: membership
based on birth and ban on marriage outside the group.
Dutt does not define caste but gives its features: en-
dogamy, restrictions on eating and drinking with members
of other castes, caste heirarchy with the Brahman at the
top, loss of caste through violation of its rules, and
the impossibility of changing one's caste. Hutton ob-
serves that Dutt's description is applicable to the whole
of India.[4] It is Senart who gives a comprehensive descrip-
tion that brings out all the features of caste.[5]

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[4] Ibid., pp. 47-50.

[5] Ibid., pp. 49-50. Senart's description of caste:
"Figurons-nous un groupe corporatif, fermé, et, en théorie
du moins, rigour-eusement héréditaire, muni d'une organi-
sation traditionelle et indépendant, d'un chef, d'un conseil,
se réunissant à l'occasion en assemblées plus ou moins
plénières; uni souvent par la célébration de certaines
fêtes; relié par une profession commune, pratiquant des
usages communs qui portent plus specialément sur le mariage,
sur la nourriture, sur des cas divers d'impureté; armé
enfin, pur en assurer l'empire, d'une juridiction de
competence plus ou moins étendue, mais capable, sous la
sanction de certaines pénalités, surtout de l'exclusion
soit definitive soit révocable, de faire sentir efficacement
l'autorité de la communauté: telle en raccourci nous
apparaît la caste."

Theories and definitions regarding caste are bound
to be modified by the transformations that have been, and
now are, taking place in the practice of caste. In 1935,
Gualtherus H. Mees defined caste in the following manner:

> A society subjected to a caste system consists of
> a number of sub-divisions or castes which are ex-
> clusively endogamous, which show a strong tendency
> to be socially exclusive, which perpetuate them-
> selves hereditarily, which are superposed on a basis
> of standard supposedly cultural, and which by the
> working of these four tendencies within the social
> field of their delimitations may split up into more
> and more castes indefinitely.6

In this definition the factor of culture is mentioned,
though with the qualifying word "supposedly". The hor-
izontal aspect is emphasized by Gilbert:

> A caste is a functional unit of Hindu society
> which has the following characteristics: endogamy
> or marriage within the group; congenitally acquired
> at birth from one's parents; exclusive in that one
> can belong to only one such group (allowing of course
> for categorical inclusion in larger groupings of
> cognate castes); horizontal in nature inasmuch as
> the members of a caste belong in a fixed stratum of
> society in their social status; distinguished by a
> common name which may be attached to the personal
> or lineage name of the individual member.7

After elaborating on the characteristics of the caste

system, Gilbert remarks that the definition depends on

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6 Gualtherus H. Mees, Dharma and Society. N. V.
Servire, The Hague; Luzac and Co., London, 1935, p. 71.

7 William H. Gilbert, "Caste in India," A Bib-
liography. Washington: Library of Congress, 1948,
pp. 31-32. (Unpublished document.)

the attitude, slant and personal point of view of every
writer, since "Each one is seeing something of the facets
of the almost indescribable whole."[8] Besides the Biblio-
graphy, which lists over five thousand references,
Gilbert's discussion on the caste system of India sug-
gests several new approaches to the study of the subject.

Recently the trend in the study of caste has been
with reference to the actual practice of it in the daily
life of a caste group surrounded as it is by economic and
social pressures in which other caste groups are involved.
One type of approach to these problems is through the
study of tensions as they exist between different social
groups as has been done by Gardner Murphy. His comments
on the caste system indicate the changes that are slowly
taking place, especially from the point of caste rigidity.
He observes, "Caste means, however, very much more than
occupation. There are caste traditions, caste modes of
greeting, caste ways of preparing food, caste ceremonial
and ritual. Caste indicates a definite place in the
social system."[9]

Studies of Indian villages have shown the im-
portance of the pattern that the caste groups make in

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[8] Ibid., p. 32.

[9] Gardner Murphy, In the Minds of Men. New
York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1953, p. 38.

the economic and social activities of the village. Under
the auspices of the Bureau of Social Science Research
(The American University, Washington, D. C.), the sub-
ject of Communication of Ideas in India was covered by
a survey in Lucknow and three Indian villages. The re-
port, in its section on "Caste in Lucknow", says:

> The findings so far brought out correspond closely
> to what was found in several UNESCO "Tension" studies
> in India which have been summarized by Gardner Murphy
> in his In the Minds of Men. Our emphasis here, how-
> ever, has not been on points of conflict as was the
> case in the UNESCO work, but rather on differences
> in caste behavior between groups, particularly as
> they may be related to any evidence of a decreasing
> hold of caste on the individual.10

The decreasing hold of caste on the individual is chiefly
seen in the increasing scope for occupations other than
the traditional one, interdining with other caste members,
violation of food taboos, and the tendency to ignore bar-
riers to intermarriage.

Village India (1953) gives an account of the ap-
plication of anthropological methods of "holistic analysis"
to eight Indian villages. In the Foreword by Robert
Redfield and Milton Singer one gets the impression that
the fact of change is sharply noticeable. They say, "In
village India the traditional landmarks lose their

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10 Bureau of Social Science Research, "Public
Opinion in Lucknow," April 1954, 859, Part II, p. 76.

outline - caste, joint family, festivals and religious

beliefs. The school, the political party, the movie,

the community plan, begin to reach even remote villages."[11]

A comment on the Mysore village of Rampura throws light

on the processes now at work in most Indian villages:

> The castes, kept apart by endogamy and the rules
> of commensality, are brought together by institutions
> and sentiments that unite the whole village: the
> ceremonies, the village political organisation, and
> the court of justice, the common dependence on the
> dominant peasant caste.[12]

It is further described how individuals and families be-

longing to different castes are brought together through

the relationships of patron and client, friendships and

affiliations to political parties. The comment continues:

> This village is no simple layered structure of
> functions and statuses. It is rather an intricately
> woven network of relationships between this man and
> that, this family and that. The hereditary factors
> only limit and only partly predetermine who is to
> be related to whom and how.[13]

The studies by eight social anthropologists il-

lustrate the new approach to the study of caste in the

context of life in an Indian village.

The conclusions reached in _Village India_ are borne

out in Kingsley Davis's _The Population of India and_

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[11] McKim Marriott (ed.), _Village India_, The
American Anthropologist, 83, June 1955, Foreword, p. x.

[12] _Ibid._

[13] _Ibid._

Pakistan (1951). While enumerating the forces that tend
to diminish caste, Davis also reminds the reader that
there is persistence of caste. The impact of modern
conditions, the spread of education, political democracy,
legal changes, urbanization, new technology, and similar
factors undermine the power of caste. The persistence
is furthered, according to Davis, by associations that
consist of members of the same caste and who speak the
same language. (The Nadar Mahajana Sangam is an associ-
ation exclusively for Nadars, Hindu and Christian; and
their common language is Tamil. Refer to Chapters IV
and VI.) Davis also thinks that the formation of sub-
castes and their tendency to consolidate, are factors
contributing to the persistence of caste. What he says
in this connection is in the nature of a prediction:

> The fusion of subcastes, if carried far enough,
> will tend to alter the caste system. Like caste
> associations, it is a movement to strengthen the
> caste in its competitive fight with other castes,
> and like them it disturbs the fixed heirarchy. If
> carried to the point of fusing castes rather than
> merely subcastes, it will tend to create broad
> classes, and thus the caste system will be trans-
> muted into a class system.[14]

A process like this has been going on in South India
leading to the broad division of two classes, Brahmans

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[14] Kingsley Davis, The Population of India and
Pakistan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951,
p. 175.

and non-Brahmans, representing two traditions. Balancing the two forces, caste decline and caste persistence, Davis finds the former stronger; and he supports his arguments with the following points: the noticeable loosening of restrictions on interdining; the widespread violation of food taboos; the slight tendency to ignore intermarriage barriers; the gradual removal of untouchability; the pronounced growth of social mobility.[15]

Noel P. Gist conducted research in the field of caste in India during 1951-52, selecting for his area Mysore and Bangalore (South India).[16] While he considers caste to be pervasive in India, Gist observes that its stronghold is in South India, especially in the "over-whelmingly Hindu states of Mysore and Madras." He found castes to be divided and sub-divided to constitute "a complex array of groups, each more or less distinctive and separated from other groupings by varying shades of caste or sub-caste consciousness".[17] He saw that each

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[15] *Ibid.*

[16] The results of his field work are given in three papers published in 1954: "Caste Differentials in South India," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (April 1954); "Caste in Transition: South India," *Phylon*, 1954, Second Quarter; "Occupational Differentiation in South India," *Social Forces*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, December 1956.

[17] Noel P. Gist, "Caste Differentials in South India," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (April 1954), p. 126.

group was distinctive in its organizational, ceremonial
and ideological features, yet many of the groups were
strikingly similar. From his study of about one hundred
caste groups Gist inferred that they formed groups or
"constellations" with such factors dividing them: high
or low, "clean" or "unclean", the "clean" including in
one category both Brahman and high non-Brahman, and mark-
ing social distances. He noticed the cultural character-
istics of the various castes. Out of the two thousand
married Hindu household heads who gave information, only
nine had wives from different castes. This was in
Bangalore, and in villages the incidence of intercaste
marriage would be lower still. Gist remarks that, "The
point in which caste endogamy is tending to break down
is in marriages outside the sub-castes, but within the
main castes."[18] As for the pattern of traditional oc-
cupation, Gist found that the "occupational inheritance"
had undergone considerable change, due to urbanization
and industrialization. The growth of city-life and the
expansion of trade and industry have led to a new economy
in which the relationship of the worker to the employer
is on the basis of contract, and no more on the old or-
der of caste-status.

Gist refers to a study of caste attitudes among

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[18] Ibid., p. 128.

591 college students made by Professor Kuppuswamy of the
Mysore University Psychological Department, and their at-
titudes were found to be more liberal than that of the
rank and file of Indians. In the Lucknow studies also
the college-educated were found to be less restricted by
caste rules than others. The Bureau of Social Science
Research report 688, with the title The Indian Student
(1954), has observations on the declining importance of
caste. On the subject of marriage qualifications, the
following results were obtained: "Among the four sug-
gested marriage qualifications (education, caste, hand-
someness, and wealth), the students were most interested
in education. Handsomeness is the second most important
qualification, 'same caste' is third, and wealth is
fourth. (Table 22)."[19] As for opinions on caste, it
was expressed by a majority that "the caste system has
outlived its usefulness." The findings were based on a
questionnaire study of 2,047 students at ten Indian Uni-
versities. Gist in his paper contributed to Phylon,
"Caste in Transition" (1954), remarks that college stu-
dents are not truly representative of public opinion.
But the trend of thinking in the higher educated groups
who will have a share in moulding the future is a pointer

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[19] Bureau of Social Science Research: 688, The
Indian Student, April 1954, p. 24.

to what lies ahead. As for the present, according to
Gist, "Caste as a social system will continue for many
years, but shorn of its undemocratic practices."[20] This
is indeed reminiscent of what Max Muller wrote about
caste in 1853 that "as a social institution it will live
and improve."[21] The planned policy of the Indian Gov-
ernment now is to rid caste of its undemocratic prac-
tices. The caste studies reviewed above reveal the fac-
tors that are contributing to change in the social system
of India, besides bringing out the features that continue
to make the system a unique one.

In Caste in India (1951 edition), Hutton describes
the background to caste in the course of three regional
surveys: Southern India; Western, Central and Eastern
India; Northern India.[22] He observes, "Indeed, it is
only against this background of almost incredible diver-
sity of racial origin and of social custom that the phenome-
non of caste can be appreciated and understood."[23] Re-
gional differences in language dress, manners, kinship
system, in short all social customs, are to be found

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[20] Gist, "Caste in Transition," op. cit., p. 164.

[21] Max Muller, Chips from a German Worship. New
York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890 ed., p. 353.

[22] J. H. Hutton, Caste in India, 1951 ed., chap-
ters II, III and IV, pp. 8-45.

[23] Ibid., p. 45.

under the widespread canopy of the caste system. These differences have been accentuated by varying degrees of isolation or exposure to invasions. In the case of South India, which is the background to the subject of this thesis, the peninsular part of the country, though open on three sides to access by sea-transport, was not subjected to the fury of conquering hordes and the close supervision of reigning Muslim monarchs to an extent that the northern parts of the country were. Besides the North was impregnated with the Aryan culture, and whatever part of it the Dravidian fell heir to, it was very limited. It is not relevant to the present study to compare the South with other parts of the country from the point of cultural differences and caste observances. But one or two points at least may be mentioned here as an indication of differences within the general caste pattern. A striking one is with reference to kinship. The North Indian pattern, not based on the classificatory system, which is operating in the South, does not allow marriage between near relatives in the parallel or cross lines.[24] The seven volumes of Thurston's Castes

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[24] Hilda Raj, "Some Observations on the Classificatory System," The Eastern Anthropologist, Vol. IV, No. 1, 1950-51, pp. 122-31. Lucknow: Prem Printing Press; A. M. Hocart, Caste. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1950. Caste by Hocart is a discourse on caste as a sacrificial organization, and is strewn with differences in the

and Tribes of Southern India (1909) delineate the cul-
tural features of caste in South India which in many re-
spects are peculiar to the area.[25]

The relationship between habitat, economy and
society is reflected in the cultural developments that
took place in South India. In order to appreciate "the
complex relations between the human habitat and the mani-
fold technical and social devices developed for its ex-
ploitation,"[26] in the area under study, the early history
of the southern districts needs to be explored. Here
ecology played a very important part in the distribution
and occupation of human groups. Five regions, marked by
distinct physical characteristics in the environment
that they offered, determined the way of life which
people could develop in each of these zones. Palai, or
the desert, inhospitable region, with its infertile soil,
was the home of nomads and adventurers who specialized

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religious pattern between the North and the South; E. A.
H. Blunt, Caste Systems of Northern India with special
reference to the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.
Oxford University Press, 1931. Blunt's book brings out
features of the caste which are not similar in South
India.

[25] Edgar Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern
India. Vol. I-VII. Madras: Government Press, 1909.

[26] C. Daryll Forde, Habitat, Economy and Society.
London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., New York: E. P. Dutton &
Co., Inc., 1949, 7th edition, p. 460.

in raiding the wealthy communities beyond. The forest zone, Kurinji, called forth all the ingenuity of the semi-nomad, the hunter, who, with his bow and arrow, hunted animals, used their skin for dress, and became a brave warrior. On the wooded hills, known as Mullai, lived the men called, "Idayar" (meaning "men of the middle region"), who tended the cattle and had leisure to play on the bamboo flutes. Marudam, the region by the lower-most reaches of rivers, was favorable to cultivation by irrigation, and here agriculture was the occupation of groups who developed their own tools. The littoral region, known as Neydal, encouraged fishing, salt-making and the technology of water transport. It is interesting to note how each group developed its own special culture, both material and immaterial; but there was no caste - not yet. Society developed on occupational lines, with no social barriers, the highest regard being given to men of knowledge, known in Tamil as Arivar. There were farmers, shepherds, artisans, fishermen and also armed warriors who were willing to protect or fight anyone for a payment.[27]

The various occupational groups, in course of time, turned into castes - castes that fell apart in a natural-

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[27] V. Kanakasabhai, Tamils 1800 Years Ago. Madras, 1904.

seeming fashion, as though they had been designed from
the beginning to function as separate social units and
social entities, each building up its own traditional
way of life, and accumulating a culture on which it laid
its special marks of identification. Each group had de-
veloped its own theology, its tribal or communal deity
who ruled over a pantheon of minor deities or sacred
beings, or who received homage and offerings on special
occasions.[28] Over and above all these and immersing them
gradually, developed the religious system of the land -
Hinduism. A common cultural factor, religion, now and
then brought the various groups together, not completely
making them one corporate body socially as such. The
groups became still more distinct as social units, each
contributing something towards the performance of cere-
monies, the celebration of important festivals, and the
carrying out of religious obligations with reference to
shrines, temples, priests and their maintenance.[29]

On the basis of occupation the groups continued
to develop and specialize in their particular skills,
passing on secrets to the younger generations, and par-
ticularly to sons in each family that would carry on in

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[28] Rt. Rev. Henry Whitehead, Bishop of Madras,
The Village Gods of South India. Calcutta: Association
Press; London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press,
1921.

[29] Ibid.

the future. The agricultural groups, the various artisan castes working on stone, wood, and metals, the money-lender and the trader in all kinds of goods, the toddy-drawers, potters, basket-makers, the fishing-folk, shepherds and cattle-breeders, and all other occupational groups, carried on their work. At times they split up into separate small groups due to social or other pressures and disagreements with the parental groups, the dissidents usually forming sub-castes with new nomenclature.

The role of Manu[30] and later law-givers in hardening the existing social system into a frame holding separate and tight compartments, has been emphasized by every writer on the traditional caste system of India. The famous Code of Manu[31] offered a perfect blue-print for

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[30] Max Muller (ed.), The Sacred Books of the East, translated by Georg Buhler, Vol. XXV. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1886, Introduction, pp. LVIII-LIX: "Being the father of mankind, Manu is naturally considered as the founder of social and moral order, as a ruler of men, and as a Rishi to whom sacred texts were revealed, as the inventor of sacrificial rites, and the author of legal maxims. We find, therefore, passages which assert that he was a king, which speak of his coronation or make him the ancestor of kings . . . . In later times this ancient idea, which makes Manu first king of men and the ancestor of kings, has led to his being at the head of mythical and of partly historical genealogies." The Laws of Manu are translated in this volume.

[31] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), A Source Book in Indian Philosophy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. In the fifth chapter

a well-ordered society in which each unit or caste looked
after the welfare of its own members. But what made for
real hardship and led to the tyranny of caste, was the
sanctification of a rigid social system in which human
beings were fixed by birth into a behavior system not of
their own choice or seeking. It was a behavior system
which linked the past with the present and the future.
Behavior in a past life determined one's birth into a
particular caste, and behavior in the present conduct of
life determined one's being born in a caste of higher or
lower status in the social scale, in the next birth.[32]

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of this book the Laws of Manu are set forth as covering
the entire social order. The general pattern consists of
four orders: the student, the householder, the hermit and
the ascetic. The duties of the members of the four castes,
Varnas, are explained in detail. On page 100, it is said,
"While in Manu's system there is scope for some progress,
the main emphasis is on the conservation of the social
order." See Glossary for Varnas.

[32] K. M. Panikkar, Caste and Democracy. Day to
Day Pamphlets, No. 17. London: The Hogarth Press, 1933,
p. 14: "They (the Brahmin sociologists and philosophers
responsible for the social structure) also realised that
unless the masses could, by some method, be made to be-
lieve in the justice of the caste system, their own domin-
ation would be continually menaced and gradually under-
mined. Here also the subtle mind of the Brahmin found a
solution in the fatalistic philosophy embodied in the
theory of Karma and its fatalistic corollary of the trans-
migration of souls . . . . It placed the responsibility
of the social and political disabilities of the lower
castes on their own past lives. It invested the super-
iority enjoyed by the Brahmins with the appearance of
just reward for their former good lives . . . . Thus ac-
cording to the theory of transmigration which is the
philosophic justification of caste, it is only in the world
of the dead that a man may rise in the heirarchy of caste
and attain ultimate equality with the highest in a future
life." See Glossary for Karma.

Unquestioning, resigned, and not unhappy within
the common cultural pattern of his particular caste, each
individual by his adherence to the caste system strengthened
its hold on society though its strength could, and did,
strangle the development of personality in individuals
who would have preferred not to conform to the general
pattern in conducting their personal lives. Economical-
ly and socially the individual's life was preordained to
him from the moment of his birth. Without the trouble
of going through difficult choices in life, in times of
crises the individual found the choices already made for
him, or being made for him as each occasion arose. Be-
sides, for the conduct of every day and ordinary days
there were rules and prescribed directions to correct
behavior relating to every aspect of life. From his
cradle to his deathbed his path was chalked out for him.
Within the magic circle, within only which he may walk
with his caste fellows, he could choose or reject only
with the approval of the social group to which he be-
longed by birth. Guided through all the changing aspects
of life, through every stage of physical growth and men-
tal development, he found ready directions regarding
food, dress, occupation, kindred, behavior within the
caste group and outside, marriage, and other essentials
for correct and socially approved conduct. To carry out
all the injunctions respected and exhorted by his caste

became his religious duty. Not that these precepts were
handed to him in a manual. He learned everything by
practice, from oral guidance, and exemplary behavior on
the part of his parents, family members, kindred and mem-
bers of the whole caste group.

By carrying out his religious duty through the
practice of his caste precepts a man built up a store of
piety for future lives. This linking of the social and
the religious into one pattern of behavior, indivisible
and inviolate in theory and principle, lifted the caste
system into a horizon where nothing mattered but merit
won by strict adherence to the prescribed code of con-
duct. The goal was clear for everyone to follow - cor-
rect behavior led to piety which in its turn bettered
one's chances for a higher status in society in the next
life, and finally took one nearer the ultimate goal of
reaching eternal bliss in delivery from human existence.[33]
Such an ideal did much to ensure correct behavior and a
harmonious living within the social milieu. Caste rules
and principles were directed to the achieving of social
solidarity and social welfare which are essential for
the continuity of any organized society. Within the re-
cognized social frame set up for each caste the members

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[33] Hutton, op. cit., Chapter VIII, "Its Functions,"
pp. 111-132.

shared life on a cooperative basis. And within the over-all framework of caste system the various castes tried to work also on a cooperative basis, since they were all mutually dependent on one another due to the division of labor. Though any close social intercourse was not permitted between the various castes the exchange of goods and services inevitably brought individuals into a proximity which again had a scale of its own, indicating prescribed distances and attitudes of behavior. This traditional pattern continued for many centuries.

In Hindu Customs and their Origins (1937), Stanley Rice attributes the strength of Hinduism to its association with caste. He says:

> We have to account not only for the peculiar phenomenon and its birth but for its strange persistence through so many centuries and through so many historical vicissitudes. Arabs and Scythians, Tartars and Huns, Afgahans and Persians, and Englishmen have flowed over the face of India, and yet the Hindu religion has maintained itself with caste as its principal social bulwark. It has withstood the powerful schism of Buddha, the violent persecutions of Islam, the fiery onslaught of the early Christian missionaries and the persistent attacks of later ones, and yet caste among the masses of the people remains as firmly rooted as ever, and even among the more educated it has only yielded up the unimportant outworks of the citadel. Nowhere in the world has such an institution been maintained for so long on purely temporal basis.[34]

The changing situations mentioned in the recent

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[34] Stanley Rice, Hindu Customs and their Origins. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1937, p. 81.

studies on caste in India indicate that the system in
its traditional form is on the decline. Too many forces
have been at work to allow it to continue unchanged.
Travel of Indians over the forbidden seas, continuous
influx of foreigners into the country, mobility encour-
aged by railway travel which could not keep the castes
apart, the increasing importance of education and en-
lightenment derived therefrom, the zeal of social re-
formers, modern industrial organization and the widening
scope for new occupations, are among the most important
factors that have weakened the power of the caste system.
Change of occupation, that is choosing an occupation to
which one's birth had not entitled one, was the first
great blow to the theory of caste as it had been developed
in the Sacred Laws of Hindus. It was the first break in
the chain that bound individuals to a position in the
social ladder, as determined by birth.

With growing disillusionment in the caste system
itself, with a new clarification that caste duties and
religious duties are not necessarily identical, with in-
creasing impact with cultural elements alien to the fa-
miliar caste culture, and, in the case of some with the
acceptance of a foreign faith, the concept of caste was
bound to undergo a transformation. This transformation
is a continuous process, retarded or accelerated accord-
ing to the nature of the pressures brought to bear upon

it by internal and external circumstances. The last de-
cade marks the first planned reformation of society on
a country-wide scale, caste being considered one of the
elements that place obstacles to national unity and social
progress. It is the declared aim of the government to
weaken, if not to "do away" with, caste gradually.

Social mobility largely due to the transfer of
populations, movements of individuals and families on
government business, trade, education, or other reasons,
have led to the mingling of various social groups in a
manner which inevitably breaks down social barriers that
caste had set up and tried to maintain. In South India
these days it is quite common to see turbaned Sikhs and
people from other distant states, and to hear several
languages in street cars and buses and in stores - a
state of affairs unknown or uncommon ten years ago.
Caste lines are tending to be blurred in South India,
still the home of numerous castes and sub-castes which
are clearly definable. Against this background of caste
continuing to function as a social system the Nadars
have maintained their identity. Most of the members of
the Christian segment feel that as professed Christians
they should abolish all distinctions that in any way pre-
vent them from identifying themselves with other Christians
in the first place, and with all Indians generally. This
feeling is best expressed in a letter written by a Nadar

Christian woman who has had higher education in India
and abroad, who has been the head of an educational in-
stitution and is now a leader in the Christian community:

> I am not much of a Nadar and we are trying to get
> away from our exclusiveness because it seems wrong
> to be a Christian and keep up these walls of par-
> tition between our Christian brethren and ourselves.
> And yet awareness of the value of some of the quali-
> ties that belong to us Nadars makes us afraid to
> lose ourselves in the cosmopolitan Christian com-
> munity. But it must come eventually.[35]

As a social system caste continues to function in
India, its dynamic force unspent. In South India, to
quote from Noel Gist, "it is still a going concern and
will be for a long time."[36] There is no general demand
in the country either for the retention or abolition of
caste. But there is plenty of opposition to certain
features in the system, especially what are called the
undemocratic elements. The last citadel appears to be
endogamy, and to quote from Gist again, "The hard core
of the system, caste endogamy in marriage, is remarkably
resistant to change."[37]

The ancient law-givers were the first to tamper
drastically with the existing social phenomena. Social
conditions that had been fluid, and which consisted in

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[35] Life history document, 13.

[36] Noel Gist, "Caste in Transition: South India,"
Phylon, 1954, Second Quarter, p. 164.

[37] Ibid., p. 155.

practices of convenience, were made into a rigid system,
codified, standardized, and written down for the learned
Brahmans to interpret as it seemed proper in their opin-
ion. A similar treatment is now being undertaken by the
government, but for pulling down the insurmountable walls
of partition that came into existence after Manu's Code
became the social law of the land. During the long cen-
turies between the two treatments engineered by man, two
strong social forces have evolved: one a general caste
rule which is found to be operating as caste in India.
The other is the particular caste rule which operates
within each individual caste or sub-caste.

In order to clarify what has just been stated
above, two separate definitions are given below to express
the rule of caste which is indicative of a general cul-
tural pattern uniquely Indian, and the rule of the in-
dividual caste which is particular and peculiar to each
caste and sub-caste, and which is also unique in its own
way, being a distinct cultural pattern. These are two
working definitions for developing the subject of this
thesis. Caste in India is a phenomenon related to the
structure of society which holds together numerous cul-
turally distinct groups, in each of which membership is
based on birth, endogamy is enforced, and, whether prac-
tised or not, traditional occupation is recognized as a

dividing factor between group and group, and is also made
the basis for stratifying society in an artificial heir-
archy. A caste in India[38] is an exclusive, endogamous
group, whose members inherit at birth, and share through-
out life, a common culture, developed and handed down by
their ancestors, stamped with unique features, the main
one being a distinct and special occupation, actually
pursued or only traditionally associated, and marked in
varying degrees by characteristics which are found to be
common to similar social groups within the country.

Two main principles appear to be the basis of both
the theory and practice of caste. There is the positive
side which prescribes duties, and there is a negative
side which forbids certain practices. This amounts to
correct performance of one's allotted duty and avoidance
of evil which is caused by the breaking of caste regula-
tions. In this set-up it is not fanciful to see two
strains of morality combined; one may go further and see
in them two different models of living, the "thou shalt"
and the "thou shalt not". These two different approaches
to living sum up the Aryan way of life and the South
Indian Dravidian's excessive concern for unseen forces
that wrong-doing might release to work havoc with humans.

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[38] The term used to denote a caste in North India
is Jat, and Jati in South India.

There are two key words, _Dharma_,* or doing one's duty, and
Mana, or the impersonal power that belongs to all that is
sacrosanct and so is forbidden.

It is interesting to sift the stuff that the caste
system is made of, and to look at the way the two themes
have become the essential foundation of the huge struc-
ture of society we find it to have developed into. So-
ciety came to be stratified on the basis of occupation,
and occupation itself came to be stratified on the basis
of its degree of pollution or pollutability or lack of
pollution. Rather the Brahman at the top of the social
scale was placed there because of his nearness to holy
things and his avoidance of whatever would be polluting.
He was liable to become ceremonially unclean through the
death of a close kinsman, but he could also purify him-
self, by going through special purificatory ceremonies.
Superiority the Brahman had achieved, but then he had
made many renunciations also, and he had to maintain a
rigid discipline to safeguard his social status. The
Brahman was obliged to observe numerous prescribed and
proscribed regulations affecting every aspect of his
life. The lesser privileged castes in comparison had
less rigid a discipline. But every caste had duties
within the group, especially toward the family, kindred
living and dead, and avoidances in the matter of food,

* See Glossary.

physical contact, and marriage partners. The two prin-
ciples for living, the positive and the negative, became
fused into one main group of regulations with values,
for achieving merit by correct behavior. This was the
vital bond that kept the caste system valid for all.
There had to be conformity in outward behavior whatever
the individual might feel or resent about the rigidity
of the system.

Each caste group, like an island in the vast ocean
of the general caste system, connected by the very ele-
ment which surrounded them, yet distinctly apart, con-
tinued to specialize in a unique way of living that de-
veloped into a complex cultural pattern. The caste system
may further be likened to a universe, fluid and dynamic,
in which float the individual castes, sharing in the com-
mon element, dependent on and depended by neighbouring
castes, influencing each other and at the same time in-
fluencing the general universe of the caste system. At
present two stages may be observed in the attitude of
the people themselves: observance of caste and non-
observance of caste. In stage one may be seen three
steps of observance of or allegiance to caste: allegiance
with belief in the system, allegiance with doubt, and
thirdly formal observance with absolutely no belief at
all, but following caste rules for the sake of conformity.
Then there are those who do not observe caste rules,

because they are doubtful of their validity, or find the rules contrary to their own ways of living, especially in towns. There are those who have become indifferent to caste observances, and are not troubled by doubt in the system. There are some who have given up observing caste because they are convinced that it is outmoded for reasons of their own. Such persons are to be found all over the country, in towns mostly, in upper class groups; and they have close social contacts with members of other castes. These persons are more class-conscious than caste-conscious; and their social activities are usually limited to their own class within which interdining is common, and intermarriage is not uncommon.

One more observation remains to be made on the caste system of India. The individual by himself has no caste. He can have it only in relationship to the family in the first place, and to the kindred next. His family is the social unit, one of the many units that make up the caste group; and through the caste principle of endogamous marriages the families tend to be a large community of kindred, either through blood relationship or marriage alliance. The individual who does not need caste is the sanyasi, or ascetic. He gives up his family and kindred, and through his renunciation he rises above caste. He is one with all men, he can take food from anyone, and he is free of all trammels even in this life.

He is nearer the ideal towards which all castes are be-
lieved to be working - freedom from the bonds of caste.
He may have belonged to any caste, high or low, and once
he decides to give up all worldly ties - home, family,
property and other attachments - and live the life of an
ascetic, his aim in life is to be freed of all desire so
that he may not be born again, but attain oneness with
and become "Brahman". He is no longer a householder or
the man who has to do many duties and practise many cere-
monies, because he is a family man. "The sanyasis re-
nounce religious rites and ceremonies, philanthropic
duties, and other secular activities because these are
associated with the idea of a doer, an instrument and a
result."[39] The wandering ascetic, representing the fourth,
and the highest stage of life, is elaborately described
by Manu: "He shall neither possess a fire, nor a dwell-
ing, he may go to a village for his food, (he shall be)
indifferent to everything, firm of purpose, meditating
(and) concentrating his mind on Brahman."[40] The ideal
of the sanyasi, born in the Epic period (500 or 600 B.C.
to A.D. 200) survives in the Indian social pattern to

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[39] The Bhagavad Gita, translated by Swami
Nihkilananda. New York: Ramakrishna Vivekananda Center,
1944, p. 345.

[40] Radhakrishnan and Moore (eds.), A Source Book
in Indian Philosophy, Chapter V, "The Laws of Manu",
p. 183.

this day. This social pattern, originally based on the
four Varnas, now holds hundreds of castes and sub-castes.

CHAPTER III

CASTE AND RELIGION

The purpose of this chapter is to examine first
of all the place of religion in society, and in that con-
text to see the place of religion in the social system
known as caste. Secondly, the purpose is to present
some of the views of Protestant missionaries on caste
and their attitude towards the practice of caste customs
by the converts to Christianity. The Protestant mission-
aries expected the Christians, drawn from the different
castes, to become integrated into one group, religiously
and socially, whereas in reality the converts found that
they still belonged to the old social group which they
preferred to the new society which the missionaries held
out to them as an ideal. When the converts refused to
break away completely from their old caste customs and
felt closer to their own caste than to Christians from
other castes, the missionaries were deeply disappointed.
This disappointment is expressed with great bitterness
by Rev. H. Bower, whose Essay on Hindu Caste (1851) sums
up the views of the Protestant missionaries in South
India.

The terms, society and religion, are becoming in-
creasingly difficult to define, due to the changes that
lead to new forms of social and religious expressions.

Sociologists and anthropologists, themselves baffled by the innumerable patterns that society has evolved, and the varying degrees of association of religion with social living, are not able to come up with any definition that will adequately cover all forms of society and the type of religious affiliation found, or not found, in them. In the Henry Myers Lecture delivered in 1945, Radcliffe-Brown said:

> We may entertain as at least a possibility the theory that any religion is an important or even essential part of the social machinery, as are morality and law, part of the complex system by which human beings are enabled to live together in an orderly arrangement of social relations. From this point of view we deal not with the origins but with the social functions of religions, i.e. the contribution that they make to the formation and maintenance of a social order. There are many persons who would say that it is only true religion (i.e. one's own) that can provide the foundation of an orderly social life. The hypothesis we are considering is that the social function of a religion is independent of its truth or falsity, that religions which we think to be erroneous or even absurd and repulsive, such as those of some savage tribes, may be important and effective parts of the social machinery, and that without these "false" religions social evolution and the development of modern civilization would have been impossible.[1]

Radcliffe-Brown emphasizes "the social functions of religions, i.e. the contribution they make to the formation and maintenance of a social order." This statement has a significant bearing on the interpretation

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[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, _Structure and Function in Primitive Society_. London: Cohen and West Ltd., 1952, p. 154.

that is put on the Code of Manu[2] in _A Source Book in Indian Philosophy_ (edited by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, 1957). It is said:

> In the _Code of Manu_ detailed instructions regarding the then social rules and practices are given. The metaphysical and cosmological speculations found in Manu are not of much importance since they are mentioned only to give the intellectual background of the social code. While in Manu's system there is scope for some progress, the main emphasis is on the conservation of the social order. It glorified custom and convention at a time when they were being undermined.[3]

Society was superimposed by a specific "metaphysical" machinery which was yet to make tyrannous exactions from the masses, by imposing, in the name of religion, man-made sanctions as the valid authority for maintaining social relations between men.

It was to maintain the social order in the form of separate groups, functioning as separate units, that religion was made to serve society in India. Durkheim, in _The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life_, develops his theory that religion is a "social thing". Timasheff, while disagreeing with Durkheim, gives an excellent summary of the latter's views:

> Durkheim develops his fundamental theses: that group life is the generating source or efficient

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[2] See footnote No. 31, Chapter II, pp. 32-33.

[3] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), _A Source Book in Indian Philosophy_. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 100.

cause of religion; that religious ideas and practices refer to or symbolize the social group; that the distinction between sacred and profane is found universally and has important implications for social life as a whole.

The sacred, for Durkheim, refers to things set apart by man, including religious beliefs, rites, deities, or anything socially defined as requiring special religious treatment.[4]

The caste system of India had received special religious treatment so that the social order could be maintained, and "sacred objects"[5] were defined in terms of action or behavior.

That there is some correspondence between the form of social structure and the form of religion has been emphasized by cultural anthropologists. Claude Levi-Strauss echoing Radcliffe-Brown says, "The anthropologist's task is to discover correlations between different types of religions and different types of social organization."[6] In cultural areas, whose limits can be defined, the power and dominance of tradition are indicative of the close correspondence between social structure and religion. Talcott Parsons, in his essay on the

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[4] Nicholas S. Timasheff, Sociological Theory. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955, p. 113.

[5] Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1945, p. 37.

[6] Claude Levi-Strauss, Social Structure in Anthropology Today. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954, p. 548.

Contributions of Max Weber, summarizes Weber's findings

with regard to India, thus:

> Not only were the basic goals of religion in India,
> as in all such cases, transcendental, but the situ-
> ation was defined in such a way that these goals
> could be meaningfully pursued only by turning one's
> back on everyday social interests and responsibilities,
> by engaging in mystical contemplation or other
> worldly asceticism. The pursuit of salvation in
> this radical sense was, to be sure, not traditional;
> but in the nature of the case it was a goal accessi-
> ble only to a small minority. For the great major-
> ity, Hinduism resulted in the most radical sanction
> of the existing traditional order and ways of doing
> things that has ever been developed anywhere. In
> the caste system the only form of virtuous behavior
> consisted in the conscientious performance of the
> traditional obligations, especially the ritual ob-
> ligations, of the station in life in which one was
> born. Only by such faithfulness to tradition was
> there any prospect of improvement of one's funda-
> mental religious status by being reborn in a higher
> caste position.[7]

There is a certain amount of similarity in the

patterning of the correspondence between the structure

of society and religion in the centres of ancient civiliz-

ation. The philosophers of ancient China emphasized the

importance of performing rites and sacrifices. In the

Henry Myers lecture on Religion and Society referred to

earlier, Radcliffe-Brown quotes from the ancient Chinese

Book of Rites, "Ceremonies are the bond that holds the

multitudes together, and if the bond be removed, those

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[7] H. E. Barnes (ed.), _An Introduction to the
History of Sociology_. Chicago: The University of Chicago
Press, 1954, p. 296.

multitudes fall into confusion."[8] Radcliffe-Brown comments on the place of religion in the society of ancient Greece and Rome: "The religion was an essential part of the constitution of society. The form of the religion and the form of the special structure correspond one with the other."[9] In this lecture delivered in 1945, Radcliffe-Brown refers to his theory of the social function of rites and ceremonies formulated by him as early as 1908. He says:

> Stated in the simplest possible terms the theory is that an orderly social life amongst human beings depends on the presence in the minds of the members of a society of certain sentiments, which control the behavior of the individual in his relation to others. Rites can be seen to be the regulated symbolic expressions of certain sentiments. Rites can, therefore, be shown to have a specific social function when, and to the extent that, they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the constitution of the society depends.[10]

What the Code of Manu did was to bind together all the existing strands of the social fabric and to dye them with religious hues that continue to shine through the social structure of individual castes to this day. There was no emphasis on spiritual or moral power as such, but increasingly emphasis was placed on action, on the performance of rites and penances, sacrifices and rituals.

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[8] Radcliffe-Brown, op. cit., p. 159.

[9] Ibid., p. 163.

[10] Ibid., p. 157.

Society became a well-knit fabric shot through with re-
ligion, and the integration of the two was so complete
that in Radcliffe-Brown's words religion became "an es-
sential part of the constitution of the society." The
social fabric was reinforced with numerous institutions
as the years went by, and rites and ceremonies became the
governors of human destiny worked out individually and in
group-life. There developed systems of behavior to guide
the individual with reference to family, kindred and the
dead ancestors. There developed side by side another
system to guide the individual and the group in times of
crises for which rites and ceremonies for every occasion
of passing from one stage of life into another, determined
the status and the necessary social approval. More, the
social sanctions themselves had the sanctity of religious
rituals. The domestic and the communal assumed the sac-
redness of holy things and the atmosphere that prevailed
during the performance of various passage rites was tan-
tamount to religious fervour.

In The Tree of Culture (1955), Ralph Linton gives
an admirable summary of the developments that took place
in India over the centuries:

> It is quite impossible to trace the successive
> steps by which Indian society and religion arrived
> at the forms which they manifested at the time of
> the first European contact. As has been previously
> noted the Indians have been singularly uninterested
> in history and the applied sciences, and the Brahmans

have maintained the pattern of claiming both remote
antiquity and Vedic origin for any and all forms which
they favored. By the colonial period Indian relig-
ion and society had been integrated into an indis-
soluble whole. Daily life and social intercourse
were ritualized to a greater extent than in any of
the other world civilizations, and every detail was
reinforced by supernatural sanctions. Even the
caste system was justified by elaborate theories of
spiritual development. As the result of the work
of many sages over centuries, Hindu religion and
philosophy has been brought into a working whole.[11]

Many Indians have written on the caste system, ex-

plaining, elaborating and trying to interpret its theory

and practice. The social reformers have condemned the

practices which have been harmful and unjust to the

groups placed in the lowest rungs of society. But very

few have been emboldened to condemn in no uncertain terms

the religious basis of social relations obtaining in gen-

eral, like Sir R. P. Paranjpye, who in 1931 wrote The

Crux of the Indian Problem. Portions from this book were

put together to form a small booklet as one of the series

in The Thinker's Forum, in 1943. Extremely critical of

all religious organization, whatever the religion, he

says with regard to India:

The infinite number of religions and religious
sects; the immense influence of priests, moulvis,
et hoc genus omne; the multiplicity of temples,
mosques, and other places of worship; the wealth
squandered on funeral ceremonies and tombs; the

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[11] Ralph Linton, The Tree of Culture. New York:
Alfred A. Knopf, 1955, p. 511.

complexity of expensiveness of various religious
ceremonies even when all real meaning has disappeared
from them - all these show that religion is the all-
pervading element in Indian society.12

In another place he says, "The hold of religion over the
Indian people is so strong that almost every act has come
to have a religious significance."[13] Again, "The small-
est detail of sanctional usage or custom comes to be re-
garded as of deep religious significance."[14]

The functional theory of religion is of compara-
tively recent origin. Sociological analysis of social
institutions, developed by William Robertson Smith at the
end of the nineteenth century, was applied by Durkheim
to "social facts", in the early years of this century.
His theory was later developed into the formal functional
theory now associated with the two famous anthropologists,
Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, and one of the foremost
sociologists of America today, Talcott Parsons. Through
the new view-point held out by these social scientists
and their followers a reorientation of the place of re-
ligion in society is being gradually adopted. Kingsley
Davis simply states: "In the first place religion is

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12 Sir R. P. Paranjpye, Religion and the Indian
Problem, The Thinker's Forum No. 26. London: Watts and
Co., 1943, p. 5.

13 Ibid., p. 11.

14 Ibid., p. 12.

a part of society."[15] Also, "One of the functions of religion is to justify, rationalize, and support the sentiments that give cohesion to the society."[16] To repeat what has already been quoted earlier, "For the great majority, Hinduism resulted in the most radical sanction of the existing traditional order and ways of doing things"; and "the basic goals of religion" being "transcendental"[17] were accessible only to those who could engage themselves in "mystical contemplation or other worldly asceticism." Ascetics and mystics, living as they did on the fringes of society, were not concerned with group-life or social cohesion. Free from social demands, family responsibilities, obligations to the kindred, loyalty to the group stamped with caste insignia, they were beyond the pale of rules laid down by tradition. They were outside society and yet above it - individuals who outranked everybody else that maintained his identity and clung to his social status within the traditional pattern that caste upheld.

At a certain stage in the development of society in India, deliberate and ingenious plans of the human mind were applied to give direction to the social evolution,

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[15] Kingsley Davis, Human Society. New York: Macmillan Company, 1955, p. 519.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Barnes, op. cit., p. 296.

which had been going on for centuries, and which had
been shaped by circumstances not directed by deliberate
human agency. Once the Laws of Manu had been applied to
the traditional ways of living with respect to existing
occupational and tribal or semi-tribal groups, the steel
frame of the caste structure was fastened to society -
all in the name of religion, and an artificial heirarchy
marking status positions was set up. The existing social
differences, endogamous groupings, taboos relating to
food and ideas of ceremonial pollution were seized upon
to make a social scale of superior and inferior positions.
Popular religious beliefs and practices, superstitions,
sacrifices and offerings to various divinities, were just
allowed to flourish; and since the essentials of group-
living had not been affected, the increasing demands of
caste discipline did not appear to be great hardships.
To those who demurred, the prospects of superior social
status in rebirth as a reward for doing the right things
within one's caste, were held out. Hence the aura of
religion over all social attitudes and behavior between
man and man, and between caste and caste groups.

In the light of the above discussions it is possi-
ble to understand the attitude of Christian European mis-
sionaries, from Western countries, to the whole problem
of caste, especially of caste in its relationship to the

Christian converts. Many a scholar among them attempted a deep and serious study of the Hindu scriptures, many wrote about their findings, appreciating at times Vedic[18] literature and the later developments of Hindu philosophy. But when it came to the active day to day life of the people, as Gilbert remarks in Caste in India (1948), "To the missionary caste behavior seemed to consist of heathen abomination."[19] Rightly the missionary condemned the inequalities that the caste system permitted. Many a missionary treated the operation of caste with tolerance, however bitter he might feel about its undemocratic aspects. There were not found wanting a few who with understanding recognized the importance of caste as a stabilizing factor in social relations.

On the whole it was the non-missionary European, writer, traveller or civilian, working in the districts, that had a better understanding of the caste system in practice and theory. A. H. Benton who had retired from the Indian Civil Service wrote in 1917 the book entitled Indian Moral Instruction and Caste Problems in which he argues that caste served secular and not religious

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[18] See Glossary.

[19] William H. Gilbert, Caste in India, A Bibliography. Washington: Library of Congress, 1948, pp. 56-57. (Unpublished document.)

purposes, and that it conferred important benefits like
security, contentment, pride, economic help, moral guid-
ance and so on. He says:

> The province of ethics must obviously lie in close
> proximity to that of caste, for they are both de-
> voted to the regulation of human conduct; indeed
> they may be to some extent overlapping, for the
> brotherhood sometimes pronounce excommunication for
> serious criminal offenses as well as for infringe-
> ment of caste rules.[20]

The Protestant missionaries denounced the practice of
caste rules on the part of the converts because the prac-
tices appeared to be based on Hindu religious beliefs.
The civilian Benton expressed an unbiased view when he
stated:

> Caste is the social framework which enables a man
> to know where his place in society is, with whom he
> may associate, eat and drink, and especially whom
> he may marry. He might as well try to escape from
> under the sky as from religion, but obviously no
> religion in particular has any special hold over any
> of these matters.[21]

Another Englishman, who retired from the Indian
Civil Service, observing a close connection between the
Hindu religion and Hindu society, wrote in 1932 a book,
Indian Caste Customs. He quotes from Sir Monier-Williams,
in the Preface, "Caste has been useful in promoting self-
sacrifice, in securing subordination of the individual
to an organized body, in restraining from vice, in pre-

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20 A. H. Benton, Indian Moral Instruction and Caste
Problems. London: Longmans Green & Co., 1917, p. 27.

21 Ibid.

venting from pauperism."[22] He quotes also from Meredith Townsend's _Europe_ _and_ _Asia_:

> I firmly believe caste to be a marvellous discovery, a form of socialism which through the ages has protected Hindoo society from anarchy and from the worst evils of industrial and competitive life - it is an automatic poor-law to begin with and the strongest form known of trades union.[23]

O'Malley observes, "It is exclusiveness as regards both _marriage_ and _social_ _intercourse_ which makes caste such a peculiar form of social organization, one to which there is no parallel in the modern world."[24] After referring to the inequalities of the caste system and the justification offered to the Hindus by their preceptors on the basis of religious beliefs in rebirth and the doctrine of _Karma_, O'Malley states:

> Caste is not merely a social institution but part of Hinduism, which on that account has been described as a socio-religious system, for it is partly a social organisation based on caste and partly a religious belief, or congeries of beliefs. Caste, is in fact, the steel frame binding together the many beliefs massed together in Hinduism. So integral a part is it of Hinduism, that a Hindu without a caste is almost a contradiction in terms. An ascetic, it is true, may rise to such a height in spiritual life as to be above the trammels of caste, but a layman cannot.[25]

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[22] L. S. S. O'Malley, _Indian Caste Customs_. Cambridge: University Press, Cambridge, 1932, Preface.

[23] _Ibid._

[24] _Ibid._, p. 2.

[25] _Ibid._, p. 19.

Here is expressed the paradox of the caste system which
is due to the discrepancy between the theory of caste and
its practice in society. O'Malley elaborates on the good
points of the caste system before finally making his ob-
servations on the modifications taking place and modern
tendencies working for the lessening of caste rigidity
due to factors like travel, Western ideas, town-life and
education.

The most clarifying interpretations of the caste
system of India come from the pen of Max Muller in a
book published in 1890. The temptation to quote exten-
sively from his Chips from a German Workshop may become
clear from the following quotations:

> In India caste, in one form or other, has existed
> from the earliest times. Words may remain the same,
> but their meaning changes constantly, and what was
> meant by caste in India a thousand years B.C. in a
> simple, healthy, patriarchal state of society, was
> necessarily something very different from what is
> called caste nowadays.[26]

After stating a number of arguments to show "that in dis-
regarding the rules of caste no command of the real Veda
is violated" he proceeds to say, "Caste in India is a
human law, a law fixed by those who were most benefited
by it themselves."[27] "Caste, in the modern sense of the

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[26] Max Muller, Chips from a German Workshop. New
York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890, p. 296.

[27] Ibid., p. 306.

word, is no religious institution; it has no authority in the sacred writing of the Brahmans."[28] Again, "although caste cannot be called a religious institution, it is a social institution, based on the law of the country. It has been growing up for centuries, and the whole frame of Hindu society has been moulded in it."[29] Max Muller saw in the caste system a social institution changing and developing all the time. He observes:

> In fact, if caste could be divested of that religious character which the priests for their own advantage succeeded in fastening upon it, thereby giving an unnatural permanence and sanctity to what ought to be, like all social institutions, capable of change and growth, it would probably be found that the system of caste was well adapted to that state of society and that form of government which has hitherto existed in India; and that if it were suddenly destroyed more harm than good would follow from such a change.[30]

Max Muller may be called an arm-chair social scientist. He never visited India, yet by virtue of his scholarship in Sanskrit and his writings, he remains an outstanding authority in Indology, or the study of Indian history and culture. Gilbert (1948) says, with reference to the study of caste in India, "It is largely up to the Indologist to explain in detail the forms and functions

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[28] Ibid., p. 316.

[29] Ibid., p. 317.

[30] Ibid., p. 344.

of this outstanding pattern of human thought and con-
duct."[31] It was in the nature of an exciting discovery
to the writer to come upon some of Max Muller's state-
ments made over sixty years ago, and which serve to il-
luminate the problem of the persistence of caste. Since
what he said covers the outline of the thesis it is im-
portant to quote him at length:

> Much offense has been given by the missionaries
> by maintaining that no one can be a true convert who
> refuses to eat and drink with his fellow-converts.
> "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink". The
> social position of the converts in India will be
> for a long time a stumbling-block. Native converts
> are not admitted to English caste, and it is the
> dread of this isolated position which acts most pow-
> erfully against conversion. The Mohammedans admit
> Hindu converts into their own society, and treat
> every Mussalman on terms of equality. Christian
> society in India is hardly able to do this, and it
> is a question whether even the purest religion will
> be able to overcome that deep-rooted feeling of
> caste which divided the white European from the dark
> Asiatic. Measures must be adopted to give to the
> Hindus who accept Christianity something in place
> of the caste which they lose. In a certain sense no
> man ought to be without caste, without friends who
> take care of him, without companions who watch him,
> without associates whose good opinion he values,
> without companions with whom he can work for a com-
> mon cause. The healthy life of a political body
> can only be supported by means of associations,
> circles, leagues, guilds, clans, clubs, or parties;
> and in a country where caste takes the place of all
> this, the abolition of caste would be tantamount to
> a complete social disorganisation.[32]

One more pronouncement on caste from Max Muller: "As a

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[31] Gilbert, op. cit., p. 4.

[32] Muller, op. cit., p. 351.

religious institution caste will die; as a social insti-

tution it will live and improve."[33]

Compare with the above statements what the Essay

on Hindu Caste (1891) by the Rev. H. Bower says, "It is

founded upon ceremonial purity and pollution, and is

therefore an essential part of the idolatrous religion

of India."[34] He continues:

> The Hindus do not distinguish between a civil and
> a religious element of caste. Even if it was origin-
> ally a political scheme, the question is, did it
> ever exist separately from the religion of the
> Hindus? Their civil and religious polity seem to be
> inseparably connected. This is proved by the fact
> that when a Hindu embraces Christianity, he is con-
> sidered by the heathen as having forfeited his caste,
> the change being considered a breach of moral and
> religious duty. Caste is not only guarded by the
> prescriptions of law, but fortified by the adaman-
> tine and impregnable barriers of the divine decree.
> And to mingle or confound what was originally separated,
> is considered a deed of the most daring impiety.[35]

Further the Essay continues, "Every Hindu distinction

is connected with and sanctioned by, nay, owes its origin

to religion, and is so intimately connected with it that

he who gives up caste in one respect loses it in all

respects."[36] Bower gives a number of arguments to indicate

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[33] Ibid., p. 353.

[34] Rev. H. Bower, Essay on Hindu Caste. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1851, p. 14.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 16.

how evil caste appeared to him, and he strongly expresses

himself as a bitter opponent to the practice of it.

> Caste has not only a powerful influence in con-
> tracting the intellectual faculties, but also oper-
> ates in contracting the social affections. It is
> emphatically unsocial. It has been known to impede
> the flowing forth of sympathy, to destroy kindliness
> of heart, and love for country - where Egotism reigns,
> Benevolence must languish. It resists the progress
> of truth, - it perpetuates ignorance, - on it mainly
> depends the practice of early marriages, and mourn-
> ful widowhood.37

Evidently Bower was determined to see only unsocial

and unmoral aspects in the caste system. His _Essay_ is a

good starting point to examine the attitude of Christian

missionaries in general. He recalls how the early Pro-

testant missionaries made a very firm and determined stand

against caste, but that gradually they had to give way

to expediency. He quotes from the Reports of Ziegenbalg

and Grundler written in 1712:

> When a heathen embraces Christianity he must re-
> nounce all superstitions connected with caste, viz,
> that no one should intermarry or eat with those of
> another caste; that every caste should have a dis-
> tinguishing way of living; that those who acted con-
> trary should lose their caste and be accounted the
> most despicable wretches. For we admit of no such
> distinctions.38

Noting how gradually concessions were made to the obser-

vance of caste by Christian converts, Bower remarks,

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37 _Ibid._, p. 33.

38 _Ibid._, p. 59.

"as caste Christians became now of importance; occupy-
ing respectable government situations, their minds became
secularized, and they studied to please their heathen
neighbours by conforming to caste customs."[39]   This he
says happened after the death of the famous missionary
of South India, Christian Friedrich Schwartz,[40] in 1798.

Bower deplores most the toleration of caste dis-
tinctions allowed within the walls of the church by the
Roman Catholic missionaries. Their tradition goes a
long way back to the time of Robert de Nobili who arrived
in Madura, in South India, in the year 1605. His was a
very colorful career as a missionary of the Roman Church.
The Anglican Bishop Stephen Neill in his Builders of the
Indian Church (1934), writes:

> de Nobili's attitude to caste serves as a key to
> his whole programme. His aim was to change as little
> in the outward status of his converts as possible.
> Everything in Hindu customs and usage which was not
> positively idolatrous was to be conserved and taken
> over into the Church. Caste, he regarded as simply
> political in character, and as having no religious
> significance at all. There was no question of his
> converts "coming out", and leaving their homes; they
> should conform sufficiently to Hindu customs to be
> able to go on living with their families. It is
> the custom of the Brahmins and other "twice-born"
> castes to wear a sacred thread from the left shoulder.
> Christian Brahmins should continue to wear a thread,
> but it should be of different material, and put on

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[39] Ibid., p. 62.

[40] See Footnote 6 in Chapter V.

without the ceremonies of heathenism. In order to
maintain Hindu distinctions within the Christian
community de Nobili was prepared to accept the
complete division of the church into two.[41]

The plan which was actually put into practice was to
give the Brahman converts a superior grade of missionaries
who clothed, fed and lived like the Hindu religious
mendicant, and they were called <u>Saniyasis</u>. For the lower
castes there came into being another order of non-Brahman
teachers, known as <u>Pandaraswamis</u>. Commenting on this
Bishop Neill says, "The situation was not unlike that
which St. Paul had to face in Antioch, when even Peter
withdrew and would not eat with the Gentiles. We can
imagine what Paul's comments would have been on the methods
of de Nobili."[42]

The example set up by de Nobili came to be known
as "the accomodation method", which was criticized for
many decades until the Bull of Pope Benedict XIV in 1744
settled the matter by condemning the practices of de
Nobili, and declaring at the same time the principle
that Christianity must be presented to India in an In-
dian form. The result was, as Bishop Neill points out,
that for a hundred and fifty years the Roman Catholic
missionaries, identifying themselves with the people of
the country lived as they did, even to the extent of

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[41] Bishop Stephen Neill, <u>Builders of the Indian
Church</u>. London: Edinburgh House Press, 1934, p. 60.

[42] <u>Ibid</u>.

abstaining from meat. Thus social usages were left untouched. As for the Protestant missionaries they found it bitter to get reconciled to the idea of the converts following caste customs, once they had declared themselves Christians. The subject of caste never failed to be on the agenda whenever Protestant missionary conferences were held, which were fairly frequent, and resolutions were passed that caste should not be allowed within the church.

From time to time inquiries were made among the different Protestant churches reagrding the attitude of the Christians to caste. The Rev. H. Bower refers to one such inquiry under four headings: general, church, school and social intercourse. Under the subject of social intercourse, the following questions were searching enough for the purpose:

1. Supposing Natives of different castes to become converts to Christianity, do they object to eat and drink together of the same provisions, and if the objection is made, is it on the side of the higher or lower caste?

2. Are any distinctions observed among Christian converts in contracting and forming marriages? And if so, are these distinctions merely of their trade and calling, or of a religious nature?

3. In addition to the ceremonies of the Church

in solemnizing marriages, do the Christian converts observe any other ceremonies? And if so, enumerate them, stating whether they are observed in the procession to and from church, or in the domestic festivities consequent on the marriage.

4. Are there any such observances in the case of funerals, either at the time of the service, or at any subsequent period?[43]

The final word by the Rev. H. Bower is, "Caste, as observed by native Christians is essentially the same as that observed by the heathen."[44] He could not make any distinction between the social significance of caste customs and religious belief and ritual.

Bishop Stephen Neill, who first served in the Tinnevelly district as a missionary, speaking and preaching in Tamil in the villages of that district, and later became Bishop of the Tinnevelly diocese, was very familiar with the social conditions that prevailed there. He says in the book from which quotations have already been made:

> It is almost impossible for those who have not lived in India to understand why this problem of caste meets us at every point in our story. Life in India is largely lived in the open air. Men of diverse castes will meet on the bathing ghat, at

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[43] Bower, op. cit., p. 105.

[44] Ibid., p. 63.

market, in the village panchayat.[45] But there is
another hidden life - the life within the house, and
in that life caste reigns supreme. No man of another
caste will ever penetrate the inner rooms, he will
never be invited to share a meal with any of the
family. Even among the outcastes there are many
divisions and gradations; the Paraiyan will not sit
down with the Pallan, the Mala will not eat with the
Madiga.[46]

In 1910 there was published in England South In-
dian Missions,"Containing glimpses into the lives and

customs of the Tamil people" by Rev. J. A. Sharrock, an

Anglican missionary, and sometime Principal of a mission-

ary college - the S.P.G. College - in Trichinopoly, in

South India. Chapter eight of his book is devoted to the

subject, Caste in the Christian Church. The chapter is

full of incidents that illustrate the superior attitude

of converts from the castes, placed higher in the social

ladder, towards converts from the lower caste groups,

and from the so-called outcastes. The incidents relate

to sharing food and drink, marrying, sitting together

in church and taking communion from the same cup at the

altar. The well-meaning missionary who tried his best

to level off all differences between the Christians, at

least inside the walls of the church, found himself up

against tremendous social obstacles. He relates how once

he was even reprimanded by his own bishop for the zeal

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[45] See Glossary.

[46] Neill, op. cit., p. 50; see Glossary for the
castes mentioned.

with which he had tried to perform his share in stamping caste out of the Christian church. He narrates how the early missionaries, due to the misconception of looking at caste as class, made concessions in the beginning, like having separate churches for the higher and lower castes, or even allotting different places within the same church, as in the case of the Roman Catholic missionaries who openly permitted caste distinctions. The Lutherans were found to be almost as bad as the Romans in the same respect. So, when the S.P.G. (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (Anglican)) missionaries began their work in 1826, that is a century after the Luterhans, they found the concessions made to caste by the earlier missionaries were a stumbling block to their own work.

Rev. J. Sharrock says:

Again and again have Christians from the different Sudra castes seceded from the church rather than admit any kind of equality with Christians from the outcastes in Madras, Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Tinnevelly; and similarly Roman Catholics have come over to us because of caste disputes. Missionaries may thus see the work of a lifetime ruined, as it appears, in a moment; hence many have been ready to catch at any kind of an excuse for caste - special rank, the parallel of slavery, the plea that the evil will die of its own accord, and so on, whilst some have gone further and have openly defended the custom on the plea of dirty habits among the Pariahs, and justified their action by appealing to the Bible.[47]

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[47] Rev. J. A. Sharrock, South India Missions. Westminster, 1910, p. 183.

He quotes one of the missionaries who defended the observance of caste customs on the part of Christian converts:

> To desire a man to renounce his caste signifies to require (for example) a man of the high Saiva or Vellala (cultivator) caste, who is accustomed from his infancy to live only on vegetables, to eat meat, to enter into a close connection, or to level himself with the lower classes and intermarry one another (e.g.) with the Pariahs, a caste who, from time immemorial, have made themselves disgustful to all other classes of the natives by their inattention to, and disregard of cleanliness, and particularly by feeding upon carrion. And although our Protestant Pariahs are not allowed to use such detestable food; yet as their heathen and Romanist relations are not debarred the use of it in the like manner, the aversion of well-bred persons to enter into the closest connections with such a class of peoples (at least until every vestige of such filth propensities shall have been effaced) is founded upon reason and decency; and we do not feel ourselves warranted to require of the higher ranks such an unscriptural surrender of their birthright, to which no nobleman or gentleman in our own country would ever submit.
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> As we presume that the equality of such a demand cannot be proved by any precept in the sacred Oracles nor from the practice of the Apostles and primitive Christians, and as besides such a demand might be productive of fatal consequences, we have taken care to follow the same mode of acting as our predecessors have done.[48]

Besides the reluctance and refusal of so-called "caste-Christians" (a term that is anathema to a missionary like Sharrock) to eat and drink with the converts from lower castes or out-castes like the Pariah, now generally referred to as Panchama or Harijan, what displeased

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[48] _Ibid._, pp. 183-184.

the author were features such as the use of caste titles,
like <u>Pillai</u>, <u>Nadar</u>, and so on; the use of caste insignia
like marks on the forehead; the long tuft of hair knotted
on top of the head on the part of the male convert; tak-
ing out processions at the time of marriage or funeral -
customs which were declared Hindu and heathenish. More
than these the custom of marriage within the caste seems
to have worried the missionaries more, for they felt that
if they could break down this barrier, and bring about
intermarriage, social intercourse between the Christians
from the different castes would be facilitated, and there-
by the hold of caste would be loosened so far as the
Christians were concerned. The missionary's ideal was
to build up one single Christian community, not segments
labelled under the different castes. It is interesting
in this connection to note that one of the early mission-
aries in Tinnevelly, Rev. Margoschis, who wrote on Caste
and Christianity in 1893 (which unfortunately is not
available for reference) conducted an experiment in in-
termarriage by bringing up orphans from different castes
in the mission boarding school, and when these children
grew up they were married. This was in the heart of the
Tinnevelly district which then was a stronghold of con-
verts from the Nadar caste. But his example did not put
an end to the observance of caste customs and caste en-
dogamy among the Christians was not weakened, not for

many more years to come.

In 1876 the Rev. James Vaughan expressed what must have been the reaction to the problem that caste presented to many a Western European missionary:

> The first impression is that caste is a thing positively unique; there is nothing in any country with whose history we are familiar, ancient or modern, with which it can be compared; it has a social element, but it is not a social distinction; it has a religious element, but it is hardly a religious institution; it finds its sanction in a religious idea, inasmuch as Brahman is said to have been its author, but it lives on irrespective of religious faith or observance.[49]

He also came to the conclusion, "Strange and anomalous as it may seem, a man's belief or disbelief has nothing whatever to do with his caste."[50]

Finally the pronouncement on the subject from the lips of an Indian divine, whose social background lay in Tinnevelly and with the Christian Nadar group. The following extract is from "The Caste Movement in South India", a paper contributed to the International Review of Missions, in 1932, by the Rt. Rev. V. Azarish, the late Bishop of Dornakal:

> Again, caste spirit in the church must be frankly, firmly and from the outset recognized and taught to be contrary to the religion of Christ. To ignore caste, to refrain from teaching about it, to yield to age-long prejudices and habits which enfeeble the Christian life are sure ways of fostering the

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[49] Ibid., p. 36.

[50] Ibid., p. 33.

continuous hold of caste in the church. Modern India
will not respect a Church that harbours the age-long
evils through which Manu's India was cursed, and
from which political leaders seek to set the country
free. The Christian witness for a universal brother-
hood in Christ can make an appeal which India cannot
long resist. This, however, does not mean that we
should make inroads into the caste citadel, and by
ecclesiastical legislation demand interdining and
intermarriage as prerequisites to baptism. The King-
dom of God does not consist in eating, drinking and
marrying. We must, however, insist that within the
sphere of religion, that is, in worship, in the ac-
ceptance of the ministry and in the use of the sacra-
ments caste differences should neither be recognized
nor respected. Much gentleness, great sympathy, and
deep humility will be required of the leaders in
dealing with particular difficulties; but conviction,
firmness and loyalty to the truth will also be
needed.51

That caste still persists among the Christians in

South India, and that it continues to be a worrisome

problem, may be seen in the October, 1957 issue of The

South India Churchman, the Magazine of the Church of

South India which is a Union of the Protestant groups of

that area. In the Editorial which is on Church Union

and After, existing problems are mentioned, one of them

being caste:

The community itself can become a selfish pre-
occupation in an area identified with a homogeneous
community of the old caste system. There are several
such communities within the Church of South India
which continue as before. The Union has not so far
broken down this communal exclusiveness. Is it
reasonable to hope that the barriers that divide

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51 The Rt. Rev. the Bishop of Dornakal, "The
Caste Movement in South India," The International Review
of Missions, Vol. XXI, No. 84 (October 1932), pp. 457-
467.

peoples from one another will ultimately disappear
and that a society that transcends caste, conscious
of a unity beyond the kin-group will emerge? . . .
While the caste has been an inheritance from the
Hindu past, denominations are a bequest from the
churches of the West, through whose generosity we
received the gospel.52

This chapter has stressed the close association
between society and religion, and the association of the
Hindu religion with the traditional origin and develop-
ment of the caste system in India. The general attitude
of Christian missionaries from the West to caste was
noted: indulgence and tolerance on the part of the Roman
Catholics, and opposition on the part of the Protestants.
What the Protestant missionaries failed to see was first
and foremost the need that the convert felt for continu-
ing to be a member of the caste group to which he had be-
longed, and the values it held for him, apart from re-
ligious beliefs and practices. They themselves had no
substitute to offer, excepting in the form of a new kind
of grouping made up of converts from various castes; but
such a society does not get formed easily or in a short
time. There was no model for such a social group. Be-
sides the Western missionary did not realize that he had
a background of culture which supported him, which he
was not called upon to renounce. He had a culture in

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52 The South India Churchman, October 1957.

which his religion was a part. The convert was prepared
to renounce his old religion, but not the rest of the
culture which was embedded in his caste group.

Another fact that the Western missionaries failed
to face up to was that the caste system had been, and
was, undergoing great changes. Each caste group had ac-
cumulated its culture, which came to be cherished as
its social heritage. Within the pattern of the caste
culture the component elements were gradually changing
their relative positions of importance, and religion did
not necessarily have the most dominant place. What Max
Muller said was coming true: "As a religious institution
caste will die; as a social institution it will live and
improve."[53] Here was a new social situation that was not
intelligible, or not acceptable, to the Protestant mission-
aries. The religious element within the context of the
Nadar's caste system had changed for some of the members
of the caste; and certain features of the system were con-
tinued unaltered even after Christianity had been sub-
stituted for Hinduism. This will become evident in the
following pages as the subject of the thesis is developed
with reference to the Christian Nadar.

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[53] Muller, op. cit., p. 353.

CHAPTER IV

THE NADAR CASTE OF SOUTH INDIA

This chapter will describe the Nadar caste with
reference to its home district, its traditional origin,
social divisions, occupation, status in the traditional
caste system of India, economic and social progress, and
some important aspects of its culture observable at present.
To begin with the early known habitat of the Nadars,
the district of Tinnevelly is the home of the Nadar
caste. The original name, Thiru-nel-veli (in Tamil mean-
ing the sacred rice hedge), is now in use again. The
anglicized form, Tinnevelly, has been preferred for use
in this report, since most of the sources use that form.

The capital of the district, Palamcottah,[1] which
is about four hundred miles south of Madras city, is get-
ting to be known by its old name, Palayam-kottai, mean-
ing fortified citadel. One of the southern districts of
the present Madras State, the Tinnevelly district is di-
vided from Travancore by a natural barrier, the Western
Ghats, a range of mountains that stretch unbroken, ex-
cepting for the Palghat Gap, from the Bombay State to
the southern limit near Cape Comorin,[2] known in Tamil

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[1] Refer Map of Tinnevelly District in the Appendix.

[2] Refer Map of South India in the Appendix.

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as _Kanya-kumari_ (virgin daughter). Rising from three thousand to eight thousand feet above the sea-level, the Ghats reach their highest point on the Travancore side at the peak of _Anai-mudi_ (elephant's crown), and on the Tinnevelly side at the conical _Agastya-malai_ (hill of Agastya). The former is 8,837 feet, and the latter 6,125 feet, high. To the north of Tinnevelly are the districts of Madura and Ramnad,[3] and the east and south are bounded by the Gulf of Munar.[4] The extent of the district is 4,326 square miles, and it has a sea-coast of 85 miles with a harbor at Tuticorin,[5] which is its largest port.

There is through train service from Madras to Tinnevelly Junction,[6] the journey taking about twenty hours even by the fastest train, since the Southern Railway serves many important towns that lie in the densely populated area on the way. It is possible to travel by plane as far as Trichinopoly (_Thiru-chira-palli_, the place of the three-headed giant), which is two hundred miles south of Madras. This takes only a short time,

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[3] _Ibid._

[4] _Ibid._

[5] _Ibid._

[6] Located in Tinnevelly town. Refer Map of Tinnevelly in Appendix.

but the rest of the journey must be made by train, or car or bus, for buses also ply between the towns and major villages. Small coastal steamers carry cargo between Madras and Tuticorin, calling at, or passing, Pondicherry, Cuddalore, and Point Calimere, before entering the narrow straits of Pamban where Ceylon is closest to India.

Between Palamcottah and Tinnevelly town, which is three miles away, flows the famous Thamraparni (copper-colored) river that rises on the Agastya-malai. This peak is commonly called Pothigai (short for Pothiya-ma-malai or the great mountain). Legend has it that the sage Agastya who introduced the Aryan civilization to the south, lived in the inaccessible recesses of the mountain. The average rainfall on the top of the mountain is 300 inches a year, while in Palamcottah it is less than 27 inches; and the average for the plains of the Tinnevelly district is even less - 25 inches. As for the temperature the mean average for the year is 85.3°; and for May, the hottest month, the average is 100.9°, but it can go beyond 103° in the driest parts of the district.

The Thamraparni, before finishing its course of 75 miles in the Gulf of Munar, drains an area of about 1,750 square miles. Water to the district is supplied also by smaller rivers, deep-sunk wells and inland lakes (known as tharuvai), which get filled by the north-east

monsoon rains. The vegetation, depending on the water supply, gives variety to the scenery. There are wooded hilly tracts where the banana and the orange flourish; green fields of rice close by the rivers; the black cotton area where under "dry cultivation" food grains and cotton grow; and the "palmyra forest" where among the red sand dunes (locally called theri) the palmyra stands firm even when the south-west winds shift the sands, and change the contour of the highlands. Here nothing else can thrive. In the lower foothills, here and there, as in the Tenkasi region, are spice gardens. In the coastal regions are the centers of the fishing industry, and in season large numbers of divers are drawn from the neighboring districts to Tuticorin to dive for pearls and shells.

Historically the district of Tinnevelly was continuous with Madura as the southern part of the Pandiya kingdom, which Marco Polo visited in 1288 and 1293. The Nayaks came into power, after overthrowing the Pandiyas; and in the middle of the eighteenth century the Nawab of Arcot made Tinnevelly a separate unit under his jurisdiction. The pearl industry attracted the Portuguese and the Dutch; and when the British rule was established over the area, Tinnevelly became one of the districts of the Madras Presidency. Now the district is densely

populated with numerous castes that are engaged in a variety of occupations.

The Nadar caste came into prominence after the riots that followed their unsuccessful attempts to enter certain Hindu temples which were not open to them for worship. With the coming of the Christian missionaries from the West, and their increased activities in the nineteenth century, converts from the caste came under notice, especially when some of them began to clamour for superior social status for the Nadar caste. There is no single monograph dealing with the caste in all its aspects, with its social and economic developments, and special features which make it a distinct group in the middle of other caste groups of South India. However, there are several sources from which it is possible to reconstruct the background and development of the Nadar caste.

The traditional origin of the caste is given in the Tinnevelly District Gazetteer for 1917.[7] The founders of the caste, as popularly narrated, were the sons of seven virgins who were formed from the eye-sight of the god, Narayana. The boys, being so very special, were fed with the milk of the cow which belonged to the god,

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[7] Madras District Gazetteers - Tinnevelly, Vol. I. Madras: Government Press, 1917, p. 129.

Indra. After some time it happened that the boys were
given into the care of another deity, <u>Badrakali</u>, the
household goddess of the caste of the present day. The
story goes that once upon a time the river, <u>Vaigai</u>, which
flows through the Madura district, was in floods. The
king of the country was told that the only way to stop
the floods was to get the seven boys to carry mud in
baskets on their heads, and close the breaches on the
river banks. The boys refused, saying that their heads
were made to carry crowns and not mud. Thereupon the
king ordered one of the boys to be buried in sand up to
the neck, and an elephant was made to kick the boy's head
off into the river. The same fate overtook another boy,
but as his head floated down the stream, it cried out,
"Shall this head prove false to the other?" The king
heard of this and his anger was appeased. The five boys
who were spared were the founders of the five sub-
divisions of the caste.[8] <u>Karukku-pattayar</u>, meaning those
of the sharp sword (at times referred to as <u>Karukkumattayar</u>
or those who are like the sharp-edged petiole of the
palmyra leaf), were considered to be superior to the
rest. The <u>Mel-nattar</u> (men of the west) lived in the

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[8] Edgar Thurston, <u>Castes and Tribes of Southern
India</u>. Vol. VI. Madras: Government Press, 1909, pp.
376-377.

western part of the Tinnevelly district and in Travancore.
A third sub-division was called Kodikkal. Kodi means
flag, and kal is leg, or standard; and the term has been
taken to mean standard bearers of fighting men. (Another
interpretation would make the term Kodikkal mean a betel
garden, which would make the occupation to be tending the
vine of the betel.) Sometimes this division is confused
with Nattathi, the name of another sub-division that was
settled in the village of Nattathi, near Sawyerpuram,[9]
later on a Christian village that was named after a mis-
sionary, Sawyer. The fifth group, called Kalla, were
supposed to be the original servants of the Karukkupattayar.
In olden days intermarriage was not allowed between the
sub-divisions, but there was no taboo on eating together.
Most of the members were meat-eaters, but some abstained
from meat. The five divisions appear to be territorial,
and culturally united like a tribe.

In recorded history the main occupation of the
caste is given as palmyra-climbing for obtaining its
juice, which while fresh is sweet and is boiled into
sugar; and when allowed to ferment it becomes an intoxi-
cating drink, known as toddy and kal in Tamil. Since
drinking any intoxicating drink was believed to be one

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[9] Refer Map of Tinnevelly in Appendix.

of the five deadly sins, according to Hindu religious
teaching, any association with the making of toddy was
considered polluting. An occupational group that was en-
gaged in any work associated with fermenting juice was
not considered clean enough to enter the temples where
the higher castes worshipped. The Rev. Robert Caldwell
said in a lecture delivered in 1869:

> There are but few of this caste in Madras, Tanjore
> or anywhere north of Madura; but in the southern por-
> tion of the Madura district they are frequently met
> with, and in Tinnevelly and South Travancore they
> are very numerous. Most of the Christians in
> Tinnevelly belong to this caste . . . . The Shanars
> have a special connexion with the cultivation of the
> palmyra palm, inasmuch as, in the southern districts
> at least, Shanars alone climb the tree and prepare
> sugar from its juice; but it would be a mistake to
> suppose that climbing the tree and boiling its juice
> are the only occupations of the Shanars. Many of
> them, perhaps the greater number, are cultivators of
> the land, like other ryots; sometimes renters, some-
> times proprietors, of the land they cultivate. Some
> are traders and some are day labourers. As a rule
> they are poor, though their poverty is far from being
> extreme, and some of their numbers are in good cir-
> cumstances. One member of a division of the caste
> is a Zemindar.[10] The districts of the country they
> mainly occupy seem to have been the last that were
> taken up and cultivated, the better soils everywhere
> cultivated first; and the Shanars, as it seems to me,
> deserve much credit for not having despaired of the
> sandy wastes allotted to them, but on the contrary
> for having covered them with the useful palmyra, or
> the beautiful as well as useful plantain (banana).[11]

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[10] See Glossary.

[11] Rev. R. Caldwell, "Tinnevelly and the Tinnevelly
Mission," a lecture delivered before the Native Christian
Literary Society, May 13, 1869, p. 9.

It was pointed out in Chapter I that the term,
Shanan, or Shanar, is rarely used by the members of the
caste themselves, unless they use it to designate the
actual palmyra-climber, or as a derogatory term. Other-
wise they prefer to be called, and addressed as, Nadan
or Nadar which is the caste-title. The title Pandiyan
had been used in certain parts as equivalent to Nadan,
and the caste is believed to have been once composed of
the followers of the Pandiyan kings of the south. Names
like Guna Pandiyan, Selva Pandiyan, Durai Pandiyan,
Sundara Pandiyan, are quite common among the Hindu and
Christian sections of the caste.

Thurston, in his Castes and Tribes, Vol. VI (1909),
gives a number of incidents relating to the aspirations
of the Nadars to be considered socially superior. He
quotes from the 1891 Census Report:

> Shanans are in social position usually placed only
> a little above the Pallas[12] and the Paraiyans,[13] and
> are considered to be one of the polluting castes, but
> of late many of them have put forward a claim to be
> considered Kshatriyas,[14] and at least 24,000 of them
> appear as Kshatriyas in the caste tables. This is,
> of course, absurd, as there is no such thing as a
> Dravidian Kshatriya. But it is by no means certain
> that the Shanars were not at one time a warlike

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[12] See Glossary.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

tribe, for we find traces of a military occupation
among several toddy-drawing castes of the south,
such as the Billavas (bowmen), Halepaik (old foot
soldiers), Kumarapaik (junior foot). Even the kadamba
kings of Mysore are said to have been toddy-drawers.[15]

Thurston quotes from the 1898 judgment of the

High Court of Madras in the famous Kamudi temple case

which was the result of the Nadars trying to enter a

Hindu temple meant for castes higher than they, and not

meant for any caste dealing with intoxicating liquor:

> No doubt the Shanars have abandoned their heredi-
> tary occupation, and have won for themselves by edu-
> cation, industry and frugality, respectable positions
> as traders and merchants, and even as vakils (law
> pleaders) and clerks; and it is natural to feel
> sympathy for their efforts to obtain social recog-
> nition, and to rise to what is regarded as a higher
> form of religious worship; but such sympathy will
> not be increased by unreasonable and unfounded pre-
> tensions, and, in the effort to rise, the Shanars
> must not invade the established rights of other
> castes. They have temples of their own, and are
> numerous enough, and strong enough in wealth and
> education to rise along their own lines.[16]

Caldwell says of them, "The Shanars are not isolated from

the rest of the community, but are simply one caste out

of many - Hindus in their nationality, and Hindus in their

religion, like the rest of the Tamil castes above and

below them in the social scale."[17]

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[15] Edgar Thurston, _Castes and Tribes of Southern India_, Vol. VI. Madras, 1909, p. 368.

[16] _Ibid._, p. 371.

[17] Caldwell, _op. cit._, p. 10.

It is remarkable how the social status of the
caste was cherished even by those who had been converted
to Christianity. Thurston refers to a petition that he
received from some Christian members of the caste re-
siding in Nazareth, and signed by a very large number of
the community - a petition bearing the impressive title,
"Short account of the Cantras or Tamil Xatras, the origin-
al but down-trodden royal race of Southern India." Ac-
tually the petition was drawn by Nabhi P. V. Pandion,
son of the learned A. N. Chattampillai Aiya, "on behalf
of the Nadar Community." The petition has an appendix
containing extracts from comments on the caste made by
Government officers and missionaries. There is a passage
from Inquiries made by the Bishop of Madras (1868), "There
are two divisions even among the Shanars: namely, Nadars
otherwise called land-holders, and common people. They
buy Pariahs and Pallas, to work in their houses as slaves,
so as to retain their usual proud customs."[18] To this
day in the villages of Tinnevelly Pariahs and Pallas are
engaged to work in the fields owned by Nadars, but are
not allowed inside their houses; and the laborers drawn
from the two castes mentioned above usually live outside,

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[18] Nabhi P. V. Pandion, A Memorial to J. C. Molony
Esq., I.C.S., Superintendent of Census Operations. Madras,
Trichinopoly: The "Southern Star" Press, 1910, p. 12.

or at the fringe of the village, and not near the dwell-
ing places of the Nadars. (See Appendix for sketches of
two villages.)

Another extract is from an account given by Miss
S. Tucker, sister of Rev. J. Tucker, M.A., of the C.M.S.
(Church Missionary Society):

> "Nadars" are the acknowledged proprietors of the
> soil; even when a Nadan has sold a piece of land, he
> retains the right to a sort of quit-rent. Indeed
> the system is very like that of our lords of manor,
> with the addition of the remarkable privilege, that
> in any dispute that is brought into a court of law,
> with regard to landed property, though all other
> classes are obliged to establish their claims by
> written documents, it is only necessary for a Nadan
> to be identified as the Nadan of such a particular
> spot; and the disputed property is adjusted to him
> unless the opponent can prove his purchase of it.[19]

A statement made by Bishop Caldwell in 1849 on the same
subject is as follows: "The Nadars are in possession of
extensive tracts of land, besides claiming hereditary
rights of seignorage over the lands and habitations of
the rest of the Shanars."[20]

The important features of the caste and culture
of the Hindu Nadar will now be described. The caste
group is one of the many castes classed together by the
Brahman in the south under the category, Sudra.[21] In

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[19] Ibid., p. 18.

[20] Ibid.

[21] See Glossary.

South India the great cleavage is not so great among the sudra groups as between the Brahman and the rest of the groups in the area who are generally referred to as non-Brahmans. The non-Brahman castes have much in common, religion which is Hinduism, and the general cultural pattern. Tamil is the regional language, and the Nadar caste boasts of being able to use the refined type of Tamil, called Senthamil, or pure Tamil, which is supposed to be free, or using very little, of Sanskrit. Even the illiterate among the caste are capable of expounding Hindu philosophy and ancient Tamil literature in a language that in no way is unrefined.

Only a small section of the Nadar caste is engaged in palmyra-climbing, and large numbers have taken to trade. Nadar Mannarum, Nayaka Mannarum[22] while tracing the historical antecedents of the caste, recalls that from early known times trade has been one of their occupations, and especially the transportation of merchandise from place to place. So when they fell upon evil times more of the people turned to peddling goods till they could build up their industry. One has only to visit places like Sivakasi and Virudhunagar to see how busy the Nadars could be, collecting grains, cotton, tamarind,

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[22] Ramalinga Gurukkal and V. A. Kumaraiya Nadar, Nadar Mannarum, Nayaka Mannarum. Virudhunagar: Sachidanandam Press, 1957.

betel, areca nuts (for chewing with betel leaf), jaggery (palmyra sugar) and other goods, for export. Their pettais (local stopping places maintained only for Nadars) are always scenes of coming-in and going-out of heavy bullock-drawn carts, as they have been for centuries. Trade and business have contributed to the wealth and economic progress of the caste. Conscious of the advantages of education, increasing numbers of boys, and for some years now, girls also have been sent for higher education to the universities in the country, to become qualified for various occupations. There are many teachers, doctors, lawyers, and government employees scattered about the country. A few have been to England and qualified as Barristers. The men have progressed in the various professions, and the women, among whom many are graduates, are just venturing beyond the fields of teaching, nursing and home-making. A spinster is rare among the Hindu Nadars, for as a matter of course a girl gets married, and becomes a home-maker.

The material culture of the Nadars has some special characteristics which are seen in their household furnishings, domestic utensils and personal ornaments, especially the jewelry of women. The men continue to wear the veshti (lower garment), and shoulder piece, angavasthiram, both common to South India. A shirt is

also worn at times, and the Western suit and shoes have been adopted by some living in towns. In the olden days men wore their hair long, the tuft known as Kudumi, and now the custom may be met with here and there in villages. They had their ears bored in infancy, and wore gold earrings of the type worn by men in South India, with or without a stone in it. Nowadays the tendency throughout the area is for uniformity of dress and ornament, hair style (cut short for men) and footwear of locally made sandals, for men and women of all castes.

The Nadar women used to wear in a style now seen only in villages, a saree, seelai, and a bolero-like bodice, ravikkai tied in front. (Both garments and the styles are common to South India.) Their distended earlobes were weighted down by heavy golden ornaments that dangled down to the shoulders. These are rarely seen nowadays, even in the villages, for now the fashion is to wear small earrings. One does not also see anymore the heavy gold ornaments for the neck and the wrist, and hardly finds the silver anklets and toe rings which used to be common. The hair ornaments also have been mostly discarded in favor of something small and not elaborate.

In the Hindu Nadar home one sees the articles made of palmyra wood and fiber and leaf; fans, mats, baskets and cots. One of the occupations of the caste is the

making of these articles. The fibers drawn from stems and leaves are stained with red, blue, green and purple; and the weaving techniques wherever employed make very beautiful and ingenious pictures. The household vessels, pottery and metal (iron and brass), have certain types which the Nadars use in their homes; but again these days the old forms are giving place to factory-made vessels for cooking, eating and drinking, which are sold throughout the country.

Now for the food habits of the caste. Some of the Nadars are strict vegetarians, but the majority are meat eaters, the meat being limited to the flesh of sheep and goats, chicken and certain wild birds, and venison. Beef and pork are excluded from their diet, the former due to religious scruples and the latter because pigs are considered unclean. Fish, fresh and salted, are prominent in the Nadar's diet. Though the palmyra juice is drawn from the tree by their climbers, who also handle the juice for trade, it is never drunk in its fermented state; and drunkenness is one of the sins that must be avoided. Besides drinking the unfermented juice, and eating the varieties of sugar made out of that juice, they eat the tender kernel of the young fruit, and the sweet golden pulp of the ripe fruit (after roasting or boiling it with its rind). The palmyra seed itself is hard and large, and it takes a long time to germinate.

It is sown in thousands in the sandy soil, for raising new trees, and also for purposes of food. The young tuber, when it gets to the stage of sprouting, is dug up, roasted or boiled, and it makes good and nourishing eating. It can be dried and kept for months, to serve as a handy snack. The fact that every part and produce of the palmyra are used: the trunk for pillar or rafter; the leaf for thatching, basketry and writing; the stem for fence; its fibers for rope and basketry; and whatever is left over (including the rind of the fruit) for fuel, makes it appropriate to call the material culture of the Nadars the "Palmyra culture". There is also the fact that the traditional occupation of the Nadar is the climbing of the palmyra for extracting the juice from the flower-bearing stem of the tree.

Thurston refers to certain weapons used in fencing, and other physical feats which he says impressed him: "Fencing and figure exercises with long sticks of ironwood (Mesua ferrea). Figure exercises with sticks bearing flaming rags at each end. Various acrobatic tricks. Feats with heavy weights, rice-pounders, and pounding stones",[23] and finally he mentions an interesting sport, "Falconry". Hunting with a dog was a common practice,

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[23] Thurston, op. cit., p. 373.

especially hunting the wild pig that devastated the crops before harvest. As for musical instruments, Thurston refers to a horn made of bison horn. In olden days the Nadars were trained to play bell music in their temples on an instrument which consisted of a bow, seven or eight feet long, fitted with a cord of strong leather on which a number of bells were strung. The singers, four or five at a time, would sit on the floor, the bow before them, its middle resting on an inverted pot, and they would strike the cord with short sticks to produce the music.

The majority of the people live in small towns like Virudhunagar, Sivakasi, and Tuticorin which are close to villages where agricultural pursuits keep them busy. In these areas, particularly in the villages, it is usual for them to have their dwellings where the families of castes, considered to be lower than they in the social scale are not supposed to live. The houses on certain streets may be entirely owned by Nadars only. (See Appendix for sketches of two villages.) Social contacts with other castes are possible only on the public places like open spaces or commons, streets where the shops are business centres, while the home may be visited only by members of the caste. The typical Hindu Nadar house has different sections where men and women can be entertained separately, if they so desire. The

writer had the privilege to be invited to lunch at the
home of a prominent Hindu Nadar at Sivakasi, along with
the members of the Christian family the writer was stay-
ing with, and who were related to the Hindu family. On
this occasion all the men and the women sat down together
to eat a meal in which a special dish of a certain kind
of fish that all Nadars like was prominent.

This house, in which the lunch took place, had a
second storey with separate sections for the two married
sons, for the family was living in the traditional pat-
tern which is the joint family. This type could survive
only where the family property is kept together and the
sons follow the same trade as the father, or even if the
occupations are different the family income is undivided,
and expenses are met from a common fund. New houses built
nowadays by Nadars do not cater to the traditional needs
of the community. A very interesting feature in the
house visited was the strong room, which was placed in
the middle of the structure, and which had no windows,
but just one small doorway fitted with a heavy wooden
door with ornamental, yet strong, brass fittings. The
iron bar with a heavy lock would easily keep any intruder
from venturing to open the door of the strong room. Here
were kept the family jewels, silver vessels and other
valuables, and costly costumes. Another interesting

feature was a small place for family worship before the little shrine set up for the family deity, which among Hindu Nadars is usually the divinity called, Badrakali. The tall brass oil lamp with its cotton wicks burns day and night, and here early in the morning after the daily bath the man of the house or his wife do their puja (prayer-offering). In the evening, and especially on festival and other important days, flowers, and, according to the occasion, fruit and food as well may be offered. At this point the material culture of the Nadars overlaps the sphere of their religious practices.

Apart from the domestic ritual which is entirely up to the family to perform or not, visits to temples and shrines may be called for, and there offerings may be made. Again such visits are entirely up to the family, or head of the family, or his wife, to make or not. The deity that is the traditional object of worship among the Nadars is the god, Siva, and the worshippers are described as Saivites, who are distinguished from the worshippers of Vishnu by marks on the forehead differing from the ones used by Saivites. The Hindu Nadar may have a linear smear of ashes on his forehead, or a large dot made of sandal-paste, which he usually applies after the morning bath, when he is ceremonially clean. The Nadars have their own temples endowed with funds donated by their

members. The Tinnevelly District Gazetteer of 1917 says:

> The corporate spirit which is such a marked char-
> acteristic of the community . . . . Almost every
> settlement of Shanans has its own Amman[24] temple,
> which they themselves control; the important Amman
> shrine at Koranganni on the right bank of the
> Tambraparni in the Tiruchendur Taluk, to which
> thousands of all classes congregate on feast days,
> is the property of their caste. Here and there, as
> for instance at Nallur (Tenkasi Taluk) are Siva
> temples which belong to Shanans, and in which they
> control, if they do not perform, the services with
> the aid of their barbers, who are the repositories
> of the ritual, they conduct their own marriages,
> Brahmins very rarely officiating.[25]

In his famous monograph, The Tinnevelly Shanars,
written in 1849 and published in 1850, Caldwell says,
"Notwithstanding their traditional use of the name of
one God, it may be asserted that, practically, the Shanars
are destitute of the belief in God's existence, and that
their only real faith is in demonolatry."[26] He refers
again and again to the worship of devils, "devil temples"
and devil-dancing, and the offering of bloody sacrifices
and he states that the "Shanar religion" offers no moral
restraint to their behavior. "Devil-worship", or the
worship of spirits such as described by Caldwell, is one
of the elements of popular religion that got swept into

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[24] Amman - female deity.

[25] Madras District Gazetteers-Tinnevelly, op. cit.,
p. 131.

[26] Rev. R. Caldwell, The Tinnevelly Shanars.
London, 1950, p. 15.

Hinduism as part of its structure. And "devil-dancing"
on the part of the officiating _Pujari_[27] is not exclusive
to the Nadar caste. It is part of the realm of magic and
animism which rules by terror.

The social organization within the caste is based
on kinship organization. In general all older men are
addressed as _Aiya_ or father, or as _Annan_ or elder brother,
according to the seniority of the person addressed and
the relative younger age of the speaker. Similarly older
women are addressed as _Amma_ or mother, or _Akka_ or elder
sister. This mode of address is resorted to even when no
relationship is claimed on the basis of blood-kindred or
marriage alliance. Seniority in age is always to be
treated with respect, and no one older than oneself, un-
less he or she is a close friend, may be addressed by name.
And always a clear distinction is made in the use of
the second person singular, _Nee_ which can be used towards
a younger person generally, or a close friend, or a younger
relative. The plural, _Neengal_ is the term of respect
adopted even towards strangers who may be younger, and
in the case of certain relatives who are known to be
younger, but still are entitled to the plural _Neengal_,
due to the particular relationship, and it is always the
right term to use towards persons older than oneself.

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[27] See Glossary.

For instance a stranger may be addressed _Aiya neengal_, which is "Sir, You", or an elderly lady, _Amma neengal Sugama?_ which means "Madam, are you well?" The special use of the plural _Neengal_ is called for in the following cases: parents-in-law addressing son-in-law, woman addressing husband's younger brother (unless he is very young), man addressing elder brother's wife even if she is younger. Sometimes after marriage the change from _Nee_ to _Neengal_ may take place, as in the case of the son-in-law, who as a nephew or a relative prior to his marriage to the daughter, may have been addressed by his name, and the single second person may have been used.[28]

The above account gives the clue to the general pattern of behavior within the caste group. Respect is expected in dealing with members belonging to castes known to be of the same social status and above. Extreme respect is conveyed by the use of terms like _Thangal_, when there is complete omission of the second person by the use of such expressions as _Aiya_, or _Amma_ or even _Periya_ (big) _Aiya_ or _Periya Amma_ without directly using any second person, but the special term, _Thangal_. There are degrees conveyed in the following sentences: _Nee Sugama_ (are you (s.) well?), _Neengal Sugama_ (Are you (pl.)

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28 Refer Nadar Kinship Terms in the Appendix.

well?), <u>Thangal Sugama</u> (Are you (special plural) well?).
With regard to the members of castes known to be social-
ly inferior the respectful address with the use of the
second plural is not called for, unless the older person
addressed happens to be someone who holds an important
office, as is the case nowadays, in towns and villages.
Or the person from a lower caste may have wealth and pro-
perty, and so can command the respect of persons that
are supposed to have higher social status due to a heir-
archy that does not include the heirarchy of merit and
personal worth.

The family is the unit of the caste since indi-
viduals as such have no social standing by themselves.
The Nadar family is patrilineal and patriarchal besides
being a joint family, typical of the Hindu Sudra castes
of South India. The family consists of a man's wife and
sons, married and unmarried, and unmarried daughters.
The sons marry and bring their wives to the father's
home, whereas the daughers on their marriage leave the
parental home to live with the family of their husbands.
It is rarely that a man has two wives at the same time,
though the Hindu religion and society allow a second wife
when the first wife has no children. At times two brothers
may marry sisters and bring them to the parental home,
and their children grow up together as brothers and sisters,

since the parallel cousins, that is children of two brothers and sisters, stand in the relationship of brothers and sisters. As for the children of a brother and his sister, they are cross cousins and potential mates, prescribed and considered proper.

The Nadar caste has a kinship system,[29] which conforms to what is known among cultural anthropologists as the classificatory system, and of the type that is referred to as "Seneca" by Robert Lowie. The father and his brothers being put into the same category, a man's children stand in the relationship of children to his brothers. Similarly a woman's sisters stand in the relationship of mother to her children. Here we find parallel "fathers" and parallel "mothers". The mother's brother is equated with the husband of the father's sister' and their children, so far as Ego is concerned, are cross-cousins to Ego, and parallel cousins between themselves. Lowie tabulates the cross-relationships as follows:

"My mother's brother is my cross-uncle.

My father's sister is my cross-aunt.

My mother's brother's child is my cross-cousin.

My father's sister's child is my cross-cousin."[30]

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29 Refer Nadar Kinship System in the Appendix.

30 Robert H. Lowie, _Social Organization_. New York: Rinehart and Company, 1948, p. 62.

Since kinship is reckoned on the basis of consanguinty and affinity, the above relationships are duplicated by marriage alliances. Through marriage a man acquires a host of new relatives whose relationship to him is determined by their relationship to his wife. The father-in-law's brothers (his wife's "parallel father") are now "parallel fathers-in-law" to him. His wife's brothers and sisters, and her parallel cousins, traceable to more than one generation beyond, becomes his "cross-cousins". Her cross-cousins become his parallel cousins, and thereby are equated with his brothers and sisters. It is important to know these relationships, for only then can one know the correct term of address, and follow the correct form of behavior conventionally recognized. In following the above system of kinship the Nadars are one with many of the Tamil, non-Brahman castes of South India. There may be minor differences in the emphasis of certain relatives, like the father's sister being important and her daughter may be preferred as Ego's proper spouse. The mother's brother has an important position in the social organization of all the South Indian castes, including the matrilineal Nairs in Malabar and Travancore.

Among the Nadars the mother's brother has a very significant role during the crisis ceremonies of his sister's children. He has a right to declare his opinion

on the choice of a mate for his nephew and niece, for the
children of his sister are the prescribed mates for his
own children. He is usually consulted on important mat-
ters concerning the members of his sister's family, and
his sister's children feel closer to him than to the
father's brother or sister. They are privileged to joke
with him, and be familiar to an extent which would be
regarded improper towards older relatives on the father's
side, unless they are in the relationship of cross-
cousins. But the mother's brother is gradually losing
his importance with changing social conditions, and due
to the slow dispersal of kindred to different, and even
distant, parts of the country. The maternal uncle visits
the newborn baby of his sister with suitable gifts, when
the birth ceremonies and later childhood ceremonies are
performed.

When a girl comes to maturity, her maternal uncle
is immediately informed, and it is the duty of his wife
to give the girl a ceremonial bath on the day fixed for
it, besides giving her new clothes, and even jewels, or
money, according to the ability and status of the uncle.
At the time of her marriage, unless she is married to one
of her maternal uncles (this custom is shared by the
Nadars with many other Hindu castes, including Brahmans),
or to the son of a maternal uncle (her proper mate), the

ceremony called, __Maman__ __Kalippu__ (getting past or getting
rid of the maternal uncle) has to be performed.

Like the Hindu castes among whom they live (though
not in the same street or locality), the Nadars are very
particular about observing crisis ceremonies at birth,
puberty of girls, marriage and death. These ceremonies
concern the immediate kindred, related by blood or by
marriage to blood relatives, though distant relatives
and friends, even from other castes, may be invited to
share in the festivities, or be observers of certain
stages in the proceedings. It is usually marriage that
calls for large crowds, and second come the funeral cere-
monies when duty requires the presence of close relatives.
It is important first to note that certain persons at
certain times are considered ceremonially unclean - for
instance a woman who has had a miscarriage, a woman who
is menstruating, a woman at childbirth, a dead person and
those who touch and handle the dead body. Purificatory
rites include first and foremost a ceremonial bath after
the rubbing of oil on the head and all over the body.

In the questionnaire forms completed by Hindu
Nadars a number of ceremonies are mentioned - purifica-
tion ceremony on the seventh day after the birth of the
child, __Elaikattal__ or fastening strings on the arms of
the child, fastening a string round its waist, naming

ceremony, shaving its head after a few months, boring
the ear lobes and decorating them with earrings, and
feeding the child with solid food when the first teeth
appear. The maternal and paternal grand parents are
expected to give gold ornaments in the shape of bangles,
chains and gold cord for the waist, according to their
status and wealth. The first child usually gets much
attention and gifts. As soon as the baby is born the
father consults the astrolger, having noted the time of
birth, and the child's horoscope is cast, and carefully
kept for future reference. Purification ceremonies of
the seventh day are preceded by house cleaning and decor-
ating. For sixteen days the oil lamp is kept burning in
the room where the child was born. Margosa (Azadirachta
Indica) leaves are hung from the eaves of the house.
These leaves, which have medicinal value, are believed
to ward off all evil.

Regarding puberty ceremonies for girls it is ob-
served that only the very conservative families adhere to
all of them; that on the whole the ceremonies are gradu-
ally "falling into disuse"; and that these ceremonies
were "meant to let people know that the girl is ready for
matrimony because the girl" would not be allowed to go
out after maturity. One respondent says, "In many places
puberty ceremonies are performed for fifteen days. But

the custom is being gradually given up." One Nadar woman says, "The maternal uncle takes the lead in the ceremony." The term, sadangu, covers a number of ceremonies that are performed on such occasions. It is the duty of the maternal uncle to give a feast, and relatives who have been invited bring sarees and other gifts to the girl.

Before marriage, weeks or even months before, it is usual to have a betrothal ceremony which is like a marriage on a minor scale, its elaborateness depending on the wealth and status of the parents of the girl and the boy. Since marriages are usually arranged by the parents, relatives assist in the selection of a bride or groom, and in drawing up conditions regarding jewels, dowry and settlement of property. The young people have little or no say in the matter. They may see each other for the first time only during the marriage ceremonies, unless they are related already and have met before, in childhood and later. Like many other social customs this also is changing among urban families. A boy or a girl may not only have the right of choice by indicating preference or otherwise, they may also have the opportunity to meet and to get to know their future mate. This is true of young people who are in co-educational institutions, and have parents with progressive views.

"The relatives of the bride and bridegroom", says a young man attending college, "come together on an

auspicious day, and they fix the date of marriage and dowry." Another says, "The people of the bridegroom family will bring a new sari to the home of the bride." It is usual for the family of the bridegroom to give some jewelry to the bride-to-be: a ring, or chain, or bangles of gold. The important ceremony, as more than one report indicates, is the exchange of trays containing fruits, and coconuts, and these articles are also accompanied by flowers, betel leaves and areca nuts. Flowers and fruit, along with the betel leaves and nuts, are distributed to the company present. The betrothal ceremony is a public declaration on the part of the parents concerned that their children are engaged to be married. Such an engagement is not easily broken off.

Marriages used to be conducted with elaborate rites, and over several days, accompanied by much drumming and feasting. Nowadays even the Brahman priest is not called, but elders conduct the simplified ceremonies, the chief ceremony, as everybody reports, being the thali-tying. The thali is the marriage symbol, made of gold, shaped according to the custom of the caste, and inscribed with the trident of Siva. This is strung on twisted cotton colored yellow with turmeric paste. These days plaited gold is used instead of cotton string, which if used gets replaced with the gold cord, after some time.

Gold beads are also strung on either side of the central

thali piece. At the peak of the marriage ceremonies, and

to the accompaniment of music and drums, the bridegroom

places the marriage badge round the neck of the bride,

and ties the string with a knot, or if a gold cord is

used it is fastened with a hook or screw. As this is

going on everybody strews the bridal pair with petals of

roses and jasmines. The bride wears new garments, es-

pecially a wedding sari, presented to her on a tray ac-

companied by articles on several trays: flowers to deck

her hair and garlands for her neck, coconuts, betel

leaves and areca nuts, turmeric, etc. There may be

gifts of jewels also. This is the day on which relatives

and friends offer their own gifts to the bride and groom;

and in return the young couple after receiving the gifts,

stoop down and touch the feet of the elders. The latter

also bless the young couple, and change the bridal gar-

lands, taking the bride's from her neck and putting it

round her husband's neck, and vice versa.[31] At present

through a process of simplification only the ceremonies

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[31] Rev. Samuel Mateer, Native Life in Travancore.
London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1883, pp. 99-107. Many
details regarding marriage and other crisis ceremonies
as observed by Nadars are given by Mateer whose account
refers particularly to the Nadars of Travancore State.
He says that these Nadars belong to the same caste as
the Tinnevelly Nadars.

that are considered essential are performed. Besides it is not relevant to the objectives of the thesis to elaborate on domestic ritual, excepting to mention the important ones for comparison with the observance of similar customs by the Christian members of the caste.

Among the Hindu Nadars the custom nowadays is to cremate the dead body, though burial used to be the usual practice in former days. Cremation is common to all the Hindus, and burial is practised for young children. The idea of pollution by death is common to all, and funerary ceremonies continue over a period of days and weeks, the sixteenth day being considered very important. Death anniversaries are observed with special rites and observances according to the prevailing customs of the caste. The reports mention, "Water taking ceremony from a river", thithi or the second day ceremony, and Karumathi on the third day after death as the important ceremonies. The water from the river is for purifying the dead body; before it is taken to the cremation ground; the second day the ashes are collected; and the third day offerings of food, especially milk, are taken to the place where the ashes had been deposited. The first day no food is cooked in the death house, and usually fasting is the rule. The whole place is washed and purified. For a time food is supplied by relatives, and on a very simple scale. Mourning continues for sixteen days, after which relatives are

invited and a feast is made, care being taken to remember the dead with offerings. The widow takes off her _thali_ and all her jewels. After a ceremonial bath at which she is assisted by her close relatives, she wears white cloth that has been presented by her brother and other close relatives. She may no more wear any other color but white, and no jewelry or flowers on her person; and remarriage, unless she were very young, would not be considered proper by her society.

There are certain institutions which concern the welfare of the whole caste group. There is the council of elders, made up of some of the prominent members of the caste, which is different from the Village Council or _Panchayat_ of five men. The latter is concerned with the welfare of all the communities living in the village, which may consist of members drawn from the different groups. The Nadar caste council, consisting of elders of the community, is specifically meant to function as "a court for the hearing of disputes or caste questions."[32] The council may meet for its business at a common place like the village _madai_, a piece of open ground and in the middle of it is a _chavadi_ or "half-club and half court-house". Here caste problems are attended to by

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[32] _Madras District Gazetteer-Madura_. Madras: Government Press, 1868, p. 81.

the elders, who often have to deal with domestic differ-
ences, caste infringements, and property disputes. The
Nadars tax themselves with a contribution, known as
Mahimai,[33] which is a common fund for communal benefits,
like the maintenance of the common Nadar chavadi, temples,
ceremonies at the temples, repairs to drinking water-
sources (wells usually), dramatic performances and so on.
Now of course after the starting of the Nadar Mahajana
Sangam (Great Assembly of the Nadars) in 1910, various
cultural and social activities have been undertaken by
the Hindu Nadars jointly with the Christians, whose an-
cestors were converted two or more generations ago.

Like every other caste group in South India, the
Hindu Nadars have burst the bond of caste restrictions so
far as occupation is concerned. They are to be found in
every profession: teaching in schools and collages, law,
medicine, government service, and a host of other fields.
The women are gradually overcoming social (caste) opposi-
tion to higher education, and the men are not discourag-
ing them to the extent they used to in the past. On the
whole the Hindu Nadar group, well-to-do materially, pro-
gressing in education, taking to more and more enterprise,
is among the progressive communities of South India.

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[33] See Glossary.

The Nadar caste, along with other castes in India, whose avowed religion is Hinduism, are governed by a system of law which in very recent years has been drastically modified with respect to marriage, divorce, succession and inheritance. The sources of Indian law, rooted in ancient customs and usages, were varied, and a Hindu code took shape at the hands of a series of lawgivers, until the British gave it specific form and distinctness. Hindu law was recognized and put into force as one of the systems of law pertaining to Indians during the British times. The followers of other religions like, Muslims, Christians, Parsees and so on had their own system applicable to them, and in consonance with their old customs and practices. As Paul Appasamy says, in his Law Applicable to Christians (1928), "Hindu law is administered to all persons who fall within the category of Hindus and who have not renounced their religion."[34] But differences from province to province, and from caste to caste, were obstacles to uniformity. For the purposes of this chapter, a few essential features of law applicable to Hindus in general, and applicable also to the Hindu Nadars are touched upon: marriage, the joint family, succession and inheritance.

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[34] Paul Appasamy, Law Applicable to Christians. Madras: Church Literary Society, 1928, p. 20.

A general proviso may be mentioned here that whatever laws the legislature may have established, each caste had the power of veto with regard to certain social matters. In **Legal Aspects of Social Reform** (1929), Paul Appasamy observes: "A caste is treated as a self-governing body which has power to make rules for the guidance of its members and punish those who act in contravention of those rules. The courts are usually unwilling to interfere with the powers of an autonomous body like it."[35]

A Hindu marriage is recognized as valid only when a man marries a woman of the same caste - this is the general rule. But, in practice, in South India the non-Brahman castes, known as "Sudras" as distinct from the Brahmans, are known to allow inter-caste marriages as

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[35] Paul Appasamy, **Legal Aspects of Social Reform**, 1929, p. 123. "Each caste is an autonomous community governed by its own rules and precedents, and it is scarcely possible for the legislature to dictate to such autonomous communities as to what they should do or what they should not do." Ibid., p. 122. "The community imposes penalties on a person who is guilty of breach of caste rules by depriving him of right of worship or social rights like the right to be invited to a marriage or other ceremony or by subjecting him to pecuniary penalties or in extreme cases by putting him out of caste altogether. These penalties are inflicted for the breach of some rule which in the opinion of the caste is an inviolable caste custom, e.g., crossing the seas, or marrying a widow, or keeping a woman of higher or lower caste, or dining with prohibited persons, or eating prohibited food like beef or pork or food cooked by prohibited persons like Muhammadans, publicly throwing away the sacred thread, or embracing an alien religion, or by a woman eloping with a man or becoming pregnant when she is a widow." Ibid., pp. 122-123.

exceptions. To be legal the marriage must be solemnized
by a priest, usually Brahman, or by elders of the caste,
in whose presence the bride is handed over to the bride-
groom by her legal guardian. A Hindu marriage is believed
to be a sacrament, and is binding for all time. The
woman remains the wife of the man she has married even
if he should discard her, and he can never be loosened
from the bond of marriage, since divorce is not allowed,
for either man or woman. Such conditions have been in
force for centuries, until 1957 when the new Hindu Code
Bill granted the right of divorce to both man and woman,
under specific conditions, like insanity, incurable
disease, and incompatibility. Since now in the eyes of
the law the citizens of India are equal, no distinction
can be made on the basis of caste and religion. Marriages
contracted between members of different castes and re-
ligions are valid, if the contract of marriage is duly
registered. The marriage then becomes a civil and legal
contract. But most marriages continue to be solemnized
by a priest, and inter-caste marriages are not yet com-
mon.

The Hindu Nadar continues to live within the shelter
of the joint-family life, unless business or profession
takes him away from the parental home. The joint-family
is the stronghold of the Hindu caste structure, for it

is not only the training ground for its members, it is

also the custodian of customary law. As Paul Appasamy

says:

> The personal law applicable to Hindus has grown
> up mainly round the institution known as the joint
> family, and owes all its peculiar incidents to that
> institution. The system is a chronological develop-
> ment of the patriarchal family, which was a recog-
> nized feature of ancient life not only in India but
> in Greece and Rome, in the England and Germany of
> the pre-Christian era, and in many other parts of the
> world where such a constitution was found to answer
> to the needs of the people.[36]

Property was kept intact from generation to generation

by being tied up in the name of the joint-family, and

administered by the oldest male member whose duty was to

provide for the needs of all the members. Proceeds from

the family property could be enjoyed by a daughter only

until her marriage, and she had no further claim on it.

Succession and inheritance were in the male line; and the

heirs, sons, brothers and nephews had specific funerary

duties towards the deceased head of the family and to

ancestors. Women had no share in such duties or in the

property, unless a man died leaving no sons, but only

daughters, in which case there were special provisions

made for their benefit. Even so they had no right to all

the property left by a man.

The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 caused a revolution

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[36] **Ibid.**, p. 183.

in the above system and dealt a severe blow to the joint-family at the same time. For the first time women were given the right to inherit ancestral property belonging to the Hindu joint-family. "The property of a Hindu who dies intestate will now be divided equally between his widow, his children and his grand children by a predeceased son or daughter. The mother of the deceased will also inherit along with the children and the grand children. Another important change made by this Act is the right of succession given to female heir in joint property."[37] The Hindu Nadars are now governed by this new Act which has given equal rights to sons and daughters, to widows and mothers.

This chapter has dealt with the Nadar caste of South India with reference to its place in the Hindu society of which it is a part; its traditions, development, economic and social progress, its laws which are the same as for Hindus in general, and the recent legal reforms. The culture and social structure of the caste group have been described with emphasis on features which distinguish it from other caste groups in the area. It was out of this caste group that large numbers of converts to Protestant Christianity were made in the first part

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[37] *India - A Reference Manual*. Government of India Publication, 1957, p. 466.

of the nineteenth century, and the descendents of these converts now stand out as a separate group, linked to the Christian community through religion, and at the same time maintaining a kinship with the Hindu Nadar group. The next chapter will give an account of the days of conversion and the development of the Christian group within the framework of caste structure.

CHAPTER V

CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY AND DEVELOPMENT

OF THE NADAR CHRISTIAN GROUP

This chapter will give an account of how several

thousands of Hindu Nadars became Christians in Tinnevelly

during the nineteenth century and how their descendants

have come to form a separate group in South India. The

earliest missionary efforts among the Nadars were begun

by Roman Catholic missionaries about the middle of the

seventeenth century. In 1683 Father John de Britto, who

had taken charge of the Madura Mission, visited the

Tinnevelly district and took some steps to promote mis-

sion work among the Nadars.[1] The Tinnevelly District

Gazetteer of 1917 reports:

> A congregation, however, of Shanars appears
> definitely to have been formed by 1685 at Vadakkankulam;
> and under Father Borghese, the first resident mis-
> sionary of Kamanayakkanpatti, the work of conversion
> amongst that caste, whose members now constitute
> one-half of the Roman Catholic population of the
> district progressed rapidly in the south of the
> taluk of Nanguneri and in south Travancore. "By
> its numbers and its wealth," wrote Father G. Calini
> in 1716, stationed at Vadakkankulam, which had two
> years previously become a residence, "the Shanar
> caste is in comparison with all other castes admir-
> ably adapted to Christianity. In fact the Shanars
> could easily observe the Christian practices. The
> nature of their life, the necessity of climbing

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[1] Madras District Gazeteers-Tinnevelly, Vol. I.
Madras: Government Press, 1917, p. 90.

palmyras, preserves them from laziness, the fountain
of all disorders. Besides, they are gifted with an
excellent disposition most inclined to religious
matters."2

For the purposes of this thesis the relevant ma-
terial is drawn from the history of Protestant missionary
effort in the district of Tinnevelly. The beginning of
the nineteenth century saw the dawn of the great missions
to South India. The Society for the Propagation of the
Gospel (S.P.G.), and the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.),
sent out their missionaries from England. The District
Gazetteer of Tinnevelly, of 1917, states:

> Very soon a beginning was made amongst the Shanans
> of the south, the first convert from this class being
> a man of Kalankudiyiruppu, some ten miles east of
> Sattankulam. Receiving the name of David, he was
> put to work in his native place, and the conversion
> of Shanars, who now form the bulk of the Protestant
> community, began on a large scale. Mudalur, "First
> town", was established as a definitely Christian
> settlement before 1800; and between 1800 and 1803
> over five thousand Shanars in the south of Tiruchendur
> and Nanguneri taluks were admitted to Christianity.3

The Rt. Rev. Robert Caldwell, Bishop of the diocese
of Tinnevelly, says in his book (1881) how from a number
of English and Tamil letters that passed between Satyanathan
and the missionaries, Schwartz, Jaenick and Kohloff, he
was able to reconstruct the history of David, the catechist,
"the first Shanar Protestant Christian", and who was the

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2 _Ibid._

3 _Ibid._, pp. 93-94.

"means of first introducing Protestant Christianity among the Shanars."[4]

Caldwell continues:

> Sundaranandam, subsequently called David, was a
> native of Kalangudi, a village between Sattankulam
> and Mudalur; but the greater number of his relatives
> belonged to Vijayaramapuram, another village in the
> same neighborhood. As his parents died when he was
> young, and he was brought up by his relatives,
> Vijayaramapuram may be considered as the village to
> which he belonged.
>
> In early youth he learned to read and write and
> versify, and being more intelligent than most lads
> of his class, he devoted much of his time to astrology,
> medicine and magic - the scientific studies held in
> the highest estimation by the villagers in the
> neighborhood - and learned to wander about idly from
> place to place in the company of some philosophical
> vagabonds of his acquaintance. In consequence of
> this mode of life, he incurred the displeasure of
> his relatives; and one day, having got a beating
> from his aunt with a churning stick for neglect of
> duty, unable to bear the disgrace, he ran away from
> home, and joined himself to some travelling mer-
> chants, and accompanied them to Madura, Dindigul
> and other places in the North.

This was about the year 1793.[5]

The account goes on to say that the boy found his way to Tanjore, which is not very north of Tinnevelly, being less than two hundred and fifty miles away. There he found employment under a bazaar-man, and helped him in

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[4] Rev. Robert Caldwell, Records of the Early History of the Tinnevelly Mission of the S.P.C.K. and S.P.G.F.P. Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1881, p. 55.

[5] Ibid., pp. 93-94.

his business. While there he heard about Christianity from the catechists who had been trained by Schwartz.[6] They took the boy to another missionary, Kohloff by name, who instructed him, and baptised him. He was trained for work in the mission, and later sent to Palamcottah to assist Satyanathan. David was now twenty-one. In the Tinnevelly District Gazetteer, above referred to, it is stated that in 1771 Schwartz mentions in his diary that one of his converts was preaching in Tinnevelly. Seven years later when he visited Palamcottah, he found a few Christians there. In 1790 he sent one of his catechists, Sathyanathan, to be in charge. It was this Sathyanathan whom David was appointed to assist, and the former impressed by the young man, sent him to visit his relatives. Caldwell reports how David's relatives "after having performed in vain a sacrifice for his return, gave him up for lost." So when David returned, there was great rejoicing over him. And when he left for Palamcottah, the headquarters of the missionary, he took with him a

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[6] In Bishop Caldwell's account, Ibid., p. 3, it is said, "The founder of the Protestant Missions was Schwartz, the most memorable name in the history of the Protestant Missions in Southern India." Schwartz's work began first in Tranquebar (in Tamil called Tharanganbadi), then continued to Trichinopoly (in Tamil known as Thiruchirapalli), and was extended to Tinnevelly. His full name is Christian Friedrich Schwartz. He was born in Sonnenburg, Prussia, on October 26, 1726. His voyage from London to Cuddalore, on the eastern coast of South India, took him more than six months, in the year 1750. His first visit to Tinnevelly district was in 1778.

young nephew whom soon Jaenicke began to instruct in the
Christian faith. David was sent to his village to be a
teacher there. Within a few weeks of preaching he con-
verted a number of his relatives. Caldwell quotes from
the letters of Sathyanathan, "They are a simple people,
quite unacquainted with deceitful motives, and all are
David's relatives."[7]

The following is an interesting account from
Caldwell's account:

> David's uncle is rather an intelligent man; he
> has hitherto been a leader among the people who prac-
> tice Saktipuja. It is the custom, as you are aware,
> for the people who practise this kind of worship to
> assemble once or twice a year and perform puja at
> night, when they all drink out of the same vessel,
> and all eat together promiscuously, without distinc-
> tion of caste. Fifteen houses in Vijayaramapuram
> are attached to this kind of worship, and they es-
> teem it a great honour to have renounced caste.
> David's uncle was the principal man among them, but
> having heard the word of God, he has become a
> Christian and abandoned Saktipuja.[8]

The first converts were David's relatives at
Vijayaramapuram, and from there Christianity spread among
the Nadars throughout Tinnevelly. Yet in course of time
no Christians were left at Vijayaramapuram itself, whereas
slowly the surrounding villages accepted the new faith;
and Caldwell says, "that heathen village was the dark

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[7] Ibid., p. 58.

[8] Ibid., p. 59.

centre of a circle of light." Persecutions of the con-
verts led to their founding of a new village, "Mudalur",
meaning first village. David, it is said, purchased a
piece of land, built a prayer house, dug a well, and
settled the Christians in the new village. It is further
reported that in the name of Jaenicke more land was pur-
chased, since the population from twenty-eight rose to
over one thousand converts. Quoting from the Tinnevelly
Mission Register Caldwell gives figures of large-scale
baptisms of Nadars, of over two hundred a day, so that
out of a total of five thousand six-hundred and seventy
Christians, those who belonged to the Nadar caste were
over five thousand.

Though within three years the number of converts
from the Nadar caste rose to five thousand, a sharp de-
cline followed due to a number of reasons. Persecution
from the Hindus was continuous, and between the years
1810 and 1816, famine and fever added to their adversity,
and no missionary was in residence to keep up the morale
of the converts. Many relapsed into Hindusim. In 1816
James Hough was appointed as Chaplain at Palamcottah.
A period of great revival followed. Schools were built,
the Bible and prayer-books in Tamil were distributed.
In 1820 another notable missionary, C. E. Rhenius, founded
several societies to organize the activities of Christians

for their own benefit. For instance, <u>Dharma Sangam</u> or Philanthropic Society, was started for the acquiring of lands and houses for released convicts. In course of time a number of Christian settlements arose, with the acquisition of more land; and the names of these places are named after the new faith, <u>Suviseshapuram</u> (Gospel village), <u>Nallur</u> (Good village), <u>Megnanapuram</u> (Village of salvation). A Poor Fund for helping the poor of the community, a Widow's Fund, and a Bible Society to provide literature for the Christians were started. The number of converts to Christianity again began to increase so that the corresponding need for schools and other institutions became increasingly felt.

In 1840 the young missionary, Robert Caldwell from England, arrived on the scene. At that time the S.P.G. and the C.M.S. were working side by side, in different parts of the Tinnevelly district. And their efforts had led to the building of many institutions. There were churches, schools, including the famous one for girls, called after Sarah Tucker, and now a big college for women; and schools for the blind, the deaf, and the dumb. In 1836 a high school was founded for girls, the first of the kind in the Madras Presidency. The Tinnevelly District Gazetteer of 1917 reports, "The native adherents of the mission, the bulk of whom are Shanans,

number about 50,000."[9] Caldwell says:

> Already nearly 40,000 souls in Tinnevelly alone,
> in connexion with the <u>Church Missionary Society</u> and
> the <u>Society for the Propagation of the Gospel</u>, and
> about 20,000 souls in south Travancore, in connexion
> with the <u>London Missionary Society</u> have abandoned
> the demonolatry received by tradition from their
> fathers . . . it is certainly, for India, a remarka-
> ble thing that so large a number of this class should
> have embraced Christianity.[10]

How impatient and ununderstanding Robert Caldwell
was, due to lack of experience, can be seen by the fol-
lowing extract from his monograph, The Tinnevelly Shanars,
written in 1849. Their objections to adopting the
Christian faith were ascribed by him to what he believed
to be "dullness of intellect" on the part of the caste
in general. He lists their objections: "I shall become
a Christian when the rest of the people of the village
come. How can I learn alone?"; "I shall become a Chris-
tian when God wills, when He gives me wisdom, or tells
me in a dream that I must learn"; "If I become a Christian,
the devil will kill me"; ". . . farewell to dances and
festivals and caste customs; farewell to the dear, de-
licious uproar of tom-toms and horns at weddings and
funerals"; "I shall not be allowed to work on Sundays;

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[9] Madras District Gazetteer-Tinnevelly, <u>op. cit.</u>,
p. 96.

[10] Rev. Robert Caldwell, The Tinnevelly Shanars.
London, 1850, p. 111.

every little accidental fault will be strictly inquired
into, and I shall be expected to give money to a great
many societies."; "If I become a Christian, I shall have
to learn a great deal; morning and evening the gong or
drum will be calling me to church, and if I don't come
often you will be vexed; and the catechist will always
be running after me to teach me something or other. I
am a poor stupid man, and don't understand anything. Why
should I take so much trouble about anything that is not
eatable or wearable? You say, if I become a Christian,
it will be well for me after I die; but who has seen
heaven? Who has seen hell?"[11]

Since Caldwell moved very closely with the people
whom he tried so hard to convert, and yet found it dif-
ficult, if not impossible, to recognize the hold of tra-
dition and custom on their lives, it is very revealing
to read his early account, which it is said he lived to
regret for its publication. His statements need to be
quoted at length to get the benefit of their implications:

> Partly through their indolent submission to cus-
> tom, and partly through their inability to think for
> themselves, and their timidity, their habits of mind
> are "gregarious" beyond those of any people I know.
> Solitary individuals amongst them rarely follow the
> multitude to do evil, and they follow the multitude
> to do good. They think in herds. Hence individuals
> and single families rarely are found to relinquish

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

heathenism, and join the Christian Church. They
wait till favourable circumstances influence the
minds of relatives or neighbors; and they come in
a body. In like manner if through any cause a new
learner should wish to return to heathenism, he gen-
erally waits till he can succeed in engaging on his
side the sympathies of a portion of the congregation.[12]

He continues, "The gregarious disposition of the

Shanans as a class, appears in the after life of the ma-

jority of our converts. It is inconceivably difficult

to induce individuals to take a single unaccustomed step

alone."[13] A few pages later the account says:

Without priests, without a written religious code,
without sacred traditions, without historic recol-
lections, without the aversion to Christianity as a
foreign religion, which other classes evince, the
chief obstacle to their evangelisation is the den-
sity of their ignorance. They have been found more
willing to embrace Christianity, and after they
have embraced it, more willing to be guided, con-
trolled, and moulded by its principles than any
other class; and the number of this one caste that
have placed themselves under Christian instruction
is greater than that of all other converts in India,
in connexion with all Protestant Missions.[14]

In 1869 the same missionary reports:

The total number of Christian converts in Tinne-
velly, that is, of persons who have abandoned the
worship of demons and divinities of their fathers
and joined themselves to the various mission con-
gregations that have been established in the dis-
trict is upwards of 58,000. This is the number of
sould, that is, as in all population returns, it

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[12] Ibid., p. 106.

[13] Ibid., p. 107.

[14] Ibid., p. 110.

includes men, women, and children. These people of course do not live in one place, but are scattered about in every direction throughout the district, more numerous in some localities, less numerous in others. There are upwards of 900 villages and hamlets in which there are congregations of Christians, some of them large congregations of 1000 or 1200 souls, some of them very small, comprising less than 20.

One of the most remarkable circumstances connected with the Tinnevelly Mission is the large number of native Missionaries and native pastors now connected with it. No fewer than 51 natives of Tinnevelly are now ordained clergymen of the Church of England.15

Caldwell further reports on the improved facilities for education imparted in 450 schools in Tinnevelly, 32 of them boarding schools, some for boys, some for girls. Some schools were Anglo-Vernacular, that is the teaching was both in English and in Tamil, which is the vernacular of the area. Training institutions for teachers to teach in the mission schools, were started for boys and girls, and some of them were attached to the already existing schools. Referring to the large number of children receiving instruction in these schools, 13,500, Caldwell comments:

The fact that more than 3000 girls are receiving a simple but sound education in the schools connected with the Tinnevelly Mission is a fact without a parallel in any other Indian district. The desire for education has now extended beyond the sphere of the existing Missions; there are now many English

15 Rev. Robert Caldwell, "Tinnevelly and the Tinnevelly Mission," A Lecture delivered before the Native Christian Literary Society, May 13, 1869, p. 16.

schools in the district, in the towns and large vil-
lages, supported by the Hindu inhabitants themselves;
and it is a circumstance worthy of notice that no
fewer than 16 of the masters of those independent
Hindu schools are native Christians.16

The Digest of S.P.G. Records published in London

in 1893, gives an account of the expansion of Christianity

in the villages of Tinnevelly:

Nazareth itself and ten of its villages were now
"wholly Christian", and the Shanars, who had seemed
to be averse to the reception of castes lower than
themselves into the Church, had begun to strive to
bring in Panikers, Pullers, Pariars and other castes.17

The end of the year 1877 brought great trials in the form

of a terrible famine, but the numbers of new converts

kept increasing. In 1880, on the 20th of January, at

Palamcottah, "the centenary of the introduction of Chris-

tianity into Tinnevelly" was celebrated.

The Digest states that, "The appointment of the

Rev. S. G. Yesudian, an anergetic Tinnevelly evangelist

to Vepery in 1883 led to a much-needed development of

evangelistic work in Madras district."18 Regarding the

approach of this evangelist to preaching in the villages,

it is said, "And in villages where English education is

unknown, the Rev. S. G. Yesudian had adopted with

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16 Ibid., pp. 16-17.

17 Digest of the S.P.G. Records, London, 1893,
p. 547.

18 Ibid., p. 509.

modifications a lyrical musical style of preaching founded
on precedents delivered from Indian antiquity - his ef-
forts being attended with remarkable results (in the
Nagalapuram district)."[19]

In 1896 the Tinnevelly Church became a separate
Bishopric under Bishop Morley, and in 1924 the two mis-
sions S.P.G. and C.M.S., merged into the diocese. By
this time the Protestant groups that belonged to the
Anglican communion formed part of the greater Church of
India, Burma and Ceylon. One of the research studies
conducted by the Christian colleges, says, "From the
point of view of the distribution of castes, the Church
of India Burma and Ceylon of the Tinnevelly Diocese may
be said to be almost a 'one-caste' church as the vast ma-
jority of its members (68%) are drawn from the Nadar com-
munity."[20]

The impact of Christianity on the Nadar caste

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[19] Ibid., p. 549. On the same page there is a
footnote with reference to the Rev. S. G. Yesudian's
"lyrical, musical style of preaching" (which was modelled
on the Hindu bhajana or singing discourses of the Hindu
scriptures): "Providing himself with a trained choir of
boys, the missionary selects an open place in the village,
and there after dark, and after the people have dined, he
sets up a table with lights, and sings a series of Tamil
and Sanskrit verses, accompanying himself with the violin,
and ever and anon explaining the meaning of what he sings,
and impressing it on the attention of the hearers. The
singing abounds in choruses, which are sung by the boys
and occasionally joined in by the people."

[20] Research Studies by Christian Colleges, Di-
rected by J. S. Ponniah, 1938, pp. 29-30.

produced a new sect which has now dwindled down to a few

families, descended from the founder, Chattampillai Aiya.

The following passage is taken from his manuscript, which

is one of the primary sources obtained at his home in

Prakasapuram, near Nazareth. From a copy of a letter ad-

dressed to Rabbi Lichtenstein, Tapio-Szele, Buda-Pesth,

Hungary, the following extract is taken:

> I am a native of South India, a descendant of the
> Shanar race, the original intelligent Lords of the
> country, but down-trodden to the utmost for the last
> three centuries. In 1804 A.D. my grandfather and
> his whole family, stricken with a contagious plague,
> were obliged to renounce Hinduism which consisted in
> worshipping their ancestors Siva and Bhadrakali and
> to embrace the Protestant Christianity which had just
> then stepped in this quarter. I was born in that
> religion in 1823, but as my soul and spirit were
> over-powered by divine and moral circumstances, I
> formed in 1857 a new sect under the name of "The
> Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus", or "The Hindu
> Christian Religion." The neighbouring religionists
> call it by various names "The Nattar Community"
> (Nattar meaning the native landlords), "Shattampillai
> Christians" (Shattampillai, meaning monitor, a cogno-
> men vulgarly used by the local people to me from my
> seventh year of age) . . . . At one time the members
> of my Church numbered more than one thousand families.
> But the rigorous discipline of the Church and the un-
> abated diverse kinds of temptations and persecutions
> by the other religionists, especially C.M.S., S.P.G.
> Protestants and Jesuit Romanists surrounding us, have,
> in the course of these forty years, reduced the num-
> ber to about a dozen families.21

Many of the observances of this sect were drawn from

Judaism, and supported by Biblical teaching from the Old

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21 Diary of Correspondence of S. V. Nayagam Nadar,
known as Chattampillai Aiya.

Testament, and special attention was given to avoidance of

pollution and the importance of ceremonial cleanliness.

In The Trident, the Crescent and the Cross, pub-

lished in 1876, the Rev. James Vaughan writes about the

"schism in the district of Megnanapuram in South India",

without referring to the name of the founder:

> Caste prejudices seem to have originated this
> movement. A number of the Shanar converts wished
> to uphold their caste distinctions. The missionary
> in charge of the station (Nazareth) resisted this
> tendency; the schism followed as the consequence of
> this opposition. In a short time the sectaries
> numbered some 2,000 souls. They call themselves in
> their documents, "The Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus",
> but they seem to prefer the definition of "The Na-
> tional Party". Their animus is to eliminate every-
> thing which appears to them to be of European origin;
> they consider infant baptism and an ordained ministry
> to be foreign inventions, accordingly they reject
> both. On the same ground they keep Saturday instead
> of Sunday as their Sabbath; they also celebrate an
> ordinance which they regard as the Lord's Supper by
> the use of the unfermented juice of the grape.22

This describes the character of the Sect originated by

Chattampillai Aiya.

In Chantror Sangam (1912), written in Tamil and

interspersed with passages in English, by P. V. Pandion,

the eldest son of S. V. Nayaga Nadar (Chattampillai Aiya),

there is a short account of the new sect:

> It is a small Christian sect existing in the
> neighborhood of Nazareth, in the Tinnevelly district.
> It was founded in 1857 by one Rabbi A. N. Chattampillai-
> Aiya, who is still living at Prakasapuram, aged 88

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22 Rev. James Vaughan, The Trident, the Crescent
and the Cross. London, 1876, p. 303.

> years. As it is well known from old S.P.G. and C.M.S.
> publications and from personal experience, he was a
> student of many of the European and Oriental languages
> and literatures, before bringing out his religious
> principles . . . . They have at present only five
> church buildings in five different villages. The
> original one at Prakasapuram which is under the man-
> agement of the Founder and his family contains a
> small Library with nearly ten thousand volumes.23

The writer had visited this famous library many years

ago, and in December 1956 travelled all the way to

Prakasapuram with the hope of looking into some of the

books for information on the subject of this dissertation,

but was deeply disappointed. The books had been given

away or sold for a pittance, and of the church in which

many had worshipped only the bare site was left.

In December 1938 the International Missionary

Council, representing the Protestant Communion through-

out the world, met at Tambaram, near Madras. In prepara-

tion for this the various Christian colleges had made re-

search studies pertaining to the Christian community in

India. One such, directed by J. S. Ponniah, a Nadar

Christian on the staff of the American College at Madura,

was an inquiry into the economic and social problems of

the Christian Community of Madura, Ramnad and Tinnevelly.

The Nadars were found to be concentrated in the southern

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23 P. V. Pandion, _Chantror Sangam_. Madras, 1912,
p. 7.

and eastern parts of Tinnevelly, and in the centre of Ramnad district. In Chapter IV the report reviews the economic history and the effects of conversion to Christianity on the part of particular communities. With regard to the Nadars it says, "Two factors in physical geography have played a large part in determining the social and economic life of the Nadar community."[24] The first one, physical environment, is described as arid, sandy, and locally known as <u>theri</u> in the southern and eastern parts of Tinnevelly, "which was most probably their original or adopted home (according to tradition the place of exile of this community)."[25] The other factor is the palmyra tree,

> . . . the only important vegetation of the region and therefore until recently the chief means of livelihood for the community, except of course, for a few powerful families which were strong enough to establish themselves securely in the small isolated patches of fertile land found here and there. It is creditable to the Nadar community that it has been enterprising enough to make an honest living in an inhospitable region by taking to the cultivation of this tree.26

The economic progress was combined with education as seen in the founding of new villages, and schools which necessitated the drilling of wells which made water-supply

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[24] Research Studies by Christian Colleges, directed by J. S. Ponniah, 1938, p. 36.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

adequate enough for planting coconuts and fruit-bearing trees, which helped to arrest the desert conditions.

With the increased facilities for education and social progress the Christian community, growing in numbers and looking for new fields of enterprise, was prepared to consider emigrating to other countries. The Nadars, more Christians than Hindus, left for Ceylon, not very far away, and later on to Burma and Malaya. Another research study was prepared by M. V. Subrahmanyam of St. John's College, Palamcottah, under the title, "A Study of Emigration in Relation to the Life of the Tinnevelly Church". In this, one of the causes for emigration is ascribed to:

> . . . the enterprising spirit of the Nadar community which forms the bulk of the Tinnevelly Church. It is a matter of common knowledge that the trade of South India is in the hands of the enterprising Nadars. They have good business instincts and they go in large numbers to Ceylon, Burma and Malaya to trade and make money. If the half-educated Nadar goes abroad to trade, his highly educated brother also goes abroad to find a decent employment suitable to his qualifications and ability rather than rot in his native district for a pittance. The spirit of enterprise peculiar to the Nadar community has been we think very much quickened by the influence of Christianity. We find from the replies to our questionnaire that in 73 pastorates the proportion of Christians who emigrate is greater than that of Hindus of similar position and caste. The spirit of freedom engendered by Christianity has made the convert shake off the shackles imposed by tradition and custom. Besides Christianity has raised the standard of life among its followers and increased their wants.[27]

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[27] M. V. Subrahmanyam, "A Study of Emigration in Relation to the Life of the Tinnevelly Church," 1938, p. 11.

The report says that in many cases the men leave their families behind, in the village, where living is cheaper comparatively, and visit them from time to time. But it was found that separation from the family did not lead to deterioration of morality. The emigrant lived with propriety abroad, for-

> . . . the Scotchman of India - we mean the Tinnevelly Christians - have the group consciousness so strongly ingrained in them that in Ceylon they live in groups, and it is difficult for them to go astray, for if anyone went astray, he would be packed to Tinnevelly by the next boat . . . . Probably a few Christians on account of the great opportunities afforded in Ceylon acquire the habit of drinking but not to the point of drunkenness.28

The emigrant was found to have a strong sense of duty to his church in Tinnevelly, to which he was glad to contribute.

> After all the emigrants feel that they are Tinnevellians first and last, and their attachment to their native district is so strong that while they are liberal in sending contributions for any good purpose in their district they are not so liberal in giving money towards the churches in the places of emigration.29

The growth of cities and the wider fields opening for new professions, were strong urges for Christians to move from the village to town. The rural-urban movement, of course, is common throughout the country. Kingsley

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28 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Davis observes, in his book (1951), "The Christians are
also more urban than most of the other religious groups.
In 1931 more than 20 per cent of their number lived in
urban places, as against 13 per cent for the Muslims and
10 per cent for the Hindus."[30]   Davis does not precisely
say this of any particular Christian group, but what he
says of the Indian Christians in general applies to the
Nadar Christian group as well.   In Table 58, for which
the figures have been compiled from the Census of India
summary volumes of 1911, 1931 and 1941, the following
data are given against Christians which show the propor-
tion of the urban to the rural population:

1911		1931		1941	
Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
2.72	1.05	3.22	1.58	3.00	1.75[31]

After the Hindu and the Muslim groups the Christians
are found to be the third most numerous in the urban
population, but fourth in the rural parts -- as may be
seen in Table 59 which throws light on the rank of the
different religious groups in urban and rural areas:

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[30]   Kingsley Davis, The Population of India and
Pakistan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951,
p. 188.

[31] Ibid., p. 142.

Per Cent of the Urban Population		Per Cent of the Rural Population	
Religion	Per Cent	Religion	Per Cent
Hindu	66.46	Hindu	71.00
Muslim	27.68	Muslim	22.93
Christian	3.22	Tribal	2.52
Jain	1.16	Christian	1.58

[32]

Table 59 indicates the general shift of the Christian population from village to city. Commenting on the figures in Table 60 which show a slight decrease in the percentage of migration to the cities for the period 1911-1941, Davis observes that the rate of converts in rural areas was more rapid than in the urban, but that the tendency of Christians was always to move to the city.

Though there was movement of individuals, at times accompanied by their families, to other lands and from village to city, within the country, Tinnevelly continued to be the Nadar's native place. Often earnings made abroad, or wealth accumulated in town, were used to buy property or build houses in or near the village one came from.[33] In the summer of 1952 the writer happened to

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[32] Ibid.

[33] An analysis of the first five items of the questionnaire completed by thirty Christian Nadars, shows that out of the fifteen persons who were born in Tinnevelly ten own property there. Of the other five, born in Tinnevelly, four have no property at all, and one has it elsewhere in the Madras state. Five others, born outside the district, now have property there. The analysis also shows that nobody owns property north of the city of Madras.

visit a Nadar Christian family in a small village in
Tinnevelly, called Karungulam, about thirty miles from
Palamcottah. The village distinctly showed the palmyra
culture with most of the houses roofed over with the
broad palmyra leaves and fenced with the sharp-edged
palmyra stems. The sweet smell of boiling sugar was
everywhere, for it was the season. The particular family
that was visited lived in a two-storeyed brick house,
white with plastered lime. The house had been built out
of the money the head of the family had made in Malaya;
and now he was living in retirement. At the time of the
visit the wife was actually busy boiling the palmyra
juice in a shed specially used for the purpose, and all
the accessories needed were kept in the shed. The daughter
was home for her holidays from her school in Palamcottah.

The rural-urban movement was a two-way traffic and
it affected the culture of the Christian Nadar. In the
city he moved in a wider world where he came in close
contact with other caste groups, and along with them was
exposed to the cultural elements that came from foreign
countries, especially from England and Europe. In Tinne-
velly he had house or lands, or at least close relatives
whom he visited occasionally, specially at weddings. He
was getting accustomed to two standards of life and trying
his best to adjust his behavior accordingly, but in the
village his behavior had to conform to the pattern approved

by his society or caste group. In the city he lived
among other caste groups, and even enjoyed social inter-
course with them to a certain extent which would not be
possible in the rural background he was familiar with.

During, and since, World War II, several Nadar
Christian families left Burma, where they had held landed
property, and settled in the southern parts of India -
Bangalore, Madras and further south. Some remained in
Burma, and took citizenship there. Several families,
that found employment in Ceylon and Malaya, are now faced
with the choice of returning to India, or taking on citi-
zenship in the country where they are now residing.

The early mission schools had brought to the Nadar
converts to Christianity, facilities for education, and
when higher institutions for learning were established
in cities, their sons, and gradually their daughters,
were among the first to avail themselves of the oppor-
tunities for higher education. It was not unusual for
parents in faraway villages from Tinnevelly and Travancore
to send their children to Madras to do their graduate
and post-graduate studies there. Missionary, government
and other private institutions for arts and technical
courses like medicine, engineering and technology, drew
them to the large towns for education and for professional
occupation. Some found their way to other centres of
learning within India, accompanying their parents, or

were sent by the parents for pursuing higher studies.
Some went to England, a few to the United States, fin-
anced by parents, or with the help of scholarships given
by the Indian government or universities, or with the aid
of foreign scholarships.

The development and expansion of the Nadar Christian
group have been accompanied by problems in which their
social inclinations appeared to have been at variance with
their religious beliefs. Comments on the compromises to
which the Indian Christian in general had to resort at
times, which are found in the Introduction to S. Modak's
Director of Protestant Indian Christians (1900), are ap-
plicable to the Nadar Christian group as well. They are
often tempted to follow the Westerner's ways, and so are
blamed for giving up Indian customs; and at the same time
if they keep to the traditional ways of life they are ac-
cused of trying to get closer to their Hindu brethren.[34]
However, the times reviewed were indicative of a transi-
tional period, before the community had had time to estab-
lish itself as a group with the right to social status
and to a separate cultural identity, in the midst of the
vast Hindu society from which it had broken away, due to

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[34] S. Modak, Directory of Protestant Indian
Christians. Ahmednagar, 1900, Introduction.

the change of religious beliefs, or rather due to the
adoption of new religious beliefs. The break with the
old religious tradition placed the Christian convert in
a situation which was entirely new and unparalleled in its
enigmatic intensity. As it is said in the Introduction
to Modak's Directory, "The Indian Christian community
has not got a past."[35] Here were people who had lived
in the light of the past, and were now faced with the

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[35] Ibid., Introduction, p. xvii. The following
notes are extracts from the Introduction to Modak's Di-
rectory: "Whilst there is a tendency, on the one hand,
among a certain section, especially in Southern India,
to favour purely Hindu customs, on the other hand, there
is another section that rush headlong in the direction
of everything English and Western; and between these two
sections there are other sections which favour partly
Eastern and partly Western habits and customs. Such
varieties we must expect at this stage of transition;
and it would not be prudent to legislate in a hard and
fast manner in regard to social matters for the community
as a whole. The complaint has been made often that In-
dian Christians have become denationalised, and that the
effect of Christianity is to convert the natives into
'middle class Englishmen'. Such criticisms are often in
the mouth of Missionaries also." p. xiv. "It has also
been said that Indian Christians sever themselves from
the old traditions and ties which bind them to the Hindu
community. But such a separation is inevitable so long
as the Christian convert is persecuted and is treated with
contempt. In the eyes of the Hindu nothing is more de-
grading than one of his own kith and kin becoming a
Christian. Under these circumstances is it any wonder
that the convert takes a dislike to everything Indian?
But now there is such a thing as a society of Indian
Christians, with a recognized status and position, the
so-called denationalising tendency is not very conspicu-
ous." p. xvi. Reference to the possible danger of leaning
strongly towards "everything purely Hindu": "The social
customs of the Hindus have all more or less a spiritual
basis. Take, for instance, the marriage ceremonies and

problem of making a new way of life. But the new could

not be created completely with only new elements, and

the foundation had to be laid in the past which was known

to them.

Conversion to Christianity brought about great

changes in the legal position of the Nadar. The prin-

ciples of the Hindu Law ceased to apply to him the moment

the ceremony of Baptism made him a Christian, and there-

by he had openly rejected the old faith. At first he

lost all his rights. He lost his caste at once, he be-

came casteless in the eyes of the Hindu society out of

which he had come; and he was deprived of all claims to

property and inheritance. This was the situation until

in 1860, when a new law was passed known as the Caste

Disabilities Removal Act XXI of 1860. According to this

law nobody who changed his religion was subject to the

forfeiture of his rights to property and privileges of

inheritance. The Act says:

> So much of any law or usage, now in force, within
> the territories subject to the Government of the
> East India Company, as inflicts on any person, for-
> feiture of property or rights, or may be held in

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customs. Everyone of them has a religious significance.
As a matter of fact, in that section of the Indian Chris-
tian community, - and this we are glad to say is a very
small section, and is to be found chiefly in Southern
India, which clings tenaciously to Hindu customs, is most
under the dominance of the spirit of caste." p. xvi.

> any way to impair or affect any right of inheritance,
> by reason of his or her renouncing, or having been
> excluded from the communion of any religion, or
> being deprived of caste, shall cease to be enforced
> as law in the Courts of the East India Company, and
> in the Courts established by Royal Charter within
> the said territories.36

This law removed all the disabilities which the converts

to Christianity had suffered.

After conversion a man could break away from the

joint family, and also get his share of the family pro-

perty. Problems had risen when a man's wife refused to

become a Christian along with him. If she agreed to be

baptised the marriage did not break up, and if she re-

fused, the convert was free to marry again with a Christian

woman. If as a Hindu a Nadar had had more than one wife,

after conversion he could take only one to live with him

as his wife. The other wife or wives, still bound to the

man by the sacrament of marriage which only death could

end, had claims on him for maintenance and residence. In

1866 another Act relating to Native Christians, called

the Native Converts' Dissolution of Marriage Act XXI of

1866, allowed for the man to be released from claims of

his Hindu wife or wives. When the wife did not wish to

become a Christian, but continued to be a Hindu, the

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[36] Paul Appasamy, Law Applicable to Christians.
Madras, Allahabad, Rangoon, Colombo: Christian Litera-
ture Society, 1928, pp. 45-46.

Christian father did not lose his guardianship of the children. Legally the children were Christians, unless the Christian father neglected his duties towards them, when the Hindu mother could bring them up as Hindus if she could prove before a law-court that she could be completely responsible for their up-bringing. If the mother were Christian and the father Hindu, the children were legally Hindus and continued to be under the father's guardianship and control.

Difficulties arose in connection with the children of mixed marriages, i.e. when one parent was Hindu and the other was Christian, in the matter of guardianship, and the right of the individual to change his faith. It became necessary to clarify who were Christians. According to the Indian Christian Marriage Act XV of 1872 the term, "Christian" applied to "persons professing the Christian religion". The term, "Native Christian" includes both converts to Christianity and the descendants of these converts.[37] The term used these days is Indian Christian. According to the Indian Christian Marriage Act the marriage has to take place before a Minister of the Christian religion, or a Christian layman who has been licensed for this Act, or a Marriage Registrar. In

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[37] See _Ibid._, Chapter I.

the case of Native Christians, a certificate is required
and the condition is that the girl should be over thirteen
and the groom over sixteen. The latter condition was
modified by another rule that if either of the contract-
ing parties should be below eighteen, the consent of the
guardian was necessary. But in these matters the Church
concerned, Roman or Anglican or others, could give direc-
tives. Though the Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872,
now regulating marriage between Christians in India, su-
perseded earlier enactments, it is described as "a very
clumsy piece of legislation which has been frequently
amended and still requires amendment or wholesale re-
drafting."[38]

When the Hindu Nadar embraced Christianity he be-
came a member of a society in which monogamy is the rule.
The marriage as regulated by the Act is both a sacrament
and a legal contract, and the latter nature makes any
breaches liable to penalty in a civil court. In spite
of the sacramental character of the union the marriage
can be annulled or the parties divorced, under certain
conditions. Marriage performed under Hindu ceremonies is
sacramental, and for life, and can never be dissolved.
Marriage regulations in the Christian society were some-
thing new to the Christian convert who in his Hindu state

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

and society could not have his marriage annulled, or be divorced from his wife. Another feature that was new to him was the right to remarriage on the part of both man and woman after the marriage union had been dissolved by annulment or divorce, after the passage of the required period of time.

In the matter of inheritance and property the Christian Nadar came to be governed by a different set of laws, which have no reference to the joint family and its ceremonial duties. Until the very recent legislation changed the entire situation, what Paul Appasamy says applied to the Hindu Nadar:

> The rules of inheritance are regulated by consanguinity and funeral ceremonies, the son, the son's son, the brother's son, etc. obtain shares in the property of a deceased member according to their customary precedence in offering funeral oblations. The daughter and the daughter's children and generally collaterals claiming through females are postponed to collaterals claiming through males.[39]

The Indian Succession Act X of 1865 codified the law relating to Christians in the matter of inheritance and succession since the earlier Hindu law relating to these subjects could not be applied. The Indian Succession Act XXXIX of 1925, was an improvement on the 1865 Act and clarified along with other matters the exact position of the "Indian Christian", who had often been lumped together

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[39] Ibid., p. 22.

with foreign nationals who were also Christians. According-
ing to the new law the Christian widow was entitled to
one-third of her husband's property if she had children
by the deceased husband, half the property if she had no
children, but there were kindred; and she was entitled
to the whole property if there were neither lineal descend-
ants nor kindred. The widower likewise is entitled to
the property of a pre-deceased wife. Only those impor-
tant aspects of law applicable to the Christian Nadar as
an Indian Christian, and which are different from those
applicable to the Hindu Nadar have been selected for men-
tion in this chapter.

The account of the days of conversion from Hindu-
ism to Christianity; the later developments following
conversion; and the changes that were brought about in
the economic, social, religious and legal aspects of the
new Christian group, serves as an introduction to the
next chapter. In Chapter VI the Christian Nadar will be
presented as a sub-caste. Between the early days of be-
wilderment and the present there have passed slow years
of expansion during which new fields of occupation, ac-
cumulation of wealth, a new social status with self-
respect, and social stability, have led to the consolida-
tion of the Nadar Christian community. Chapter VI is
concerned with what Robert Redfield calls, "the biographic
dimension of the community" in The Little Community (1955).

It may be questioned why the Christian Nadar is referred to, and is to be described, as belonging to a sub-caste.[40] The Lingayats,[41] a Saivite group who revolted from the Brahman supremacy and caste rule in the twelfth century, formed a new caste under the compulsion of new religious beliefs. This is just one out of many examples. The Christian Nadar, carries the title of his original caste, and his culture is based and built upon that of the Nadar caste described in the fourth chapter. He claims that he belongs to the Nadar caste, and since he does not conform completely to the type known as the Hindu Nadar, he has to be studied under another category - a segment or sub-group or sub-caste of the Nadar caste itself.

The two segments of the Nadar caste - Hindu and Christian - are indeed two separate social groups, whatever similarities may be noticed in their social structure and cultural traits. The definition of a social group is given below:

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[40] _The Census of India_. Madras: Government Press, 1902, p. 521. The Report gives the types of castes to be found in India, and the probable causes that led to the multiplicity of castes.

[41] To distinguish themselves from other groups they carry a small metal casket containing the _lingam_ (phallic symbol) on their body, indicating that _Siva_ is their deity. Though originally they protested against the caste system, they themselves came to be a separate caste group.

> A social group may be defined as any system of
> social relationships in which the members are
> united by a sense of emotional solidarity, of
> common purpose, or of both, and share a culture
> which defines their social roles and the standards
> by which members are differentiated from non-
> members.[42]

This will become clear when the next chapter, while giving

an ethnographic picture of the Christian Nadar group,

will bring out the similarities and differences that exist

between the two groups, which have a common tradition and

a common cultural background.

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[42] Wilson and Kolb, Sociological Analysis. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949, pp. 266-267.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW SUB-CASTE - THE CHRISTIAN NADAR

In this chapter it is proposed to treat the Nadar
Christian as a member of a sub-caste which came into
being in the district of Tinnevelly after conversion.
The change from Hinduism was openly acknowledged by in-
dividuals and families through the ceremony of baptism
at the hands of a Protestant (Anglican) Christian priest,
European or Indian. The members of this sub-caste are
made up of those who were converted during the nineteenth
century and their descendants.

Conversion and open confession of the Christian
faith disrupted membership in the Nadar caste whose pro-
fessed religion is Hindusim. In the eyes of the Hindu
Nadars, and in the eyes of all the other castes that pro-
fessed Hinduism, the new Christians were casteless. But
the Christians, gradually increasing in numbers, formed
their own association or group, and they felt and be-
lieved that they had not lost their caste. Social con-
tinuity was never lost, for as Bishop Stephen Neill says
in Builders of the Indian Church (1934), "When several
families or the members of a whole village are baptised
there is no complete break of continuity; the old life

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merges immediately in the new life of the Church."[1] And
the Nadars were usually baptised in families. Their
family life had not been impaired, some of their kins-
men were with them (though many were still in the Hindu
group), and excepting for the belief and practice of cer-
tain new ways of life, they found themselves as a social
group with a new kind of identity. This group has now
established itself as a distinct social entity, and can
be studied by the sociologist and the cultural anthro-
pologist, who are interested in analyzing human groups
and associations.

The background of the Christian Nadar is the same
as that of the Hindu Nadar of whom an account has been
given in the fourth chapter. His social status, which
at one time had sunk to the lowest level, was restored
to him and now it stands in a special class by itself.
It is a status won by merit through the performance of
his work in creditable occupations, commendable behavior
in public service, and private life, and it does not have
a level in the traditional heirarchy of the old caste
system. That is from the point of view of the Hindu
society in general. But the average Christian Nadar
himself feels that he belongs still to a caste system in

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[1] Bishop Stephen Neill, <u>Builders</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Indian</u>
<u>Church</u>. London: Edinburgh House Press, 1934, p. 46.

which he has no inferior status. And this at a time when
the whole fabric of the traditional caste system is being
threatened from various directions, with the Government
leading the way in its attempts to establish a casteless
Indian society. In South India the Christians, mostly
drawn from the sudra[2] or non-Brahman castes, group them-
selves for political and communal representations under
the non-Brahman group. In this classification the Nadar
Christian finds another link with his Hindu counterpart.

The distribution of the Nadar Christian group is
wide. It has spread itself out within the country and
outside, chiefly in the course of finding new fields of
occupation. The members are usually referred to as Tinne-
velly Nadar Christians, though some of them are found in
far-away Mauritius, in Ceylon, Burma or Malaya. Since
no occupation is barred to them, they qualify themselves
for whatever jobs are open to all Indians: teacher in
village or town, school or college, nurse, doctor, lawyer,
trader, government official, petty to high officer in
the army, navy and air force of the country, priest, mis-
sionary, social worker, and server in the now-developing
Christian ashram,[3] in South India especially. The lan-
guage is Tamil, in the study of whose literature many of

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[2] See Glossary.

[3] Ibid.

the Nadar Christians are now engaged. In the early part
of the present century it used to be considered fashion-
able for the Nadar Christian (other Christians too have
been guilty of the same) to be more familiar with English
rather than his mother tongue, Tamil. In many families
English was the spoken language of the home, and a certain
feeling of superiority was associated with the practice.
This was part of that stage of the development of the
Indian Christian community, when to follow Western ways,
and even to despise Indian customs and speech, seemed
socially superior. Reference was made to this in the
previous chapter (see notes from Modak in Chapter V).
But English was part of the educational system that was
introduced into the country, and the Nadar Christian was
among the early students of the English language and its
literature. His literacy in the English language was an
asset to his access to all kinds of jobs which would not
have been available to him otherwise. Along with the
English language certain amount of Western culture found
its way into his cultural life.

In the villages of Tinnevelly the Nadar Christian
has his residence either with his own group, or near, if
not in the midst of the Hindu Nadar group. That means
he lives away from the castes considered lower in the
scale, and if any Brahmans were to be found living in
the village, far from them also. In the cities there is

a great deal of mingling of the castes, excepting for the Panchamas[4] and similar groups whose occupation and customs regarding food and drink still keep them aloof in cheries[5] which are little settlements by themselves, and exist as small cultural units. At the opposite end of the scale from the Panchamas, the Brahmans may have their own residential settlements, known as agraharam,[6] or may be living in an entirely Brahman neighborhood. Otherwise Hindus, Christians and Muslims live in areas according to their financial ability and official ranking, for in some towns the government provides quarters for a certain number of officers.

House furnishings differ in village and city, usually. In the Tinnevelly villages which are known to be and are called Christian, like Nazareth for instance, there are features very similar to the amenities of town life. One sees here a blend of the typical Nadar cultural elements modified by the addition of cultural traits introduced by, or copied from, the Western missionary's way of life. This is seen in the architecture of the house, the layout and form and the furnishings. Besides

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[4] See Glossary.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

using the typically Tinnevelly palmyra-fiber-strung cot,
which is a favorite to this day for its lightness and
coolness, the Christian Nadar added Western type of chairs
and tables, which are now common in most Indian homes.
He continued to use the old type of household utensils;
pots and pans, and basketry for domestic purposes.

The products of the palmyra, whether for furniture,
basketry, or for food have always been enjoyed by those
who live near enough to the places of production. Even
those who have moved from Tinnevelly get some of these
things sent to them. Some still prefer to use the palmyra
sugar for their coffee and not the white refined sugar.
The food habits did not change, and they continue to be
similar to those of the Hindu Nadars. Beef and pork are
avoided. The flesh of goats and sheep, chicken, eggs
and fish are eaten.

In the well-to-do homes people do not sit on a
mat when they eat, but have a dining table and use Western
type of plates. The well-to-do Hindu Nadar would prefer
to sit on a mat and eat out of a banana leaf, the custom
prevalent among Hindus in general, and which is usually
adopted by Hindu and Christian alike at a wedding in the
bridal home. At present it is becoming the custom for
all persons of high social and official rank to hold a
wedding reception in a fashionable hotel, or restaurant,
where the food is served on tables and in china plates,

and cups and saucers, and spoons are used. In all In-
dian homes the custom is to wash one's hands before eat-
ing, and eat with the fingers of the right hand, and the
convention is not to let the left hand touch any food.
The Christian Nadar, if he uses the Western type of eat-
ing with spoon and fork, is in the company of many In-
dians, Hindus and others who like to do so.

Now to pass on to the dress and ornament of the
Christian Nadar. The convert continued to wear what he
was used to: a _veshti_ or lower garment which he wrapped
round his waist, and an upper piece that went over his
shoulders. He usually wore his hair long, and twisted a
turban over it at times. Only he did not use any caste
mark on his forehead. He wore earrings, and in child-
hood he wore silver or gold bangles on his wrists. But
gradually, with the persuasion of the Western missionary,
he and his family adopted slight changes in their attire,
the man adding a coat to his ordinary wear (for his wed-
ding a man had a satin coat that closed at the neck and
was buttoned all the way down) especially when he went
to church. And also he was reconciled to parting with
his long hair, the _kudumi_. As time went on he got familiar
with the use of Western suits, ties and shoes, much
earlier than his Hindu brother.

The Christian woman was asked to cover her body
more, and she added the Western type of jacket with long,

puffed sleeves. One has only to look at the old photo-
graphs in which the women are seen to be wearing the long
sleeves with lace at the cuffs and a broad lace collar.
The Christian Nadar woman began to look quite distinct
from other women, especially when she gave up the old
styled earrings that hung from the ear lobes, and started
wearing smaller earrings with screws. As for ornaments
for the wrist and neck they continued to use the old
forms, which gradually gave way to new types throughout
the area. At present, due to increasing uniformity, she
wears the same sort of clothes and jewels that are in
fashion in South India, and uniformity in women's dress
and ornament is spreading all over the country.

It is in the manner of following and practising
his religion that the Christian Nadar is particularly
different from his Hindu Nadar brother, as from all non-
Christians in the country. He does go to a place of
worship - the Church of a Protestant denomination (if
he is not a Roman Catholic) - just as the Hindu goes to
his temple. He has adapted himself to worshipping with
a group - a congregation where he is one not only with
Christians from his original caste, but also with con-
verts from other castes. The priest is not a Brahman,
nor always a Nadar, but a Christian minister who officiates
before and serves the whole group. The Nadar Christian,
by the fact of his baptism in infancy or later, becomes

a member of the church organization to which he subscribes,
and which he is expected to support with money and cer-
tain obligations like regular attendance, propriety of
behavior and social duties towards his Christian brethren,
irrespective of their caste. Caldwell refers to the
thrifty ways of the Nadar Christian and their giving to
the Church, as may be inferred from the following passage:

> It is nevertheless a fact worthy of notice that,
> wherever the Shanars have sincerely embraced Chris-
> tianity, and adhered firmly to their profession of
> it, their worldly circumstances have sensibly im-
> proved; and that, not in consequence of any pecun-
> iary help they received from the Missionary - for
> native Christians in Tinnevelly are expected to give,
> not to receive - but through the operation of moral
> causes alone.[7]

Besides the regular duties expected of him as a
member of the Christian group, he may be called upon to
take an office in the church parish as a layman to help
with the maintenance of the church and its properties.
Through the profession and practice of his religion he
comes to understand that besides belonging to his own
social group in which his family and kindred are placed,
he belongs to a wider society of fellow Christians with-
in the country and throughout the world. This super-
imposition of a larger social organization of which he
is an individual by virtue of his new religion usually

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[7] Rev. Robert Caldwell, The Tinnevelly Shanars.
London, 1850.

gets lost sight of in his pre-occupation with his own familiar, intimately known, group of Christian Nadars.

The social organization of the Christian Nadar group, or sub-caste, formed from the Nadar caste of Tinnevelly, is based on the kinship pattern, as it exists in the parent caste. Being a smaller group compared to the Hindu counterpart, and due to continuous endogamous marriages taking place, i.e., within the caste, the Christians can usually find some sort of relationship, tracing back even to three or more generations, through blood kinship or marriage alliance. And when they meet, if they are not already aware of the relationship, they trace it through intricate connnections, and establish the link, which would be necessary to know for adopting the correct mode of address. The general behavior towards one another is based on the age system, seniority in years, or seniority acquired through certain relationships as were pointed out in the case of the Hindu Nadar. This gives the general behavioral pattern within the caste group.

The kinship pattern is characterized by its classificatory system which continues unbroken for generations now, and which was derived from the parent caste group - the Hindu Nadar. Change in religious beliefs and practices did not in any way affect the kinship

system, and relationships were maintained with Hindu rela-
tives with whom occasionally intermarriage took place.
Relationship terms were used, and continue to be used,
towards those who remain in the Hindu fold, in the same
manner as towards Christian relatives. Often relation-
ship is traced back through several generations to a
time before Christianity split relatives into two dif-
ferent groups. Nowadays, with more toleration and under-
standing, it is possible for a member or more in a family
to practise and profess the Christian faith while the
rest continue to be Hindus.

The Christian group practises cross-cousin mar-
riage, and observes the degrees of prohibition as indi-
cated by certain relationships. For instance a man would
not marry a parallel cousin, who stands in the relation-
ship of sister to him, or a parallel cousin of his mother,
for his relationship to her would be that of son. The
Church does not object to such marriages, but the Chris-
tian Nadar, following the rules of his caste group, con-
siders such unions incestuous. But such relationships
lose their significance beyond the third and fourth gen-
erations. And at present there are odd cases of the
children of two sisters marrying, but not with the parents'
knowledge or consent. The community does not approve
such marriages though gradually toleration is extended

to the offending parties, after some time has passed.

Conversion to Christianity disrupted the joint-family. The old laws, territorial and personal, deprived the convert of all his social rights. Though he was accompanied by his wife and children immediately after conversion or later, he found himself committed to a new family type - the monogamous Christian family. Though his Hindu kinsman rarely availed himself of the right to a second wife or a concubine, he himself was pledged to monogamy and loyalty to his wife in a union sanctified by the Church. Marriage continued to be regarded as a sacrament, but with a different meaning and significance. The law relating to Christians will be dealt with later. It may suffice now to observe that though divorce now became permissible under certain conditions, the Christian Nadar rarely felt called upon to use the right. The shadow of the joint-family has been all the time over the Christian Nadar family in the form of close parental or/ and grand-parental supervision and control unless the husband and wife moved to a distant place. Here and there the joint family is continued by Christians when the sons are employed in the same place or help the father in his business. For marriage consultations there is the unofficial, though not now very effective, family council on which grand parents, uncles and aunts function. The

maternal uncle has lost much of his importance, but still
retains certain duties, like giving gifts to his nieces
and nephews at the time of their marriage, as well as at
other times. He and his wife used to have special ob-
ligations when his sister's daughter attained puberty,
but even that office is gradually losing its significance,
mostly due to the mobility of the Christian families.

Before we look at the crisis ceremonies, the gen-
eral attitude of Hindus in general, and of Christian
converts also, to pollution may be considered here.
Among the Hindus, as has been mentioned before, a girl
at puberty and a woman who has given birth to a child or
when she is having her period, are ceremonially unclean;
and only very close relatives may approach them and help
them. Their clothes and vessels used by them also are
unclean. This attitude continued with the early converts,
and is slowly changing. The first bath after puberty,
after the monthly period, and after childbirth are in
the nature of a ceremonial cleansing, very important in
the first and third occasions mentioned.

The Christian Nadar woman, used to following the
customs of the caste in these matters, trained her daughter
accordingly. So for a few generations at least it was
considered improper to go to church, or go to the altar
for taking communion when a girl was "ceremonially

unclean". After childbirth a woman would have an oil-bath,[8] the day before she went to church for the churching ceremony, which is really a thanksgiving occasion. To the Nadar Christian woman this would be a purificatory ceremony as well. The baby would be taken along too, usually, at times the mother carrying the child up to the altar railing for the blessing from the priest.

For purposes of reference the questionnaire forms completed by the Nadar Christians have been marked A-Z, AB, BC, CD and DE. The information given in them will be used here to illustrate the ceremonial observances of the group with reference to childhood, puberty, betrothal, marriage, funeral and after. "Naming" has been referred to as a "ceremony". This actually refers to the ceremony of baptism in the Christian church. Among the Hindus the "naming" is a domestic ceremony, and the idea associated with the term underlies the manner in which it is used when baptism is meant. The distribution of sugar to visitors, when a child is born, is common throughout South India. The Christian Nadars have kept the custom as an expression of joy over the arrival of

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[8] Oil is rubbed on the body and head before the bath. The oil is removed by the use of soap-nut powder which is made into a paste for the purpose. Then it is washed off with water. Both men and women do this at least once a week for physical well-being.

a new member into the family. After the baptism in the
church it is usual to have a party at home to which
friends and relatives are invited. The guests usually
bring gifts for the child. The grand parents on both the
sides are expected to give costly gifts; gold or silver
objects, according to their status in life.

The cradle ceremony, mentioned by a few of the
women, is quite important among the Hindus. It is a
women's ceremony, when the child is officially placed in
a decorated cradle, and songs are sung. Some Christian
mothers still do this as a social observance to mark the
development of the child. This takes place a few weeks
after birth, but it does not mean that the child had not
been placed in a cradle earlier. A long piece of cloth
is used as a cradle quite early in the child's life; but
for the ceremony a wooden cradle, attached to a frame
from which it can be swung, is used. The next stage of
development is seen when the child turns over. Though
in one form it is stated that coconuts are broken to cele-
brate the event, Christians are not given to the breaking
of coconuts, which is a typical Hindu practice.

For girls, the ear-boring ceremony is not of such
importance as it is among the Hindus. The Christian
Nadar woman calls the goldsmith to the house, and he pro-
ceeds to pierce the ears of the child (a baby-in arms or
a toddler) with a small piece of gold wire which is

twisted into a tiny loop. For his service the goldsmith is paid a **fee** in a tray on which the usual betel leaf, areca nuts, bananas and flowers are also placed as gifts. It is usual to have the ear-boring done when one or the other set of grand parents is visiting, and the child has her ears pierced while seated on the lap of a grand parent.

One of the forms mentions "tonsuring of the head" for the boys. This is an important occasion among the Hindus. Since the early converts followed most of the practices that were still familiar to them, and the men let their hair grow long, the front part of the head was shaved off, so the rest of the hair could be tied up in a knot, called _kudumi_. It is likely that the Christian boy had his _kudumi_ started after the first "tonsuring". The early missionaries did not think the _kudumi_ was becoming to the converts. They made it a point that at least the man who offered himself for ordination as a priest should have his hair cut short.

The forms were completed by town-dwellers, who occasionally visit relatives in villages, or visit the villages where they own property; and they do not have much contact with the social life of the villagers. The individual who lives right there, and is in close touch with the roots of the traditional culture, is tempted to conform to the local pattern of behavior. He gets closer

to the Hindu Nadar in whose eyes he seeks approval by
performing certain domestic ceremonies as part of the
conventional behavior expected of him.

The puberty ceremonies are not as elaborate among
the Christian Nadars as they are among the Hindus. In
fact they are becoming obsolete, excepting for the giving
of gifts by near relatives. Formerly "the bathing cere-
mony known as Sadangu", also called, "Ruthu Snanam", was
observed, when relatives were still living near enough
to be informed and invited. The "sixteenth day ceremony"
is still observed, when relatives and friends are invited
to a feast. There is no ceremony as such. The guests
bring gifts for the girl, usually a saree, and some may
be pieces of jewelry or gifts of money. It is an occas-
ion for relatives to meet and to know that a girl in the
family "is eligible for marriage".

One gathers the impression that the so-called puri-
ficatory ceremonies are falling into disuse among the
educated families. But the obligations of relatives are
still recognized. The reciprocities are seen in the
giving of gifts. A girl's parents are expected to give
similar gifts to the daughters of those relatives who
brought gifts to her at the time of her puberty. The
same principle of reciprocity governs all social relations
at the time of betrothal, marriage, death and funeral,
and is a clue to the kinship system within the social

structure of the Christian Nadar group.

From the time of the betrothal, and until marriage, the girl and young man are usually referred to respectively as _Penn_ meaning bride, and _Mappillai_, meaning bridegroom. Betrothal is a domestic ceremony when there is the usual "Exchange of ring and bible, followed by a feast and prayer."[9] The ceremony is held at the bride's house, and close relatives are invited, but no gifts are expected from them. An important item is the gift of an "engagement saree" to the bride from the bridegroom's family. This, offered on a tray, is first blessed by the priest who presides and leads the group in prayer. With reference to the occasion, one person says, "Part of the cash is also received at the time."[10] The cash refers to the dowry, which seems to have taken a strong hold in the Nadar Christian group. It is usual to agree on the amount that the girl's father will give to the groom's father before betrothal takes place, and part of the amount will be paid sometime during the day. The rest of the amount has to be paid before the marriage takes place. The money is for expenses the groom's father has to meet.

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[9] Qu: Form C.

[10] _Ibid._

One of the respondents, referring to betrothal, mentions it by the commonly known term, <u>nichaya thamboolam</u>,[11] i.e. confirming the engagement by the exchange of gifts between the two families. The gifts are offered on trays in which the <u>thamboolam</u>,[12] (betel etc.) is prominent. Also the <u>thamboolam</u> is offered to the witnessing guests. It is significant that on the occasion of betrothal the relatives are not expected to bring gifts. But their presence is important since they witness the formal agreement of marriage which is the <u>nichaya thamboolam</u>.

An interesting feature of the festivities connected with betrothal and marriage is their importance for social relations within the caste group. According to one person, "Relatives of both the parties meet for a family feast known as <u>Sambandham kalandhal</u> - now becoming extinct among forward Xtians."[13] The Tamil words mean the mixing of the <u>sambandhis</u>, or families of the contracting parties. Every marriage, renews old relationships, and also brings about new ones, especially where the bride and the groom are not very closely related. It is important that the two families should get to know their

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11 See Glossary.

12 See Glossary.

13 Qu. Form U.

members well, their unity contributing to the future wel-
fare and happiness of the bridal couple. Marriages are
important occasions demonstrating the strength of kinship
and social solidarity among the Nadar groups - Hindu and
Christian alike. It often happens that these occasions
also lead to the forming of future alliances, since whole
families of both parties attend the wedding which usually
is a prolonged social affair, extending from a day or
more before and up to a day or more after the actual day
the marriage ceremony is performed. The conventional in-
vitation card, touched with the yellow of turmeric paste
at the four corners, invites relatives to come with all
the members of the family, to come and bless the bridal
pair. Very close relatives are expected to come several
days before the marriage and help get the house ready
and decorate it, and help in making sweetmeats which have
to be made in large quantities.

It is not unusual to select for marriage a "good
or auspicious"[14] day. For instance nobody would select
a new moon day for a marriage. Usually a day is selected
when the moon is on the increase. The Indian calendar
gives auspicious days and times, and Hindu friends are
always ready to suggest suitable days and times which
are believed to be auspicious. Evil days and periods

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[14] Qu. Form N.

when evil forces are rife, should be avoided, in the interests of the bridal pair who must be launched on their new life together with the help of good influences.

One Christian Nadar refers to the "Planting of pandal pillar",[15] before marriage. Another says, "A date is fixed for the marriage to suit the convenience of both parties. The day before the wedding day is known as _mugurtham_. This _mugurtham_ fixed up according to Hindu _panjakam_.[16] In front of the bride's house and as well as the bridegroom's house a _mugurthakal_ is planted.[17] The terms, pandal and mugurtham are explained in the footnote.[18]

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[15] Qu? Form X.

[16] _Panjakam_ - calendar.

[17] Qu? Form BC.

[18] There is no single word in English to convey the meaning of _pandal_. It is a structure, which is often erected for temporary purposes. At the time of a wedding, when large numbers of guests are entertained, to witness the actual marriage ceremonies in the case of Hindus, for feasts and receptions after the marriage in the case of both Hindus and Christians, the _pandal_, is put up in front of the wedding house which is the bride's usually. A number of posts, wooden or bamboo, referred to as pillars, or _kal_ (leg), are firmly fixed in the ground to support a thatched flat roof that covers a wide space. The interior is then decorated with cloth, so that the thatch is hidden, and ornamented according to the expenses available for the purpose. But even the poor man gets a few banana trees, with bunches of the green fruit hanging, to set up at the entrance. Of the supports used, one has special significance among all the Hindu groups. This may be called _mugurthakal_, or _nadukal_ (the muhurtham post - a central post), and when it is set up certain ceremonies have to be performed. The Christians have no

Some Christians set this convention of muhurtham for the
evening before the wedding or the morning of the wedding
day, if the church ceremony is to take place in the after-
noon. It is usually a women's affair.

Women from the bridegroom's side visit the bride,
with flowers, and other gifts, including gold bracelets
or chains, at a time convenient to the bride's family,
due consideration having been usually given to the aus-
picious nature of the hour. The bride, festively attired,
is made to sit in the midst of the company, and the women
treat her to a number of marriage songs. If men are
present they also join in singing and usually there is
a small harmonium and a violin, drum or cymbal, for ac-
companiment. These songs are original compositions in
Tamil by Christian converts who have composed lyrics for
different occasions. They have been set to South Indian
music; and they are used regularly during church services,
along with English hymns that have been translated into
Tamil. Besides the women from the bridegroom's side
there may be other guests as well, invited for the oc-
casion; and all are treated to some light refreshments.

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such ceremonies, unless an elder in the family or a priest
is asked to say a prayer and bless the central post of
the pandal when the first stage of the structure is begun.
      Muhurtham, or Mugurtham, among the Hindus, is usual-
ly the wedding ceremony itself, but some people seem to
interpret it as a ceremony preceding the marriage.

Many of them would be staying on to have the dinner or
lunch that follows, for the custom is for the bride's
father to play host during the days of the wedding fes-
tivities, to the bridegroom's party in the first place.

Before marriage takes place, it is usual to have
the banns published in the church. Marriage among the
Christian Nadars is described by one of them: "Two hours
before the Service, the Groom's Party will bring Varisai[19]
in seven[20] Trays (Elu thattu) containing the Wedding
dress for the Bride, garland, coconuts, etc. After this
the Bride is dressed. Tying the Thali made out of 5 or
7[21] sovereigns by the Groom to the Bride's neck is the
most important."[22] The bridegroom has to go to the
bride's home with his kinswomen who carry the various
trays. There on arrival at the entrance the bride's
father, or guardian if her father is not alive, receives
the party, garlands the bridegroom, and also usually puts
a gold ring on his finger. He is led to where the men
are and is given a special seat, while the women who ac-
companied him go inside, where the bride is seated among
her kinswomen. There the bride is dressed in the clothes

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[19] See Glossary.

[20] Odd numbers are believed to be auspicious.

[21] Ibid.

[22] See Form E.

brought to her as gifts from the bridegroom and his family,
and is garlanded with fresh flowers. She may be given
gold ornaments also as part of the gifts. The bride-
groom is not supposed to see or meet his bride excepting
at the steps of the altar. So he is taken in procession
to the church, with the bride and the women following,
in vehicles, one behind the other, the whole entourage
usually led by musicians who play as they go along at a
slow pace. The bridegroom arrives first and takes his
seat in the first row, then the bride is led in by her
father or guardian preceded by priests; and after that
the whole procedure is exactly like the Anglican marriage
service. Excepting for the use of the <u>thali</u> or gold
badge, unless a ring is substituted after the Western
style.[23] So much for the ceremonies associated with
betrothal and marriage in the Christian Nadar group.[24]

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[23] Edgar Thurston, <u>Castes and Tribes of Southern
India</u>, Vol. VII, p. 3. Thurston quotes from an article
of Bishop Caldwell, <u>Indian Antiquary</u>, IV, 1875 (not avail-
able for direct reference): "The Tali", Bishop Caldwell
writes, "is the Hindu marriage answering to the ring of
European Christendom. I have known a clergyman refuse to
perform a marriage with a tali and insist upon a ring
being used instead. A little consideration will show
that the scrupulous conscience can find no rest for it-
self even in the ring; for if the ring is more Christian
than the tali, it is only because its use among the
Christians is more ancient. Everyone knows that the ring
has a pagan origin, and that for this reason is rejected
by Quakers."

[24] With regard to the festivities that go with
marriage in a Nadar Christian family the following passage
from Paul Appasamy's book, <u>Law Applicable to Christians</u>,

As in the case of the preceding crisis ceremonies, material for the funerary ceremonies is taken from answers to the questionnaire and from data collected by the writer as a participant observer. When a death occurs in a Nadar Christian family, all normal activities are suspended at once. No cooking is done in the house, and it is the duty of relatives to supply food to the bereaved family for a day or more. No one in the house combs the hair or takes a bath until after the funeral.

The dead body is bathed, dressed in the best dress

1928, pp. 54-55 is enlightening: "Even after their conversion to Christianity, converts retain a good many customs to which they have become used, provided such customs are not inconsistent with the principles of their new faith. Weddings for instance are celebrated on a scale of expenditure and with ceremonies which are prevalent in the caste from which the converts have come. Missionaries have sometimes refused to attend a wedding because the bridal procession towards the church was headed by an elephant from the nearest Hindu Temple wearing Vaishnava Caste marks. In the early days some of them even objected to a Thali or necklace being used in the place of the wedding ring as the latter alone is mentioned in the marriage service; but the Thali is now freely consecrated and used."

The writer remembers being present at a Nadar Christian wedding when a mother elephant (from the local Hindu Temple) and its baby trailing behind, were at the head of the bridal procession to the church and back. The latter part a long detour, while musicians played on their instruments, stopping now and then, and hundreds of people living on the streets used for the route, were happy to watch and make comments. The writer, who happened to be in the bridegroom's party, also remembers how at a certain point before reaching the bride's home, the groom's procession was held up for quite some time, because the auspicious hour had not yet arrived for the party to reach the bride's house.

available (married women dressed for burial usually in
their wedding saree), a garland of fresh flowers is placed
round the neck, and loose flowers are strewn on the bed.
At the headside, on a table or stool, candles and scented
sticks are kept burning until the body is taken away for
burial which takes place within twenty-four hours after
death. Visitors keep coming, especially the priest comes
in to pray with the bereaved family. From time to time
the women join in singing Christian hymns appropriate for
the occasion.

The body is carried out by bearers, if the church
is near by, for the funeral service, and then taken by
hearse to the cemetery for burial. The house where the
dead body had lain is given a thorough washing and clean-
ing. Then the women members of the family have a bath,
after rubbing a little oil on their heads. If the de-
ceased were a man, his widow would be assisted by her
relatives at her bath, after her _thali_ is removed. She
would be given a fresh set of clothes to wear, usually
gifts from the near relatives.

The men folk, returning from the funeral, enter
the house by a back or side entrance, and go straight for
a bath and change of clothes. The clothes that the men,
women and children had been wearing until the funeral
are to be given to the washerman for laundering. The
idea of ceremonial pollution is at the back of these

practices, and anyone who has been in contact with or in the vicinity of a dead body needs a cleansing which is not merely a physical cleansing.

Before proceeding further, two special terms used in the answers need to be explained. One is _neer-malai_, which literally means water-garland. Among the Hindus it is the custom to wash the dead body with water specially fetched for the purpose from a running stream, if one is near by, or from a lake or tank where water has collected. The Christians may be doing the same thing, especially in places where houses do not have water-taps. The practice and the term used to designate it, _neer-malai_, would be a matter of social importance to Nadar Christians living in the midst of Hindus, besides giving them the satisfaction of following the customs of their ancestors. The other term is _moi_ which refers to the gifts of money and clothes by near relatives, given to the widow. The money is for funeral and other expenses. It is the duty of the widow's brothers and sisters and of her husband's brothers and sisters to give _moi_. The clothes would be white in olden days, as it continues to be among the Hindu Nadars. Though colored sarees are worn by the Christian widows these days, the preference is for white and for little or no jewelry.

Now to proceed with the ceremonies: on the third day after death, the members of the family, usually men,

and near relatives, visit the grave with milk and flowers.
They wash the grave with water, and then sprinkle milk
over it. Then they strew or arrange the flowers over the
grave. This is called the third day ceremony, or the
milk ceremony. The next important ceremony falls on the
sixteenth day after death, when again the family members
have an oil-bath before they treat their relatives to a
feast. This is meant to be a day on which mourning is
supposed to be put off. The expression in Tamil,
thukkam-**kalithal** just means that. Usually there is a
prayer meeting preceding the meal, and a number of poor
people also are fed on that day. This feeding of the
poor is often an annual occasion on the anniversary of
the death, on which day the grave is visited and flowers
are placed on it.

Certain institutions honored by the Christian
Nadars will be considered next. In the villages the
Christian Nadar submits himself to the rule of the
Panchayat on which he is sometimes privileged to serve.
This ancient institution exercises the powers of a mun-
icipal council, for the welfare of the local residents.
The elders of the Nadar community, both Hindu and Chris-
tian, concern themselves exclusively with matters af-
fecting their own caste group - economic and social prob-
lems and questions of morality with the right to ostracize

a man socially for certain types of misbehavior. Such
a man would be socially boycotted, and would not be in-
vited to the social affairs of the caste group. Similar-
ly in towns where there are numerous Christian families
drawn from the Nadar caste, senior men of high social
and economic status, get together for exercising social
control over their erring brethren. Marriages that were
about to be broken up and broken homes have been mended
by their efforts.

Reference has already been made to the Nadar
Mahajana Sangam, in which membership is limited to mem-
bers of the Nadar caste only, irrespective of their being
Hindu or Christian, provided they pay their annual sub-
scriptions regularly. It has a committee of management,
with a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer,
Committee members and so on, to manage the funds, pro-
perties, and activities of the Sangam. The great event
of the year is the Annual Conference, at which reports
are made on the progress of the Sangam's activities, dis-
cussions held, and plans are made for the future, ending
up with a series of resolutions, all of which are later
printed and distributed to the subscribing members. The
objectives are directed towards improving the social,
economic and cultural life of the Nadar community, and
towards providing facilities for the same in the form of
scholarships, better-equipped Nadar-managed schools and

generally encouraging the trade and other enterprises un-
dertaken by Nadars. The Sangam's report[25] for the year
1st April, 1950 to 31st March 1951 (collected by the
writer at Virudhunagar) has a financial report signed by
the auditor, Gell Thomas. The income, the largest amount
from rents earned by _Pettais_ (Stopping-places for Nadar
merchants in villages and towns), is given as Rs.48441-4-7.
The largest amount spent on a single item is on staff,
which is given as Rs.4042-1-0. The next large expendi-
ture is on scholarships given to Nadar boys and girls;
and if names are clues, at least ten of the 26 scholar-
ships went to Christians. It is possible more of them
got the benefit, since it is not always possible to judge
from names.[26]

Besides all these the Conference provides for what
may be called a "gathering of the clan", which brings
out the solidarity of the caste group. This of course
is accompanied by a sense of pride in the performances
of the group, and acts as a stimulus to caste unity and
further progress in education and social welfare. In

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[25] _Sixth Report, Detchana Mara Nadar Sangam, for
1st April 1950 to 31st March 1951_. Tinnevelly: Arasan
Press, 1952.

[26] Christians are tending to give up Bible names,
Western names are now out of style, and the preference
is for distinctly Indian names.

the Sangam, however, the proportionate strength of the
Christian segment, is small compared to the Hindu. For
one thing the Christians are more widely scattered, and
even among those who live within the districts of Tinne-
velly, Ramnad and Madura where the Sangam is very active,
not many are subscribing members. The Christians al-
ready enjoy some of the benefits which the Sangam desires
all its members to have, and also they get caught up in
various activities of the Church where they are members
or in the institutions in which they are working. But
there are many prominent Christians who take an active
interest in the Sangam, some accepting official positions
as President,[27] Secretary or Treasurer, or are called
upon to deliver the main address at the Conference.

The laws which are applicable to the Hindu Nadar
do not apply to the convert from that caste group. This
has been dealt with in the previous chapter. It is clear
from the legal position of the Christian Nadar that he
is grouped under "Indian Christian", a term which covers
all the Christians who bear the Indian nationality. For
purposes of reckoning he will figure only when grouping
on the basis of religious affiliation is considered, and

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[27] In December 1953, A. C. Paul Nadar, distinguished
lawyer of Tuticorin, and leader among Christian Nadars,
presided over the Sangam's Conference.

he has neither "disabilities" nor privileges on the basis
of caste. But socially he stands as a distinct group.
He is an Indian Christian, but all Indian Christians do
not have his cultural features. In North India the In-
dian Christian has no caste affiliation, and uses no
title to indicate his original caste. In the South,
Christians are still characterized as <u>Vellala</u>, <u>Parava</u>,
<u>Paraiya</u>, <u>Marava</u>,* and so on; and in this medley the
Nadar Christian finds himself as a member of a group with
a clearly definable culture. That is why it is possible
to analyze him as a member of a sub-caste, a segment of
the Hindu Nadar caste, but professing the Christian religion.

In this chapter, the Christian Nadar community
has been presented as a social group with a system of social
relationships that promote social solidarity, and with a
culture which is distinct and can be clearly outlined.
The members of the group can be distinguished from mem-
bers of other social groups by their ways of living.
Some of these ways are similar to the customs obtaining
among the Hindu Nadars, some of them entirely new, and
there are also cultural elements that show a certain
modification of old cultural ways. That caste endogamy
is a strong feature of the group is indicated in the
answers stated in the questionnaire given to Christian

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*   See Glossary.

Nadars. Out of thirty persons who responded, twenty-four are married within the caste, and the rest are not yet married.* Several of them advocate marriage outside the caste, for as Christians they feel it is their duty not to discriminate. Some of them have a relative who has broken the rule of caste endogamy, and opinions are divided as to the propriety of the action of the offender.

In the light of the statement made above, and from the material supplied in this chapter, the working definition of a caste in India (given in Chapter II) may be recalled here, to see how far the Christian Nadar group satisfies the criteria mentioned in the definition:

> A caste in India is an exclusive, endogamous group, whose members inherit at birth, and share throughout life, a common culture, developed and handed down by their ancestors, stamped with unique features, the main one being a distinct and special occupation, actually pursued or traditionally associated, and marked in varying degrees by characteristics which are found to be common to similar social groups within the country.

In the opinion of the writer the Nadar Christian group does satisfy the criteria, though the writer is also aware that disintegrating forces are already at work.

The dominant features of the Christian Nadar may be put together in summing up the material presented in this chapter. From the point of occupation, according to the 1938 Research study, directed by J. S. Ponniah, 20% of the group was engaged in tapping the palmyra trees,

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* See Table A in Appendix F.

either as laborers or as owners of the trees.[28]   At present, after the Prohibition policy of the Indian Government was implemented in South India, less number must be engaged in the traditional occupation. This holds good for both Hindu and Christian alike. Agriculture, trade, industry, and the so-called learned professions, have made all Nadars depart largely from the one despised (in the eyes of other castes) occupation, associated with the caste.

Material culture has been affected more than any other aspect of the culture of the Christian Nadar. Urban living, social mobility, contacts with other cultures, especially Western, have left only the vestiges of the Palmyra Culture; but these vestiges, like the products of the palmyra tree, and the use of the marriage badge, known as thali, are still powerful objects that evoke deeply satisfying emotions.

On the group level there are factors indicating social solidarity, and feelings of closeness with members of the group, extending even beyond the barriers of religion into the Hindu Nadar caste group. What Linton has observed with reference to the formation of a new

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[28] Research Studies by Christian Colleges, Directed by J. S. Ponniah, 1938, p. 96.

society, is applicable to the Nadar Christian group:

> Such sects usually have a well-defined group of
> ideas and values in common and a strong esprit de
> corps. Lacking patterns for the expression of these
> in concrete, predictable behavior, they nearly al-
> ways end by reverting to the behavior patterns of
> the society from which the bulk of the converts
> have been born. These patterns may be reinterpreted
> and rationalized in terms of the new beliefs, but
> the patterns themselves undergo only minor changes
> in the process.[29]

Linton states that only when "the plan for the new so-

ciety" had included patterns of behavior from the old

society, does the new society get successfully estab-

lished. As for the converts from the Hindu Nadar caste

when they were offered new "designs for living", they

learned them objectively, substituting them for the old.

In the Nadar Christian group, "What is seen to persist

are sets of folkways and mores which are only slightly

altered from generation to generation in the normal

course of things."[30]

Group life and group identity are found to have

been preserved on familiar lines, and each new genera-

tion is conditioned in a milieu that has a "character,

an historical traditional character", and the social

system is labelled by a caste name. Within the caste

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[29] Ralph Linton, The Study of Man. New York:
D. Appleton-Century Co., 1936, p. 97.

[30] John Dollard, Criteria for the Life History.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935, p. 15.

group, where its culture is imbedded, the members are
knit together in a kinship system which is common to the
Hindu and Christian Nadars. The family, which is the
unit of the caste group, maintains the structure of the
kinship pattern, and disciplines its young in tradition-
al ways of behavior. By its social organization and
its typical cultural character, the Christian Nadar con-
tinues a social identity under the title of a caste.
The change from Hinduism to Christianity did not disrupt
the social structure of the caste which was based on the
traditional kinship system. As Fishman observed with
reference to the Maligas in Nellore (South India),
"Solidarity of caste survives changes of religion, even
has its social value."[31]

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[31] A. T. Fishman, Culture Change and the Under-
privileged . Madras, Colombo, Bangalone, Secundcia;
The Christian Literature Society for India, 1941, p. 150.

CHAPTER VII

ANALYSIS AND THEORETICAL CONCLUSIONS

The ethnographical materials presented so far have
been in the nature of an exploratory tour into the realm
of caste, the special area of selection being South India.
The objectives of the exploratory study were explained
at the outset. They are related to the problem of caste-
persistence in a Christian group whose ancestors belong-
ing to the Hindu Nadar caste in Tinnevelly district were
converted by Protestant Christian missionaries from Eng-
land, a century ago. For the consideration of the prob-
lem it is proposed, in this chapter, firstly, to set up
a theoretical scheme for the analysis of the Nadar caste,
the Christian group in particular; secondly to look for
factors that could explain the persistence of caste in
the latter group.

The theoretical scheme for analysis which is given
below is in the nature of a model for analyzing caste
groups. The subject matter presented in the previous
chapters will be used in the analysis. Caste in India
is a system of behavior, and each caste group represents
an ordered, well-knit system. Hence for the analysis of
such a system the methodology of functionalism[1] is

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[1] Raymond Firth, "Function," Current Anthropology,
edited by William L. Thomas, Jr. Chicago: University

appropriate. In order to see how caste functions, the relationship of the parts to the whole system has to be assessed. This will be the business of the first part of the chapter with reference to the two segments of the Nadar caste which are the subjects to be analyzed. The second part of the chapter will be given to discussions based on the analysis, the results of the analysis and to theoretical conclusions.

The purpose of the analysis will be, in the first place, to see what aspects of the caste system are observable in the Christian group of the Nadars to justify their being called a sub-caste of the Nadar caste. Secondly in the course of the analysis it is also the purpose to look for causes that could explain the retention of caste features in the Christian group. In looking for these causes it is expected that the factors for caste persistence will become evident.

A theoretical scheme for analysis is given below as a model for analyzing caste groups in terms of social grouping and culture with its different aspects, including values:

of Chicago Press, 1956, pp. 237-258; A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, On the Concept of Function in Social Science, Structure and Function in Primitive Society. London: Cohen and West Ltd., 1952, pp. 178-187.

Caste {

I
Social
groupings {
a. Family
b. Kindred
c. Caste group

II
Culture {
a. <u>Structure</u> and <u>pattern</u>.
b. <u>Symbolism</u>: caste name, occupation, personal names, residence, dress and ornament typical of caste, caste marks.
c. <u>Religion</u>: beliefs, practices, deities, priests, place of worship, fasts and feasts, organization.
d. <u>Language</u>: areas of communication.
e. <u>Material</u> culture: house, food, dress and ornament, objects used in occupation, in domestic ceremonies and in religious ritual.
f. <u>Special institutions</u>: caste panchayat, caste associations, laws regarding food, marriage and property, reciprocities relating to social grouping and reciprocities relating to other caste groups (if any).
g. Values: Group, personal.

The classification given above is applicable to all the castes in India,[2] allowing for variations, especially with regard to cultural elements which are comparatively variable whereas the categories under social grouping may be relatively stable. The ranges of variability may be narrow or wide, between caste and caste and between a caste and its sub-caste, determined by factors of history, social development, external pressures and so on. The traditional Nair family in Malabar, matrilineal and matriarchal, is gradually changing to the

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[2] J. H. Hutton, <u>Caste in India</u>. Oxford: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1951, Chapter II. Caste, Its Structure, Strictures, Sanctions, Functions.

patrilineal type, whereas the Hindu Nadar family continues
to be patrilineal and patriarchal, though the tradition-
al type of joint family is undergoing certain changes.
To mention other possible variations: a family may be
based on monogamy or polygyny, endogamy or hypergamy.
The reckoning of kindred may differ from caste to caste,
with the accompanying differences in the terms of kinship
used. Similarly the ranges of variability may be seen in
the value-orientations of the group and of the individual.

Diagram X
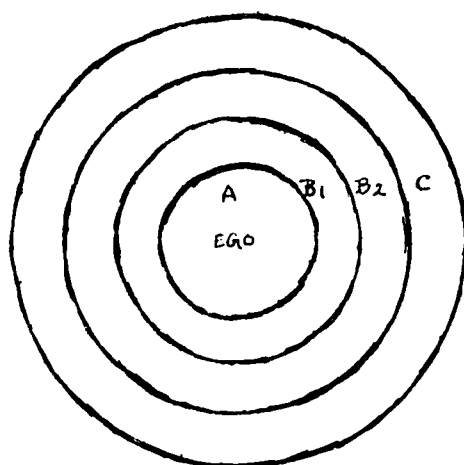
Diagram Z
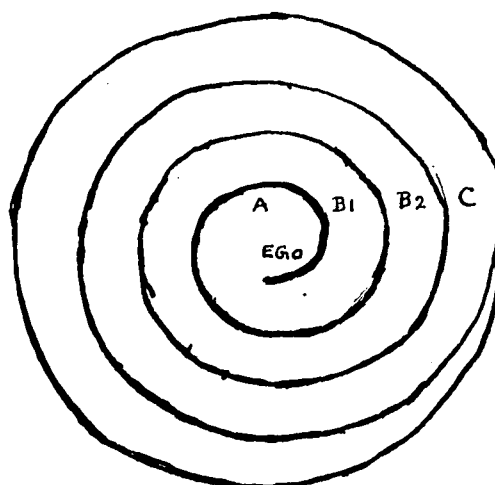
A. Family
B1. Kindred -
   consanguinal
B2. Kindred - affinal
C. Caste group

Diagram X given above may help to see how well entrenched an individual is within the social matrix of a caste. The position of Ego would be better represented by a whorl as in Diagram Z, rather than by concentric circles. In actual practice A opens into B1 and B2, and then into C after which the circle is closed. Within the confines of the caste is a functioning socio-cultural system which patterns the behavior of the individual from birth to death; and the social interaction intensely carried on, integrates the members into a stable in-group. The network of human relations within the caste in-group, patterned by its culture, have been illustrated by the empirical data on the Nadar caste, both Hindu and Christian. Within the pattern of the cultural components the values are imbedded.

The classification of caste given under the main categories of social grouping and culture will be used as a frame of reference for analysis of the two segments of the Nadar caste which are concrete realities with observable uniformities. Although in theory it is possible to separate the parts of the holistic system that a caste is, and categorize its parts in terms of social grouping and culture, and break up culture into a number of elements, the observable behavior expresses the totality in which the parts are fused together. In a

model or a paradigm it is not possible to make concrete
the cohesive forces that pull the parts of the caste
group into a living, dynamic reality. So in analyzing
the Nadar caste with reference to its two segments it
is not possible to delineate the social grouping with-
out at the same time describing the structural aspects,
the special institutions associated with them, reciproc-
ities and the like, and referring to the values from time
to time as they are inferred.

The analysis will now be taken up point by point
according to the model. The Hindu Nadar group has the
characteristic Hindu joint-family which is patrilineal
and patriarchal, and the laws of inheritance and property
are governed by the funerary obligations of the male
heirs. The kindred are reckoned on the father's side
and the mother's side, and relatives are grouped accord-
ing to what has been technically called the classifica-
tory type. Relationship terms determined by the recog-
nized classification, are used not only to designate
consanguinal kindred, they are extended to affinal kin
also. This extension turns the whole caste group into
a vast kindred group which is a closed circle. The socio-
cultural activities of the group are limited to the caste
members and social interaction of the type prescribed
within the caste, and recognized as valid for the Christian

group also in regard to certain activities, are not permissible with outsiders, that is with members of other castes. It is only the Nadars, who by right of being born into the caste as a Hindu or a Christian may completely or partially participate in the social action of the caste. The joint family, typical of the Hindu section has been continued here and there among the Christians also. Though polygamy was allowed to the Hindu, it was rarely practised, and now monogamy has become the norm for all Hindus, due to government legislation. In the nature of the family type the Christian Nadars are patrilineal like the Hindu Nadars.

The structuring of the social groupings has been outlined in the previous paragraph indirectly. The structuring of the behavior patterns within the caste is based on the degree of relationship, sex, and age. The behavior patterns are closely linked to some of the special institutions like the laws regarding food and reciprocities. The Hindu Nadar observes the avoidance of beef and pork and the meat of dead animals; he is not supposed to drink any liquor, though he may trade in the fermented juice of the palmyra. All this is applicable to the Christian Nadar also. In the Institutions of the crisis ceremonies which are included in the reciprocities relating to social groupings, the Hindu and

the Christian Nadar are obliged to follow a recognized code of behavior. Indeed, the position of the mother's brother among the Hindu Nadars is an institution by itself as depicted in the fourth chapter; and he is important as the father of his daughter who is a prescribed mate to his sister's son. Among the Christians the maternal uncle is losing his identity, and as an institution his position has little or no value.

The symbolism of the caste title of Nadar is of great value to the whole group and its individual members from the point of group identification. But many Christians have discarded the use of the title. The traditional occupation of palmyra-climbing which is practised only by a small section of the caste, even less since prohibition was introduced into the Madras State a few years ago, is symbolic only from the point of view of the outsider. The members of the caste insist that the extraction of the palmyra juice is only one of the many occupations practised by the Nadars. There are other occupations connected with the palmyra, like boiling the juice for sugar of various types, basket-making and using the palmyra fiber, leaf and its other products. The symbolism of traditional occupation has lost much of its significance, as in the case of many other castes in South India, since a variety of new occupations has widened the scope of employment for all castes, and for

men and women. Similarly symbolism with regard to per-
sonal names, residence, dress and ornament which distin-
guished the Nadar caste from others, is losing signifi-
cance in the movement towards uniformity, not only in
South India, but throughout the country. In these areas
the values are shifting towards everything Indian and
national.

The orthodox Hindus wear on their foreheads dots
of sandalwood paste or linear smears of ashes. A man
may do this when he goes to the temple to worship or/and
to make offerings there, and after a ceremonial bath.
When the Nadars were converted to Christianity, they
gave up all caste marks. Now ordinarily caste marks or
any marks on the forehead are not affected by the men to
the extent that the black or red dot is in the case of
the women. Whatever religious significance the black
or red dot may have had in the past, they are now becom-
ing more of beauty spots than anything else, and Pro-
testant Christian women have taken to using them too.
The Roman Catholic women have always decorated their
foreheads with a black or red spot like the Hindu women.

In religion the Hindu Nadars follow two systems:
the traditional system of the caste deities, Siva and
Badrakali, and the traditional Hindu system with its
roots in the Vedic culture. The former is the more

significant of the two for practical purposes. The Nadars
had always had their own priests, known as <u>Pujaris</u>,* al-
though sometimes they use the Brahman priest to offici-
ate at ceremonies, or when they visit a temple where they
are permitted to enter. Nowadays the Hindu Nadar finds
all Hindu temples open to him, and his association with
the traditional occupation is no longer held a bar. But
there are temples maintained by the Hindu Nadar caste
and minor shrines of its own where its casteman presides.
The caste observes the fasts and feasts common to Hindus
in general in South India, and attaches much importance
to the feast of <u>Pongal</u> which is also an occasion for
visits and gifts to members of the family. Organization
on the religious side is comparatively strong among the
Hindu Nadars who have the institution of a tax for the
maintenance of shrines and <u>Pujaris.</u>

The differences in the beliefs and practices of
religion that the Christian segment show are observable
also in the very structuring of the religious aspect of
its culture. The institutions of his religion link the
Christian Nadar to Christians drawn from other castes in
India and with Christian groups outside the country.
This leads to certain types of interaction which he can-
not share with his Hindu counterpart in the caste group-
ing. His object of worship, his priests, place of worship,
* See Gossary.

fasts and feasts and religious organization are new features which he received in the place of what his ancestors gave up as part of the religion that they renounced.

The language of the Nadars has always been Tamil, and English is an additional language for knowledge for those who have received their education in it. But Tamil is the language of the home and covers all the socio-cultural activities that the caste engages in. The kinship terms, not easy to translate into another medium of expression, are all in Tamil which is the vehicle for communication in all essentials.

The material culture of the Nadars has been referred to elsewhere as the Palmyra culture, and it is not necessary to describe it in detail here. The palmyra climber has his distinct tools and containers. The material objects used in domestic ceremonies have also been enumerated elsewhere, but will be referred to again with regard to values in the area of material culture. As for objects used in religious ritual they are common to all Hindus in South India: bell metal lamps, utensils of the same metal and other paraphernalia which need not be detailed for the purpose in hand. Modifications in the material culture of the Christian Nadar have been noted already.[3]

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[3] See Chapter VI - The Christian Nadar - a Sub-Caste.

Some of the special institutions have been hinted
at before. The caste panchayat is a very important in-
stitution, consisting of five or more responsible members
of the caste. To the bar of this council are brought
many social problems that are quietly settled without
dragging individuals to the law-courts. The Nadar
Mahajana Sangam is a caste association whose declared
purpose is to promote the social and cultural welfare of
the members of the caste, both Hindu and Christian.
Caste laws regarding food, as to what one may not eat,
with whom, and so on, are gradually losing their validity,
especially with respect to commensality.

As for marriage the rule is endogamy which is rela-
tively more strictly followed among the Hindu Nadars than
among certain other castes in the south. Cross-cousin
marriage is the approved pattern, and certain relatives
come within the prohibited degree as has been observed
in the report on the Nadars. The recent legislation re-
garding inheritance among Hindus in general and the change
in the pattern of laws of succession to property for the
Hindu Nadars has been noted earlier.[4] The reciprocities
are the duties and obligations between members of the
family, kindred and caste members with special reference

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[4] See Chapter IV.

to the crises of birth, puberty of girls, betrothal,
marriage and death. These have been described in the
chapter on the Hindu Nadars. Reciprocities still honored
as institutions by the Christian Nadar have been con-
sidered in the sixth chapter, and will be referred to
again in the discussion on values.

Social solidarity becomes a thing of value to the
individual, and increasingly so as he goes through the
crisis ceremonies, himself, assisted by his nearest kins-
men and kinswomen behind whom stand the whole phalanx of
the caste group. Passage rites, marking the individual's
development physically and morally with change in status
and role, as dictated by the cultural pattern, indicate
the area where social interaction is at its intensest
within the caste group. There is nothing abstract about
the rites - they are activities of the group, or activi-
ties that the individual is expected to perform as a mem-
ber of the group, and as dictated by the group's stan-
dards of behavior. In chapters four and six ceremonies,
performed by the Hindu Nadar and the Christian Nadar re-
spectively, have been described from primary sources.
Social values are expressed for all the world to know
that these groups believe in their group action for the
benefit of their members at the time of birth, puberty
(with reference to girls), betrothal, marriage and funeral.

The expressions of value are not only for the individuals for whom the ceremonies are performed, but also for the whole group which takes these occasions to affirm its social and cultural unity. These occasions are charged with tremendous emotional appeal to the members of the caste group to perpetuate a social system which has such great values for them, when large numbers of fellow caste men are brought together in an atmosphere of face to face association in the spirit of kinship and friendliness.

Marriages are significant events in the life of individuals since new relationships are formed, adjustments are made in the relationship pattern, and terms of address are changed or new ones adopted to express the new relationships. These changes involve new regulations which affect the behavior of individuals. It is here that the kinship system steps in to explain, and to make meaningful, the whole range of the new relationships brought about by a marriage between near kindred, or distant relatives, connected by blood or affinity, or between parties not related at all, or whose relationship is far too removed to be taken into account. The network of relationships, extending and changing its pattern, becomes a visible reality to the caste group. In these matters, people's memories are very long, and they can

trace relationships over several generations. Every
family can trace the relationship pattern or genealogy
of other families also, or, even if it does not know well
enough, makes it its business to know. Marriages give
the caste group members the opportunity to find out and
keep track of relationships. The oldest members present
get the greatest respect and consideration, for they are
the storehouse of traditional knowledge, and have the
power of experience to support whatever they say by quot-
ing precedents. Family tradition and stories of ances-
tors are recited by them, and the young are initiated
into the ways of the culture which is their heritage.
The meeting of generations helps to strengthen old, and
generate new, values in the context of social interaction.

It is very clear that among Nadars, both Hindu
and Christian, that the kinship system has ramifications
in the most significant areas of their social activities.
Crisis ceremonies, duties to family and relatives, and
the values that accrue therefrom, strengthen the bonds
of kinship and lead to harmonious interaction between
the younger and older generations of relatives. In this
context the significance of caste endogamy may be seen
and evaluated. The culture of the caste demands social
interaction in intimate areas, and the cultural features
of one caste would not harmonize with those of another
caste. One Nadar Christian says that the ceremonies

bring people of close families together in times of hap-
piness and sorrow, and that there is sharing of expenses
known as "kumbidukkattu, moi etc." The last two terms
which are in Tamil are explained in a footnote.[5]

The crisis ceremonies, performed in the home have
been referred to as domestic ceremonies, excepting some
of the funeral ones which take place outside the house.
They are group performances, and, as such they have been
referred to as "social"; and it is clear that they are
associated with the duties expected of kindred. To the
Christian Nadar values lie within the cultural pattern-
ing of his caste, and with reference to the norms and
standards that are valued within that group to which he
had belonged from birth. Kroeber observes in his paper

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[5] Kumbidukkattu: Kumbidu - refers to paying re-
spect, or giving obeisance. The married couple especially
are expected to show their respect to their older kindred
by folding their palms together before them, and among
the Hindus generally, and so with the Nadar Hindus, and
among orthodox Christian families, the bride and groom
stoop and touch the elders' feet with their hands after
greeting them in the traditional manner which is with
folded palms.
Kattu - Besides other things means, a packet; also
"Positive injunctions, established rules, duties, obliga-
tions, etc. - as of caste, religion." p. 227, Tamil and
English Dictionary by Rev. Miron Winslow. Madras, 1862.
Kumbidukkattu would mean what is given in accordance
with caste rules to those who pay respect on certain oc-
casions, like marriages. Funeral expenses also are shared
by kindred.
Moi - The above Dictionary translates the term thus:
"Money given or subscribed in small sums, as to a new
married couple." p. 900.

on Values (1949) referred to earlier:

> The essential characteristic things about a cul-
> ture are its forms and patterns, the interrelations of
> these into an organization, and the way these parts,
> and the whole, work or function as a group of human
> beings lives under them. A culture is a way of
> habitual acting, feeling and thinking channeled by
> a society out of an infinite number and variety of
> potential ways of living.6

Kroeber's observations have significance to the caste

society under discussion. The forms and patterns are

clearly discernible. The parts and interrelations that

make up the whole are so organized that the human beings

who live within the structure of it all, work or function

on habitual cultural lines which have patterned their

ways of feeling, thinking and acting, behaving in gen-

eral.

In both the segments of the Nadar caste the struc-

turing of the crisis ceremonies follow a similar pattern,

with differences in the actual number of the elements or

the significance attached to the rites. Observances of

some of the customs taken over from the pre-Christian

days, have decreased in practice and importance. Often

they have more than survival values, they are observed

because the ancestors practised the crisis rites, and

now these rites are also symbolic of group solidarity

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6 Kroeber, *Nature of Culture*, op. cit., p. 136.

and group identity. The significance of the crisis cere-
monies, besides what values they have to individuals in
the group, lies in the way they are structured and linked
to the kinship relationships. Duties and responsibilities,
rights and privileges, associated with the performance
of rites (ceremony taken to mean a group of rites) dur-
ing crisis ceremonies belong to the kinship group. So
in the total patterning some of the sub-structures are
closely linked as seen in the Nadar caste structure:
viz kinship, kinship terms as expressed in the total
Tamil language, and crisis ceremonies. All the sub-
structures - the parts of the structure - are of course
linked together in the total cultural pattern of the
social structure, but some of them appear to be more in-
tricately connected with each other than with others.

The two segments of the Nadar caste have not one
common cultural configuration because the patterning of
the Nadar culture was modified by changes in the religious
sub-structure. The two separate social groups, divided
on the basis of religion and the consequence of the
change, have common sub-structures which indicate a
limited common configuration in their culture pattern-
ing. The accompanying figure illustrates the common
area of agreement, in which the common sub-structures
are found.

Figure 1
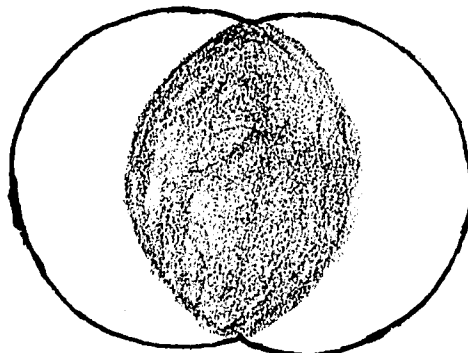
A and B are inter-
locking spheres repre-
senting the two segments,
Hindu and Christian,
of the Nadar caste.

The area of agreement which is shaded in the diagram is
meant to indicate that the two segments of the Nadar
caste have achieved integration within limits. The
closed circle of the Hindu Nadar caste opened to the
Christian group when it was found that many elements of
culture were common to both. The recognition of the
fact led to close interaction in areas which did not in-
volve religion. The unshaded part in both the spheres
indicate the areas - and the substructures involved - of
non-agreement in the cultural configuration, mainly the
religious substructure which in the case of one group is
Hinduism, and Christianity in the other.

The area of agreement symbolized in the diagram
holds the core of the culture of the Nadar caste, that
part of the cultural configuration which maintains cul-
tural continuity and group unity, through time, in the
midst of temporal vicissitudes. This core of the Nadar
culture is basic to the culture of the two segments.
From the manifest elements of the culture the most

important observable patterns of behavior lie in the kinship structural pattern, which is sustained by caste endogamy as a principle of survival for the group, if it is not to disintegrate.

The kinship structuring in both segments of the Nadar caste is identical, and the kinship terms are the same. It is important to remember that the terms[7] are in Tamil which is the language of both the groups. In the kinship substructuring there is a continuity of a cultural pattern that is not only ancient, but also pre-Vedic, and probably pre-caste. The Vedic rules forbade marriage between near relatives, up to seven generations on the father's side and five on the mother's and these rules obtain in the North among the Hindus. The prohibited degrees were different in the South, and the existing regulations for marriage were so strongly upheld that when the Northerners came down into the Southern parts of the country, they were horrified by some of the customs they found there. They are enumerated in the Sacred Laws (Part II) Baudhayana and in the Satapatha Brahmana. The first states, "They are, to eat in the company of an uninitiated person, to eat in the company of one's wife, to eat stale food, to marry the daughter

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7 See Appendix.

of a maternal uncle or a paternal aunt."[8] Another passage mentions "that the Dakshinatyas allow marriage with the daughters of the mother's brother and with sons of the father's sister."[9] In a paper published in the _Eastern Anthropologist_, the writer, while comparing the kinship systems of North India and South India, observed:

> The law-givers themselves advised tolerance wherever local differences existed in social customs . . . . When the Aryan culture infiltrated into the South it did not clash with the social pattern of the Dakshinatyas or the Dravidians. On the other hand it absorbed some Dravidian elements, one being cross-cousin marriage.[10]

The Christian Nadar was permitted by the rules of the Anglican Church to marry parallel cousins, but he preferred to conform to the prohibitions of his own caste.

The closeness of the Christian Nadar to the Hindu Nadar has been emphasized in the preceding pages. The existing aspects of caste in the Christian group may now be considered against the total picture of caste in India.[11]

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[8] Max Muller (ed.), _The Sacred Book of the East_, Vol. XIV, translated by Georg Buhler. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882, Part II, p. 146.

[9] _Ibid._, Vol. 12, translated by Julius Eggeling, Part I, Books 1 and 2, pp. 238-239.

[10] Hilda Raj, "Some Observations on the Classificatory System as seen in North India and South India," _The Eastern Anthropologist_, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Sept.-Nov. 1950-51, pp. 27-31), p. 30.

[11] The features of caste in India were brought out in the second chapter. They are, according to Risley, Ketkar, Dutt, Hutton and others:

The Christian Nadar group uses the caste label, and the use of the title "Nadar" is recognized by other groups to differentiate them. But, many of the individual members nowadays do not use the title after their name. The Christian Nadar has a common descent with the Hindu Nadar, and membership in both the groups is based on birth. The homogeneity of the Christian group has been already demonstrated. The "hereditary calling" (Risley) of palmyra-climbing is practised by only a small section in the rural parts.

It has been noted that caste endogamy is under pressure from external factors like social mobility, contacts with other castes in city life, higher education, and the policy of the Indian government which is to discourage caste distinctions. The thirty Nadar Christians, who completed the questionnaire form, are living in cities, big or small. Twenty-four of them have married within the caste. The other six are bachelors and spinsters. Seven of the married have said that they exercised their own choice in selecting a mate (within the caste).

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1. Caste name   2. Common descent
3. Membership based on birth   4. Homogeneity
5. Traditional occupation   6. Endogamy
7. Heirarchy   8. Commensality
9. Loss of caste through violation of caste rules
10. Impossibility of changing one's caste
11. Ceremonial purity.

Twelve of them married according to the choice of the
family, and five indicated their choice which the family
approved and then made the arrangements for marriage.
The value preference of the whole group (24 married, 6
not married) is as follows: fifteen prefer to marry a
Christian Nadar, five have no special choice, and ten
have not expressed one way or the other definitely.
This group of thirty has many persons with university
education, some holding post-graduate degrees, and most
of them belong to the middle class. A few rank even
higher. *

In the Hindu group of eighteen individuals who
responded, two have relatives who have married outside
the caste. Among the thirty Christians, half the number
have one or two relatives married into other castes.
Relatives, it must be remembered, cover both consanguin-
al and affinal relatives. It is noticeable that in prac-
tice caste endogamy has weakened in the Christian Nadar
group. This is part of the general social change that
is affecting the urban, middle and upper classes of the
various castes in the country. Samples from the rural
Christian Nadar families isolated and uneducated, are
bound to tell a different story. But the fact that
caste features are still entrenched in the society of
the highly educated Nadar Christian who lives in urban

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* See Appendix F.

areas is indicative of the persistence of caste.

The features of caste heirarchy, commensality, loss of caste through violation of its rules, and the impossibility of changing one's caste may be considered together.[12] Restrictions on eating and drinking with other castes, and taking cooked food from lower castes are losing their meaning in the reorganization of society that is going on in India today. The heirarchy of occupation, and hence of the castes, is ineffective in the general process of individuals equipping themselves with new skills which take them from from their ancestral or traditional caste occupations. With such a social revolution going on it would be extraordinary if individuals were subjected to penalties for the violation of caste rules. But the unalterable fact continues that one cannot change his caste. This applies to the Hindu Nadar and the Christian Nadar. The Christian Nadar may repudiate caste, but he cannot adopt the name of any other caste, unless he goes far away where he is not known, and call himself anything he likes. Or he may give up his caste affiliation and be absorbed into the larger group known as the

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[12] The observation of Kingsley Davis quoted in the third chapter on the present state of caste in India is relevant here. He says that the new sub-castes while trying to consolidate themselves are having a competitive fight with other castes, and that the resulting feature is the disturbance of the fixed caste heirarchy.

Indian Christian, in which he already has a place.

Although ceremonial purity is associated with some of the other points that have been dealt with, it deserves special mention. The concept of ceremonial purity is based on the assumption that certain objects and humans are ceremonially unclean at times, or all the time, and hence they are to be avoided. Illustrations of ceremonial cleansing to get rid of pollution, acquired at certain times and occasions, have been given in the chapters that described the Nadar caste. The Christian Nadar still practises ceremonial cleanliness. This is due to the long training provided by the caste.

The analysis and the discussion that followed the analysis have established the following:

1. The social matrix is similar in both the segments of the Nadar caste. Ego's position in the center of the patrilineal family is open to intimate interaction with the consanguinal and affinal kindred, and further interaction is with the rest of the caste group, within which the socio-cultural activities of the Nadar are confined.

2. Cultural modifications are seen in the Christian Nadar; but the cultural identity of the group has not been lost. The culture of the group is identical with that of the Hindu Nadar in significant aspects.

3. Against the background of caste in India the aspects of caste existing in the Christian group are significant.

4. The inference from the above conclusions is that the Christian Nadar group is a sub-caste of the Nadar caste, a dichotomy having been brought about by change of faith.

The first objective of the thesis has been realized in this part of the chapter.

The major objective of the thesis is the persistence of caste in the Christian Nadar group. The persistence is explainable in terms of the need felt by the early converts for the continuity of the familiar group-living. Secondly, the meaning that the culture of the caste still has for its members. This is seen in the explicit and implicit values of the culture. A review of the Christian Nadar with reference to the processes that led to the formation of the sub-caste will explain the need for continuity of the familiar group-living. The "social equilibrium"[13] of the Nadar caste was disturbed when some of its members adopted Christianity. The reaction of the caste group was to ostracize

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[13] Vilfredo Pareto, _The Mind and Society_, Vol. IV. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935, Chapter XII.

the converts, throw them out of the caste, and make them "casteless". The circle of the caste stayed a closed circle, so far as the non-Hindu Nadars were concerned. As for the converts themselves, they were faced with an intolerable situation. They were cut off from their kith and kin; they lost their material goods and economic resources when they lost house, lands, and occupation on these lands. They lost the social services of other castes which had been available to them in the past. The Nadar barbers would not serve them any more. In the event of a crisis like birth, marriage and death, they had only themselves, and not the whole caste group to stand behind them. They were in a state of __anomie__, they had no pattern to conform to in their "castelessness" which was a form of social disorganization.[14] What the Protestant missionary said to the converts was something like this: "Come out of your caste, it is heathen. Be baptised and renounce all associations with your old life. Go to church and follow Christian rules of which the first important rule is to feel one with the Christians from other castes, high or low. Eat what you like, marry any Christian of your church." What the same

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[14] Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," __American Sociological Review__, October 1938, pp. 672-82.

missionary did not realize was that the convert had other needs as well.

The converts to Christianity were sorely in need of belonging somewhere socially and culturally. There were not many choices before them to satisfy this need. The new faith united them on the basis of religion with two groups: the Western missionary's group with its Western European culture, and the groups of Christians whose background lay in other castes. The kind of new group that the Western missionary envisaged for the converts was unrealistic, for the converts were still thinking in terms of their old caste status. Those who had had higher social status than the Nadars would not join with them, those from a lower social status would not be socially acceptable to the Nadars. Anyway whatever attempts the missionaries made in that direction were fruitless. As for the missionaries themselves, there were too many obstacles for them to get identified with the converts. Differences in language, food, dress, social manners, occupation, recreation and many other cultural elements stood in the way of the Nadar converts being assimilated with the Western Christian missionary's group. Any grouping of the two types mentioned would have been artificial, it would not have led to the living reality of a functioning social unit, which can exist

only when integration takes place on the level of accepta-
ble social relations.

Linton observes in The Study of Man (1936) that
it is difficult to form a new society for individuals
who had been trained in an old cultural pattern from their
birth, unless the new society could offer similar pat-
terns of behavior. He says, "When the new society lacks
such patterns, each individual must stop and think each
time before he acts."[15] The easier way would be to use
the familiar patterns. Linton remarks that this tendency
to revert to the old habits is observable in the history
of religious sects. He says:

> Such sects usually have a well-defined group of
> ideas and values in common and a strong esprit de
> corps. Lacking patterns for the expression of these
> in concrete, predictable behavior they nearly always
> end by reverting to the behavior patterns of the
> society from which the bulk of the converts have
> been drawn. These patterns may be reinterpreted
> and rationalized in terms of the new beliefs, but
> the patterns themselves undergo only minor changes
> in the process.[16]

This was what happened to the converts from the Nadar
caste. They were already, a large number of them, living
with the family, the social unit of the caste structured
in the old pattern. Many had their relatives also among

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[15] Ralph Linton, The Study of Man. New York:
D. Appleton Century Company, 1936, p. 97.

[16] Ibid.

the Christians. They had the nucleus of the caste they
had come from, and they were bearers of its culture,
though religion had changed a part of it. They con-
tinued within the caste, though not in active association
with the Hindu Nadars. With increasing numbers the con-
verts sensed that the reality of the caste was restored,
and contacts with Christians from other castes were
limited only to social relations which did not contra-
dict the norms of behavior recognized within the Nadar
caste.

The Christian Nadar group has been through social
changes that involved disorganization and reorganization,
and during the last hundred years or so achieved social
equilibrium and stability. During all these processes
there were bound to be modifications in the patterns of
their culture. Religion, on the side of belief and prac-
tice, underwent a complete change, and the social change
was so violent for the converts that whatever they had
known in terms of society and culture seemed to have
been destroyed. Yet now the Christian group is seen to
have survived as a social unit with a special culture.
In spite of differences in religion, and in spite of a
new traditional religious pattern growing within the
unit, the culture of the Christian group in its totality
shows that the Christian unit stands much closer to the
Hindu unit than to any other social group. In this

context the religious sub-structure is not relevant to
the problem of caste persistence. The economic sub-
structure has been considerably modified in both seg-
ments of the Nadar caste, since occupational choices
have become very broad and wide, depending on the indi-
vidual's capacity and skills, and also mobility has
opened up new avenues to wealth.

"The hard core of the system, caste endogamy in
marriage, is remarkably resistant to change."[17] In the
Christian Nadar group caste endogamy is the last citadel
of caste persistence, though the values of caste customs
and practices are still there contributing to the per-
sistence of caste. The residue of caste left within the
Christian Nadar group is linked with the core of the
Nadar culture whose roots were pre-Vedic and precaste,
as is seen in the kinship pattern. The later develop-
ment, part of which survives in the Christian Nadar,
like the crisis ceremonies which have strengthened the
bonds of kinship, belong to areas over which the Code of
Manu had no sanctions to offer. What is suggested here
is that when the caste system developed over the centuries,
Hinduism did not completely dominate the inner life of
the caste. Here culture was free to develop quantita-
tively and qualitatively.

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[17] See Footnote No. 37, Chapter II.

When the social groups were compartmentalized in-
to castes between which there could be no social inter-
course the process of elaboration through intense inter-
action inside the group led to cultural accumulations as
the genius of each caste gave directions. These factors
have helped in the persistence of caste in general. The
passage of time and increasing mobility have led to the
secularization of caste in India so much so that the
power basis of caste with supernatural sanctions is now
becoming an anachronism. The observations made so far
emphasize that certain aspects of caste are present in
the Christian Nadar, and they are significant to him.
This is seen in the continuity of the familiar group-
living of the caste, and its culture.

The meaning that the culture of his caste has for
the Christian Nadar lies in the values that he finds in
it. Kluckhohn defines value thus: "A value is a con-
ception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an indi-
vidual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable
which influences the selection from available modes,
means, and ends of action."[18] Caste as a socio-cultural

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[18] Clyde Kluckhohn, Values and Value-Orientations,
Toward a General Theory of Action, edited by Talcott
Parsons and Edward A. Shils. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard
University Press, 1951, p. 395.

system is heavily laden with values both group and in-dividual. Kluckhohn elaborates, "The. spread of a value may range from a single individual to the whole of human-ity. An _idiosyncratic_ value is held by only one person in the group under consideration . . . . A _personal_ value is the private form of a group value or a univer-sal value."[19] Values bind the members of the caste group together, and the most important factor in the perpetua-tion of group values[20] is the meaning they have to the individual, who lives within the caste group. He inter-nalizes the values of his group, makes them his own, and they influence his choice of behavior or action from available modes, means and ends.[21]

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[19] _Ibid._, p. 417.

[20] _Ibid._; Kluckhohn defines group value as being "distinctive of some plurality of individuals, whether this be a family, clique, association, tribe, nation, or civilization. Group values consist in socially sanc-tioned ends and socially approved modes and means."

[21] Some relevant statements regarding values:
a) Raymond Firth, _Elements of Social Organi-zation_. London: Watts & Co., 1951, p. 42. "Every value has an emotional charge as well as an ideational compon-ent. But values do not serve only to express feelings; they stimulate and guide conduct. Moreover they are not in entire independence of one another. They are in an inter-connected system, albeit of varying integration for individuals and social groups. Classification of values is difficult. But for our purposes here it is convenient to consider these social standards of prefer-ence as applied in regard to six major types of quality: technological; economic; moral; ritual; aesthetic; as-sociational." p. 43.
b) F. S. C. Northrop, _Cultural Values in_

Some of the group values may now be taken up for consideration. The exclusive caste name and title have the value of belonging to a particular social group which has its characteristic unity and solidarity, and holds for each member security, fellowship, and a cultural wealth that is unique, and which he is privileged to share with his fellow members. This self-identification with the social group, besides evoking pleasurable emotions of pride, satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment of his duties to society, bring home to Ego the value of

Anthropology Today, 1952, pp. 668-681, pp. 678-9: "It appears . . . that the values of a culture are the fruits of living according to the basic philosophical assumptions used by a people in conceptualizing the raw data of the experience.

In short, the inner order of a given society is put upon an objectively determinable basis only when anthropological and sociological scientists not merely observe in the field as many facts as possible but also discover the philosophy used by the people in the culture in question to conceptualize those facts. If, moreover, at bottom, as in the Hindu and Moslem communities in a village of India, two different philosophies are used, then to that extent one is confronted with two cultures rather than one."

c) David Bidney, "The Concept of Value in Modern Anthropology," in _Anthropology Today_, 1952, pp. 682-699. On page 691 he says: "All so-called 'absolute' values are really 'relative absolutes', whose validity is recognized only within the context of a given culture."

d) Krober in his paper, "History of Anthropological Thought," which appears in _Current Anthropology_, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, after defending the position of anthropologists as "cultural relativists" (Bidney), gives a section to _Values_ which is very instructive and enlightening. He traces the interest of both sociologists and anthropologists in the subject and concept of value, and summarizes the findings of Kluckhohn.

the esprit de corps of his own group.[22]

The value of the group to the individual is enhanced and his goal set towards the well-being of the group, his behavior becomes value-oriented in all matters of social interaction. This is the general pattern that the value system assumes, but individuals differ in their responses to the compulsives of their culture, and in the values they internalize to guide them in defining situations and taking decisions for action. Hence while norms, standards, and ideals are uniform for the group, values are different for the individual members. An individual's greatest measure of values may lie in some

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[22] Autobiography No. 5. "Both my grandfathers were converts who became preachers and were catechists in S.P.G. and C.M.S. in Tinnevelly District. They had house and lands and paternal grandfather was a popular native doctor. But all my father's brothers and sisters, including himself, settled in and around Madras. I had all my education in Madras. We have been a very united family and all cousins meet together at weddings and other family functions. On the whole, younger people seek the advice of the older members of the family and all marriages both for men and women have been arranged by the family. We make friends readily with members of our own community, as there is a kinship and we have many things in common.

"I myself have had the privilege of travelling widely both at home and abroad and feel at home in any country and with any group. My close and long connection with the Girl Guide Movement has given me contacts with varied and many groups in India and outside India. There is a sense of security and solidarity in belonging to a definite caste which gives self-confidence in bringing out the best in a person. This caste (meaning the Nadar caste) is noted for its hard work, reliability, initiative and a deep sense of responsibility."

special area like technology, or kinship or in domestic rituals, or in his religious beliefs. Interpreting Durkheim's ideas contained in his _Collective and Individual Representations_ (1899), and in _Judgments of Value_ (1911), Timasheff sums them up as follows:

> Religion, law, morals, and economics ᵣ considered by Durkheim as the major social systems - are at once systems of values and of ideals. Social ideals constitute the collective conscience as it exists independently of individual conceptions, while values are manifestations of the common conscience in individuals themselves.[23]

Technology, or material culture, is an area where modifications and changes due to external pressures and cultural contacts, take place and are more readily discernible. Unless of course sentimental or ritual association protects some object, as is seen in the case of the marriage badge or _thali_, common to the Tamil caste groups of South India. In such an instance the value remains constant to the group since the _thali_ stands for a social norm. To individual members its value may be even as high as that of an ideal form of group identification, or the level of the value may be lower, but that it has value is shown in actual use of this traditional type of marriage badge. The Hindu Nadar uses it, and

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[23] Nicholas S. Timasheff, _Sociological Theory._ Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1955, p. 112.

the Christian Nadar uses it with certain modifications,
but it remains a symbol of value.

Among Indians in general there are a number of
articles which used at rituals or at social gatherings,
have social values: flowers; coconuts; betel leaves and
areca nuts; fruits, particularly bananas; sandalwood
paste; rosewater; incense and incense sticks; turmeric
roots. All caste groups use these objects, and some of
them may be given prominence in certain circumstances
according to the custom of the caste group. There may
be differences, for instance, in the number of coconuts
that should accompany a gift to a guest, or to a bride,
or to the bridegroom's party, and so on. Same with the
number of fruits or turmeric roots, the number usually
preferred being an odd one, - five, or seven, or nine.
During the crisis ceremonies various other articles also
are used, like the oil lamp, with wicks specially twisted
for the occasion; earthen or metal vessels or special
size and shape; marriage baskets (among the Nadars, made
of palmyra fiber); and household articles that the bride
takes from her father's home. The group of household
articles again is characteristic by differences observed
by different caste groups, and the differences are empha-
sized as symbols of values that each group uses as part
of its total cultural identity, and differentiation from

other groups.

Language is an interesting area to look for group values. Though several castes may be using the same language, like Tamil for instance, in South India, each caste group develops special idioms and expressions, proverbs, songs, jokes and stories which would have value only within the particular caste group. These are heard in the home by the growing child, and are used when members of the family or kindred meet. Jokes, some of them sung, are used between cross-cousins, or about them, with the use of kinship terms, such as machan (male cross-cousin), machanachee (female cross-cousin), mama or manan (maternal uncle), pethee (female grand child), pootee (great grand parent and also great grand child). Some of the expressions, so familiar within the caste group, would be difficult to translate into a foreign language without their losing their real sense or point. To those who are familiar these expressions have enormous associational value, calling up the imagery of childhood and youth, and they produce a nostalgia in those persons who have been cut off from contact with their kindred for a long time. Thus a common language, with an inner magic circle to which only the fellow caste members have access, serves as a frame of reference to a shared value system. Interaction is made very easy where minds

communicate through a special verbal expression, and as Josephine Klein comments, there is "a kind of reward in the very fact of using a common language."[24] This common language within the caste group is the verbal and outward symbol of one of the many bonds that unite the members of the group.

Dress and ornament that used to be the marks of identification for caste groups in the past, are gradually losing their differences in the slow but gradually increasing process of uniformity typical in India today. In the South the differences are noticeable these days more between the classes (based on wealth) and between city-dwellers and villagers, than between caste groups themselves. Even in the villages the artisans, metal workers, weavers and others, or those who sell imported goods cater to all the various caste groups, who may show special preferences for certain types. The Nadar women used to wear typical jewelry, heavy ear ornaments for distended ear lobes, gold beads for the neck, hair ornaments, bracelets and anklets. Some of these, which have been preserved as heirlooms in families in the Hindu segment, are brought out on special occasions like weddings. The early Christian converts from the caste

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[24] Josephine Klein, The Study of Groups. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1956, p. 115.

must have used similar ornaments, according to their status; and even the second generation Christians are seen to be wearing the typical Nadar jewelry in old photographs of bridal groups and in family photos. Such jewelry had a social value for the Nadar caste, and it was again another symbol of group identity and group uniformity which engendered further values in guiding members to work for social solidarity.

Reference has been made to the restrictions on certain items of food among the Nadars: beef, pork and the flesh of dead animals. Not to eat them was considered to be clean and superior; and the Nadar Christians never changed their food habits after conversion. With them now the sentiment is still against eating the forbidden items, and even those persons from the group who have eaten beef and pork abroad, give up the practice once they get back to the family circle. The value behind the sentiment is partly related to the social prestige of the group.

The Nadar kinship system is typical in its complexity, and the structural principles are so clearly defined that the orderliness of the whole pattern can be surveyed without confusion. What Fred Eggan states with regard to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Kinship System is applicable to the Nadar kinship system:

The kinship system classifies relatives into socially recognized groups, on the one hand, and regulates their social behavior on the other; toward each class of kindred there is a fairly definite relationship, expressed in terms of duties, obligations, and attitudes, which serves to order social life with a minimum of conflict. Within each class of kindred the intensity varies with the "social closeness" of the relative.25

The values arising from the practice of kinship, of the type described, refer to the emotional and ideational requirements of an individual living in caste society.

Values arising from the kinship pattern of the Nadar caste begin to express themselves first in the area of the immediate family which introduces the individual to the close kindred group, and then to the larger kindred circle extending almost to the entire caste group. The training in infancy begins with the parents and siblings. There is a Tamil proverb which says that the mother and the father are the first gods one knows. The relationship between the siblings is a close and special one, and in the growing years they learn that in the future there may be marriage ties between their children. The values that are derived from these relationships are echoed in the relationship pattern modelled on the parent-child and brother-sister relationships to

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25 Fred Eggan, "Cheyenne and Arapaho Kinship System," in Social Anthropology of North American Indians Tribes, edited by Fred Eggan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, 2nd edition, pp. 66-67.

father's brothers, mother's sisters (and their mates),
parallel cousins and their mates. Further, all these re-
lationships foreshadow to the child its own future as an
adult in the kinship pattern which has its ramifications
into the past as well as the future generations.

The moral principles that guide the behavior of
the various categories of relatives, based on age, sex,
generation and so on, have their origin in the home; and
the family, which in the caste group is the repository
of culture, familiarizes to the developing child the
socially approved pattern of behavior. The sense of be-
longing to the caste is engendered within the family
circle where the individual gets "his earliest and com-
pletest experience of social unity." Guidance and dis-
cipline within this primary group train the child to
make its values with reference to the social environment
to which it is exposed through all the growing years.
The value of conforming to the norms of the caste group
is brought home by the example and precepts of the family,
and gradually social facts are made meaningful and sig-
nificant. This adds to the zest of social living, in-
creasing and strengthening interaction inside the caste.
The values that the individual finds in society through
the training in the family and home-life become the
guiding principles for behavior unless an individual

becomes a sceptic, and conforms outwardly with no sense
of value in his own action, or repudiates caste alto-
gether.

The unique features of each caste are the signi-
ficant part, that is significant to the individual with-
in that group. The differences themselves in symbols
of caste for identification constitute an important part
of the individual's value system, for the genius, or
ethos, of the group demands the separate unique identity.
The distinctness of caste grouping and the distinctness
of culture are seen in the two segments of the Nadar
caste. In the chapters that described the ways of life
of the Nadars, an "outside view" was obtained by the ob-
server. In looking for values the investigator has to
pierce through the outer layers of the culture. Robert
Redfield observes, "Ethos is a precommitment by the out-
side investigator to look at values as the leading mode
of the personal and social life. Ethos is a conception
in which the normative aspect of human experience is in
advance given priority, allowed at the outsider's decree
to give order to the whole."[26]

The writer is aware of the plight of a Nadar
Christian girl who repented for marrying out of caste

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[26] Robert Redfield, The Little Community. Chicago:
The University of Chicago Press, 1955, p. 86.

when the man's fancies changed, and she bitterly ex-
pressed, "If only I had married within the caste, and my
husband was disloyal to me, I could have got the elders
of my community to put pressure on him." Many problems
relating to marriage, family and property, are not taken
to the law courts, but often settled by the elders among
Hindu and Christian Nadars. Strains in the individual's
life are eased, and his burdens are lessened when he
lives in caste society. Social discipline and regimenta-
tion may not be to his liking, but he finds many compen-
sations which are of value to him. As Meyer Fortes ob-
serves, "the values of the individual are those of the
whole community."[27] The study of these values gives
reality to the structural concepts of caste. Value, ac-
cording to Firth, "suggests persistence of a common ele-
ment over time."[28]

An attempt has been made to get an inside view of
the two segments of the Nadar caste, to get an outlook
on life from the inside of the caste group. The values
relating to the Nadar caste have been brought out by the

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[27] Meyer Fortes, Chapter VII, "Mind" (pp. 81-94),
The Institutions of Primitive Society. Basil Blackwell,
Oxford, 1954, p. 94.

[28] Raymond Firth, The Study of Values by Social
Anthropologists. The Marett Lecture, 1953. Man, Vol.
43, October 1953, p. 231. London: Royal Anthropological
Institute.

writer as a participant observer. It is time to turn to
the values of the individual who lives inside his caste,
as expressed by him. The responses in the questionnaire
form have made it possible for the investigator to stay
with the states of minds as they range over experiences
that have value for the individual.[29]

The Christian Nadars were asked to express their
values with reference to crisis ceremonies, duties to
relatives and the caste group, and caste associations.
The values of the crisis ceremonies as a means of strength-
ening the bonds of kinship and social ties in general
are mentioned, and also the values of observing customs
based on tradition. Mutual affection and help, security,
and the sense of belonging to a group are emphasized as
objects of value. That is why it is important to per-
form one's duties towards relatives and the caste group.
Regarding the value of supporting caste associations,
the emphasis is on the financial aid that the Nadar
Mahajana Sangam gives for the education of deserving

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[29] Redfield, op. cit., p. 84. Redfield observes,
"The scaffolding of ideas that guides the investigator
is composed of relationships, groups, institutions, As
we move to human career, group personality, and system
of values or ethos, we move to conceptions in which the
self is the axis. Now the investigator must stay with
the states of mind of somebody in the community as these
states of mind range over many experiences and many
phases of a single human life."

boys and girls of the Nadar caste, the aid being given irrespective of religious differences.

Those who have been used to living within the security of group-life know its values. While social relations weave a close pattern of duties and rights relating to the in-group, and limit interaction with out-groups, culture accumulates and holds the individuals together by all kinds of sentiments and values. For the individual who lives within a caste group his values would be a major determinant of his behavior.

The subject matter of this thesis has been limited and the focus has been on selected experiences and phases of the group and the individual within the caste framework. A comprehensive survey has not been attempted as will be inferred from the omission of several cultural aspects of the Nadar caste. For instance religion and tradition per se have not been analyzed for values, nor the whole range of the Nadar's life examined within the context of the caste group-life. A detailed study that presents "an inside view that is very deep and very broad"[30] would be suitable to a monograph on the caste. Kinship was specially selected as a significant area of social interaction and found to be value-laden from the

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[30] _Ibid._, p. 85.

point of view of the individual who lives, moves and has
his being within the caste, like the Hindu Nadar. The
Christian Nadar also finds similar values, while feeling
at the same time the pressure that the external world of
a changing society is slowly affecting him in his atti-
tude to social goals. The closed circle of the caste
group is expanding in the process of adjusting to the
inroads of the new values that the individual finds in
the external world, and the values associated with kin-
ship and endogamy are slowly being undermined.

The group of the Christian Nadar in the form of a
separate, distinct sub-caste, continues to preserve its
identity through a unique culture that is implicit and
explicit. Continuity in group-life is maintained through
continuity in culture; and cultural continuity, sustained
by the values it continues to have for the individual,
is the cause for the persistence of caste in the Christian
Nadars who are a sub-caste of the Nadar caste of South
India.

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APPENDIX

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MAP OF SOUTH INDIA
AFTER
REORGANIZATION OF STATES

ANDHRA

MYSORE

BANGALORE

MADRAS

COORG

PONDICHERRY

KERALA

TANJORE DISTRICT

POINT CALIMERE

MADURA DISTRICT

RAMNAD DISTRICT

TINNEVELLY DISTRICT

GULF OF MANAAR

CEYLON

TRIVANDRUM

PALAMCOTTAH

TUTICORIN

CAPE KANYAKUMARI

251

MAP
of the
TINNEVELLY DISTRICT

Scale of Miles

0   5   10   15   20 Miles

Reference to numbers

Sankaranayinarkoil Taluk
1. Moniyachi Zamindari
2. Seivalpatti   do.
3. Alagapuri   do.
   Koilpatti Taluk
1. Nagalapuram Zamindari
2. Kulattur   do.
3. Kadalladi   do.
4. Ettiapuram   do.
   Ambasamudram Taluk
1. Aariar Forest Bungalow
2. Keenakoil   do.
3. Ullar   do.
   Nanguneri Taluk
1. Nadugani Forest Bungalow

REFERENCE

PALAMCOTTAH	District head quarters
TUTICORIN	Division do.
NANGUNERI	Taluk do.
RADHAPURAM	Deputy Tahsildar's station
Vijayapati	Village above 5000 inhabitants
Panailvai	Other important villages
	District boundary
	Taluk & Zamindari boundaries
	Railway

Note.—Railway line from Tinnevelly to Tiruchendur
is under construction.

REFERENCE

	Metalled road
	Earthen road
	River, channel & anicut
	Tank
	Hill
	Sand hill
5377	O. T. S. and height in feet above sea level
★	Light house
Zam	Zamindari

Chetty
10

Kudumban
100

Nadar 50

Adi - Dravida
20

Cattle Pound

Chakkili
15

Nadar 50

Nadar 50

Nadar 75

Mudali 20

Mudali 20

Mudali 50

Mudali 100

Nadar 200

Nadar 50

Nadar 100

Pillai 20

Adi · Dravida

Christian School

Protestant
Church

Fair

Thevar
Konar
50

Asari
50

Pillai
20

Hindu
Temple

Adi - Dravida
70

VILLAGE OF PUTHIAMPUTHUR
Number refers to houses

N
E
S
W

Chakkili
10

Main Street

Roman Catholic
Nadars
300

↓ Main Street ↓

Main Street

Muslims 60

Weavers 30

Main Street

Main Street

Hindu Nadars 150

Main Street

Maravas
75

Main Street

Main Street

Pallas
25

VILLAGE OF KARUVAKKULAM
Number refers to houses

N
E
S
W

KINSHIP SYSTEM
OF
THE NADARS

GGf △ = O GGm POOTTAN | POOTTEE

△ = O GGf | GGm

△ = O GGf POOTTAN | GGm POOTTEE

△ = O GGf POOTTAN | GGm POOTTEE

GmO PATTIAMMĀ Gf △ THĀTHĀ = O Gm PATTIAMMĀ Gf △ THĀTHĀ

O Gm PATTIAMMĀ Gf △ THĀTHĀ = O Gm PATTIAMMĀ Gf △ THĀTHĀ

FaOlBr △ PERIAPPĀ FaYoBr △ CHINNAPPĀ FaSi O ATHĀI = △ MĀMĀ Fa △ APPĀ = O Mo AMMĀ MoBr △ MĀMĀ = O ATHĀI MoOlSi O PERIAMMĀ MoYoSi O CHINNAMMĀ

△ ANNAN THAMBI O AKKĀ THANGACHEE = △ ATHĀN KOLUNDHAN O ANNEE KOLUNDHEE = △ ANNAN OlBr △ THAMBI YoBr △ EGO △ OlSi O AKKĀ YoSi O THANGACHEE = △ ATHĀN KOLUNDHAN O ANNEE KOLUNDHEE = △ ANNAN THAMBI O AKKĀ THANGACHEE
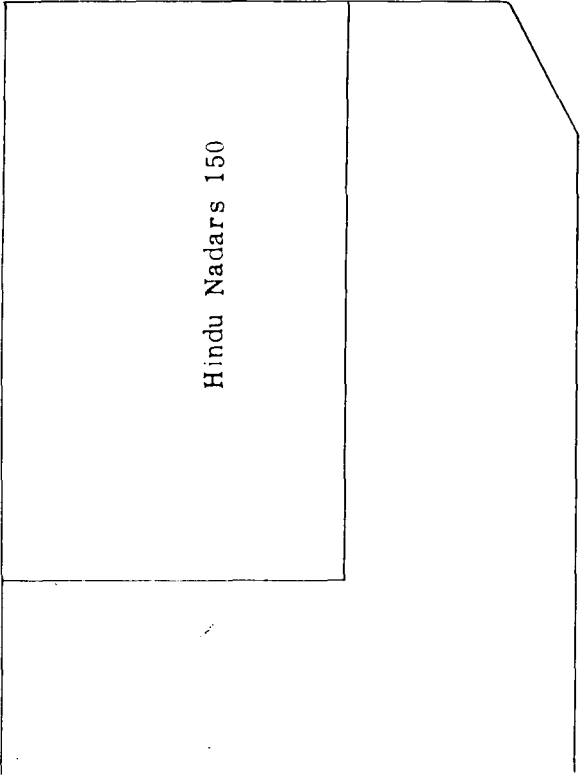
△ MARUmahan O = △ Marumahal Mahan O △ Mahal Mahan O Mahal So △ Mahan Da O Mahal △ O MARUmahan O Marumahal △ Marumahan O = △ Mavamahal Mahan O Mahal

Ge Péthee O = △ Péran Ge Péthee O = △ Péran

GGe Poottee O = △ Poottan GGe O = △ Poottan Poottee

KINSHIP TERMS AND TERMS OF ADDRESS

AMONG THE CHRISTIAN AND HINDU NADARS

Relationship to Ego	Kinship term	Term of Address
Great grand parents-GGp		
Their siblings and mates		
Male	Poottan,Poottaiyā.	Poottaiyā, Poottee.
Female	Poottiamma,Poottee.	Poottiamma,Poottee.
Grand parents-Gp		
Their siblings and mates		
Male	Thathā,Pattan.	Thathā,Pattaiyā.
Female	Pattiamma,Pattee.	Pattiamma,Pattee.
Parents		
Father-Fa	Thahappan,Appan. Appā,Aiyā.	Appā,Aiyā.
FaOlBr=MoOlSiHu	Peri-appan,Peri-appā, Peri-aiyā.	Peri-appā,(Peri-big) Peri-aiyā
FaYoBr=MoYoSiHu	Chinnappan,Chithappan, Chinnaiyā.	Chinnappā,(Chinna-Chithappā, small) Chinnaiyā.
FaSi=MoBrWi	Athai,Mamiyār.	Athai.
Mother-Mo	Thai,Ammā.	Ammā.
MoOlSi=FaOlBrWi	Periammā.	Periammā. (Peri-big)
MoYoSi=FaYoBrWi	Chinnammā,Chithee.	Chinnammā,(Chinna-Chithee. Chith-small.)
MoBr=FaSiHu	Māman,Māmā,Māmanār.	Māmā
Siblings		
Brother-Br=FaBrSo and		
MoSiSo		
OlBr	Thamayan,Annan.	Annan.
YoBr	Thambi.	Thambi,or name used.
Sister-Si=FaBrDa,		
MoSiDa		
OlSi	Thamakkai,Akkā.	Akkā.
YoSi	Thangachee.	Thangachee. Use of name common.
Cross-cousins-Cc	Machinan(male);Machinee(female).	
OlCc,Male=OlSiHu	Athan.	Athan.
YoCc,Male=YoSiHu	Kolundhan.	Machan.
OlCc,Female=OlBrWi	Annee,Madhanee.	Annee, Madhanee.
YoCc,Female=YoBrWi	Kolundhee,Kolundhial.	Kolundhee (name used) (Same for wife of YoBr.)
YoCc,Female(Female speaking)	Nathini,Nathinar.	Name used

Children
Son-So.................Mahan   Mahané (name used)
Son's wife-SoWi........Maru-Mahal   (name used)
Daughter-Da............Mahal   Mahalé (name used)
Daughter's husband-
  DaHu.................Marumahan   Mappillai (Bridegroom)

Grandchildren-Gc
Male...................Péran   Péran-(name used)
Female.................Pethee   Pethee (name used)

Great-Grandchildren-GGc
Male...................Poottan   Pootta (name used)
Female.................Poottee   Poottee (name used)

REPORT ON LIFE-HISTORY MATERIAL

I

On the basis of an outline supplied for the pur-
pose eight Christian Nadars (five men and three women)
and two Hindu Nadars (men) wrote out an autobiographical
sketch. One, a Christian Nadar (XL) combined in one ac-
count his autobiography and answers to some of the ques-
tions given in the questionnaire form (See H in the Appen-
dix). Another (BC) affixed to the form that he completed
an elaborate account of crisis ceremonies as supplied to
him by "elderly relatives". A young mother (Christian
Nadar, Y), now on a visit to this country, has given a
short account of birth, puberty, betrothal and marriage
ceremonies as observed by Christian Nadars. From the
above documents extracts have been put together (See F)
under the following topics:

1. Nadar caste considered narrow, but united.

2. Ancestry and special qualities of the Nadars.

3. Family and Kindred, and duties.

4. Social control.

5. Marriage and other social events.

Several relevant passages from XL have been reproduced as
a separate note.

(The ten autobiographies have been marked with Arabic
numerals.)

II

It has been mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis that thirty self-administering questionnaire forms were completed by Christian Nadars and eighteen by Hindu Nadars. The former group has been marked for reference A-Z, AB, BC, CD and DE and the latter has been numbered with Roman numerals I to XVIII. The questionnaire form for the Christian Nadar has twenty-four items with sub-divisions under 2, 11, 12, 13, 17, 19 and 24. The same form, with the deletion of item 5 (Are you Christian by birth or choice?) was given to the Hindu Nadar. Much of the information given by the respondents has been incorporated in the text of the thesis.

The samples, thirty for the Christians and eighteen for the Hindus, are not sufficiently informative or completely representative of the two groups, the population of each numbering many thousands, distributed in numerous villages and cities, pursuing a variety of occupations, and found at different economic levels. The forty-eight Nadars, (thirty-five men, twelve women and one sex unknown, since name is not given), are living in cities, big or small; belong to the middle class with a few above middle class; several are university-educated and some follow the learned professions. The two groups are analyzed below in Tables A and B under age distribution

and educational level and with reference to caste endo-gamy in Tables C and D.

TABLE A

CHRISTIAN NADARS: AGE DISTRIBUTION AND EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

	20-40	41-55	56 & above	
Males				
High School educated	4	3	-	
University graduates	6	6	2	
Total	10	9	2	Total 21
Female				
High School educated	1	1	-	
University graduates	3	1	2	
Total	4	2	2	Total 8

Of the thirty, twenty-four are married and within the Total 2

caste.(Sex of one not known.)

TABLE B

HINDU NADARS: AGE DISTRIBUTION AND EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

	20-40	41-55	56 & above	
Males				
High School educated	1	2	1	
University Graduates	8	2	-	
Total	9	4	1	Total 14
Female				
High School educated	2	-	-	
University Graduates	2	-	-	
Total	4	-	-	Total 4

Total 18

TABLE C

CHRISTIAN NADARS: CASTE ENDOGAMY AND EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

	By Personal Choice (P.C.)	By Family Arrangement (F.A.)	By Choice and F.A.	
Males				
High School educated	-	3	5	
University Graduates	5	6	-	
Total	5	9	5	Total 19

Females
  High School Educated   -   2   -
  University Graduates   2   1   -
  Total   2   3   -   Total 5

TABLE D

HINDU NADARS: CASTE ENDOGAMY AND EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

	P.C.	F.A.	P.C. & F.A.
Males			
High School educated	1	3	-
University Graduates	-	1	2
Total	1	4	2	Total 7
Females			
High School educated	-	2	-
University Graduates	-	2	-
Total	-	4	-	Total 4

NOTE: Of the thirty Christian Nadars, twenty-four are
married within the caste and six are not married.
Out of eighteen Hindu Nadars, 11 married within
caste and seven are not married.

APPENDIX G

EXTRACTS FROM PERSONAL DOCUMENTS OF CHRISTIAN NADARS

I. <u>Nadar caste considered narrow, but united.</u>

<u>Autobiography No. 3</u>: "I think that the members of my caste or (are) rather narrow-minded in that (1) they do not like to marry outside the caste, (2) they do not like very much to have social contacts with people of other castes, (3) they (are) fond of giving their caste names to institutions founded by them. But in the name of caste they stand somewhat united and sometimes organize some sort of help to the needy members of the caste. If they stand united for good purposes without hatred towards people of other castes, I think it will be for the better."

<u>Autobiography No. 4</u>: "I am aware of the fact that my caste people are well-knit as a body in the villages of Tinnevelly and Madura Districts. Such communal organisations may have their advantages both social and economic for the individuals who compose them. But I strongly feel that only people with tribal ideas will agree to organise their social and cultural life on caste lines."

<u>Autobiography No. 6</u>: "Our community people have the advantage of a great measure of tenacity and perseverance. But they are very narrow minded. A very few people are enlightened. Even Christianity has not made any deep influence. It is like change in an idol for Cross without change in spiritual outlook.

II. <u>Ancestry and Special Qualities of the Nadars</u>

<u>Autobiography No. 7</u>: "Mother --, daughter of a merchant in Sivakasi, an ardent Saivite Hindu who became a Christian after studying the gospel of S.Luke distributed at a festival in Madurai. He built a church on his own land and engaged an evangelist to preach the gospel in Sivakasi. His brothers <u>drove him out</u> and he lost all his money . . . . Her (mother's) cousins who have remained Hindus are more than willing now to come and claim relationship with us.

. . . .
"In Sivakasi there has been much persecution of Christians through social ostracism from time to time, but the tendency now is for Hindu Nadars to seek the company and friendship of their Christian cousins and friends. Inter-marriage is not uncommon. . . . .
"Habits of thrift, industry and discipline belong to <u>my</u> <u>caste</u>. Nadars are very careful with money because they

have to give dowries to their daughters. They do not
waste too much money on fineries and fancy articles.
Things of solid worth like education, durable clothes,
real jewelry, musical training - these are the things
on which I spend my money . . . ."
"Nadar exclusiveness has come in for much condemnation
& criticism by the Church. Arrangements of marriage by
parents to some one within the caste has its good effects.
Young people, particularly girls, have a sense of security
knowing that their parents will arrange a suitable mar-
riage. They are therefore steady and concentrate on their
whether as students or as professional women.

Autobiography No. 10: "I feel proud about the fact that
the Nadars have advanced much intellectually, socially
and morally compared to other castes. I feel proud about
the fact that the Nadar women too are well educated and
music minded. Also I feel proud of the fact that there
are many Nadars who strictly adhere to the Christian
principles.
    "The Nadar community has shown an example to others
in matters of religion and education. They are admired
by other caste members. It is hoped that in course of
time people will forget the caste differences and that
there is only one universal caste namely the humanity, as
a whole."

III. Family and Kindred, and duties

Autobiography No. 10: "As it is well known, it is only
the Patriarchal system that prevails among the Christian
Nadars. N.B. Hereafter the word 'Nadar' may please be
taken to refer only to 'Christian Nadars'.
    "The Nadar community has borrowed many of its tra-
ditions from local Hindus, the reason being all the Nadars
at the time of their ancestors were converted from Hinduism. .
    "A Nadar family consists of father, mother, sons
both married and unmarried, and unmarried daughters
(married daughters are excluded). Father is the head of
the family. Family unity is maintained by the head of
the family, namely father. In a Nadar family a father
holds an important position and has great powers over
the other members of the family. The right of choosing
a particular line of education for his children, the right
of choosing partners in life are all his. Relatives are
important in as much as they are consulted by the father
and mother on all important occasions in the family. No
celebration is left without the relatives being invited
for the same. Among Nadars in Tirunelveli, the relatives
have a great voice particularly in matters connecting
marriage. When a choice of a mate for a boy or girl is

made by his parents, it also requires an approval (though it is formal in some cases) by the elders in the family. On occasions of joy or sorrow, all the relatives meet together. Relationships with members of the same caste is maintained, by inviting them to family functions. Nowadays the Nadars have a broader outlook and so the ties binding them with members of the same caste are not many."

"Members of the family have got responsibility in maintaining family unity. Sons have a responsibility to support their parents in their retired life. If father of a family passes away, the eldest son of the family is clothed with several responsibilities. It is his duty to educate his junior brothers or to make them earning and useful members of the family. It is also his duty to get married his unmarried sisters. Relatives also have duties towards each other, A rich brother has to support his deceased brother's poor family, if the latter particularly contains only minor members and the widow. In these enlightened days, no duties are cast towards fellow caste members."

IV. Social Control

Autobiography No. 10: "A good amount of social control has been exercised by members of the family, relatives and by the whole caste. Social control is great particularly in regard to marriage. Intercaste marriage is still not a welcome thing among Nadars, though the modern youth has advanced views in this respect. In villages in Tirunelveli District, there will be almost social ostracism if a Nadar marries a non-Nadar. Similarly if a person goes against the wishes of his parents and marries a girl, even though the girl be of the same caste, this too is not welcome among the social circles. Open religious church marriage is preferred to register-marriages. Any thing done against the family customs, is not liked by the members of the family. Misbehavior will result in enmity with fellow caste members."

Autobiography No. 8: "A line may enlighten you if I say, the old system of group gathering to settle and to punish them (those who do wrong things within the family) on bad matters will improve moral standard of the Nadar caste both Christian and Hindu."

V. Marriage and other social events

Autobiography No. 7: "All relatives, close or distant, expect to be united at the time of a marriage in the

family, and informed when death occurs. In arranging a
marriage suitable cousins usually have priority. Chris-
tening, puberty and marriage are celebrated with feasts
and giving of gifts by family members."

"For those who live in a city like Madras social
control by one's relatives and caste is not very strong.
But to marry outside caste would offen my relatives.
Members of my caste would look upon my family as having
put ourselves outside the fold of our caste. Henceforth
members of my family may not marry 'pure Nadars'. There
is a loss of a sense of security."

Autobiography No. 3: "Relatives come together during
times of betrothal, marriages, births and deaths. Apart
from this there are occasional visits by relatives for
exchanging some presents of agricultural products (Author's
grandfather and father agriculturists in a village. Author
is lecturer in a college and lives in a city), or to
narrate and get advice about certain difficult problems.

"Betrothals and marriages are the important cere-
monies performed in the family.

"Sometimes members of family give presents and they
also help one another financially in times of need some-
what. Fellow caste members are invited to attend cere-
monies.

"The members of the family, relatives and the
whole caste want a member to marry only a member of the
caste. Usually the parents want their children to marry
persons chosen by them. The system seems to disappear
slowly."

Autobiography No. 10: "The important family ceremony is
marriage of a member of the family. All the relatives
gather together, even though they live or are employed
at far off places. Marriage ceremony is preceded by
engagement ceremony when the bride gets a saree from the
bridegroom's party and the bridegroom is given a ring
from the other side. The priest will be there to bless
the occasion. Sometimes garlands are exchanged between
the couple. Then the marriage takes place in all grandeur
at the church, followed by a reception and a good feast
accompanied by band or orchestral music. These features
of marriage, of course, are commonly known to everyone.

"Then a death in the family also invited the at-
tention of the relatives. They meet together and offer
their condolences. The funeral is attended by all the
relatives. When an important member who was the bread
winner for the family passes away, the other relatives
meet and arrive at solutions solving the various problems
in the family of the deceased. Thus mutual help and as-
sistance are maintained.

"A new addition to the family is also another occasion, presents are given to the new born baby by the relatives . . . . The birth of the child is followed after sometime by Baptism ceremony for which also the relatives are invited. Of course it is done on a smaller scale compared to the other occasions."

"Some of the other smaller ceremonies are: Most people celebrate their birth anniversaries and wedding anniversaries. Some celebrate 'Shastiaba Poorthi' i.e. the completion of 60th year. During this celebration best wishes are conveyed to the person and he will be the recipient of gifts from relatives and friends. This is purely borrowed from Hindu neighbours. Some celebrate their wedding silver jubilees and some even their golden jubilees! A girl coming to age is also regarded as an important occasion and the girl will be usually lucky enough to get gifts from her relatives."

"A death in a family is followed by a ceremony called 'Sixteenth ceremony'. After this ceremony the bereaved members of the family are supposed to shake off themselves from their sorrow and lead a normal life. Though the purpose of this ceremony is good, in practical life it does not produce the desired effect."

Extracts from XL (in which autobiographical material is combined with answers to some of the items in the questionnaire form):

"My father belonged to a very poor Hindu family of . . . village near Srivaikuntam on the banks of the Tambraparni River in Tinnevelly Dt. His father died in his infancy and his mother became a Christian with her family of two girls and my father, her other son not having joined her in the change of religion till some years later. The family was knit together by strong ties of deep love and affection til they dropped out one by one.

"My mother belonged to a peasant family and was brought up in the house of her mother's sister's husband, . . . and her education and training at Mengnanapuram was of the best kind available nearly a century ago. My mother had only two sisters one of whom was brought up in my mother's house from her childhood till her marriage. I have pleasant recollections of my boyhood days with relatives on my father's side than my mother's. All that I am able to recollect of my senior relatives is that they were intensely sincere and utterly unsophisticated.

"No person should be treated as belonging to two families. Boys have to be treated as belonging to their own families and girls as belonging to their husband's families & should they marry their cousins their interests being identical with those of their husbands' they do'nt go out of the families at all.

"From 6 to 16 my life was entirely among the Hindu Nadars at Virudhunagar & from 17 to 23 my education was in Christian institutions, boarding school and hostels at Palamcottah, Trichy (Trichinopoly), Madura & Madras. My parents were school teachers. The persons who influenced me in thought at college were few. In later official life I have been largely influenced by Mirasdars (land- lords) in villages & by friends of all communities . . . .

"Having been born in a particular (caste) & not being responsible for it & being unwilling to foul my own nest & having nothing but pleasant recollections of my boyhood friends I must say that I am very proud of the self-reliance, slow but steady progress & closeness of association of the caste people both Christian & Hindus more particularly because change of religion in- volves no social ostracism.

"Caste has got a great binding force & but for this the Sivakasi Nadars would not have successfully withstood assaults, on them by outsiders. In a society with loose ties one doesn't know who his friends are until the testing time comes & in a time of stress and strain it is best to have proved friends by our side. I consider it has a great use for the individual who will not think himself all wise and all those who have gone before him are fools. It restrains mischief-makers & has a cultural force what it is is for wise men to say."

APPENDIX H

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NADAR CHRISTIANS

1. Age Group - (Please mark the relevant group) 20-40
   41-55   56 & above

2. (a) Name
   (b) Education - Elementary School
                   High School
                   College
   (c) Occupation

3. Place of birth and present place of residence.

4. Place where you hold house or landed property.

5. Are you Christian by choice or birth?

6. When, and how, did you become aware that you belonged
   to the Nadar caste?

7. Are you married within the caste?

8. Was it by choice or by family arrangement?

9. Have you any relatives that have married outside the
   caste?

10. Do you approve such marriages? Give reasons for your
    approval, or disapproval, if you disapprove.

11. Do you know of any domestic (social) ceremonies per-
    formed by members of the Nadar caste during
    (a) childhood
    (b) puberty
    (c) betrothal
    (d) marriage
    (e) funeral and after

12. Do you think these ceremonies have
    (a) meaning and value for you
    (b) social importance for the Nadar caste

13. Mention the most important duties you have towards
    (a) your relatives
    (b) your caste group

14. What values do these duties have for you?

15. Are you a member of any association of the Nadar caste?

16. What values do your caste associations have for you?

17. In what ways do you identify yourself with members of your caste?

>   Working together
>   Meeting socially and eating together
>   Marrying within the caste
>   Mention other ways if any

18. Do you find it easier to associate and be friendly with members of your caste than with other caste people?

19. If easier for what reasons?
    (a) Because they are related to you
    (b) Share common traditions with you
    (c) support you socially
    (d) Any other

20. Name five intimate friends, indicate their caste and relationship to you if they are of Nadar caste.

21. Name five persons you admire most in the village or town where you live, and indicate their caste.

22. Name five persons you admire most outside your caste (excluding persons of national importance).

23. Name five persons of national importance you admire most.

24. Please say "Yes" or "No" under the five columns below:

	Vellala	Pariah	Hindu Nadar	Brahmin	Christian Nadar	
I would like to work beside a	:	:	:	:	:	:
I would like to live next to a	:	:	:	:	:	:
I would like to eat food prepared by a	:	:	:	:	:	:
I would like to be a friend of a	:	:	:	:	:	::
I would like to marry a	:	:	:	:	:	:

APPENDIX I

GLOSSARY·

ADI-DRAVIDA - A general term for the so-called out-
castes. A synonym is Panchama. Harijan is the more
commonly used term at present.

AGRAHARAM - In South India the Brahman colony, or ex-
clusive residential section, where Brahmans live in town
or village.

ARYAN - A pastoral tribe which is believed to have come
into North India from Central Asia, around 1500 B.C.,
bearing with it a new culture which besides many elements
consisted of a form of worship and a language (which later
developed into Sanskrit), not known to the indigenous people.

ASARI (Tamil) - A general name and title for artisan
castes like masons, carpenters, ironsmiths and goldsmiths.

ASHRAM - The modern rendering of the ancient Indian
"asrama" or forest-dwelling to which people retired for
rest and meditation. Such places became centers of
philosophical thought and spiritual experiments. The
institution has been revived by Hindus and Christians.

BETEL - The long, heart-shaped, green leaf of the betel
vine is chewed in India, after a meal usually, with areca
nut and lime. The betel leaf, areca nut and lime to-
gether are called in South India thamboolam (Tamil), and
they are offered in a tray, or a metal box (specially
made for the occasion), to visitors and guests. Its
ceremonial importance is seen from the fact that it is
used on all auspicious occasions, like social parties,
betrothals and weddings. The Tamil expression for be-
trothal is Nitchaya thamboolam i.e. confirming the
marriage contract with thamboolam. The gifts, ring, or
other pieces of jewelry, clothes, etc. are not complete
unless thamboolam also is offered to the bride's father
or guardian, when the betrothal is publicly confirmed.

BRAHMAN - First, and the chief of the four-fold division
of society according to the Hindu Sacred Laws, the
sacerdotal caste said to have sprung from the face of
Brahma.

CHAKKILI (Tamil) - Caste whose occupation is working in
skins and leather, and so is considered low in the social
scale.

CHERI (Tamil) - The Adi-Dravida's colony in town or village.

CHETTY - Title used by mercantile castes of South India.

DHARMA - This term has several meanings: That which is right or moral; the principle of law and order; the existing moral code; justice; with reference to caste, the observance of rules of one's caste. Also personified as as a superhuman or divine being who is all justice or all morality.

DRAVIDIAN - Term often used as a synonym for South Indian. Its correct use is with reference to the language of South India: Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Canarese and Tulu to which the linguistic family name of Dravidian is applied. By an extension of the meaning the term is applied to the groups of people who speak these languages as their mother tongue. The term "Dravida" is also used as a synonym for the area in which these five languages are spoken.

JATI - The term is used in South India for caste. In the north the Hindu word for caste is jat. Sometimes jati is confused with varna.

KARMA - Term used with reference to the theory of destiny based on action in previous existence, and action involving future retribution.

KONAR (Tamil) - Title of the milkman's caste.

KSHATRIYA - Second in the order of the fourfold division in which the Brahman is first, and at the top. This refers to the royal or military caste, said to have sprung from the shoulders of Brahma.

KUDUMBAN (Tamil) - Title of chief among the Pallas, and used to designate the caste.

MADIGA - Caste of leather workers in the Telugu country. Their counterpart in the Tamil area are called CHAKKILI. Both are considered low in the social scale since they work on skins and leather.

MAHIMAI - In Tamil means greatness or glory. The reference in the thesis is to a contribution by Nadars to a fund for common purposes.

MALA - Weaver caste in the Telugu country.

MARAVA (Tamil) - A South Indian caste grouped with the Nadars in the caste heirarchy.

MUDALI (Tamil) - A title used by certain sections of Vellalas.

PALLAN - Literally, in Tamil, man from the lowland. A caste in South India, usually hired for doing menial and heavy jobs, cutting, clearing, cleaning; and considered low in the social scale. Ranked with the Pariah. Also called PALLU. Both terms used in contempt towards anybody.

PANCHAMA - Literally the fifth man, or the man who has no place in the four-fold division of society; and so an out-caste.

PANCHAYAT - Means the council of five men. More than five members may be found to serve on the council. There is the Village Panchayat in which members from different caste groups are included as representatives. Then there is the Caste Panchayat, which is a council of elders within a caste to deal with caste matters only.

PARAIYAN - Literally, in Tamil, the man who plays the drum. This is the work of the Paraiya caste, who are considered a low caste chiefly on account of their food habits. This is one of the degraded caste groups which still retain some of their old rights. One group of the Paraiya caste is known as Valluvan, who serves as fortune-teller and family priest for the Paraiya.

PARAVA - A fishing caste along the Tinnevelly coast. The fishermen, further north, near and in Madras, called SEMBADAVAN, are a different group.

PILLAI (Tamil) - A title of the Vellala caste. But other castes are also known to use it.

PUJARI (Tamil - Poosari) - In South India, the non-Brahman priest that officiates at shrines and temples where the Brahman does not officiate. E.g. the temples of the Nadar caste.

SUDRA - The fourth and the last of the four-fold division of society in which the Brahman is at the top. The Sudra is said to have sprung from the feet of Brahma.

TALUK - A division of a district under a revenue official known as Tahsildar. A district has a few Taluks and the Tahsildars are responsible to the District Collector.

THALI - The marriage badge in South India. It has three parts: the central piece of gold, shaped according to the custom of the caste; the gold bead or beads on either side of the central piece; and the string of twisted cotton, dyed in turmeric, or golden cord on which the beads and central piece are strung. Also known as Mangalyam.

THEVAR - Title used by the Maravas.

TURMERIC (In Tamil called manjal, which is also the word for the color yellow) - Dried yellow root. There are two kinds: one used for curries, the other for ceremonial purposes, e.g. placed on the bridal tray along with betel, flowers, etc.

VAISYA - Third in the four-fold division of society: herdsmen, merchants, agriculturists. Said to have sprung from the thighs of Brahma.

VARISAI - The literal meaning in Tamil is order or row. The term refers to the gifts that are carried to the bride as prescribed by custom.

VARNA - Used to designate the four divisions or groups of which the first three: Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaisya are said to be "twice-born", which does not apply to the fourth varna, the Sudra.

VEDIC - Refers to the Vedas or holy books of the Hindus. The four Vedas, Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda and Athar-Veda prescribe rites and ceremonies that are to be performed by the Hindu and hymns and mantras.

VELLALA - Agricultural caste in South India, holding a superior position among the Sudra castes.

ZEMINDAR - Hereditary landowner, who has extensive properties which may include several villages. His jurisdiction over them is like that of a feudal lord.