

The Kaniatchi Form of Labour

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Marxist writing on Indian agriculture has, in recent years, tended to concentrate on the question of the mode of production. The development of capitalism in agriculture has been the major focus of the discussion. This emphasis is quite understandable since for over the last two centuries, capitalist forces have had an unprecedented profoundly transformative impact on the indigenous cultures of millions of people, not only in India but throughout the continents of Latin America, Africa and Asia, to arrive at a conception of the nature of present-day agrarian relations in these areas, therefore, it becomes vital to study the process of this transformation.

The debate on the mode of production in Indian agriculture, however, can hardly be said to have contributed to our understanding in this regard. This paper argues that owing to the adoption of a fairly crude Eurocentric model, the debate seems to have got bogged down in a series of false problematics with a number of extremely important questions getting neglected in the process. The paper attempts to chart only a bit of the way in bringing to the fore just one such question. It seeks to highlight the possibility that there could be important differences between the agrarian structures of pre-colonial Indian and feudal Europe quite apart from significant regional variations within the Indian sub-continent itself. Variations which could imply that peasant differentiation and a growth in landlessness may not be the only or even the most important indicators of change following capitalist transformation and that the process may take very diverse forms in different parts of the country. Thus, in many areas the much more significant process may be the qualitative transformation in the relationship between agricultural labourers and their employers.

This proposition cannot be fully understood, however, unless we have some conception of the nature of these relations in the immediately pre-colonial period. Although they show a remarkable diversity of form across different regions, there is hardly any detailed study of these relations in even a single region or district in pre-colonial India. The following account drawn from immediately pre-colonial and early colonial Chingleput is an attempt—doubtless still quite fragmentary—towards filling this lacuna.

THE MODE OF PRODUCTION CONTROVERSY

MARXIST writing on Indian agriculture has, in recent years, tended to concentrate on the question of the mode of production.¹ The development of capitalism in agriculture has been the major focus of the discussion. This emphasis is quite understandable for over the last two centuries, capitalist forces have had an unprecedented, profoundly transformative impact on the indigenous cultures of millions of people, not only in India but throughout the continents of Latin America, Africa and Asia. To arrive at a conception of the nature of present day agrarian relations in these areas, therefore, it becomes vital to study the process of this transformation.

The debate on the mode of production in Indian agriculture, however, can hardly be said to have contributed to our understanding in this regard. This has much to do with the kind of approach adopted by most of the participants in the debate. A major preoccupation of the discussion has been with specifying the necessary and sufficient conditions which would allow one to speak of the existence of capitalism in Indian agriculture. This has given rise to an excessive concern with questions of characterisation! identification and measurement. Thus, the task has widely been understood to be one of assessing, *at a point of time*, whether capitalism can be said to exist, how far it has developed, etc. And so a major portion of the debate has been devoted to arguments over the adequacy of different criteria of measurement. The method

followed, with minor variations in criteria, has been to estimate the proportion of farms which may be said to be capitalist at a given moment of time. This is then used as a basis to arrive at an approximate measure of the *extent* of capitalist development at that point of time.

Such a narrowly quantitative, basically static, at best comparative-static approach is obviously inadequate for the study of a social process which involves *time* and *qualitative change* in an essential way. It could, of course, be argued that some of the measurement criteria being used do suggest an implicit conception of a social process which has also been explicitly put forward by some participants in the debate, *viz.* the process of the differentiation of the peasantry and the growth in the proportion of wage labour as a result of depeasantisation. What we need to recognise, however, is that this conception is based on a model of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, the implicit assumption being that the process of capitalist transformation in India fundamentally mirrors the European process.² For one thing, an identity of points of departure is presumed. What is overlooked thereby is the possibility that there could be important differences between the agrarian structures of pre-colonial India and feudal Europe, quite apart from significant regional variations within the Indian sub-continent itself.³ Variations which could imply that peasant differentiation and a growth in landlessness may not be the only or even the most important indicators of change following capitalist trans-

formation and that the process may take very diverse forms in different parts of the country/ The contrast with Europe becomes even sharper when we recognise that the impact of capitalist forces on agrarian relations begins to be significantly felt in India following colonialism and not through the growth of an indigenously engendered rural bourgeoisie—once again in a manner characterised by significant inter-regional diversity. Thus in India the process that has to be studied is that of the transformation of agrarian relations after the advent of colonialism—how the conditions of reproduction of these relations were altered—in particular, through the unprecedented penetration of market relations and the rise of the institutions of the bourgeois state, first in the colonial and then in the post-colonial period. An essential element of this study would be the conflicts within the relationship of the state and the dominant rural elites, and those within rural society between the latter and their tenants and labourers. The resultant qualitative transformation in agrarian relations may then be seen as a complex product of these struggles, each set of relations being subtly redefined *in* the process.⁵

The very manner of our posing the central question, therefore, differs sharply from what it would be in a historical context where capitalist development occurs under the aegis of a local rural bourgeoisie. This is all the more reason why it would be a serious error to reduce the study of the process in India to a "search for the capitalist farm or farmer"—one would, rather, in the

spirit of Kautsky's appeal, attempt to document the entire gamut of transformations occurring in the antecedent agrarian structure, once the process of penetration of bourgeois forces begins to occur. The tracing of the rise of an agrarian bourgeoisie, as and when it takes place, would be only one, *albeit* an important part of this attempt.⁶

The final implication of the contrast with Europe is that one cannot study the process of capitalist transformation in India with a fixed, linear, teleological, Eurocentric conception of what agrarian capitalist relations must "ultimately" look like. Such a view could give rise to facile arguments of changelessness or could make one characterise production relations, at any point of time, as necessarily "semi-capitalist", or worse, as "semi-feudal" even if important changes following capitalist penetration have occurred. For, after all, compared to a certain fixed notion of a 'pure' capitalist form, (which in any case does gross injustice to the European experience⁷), Indian agrarian relations are perhaps destined forever to remaining semi-capitalist. Not only are the "semi" prefixes utterly inadequate in capturing crucial *qualitative* aspects of and the *diversity of forms* in which the impact of capitalist development occurs in different parts of India, they also convey the misleading and erroneous impression that a 'greater' development of capitalism would lead to the emergence of 'fuller' or 'purer' capitalist forms.⁸ Such terminological quibbling ultimately evades the very real complexity and specificity of agrarian relations in our context. Its teleological character does not allow for the possibility that capitalist relations could well be *overthrown* before they come to "fruition" in any Eurocentric sense—that what we are witness to in India may be a unique *form* of penetration of capitalist relations, a distinctive trajectory of rural proletarianisation, which given the specificity of the historical context, defies encapsulation in European teleologies.⁹

AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN PRE-COLONIAL INDIA: A DISTINCTIVE ELEMENT

Elsewhere (M Shah, 1984a and 1984b) I have attempted an elaboration of each one of these propositions. In this paper I limit myself to providing a preliminary and partial substantiation of just one of them by highlighting a distinctive element of the agrarian structure of pre-colonial India.

Evidence from large parts of India suggests the existence of a highly differentiated agrarian structure in the immediately pre-colonial and early colonial periods. While the quality of the evidence is variable, there is no doubting the general direction in which it points. First we have the evidence for high levels of inequality in the structure of land control—for North India broadly in I Habib (1984) and S Chandra (1974), for Rajasthan

in D Singh (1976) and M Tandon (1978), for the Deccan in H Fukazawa (1984), for Punjab in I Habib (1963, p 119), for Uttar Pradesh in E Stokes (1975) and A Siddiqi (1973, pp 32-41), for Bengal in R Ray (1979, Ch 3) and for South India in D Kumar (1975) and M Shah (1984b, p 48). At the same time we have wide-ranging evidence from all over late 18th-early 19th century India, of the existence of a fairly substantial stratum of individuals who had access to little or no land and who relied on agricultural labour for the major part of their livelihood. In a series of classic studies on agrarian relations in pre-colonial, especially Mughal India, Irfan Habib (see especially I Habib, 1963 and 1983) has stressed the unique significance of such a stratum of labourers in Indian history. Most recently, he has suggested that in North India during the Mughal period this labour-force could have formed as much as 20-25 per cent of the rural population (I Habib, 1984, p 249). The most decisive demonstration of this phenomenon is provided by Dharma Kumar (1965) for South India. In her view, agricultural labourers might have formed as much as 17-25 per cent of the agricultural population of the Madras Presidency around 1800 (D Kumar 1965, p 181). Supportive evidence for these views may be found for North India generally in T Raychaudhari (1984, p 12) and S Chandra (1974, p 51), for Uttar Pradesh in A Siddiqi (1973, pp 49-54), for the North-West Provinces in L Alaev (1976), for Gujarat in J Breman (1974), for Maharashtra in H Fukazawa (1974), for Rajasthan in H Mukhia (1977), D Singh (1976) and M Tandon (1978), for Bengal in R Ray (1979, pp 266-271), for Bengal and Bihar in B Chaudhari (1984, pp 164-166), for South India generally in B Hjejle (1967), and for the districts Shimoga in E Harper (1968), Tirunelveli in D Ludden (1978) and Thanjavur in K Gough (1981).

Moreover, most of these authors relate this high level of agrarian differentiation and the presence of a significant proportion of agricultural labourers to the operation of strictures associated with the caste-system. A vast majority of these labourers, in particular, belonged to castes occupying the lowest rungs in the social hierarchy.¹⁰ Thus, both the order of magnitude of these phenomena and their social origin imbue the agrarian structure of immediately pre-colonial India with a definite distinctiveness which must seriously modify the way the question of transformation following capitalist penetration is approached. For one thing, this should displace somewhat the centrality of the question of peasant differentiation. For an already highly unequal agrarian structure may not show too remarkable a rise in differentiation even after capitalist development, especially if checks operate on the differentiation process within agriculture and the rate of growth of the non-agricultural sectors is not very high. The very definition

of change has to be radically altered in this context. Again the pre-existence of a high proportion of agricultural labourers means that the way we study the process of rural proletarianisation must be altered. The latter would no longer be reducible to the process of depeasantisation alone—it would much more be reflected in the *qualitative* transformation of the relationships of these labourers with their employers."

This last proposition cannot be fully understood, however, unless we have some conception of the nature of these relationships in the immediately pre-colonial period—which would provide an indication of the principal elements in which we would subsequently trace a qualitative transformation. What is immediately obvious here, even from a preliminary sifting of the available evidence, is the remarkable diversity these relationships show across different regions in India. The widely reported existence of *jajmani-xypt* relations from all over India does suggest a possible unifying framework for analysing these relations.¹² But beyond this unity their inter-regional variedness is undeniable. In any case there is hardly any detailed study of the relations between agricultural labourers and their employers in a single region or district in pre-colonial India. It should be obvious that without several such studies, any all-India generalisations regarding the nature of these relations could scarcely be considered credible.¹³ The following account drawn from immediately pre-colonial and early colonial Chingleput is an attempt—doubtless still quite fragmentary—towards filling this lacuna.¹⁴

THE KANIATCHI FORM OF PROPERTY

Control over land in Chingleput in this period was exercised collectively by a group of *kaniatchikars* (or holders of *kaniatchi* right), who were also known as *mirasidars* (or holders or *mirasi* right) since the advent of the Mughals.¹⁵ These landholders, a large majority of whom were Vellalas and Brahmins, did not generally cultivate their lands on their own. They either leased them out to tenants or directly employed labourers to cultivate them. Our focus is on the latter relationship, to understand the character of which we need to get a picture of the nature of scope of the *kaniatchi* form of property as also the place and role of the *kaniatchikars* in village life.

The *mirasidars* derived their control over land, as also a position of overall pre-eminence in village affairs, through their collective ownership of the total number of principal shares (*pangus*) into which the village output was divided, once certain deductions had been made. The village output was regarded as a unit from which various shares were allocated to participants in the village economy in accordance with customary norms governing the allocation. Some deductions called *swatantram* were made before the gross produce was esti-

mated: "Some are taken while the grain is in straw, some by computation and some by measurement: the lame person receives different fee? in as many different ways" (Letter from Place, Collector of the Jaghire to the Board of Revenue, October 6, 1795, para 33). While their number and value varied greatly across villages they were extremely important in assuring the subsistence of different participants in the agrarian system, given especially the collectivity of the property form. Place indicates this when he remarks:

besides that they define the property of individuals, they have a further utility, in constituting the temporary subsistence of the inhabitants, till the final division of the crops takes place. First they are received whilst the grain is cutting; and, secondly, when it is beat out, and between these two stages of the harvest and the ultimate disposal of the crops, various inevitable delays occur, which would make the privation of these fees a real hardship. (Place's Final Report on the Jaghire, June 6, 1799, para 204.)

From the gross output itself several deductions were made which included the *calavaram* or the share of the agricultural labourers and different kinds of *murui* or customary payments made to the village artisans, the temples, for the maintenance of irrigation tanks and sometimes also to *kantatchikars* and to certain chosen individuals favoured by the state. Once these deductions had been made, the state share or *mel-varam*¹⁶ was set aside. The striking thing about Chingleput is that the overwhelming proportion of land-revenue was paid *collectively* by each village, in *kind* and as a *proportion* of the total output.¹⁷ The remaining village output, the *kudi-varam* or *kit-varam*¹⁸ was shared among the *mirasidars* and their tenants.¹⁹

The number of *mirasi* shares remained fixed even if the number of shareholders (*pangalis*) increased or decreased over time. Thus for example, Place found that the village of Poolatoo, divided into four shares, was in his time held by thirty shareholders, while in the village of Darnerlah only 23 *mirasidars* held the 160 shares (Place's 1799 Report, op cit, para 69). The interesting thing is that the current shareholders would still be recorded to be holding a certain fraction of the fixed number of principal shares—the summation of their various holdings adding up to the original number of shares. Thus, as Place says of the village of Poolatoo:

Ask any of the thirty, into how many shares his village is divided, he will say, four; ask him how much *mirasi*, or how much landed property, he has in the village, he will say a half, a quarter, or a sixteenth, or any other fractional part of a share (loc cit).²⁰

The *mirasi* right was, of course, exceptionally secure. On the basis of a review of ancient legal texts, Ellis expresses the view that:

Mirasi right is not forfeited by the discontinuance of cultivation for a single year or any longer period, during the life of the *mtaW-dor*, his son, or his grandson; it would become forfeitable, that is, the claimant could not regain it, if it had passed into the possession of another, by the Hindu law after the third generation, or after the lapse of the *period of memory*, determined to be one hundred years (Replies from F W Ellis, op cit, Reply to the 3rd question).

Mirasi shares were inherited patrilineally and this was a potential source of inequality among *mirasidars*. Under such a system "a man's land shares like his personal property, were inherited equally by his sons, by 4 chosen daughter's son if he had no son, or by an adopted son if he had neither daughters or sons" (K Gough, 1981 p 209).²¹ Thus, the larger the number of sons a *mirasidar* had, the smaller would be the size of each son's *mirasi* share. Whether or not inequality would have grown over time, of course, cannot be asserted *a priori*, depending as it would have on the differential rates of partitioning of different sized shareholders. The joint family system would in any case have acted as a check. Another potential source of inequality was the fact that *mirasi* shares could be bought and sold but again little can be said *a priori* without knowing more about the trends in direction of sale.

What is interesting however, is that a well-developed institutionalised mechanism existed in most villages which kept the growth of inequality among *mirasidars* greatly within limits. Cultivation in *pasdn-carei* or *samudayam*²² villages took place collectively on the fields of the *mirasidars* who bore the joint responsibility of organising cultivation in the village. In most villages, however, cultivation generally took place on fields separately allocated to each *mirasidar* in proportion to his share, the fields themselves being subject to redistribution at regular intervals of 8, 12, 27 or 30 years (K M Gupta, 1933, pp 63-65). Such villages were known as *karaiyidu*.

On the basis of a village-survey conducted in 1817 in a village in Chingleput district yet untouched by British rule, Hodgson (1830) provides a fascinating account of how this redistribution occurred in *karaiyidu* villages. According to Hodgson, this practice was common in villages where crops such as rice, which needed a lot of water, were important. In Hodgson's village there were four principal shares, each divided into 16 parts, making in all 64 shares. The distribution procedure is described thus:

the names of each Jot and each shareholder are written on pieces of the leaf of the palm tree, such as is used for village records, and the names of each division of land to be allotted are placed in a row, a child, selected for the purpose, draws by lot a leaf with the name of a principal shareholder, and places

it under a number thus;

1	2	3	4
TANNAPPA NINA NARRAPPA MALLIYAN			

It is thus settled, by chance or lottery, that Tannappa and his under-shareholders, are entitled to cultivate the land of the principal share allotted under No 1. Tannappa next proceeds to settle in the same way each under-shareholder's portion included in his principal share; and so on till the 64 shareholders receive each his allotment.

The lots are not drawn for all the land at once, but in sub-divisions according to quality; for instance, for the division nearest to the reservoir, as being less liable to the effects of drought, first; then for the next division, as being farther removed from the reservoir; and then for the third, which perhaps receives an adequate supply of water one in two or three years only. It is thus apparent, that the object in drawing the lots for the annual or periodical occupation of the land, is to secure to each person interested a proportion of each description of land, viz, of the best, the good and the indifferent; in other words, of the best watered, second best, and so on. Each of these subdivisions has an appropriate name in the village register (J Hodgson, 1830, pp 80-81).

There were a few villages, however, where one could expect a greater tendency for inequality among *mirasidars* to grow over time. These were the so-called *arudi-carei* or *paibhogam*²⁴ villages. Here the land was *permanently* distributed among the *mirasidars* in proportion to their shares. However, even in these villages, "all other rights and privileges are held in common: in most of these also, land reclaimed from the waste since the *general division* is *samudayam* or common property" (Replies from F W Ellis, op cit). We do have some evidence on inequality among *mirasidars*. Place notes at one point that land held by *mtasidars* ranged roughly from 2.67 to 2,667 acres (Place's 1799 Report, op cit, para 344). Ellis' data on the value of *mirasi* shares from 11 villages covering nearly 200 *mirasidars* shows that the average range was in the ratio 1:3 (Replies from F W Ellis, op cit, Reply to the 1th question). The much more significant inequality, as I show in a moment, was, of course, between the *mirasidars* as a whole and the rest of the village. This immediately came to the fore in the early colonial period following the introduction of the British *naiyatwari* system. Thus, the Lorenz ratio for inequality among landowners in Chingleput in 1853-54 was as high as 0.57 (M Shah, 1984b, p 48). This high figure for inequality among *landholders* had nothing to do with the classical differentiation process—on the contrary it was a reflection of the already existing inequality in rural Chingleput and resulted from a dual process—(a) the dominant *mirasidars* obtaining *pattas* for vast areas of land, and (b) the acquisition of small fragments of land by *non-mirasidars*. There was little rise in this already high figure in the rest of the colonial period (ibid, Ch 4).

In any case, whatever may have been the level of inequality among *mirasidars* in the pie-colonial period, we must crucially take note of the deep bonds of collectivity that knitted the *mirasidars* together and which provided a distinctive form to the dominance they exercised over the village. Thus, the privileges that each *mirasidar* enjoyed by virtue of his holding the *mirasi* right derived from his being a member of the collective *mirasi* body. Moreover, the entitlement to *mirasi* right was conditional upon the payment of the *mel-varam*. Sancaraya describes the mechanism by which a defaulting *mirasidar* could be divested of his right although he does add that this was a rare occurrence. In such an event the government "may call upon other shareholders of the village to pay the balance due by the defaulting *Mirasudar* and allow them to execute for his share a *Sabhacharya Sasanam*". (Sancaraya, op cit, Reply to the 3rd question). In a footnote here he adds: "In this case the whole of *Mirasudars* of the village assemble and execute a joint deed divesting the defaulter of his share in the *Mirasu*, and investing it, according to their several proportions, in themselves: It does not appear to be necessary for the person, whose share is thus transferred, to be party to the deed" (loc cit).

The collective sanctions to which the exercise of *mirasi* right was subject are also reflected in the strict and detailed specification in the Village Register of the use to which different parts of the village land were to be put. The total description of the village land was carefully recorded in the *Terapadicana* which was "the first part of the general Village Register recording the extent and description of the several kinds of land of which the whole is composed" (replies from F W Ellis, op cit, footnote 23). Thus, "on the *nattam* they must build their houses and nowhere else, they cannot cultivate it or appropriate it to any other purposes; in the *peramboke* they have no right to fill up tanks, stop water courses, or obstruct roads" and so on (Ibid, reply to the 2nd question). The *mirasidars* had no "inherent right" to make changes in the distribution of land specific in the *larapadi* accounts but such changes could be made in special cases with the consent of the "Circar". In all such cases the *larapadi* accounts had to be suitably altered incorporating the changed allocation. Again, the customary norms governing the distribution of the village output were noted in the second part of the Village Register:

The *Rangumalei-Canaeu*, which may be considered the second part of the general Village Register, states the number of *carets*, or fixed shares into which the whole *Mirasi* is divided; the proportions possessed by each *Mirasidan* the lands held by *Uicudis* all mutations of these; and the actual distribution, in detail, of the cultivable lands, *Manyam* or *Varapet*,²⁵ for the current year, among every description of cultivator, *Mirasidar* *Ulcudi* or *Paracudi* (Ibid, footnote 21).

The conditional and collective character of the *mirasi* right is also well illustrated by considering the question of its alienation (which was a distinctive feature of this right, distinguishing it, for example, for the occupancy right of the *ulkudis* which was not transferable). According to Ellis, the *mirasi* right could "only be transferred by written deed, accompanied by certain prescribed formalities, tending to give the act general publicity and with the consent of six stated descriptions of persons" (Ibid, reply to the 12th question, para 19)²⁶. Additionally, "by the custom of the country the bill of sale must be drawn up by the *curnum* of the village; it must be witnessed by two or more creditable persons, and countersigned by all or at least the principal *mirasidars*" (loc cit). The last was essential because the *mirasidars* of a village were generally *mureicars*, possessing the rights of pre-emption with respect to each other. Thus "the execution of a bill of sale by one only, though good against himself, could not bar the rest from assertion of this right" (Ibid, remarks appended to sale-deeds of slaves). The deed itself "must state the exact share transferred (or, when land and not right is sold, the boundaries towards the four cardinal points, sometimes also it shows the measurement and produce); it must contain a distinct date and the name of the persons of the transferer and the transferee must be clearly designated by the insertion of their father's name, their caste, tribe and place of residence; and the transfer must be regularly recorded by entry of the new *mirasidars* name in the *Pangu-malei* register" (Ibid, reply to the 12th question para 19). Various kinds of transfer of *mirasi* right were possible. Broadly these could be sales, mortgages or gifts but within each of these three categories there were a number of variations.²⁷

A distinctive feature of the villages of Chingleput in this period was the absence of a village headman which once again underlines the collectivity of the property form, apart from showing the dominant position occupied by the *mirasidars* in village life. The duties of the village headman were discharged by the *grama pravartitam* or the village assembly. This assembly was responsible for the conduct of the internal and external affairs of the village. And the membership of this body was restricted to the *mirasidars*. Thus as Ellis says, "in this assembly every proprietor has a seat and a voice, each possessing a right to the management of the general business of the community, as to every other privilege, in proportion to his share in it" (Replies from F W Ellis, op cit, Appendix).²⁸

Smalley, the Collector of Chingleput, in a letter to the Board of Revenue (4.11.1820) also brings out the role of the *kaniatchikars* in the maintenance of the *grama-silavu* or "a fund provided for the general concern and public convenience of the village" (Ibid, para 18). The fund was derived from the various

fees and *maniams* received by the *kaniatchikars* "and whatever remains after defraying the whole village expenses is divided amongst the *mirasidars*. Should the charges exceed the income, the *mirasidars* must pay their portions of the deficiency" (loc cit). This fund is also referred to in Ellis' letter to the Board of Revenue (25.6.1817) where managing "the general purse of the village (*grama-shelevu*) according to custom" (op cit, reply to 3rd question) is mentioned as an aspect of the *kaniatchi* privilege. The *mirasidars* also took the lead on all important social occasions of the village, including festivals, as also at times when important dealings with state officials were involved.²⁹

Quite apart from this general pre-eminence in village affairs, the *mirasidars* also held a disproportionately high share of the village output.³⁰ Thus, beyond their share in the *kudivaram*, they received a variety of fees from various sources. This included the *swatantram* they received before threshing, the *cuppattam* and *murai* they received after threshing as also the output from the *manyam* land held by them. Finally, they were entitled to receive the *tunduvaram*³¹ "a certain proportion of *cudivaram*, fixed by custom or agreement, rendered by the *payacaries* (tenants) from the produce of all lands cultivated by them to the *mirasudar*" and *swami-bhogam*, "rent paid for land held on farm from the *mirasudar* for a fixed period" (Sancaraya, op cit, footnote 6).

Even more important is the fact that holding a *kaniatchi* share meant far more than a mere share in output.

If a village be divided into 16 shares and an individual hold half a share, he is entitled to 1/32nd part of the annual produce of the *Caniyatchi-Manyams* and *Mereis*; of the total productive *Varapet* lands, *he must provide for the cultivation of 1/32nd part* arid participates to that extent in the total profits from them; 1/32nd part is his share, also, in all advantages derived from forests, wastes and water; and in fine, he has an interest equal to 1/32nd part in all profits belonging to the village, tangible or intangible (Replies from F W Ellis, op cit, reply to the 12th question, para 19).

According to Ellis, the right also extended to waste-land. The *seycal-carambu* or cultivable waste was as freely available to the *mirasidars* as a *varapet* for direct cultivation or leasing out to tenants. In the *anadicarambu* or immemorial waste, the *mirasidars* "possess the exclusive right of cutting firewood, working quarries, etc" (Ibid, Reply to 2nd question). The sample deed of sale presented in the Appendix provides a very good indication of the vast scope of the *mirasi* right.³²

THE KANIATCHI FORM OF LABOUR

Indeed, what is truly remarkable and directly pertinent for our purposes is that the *kaniatchi* right included in its purview, a claim to agricultural labour, the claim

varying in proportion with one's share. The labourers, like the land, were collectively held by the *kaniatchi* body. Thus, whenever the *kaniatchi* right was transferred they went along with it. So like the *kaniatchi* right, *mirasidars* could sell, mortgage or gift labourers or rather in the context we are dealing with, the one generally implied the other.³⁵ In the deed of sale I have appended to this paper, they are mentioned as many as four times: first, when the seller proclaims what he intends to sell, secondly, when he declares what he has sold, then, when he informs the buyer all that he will become proprietor of and finally when he informs the latter what he will be entitled to sell, mortgage or gift. The reference actually is to be *Paracheri* and *Tider Pareiyer*, which suggests that the Paraiyans and the places where they live are together being sold.

The Paraiyans were the overwhelmingly important caste of agricultural labourers generally called *adimai*. One of three most important castes of the district in numerical terms (the other two being Vellalas and Vaniyars), the Paraiyans could never become *mirasidars*. Caste sanctions strictly prohibited them from control over land. As Place wrote in 1799, the Paraiyans "can by no means acquire property in land, and I have not yet met with an instance of their having done so" (Place's 1799 Report, op cit, para 75). In fact, almost all members of this caste were employed as agricultural labourers. Thus, almost all Paraiyans were agricultural labourers and virtually all the agricultural labourers were Paraiyans.

As a caste, there were severe social sanctions arrayed against the Paraiyans. We have the following contemporary description of the wide range of social disabilities to which Paraiyans were subject:

They are prohibited from drawing water from the wells of other castes, but have particular wells of their own near their habitations, round which they place the bones of animals, that they may be known and avoided. When an Indian of any other caste permits a Paraiya to speak to him, this unfortunate being is obliged to hold his hand before his mouth, lest the Indian may be contaminated with his breath; and if he is met on the highway he must turn on one side to let the other pass. If any Indian whatever by accident touches a Paraiya, he is obliged to purify himself in a bath. The Brahmans cannot behold them, and they are obliged to fly when they appear. Great care is taken not to eat anything dressed by a Paraiya, nor even drink out of vessel he has used; they dare not enter the house of an Indian of another caste; or if they are employed in any work, a door is purposely made for them; but they must work with their eyes on the ground; for if it is perceived that they have glanced at the kitchen, all the utensils must be broken (E Thurston, 1909, Vol 6, pp 78-79, citing Sonnerat's "Voyage to the East Indies 1774 and 1781").

Thurston adds that "a Brahman considers

himself polluted by the touch, presence or shadow of a Paraiyan, and will not allow him to enter his house, or even the street in which he lives, if it is an *agrahara*" (Ibid, p 86). A striking illustration of the low social status of Paraiyans is provided in the local Tamil proverbs cited by Thurston. Most of them reflect a severe contempt for the Paraiyans: for their low social status—"If a Paraiya boils rice, will it not reach God?" (implying that God will notice all piety even that of a Paraiyan); for their morality—"The Palmyra palm has no shadow; the Paraiyan has no decency" or "When a Paraiyan woman eats betel, her ten fingers (will be daubed with) lime"; and for their alleged servility and lack of intelligence and initiative—"Though a Paraiyan woman's child be put to school it will still say Ayye" or "Though seventy years of age, a Paraiya will only do what he is compelled" or "Not even a Paraiyan will plough on a full moon day" (Ibid, pp 117-118).

Paraiyan labourers were subject to extensive control by their employers. This control extended to their families. The wife and children of a male labourer were expected to work for the *mirasidar*, undertaking a variety of agricultural and non-agricultural tasks. Again a female labourer was not at liberty to marry her daughter to anyone without her master's consent and all the children from such a marriage belonged to her master. When she got her son married, however, the son's children went to his wife's master, not to his own. Or as the Collector of Chingleput describes the situation from the male labourer's point of view, "in the event of his marrying with one of the females belonging to his master the children all became his (master's) property but should he marry with a female slave of another person the children of such marriage mostly became the property of the female's (master) though in some villages the custom is otherwise" (Letter to Board of Revenue, July 31, 1819). It was also noted that "the power was vested in them (masters) of inflicting very severe corpora punishment or confining them (labourers) for neglect of the duties assigned to them" (loc cit). E Thurston (1975, part 2 Ch 5) contains a vivid account of the gruesome forms of torture to which they were liable in such instances.

The control that the *mirasidars* wielded over their labourers is strikingly evident in the manner in which they sought to use them as an instrument in their resistance to the colonial state's incursions on their authority. In November 1785, in the middle of the growing season, Paraiyan farm labourers withdrew from cultivation demanding their usual *calavasam*. At Poonarallee they were all found to have gathered in one place and threatening violence unless their demands were met. The context for the "insurrection" (as it was described in contemporary British records) was a move by Richard Dightori, Superintendent of Jaghire, to curb Nattar

privileges. A locally powerful Vellata *mirasidar* was discovered to have instigated the agitation. Letters written by him advocating the action, were found by the British. The time of the year when the labour of the Paraiyans was indispensable was chosen so as to most effectively threaten government revenues (E Irschick, 1982, pp 223-25).

The confrontation between the *mirasidars* of Chingleput and the colonial state came to an even greater head during the Collectorship of Lionel Place. In 1795, while making the annual revenue settlements in Tripassore and Poonamallec, Place found considerable resistance to his proposals from the *mirasidars*. His subsequent threat of sequestering their *mirasi* right only made their resistance greater. Once again in February-March 1796, Paraiyan labourers went on a 'strike', refusing to harvest the crop, unless they were given a higher *calavasam* share. Place wrote:

There are mamool places for beating out the grain in every village but owing to a general disregard of all prescribed rules of revenue management, the Paraiars either will not be confined to them or reject the regulation that these spots should be previously cleared of grass which is purposely allowed to grow in order that the greater quantity of grain may be concealed under it (Place to Board of Revenue, 1.3.1796).

The *mirasidars* had this time evolved a novel method of instigating the agitation. They had forged a letter supposed to have been written by Paraiyan caste-heads in Madras city to their caste-fellows in Karanguli urging them to come away to Madras or face the threat of being outcasted. Company servants later learnt from Paraiyans in Madras that two of the alleged signatories of the letter had been dead for more than a year. And one Paraiyan caste-head in Poonamallec told Place that "unless persuaded and allowed by their masters, the Paraiars would never have thought to assemble in the manner they did" (Place to Board of Revenue, 29.3.1796). Finally, a Vellala *mirasidar*, seeking to cultivate Place, revealed the names of the *mirasidars* who were behind the disturbance.

It would be quite incorrect to see in these instances, evidence of collective village solidarity against an external regime. The dealings of the Vellalas with the colonial state were (as the just mentioned instance of a 'loyalist' reveals) based on a complex strategy of manipulation, supplication and resistance. And though they may have sought their labourers' help in fighting some of their battles with the British, the *mirasidars* at the same time felt no hesitation in betraying them if it became necessary or if it could prove useful in their dealings with the Company. Thus Dighton acknowledged the favour done them by the supplicant Evalappah Mudali in revealing some of the methods which the Paraiyan labourers

used in order to cheat the Company—method! which Evateppah himself probably urged them to deploy in the first place! Dighton describes the "taking away without measuring that part of the paddy that remains under the heap on the spot where it is beat out. a practice very prejudicial to government since it allows fraud which is very difficult to prevent and which fraud Eevappah Moodelly was active in pointing out" (Irschick, op tit, p 224, emphasis added).

We must also note that once all the facts of the 1796 case were revealed, the one's who suffered were the Paraiyans and not the Vellala master-minds. Despite Place's recommendation of exemplary punishment, the chief Vellala responsible was let off lightly. But the Paraiyans involved were chained and subject to forced labour in road-gangs in the lean season.

At the same time it is clear from all contemporary accounts that Pamiyan labourers were entitled to a range of customary privileges. While the actual share of the labourers in gross output came to a mere pittance (Place's estimate based on evidence from a survey of 898 villages in 1795 was 3-11 per cent), it was generally regarded incumbent upon the *mirasidars* to supplement this, especially in times of dire need. As Ellis says, "custom, however, allows them certain indulgences, which, if withheld would be thought disgraceful to the master, and occasion inconvenient discontent" (Replies from F W Ellis, op cit, Remarks appended to sale deeds of slaves). These included additional allowances of grain in particular seasons, gifts, mainly cloth, at the major festivals and family wedding expenses. According to Ramaswami Naidu, a contemporary writer, the last generally included the expense for the kura, or the cloth worn in nuptials and *tali*, the small gold plate tied around the bride's neck by the bridegroom (R Naidu, 1834, p 296). Indeed, the Collector of Chingleput found in 1819 that the labourers were given "a proportionate subsistence for each of their children or others of the family; they are housed and clothed and during the principal festivals certain other allowances are made to them both in money and articles requisite for their ceremonies and their marriages are also performed at the charge of their masters and when reduced by infirmity they are also supported by their proprietors" (Letter to Board of Revenue, July 31, 1819). Hodgson in his village-survey also made very similar observations. He states that labourers "are remunerated or supported by allowances of grain and donations of cloth for clothing: their families have the benefit of gleanings and of the sweepings of the treading floor ... and have presents on marriages or births in their families or on the new year" (J Hodgson, 1830, p 81). In any case as already noted, collectively from the village output they received the *swantantram* fees

which were paid before the gross produce was estimated.³⁴

The Paraiyan labourers also possessed a set of customary rights which they were supposed to have enjoyed through generations. To begin with, there was the right to hereditary employment. Thus, as Ellis puts it, while these labourers could not "be sold separately from the Mirasi nor can the Mirasi be sold separately from them" (Replies from F W Ellis, op cit. Remarks appended to sale deeds of slaves). Place, provides a fascinating account of the ritual by which labourers entered employment and then "withdrew" at the end of each year, only to be re-employed by their *mirasidar*.

The servant engages in the service of the cultivator at the beginning of the year, on the customary terms of the village to which he is conciliated and binds himself by the acceptance of betel ... his servitude expires with the year during which it seldom happens that he is guilty of desertion if those terms are faithfully observed towards him ... yet the ceremony of withdrawing themselves at the end of the year and recontracting themselves for their labours is invariably renewed; for the disposition of each party towards the other is so well understood, that this retirement is never further than the adjoining village and if under such disposition one should not allow reasonable time or the other refrain to offer a renewal of the contract within that time, the complaint would be equally heavy" (Place's 1795 letter, op cit, para 36).

In his 1799 Report, Place cites an example from Madhurantakam of hereditary servants claiming back their jobs even after a break in service for some length of time: "Maduranticum affords a very curious example of the preservation and assertion of this right. Previous to the repair of the tank—it is not known how long—the lands had been uncultivated, but so soon as this work was completed, the descendants of many families who had been the hereditary servants of the Brahmins, claimed, and were admitted to their inheritance, although, in the intermediate time they had taken up other occupations" (Place's 1799 Report, op cit, para 75).

The labourers could, of course, be transferred from one *mirasidar* to another but they remained entitled to all the customary privileges they had enjoyed previously. These included *thepamcheri*, the pan of the village where they built their huts, and the backyards attached to these huts. These were held rent-free and no taxes were levied on them. At times they were also allotted small plots of land by their *mirasidars* for cultivation on which the latter provided them seeds, cattle and implements, although most of the output from these plots went to the *mirasidars*. In addition, they hereditarily held the village offices of *Taliyari* or the village watchman who, among other things, guarded the heaps of harvested grain, and *Totty*,

Kumbokutti or *Vettiyan* who performed the functions of watering the fields, measuring grain, delivery of messages and burning the dead.³³ Finally, we may note the existence of an annual ritual of status-reversal which could be considered yet another dimension of the customary rights of the Paraiyans. This ritual seems to have characterised their relations with their employers in Chingleput till as late as the advent of the British:

At the close of the Tamil month *Auni*, with which the revenue year ends, and the cultivation of the ensuing year ought to commence, the whole of the slaves *strike work* collect in bodies outside of the villages, and so remain until their masters, by promising to continue their privileges, by solicitations, presents of betel, and other gentle means, induce them to return. The slaves on these occasions, however well treated they may have been, complain of various grievances, real and imaginary, and threaten a general desertion; this threat however they never carry into execution, but after the usual time, everything *having been executed according to namul* return quietly to their labours" (Replies from F W Ellis, op cit, Remarks Appended to Sale deeds of Slaves).

REFLECTIONS ON THE FORM OF POWER

What I have been describing so far is clearly a relationship of power a relationship involving two social strata at opposite ends of the village hierarchy. On the one hand we have the *mirasidar* collective whose members, though performing no agricultural labour, controlled a disproportionate share of the village produce, indeed, exercised a remarkably comprehensive kind of proprietary right over village land (including a claim to labour services) and thereby dominated the conduct of village affairs. At the other end, there are the Paraiyans, a whole stratum of people held in general social contempt, subject to severely degrading kinds of social disability, including pollution by touch, sight, speech and shadow, and permanently restricted to earning their livelihood mainly through onerous forms of agrestic servitude-forms involving detailed control by the *mirasidars* over their lives and of their families, which included a say in such personal decisions as marriage. They were attached to the *mirasidars* collective through generations, had little say in the choice of their employer, could be bought, sold or mortgaged within the collective; and were liable to brutal physical punishment in case they neglected their assigned duties.

In trying to understand this *form* of power, however, at least two kinds of stumbling blocks can be imagined. For one thing, it is obvious how Eurocentric categories would prove utterly inadequate. It is, of course, quite conceivable for someone seeking to fit these forms into a feudal mould to onesidedly focus on the fact that labourers were inseparably attached to the soil. On the other hand, the fact that they were bought

and sold, could suggest their being likened to the slaves of Classical Antiquity. Finally, the collective dimensions of their unfreedom recall to mind Marx's references to "the general slavery of the Orient" in the *Grundrisse* (K Marx, 1973, p 495). It should be fairly evident however, that any such partial view would be completely ahistorical for it would lose sight of the integral inter-connection of these relations with the *kaniatchi* form of property. None of these three features can really be isolated for emphasis in this manner since each one of them is equally an inextricable element of the *kaniatchi* form of labour. In any case, unlike in feudal Europe, the attachment here is not to individual lords but to a collective. The contrast with feudal Europe is, of course, already evident in the overall agrarian structure itself, for in Chingleput, as almost throughout pre-colonial India, labourers existed as a third significant stratum distinct from the landlords and the tenants.³⁶ It may, perhaps, also be necessary to stress that the collective dimensions of the *kaniatchi* form of property and the practice of the periodical redistribution of land should not mislead one into construing this as some kind of a "primitive communist" society. For the crucial contrast with other parts of the world where such forms prevailed is that here the collectivity existed among *landlords*, not *peasants*. A deep social divide separated the *mirasidars* from and pitted them against the rest of the village. This was no peasant commune; in fact, this deeply unequal rural society is best described as a system of *collective landlordism*. One would actually be hard-pressed to identify who in the *kaniatchi* agrarian system could accurately be described as a peasant proprietor—landlords, tenants, labourers, yes, but peasant proprietors?³⁷

Yet another kind of difficulty could arise for those who find it impossible to reconcile the existence of the customary rights and privileges of Paraiyans with a characterisation of this relationship as a form of power. In such conceptions the presence of these features either implies a denial of power itself or at least a mitigation of it. We can find these kinds of views being expressed in the discussion around the *jajmani* system both by those who regard *jajmani* relations as essentially characterised by harmony and reciprocity and by those who consider them relations of exploitation. Thus, Wisner, who could be regarded as *the* classic exponent of the former view, is able to sustain it only by one-sidedly focusing on these aspects of *jajmani* relations, while Beidelman who makes the most detailed argument in favour of the latter view, is at pains to show that *jajmani* is "an economic system" (T O Beidelman, 1959, p 81) or that it is "the economic aspect of caste" (ibid, p 15), as if the admittance of "non-economic features" would lead to a denial of exploitation. It should be evident that these views, by no means uncom-

mon,³⁸ and normally considered to represent diametrically opposed positions *on jajmani* relations, actually *share* the same implicit conception of power.

The common operative idea seems to be that the more overt or perhaps more directly "economic" the forms of domination, the more exploitative they are, in some sense. This must, however, be regarded as too "bourgeois-centred" a view of power in the specific sense of considering "naked, economic bourgeois domination" as the most violent form possible.³⁹ A certain kind of overtness seems to get identified with brutality. On the contrary, it has been remarked about pre-capitalist societies that "it would be a mistake to see a contradiction in the fact that violence is here both more present and more hidden" (P Bourdieu, 1977, p 191). Without immediately presuming a hierarchy in the degree of violence in either epochal direction, one must acknowledge the strength of Bourdieu's argument that simply by appearing more hidden or subtle *to our eyes*, violence certainly does not become less present. These are, indeed, "forms of domination which may strike the modern observer as more brutal, more primitive, more barbarous, or at the same time, as gentler, more humane, more respectful of persons" (loc cit). Indeed, what these views fail to recognise is that in the social context one is examining, the relation of power had to necessarily involve such features which, moreover, in no way precluded the possibility of conflict or even tyranny. The fact is that the dominant discourse laid down the kind of attributes, in terms of which alone an *effective* relation of power could be constituted. To develop this crucial proposition we need to reflect awhile on the relationship between those who exercised control over land and the Brahmins in the Indian historical context.

It is by now fairly well-established that this relationship was extremely important in several parts of India both at the village and at the state level, once the ascendancy of Brahmins had been established in the sacerdotal order.⁴⁰ A crucial element of this relationship was gift-giving, to Brahmins and Brahminical institutions. This practice has a long ancestry in South Indian history. Till around the late 7th century sacrifice remained the central defining feature of kingship, with royal *danas* being made within the constitutive framework of the royal sacrifice. However, through inscriptions from about the beginning of the 8th century AD, it becomes increasingly obvious that around this time sacrifice disappears and is replaced by divine origin and noble conduct, reflected essentially in munificent gift-giving, as the constitutive characteristics of kingship (N Dirks, 1976).

In the Pallava period the most important such royal activity was the setting up of *brahmadeyas*, revenue-free villages in which Brahmins exercised collective control over

the land and where "brahminical learning and canonical ritual were supported" (B Stein, 1977, p 19), Stein (Ibid, pp 19-26) provides inscriptional evidence to show the importance of Pallava support to *brahmadeyas* as also the continuation by the Cholas of this tradition. Considerable support was also given to the construction and maintenance of temples (see B Stein, 1980, ch 7; also A Appadurai, 1977). While the role of medieval South Indian kings in this was crucial, the fact that dominant landed groups also played a crucial part has been emphasised by some writers (D Ludden, 1978, p 109; G Spencer, 1968; B Stein, 1977, pp 19-26). Stein's mapping of *brahmadeya* villages shows that of the four major clusters in which these settlements are found, central Tndaimandalam, in the basins of Palar and Cheyyar rivers is one (B Stein, 1980, Map IV-1 and p 67). Many of these villages survived till the point of colonial intervention, gradually undergoing a decline thereafter.

The process of analysing the form of power involved in the relations we are examining must, therefore, include an understanding of the relationship between land-controllers and Brahmins. Louis Dumont, in his profound work on the caste-system (*Homo Hierarchicus*), correctly poses this as the central question and criticises those who wish it away by positing "a high degree of coincidence between politico-economic rank and the ritual ranking of caste" (L Dumont, 1980, p 76, quoting F G Bailey). He is also right in speaking at the same time of "a solidarity between them which opposes them conjointly to the other social functions" (ibid, p 75). However, the manner in which he conceives of this relationship, this conjoint solidarity, and the notion of power and of the religious or ideological that this entails, seems seriously open to question.

For Dumont, the question is one of relationship between "hierarchy" and "power". Now hierarchy is "purely a matter of religious values ... the opposition between the pure and the impure" (Ibid, p 66). while "territory, power, village dominance, result from the possession of the land" (Ibid, p 153). The caste-system, according to Dumont, "in its nature, is religious, or if one prefers, a matter of ultimate values" (Ibid, p 106). Thus, "by keeping to the level of power, one is prevented from understanding the essential characteristic of the Indian system. This characteristic is the subordination of power" (Ibid, p 76). "Dominants and dependents live under the sway of a system of ideas in which the 'power' aspect we have isolated is in fact encompassed" (Ibid, p 107). Power "is located in a framework of ideas and values, confined within the limits of this framework but distorting it to some extent" (Ibid, p 153). More precisely, it "is force made legitimate by being subordinated hierarchically to the brahman" (loc cit).

Now, the very attempt to ascertain even

if not necessarily pre-judge (Ibid, p 38) "essential and subordinate aspects" in this manner could be regarded as vulnerable to the sort of objections E P Thompson has raised in the opposite direction *vis-a-vis* the Marxist metaphor of base and superstructure.⁴¹ Centrally problematic, however, are the implicit notions of power and ideology in this conception. Because for Dumont the ideological seems to have a purely non-power connotation, or to put it the other way around, power is restricted singularly to the politico-economic sphere. One may, however well ask whether "the plane of ideology" (loc cut or of the religious is really as clean as empty of power as Dumont makes it out to be, What, indeed, happens when a certain mode of religious discourse establishes its dominance over all others and thus governs what are regarded as "ultimate values" in that social situation? Or to express it the other way, how does the "framework of ideas and values" which Dumont emphasises centrally, get constituted, established and hold "sway" in any given social context? Does this not itself entail a relationship of power? Additionally, we must recognise that the effective existence and reproduction of any relationship of power presupposes the simultaneous operation of hegemonic discourse. This would suggest a rather different way of conceiving the nature of the relationship we are trying to understand from the one suggested by Dumont.

Thus, with Michel Foucault we must direct our attention to the implication/impregnation of truth in/with power. We must recognise that in any society, "relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (M Foucault, 1980, p 93). Thus, "in the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power" (Ibid, p 94). And the process of the constitution of "true discourses" Foucault argues, is itself a process of *hierarchisation* and *struggle* and involves the *subjugation* of other discourses which are marginalised in the process (Ibid, pp 81-85).

Within the Marxist tradition, it is Gramsci's conception of hegemony which could help us grapple with our central question.⁴² However, as Raymond Williams has argued, our account of the notion must be a complex one which "allows for its elements of real and constant change. We have to emphasise that hegemony is not singular; in-

deed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified" (R Williams, 1973, pp 37-38).

Thus, when we examine Indian history we must see in the rise to dominance and sustained hegemony of Brahminical discourse, a process of continual contention with and suppression of alternative forms of discursive practice. One must not, however, conceive of suppression in the sense of pure elimination: much more accurately it is seen as a subtle process involving assimilation, incorporation and modification in the face of fresh challenges.⁴³ It needs also to be recognised that the features of the relation of power which we are seeking to understand, found their detailed codification precisely in the Brahminical law books of successive centuries, a virtually unbroken chain of hegemonic discourse. Thus, the disabilities to which the labourers were subjected was a part of the definition of the overall social order that was to be found in these texts, which specified the social function and place of the various *varnas and jatis* within the social order. The ritual aversion of the "higher" *varnas* to defiling manual labour was part of the same codification. At the same time, Brahminical texts indicated the kind of attributes and practices which would be regarded as edifying for those in a position of power. As Nandi has argued,

the avowed purpose of the performance of medieval *dana* rites was to acquire religious merit (*punya*) which would instantly purify *xhijajmana* of the different types of pollution and help him to retain, consolidate and even improve the degree of his ritual purity and his corresponding social status ... these practices enabled him to circumvent many an impure situation and thereby avoid loss of a pure status, and consequently of caste. The loss of caste particularly for those who occupied eminently 'pure' positions in society amounted to a denial of benefits and privileges ordinarily available to persons belonging to the concerned group or caste" (R N Nandi, op cit, p 93).

Ludden (1978, p 109), Spencer (1968) and Stein (1977, pp 19-26) who provide evidence of the support given to *brahmadeyas* and temples by landlords in medieval South India also stress the "religious merit" derived by the latter in the process. But the munificence of the landlords was expected to extend not only to the Brahmins but also to their subordinates. In terms of the dominant discourse, it was obligatory on their part to assure certain customary benefits to their labourers. If they were not to be "disgraced", if they were to retain a certain position of "honour", to be recognised as "worthy" holders of power, the maintenance of what has been termed a "clientele" was absolutely vital for the dominant castes. And to sustain an *effective* "patron-client" relation, to

engender the loyalty of one's clientele, necessitated the existence of these kinds of features in the relationship.⁴⁴

It would, therefore, be a serious error to place the features of these relations on a balance sheet as it were, and attempt, through an arithmo-morphic netting procedure, to gauge the "magnitude" of power involved in these relations. For the crucial fact that must be recognised is that all these features put together *simultaneously constitute* the form of power we are dealing with. The customary privileges of Paraiyans, far from implying, a denial or an alleviation of power, on the contrary, constitute precisely the conditions of possibility of the latter. In terms of the governing discourse one could not exist without the other. The *jajmani* character of the relations is as integrally tied to Brahminism as is the social ostracisation of the Paraiyans. They simultaneously constitute the language of power and truth in the social context we are examining. Thus, we may say as Bourdieu does in his context that "it is as false to identify this essentially *dual* economy with its official reality (generosity, mutual aid, etc), i e, the form exploitation has to adopt in order to take place, as it is to reduce it to its objective reality, seeing mutual aid as a corvee, the *khammes* as a sort of slave" (ibid, p 192).⁴⁵ It is imperative in other words that "the analysis holds together what holds together in practice, the *double reality* of intrinsically *equivocal, ambiguous* conduct" (Ibid, P 179),

Possibly the most evocative illustration of Bourdieu's argument is provided by the annual custom of status-reversal I described earlier. First of all we need to recognise that the ritual does not imply an alleviation or negation of power—it is rather, integrally constitutive of it imbuing it with a distinctive form. Its annual repetition is a necessary dimension of the reproduction of the relationship of power. At the same time, however, the situation must not be shorn of its essential ambiguity in the near-functional interpretation of these rituals as necessarily some kind of "safety-valve devices". For the "successful" completion of a ritual of status-reversal cannot always be taken for granted. Its outcome depends crucially upon a variety of contingent factors which constitute its setting-factors governing, broadly, the degree of social tension within which the ritual occurs. Indeed in the very necessity of its annual repetition lies the indication of the enduring possibility of the relationship being challenged, even overthrown. Thus, to be true to its intrinsic "double reality", we must acknowledge that a ritual of status-reversal in a hierarchical social context, which may generally operate as a mechanism for the reproduction of the relations of power, could also, on occasion, become the site for their overthrow.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

The point of departure for this paper was the discussion on the mode of production in Indian agriculture. Its main concern was to suggest that owing to the adoption of a fairly crude Eurocentric model, the debate seems to have got bogged down in a series of false problematics, with a number of extremely important questions getting neglected in the process. The paper has attempted to chart only a bit of the way in bringing to the fore just one such question. I argued at the beginning that the study of the qualitative transformation in the nature of the relationship between agricultural labourers and their employers, following capitalist penetration in India, is an important task as yet largely unattempted. Such a study, however, requires as its basis an understanding of the nature of this relationship in the pre-colonial era. I have tried in this paper to move towards such an understanding in a small area in pre-colonial and early colonial India.

Let us, then, attempt a summary of the key features of *kaniatchi* form of labour that emerge from the account given in the paper. To begin with, let us note that the relationship was generally always between male Vellala, Brahmin or some other "high-caste landlords (who themselves never laboured on land) and Paraiyan labourers. These landlords formed a collective which governed the village and controlled the village land through its ownership of the *mirasi* shares. The collectivity was extensively evident in the collective holding of the *kaniatchi* right, in the periodic redistribution of land, in the collective management of the affairs of the village by the *mirasidars* (the absence of a village headman) and in the collective obligation to pay land-revenue. It could also be discerned in the way the Village Register specified the precise allocation of village land to different uses and the share of each participant in the village output—neither of these being alterable without collective sanction. Again the transfer of the *kaniatchi* right could occur only under stringent, collectively specified conditions. Finally, the power of the collective shows in the process through which a defaulting *mirasidar* could be divested of his right by the body of shareholders.

The scope of the *mirasi* right extended to a right over the labour of the Paraiyans in proportion to the extent of one's share. Paraiyan labourers were attached to these shares through generations and were bought, sold and mortgaged as and when the share was. The *mirasidars* exercised an extremely comprehensive control over the life and labour of the Paraiyans and their families. In a sense, the *mirasidars* represented for their labourers a nodal point for several dimensions of their relations with the rest of the world. The remarkably unmediated, detailed, personal, even corporeal relation-

ship of the *mirasidars* to their labourers served as the vital mediation for the relationship of the latter with the outside world. The *mirasidars'* presence was felt everywhere at work, in providing subsistence, at the most important social occasions in the life of the labourers' families, at the time of major disputes or in any larger matter concerning the village as a whole—an omnipresence which makes their being designated *swami* by their labourers fairly suggestive. The involvement of the labourers was also wide-ranging: in general, the entire family would share in duties for the *mirasidars'* households, duties spanning every activity considered ritually admissible. Thus, for both the labourers and the *mirasidars* the relationship spanned several vistas beyond the agricultural labour-process which suggests that it would be an error to regard it merely as a "landowner-labourer" relationship.

One must, finally, note the connection of the form of power involved in this relationship with the dominant Brahminical discourse. This is evident in the existence of this relationship within the moral framework of the *jajmani* system which meant the assurance of certain customary, hereditary rights for the labourers, most importantly subsistence and employment. It is also reflected in the range of social disabilities to which the Paraiyans were subject as a consequence of their occupying the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy.

The descriptions of this paper have, of course, been limited to a very small region, while these relations showed a great diversity of forms across regions in India which still await detailed study. This emphasis on variations within the country should not, however, be construed to imply a kind of empiricism which ultimately degenerates into saying that every village was different. Most certainly one can conceive of a process of typological synthesis taking off from these variations.⁴⁷ The richness of this synthesising movement, however, would depend crucially on the availability of detailed region-wise studies, unblinkered by dogmatic adherence to inappropriate unifiers and sensitive to the specificities of the situation being examined. Chingleput and *kaniatchi* should hopefully become, and are best seen as, elements in this synthesising effort.

Appendix

DEED OF SALE OF KANIATCHI RIGHT

In the year Sarvari of the cycle of sixth, following the year 1642 of the era of Salivahana (AD 1720), on Sunday the 21st of A'ni, under the lunar constellation Barani, on the day this *Sasanam* was written: Arjuna Mudeli, the son of Rakiyappa Mudeli, one of the Mudelis of Tandeyarpeta, and his parceners, in the Nayeru Nadu, the Puzhel *Cotam*, in Ibdamandalam acquired by con-

quest, in the Kingdom of Chandragiri pronounces Om! Having proclaimed aloud in public auction—Are there any who will purchase one-third of my *Caniyatchi*, being one of the ten shares of the village of Tbndeyarpeta, including *Manei*^a, *Nttam*,^b *Puiam*,^c *Nir*,^d *Collei*^e *Topu/ Turavu*,^s *Kinaru*,^h *Cam-peru*,ⁱ *Cani-manyam* *Checcu-mut-teri*,^k *Tarei-cadameiJ Pura-cheri*, and *Tider Pareiyar*,^o *Pizhacadei*,^o and all other privileges whatsoever?"—The words thus proclaimed were heard by Surappen, the son of Tiruvellapillei Malayappa Mudeliyar of Connur of the *Nadu* of Ambattur, of this *Cotam* and *Mandalam*, who answered, saying aloud—"I will purchase."—I, Arjunen, the proclaimed the son of Rakiyappa Mudeliyar of the Gotram of Mayilakizhan, and the answerer Surappen, the son of Maleiyappa Mudeliyar, having agreed between ourselves and settled to our mutual satisfaction, in the presence of rulers of the land and householders of Tondeiyarpeta, sold one-third of my one share out of the ten, with the grounds, lands, fields, homestead, water, plantations, large wells, small wells, the rights of inheritance and rent-free lands thereto belonging, dues from oil presses, and the *Pareiyar of the suburbs and the plains*, hackyards and all other privileges whatsoever, thereto appertaining for 50 new Pagodas of Madras, and received the full amount of this the settled price; for the second time, and the third time, this is the price, this is the established price, so it has been fixed, and I have decidedly received the full amount. The one-third of my share, it is ground, land, fields, waters, homestead, plantations, large and small wells, the rights of inheritance and rent free lands, dues from oil presses, and looms, the *Pareiyer of the suburbs and plains*, backyards, and all privileges appertaining thereunto, you are to enjoy, you and your descendants lineally, as long as the sun and moon endure. There is no claim to the one-third of my share: if it be thought that there is any, I will stand forth and bring it to a decision. You are entitled to sell, transfer, mortgage, and to bestow as a gift, or in charity, the ground, fields, waters, homestead, plantations, large and small wells, the rights of inheritance, and the rent free lands thereto belonging, the dues from oil presses and looms, the *Pareiyer of the suburbs and the plains* and backyards, and all privileges appertaining thereunto—Thus with my free consent I have executed this deed of sale. Arjunen, the son of Rakiyappa Mudeli, and his parceners, agreeing with Surappen, the son of Maleiyappa Mudeli, pronounced Om:- All blunders in this deed arising from the quality of the *cad-jan*; errors in writing, mistakes in words, and interlineations, and from its being cut, split, or worm-eaten, from erasements, or breaks are not to be regarded.

Witnesses: PU'D'UR PREYA CATCHI YAPPA MUDELIYA'R, CANNUR

NAMASIVAYA MUDELLVR NAIYINI-YAPPA MUDELIYAR, POYAD VIRARA GAVA MUDELIYAR

With the knowledge of these the integrity of this writing is attested by the signature of Pudaven, the son of Guruva Pillei, the Village Accountant.

(Signed) Varadappen, the son of Rakiyappa Mudeliyar, Tiya' Gappen, the son of Toppei Mudeli, Tiya' Gappen, the son of CuIIa Mudeli, Nallen, the son of Shinnanna Mudeliyar, Periya Muttiyappen, Periya Mudeli, Periya Tambi, Arjunen, Tiya' Gappen, the son of Shinna-tambi Mudeliyar^p

ELLIS' NOTES TO THE DEED

- a *Manei* means here ground as divided or divisible into lots for building, or small enclosures, or the ground forming the site of the *Nattam*, contradistinguished from the rest of the village.
- b *Nilam*, land in general; the whole soil of the village, or that part under tillage in particular years. This word means that which is fixed, permanent, durable.
- c *Pulam*, a field of corn.
- d *Nir*, waters in general, tanks, large and small watercourses, and c, or, as here used, a share in all public water.
- e *Collei* which may be rendered *homestead*, is any small enclosure near the house, the difference between this term and *Pizhacadei*, *backyard*, is that the latter immediately adjoins the dwelling, whereas the *collei* may be at some distance from it.
- f *Topu*, groves, orchards and plantations,
- g *Turavu*, large wells.
- h *Kinaru*, small wells either of brick or earthen rings burnt in the kiln, commonly called *pot-wells*.
- i *Cani-peru*, consequence or dignity derived from the possession of hereditary landed property.
- j *Cani-munyam*, rent-free lands held jointly by the Caniyatchicars as a type of their proprietary right.
- k, I *Checcumuttei*, and *Tarei-cademei*, the first of these terms (*Checcu-muttet*) is derived from *checcu*, an oil press, and *muttei* an egg, and signifies the quantity of an egg-shell full of oil; the second from *lit*, a *weaver's reed*, but used for the whole and *Cademei*, tax, due, fee. The first of these dues is always paid in kind, while the second is paid in money.
- m, n *Paracheri and Tider Pareiyer*; *tider* signifies an open barren space, and the whole sentence, therefore, means the *Pareiyer* who reside in the regular *Paracheri* or suburb set apart for them, and those whose habitations are scattered over the wastes. These terms are intended to comprehend generally the whole of the *Pareiyer* slaves attached to the soil of the village, and to express especially that right to a participation in their labour inherently attached to the one-third share of *Caniyat-chi* transferred.

0 *Pizhacadei*, the back-yard immediately adjoining the houses.

p In this deed the exordium eulogising the Vijayanagar kings with which all such deeds begin, has been omitted.

Notes

[This paper is drawn from the first three chapters of a PhD dissertation "Capitalist Development and the Transformation of Agrarian Relations in Chingleput District, c. 1780-1983" written at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum (M Shah, 1984b).]

- 1 Comprehensive surveys of this discussion are found in J Harris (1980) and A Thorne (1982).
- 2 It may also be pointed out that the model of the differentiation process being used is a highly simplistic one, overlooking as it does the significance of the specificities of the agricultural sphere of production: in particular the implications of the unique use-value characteristics of land which make peasant differentiation a far more complicated process than is usually imagined. I have argued this in detail in a separate paper (M Shah, 1984a) and partly also in M Shah (1984b, Ch 4).
- 3 The presumed identity of starting-points between Europe and India appears to derive at least partly from the proposition that according to Marx, all human societies were destined to pass through the same succession of stages from Primitive Communism to Slavery to Feudalism to Capitalism. In actual fact, Marx criticised attempts to "metamorphose my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into an historico-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself" (K Marx, 1877, in K Marx and F Engels, 1979, pp 272-273). For a severe Marxist criticism of attempts at "transposition of the standard P-S-F-C pattern to every society without exception", see I Habib (1974). In any case Marx's strong opposition to characterising Mughal India as feudal is well-known (See L Krader, 1975, pp 343-412 for Marx's critique of Kovalevsky's attempts in this direction). Marx struggled almost throughout his intellectual life to grapple with the specificities of Asian history. That his conception of the Asiatic Mode of Production has several weaknesses (I Habib, 1974) and that he appears, as Said argues, almost despite himself, to have remained trapped in the hegemonic structure of 'Orientalist discourse', is, of course, yet another matter (see E Said, 1978, pp 153-156).
- 4 It is fairly ironical that at times these criteria are sought to be derived on the basis of something called the "Kautsky-Lenin laws of capitalist development in agriculture", Neither Kautsky nor Lenin claim to have developed such laws. What we find in their work are concrete studies of the process within the specific historical contexts they were examining. Indeed Kautsky appears to warn against precisely such rigid conceptions when he says: "the marxist theory of

capitalist production does not reduce the development of capitalist production to the simple formula: 'disappearance of the small holding before the big', as if such a formula were a key to the understanding of modern economy. To study the agrarian question according to Marx's method, we should not confine ourselves to the question of the future of small scale farming; on the contrary we should look for all the changes which agriculture experiences under the domination of capitalist production. We should ask: *is capital, and in what ways is capital, taking hold of agriculture, revolutionising it, smashing the old forms of production and poverty and establishing the new forms which must succeed*" (K Kautsky, 1899, pp 2-3). For Lenin also the specificity of the historical context carried paramount importance and he emphasised the possibility that the process may take fairly diverse forms: "The essence of the problem of 'the destiny of capitalism in Russia' is often presented as though prime importance attaches to the question: how fast? (i e, how fast is capitalism developing?). Actually, however, far greater importance attaches to the question: *how exactly!* and to the question: *where from!* (i e, what was the nature of the pre-capitalist economic system in Russia?)" (V I Lenin, 1899, p 385).

- 5 This is an essential corrective to studies of the so-called "dependency theorists" which while correctly rejecting transplantation of European teleologies to other historical contexts, tend generally, to ignore the concrete specificities of the latter; and their resistance to capitalist penetration.
- 6 The argument being made here is not against a comparative-historical approach *per se*. It only insists on the specificities of each element in the comparison being recognised in their fullness, so as to prevent the obliteration of the uniqueness of one historical experience by the imposition upon it of another.
- 7 To cite only *one* example, as many as 52 per cent of farm workers in England lived in tied-cottages, even as recently as 1972. The proportion had indeed gone up from the 34 per cent figure in 1954 (H Newby, 1977, P 180).
- 8 Equally problematic, therefore, also is the ideological recourse to models of formal and real subsumption of labour under capital, for understanding non-European experiences, as for example, in M Shah (1980). This is particularly so because the continued significance of land as an element in the production process even in advanced capitalist agriculture implies that the transformations in the agricultural labour-process resist schematisation into the formal-real subsumption frame. In agriculture, unlike in industry, it is virtually impossible to identify a *specifically capitalist* form of the labour-process. These arguments are developed in some detail in M Shah (1984a).
- 9 It could be argued that the way I am proceeding would leave untackled the question of a precise definition of the prevailing

- mode of production. Briefly my response would be to say that modes of production can only be identified through an understanding of their dynamics. This point is well argued in J Banaji (1977). For this, the kind of studies I am suggesting would be essential. It would be useful here to reflect a little on the way Marx "defined" anything, to heed Engels' warning not to "look in Marx for fixed, cut-and-dried definitions that are valid for all time" (Preface to Vol 3 of Capital, K Mane, 1979, p 103), to recognise the connection between Marx's use of language and his view of the world. For a thoughtful discussion on this difficult question, see B Oilman (1971, Pan I). At any rate, one needs to be wary of the facile notions of "precise definition" implicit in the mode of production discussion. The initial chapters of N Georgescu Roegen (1970) greatly helped me to understand this but, of course, little could be better than a careful reading of L Wittgenstein (1968). For one view of the relationship between Marx and Wittgenstein, see D Rubinstein (1981).
- 10 The process through which these castes came to occupy this place as well as the rough ancestry of the process in both North and South India is outlined in M Shah (1984b, Ch 2).
 - 11 A substantiation of these propositions is provided in M Shah (1984b, Ch 4, 5 and 6).
 - 12 I Habib (1983, p 50), T Raychaudhari (1984, p 9) L Dumont (1980, p 102) and B H Baden-Powell (1892, Vol I, pp 149-151)—widely different writers, all attest to the veritable universality of *jajmani* relationships in immediately pre-colonial rural India.
 - 13 This, however, is not the only sense in which I regard a district-level study relevant. Indeed, one of the major conclusions of my Chingleput study is that a limited regional analysis contains the possibility of throwing up new questions which could have significance far beyond its own geographical purview—and that some of these questions could have been brought to light only through such a micro-study.
 - 14 Chingleput is a district on the east coast of South India which surrounds the city of Madras. It corresponds to the area known as the Jaghire which was under the Nawab of Arcot's rule in the mid-18th century and which came under *direct* British rule in 1782. (For details see M Shah, 1984b, p 106). The information on which this paper is based has been collated from historical manuscripts, inscriptions and field-survey reports, some pertaining to the Madras Collectorate also. Many of these were collected and conducted by British administrations in the area during this period. Lionel Place (Collector of Chingleput, 1794-1798). F W Ellis (Collector of Madras 1810-1819) and Colin Mackenzie (Surveyor-General of Madras in the early 19th century) are particularly worthy of mention. Appreciations of Ellis are found in B Hjejle (1967, p 77) and J D M Derrett (1968, pp 258-259). of Place in C S Crole (1879, pp 240-73) and of Mackenzie in T V Mahalingam (ed) (1972, Vol I, pp i-xxii). A comprehensive account of Mackenzie's work is found in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (1834, Vol 1, pp 333-364). Even so I have sought to move with an awareness of the problems underlying an uncritical reliance on what may be described as "Orientalist discourse" (See E Said, 1978).
 - 15 *Kaniatchi*, from the Tamil, '*kani* (or property, possession, right of possession, hereditary right) and *atchi* (or power, domination) (B A Saletore, 1934, Vol II, p 446). As Ludden says, '*kani* "a basic Tamil word for resource control in production also means 'land' a measure of land, and a 'hereditary right' in general, to land, office or position of control over resources" (D E Ludden, 1978, p 172) See also A Appadorai (1936, Vol I, pp 120-21), for an explanation of the term. *Mirasi* from the Arabic, '*mira?* (hereditary right, property, inheritance).
 - 16 From the Tamil '*met* (or upper) and '*varvuf* (share). According to Stein, "the particle *me/* means not only 'higher', 'upper', or 'major' but also 'superior' in the sense of priority of entitlement and 'first' in the sense of that which is taken first" (B Stein, 1980, p 169).
 - 17 This was the case right upto the advent of the British revenue systems, except for a brief period between 1770 and 1780, in a few villages on the south, south-west border, where money assessment on dry fields was introduced by the Nawab of Arcot. What is most remarkable is that even when a money assessment became generalised on all the lands in the Tuluva and Carnatic Provinces of the Vijayanagar empire; this did not happen in Tondaimandalam (an ancient territorial division which includes the modern districts of Chingleput and North Arcot and parts of South Arcot, Nellore and Chittoor), except to some extent in its southern part (which appears to have largely excluded Chingleput) (Replies from F W Ellis, Collector of Madras to the Mirasi Questions, 30th May, 1816, Appendix, footnote 27).
 - 18 *Kudivaram* or share of the 'resident' (or 'cultivator*' in this context). '*Kil* (Tamil-lower), hence lower share' (*kiharam*).
 - 19 These were mainly *ulkudis* (occupancy tenants) or *parakudis* who moved from village to village, their right to cultivate generally being annually renewable.
 - 20 In a footnote, Place adds, "the division could only be made according to the fractions recognised in Tamil arithmetic such as 1/2, 1/4, 1/8, 1/16, 1/32, 1/64, etc, etc. Fractions not forming multiples of one of these could not be *mirasi* shares, and were called *kandamst* or detached pieces which carried no *mirasi* privileges" (loc cit). Place also found that villages of equal area were sometimes divided into an unequal number of shares. He tries to account for both this and the fact of fixed shares by suggesting that the number of shares in each village was fixed at the time of its original settlement and that it varied across villages "according to the number of original settlers, or of labouring servants that they brought with them" (loc cit).
 - 21 This meant of course, that women could never become *mirasidars*. "Women had rights only to maintenance from the land. Unmarried girls lived under the guardianship of their fathers; married women, of their husbands and fathers; and widows of their sons, or if there were no sons, their husbands' closest *dayadis*, or patrilineal kin" (Ibid, p 208). Cough's account relates to the *kaniatchi* system in Thanjavur.
 - 22 From the Tamil '*pasan*' (fair), '*carer* (shares); and '*samudayam*' (undivided or common).
 - 23 Literally in Tamil, 'field-division'. While Gupta bases himself on inscriptional evidence, Sancaraya, the Sheristadar to the Collector of Madras, describes the intervals as 7, 10 or 12 years, from his first-hand experience (Translation of Answers to the Questions enclosed in Secretary Hill's letter to the Board of Revenue, 2nd August 1814 by B Sancaraya, late Sheristadar to the Collector of Madras, Reply to the 12th Question).
 - 24 Tamil, *Arudi-carei* ('final or decisive division'), *paiabhogham* ('divided enjoyment').
 - 25 Tamil, *Manyam* or revenue-fee land and *Varapet* or land paying revenue in kind, shares of output. Of course, the *mirasidars* could and did misuse their position to tamper with the village records. Place cites examples of this in both his 1795 letter and 1799 Report. See M Shah (1984b, p 7).
 - 26 In a footnote Ellis describes how the ceremony would commence with the delivery of gold, the delivery of water, the consent of townsmen, of kindered, of neighbours, of heirs and of the king or of his resident officer (loc cit).
 - 27 A large number of deeds of sales, gifts and mortgages of *mirasi* pertaining to the Chingleput area in the 18th century were collected, translated and catalogued under Ellis' supervision. A careful examination of these reveals the remarkable intricacies involved in the question of the alienation of *mirasi* right, the wide variety of conditions under which so many different kinds of transfers occurred. For details, see M Shah (1984b, pp 74-80). A sample deed of *sate* of a portion of a *mirasi* share (with Mills' font notes) is presented in the Appendix to this paper.
 - 28 Several inscriptions dating from the late 8th century AD onwards provide details of various collective bodies responsible for all important affairs of the village in different parts of South India (K A Nilakanta Sastri, 1932, Ch 3-6; A Appadorai, 1936, Vol I, pp 135-152; B Stein, 1980, Ch 4). Some of the most famous of these inscriptions come from Uttaramerur in Chingleput district (Nilakanta Sastri, op cit, p 100). On the basis of these; Appadorai demonstrates the close connection between the collective form of property and the existence of these committees and shows that a major qualification for their membership was the holding of a *kaniatchi* share in the village (op cit, pp 151-152). The inscriptions indicate the wide range of functions performed by these committees. It may also be noted that Stein in his survey of "locality governance" across the "Chola macro region" finds that "in the central portion of the Kaveri basin and

- Tondaimandalam the *nattar* seemed to operate as an assembly without a tingle, local, exclusive crnef (B Stein, 1980, p 110). (Elsewhere *nadu* chieftainships prevailed). The *natter* generally comprised the dominant Vcilala landed strata of the *nadu*. They "classified and registered lands within the locality and took prime responsibility for effecting changes in the distribution of income from cultivated land" (loc cit). They were the ones who received and executed royal orders.
- 29 "Whatever estate a man may possess in money in countries above mentioned, the holding of *Mirasu* is always considered as more honourable by the people. The *Mirasudar* looks on himself as entitled to direct the affairs of the village, to stand forward on all occasions when the affairs' of the *Sircar* are in discussion, and to receive any *Tasrif* given by it, and the pre-eminence thus claimed is allowed him by others" (Sancaraya, op cit, Reply to the 15th Question). Sancaraya explains the term *Tasrif* as "honorary presents at the time of forming annual settlements" (loc cit).
- 30 I have made an attempt, albeit somewhat approximate, to estimate the share of the state and the distribution of the remaining village produce among different participants in the village economy (M Shah, 1984b, pp 65-66) which supports this claim quantitatively
- 31 Tamil, Tundu a piece cut off, a bit, portion.
- 32 "The eight incident of ownership in land are stated in the following Sanscrit verse—
0) *Nidhi* (2) *Nikshipa* (3) *Pashanam* (4) *Siddha* (5) *Sadhya* (6) *Jalamvitem* (7) *akshiny* (8) *agame samiyuktam ashta-bhoga samam- vitam*. (1) treasure trove (2) property deposited in land not claimed by another (3) mountains, rocks, and their contents, mines, minerals, etc (4) all land, etc, yielding produce (5) all produce from each land, etc (6) rivers, tanks, wells and all other waters (7) all privileges actually enjoyed (8) all privileges which may be conferred; these are expressed by the general term *ashta-bhogam*, the eight rights enjoyed by the owner of land⁰ (Ibid, Reply to the 12th Question, footnote).
- 33 Although somewhat less common, there were some labourers who were held by *mirasidars* independently of the *kaniatchi* share. These labourers who mainly did agricultural work could be bought and sold independently of the share. The most common form of this kind of transfer traditionally seems to have been of whole families of labourers called *coiiu-adumai* (R Naidu, 1834). It is, however, very difficult to say what proportion either form of labour constituted or whether any other form was also important.
- 34 This suggests the existence of a "subsistence ethic" or the notion of "subsistence as the fundamental right", a feature the *kaniatchi* agrarian system appears to have shared with several other pre-capitalist societies all over the world (J Scott, 1976, p 176). The existence of this ethic in the context of the caste-system, however, imbues the *kaniatchi* relations with a certain specificity. This argument is developed below.
- 35 Indeed, a Paraiyan's knowledge of village boundaries is said to have been highly regarded. There was apparently a custom "of making a Paraiyan walk the boundaries of a field with a pot of water on his head, when there is any dispute about their exact position" (E Thurston, 1909, Vol 6, p 86).
- 36 Ultimately, however, the point is not merely that in terms of a number of elements Europe was different from India. Much more crucially we must recognise (a) that even societies which at a certain moment in history exhibit somewhat similar characteristics could be involved in essentially different dynamics and trajectories and (b) that even very similar elements could add up to very different systems in different historical contexts.
- 37 Possibly the *utkudis*, who were tenants holding occupancy rights, would come closest to such a description. The several problems in so describing them should, however, be apparent. It is only after the British introduced the *raiayatwari* system in this area that one can really speak of peasant proprietorship.
- 38 See, e.g. H Orenstein (1962) for a more moderate revision of Wiser's position (in terms of mitigation rather than negation of power). Such notions of mitigation/alleviation of power are found even in the writings of those who otherwise appear to have a fairly subtle appreciation of the nature of *jajmani* relations (J fireman, 1974, p 20 and K Gough, 1960, pp 90-91).
- 39 Not that bourgeois domination in any actual situation is ever purely "economic" or so blatantly expressed either. It is often overlooked that there is a very specific system of values, "a moral order" so to speak, that characterises relationships even in a capitalist society; and that it is an order that is as *historically limited* as capitalism itself. Once this is recognised, i.e., once a conception of "human nature" as an eternal given is rejected, domination associated with non-bourgeois ideologies should not occasion too much wonder or invocations of irrational behaviour. On the contrary, one could perhaps say that capitalist domination should itself become an object evoking a somewhat greater degree of astonishment than it usually does!
- 40 The discussion here concentrates on South India. For the North, R S Sharma (1980a) and others have brought out the significance of the phenomenon of land-grants to Brahmins. All over India this was a major mechanism for drawing tribal groups into the ambit of caste-society (see especially R S Sharma, 1980b, Appendix II and B Stein, 1980, p 84). R N Nandi (1979-80) describes the growth in significance of *dona* rites in rural North India from around the 6th century AD, which were performed by Brahmins who were supported by the dominant landowners.
- 41 See footnote 42 below, although one must recognise that Dumont's is not a model of determination.
- 42 A series of suggestive remarks on the notion can be found in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks (see A Gramsci, 1971, especially "Notes on Italian History", "The Modern Prince" and "State and Civil Society"). I have relied heavily on the interpretation in R Williams (1973). One of Williams' major aims here and in several other writings (see especially R Williams, 1977, pp 75-82) is to argue that adherence to the 'base, superstructure metaphor' is a serious problem in Marxist approaches to culture and ideology. At the same time he stresses the need for any materialist approach to culture to recognise the *materiality* of the process of cultural production. The strongest Marxist critique of the use of this metaphor is however, found in the work of E P Thompson. As Thompson says, "this metaphor from constructional engineering ... must in any case be inadequate to describe the flux of conflict, the dialectic of a changing social process" (E P Thompson, 1965, p 79). More fundamentally, he questions "the notion that it is possible to describe a mode of production in "economic" terms, leaving aside as secondary (less "real") the norms, the culture, the critical concepts around which this mode of production is organised ... No agrarian system could be continued for a day without complex concepts of rights of use and access and ownership: where are we to put such concepts—in a "basis" or a "superstructure"? Where are we to put customs of inheritance—patrilinear or matrilinear, partible or impartible—which are tenaciously transmitted in non-"economic" ways and yet which profoundly influence agrarian history? Where are we to put the customary rhythms of work and of leisure (or festival) of traditional societies, rhythms intrinsic to the very act of production and yet which are often ritualised, whether in Hindu or Catholic societies, by religious institutions and according to religious beliefs? There is no way in which I find it possible to describe the puritan or Methodist work-discipline as an element of the "superstructure" and then put work itself in a "basis" somewhere else" (E P Thompson, 1977, pp 261-62). In the Indian context, the problems posed for the metaphor by the caste system are brought out in M Shah (1984b).
- 43 An account of this process is, of course, way beyond the scope of this paper. The breaking down of this hegemonic position of Brahminical discourse has been a major thrust of the non-Brahmin movements of the last hundred years or so. It is encouraging to note that Talal Asad in his recent writings has proposed an approach to religion which comes very close to the one being suggested here (see T Asad, 1983a and 1983b).
- 44 Lest any misunderstanding may arise, I would like to clarify that what I have said so far does not amount to an explanation for the existence of certain features in these relationships, i.e., I am not arguing, for instance, that "this was the form of power because Brahminism was dominant"? For this would obviously beg such questions as "Why was Brahminism dominant?", "Why did post-tribal Indian society taken on a caste character?", etc All I have attempt-

ted is a demonstration of the connection between the dominance of Brahminical discourse and certain features of these relationships. Indeed, I really wonder what kinds of answers can be proposed to such questions. Beyond stating what may be called their "negative determinants" or conditions which set the limits to the range of possible outcomes, I think one can only try to the extent possibly to describe how these processes occurred. A materialist interpretation of history could usefully take off from the proposition that "the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life" (Engels to Bloch, September 1890), while recognising that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" (Marx's 6th thesis on Feuerbach, in K Marx, 1975, p 423). One would then study the conditions of reproduction of the various existing social relations, their breakdown and transformation, always remembering that any relation of power involves a process of struggle. But I doubt very much if any general law asserting the primacy of "economic" factors can be sustained. For a fascinating account of Marx's concept of determination, see D Elson (1979).

- 45 Bourdieu is here describing the relationship between masters and *khammes* (share-croppers) in rural Algeria in the 1950s, a major difference between which and caste society is the much more rigidly hierarchical character of the latter. Even so many of his observations carry force in our context too. It may be noted that Bourdieu's use of 'dual economy' is to be sharply distinguished from its use in development economics literature.
- 46 This is a rather compressed account of a much more elaborate argument in M Shah (1984b, pp 97-101) where I bring out the significance of *liminality* in understanding such rituals, drawing upon van Gennep (1977), V Turner (1969), N Z Davis (1975) and H G Gadamer (1975) among others. R Guha (1983, pp 30-36) contains an interesting review of evidence on these rituals from various parts of the world.
- 47 For instance, we have evidence for the existence of the *kaniatchi* form of property from Thanjavur, Tirunelveli, Tiruchirapalli, Ramnad, Salem and North and South Arcot (B Hjejlje, op cit, pp 86-87 and B J Murtton, 1973, pp 169-70). The *bhaiachara* villages of North-West Provinces and Punjab (B H Baden Powell, 1892, Book III, Part I, Ch 2 and Part IV, Ch 2), and the *narva* or *bhagdari* villages of Gujarat (Ibid, Book IV, Part II, Ch 2) exhibit strikingly similar features. In any case the *jajmani* system is an extremely suggestive, partially unifying framework.

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Asea

ASEA has received its first contract from NTPC for high voltage direct current (HVDC) equipment. This is the first such project in the country for the construction of a complete back-to-back converter station. It is scheduled to enter into service at the beginning of 1988. According to Man tosh Sondhi, Chairman, the 500 MW converter station is intended to interconnect, without any transmission, the 400 KV grids of the northern and western regions. The converter station will be built in the Vin dhyachal, close to the border between UP and MP. Although in the first contract the role which the company has to play is somewhat limited, it is bound to grow in the future in an area which is technologically most advanced. The company is also actively engaged in formulating several plans for expansion and diversification. Of these, the decision to manufacture medium voltage SF6 and vacuum breakers in the Switchgear Division at Nasik will help it to maintain its market share in the power industry. Circuit breakers and other apparatus for extra high voltage upto 420 KV will be taken up for manufacture in the next phase of expansion at Nasik. The company has also been receiving several interesting enquiries for the supply of induction melting furnaces and suitable arrangements have been made to fabricate these furnaces locally with active assistance of ASEA, Sweden, with whom a revised formal collaboration agreement has been proposed and is pending with the government for approval. Consolidation and expansion of the Electronic Division's activity at Bangalore is also being actively pursued. Besides, active steps are being taken to develop the necessary engineering and project management capabilities within the area of power transmission technology, a field which will receive increased importance in the next five-year plan.