

CHAPTER III

THE CASTE STRUCTURE IN DARBHANGA AND SIKRIN

The Nepalese Caste History : A Brief Sketch

The beginning of the Nepalese caste history is as disputable as the beginning of the caste system as such in India. There are scholars (Pillai 1959, Senart 1970) who believe that the caste system existed in India even before the Vedic period. Senart (ibid : 129), for example, writes that the Aryans during the Vedic period introduced the 'varna' system in India in which the pre-existing castes were inserted. Pillai (ibid : 42) reiterates this idea but adds that during the Vedic period the varna system was still based on 'action' and not on 'birth' or 'heredity'. Bose (1975 : 116-17) also comments that the division of labour into cultivator, warrior, mason, blacksmith etc. was there but whether it was hereditary is difficult to say.

The heavy past of the caste history does not help much in the present analysis but it is not totally irrelevant either. It does throw some light on the relative degree of mutual exclusiveness within and among the different castes today. The study of Shih (1973), for example, shows that despite economic and educational backwardness the Kshatriyas were still found keen on preserving their traditional caste status.

The caste system in India seems to have developed during the several hundred years of the Aryan rule. The traditional caste structure which enjoyed the administrative patronage continued even after the Aryan rule. A disruption in the system occurred

during the major Muslim invasion in India (14th century), when a large number of Hindu refugees fled over to Nepal. They were the ones to introduce the caste system in Nepal (Lachanra 1971 : 12, Northey and Morris 1974 : 133, Lista 1976 : 3, Wright 1977 : 26, Pradhan 1978 : 695).

These emigrants from India brought the local tribes into the caste-fold by converting them into Hindus. The Gurungs and the Magars who lived on their path were the first to be converted. These two tribes are supposed to have accepted Hinduism in toto while other tribes like the Rais, Limbus and the Sunwars are found to have accepted it only partially (Northey and Morris op cit : 136). It has also been mentioned (HMSO, 1965 : 63) that most of the Rais, Limbus, Magars and Gurungs accepted Hinduism as a fashion only to get the ruling class's favour. Even among the Magars and Gurungs the influence of Hinduism was confined to the reverence for cow and respect for Brahmin. Animism still features significantly among them. Such a phenomenon may have been a result of the clear discrimination on the basis of caste in Nepal. Though, Nepal government announced in February, 1962 (Devkota, 1979:38) that no discrimination (specially in the enlistment of soldiers) would be made on the basis of caste, religion and language, caste biasness in such activities is still persistent (Gaije 1975: 157-60).

It may also be noted here that before the Hindu colonisation in Nepal the caste system was virtually non-existent there though some of the tribes practised endogamy (Lachanra op cit: 23). The tribes who were in Nepal before the Hindus

went there were the Newars, Kols, Limbus, Magars, Gurungs, Sonuwars, Tharus, etc. and they professed different types of religion broadly and bluntly known as 'animism'.

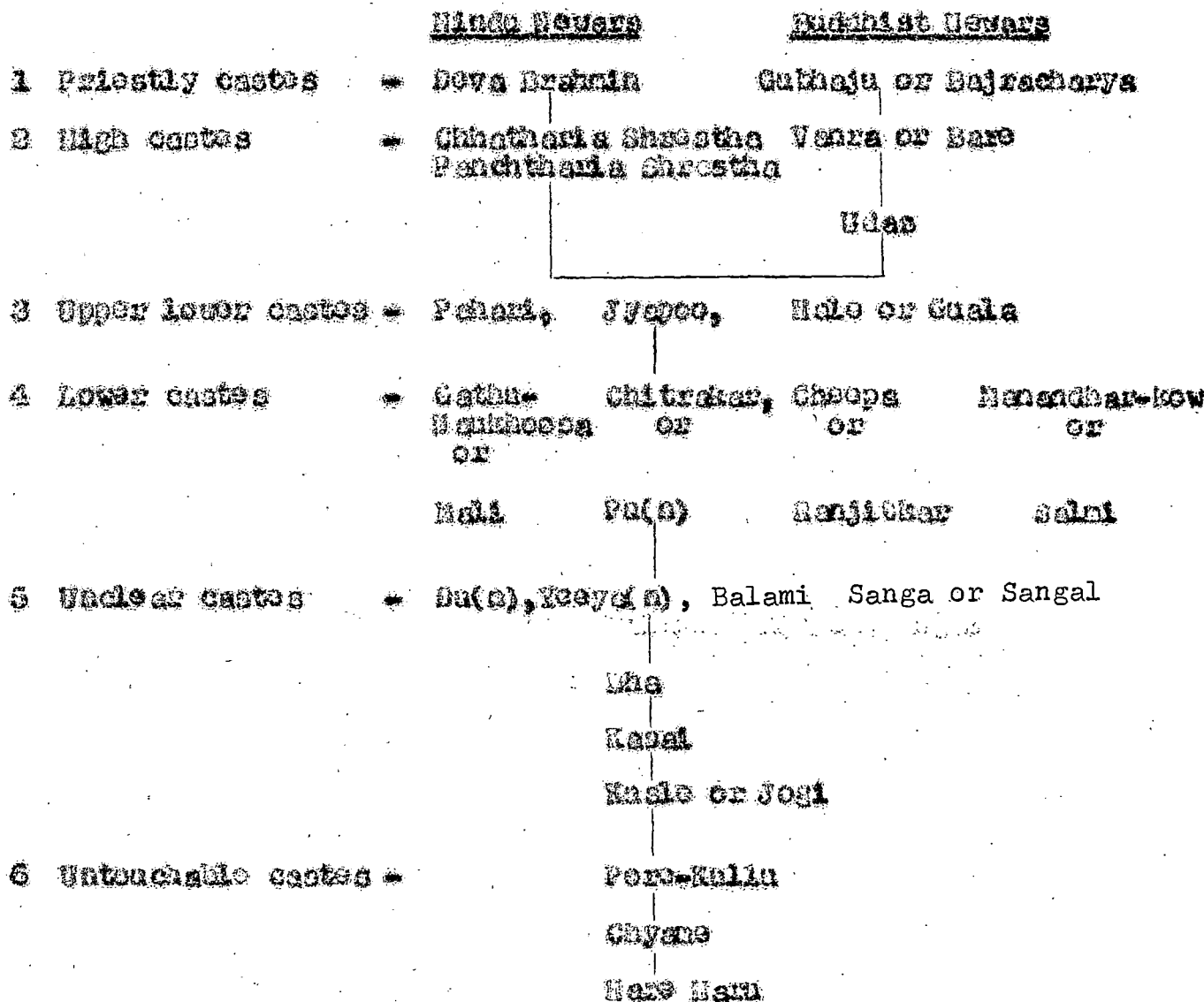
Newars and the Nepalese caste history

The Newars should be given a special attention in any discussion on the Nepalese caste history. It is oft-written that they are the oldest inhabitants of Kathmandu valley. At present they are broadly known as one of the middle castes but traditionally they did not belong to one caste or community but a nation and all the inhabitants of Kathmandu valley were known as Newars (Nepali 1965, Regmi 1969). They were first brought into the legal code of caste during the 14th century by King Jayasthiti Malla who, with the help of some Indian Brahmins, organised the society into 4 varnas and 64 castes (Nepali *ibid* : 146). The chief criteria for such ranking were hereditary occupation, marriage circles and ceremonial purity. Each caste had to follow a set of rules and regulations regarding occupation and other social and ritual matters (*ibid* : 147).

The Newar caste structure, as it is seen below, was as detailed as any Hindu caste structure in India. The occupational distribution also was as wide as the Hindu caste structure had. They had their own priests, artisans and untouchable castes.

The caste structure of the Newars then stood as follows.

Chart 1. Newari Caste structure in Nepal until 1769



source : Nepali 1985 : 150.

Note : The castes on horizontal lines are of same status.

The above chart shows that the Newari caste structure was broadly divided into six categories and the distinction between the Hindu and the Buddhist Newars did not exist below

the high castes. Nepali (op cit : 149) writes, however, that the above picture is only tentative and may be disputed from a particular caste's viewpoint. For example, it is believed (ibid : 133) that the Udas representing the Buddhist section held the highest rank in the valley during when the varnas were ascetics. Such disputes regarding a formal position in the ritual hierarchy of caste is found among the Nepalese society of Nepal, India and other societies also.

The above structure of the Newar's society existed in the valley for about four centuries. It was only in 1769 that the Newari caste structure received a death blow from the Gurkha conquerors who invaded the valley and superimposed their own caste structure on that of the Newars. They established their own Brahmins and Kshatriyas and inserted the Gurungs and the Magars as 'double order' in between the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas. On secular grounds the high caste Newars were regarded by them as the counterparts of their Vaisyas but on ritual grounds they were regarded as Shudras (Nepali op cit : 147-48).

Thus, formerly the parallel caste structure of the Newars and the Indian Hindus existed until the conquest of the valley in 1769. The shape of the Nepalese caste structure after 1769 has been depicted in the following chart.

Chart 2. Caste structure in Nepal after 1750 ✓

<u>Varna</u>	<u>Caste</u>
Brahman	Upadhyaya, Kumbal, Jaisi and Deva Bhaju (Newar)
Kshatriya	Thakuri, Shhetri, Khatri.
<u>Double order</u>	Newar and Gurung.
Valiya	Newar high castes.
Shudra	Limb, Rai, low caste Newars, Ansuars, Muzis, Thamis etc.
Untouchable	Nepali (Kari, Sarki and Dandi) and Newari untouchables (Chyano, Pore).

Source : Nepali 1965 : 142.

Despite the establishment of a new caste order including both the Gurkhas and the Newar caste structures, the internal caste hierarchies of the both continued. The existence of a large number of Buddhists within the Newari caste fold was never an obstacle to the smooth functioning of their caste system in Nepal (Rossier 1966). Rossier's study shows, however, that the caste structure was more rigid where the Hindu-Buddhist contact was shallow and new but flexible in areas where such a relationship was deep and old.

The caste structure in Nepal was initially very strictly maintained as it received the government patronage. Caplan (1970 : 73-74) also notes that hypogamous marriages were regarded as a violation of the caste strictures as well as the legal code. Inter-marriages were virtually absent and social interaction was minimum. Invitations for marriage and funeral

ceremonies used to be confined to a single caste group. Customary rules were also strictly followed by the ritually superior castes and a violation of the same was followed by social ostracism and a difficulty in getting the spouses for marriage.

Caste Structure in Darjeeling and Sikkim

As far as I am aware of not a single book has been so far written on the caste structure in Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. This study finds that the caste structure of Nepal has undergone many changes in this region due to changes in the class position of the immigrants and also the contact with the non-caste and non-Hindu peoples like the Lepchas and the Bhutias. It is also found that the initial colonisation of the villages was more or less by individual castes but gradually the villages became multi-caste in nature. In the process, the caste relations were bound to change though the ritual hierarchy has remained more or less unchanged.

In Nepal, the rigid caste structure had a legal back-up for many years but in India specially in the region under study no such evidence has been recorded. But the old villagers still recall that the caste structure was quite strictly maintained in the earlier days even in this region. It is reported, for example, that the low castes or the untouchables had to go much below the road and say Janai whenever they came across a higher caste member. Failure to observe this duty would mean punishment of various nature depending on the decision of the villagers. The

higher caste members did not like the sight of an untouchable early in the morning because they believed that this would bring ill-luck to them for the whole day. But no record of caste penchayats, as found in many parts of India earlier and till now, could be traced in Darjeeling and Sikkim.

The relationship of the Hindu castes and the non-Hindus like the Lepchas has always been a bit different from the one among the Hindus themselves. The Lepchas, for example, call themselves Pittoley Dhamra, lexically meaning 'copper pot' but symbolically, a caste which has no caste colour or affiliation. They are acceptable to all castes and vice versa. But, of late, they are found more hesitant to accept the untouchables like the Khasis, Sarkis and the Dhanis as freely as they probably did earlier. One such incident was observed in a marriage ceremony held in Tasek village during March, 1932 at Dap Ishering Lepcha's house. One of the sisters of Dap Ishering's wife was married with a Dhanal of Pedong. Being a Christian, he could not avoid a formal ceremony held at his house but the Lepcha villagers attending the ceremony were found condemning the girl (a Rai Christian) for marrying a Dhanal boy. This may be partly attributed to the influence of their Hindu neighbours.

The caste structure in Darjeeling and Sikkim may be roughly presented in the following chart (Chart 3).

Chart 3. Caste Structure in Dargleoling and Alkipin

<u>Status</u>	<u>Caste</u>	<u>Traditional occupation</u>
<u>High</u>	Bahun	Priests
	Thakuri	aristocrats
	Chhetri	warriors
	Newar	business
	Rai, Limbu, Yakkha	agriculturists ✓
<u>Middle</u>	Chuang	shepherds
	Tamang	horse traders
	Magar, Thami	agriculturists ✓
	Bhujel	slaves, basket weavers
	Jogi	horn blowers
	Yolma	paper-makers
<u>Low</u>	Kami	ironsmiths
	Dami	musicians, tailors
	Sarti	cobblers

* castes having horizontal status.

The above chart needs a brief discussion here. So far as the caste hierarchy is concerned the Thakuris are ranked below the Bahuns and the Chhetris below the Thakuris. These three castes together constitute the 'high' castes. These are also known as twice-born or 'twice born' castes and wear the sacred threads. The middle castes have a horizontal status and accept themselves of the same status* though a few of them

* Thus Dettelle (1977:60) rightly contends that caste is not only hierarchical but also cogentary.

like the Gurungs and the Magars at times claim a higher status among the middle castes. They are collectively known as Matwali Jat or 'drinking castes' but this term is a misnomer today because there are many drinking caste members who do not drink while many among the high castes do it. For example, there are many Limbus in Kalimpong who follow a religion locally known as Erangani Dharma and do not take drinks at all but many others who do not profess this religion also do not do so. Rieta (1976, 3-4) writes that in Nepal also there are many Khas or Chhetri people in Jumla, Tribhuvan, Harila, Baga, Dailikh, etc. who do not wear sacred thread and are known as matwali jats. Among the low castes the Kami rank in the top, the Sarkis in the middle and the Dalais in the bottom but it is also often reported that the Kami and the Sarkis are of ritually the same status.

The matter regarding the traditional occupation is also disputable. The traditional occupation of the Bahun caste has been supposed to be priesthood but as a matter of fact only the Upashyaya Bahuns (who are superior to the Jaisi Bahuns) are entitled to practice this profession. The Jaisi Bahuns are not entitled to this profession which is mistakenly regarded common of all Bahuns. The Chhetris are regarded as the warriors but it is a well known fact that the British and the Indian army did not recruit them unless they changed their title and adopted some other titles belonging to the middle castes. It is recorded (Hodgson op cit : 40) that the British had disfavoured the enlistment of the Chhetris, specially after the mutiny of 1857, due to their Brahmanical prejudices. Instead (Majumdar op cit : 9) the Magars and Gurungs were the most sought after, for their

superiority, in the British army.

The traditional occupation of the Jrovers is said to be business but as mentioned above they constituted a 'nation' and not a 'caste' and had a detailed division of occupations within themselves. They had high, middle, low and untouchable castes among themselves with separate and exclusive occupations. Among other middle castes also the traditional occupations in fact cannot be clearly delineated. This is not entirely untrue of the low castes also because all the members of these castes possibly could not manage their living with their traditional occupation even in the earlier period.

Despite such controversies in classifying the various castes of the Nepalese society a three-tier classification has been adopted here for analysis. There are a few distinctive features of each caste group, which make the classification meaningful. All the high castes wear or are supposed to wear sacred threads and have Aryan features and mostly fair in looks. The middle castes do not wear any sacred thread and mostly belong to the Mongoloid race and are yellowish in complexion. The low castes also do not wear sacred thread but have Aryan features and most of them have black complexion. Moreover, they are known to be 'Scheduled Castes' officially and can be easily identified in a particular village. Even culturally this broad classification stands to a good extent. The high and the low castes are more religious type than the middle castes who being originally tribes do not have an equal degree of inclination towards Hindu religion or for that matter even

caste practices. These features will be clearer in the course of discussion here.

In Nepal, the Newars still have their intra-caste status differences rather strictly maintained and the Bhujols or the Ghartis still enjoy a very low status because they were slaves, till early twentieth century. In Darjeeling and Sikkim on the other hand, the Newars have been, irrespective of their intra-caste status differences, accepted comparatively as one of the middle castes.

Unlike in Nepal where they still speak in their own language, they have adopted 'Nepali' as their mother tongue in Darjeeling and Sikkim though a few kin terms like 'Ajā' for grandfather, 'Aji' or grandmother and 'Tato' or sister are still used. They probably had to forgo their intra-caste differences as a cultural necessity to adapt to the new environment. The Bhujols also enjoy the same status as any other middle caste in Darjeeling and Sikkim. Moreover, the legal code of India has always been trying to dissolve the caste structure. Examples may be cited here of the Sattva Abolition during the British regime and the legal denouncement of caste under article 17 of the Indian constitution.

The caste structure in Darjeeling and Sikkim has been studied here mainly on the basis of consensual, marital and agrarian relations. The agrarian relations among the various castes and caste groups have been discussed in the 6th Chapter. This chapter confines itself to the discussion on consensual and marital relations in the five villages only.

Caste and Commensal Relations

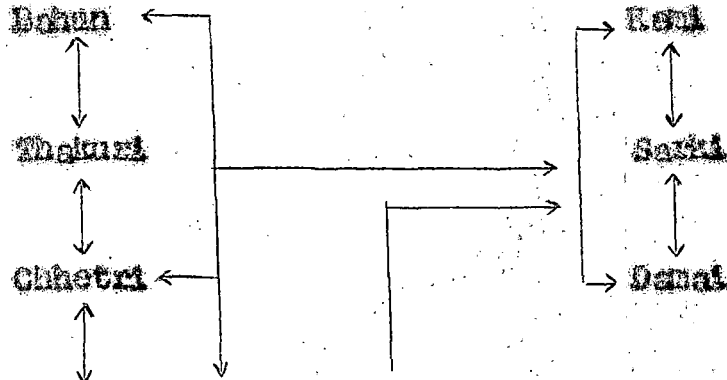
Regarding commensal relations it may be mentioned at the outset that in every village caste clusters can be seen quite conspicuously but such clusterings are not necessarily a reflection of the caste rigidity. In fact, in many places and villages it was found that these were evolved out of the gradual splitting of the joint families into nuclear families and the division of land among the members of a particular lineage from generation to generation. However, it is also true partially that such clusterings have helped the different castes and communities to maintain some amount of caste exclusiveness in respect of commensal relations.

From the commensal point of view, all the Nepalese castes can be grouped into two classes - pani chel ne jat or 'caste from which water can be taken' and pani na chel ne jat or 'caste from which water cannot be taken'. This classification was surprisingly found the same in all the villages studied. This classification of the castes on the basis of the commensal rules may be presented in the following chart (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Caste Relations regarding 'water'.

Pani chel na jat

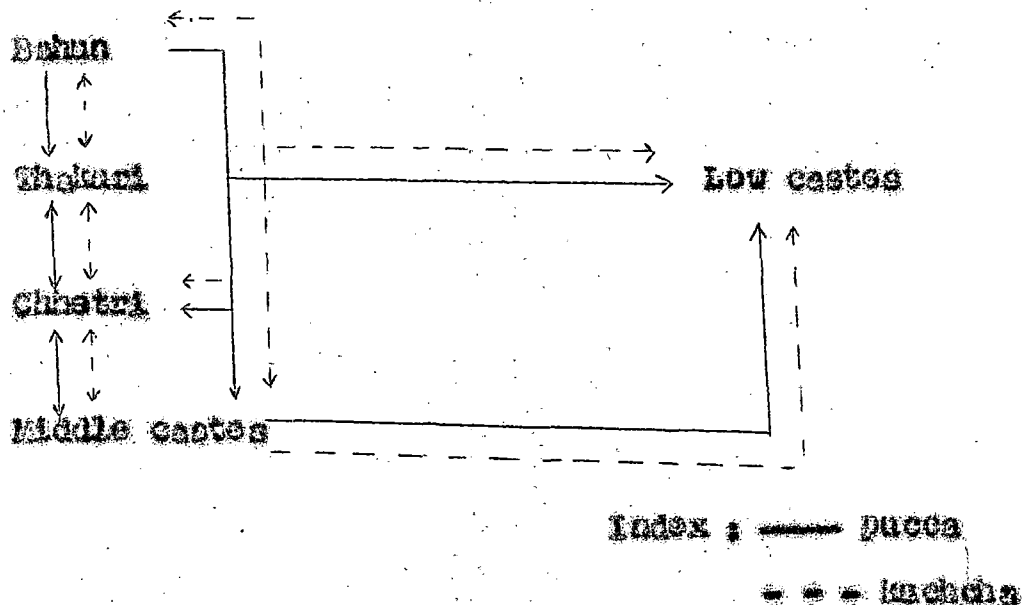
Pani na chel na jat



Hewar, Rai, Limbu, Yakkis, Garung,
 Tamang, Magar, Jogi, Bhujel, Yolma,
 Thami, Sunwar, Sherpa etc.

The low castes like Kami, Sanki and Damai are pani na chel jat because the high and the middle castes do not take 'water' from their hands. The high castes are regarded along with the middle castes as pani chel na jat because the 'water' is freely taken among them and also by the low castes from them. While the consensual relations regarding 'water' is quite open as shown by the above chart (Chart 4) the same regarding cooked food is quite restricted as the following chart would show.

Chart 5. Caste Relations regarding 'cooked food'.



This chart shows that the Bahuns do not take 'pucca cooked food' from the hands of the ritually inferior castes including the Chhetris and the Thakuris. The Thakuris and the Chhetris share 'pucca cooked food' between them and also take the same from the hands of the Bahuns. The Thakuris and the Chhetris, however, do not take 'pucca cooked food' from the hands of the low castes. The middle castes again take pucca cooked food from the Bahuns, Thakuris and the Chhetris but not from the hands of the low castes. The low castes, however, take 'pucca cooked food' from all castes above them. It should be added here that there is no exchange of 'pucca cooked food' between the Kamis and the Sarkis though both of them are supposed to be of the same ritual status. The legendary explanation (the only one found) says that the lack of

interdining between these two castes is due to the abhorrence of each other's occupations.

On the 'pucca cooked food' relationship a mention may be made of the Bahuns. Among the Bahuns also the Upadhyaya Bahuns do not take 'pucca cooked food' from the hands of the Jaisi Bahuns though the latter take from the hands of the former. This is probably due to the fact that the former are the actual priests and to keep up this ritual superiority they have maintained this exclusiveness. However, among the middle castes no such intra-caste group distances are found in any village including the most remote and backward villages like Tokuthang and Chuchen.

The above chart (Chart G) also shows that 'kuchcha cooked food' is freely exchanged among all the castes 'from which water can be taken'. It is found that even the Upadhyaya Bahuns who are ritually considered to be superior to the Jaisi Bahuns do take 'kuchcha cooked food' from the hands of the ritually inferior castes excepting the low castes. Earlier they did not even like to see a low caste in the early morning but more recently the Bahun priests are found to be serving some rich low castes and taken 'kuchcha cooked food' from their hands. These changes have been discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

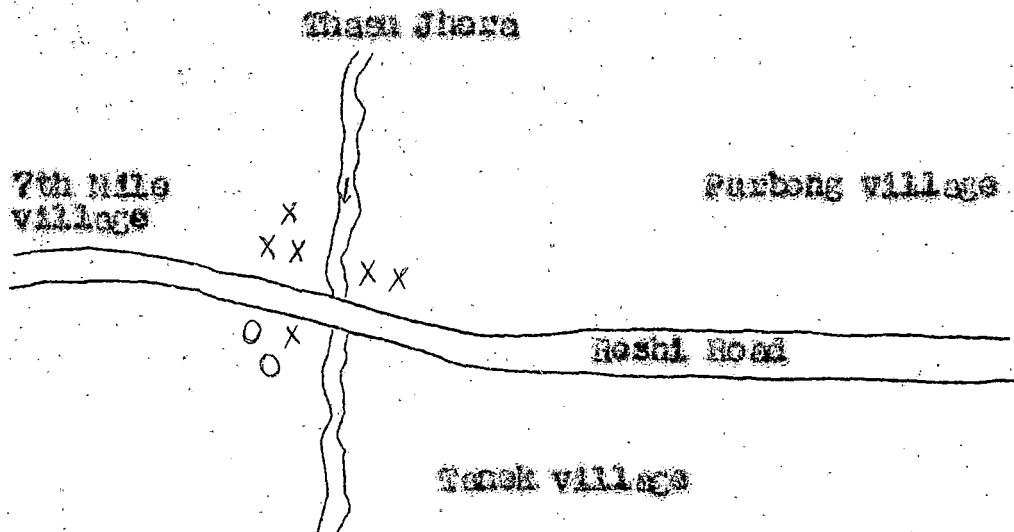
The above pattern of caste relations regarding commensal relations is, however, more in the statutory sense .

than in the actual sense. In many cases, such restrictions are ignored - specially by the poorer people and those of the younger generation. Such restrictions are even more loose in villages like Rangbali which is highly unbratised. However, every society seems to try and maintain the caste principles as far as possible. To cite one example, six young men of Tanch village - Sanbar Mang sabba (Limbu), Tilman sabba, Ten Tshering Lepcha, Herka Bahadur Rai, Sher Bahadur sabba and Abai Narayan Sharma (Bahun) (all falling in the age group between 18-30) - were reported to have taken 'pacca cooked food' from the hands of Suk Bahadur Keni in the year end of 1930. This was taken as a serious offence by the older members of the village and a lot of gossip was made about it until many months later. Some other educated young boys were also reported to have eaten 'pacca cooked food' from the hands of Prakash Das (Dama) of Purbong village but no formal meeting ever took place regarding this matter nor any formal punishment was meted out to those boys.

Such cases are still very few and can well be regarded as isolated cases. In fact, the caste distances are still maintained through such commensal relations. The inter-caste as well as the intra-caste commensal relations are found to have become more lax today than in the earlier days. The rigid commensal relations earlier are perhaps partly due to the professional insecurity because caste was closely linked with occupation. The caste monopoly over an occupation gradually weakened perhaps due to the demographic

changes and the influences of urbanization and modernization processes.

In Tenek, the intra-caste group commensal relations in the case of the low castes seem to be more based on the class distinctions than on the caste distinctions as such. Thus the poor Kasis like Mahabir Kasi and Suk Behadur Kasi are reported to have never eaten at the houses of the richer Kasis like Mani Kumar Biswakarma (Kasi) and Achok Biswakarma. But these richer Kasis have a free commensal relations with the Damais of Purbong village like Prakes Das who belongs to the same class. This is probably due to their clustered settlement though administratively in different villages as shown below.



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- X = Damai household
- O = Kasi household

This closed settlement of the low castes but all of whom are more or less economically of the same class by the village standards has made them quite independent of the higher castes in the village and a closer commensal relations. The two Hari households have a free relationship with their own class members of the Dalit caste in the commensal matters. The question of exchanging 'puces cooked food', however, does not arise as their houses are nearby.

Thus there are commensal rules but what actually happens is slightly different. A distinction may, therefore, be always drawn between the 'expected' and the 'actual' commensal relations. The main participants in the 'actual' relations are, however, the members of the younger generation only. These 'expected' and 'actual' commensal relationship may be shown with the help of the following chart (Chart 6) on Ranghail village.

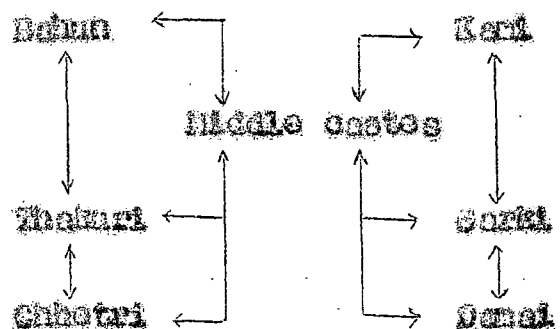
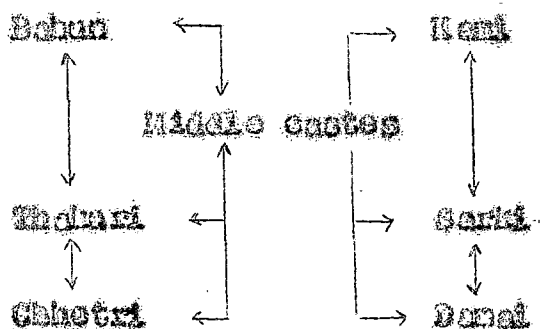
Chart C. Communal Relations in Benghal.

Expected

Actual

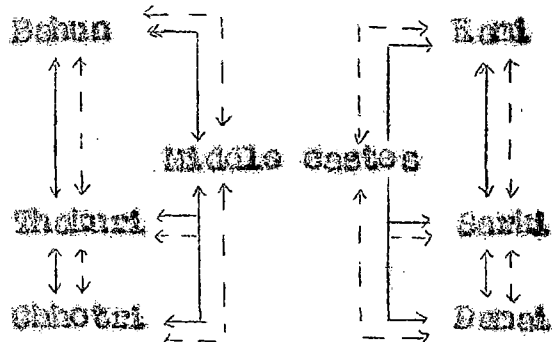
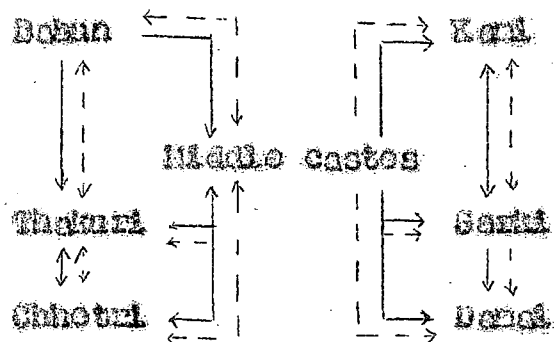
A. Castes they 'can' take the water from

A. Castes they 'do' take the water from



B. Castes they 'can' take the cooked food from

B. Castes they 'do' take the cooked food from



Index: ——— pucca
 - - - - - kuchcha

This chart shows some difference between the 'expected' and the 'actual' consensual relationships regarding 'water' as well as 'pucca cooked food'. For instance, while the middle castes 'cannot' take water from the hands of the low castes, they at times 'do' so. Regarding 'pucca cooked food' the caste differences are slightly wider and more strictly maintained than with regards to 'kuchcha cooked food'. But still in actual relationship even the 'pucca cooked food' is occasionally exchanged among the Bahans and some of the high castes like Thakuri, Chhetri and some middle castes too. Among the low castes, while Kosi and Sauri can take 'pucca cooked food' from each other they 'do not' do it between themselves but both of them often exchange even 'pucca cooked food' with the Danais.

The above chart also shows that the inter-caste relationship covering 'kuchcha cooked food' is the same as that based on 'water' but obviously, of course, more lax than that based on 'pucca cooked food' in respect of both the 'expected' and the 'actual' consensual relations. For example, the superior castes (mainly Bahans) among the 'pani chhal na jat' 'cannot' take 'pucca cooked food' from the hands of the ritually inferior castes but 'can' take the 'kuchcha cooked food' from the ritually inferior castes also. The low castes, however, have only one-way relationship with the high and the middle castes in respect of both the 'pucca and 'kuchcha' 'cooked food'. In actual practice though many of the middle castes

people are also found to have 'khachcha cooked food' relationship even with the low castes.

In general, therefore, the commensal rules regarding 'pucca cooked food' is more strictly followed than the same regarding 'khachcha cooked food' and 'water'. This is purely a matter of purity and pollution; the chances of being polluted from 'water' or 'khachcha cooked food' is considered less than from that of the 'pucca cooked food'. But the purity and pollution are not bipolar in the sense that the higher castes regard themselves purer than the lower castes. These ideas are relative; a Chhetari is purer than a Rai but less pure than a Bahun. But at the same time a scale of purity and pollution may be drawn in which the Bahuns occupy one end of the scale for their being comparatively the purest and the Damais hold the other end of the scale for their being the most polluted. Dumant has precisely emphasized this theoretical construction but in a real sociological sense, the relative degree of purity and pollution is perhaps more important than the bipolar model of purity-pollution relationship.

The present study tries to delve into some of the specific cases where there were differences between the 'expected' and the 'actual' relationship in respect of commensal matters. These cases showed a more or less common class background of the people involved in deviant caste relationships regarding the commensal relations.

A sustained observation over three months in Rangtali

village showed only a few deviant cases though such cases were reported to have taken place quite often. There were mainly two such occasions to observe : one at Bangla Ugras constituency and another at the local Gumba (monastery) near the D.S. Road (see Map No.5). No separate seating arrangement (Mandelbaum 1973: 131-133) was there for the low and the high castes. The members of the different castes sat together and took 'pucca cooked food'.

Age and Friendship are also found quite important for understanding communal relations in all the villages studied. The older people, mainly the heads of the households usually are not found, despite the village being highly urbanized, to be visiting other people's houses unless on formal occasions. Even if they do go on such occasions they remain careful not to eat together with the low caste people. Dil Naya Pradhan (55) of Raughull village was found, for example, grumbling after coming back from the funeral ceremony at the Gumba. When asked she told that Manu Lama (53), a school teacher by profession, distributed 'pucca cooked food' to all and she too had to eat the same. Dil Naya believed that Manu Lama was a Smal's daughter claiming to be a Garmag's daughter. The younger generation, on the other hand, does not mind eating at the low castes' houses also though regular interaction is found to depend on the circle of friendship rather than on the caste.

In Sakarthy village, the people make a very broad

classification of their society from the commensal point of view. The whole society is divided into gare jat meaning low castes and thale jat or higher castes including both the high and the middle castes of the present classification. Thale jat of this village is equivalent to chut (touchable) or nah chah ne jat and gare jat is the synonym of gchut (untouchable) or nah ne chah ne jat. In this sense the binary model of purity and pollution advocated by Dumont is quite significant but at the same time the structural distances within each of the castes cannot be ignored.

This village being a remote and in the most backward area has a stricter commensal relationship than the villages discussed above. Thus while 'water' is freely exchanged among the high and the middle castes, the 'pucca cooked food' is not usually accepted by the ritually superior castes even in actual interactions. The Kaniis being untouchables and occupying the bottom of the caste hierarchy do not voluntarily offer either 'water' or 'cooked food' to the superior castes because they believe that it will offend them or will not be accepted. The only exception to this rule is Kachar Singh Kani of Karling village who is a very big landowner owning big chunks of land in different villages including Samthang and Chuchen also. He also invites the teachers of Mangalbaria Junior High School, high castes included, to his house and offers them feasts.

During this isolated case the higher castes people do not have any commensal relationship with the Kaniis. In some

agricultural operations it is found inevitable for a higher caste member to work with the low caste member and eat together or to work on the land of a low caste. Under such circumstances, the low caste host requests a member of the higher caste to prepare the food for the higher caste people. The same thing is done during the marriage and funeral ceremonies in the house of a low caste member of the village. Out of four Kmi households only one Kmi (Bharka Bahadur Biswakama, 45) still follows the traditional occupation of ironsmithy.

In Chuchen village, the spatial distribution of the houses is very wide and the scope of observing inter-caste commensal interactions is very limited. The same is true of Takuthang village also. One has to heavily dwell upon the answers given by the villagers because the social gatherings like in a marriage or funeral ceremonies are usually not frequent.

Not very surprisingly, the commensal rules uttered by the villagers of Chuchen are very much the same as found in other villages discussed above. The characteristic features of this village, however, leave a narrow gap between the 'rules' and the 'actual behaviour'. Thus the high and the middle castes do not have any commensal interaction with the low castes. Among the touchable castes, again, the higher castes do not take 'pucca cooked food' from the lower castes. While the commensal relationship regarding 'water' and 'huncha cooked food' is quite free among the high and the middle castes the 'pucca cooked food' relationship is very rigid.

The absence of resentment of the inferior castes in this matter or an inter-caste or caste-group conflict is an interesting point to discuss. This particular phenomenon cannot probably be explained purely from a Marxian point of view. If the lower caste people were invariably of a lower economic position then the Marxian analysis would probably make better sense because the low economic position could be regarded as a factor causing their inability to resent the superiority of the higher castes which are economically better off. But, as the fifth chapter will show, the low caste people also have a dominant class position in some villages. Here, the respective numerical strength of each caste group is important to know because this may have an implication on this problem. The following table shows the relative numerical strength of the different castes in the five villages studied.

Table 14

Caste and Population in Five Villages

<u>Village</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Low</u>	<u>Total Household including non-caste peoples</u>
Tanok	32	135	15	234
Purbong	15	23	6	63
Rangball	41	200	19	306
Tamthang	3	72	4	94
Chachen	1	66	3	82

The above table shows that the middle castes represent

the biggest number in all the villages. The high castes also have a bigger number of households than the low castes in most of the villages except Takuthang and Chackon. Though the middle castes are ritually subordinate to the high castes they have a greater ritual proximity with the high castes than with the low castes. Their numerical strength thus does never pose a threat to the high castes nor do they have a cordial relationship among themselves due to a competition for a higher ritual or economic status. The case of Gurungs and Magars in this context has been mentioned already in the course of this chapter. It appears, therefore, that the explanation in this regard lies partly in the ritual factor which has been deeply embedded in their society.

A partial but significant explanation also lies in the elite behaviour among the low castes. The low caste elites have an interaction with the people of the same class but of the higher castes and very rarely with the poorer section of their own castes. This is shown by the discussions made above. A somewhat similar feature was noted by Caplan (1970) among the Limbu in eastern Nepal. He shows that despite the appropriation of their lands by the Brahmins the Limbu have not rebelled against the Brahmins nor any caste conflict has taken place. Instead the few Limbu elites to whom he calls 'Notables', drawing their relative affluence from the military services, have aligned themselves with the Brahmin elites. The only difference between the findings of Caplan and one noted here is that in Caplan's case the Brahmins are economically

dominant while in the case of Darjeeling and Sikkim it is not so. In fact, in many villages like Tansk and Rangnail their class status is very low. Thus, it is perhaps wrong to assume any caste-group or caste as homogeneous.

In short, inter-caste antagonism cannot find expression because of harmonious relationship between economic inequality and deeply internalized ritual values.

Caste and Marital Relations ✓

The discussion on the inter-caste and intra-caste communal relationship shows some amount of difference in the different villages. In general, however, the marital rules are found to be more strictly adhered to than the communal rules. Thus Karve (1961:9) is perhaps not wrong to say that all castes are basically endogamous. Other scholars like Ghurye (1933), Bonneron (1966:129), Saha (1967:94) and Atal (1968:240-48) also have emphasized this particular feature of the caste system.

There are, however, other scholars like Yalman (1971) and Dumont (1972) who regard hierarchy as more important than endogamy. To Dumont (1964:91) hierarchy is the precondition of all castes because it arranges them in order. But his contention (1972) that for the group maintenance the marriage must be basically isogamous and hypergamous marriages are secondary makes him face the problem of explaining the significance of isogamous marriages.

In Tanak village the castes are basically endogenous as it is true of any other village in Darjeeling and Sikkim. Bahun likes to marry within his caste as much as a Limbu or a Kani does so. Where there are class differences among the members of the same caste in the village the tendency is to bring the spouse from another village but of the same class position. However, these things depend partly on the scope of choice also. An Upadhyaya Bahun does not like to marry a Jaisi Bahun but given no alternative the same will be his first preference. This order of preference among the various castes, which is true of all the villages under study has been shown in the following table (Table 15).

Table 15

Castes and order of preference for marriage in the region

Caste	Order of Preference			
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Upadhyaya Bahun	Upadhyaya Bahun	Jaisi Bahun	Chhetri/Thakuri	Matwali
Jaisi Bahun	Upadhyaya Bahun	Jaisi Bahun	Chhetri/Thakuri	Matwali
Thakuri	Thakuri	Chhetri	Bahun	Matwali
Chhetri	Chhetri	Thakuri	Bahun	Matwali
Newar	Newar	High castes	Matwali	-
Rai	Rai	Limbu	Yakha	Matwali
Limbu	Limbu	Rai	Yakha	Matwali
Yakha	Yakha	Limbu	Rai	Matwali
Gurung	Gurung	Newar	Matwali	-
Tamang	Tamang	Newar	Gurung	Matwali
Jogi	Jogi	High castes	Matwali	-
Bhujel	Bhujel	Matwali	-	-
Sanver	Sanver	Matwali	-	-
Shorpa	Shorpa	Gurung	Matwali	-
Kani	Kani	Sarki	Denai	-
Sarki	Sarki	Kani	Denai	-
Denai	Denai	Kani	Sarki	-

The above table gives an interesting picture of the inter-caste marital relationships. It is seen that except among the Jaisi Bahuns the first preference of all castes is their own castes. The second preferences are also usually from among the same caste group. There is no question of any difference between the touchable and the untouchable castes in this regard.

It may be added here that a negotiated marriage is invariably intra-caste but among the Bais, the Linsus and the Yalhas a negotiated marriage can take place. It is perhaps due to a long history of ethnic affinity among these three castes and also the fact that they all belong to the Kiranti stock (Henthony and Norris 1974; 215). The intermarriage among these three castes is historically recorded (UN, BMSO 1966, 97). These three castes are also called jit-yatay jat meaning a formal ceremony can take place in the case of any marriage amongst them and such marriages do not create the least social offence. Inter-caste marriages outside this group is called tiho taho meaning a simple ceremony in which the groom puts the vermilion on the forehead of the bride and a small feast is offered usually to the members of the same lineage only. In other words, an inter-caste marriage is called on ajit bhān and an intra-caste marriage is called a jat bhān. A marriage with an untouchable is never formalised and is socially known as hujat bhān.

Thus the Nepalese society of Darjeeling and Sikkim broadly has three classes of marriage. The highest ranking

Marriage is a jat dhā, the second in the social status is an ajāt dhā and a rajāt dhā holds the lowest rank. Each caste has its own standards for classifying the marriages, which may be better represented in the following table (Table 16).

Table 16

Marriage Classification in the Region.

<u>Caste</u>	<u>Jat Dhā</u>	<u>Ajāt Dhā</u>	<u>Rajāt Dhā</u>
Bahun	Bahun	Other touchable castes	Untouchables
Thakuri	Thakuri	"	"
Chhetri	Chhetri	"	"
Rai	Rai, Limbu, Yakha	"	"
Limbu	Limbu, Rai, Yakha	"	"
Yakha	Yakha, Rai, Limbu	"	"
Kowar	Kowar	"	"
Garung	Garung	"	"
Tamang	Tamang	"	"
Magar	Magar	"	"
Jogi	Jogi	"	"
Bhujel	Bhujel	"	"
Sunwar	Sunwar	"	"
Sherpa	Sherpa	"	"
Yolma	Yolma	"	"
Thami	Thami	"	"
Kami	Kami	Sarki, Danal	"
Sarki	Sarki	Danal, Kami	"
Danal	Danal	Kami, Sarki	"

This table reveals some of the crucial aspects of the Nepalese caste relations regarding marriage. Kami, Sarki and Danal are Rajāt for all the higher castes and no marital relationship is expected between a rajāt and a jāt at least

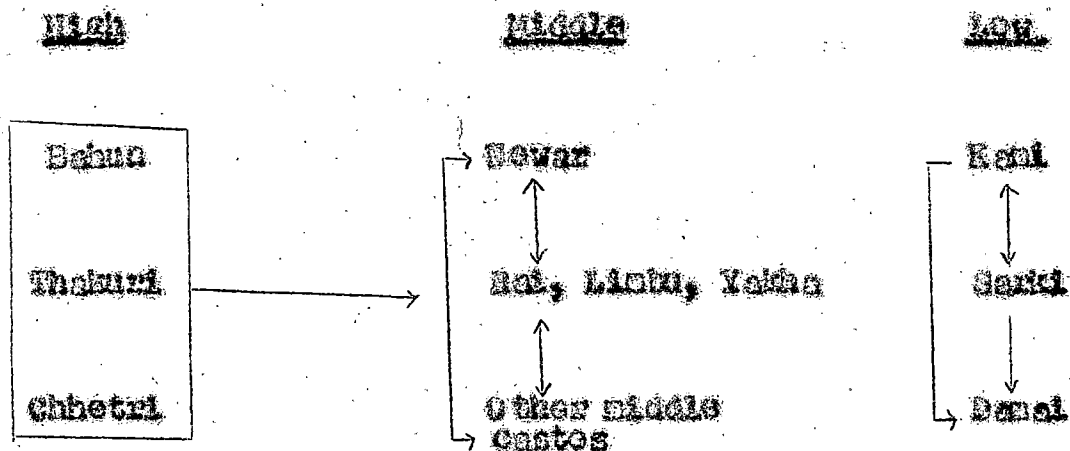
In the formal sense of the term. This table also shows that among the Rais, Limbus and the Yakkas even an inter-caste marriage is not considered as grat. Thus in their case caste endogamy is not very important or rather, all these three castes form one endogamous unit.

This pattern of ritual distance among the Nepalese castes in Darjeeling and Sikkim can be seen manifested in the form of jat danda or penalty for a breach of caste endogamy. This system is, however, prevalent among the middle castes and the low castes only. It is found that the high castes do pay jat danda to the middle castes if a member of the former caste group marries a member of the latter group. But if a member of the latter group marries any member of the former group no jat danda is taken. For example, if a Bahun girl marries into a middle caste the family of that Bahun girl does not take any jat danda from the latter. Thus, while the high castes pay the jat danda to the middle castes they do not take the same from the latter - a case of hypergamy. The rate of jat danda is usually Rs. 61 and 2 bottles of country liquor though at times even the double of it is taken.

Among the low castes, if a Kari marries a Sanki the jat danda is taken and vice-versa. But if a Sanki marries a Kari or a Sanki no jat danda is taken from the former. If any member of the low castes marries a girl of the high or the middle castes no jat danda is taken nor is it given. This jat danda relationship in the different villages of Darjeeling and Sikkim

can be depicted in the following chart (Chart 7).

Chart 7. Jat Danda relationship in the region



This chart shows that the high and the middle castes have no Jat danda relationship with the low castes. But among the high and the middle castes the inferior castes take Jat danda from the superior castes but not otherwise. Among the low castes also the Damais and Sarkis take Jat danda from the Kenis but the latter does not take from the Damais while between the Kenis and the Sarkis the Jat danda relationship is in vogue.

Inter-caste marriage even among the chhetri castes does not involve, except in the case of the Rais, Limbus and the Yakhas, any formal ceremony but such marriages are socially accepted. The ritual sanction may or may not be there but the social sanction is always there. The ritual ceremony of the Limbus in this regard is interesting to note. They have a ceremony called Jat Danda meaning cooked lentil and rice which

are offered to the neighbours to get the social sanction. The girl after that day is accepted as a member of the Limbu caste provided that she is touchable. Even without such ritual ceremony social sanction is sufficient and a person who does not respect such a union is punished.

An inter-caste marriage is not always hypergamous or a secondary one. Dumont (1934, 116-15) views that the primary marriage is always isogamous and only in secondary marriages hypergamy is tolerated. But this view was found inconsistent in the case of Nepal by Caplan (1977) nor my own findings corroborate his view. In Tanak, marriages are always monogamous and such marriages are often found hypergamous.

In Tanak village, the inter-caste marriages have not taken place between the high and the low castes but the middle castes have such relationship with both the high and the low castes. Between the high and the middle castes there are two cases of hypergamous marriage and one case of hypogamy while between the middle and the low castes there is only one case of hypergamy but three cases of hypogamy. Among these three caste groups the percentage of inter-caste marriage is almost equal between the middle and the low castes but the same is very low in case of the high castes. Among the high castes, for example, the Bohans have not been involved in any inter-caste marriage and among the Chhotris there has been only 4 or 14.3% deviant cases. Among the low castes also the Garis and the Damais have remained purely endogamous but among the Kasis

there has been 37.5% inter-caste marriage. It is significant to note here that all the inter-caste marriages in this caste in Tanak is hyogamous. If the percentage of inter-caste marriages among the low castes as a whole is worked out it comes to 20% which is almost equal to the percentage of inter-caste marriages among the middle castes (20.7). The Bopchas also have been involved in inter-caste marriage links with the high and the middle castes but not with the low castes. This is, as mentioned earlier, due perhaps to the influence of the Hindu neighbours.

It may also be noted that an inter-caste marriage among the chut castes is not a big offence but it is so if it involves an gent or untouchable member. Even today a chut-gent marital relationship is resented by the villagers and a girl married to an gent is usually not allowed to come back to the house of her natal family for years if not for the whole life. It is also reported that ex-communication used to be practised there till the early decades of the present century.

Another point to be noted regarding an inter-caste marriage is between a Bahun boy and a lower caste girl. In such unions the title of the son will not be the title of his father though the property inheritance remains patrilineal only. Thus under such cases the following structures appear.

In Purbong village, the percentage of inter-caste marriage is found to be much higher (27.0%) compared to the same in Tanek (13.7%). This is perhaps partly due to the Lepcha dominance in this village and partly a higher level of literacy (58.0%) compared to Tanek (53.3%). The degree of urbanization and modernization is also slightly higher in Purbong than in Tanek.

Castewise, it is seen that the high and the low castes have less of inter-caste marriages than the middle castes. For example, the percentage of inter-caste marriages is 33.1 while it is 16.7 among the low caste and only 10% among the high castes. It may also be noted that there is no marital relationship between the high and the low castes but the middle castes have marital relations with both these caste groups. Moreover, there is not a single case of hypogamous marriage while there are 2 or 11.8% cases of hypergamous marriage. Though both the high and the low castes are found more exclusive than the middle castes the reasons for their exclusiveness are different. The high castes emphasize the caste endogamy to maintain a superior caste status while the low castes are perhaps compelled to remain partly exclusive as the higher castes discourage hypogamous marriages.

Regarding all formalities of marital relationship the rules in Rangbali village also are the same as in Tanek or Purbong. But while the people of these villages were frank in confessing their caste prejudices some people of Rangbali

were quite evasive in their answers though otherwise very cordial. For instance, Sitan Singh Subba, President of Sukhia Pukhari Anchal Samiti but staying in the village only told me that he had no caste prejudice at all. Unfortunately or fortunately, his daughter eloped within three days of my interview with a Tameng boy of Dali Phatak, a settlement on the way to Sadar town. When the relatives of the boy came to negotiate after 3 days (it is a part of the custom) they were chased off with his Alsatian dog and no further negotiation took place during my stay in the village for 3 months after that.

This incident shows that interview as a tool of social research does not help much in getting into the reality; it gives more of impressions than the reality itself. To get a real picture of certain aspects of society like the inter-caste relations one has to collect concrete case studies.

In this village, the percentage of inter-caste marriage is found to be quite higher than in Tarek and Purbong. 32.0% households have been involved in inter-caste marriages in Sanghali compared to 13.7% in Tarek and 27.0% in Purbong. This is perhaps due to a higher percentage of literacy (69.7%) in this village compared to 53.3% in Tarek and 52.0% in Purbong and also a greater exposition to the forces of modernization and urbanization.

Castewise, the inter-caste marriage is maximum (35.0%) among high castes, followed by 33.0% among the middle castes

and only 10.5% among the low castes. Out of this total of inter-caste marriages among the different castes the percentage of hypergenous marriages among the high castes is 31.3 but that of hypogenous marriages is only 13.7. The middle castes do not have any case of hypergenous marriage while the percentage of hypogenous marriage is also only 11.1. The low castes have 50% hypergenous marriages.

It may also be noted that unlike in Tenek and Partong this village also offers one case of hypergenous marriage between the high castes and the low castes.

The highest percentage of intercaste marriage among the high castes in this village, untrue of Tenek and Partong, may be briefly analyzed here. Sadogany has always remained as a cornerstone for this caste group but still the percentage of intercaste marriage has remained high. The relatively lower economic position of the high castes is probably not a factor here because if this were so, the phenomenon would not be different from the earlier two villages where also the high castes have a lower economic status. Nor the numerical dominance of the middle castes who have supplied most seems a significant factor. The most sensible explanation here lies possibly in the fact that this village, unlike the earlier two, is highly urbanized and the settlement is clustered on the other side of the Hill Cart Road. 305 households have been sandwiched within a total geographical area of 100.70 acres. Thus urbanization and settlement pattern which are related to each other may have been responsible for this

strange picture of marital relations in this village.

In Takuthang village, due to various factors like lack of urbanization, wide scale illiteracy and location at a remote place the percentage of intercaste marriage has been very low compared to the villages described above. The total number of intercaste marriage is, for example, only 9.6% in this village. This is quite low figure compared to 13.7% in Saneb, 27.0% in Purkong and 32.0% in Rangball. Castewise, the Bahuns and the Konis have remained purely endogamous while one immigrant Chhetri has married a Khasi girl and staying on the land of his father-in-law only. The middle castes have 6 or 63.7% of the total number of intercaste marriages in the village. The high castes also have 10.1% intercaste marriage but the low castes are purely endogamous. Though the middle castes also do not have very many intercaste marriages in this village they have relatively more than that among the high castes. It is also seen that there has been two intercaste marriages between the high and the middle castes (one hypergamous and one hypogamous) but there has been no marriage between the low castes and the middle or the high castes.

The Chuchen village also has most of the features in common with Takuthang. Thus, as expected, the percentage of intercaste marriages is very low (7.3%) which is even lower than in Takuthang (9.6%). The caste/communities which have intercaste marriages are Tamang (2), Gurung (1), Lepcha (1) and Bhutia (1). Other castes including the high and the low

castes have not been involved in intercaste marriages. Moreover, there is not a single case of either a hypergamous or a hypogamous marriage. Therefore, it appears that the chances of such marriages to occur are more in villages where intercaste marriages are more in number (for example, Rangbali).

It may be noted here that the hypergamous marriages are more common than the hypogamous marriages. In fact, in Rangbali the percentage of hypergamous marriages is very high compared to the percentage of hypogamous marriages. This may be partly due to the apparent tendency among the lower castes to rise in the ritual hierarchy. A significant factor in this regard could also be the dispersed settlement pattern with the middle castes being numerically preponderant. The relatively lower class status of the high castes in most of the villages also may have weakened their caste endogamy and made it possible for hypergamous marriages to take place. It may be mentioned that the male-female ratio is really not a significant factor as it is theoretically expected to be. The male-female ratio is more or less balanced among all castes and in all villages and even if the percentage of the high caste males is much lower in villages like Takathang and Chuchen, the percentage of hypergamous marriages is equal to that of hypogamous marriages in these villages. Therefore, the male-female ratio does not really seem to be an important factor.

The picture given by Takathang and Chuchen villages cannot, however, be regarded as a characteristic feature of Sikkim as a whole. Its more urbanized districts like the east

and the south may have a higher percentage of intercaste marriages. The percentage of literacy is also higher in these districts than in the north and the west districts. Therefore, the low percentage of intercaste marriage in this village is mainly due to its location in a remote place with no proper educational and communication facilities.

Summary and Conclusion

The caste ranking in all the villages - Tanak, Furbon, Rogball, Takuthang and Chuchen - is the same being based on the ritual criteria. Some of the villagers also referred to the Varna theory of the origin of caste while answering on the caste ranking. The historical study of the Nepalese castes briefly attempted at the beginning of this chapter clearly shows that it was not based on Varna order though largely so. But after the legal enforcement and a long period of government patronage the Khas caste system in Nepal has been a part of the cultural life of the Nepalese society.

This study finds that the numerical strength of the high and the low castes has been invariably low in all the villages studied. On the other hand, the middle castes have remained numerically always dominant though some of the middle castes are individually of smaller number also. It is also to be noted that there is a sizeable percentage of non-Nepali communities like the Lepchas, Bhotias, Biharis, Marwaris and the Dukpas in almost every village studied.

The communal relations among the various castes seem to vary rather directly with the differences in the location, educational level, economic development and the degree of urbanization or modernization. Thus the more urbanized and educationally more advanced villages have a freer communal relations than the less urbanized villages.

Similarly, the marital relations among the different castes are directly influenced by the same factors. The more urbanized, educationally and economically more advanced villages have a higher percentage of intercaste marriages than the villages less developed in these respects. Thus the Ranghull village which is the most advanced among the villages studied in all these respects have the highest percentage (32.0%) of intercaste marriages while Takathang and Chuchen, which are the most backward villages have the lowest percentages - 9.6 in Takathang and 7.3 in Chuchen.

Migration has also been found to be an important factor in influencing the caste status of a person. The later immigrants are, for example, called gukopast and enjoy a lower social status irrespective of their caste positions and an earlier inhabitant is called a gathaney and enjoys a higher social status even if he is of a low caste.

It has been clearly shown by the present study that the 'ideal-ritual' caste structure is the same in all the villages but the 'actual-secular' caste structure has varied

from village to village. It is perhaps in this ideal-ritual sense that Kripalani (1938, 70) says that the castes do not change with the change in the economic position. The middle castes have apparently maintained quite a satisfactory class position in almost all the villages though their relative degree of class level is different in different villages. This aspect has been discussed in detail in the fifth chapter of this work.

One of the reasons for the change in the 'actual-regular' caste relationship is probably the 'forces of production' (Marx 1965, 133-38). The word 'production' here does not only mean the agricultural production but the sum total of all social activities directed towards production in general. The forces of production influence the relations of production which affect the caste relationships also.

Another subsidiary point in this regard is perhaps the relative strength of the non-Hindu castes in each village. Though in some villages the influence of the Hindu society is found among the non-Hindus it is also found to be a two-way process. Otherwise, the process of inter-caste fluidity in the food habits and marital relations would not have probably taken place.

With reference to the Hindu non-Hindu relationship and its impact on the caste relations the conditions in Nepal do not seem to differ much from the same in Darjeeling and

Sikkim. The only point of difference is the presence of the Christians in some villages of the latter but Nepal being a declared Hindu country proselytisation is virtually nil. Regarding the Hindu-Buddhist relationship, Rosser's study (1966) among the Newars of Kathmandu valley shows a very close and amiable co-existence of the people professing these two religions. Moreover, the study of Fuxer Haimendorf (1966) among the Maghals of north-western Nepal shows how the non-Hindu society gradually moulds itself into the caste framework. Thus Buddhism does not seem to be an obstacle to the caste system though initially its origin had been mainly by condemning the caste system.

The studies of Nepal (1965) and Rosser (1966) give a very detailed picture of the caste system of the Newars in Kathmandu valley. Rosser has gone deeper into finding the intracaste hierarchy among the Shresthas and the Jyapus, the most numerous castes among the Newars of Kathmandu valley. He (ibid : 67) finds a bipolar division of the Newar caste structure with in cahe in pin or 'the ones from whom water can be taken' and in chala ma in pin or 'the ones from whom water cannot be taken'.

Such an intra-caste division is not found among the Newars of Buxjaling and Sikkim. All the Newars are regarded as equal by other castes though some of them are quite conscious of their intra-caste differences also. But the intra-caste

differences are never manifested in their social behaviour. This may be considered as an economic and cultural necessity for them to adapt and adjust to the new environment. But should there be a large number of them within a limited geographical area the intra-caste distinctions are not improbable to emerge and more sharply than in other castes.

The studies of Boser (1966), Fuxer Haimendorf (1966a) and Caplan (1970) in Nepal show an intra-caste differences among some other castes also. The study of Fuxer Haimendorf (ibid) among the Chhetris, for example, shows that the Chhetri society was originally an egalitarian society but gradually developed as a caste with distinct intra-caste and even intra-lineage status differences. These differences are basically based on the economic difference but gradually received a social sanction also. Caplan's study in the east Nepal also marks the emergence of a new class which he calls 'Notables' among the Lintus also.

In the case of Daryeling and Sikkim the intra-caste differences in respect of secular matters is there but the ritual difference has not developed sufficiently to receive an attention. Thus the Chhetri caste is still egalitarian thereby completing the cycle of change from egalitarian to hierarchical in Nepal to again egalitarian in this region. The Lintu caste also has completed a similar cycle in this region.

An important point to be noted here is the position of the Tamangs, Magars and the Gurungs in Nepal and the region

under study. Fuxer Haimendorf (op cit: 15-17) writes that the Tamangs have a very low status and cannot enter a Parbatiya (Nepali) or Newari house except as a 'servant' or a 'farm hand'. The Gurungs are also considered inferior to the Chhetris and the Newars but superior to the Tamangs and the Sherpas. Between a Mangar and a Gurung the former does not take any 'cooked food' from the latter as it claims of a Thakuri origin. However, he (ibid: 18) writes that from the caste point of view the Newars, Mangars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Sherpas and the Kiratas are regarded as matwali castes opposite to the Kasadhari castes like the Bahunas and the Chhetris.

The picture in Darjeeling and Sikkim is quite different from that of Nepal described above. The castes like Newar, Tamang, Mangar and Gurung are treated alike and no hierarchical relationship is found among them though some of them like the Newars and the Mangars claim a higher status at times. The Chhetris are actually at a higher position but they allow all the touchable castes into their kitchen. This is perhaps due to an economic diversification which took place during a long process of migration.

It may also be added here that the ex-communication system that existed in Nepal (Fuxer Haimendorf 1966/22) in case

* O'Malley (1974: 137) criticizes the use of the phrase 'caste Hindus' because the untouchables also have castes like the Hindus and have their own generation and marital or consensual relations.

** These castes could be made slaves until the Abolition of slavery in 1923.

of a violation of the caste norms is almost non-existent in this region. An ordinary caste offence is reacted in the form of social boycott for some months or years but finally they make up with each other, only when a serious caste offence is made the aggrieved party may not allow a reconciliation for the whole life also. Thus when Haina Kala sabba (Limb), wife of Chandra Bahadur Sabba, eloped with Bah Bahadur Kani, the Limbu of Tanch village became very angry and threatened him. Had he no support of Leodip and Julian Lepcha, two of the biggest landlords of the village the Limbus could have probably caused some harm to him. But some of the same boys who had threatened him were reported to have eaten at his place later. However, Haina Kala has still not been allowed to come back and meet her people. Similarly, when Purna Bahadur Chhetri of the same village took Pankit Lepcha as his wife it was resented by the relatives of both the sides but gradually the matter was settled.

Therefore, it is clear that the caste rules are still adhered to as far as possible but the enforcement mechanism seems to have weakened considerably. This is probably due to the intra-caste class differences and also the impact of the forces of modernization and urbanization besides migration. In general, the three-tier classification of the Nepalese caste structure by Caplan (1970) into highcastes, middle and untouchables seems meaningful in the context of the region under study. However, before concluding the chapter the following contentions of Risley (1931) on the Nepalese caste structure may be incorporated.

According to Hickey, the Limbus stand in between the Bhambos (Nais) and the Yakkas - the former being regarded higher than the Limbus for their connection with the Thakuzis but all these three castes are of the higher Kiranti group and the castes like Daswar, Haya and Thani of the lower Kiranti group. The Khas (Chhetri) are put on the top followed by the Howars, Garungs and the Mangars in a hierarchic order and still below the Sunwar, Bhambos, Limbus and the Yakkas again in a hierarchic order. The castes like the Kania, Senai, Sarki and the Goin (musicians) are ranked at the lowest (ibid: 13).

About the Mangars he (ibid: 76) further writes that they cannot take cooked food from the Khas and the Garungs after marriage but can share a hookah or pipe with them including the Brahmins. Sunwars together with Mangars, Garungs and Khas form a class called Mukhia and an informal inter-caste marriage among them is recognized.

This account of Hickey does not fit into the situation in Darjeeling and Sikkim now but has a close similarity with the situation in Nepal. In the context of Darjeeling and Sikkim the caste structure is slightly different from the one existing in Nepal. This happened as the caste structure of this region had to undergo the adaptation process and migration affected their positions considerably. The migrant families were helped by people belonging to other castes also. This made it difficult for the ritually superior castes to maintain their caste superiority specially when the immigrant families belonged to

the higher castes. In this context the following table (Table 17) may be furnished here.

Table 17

Migrants and Caste/Communities helping them

Village	No. of Households Interviewed	Relatives	Helped by		Other Castes	No. Idea
			Own Castes	%		
Tench	90	10	21	23.3	24	26.7
Rengbali	86	8	4	4.7	17	19.8
Furbong	38	3	7	28.9	5	10.3
Taknathang	30	12	4	13.3	3	10.0
Chuchen	26	5	3	11.5	4	15.4
Total	259	33	39	15.1	53	20.6

The above table shows that 20.5% of the heads of the households interviewed had been helped by castes other than the immigrants. In such a situation the high caste immigrants cannot impose their caste superiority at least on the ones who have helped them in settling down at the beginning.

Therefore, the caste structure in both the ritual and the secular terms is comparatively lax in Darjeeling and Sikkim than in Nepal. However, the caste system in the whole of north India seems more lax than in the south India. The states like Tamil Nadu and Orissa have a strict caste system (O'Malley 1974:22). About Nepal, he writes that the whole society is bound up in caste ideology but the higher castes are more orthodox. Above all there was a legal sanction behind it in Nepal for many years (ibid: 23). But since the legal sanction

is not there in India and in the Himalayas where there is no
concrete economic foundation the caste system is comparatively
low.
