Chapter VI

Conclusion:

Caste, Class, and Power

In the three foregoing chapters we have discussed three important aspects of the social structure of Sripuram. These are its caste structure, its class system, and the distribution of power within it. An attempt was made to treat each system separately without considering in detail its interrelations with the others. This attempt, involving as it did a process of abstraction, was only partly successful. The discussion on the distribution of power, for instance, led inevitably to a consideration of the caste and class components of leadership.

In reality, of course, caste, class, and power are closely interwoven. They can be treated separately, and particularly the last two, only by a process of abstraction. It is necessary, however, to make this abstraction in order to reduce the diversity of empirical data to a few fundamental categories. It is also necessary to consider the three systems separately in order to understand their relative importance in the process of change. As has been emphasized from the beginning, change is a fundamental feature of the social structure of Sripuram today.

Caste, class, and power refer in different ways to the phenomenon of social stratification. There are some, it is true, who have argued that class is not a form of social stratification, but is rather to be understood in terms of social conflict. (See Dahrendorf, 1959, pp. 63, 76.) We have seen, nonetheless, that in the context of Sripuram landlords, tenants, and agricultural labourers form a rank order which is more or less tacitly recognised by all. It is,
therefore, proposed that we continue to follow the conventional usage and regard the class system as an aspect, or a dimension, of social stratification.

Marx, with whose name the study of class is particularly associated, is not himself fully consistent in the use of the concept. By and large he uses the term “class” in the wider sense to refer to owners and nonowners of the means of production. Sometimes, however, he uses it in a narrower sense to refer to structures which are characteristic of capitalist society.

Again, in writing about people whose material conditions of existence are similar, or identical, Marx adds: “In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class” (n.d., p. 124). These remarks have a particular bearing on agrarian societies, for there ownership or nonownership of the means of production does not necessarily constitute a basis for communal or political action.

Classes, thus, do not necessarily constitute communities, although they may, under specific social and historical conditions, be organised for communal action. Whether classes remain as mere categories or are organised into groups depends, to a large extent, on the action of political parties. The Communist party, for instance, tried in the early fifties to organise the kisans (i.e., tenants and agricultural labourers) in the Tanjore area for political action. This attempt died out after a brief outburst of violence, but its memory even now colours the relations between classes.

In the Marxian analysis conflict occupies a central position in the definition of class and class relations. Dahrendorf, in fact, defines class almost exclusively in terms of conflict: “Class is always a category for purposes of the analysis of social conflict and its structural roots, and as such it has to be separated strictly from stratum as a category for purposes of describing hierarchical systems at a given point of time” (1959, p. 76). But the definition of class used here does not imply the existence of conflict as a necessary or continuous element in the relations between classes.

In the context of the agrarian social structure of Sripuram classes are hierarchically arranged social categories, based broadly upon ownership or nonownership of the means of pro-
duction. Classes are subdivided in terms of (1) the types of ownership and control and (2) the types of services contributed to the process of production. Thus, a distinction is made between sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. Further, rentiers, farmers, cultivators, sharecroppers, and agricultural labourers constitute distinct categories only at the conceptual level. They do not, in reality, comprise discrete groups, since it is frequently found that a single person is both a rentier and a farmer, a sharecropper and an agricultural labourer.

Although there are points of tension between the different agricultural classes, it would not be correct to characterise their mutual relations as essentially those of conflict. One reason for this is the high degree of overlap in reality between the different classes. The individual often has divided loyalties, being at the same time a landowner and a manual worker, a tenant and an agricultural labourer.

Another important factor is the existence of conflicts based on other alignments, some of which tend to assume greater importance than those of class. The division of the village into Brahmans, Non-Brahmins, and Adi-Dravidas provides, as we have seen, fundamental cleavages in its social structure. Tensions often follow these cleavages rather than those of class. As we shall see, however, there is a considerable measure of overlap between caste and class, so that a particular conflict is often as much a conflict between Brahmin and Non-Brahmin as between landlord and tenant.

The distribution of power, again, creates a hierarchy which is different from the hierarchies of caste and class. It is, moreover, far more difficult to locate. Power cannot be defined adequately in terms of formal criteria, and frequent shifts in the power structure give to it a much more fluid character than is associated with either caste or class. Further, many features of the power structure cannot be seen at all in terms of a hierarchical arrangement—as, for example, the conflicts between two rival parties.

II

Caste and class resemble each other in some respects and differ in others. Let us first note these points of similarity and difference
before seeing how the two systems are interrelated in their actual working. The relations between class and power will be examined subsequently, and, finally, the role of caste in party politics.

Castes have been defined earlier in terms of distinctive styles of life. In the terminology of Weber (1948, pp. 186–191; 1958, pp. 39–40), they constitute status groups. "In contrast to classes," Weber writes, "status groups are normally communities. They are, however, often of an amorphous kind." (1948, p. 186.) It should be pointed out that castes constitute communities only at the local or narrow regional level. Thus, the Shri Vaishnavas of Sripuram, or even all the Brahmins of that village, can be spoken of as a community. It would be inexact, however, to speak of all Brahmins, or even all Shri Vaishnavas, as constituting a community.

Castes, as status groups, are defined essentially in terms of styles of life. Property and occupation enter as important elements in the style of life of a status group, but they need not be decisive. Thus, the Shri Vaishnava Brahmins of Sripuram, who constitute a status group or community, include people with different occupations and economic positions. There are rentiers among them, as well as clerks and schoolteachers. Such occupational differences do not significantly disturb the unity which characterises the style of life of the Shri Vaishnavas of Sripuram as a community.

Too much diversity of occupation or economic position may, however, disrupt the unity of a status group. Although a given style of life may be compatible with more than one occupation, the number and range of such occupations are not unlimited. It is doubtful whether the Shri Vaishnava Brahmins would continue to be a single status group if a large section of them took to menial occupations. As we have seen, the cleavage between Smarthas and Kurukkals is, to a considerable extent, related to their different economic positions.

Social honour in the caste system is very closely tied to ritual values. Styles of life which are highly esteemed are generally associated with a large number of ritual restrictions. Thus, there are restrictions among Brahmins on the eating of various kinds of food. Together with this there are ritual prescriptions with regard
to the manner of dress, the caste mark, and so on. These restrictions and prescriptions symbolise different styles of life and serve to mark out the different status groups which are their bearers. Although status groups are a feature of societies of different kinds, nowhere are they so sharply defined as in the caste system. This is in large measure owing to the attachment of elaborate ritual values to the pursuit by different castes of different styles of life.

Another distinctive feature of the caste system as a system of status groups is its extreme proliferation, or the multiplicity of castes. Social classes, defined in terms of ownership or nonownership of the means of production, tend to be reduced to a few broad divisions—ultimately, according to Marx, to two. Status groups, on the other hand, show a tendency to multiply. Nowhere has this tendency manifested itself in a more extreme form than in the caste system. Various estimates place the number of castes in India as between two and three thousand. We have seen how in Sripuram within a single street, the agraharam, there are twelve named endogamous divisions.

Classes and status groups have been contrasted by Bottomore (1955, pp. 58–59) in the following terms: "The difference, broadly, is between a hierarchy of a small number of organised or partly organised economic groups whose relations to each other are antagonistic, and a hierarchy of numerous groups, more correctly described as aggregates of individuals of equal social prestige based on similarities which are not exclusively economic, and whose relations to each other are not primarily antagonistic but are partly competitive and partly emulative." (Italics added.)

Each subcaste or jati, however, should not be considered as a discrete entity in any absolute sense of the term. It has been shown how a subcaste has a distinct entity only in relation to another subcaste of the same order of segmentation, and merges itself within a wider group in relation to one of a higher order of segmentation. Besides, the general tendency among castes today is one of fusion, rather than of fission.

Classes, as such, are not defined essentially in terms of social honour, although class positions do tend to be associated with differential honour. Classes, as we have seen, are defined in terms of property, of ownership or nonownership of the means of
production. Property by itself does not create social honor, although it is generally a pre-condition to it. Thus, when a Vellala acquires land, he does not automatically move up in the scale of social honour; for this he is required, in addition, to Sanskritise his style of life.

Classes are—in principle and, to some extent, in practice—open; castes are not. One may change one's position from tenant to landowner, or from agricultural labourer to owner- cultivated. One cannot, however, change from a Vellala into a Brahmin or from a Palla into a Vellala. The free mobility which is, in principle, permitted within the class system, is, in reality, limited by various factors. Thus, the son of a rentier has much greater chances of himself becoming a rentier than the son of an agricultural labourer. It is, however, not impossible for the latter to become a landowner, and cases of this have been instanced in an earlier chapter.

Movement upwards or downwards within the caste system is, in theory, inadmissible, although there is some movement in practice. We have seen how Kallas transform themselves into Maravas, and Ahamudiyas into Vellalas. Yet there are significant differences between social mobility in the caste system and social mobility in the class system. In the latter it is the individual who moves up or down, whereas in the former entire communities change their position (see Srinivas, 1962).

Mobility in the caste system is a much slower and more gradual process than in the class system. The style of life of a community has a complex and pervasive character, and it takes a long time to bring about a change in it. Property, in contrast, can be acquired and lost more easily and over shorter periods of time. This applies particularly to the contemporary economy of Sripuram, where the cash nexus is of considerable importance and where land has come into the market.

Movement between the different agricultural classes in Sripuram has been taking place at an accelerated pace. Towards the end of the nineteenth century landowners formed a more or less closed category, as did agricultural labourers. Practically the only way of acquiring land was by inheritance. Today there is considerable buying and selling of land. One of the consequences of this is that a growing section of people tend to become completely
detached from the agrarian class structure of the village. These are the ex-rentiers who, having sold their land, have taken to typical ‘middle class’ occupations such as those of teacher and clerk.

The caste system enjoyed both legal and religious sanctions in traditional Indian society. Different castes were assigned different rights, not only in economic matters, but over a wide range of social phenomena. In traditional society punishment differed not only according to the nature of the offence committed, but also according to the caste of the offender.

Classes, in contrast, are de facto categories. They do not enjoy the kind of legal and religious sanctions which were associated with castes (or, for that matter, with estates in feudal society). It is true that inequalities before law, which were associated with the different castes, have been completely removed, or almost so, in course of the last hundred years. Nonetheless, old habits of mind, conditioned by a legal and religious structure which for centuries upheld these inequalities, continue to play a part in the relations between castes in contemporary society.

III

Today, as we have seen, there is a certain amount of divergence between the hierarchy of caste and that of class. Both the systems have been undergoing some modification, the caste system because of the general trend towards westernization and secularization, and the class system because of the extension of a cash economy and because of land having come into the market.

In traditional society, and even fifty years ago, there was much greater consistency between the class system and the caste structure. One can even say, with some risk of oversimplification, that the class system was largely subsumed under the caste structure. This means, in effect, that ownership and nonownership of land, and relations within the system of production, were to a much greater extent associated with caste than is the case today. The disintegration of village handicrafts and the emergence of new ‘caste-free’ occupations have also contributed towards dissociating class relations from the caste structure.

Sripuram, as has been mentioned earlier, constituted an agra-
*haram* village. Much of the land in it was owned by a community of Brahmins who, in addition, owned land in other villages. The Non-Brahmins, in general, owned very little land. Yet there was, even in the nineteenth century, one notable exception. This was the Maratha family which at one time owned a little less than half the land in the three villages of Sripuram-Melur, Peramur, and Vishnupuram taken together.

The Maratha family, however, stood in some ways outside the framework of the local social structure. It was grafted onto the village from outside, and it differed in many ways from both the Brahmins and the Non-Brahmins. It may even be said to have differed more from the Non-Brahmin peasantry in its style of life than from the *mirasadar* Brahmins. By kinship and culture it was related to the princely family of Tanjore, and it always maintained a certain distance from both Brahmins and Non-Brahmins in the village. In fact, it is difficult to place the Maratha family within the local caste structure of Sripuram.

Ignoring, then, the Maratha family, it is certainly true to say that in the nineteenth century more land was held by Brahmins and more Brahmins were landowners than is the case today. It is generally believed that the entire land in the three villages was divided into twenty shares. Of these, nine and a half shares were held by the Maratha family, and the rest, in different proportions, by the six major Brahmin families or lineages. Even to this day one of these Brahmin families bears the title of Kakkarai (“one-fourth share”) Shastri.

Most of the residents of the *agraharam* till the end of the nineteenth century belonged to one or another of these six families and were coparcenaries in the village land. The connection between the Brahmins and their ancestral land has been indicated earlier. Learned Brahmins were often settled in the village by the ruling prince, and were endowed with land for their sustenance. Such land almost invariably became ancestral property and passed by inheritance from one generation to another.

It follows that, since service either as domestic or temple priest was adopted by only a few families in the *agraharam*, land must have been the main support of the others. The alternative avenues of employment such as teaching and clerical work which are open to Brahmins today provided very limited opportunities at the turn
of the last century. Further, many Brahmins living in the village today are supported by cash remittances sent by relatives employed in the city. Such ties between city and village were also of a rather more limited nature five or six decades ago.

Thus, in the second half of the nineteenth century the agraharam was dominated by the six Brahmin lineages which, along with the Maratha family, owned most of the land between them. Some of the older families have left the village altogether, but whatever genealogical material is available shows that land was more widely held in the agraharam than at present. Towards the beginning of the present century the terms "mirasdars" and "Brahmin" were almost synonymous in Sripuram. This is no longer the case today.

Although most of the Brahmins owned much of the land in the village, they did not themselves cultivate it. The land was leased to tenants who were mainly Non-Brahmins. It is probable that more land was cultivated under the direct supervision of Brahmin mirasdars some fifty or sixty years ago than is today. There is, however, little doubt that tenancy played a major part in agrarian relations in the past, as it does at the present.

The Non-Brahmins, with the exception of the Maratha family, owned very little land in the village at the turn of the century. Much of the land which they now own has been acquired over the last fifty years, and particularly since Independence. As a group, they were tenants rather than noncultivating owners or owner-cultivators. They tilled land taken on lease from the Brahmin mirasdars either on the warnam basis or, more commonly, according to the kuttahai system.

Even so, as far back as the nineteenth century some of the Non-Brahmin peasants of Sripuram owned land in the village. Their names figure in the settlement register dated 1897. It is not easy to go back much further than this with any measure of certainty as far as the Non-Brahmins are concerned. Family records are not maintained among them (with, of course, the notable exception of the Maratha family) as is done among some of the Brahmins.

Such land as was owned by Non-Brahmin peasants in the village in the nineteenth century was very small in amount, and landownership was confined to a small number of Vellalus and
perhaps one Padayachi family. Gradually, however, Non-Brahmins began acquiring land as Brahmins began to dispose of it. The simple picture which we have of the nineteenth century, when Brahmins owned land and Non-Brahmins did not, began to acquire a more complex character. More Vellalas and Padayachis became landowners, and the Kallas also began to acquire land from the beginning of the present century onward.

Nonetheless, the land which was sold by the older Brahmin mirasdars was not all bought by the Non-Brahmin peasantry of the village. There is today no single Non-Brahmin in the village who can be compared with the big Brahmin mirasdars, whether of the past or of the present. The only big Non-Brahmin landowner is an outsider who never had any direct connection with the village.

Thus, although the number of mirasdars among Brahmins and the size of their estates came to be reduced, there did not emerge a corresponding class of mirasdars among the Non-Brahmins of the village. Most of the Non-Brahmins of the village who now own land there are small holders. They are not rentiers, but farmers and peasant cultivators. A Vellala in Sripuram, even if he owns twice as much land as a Brahmin, has, in general, a much closer connection with the cultivation of it than the latter. Thus, ownership of land has not effectively brought the upward-moving Non-Brahmin peasant very close to the Brahmin mirasdar.

For the rest, most of the Non-Brahmins engaged in agriculture continued to be tenants, as in the past. Even when a Non-Brahmin peasant acquires land, he does not immediately cease to be a tenant. On the contrary, he will try to acquire more land, if not as private property in the capacity of an owner, then on lease in the capacity of a tenant. We have seen earlier, however, that Non-Brahmins do not have the monopoly of being tenants. There are tenants, technically speaking, even among the Brahmins, but their position is exceptional. The case of tenants among Adi-Dravidas will be considered later.

Thus, the Non-Brahmin peasant castes, such as the Vellalas, the Kallas, and the Padayachis, occupy a position in the agrarian class system which is, on the whole, different from that of the Brahmin mirasdar. By and large, they constitute the tenantry, or an important section of it, even though some Non-Brahmins are themselves owners of land. A growing number of them have been
acquiring land in small parcels, but ownership of land does not automatically transform a Vellala or a Padayachi into the prototype of the Brahmin mirasdar.

The Non-Brahmin peasants, who may be broadly characterised as tenants, include at one end the small landowner; at the other end of the class structure they shade off into the category of agricultural labourers. Many Non-Brahmin tenants, in fact, work as farm servants or day labourers in addition to cultivating the land which they have secured on lease. This is in sharp contrast to the Brahmins, who do not provide even a single recruit to the class of agricultural labourers.

As a class, agricultural labourers overlap to the largest extent with the Adi-Dravidas. Over a large area of the agrarian economy, the traditional arrangement seems to have been thus: the Brahmin mirasdars owned land which they leased to Non-Brahmin tenants who had it cultivated by engaging Adi-Dravida labourers. This, of course, is a highly simplified picture, and even in the traditional economy there were exceptions to the simple correspondence between Brahmin and landowner, Non-Brahmin and tenant, and Adi-Dravida and agricultural labourer. These exceptions have increased considerably over the last fifty years. The class system can no longer be seen simply as an aspect of the caste structure.

Of the eighty-two Palla households in the cheri at Sripuram, only about half a dozen are those of tenant cultivators with some security and permanence of tenure. The rest depend mainly upon agricultural and other forms of casual labour for their livelihood. Even the few tenants hold small leases and have to supplement their earnings by working as labourers. In one or two cases the lease is a reward from a Brahmin mirasdar for long years of dutiful service as labourer or servant.

The number and proportion of Adi-Dravida tenants in the neighbouring cheris seem to be greater. Several Brahmin mirasdars have tenants among Adi-Dravidas from one of the five other cheris which are within the physical boundaries of Sripuram-Melur or from some other adjacent cheri. In some cases the relation between Brahmin mirasdar and Adi-Dravida tenant goes back several generations.

Over the last fifteen years there has been an increase in the
number of Adi-Dravida tenants. As Non-Brahmin tenants become more demanding and aggressive, with the shift of political power in their favor, Brahmin mirasdar tend to show a greater preference for Adi-Dravida tenants, who are, on the whole, less militant and more respectful of traditional authority. A Brahmin mirasdar is generally in a stronger bargaining position with an Adi-Dravida lessee than with a Non-Brahmin. His bargaining position, in relation to the latter is, in fact, often very weak.

A Non-Brahmin tenant is much more likely to take disputes with his landlord to the courts. Adi-Dravidas can be more easily intimidated, and they are, in any case, distrustful of the courts for a variety of reasons. They do not have the influence which they feel to be necessary to push matters through the courts, and they are hard put to raise the money necessary for initiating court proceedings. Non-Brahmins, of the whole, are more familiar with court procedures and are less easily controlled by the traditional authority of the Brahmin mirasdar.

The threat of court proceedings is an important consideration in contemporary landlord-tenant relations in Sripuram. It has been shown earlier (chap. iv) that the proportions in which the produce should be shared between landlord and tenant have been stipulated by law, and that the law in this regard is not observed in practice. The landlord takes a much larger share than he is allowed by law, and he is always uneasy when threatened with court proceedings. Court proceedings, however, would affect not only the Brahmin mirasdar, but also the more influential Non-Brahmins who often sublet their land and therefore extract even higher rents than do Brahmins. Thus, although the threat of court proceedings on account of fair rents always hangs in the air, it has so far not been carried into effect in any significant way. The reasons for this will become clearer when the relationship between ownership of land and political power has been analysed.

Even without going to court, or threatening to go to court, Non-Brahmin tenants give considerable trouble to their Brahmin mirasdar. They may refuse to give the stipulated quantity of grain, or not give it on time. They have the strength of organized numbers behind them, and also of political power. A recalcitrant Adi-Dravida tenant may be beaten with impunity on the instruc-
tion of his mirasdars, but not so an influential Vellala or Kalla tenant.

Many Brahmin mirasdars now feel that they will be better served by Adi-Dravida tenants than by Non-Brahmins, but they are not fully free to make substitutions. In the traditional system, when Brahmins were in full control of affairs, their tenants were mainly Non-Brahmins. Legislation against the eviction of tenants, passed since 1952, now makes it difficult for Brahmins to get rid of their troublesome Non-Brahmin tenants. Thus, even when a Brahmin miradar wishes to bring about change in the old relations, he is often prevented by law from doing this.

There are, nonetheless, ways and means by which the law may be evaded. In the early fifties, when it became clear that some legislation against eviction was in the offing, the shrewder among the Brahmin mirasdars got rid of their troublesome Non-Brahmin lessees and had them replaced by Adi-Dravidas. Even after the laws were enacted, tenants could be evicted for arrears of payment or on other technical grounds, provided the miradar happened to be a sufficiently shrewd and powerful person. Today, a sizeable proportion of Brahmin mirasdars in Sripuram have one or more Adi-Dravida tenants, whether from the cheri attached to the village or from an adjoining one.

There are a number of reasons why Adi-Dravidas were not preferred as tenants in the traditional system. The landless Palla is notorious for being unthrifty and improvident. In the past, whatever surplus income he made often went to the liquor seller. He rarely saved, and he had very little movable property to speak of. From people of this kind it is usually difficult to extract rent when it falls due. Arrears tend to mount, and the only sanction which the miradar has at his disposal is to have his Palla beaten or put in jail, neither of which is of profit to him in the long run. A Non-Brahmin tenant, owning some movable property, would rather sell his utensils, or mortgage his wife's ornaments, than court imprisonment for nonpayment of arrears.

Concepts of purity and pollution also acted against the development of direct relations between Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas in earlier times. The relationship between landlord and tenant, particularly in the traditional system, was often a close and personal one. Exchange of goods and services extended beyond
what is strictly involved in the relation between owner and tiller of land. The tenant was often called to do odd jobs in the mirasdar's house, where he had relatively easy access.

The Adi-Dravida, by reason of the pollution attached to his person, was debarred from many of the activities which a Non-Brahmin tenant by convention performed for his mirasdar. He had access only to the outer backyard of the Brahmin's house. If the Brahmin needed him urgently, he could not himself go to the cheri to fetch him. Even today an Adi-Dravida tenant cannot, after harvest, deliver the grain directly to the house of his Brahmin mirasdar. He has to stand at the head of the agraharam and call out for his landlord, who then sends somebody to carry the grain in.

It is thus that Adi-Dravidas are associated more closely with Non-Brahmins than with Brahmins. Non-Brahmins engage Adi-Dravidas as labourers and servants, and in some cases sublet to them land which they have themselves acquired on lease from Brahmins. In such cases there is a threefold hierarchy of Brahmin landowner, Non-Brahmin tenant, and Adi-Dravida subtenant. Although the Non-Brahmin makes some profit out of such a relationship without contributing either land or labour, his position, being that of an intermediary, is a very weak one in the eyes of the law.

Thus, though the majority of Adi-Dravidas are agricultural labourers, there are some who are tenants at second hand. There are also some among them who are tenants at first hand, holding their lease directly from Brahmin mirasdars. A few have even become owners of land. As far as the cheri attached to Sripuram is concerned, this is an entirely new phenomenon. Some Adi-Dravidas belonging to the adjoining cheris have owned small parcels of land for the last few decades.

With the purchase of land by Adi-Dravidas, the class system has further dissociated itself from the rigidity of the caste structure. The term "Adi-Dravida" is no longer synonymous with "nonowner of land," as it was a few decades ago. But the acquisition of land by Adi-Dravidas is a recent phenomenon. In the Sripuram cheri only three Adi-Dravidas have purchased land, and that only in course of the last three years. In the revenue village as a whole not more than a dozen Adi-Dravidas own land.
CONCLUSION

On an average each of them owns about one acre, so that even the owners of land among the Adi-Dravidas have to supplement their income by engaging themselves as tenants or else as agricultural labourers.

The relationship between the caste structure and the class system has, evidently, been a dynamic one. In the traditional system caste and class overlapped to a very large extent. There is even today a considerable measure of overlap between the two systems. But the class system has gradually been dissociating itself from the caste structure. One can achieve a variety of class positions with different degrees of probability, whatever one’s position in the caste structure may be.

IV

Although relations between classes have been undergoing change, this change has not kept pace with changes in the distribution of power. Ownership of land has shifted only in a small way from the old rentier class to the emerging class of farmers and owner-cultivators. Power, on the other hand, has shifted much more decisively from the traditional elite of the village into the hands of the new popular leaders.

Not only was there greater congruence between caste and class in the traditional system, but both were more congruent with the power structure than today. The powerful families in the past were the big landowning families. These included the principal Brahmin families and, among Non-Brahmins, the Maratha family. Today political power, whether in the village or outside it, is not as closely tied to ownership of land as it was in the past. New bases of power have emerged which are, to some extent, independent of both caste and class. Perhaps most important among these is the strength of numerical support.

One can, of course, view either caste or class as an independent locus of power. In fact, the concept of dominant caste has been widely used to show how power in the village or the district has been controlled by one or more castes. There can be little doubt that in traditional society power was largely subsumed by the structure of caste, and this was certainly true of Sripuram also at the turn of the century. Today, however, power is no longer a
monopoly of any single caste in the village. It has, to some extent, detached itself from caste, and one has now to consider the balance of power between different castes (or groups of castes). This balance is unstable in nature, and factors other than caste play an important part in maintaining it and changing it from day to day.

Class also may be viewed as an independent locus of power, but only in a limited way. In Sripuram classes have never been communities; they have not been organised for political action; and they have never had the necessary coherence for acting as political units.

In addition to caste and class there are important loci of power which belong specifically to the domain of politics. The emergence of such loci—the panchayat system, parties, and political networks—has largely been a feature of the political modernisation of India. We have tried to achieve some understanding of the nature of the new loci of power, their sources of strength, and the processes by which they become differentiated from the traditional structure.

The popular leaders of the village today are not necessarily big landowners. The panchayat president who is a key figure in village politics owns some land, but this is not his principal source of power. We have seen how his power depends upon a plurality of factors, among which his contacts with politicians and party bosses outside the village and his position in an elaborate system of patronage are important ones.

Two factors have contributed in a big way to changes in the distribution of power in the village. The first of these is the decline in the influence of the old mirasdar class for a variety of reasons. The second is the growth of an elaborate political machinery, linking M.L.A.’s, party bosses, and village leaders and making it possible for people to acquire power in ways which were not open before the introduction of adult franchise and Panchayati Raj.

The power of the big landowners in Sripuram (and, to some extent, in Tanjore District as a whole) has been progressively curbed over the last several decades. It is not unlikely that this weakening of power has been confined to the old mirasdar or rentier class of landowners, and that the farmer and owner-cultivator classes have held their own or even strengthened their
political position. Since Sripuram has been dominated in the past by rentiers and absentee landowners, it is to this class that we now turn our attention.

The power of the mirasdars in Sripuram was considerable at the beginning of the present century. There were several among them who each owned more than thirty acres of land. Most of them lived in the agraharam, and they were united by bonds of kinship and caste and by a common style of life. The rest of the village looked up to them for their livelihood and for help and guidance on a variety of matters. In addition to agriculturists, the artisan and servicing castes also depended to a large extent on the patronage of the mirasdars.

Several factors were responsible for the power and influence of the old landowning class in Sripuram. There was, to begin with, a greater measure of unity among them as a class than there is today. Landowners were united, not only in terms of economic interest, but by a common style of life. In a majority of cases they were born in the village, had grown up there, and had known each other from childhood. Their relationships with each other, as well as with their tenants, were of a close, intimate, personal character.

Today not only has the proportion of landowners resident in the village gone down, but fragmentation has greatly reduced the size of individual or family holdings. Together with this, the cost of living has gone up, since landowners have very often to support one or more children studying outside. This makes it very difficult for the mirasdar to meet his traditional obligations to tenants and to artisans and servicing groups. Formerly at festivals such as Deepavali and Pongal, as well as on other occasions, landowners were expected to give liberally to a host of dependents. Today most of them cannot easily afford to do this. As their ability to distribute patronage becomes weakened, their power and influence over tenants and dependents also tend to wane.

Along with this, one has to consider the fact that a large section of landowners have left the village and settled elsewhere. Absentee landowners do not generally have either the opportunity or the interest to maintain control over affairs in the village. They do not have any close or enduring ties with their tenants. They do not distribute patronage or in any appreciable way influence political
life in the village. Many of them know the village, and are known by its inhabitants, only superficially.

Thus, the landowners as a class have become fragmented and scattered. Some of them cling to the traditional ways of life and continue to reside in the village. Others have acquired Western education, secured urban employment, and developed interests outside the village. The former unity of the landowners—and, along with it, a part of their strength—has been destroyed.

Political and legal factors have further undermined the position of the old class of rentier mirasdar. Earlier, the landowner had a fairly free hand in fixing rents, as well as in evicting tenants. Land legislation in recent years has considerably strengthened the position of tenants at the same time as it has curbed the powers of landowners. A tenant can no longer be evicted at the pleasure of the mirasdar. The latter is, thus, deprived of one of the most powerful weapons in his armoury. The political climate in the state as a whole is changing, and the class of rentier mirasdars in Sripuram has begun to feel that the tide is against them.

The emerging leaders of the village are, thus, not members of the old landowning class. They generally belong to the class of small owner-cultivators. Their power is, to a large extent, based upon numerical support within the village and political contacts outside it. These two factors, as we have seen, tend to reinforce each other.

Members of the old mirasdar class feel ill at ease in the face of changes in the ideological climate. The introduction of democratic forms of government, and more particularly of adult franchise, has created in the minds of people a new consciousness of their own political importance, irrespective of caste, class, and other social factors. Villagers, however low their social or economic position, have by now had the experience of being courted during elections by important political personalities from towns and cities. The support of the masses can no longer be taken for granted. And in this matter the new political leaders, the contact men, have an edge over mirasdars of the older type.

There is always a certain barrier which deters the old mirasdar from approaching his tenants and servants for votes in an attitude of supplication. There is a sense of pride which keeps him from competing for popular support with people who had till recently
taken his superiority for granted. The campaign for popular support demands many compromises which do not come easily to the rentier mirasdar, who still preserves a very keen sense of personal prestige.

There is a feeling of estrangement between the old elite of the village and the masses. The mirasdar, who is often a Brahmin, cannot go to the cheri to canvass votes from the Pallas. The new Non-Brahmin leaders have an advantage over him in this regard. Non-Brahmins in general have long had much closer contacts with the Adi-Dravidas in the village. It is easier for them to assume an air of equality when approaching the latter for votes or political support in general. The very structure which in the past ensured the superiority of the mirasdar by keeping others at a distance from him now acts as an obstacle when he is faced with the demands of an egalitarian ideology.

Popular leaders of the kind who now dominate the village panchayat began to come to the forefront after 1942. As the Congress developed more and more into a mass movement, young people with initiative and drive, and with the ability to organise support, moved into the limelight. Gradually the skill to organise people became an important factor. The self-esteem of members of the old mirasdar class often stood in the way of their developing such a skill. Particularly today there is a distinct tendency on the part of the college-educated mirasdar to regard local politics as something dirty, requiring the prospective leader to rub shoulders with people of all descriptions.

The new popular leader in his turn began to expand his contacts both within and outside the village. Lack of funds was not always a very serious handicap, since the party as well as various agencies of the government could be tapped for money. The development of democracy, with its elaborate paraphernalia of parties and local self-government, has made politics a paying business for those who have initiative, drive, and popular support. Being a part of this elaborate political machinery gives to the individual a certain standing, irrespective of his caste or class position.

As more and more specialised political agencies develop, the political system itself tends to acquire a weight of its own. In the traditional system there were no parties, legislatures, or Pan-
chayat Union Councils in and through which the individual could acquire power independently of his position in the class or caste structure. No doubt, membership in the party, the Legislature, or the Panchayat Union Council is even today largely dependent upon caste and class. But the relations between caste, class, and power have become more complex and more dynamic in contemporary society, and the introduction of adult franchise in particular has opened up new avenues for the acquisition of power.

Thus, there is a certain divergence between economic and political power in the village today. The big mirasdars are no longer the ones who are politically the most powerful. Those in whom political power is vested in the village today cannot accurately be described as big landowners. To what extent are the ones who have acquired political power also on the way to acquiring control over land? This is a question to which no satisfactory answer can be provided under the terms of the present analysis. Although it would be useful to view the relationship between political and economic power in terms of dynamic criteria, there is no doubt that there may be considerable lags between the two over a particular period of time.

One should not, however, emphasize too much the divergence between political and economic power. In order to acquire and retain political power it is necessary for a person to have some economic standing. Although political power has shifted from the class of rentier mirasdars, it has not gone into the hands of landless labourers. The latter are still largely in a state of subordination. In the panchayat and outside they have very little say in matters which affect the village as a whole.

Although not big mirasdars, most of those who enjoy political power in the village have some land or other source of income. A person who is politically influential has to distribute patronage to his followers. He has to entertain guests from outside and keep up a certain standard of living. It is not possible for a landless labourer, or for one whose income is very small and uncertain, to meet the demands which are made by followers on a leader and a man of influence.

While a moderately secure economic position is an important condition for the acquisition of power, political power, in its turn, brings certain economic advantages. The panchayat president
receives funds from the party, or from leaders higher up, and part of this he can divert to his personal use. He also has certain discretionary powers in the use of panchayat funds, and it is widely believed in the village that he is able to use these powers to his own personal advantage. Members of the panchayat and, particularly, of the Panchayat Union Council have authority to give contracts for jobs of various kinds, and the giving of contracts usually brings in its wake reciprocal benefits.

Contacts with officials in government departments is an important source of economic advantage for the villagers today. One can obtain credit facilities for various purposes and an increasing range of benefits through government departments. Political connections often help to break through the rigid demands of a bureaucratic structure. The panchayat president of Sripuram, who has contacts with important political leaders, is in a position to use these contacts to gain many administrative advantages.

Although numerical strength has become an increasingly important basis of power, by itself it does not count for very much. What is required, in addition, is organisation, and in this regard people with some social and economic standing play an important part. Small tenants and landless labourers, and those who are on the border line between them, have as yet very little power. Far from being able to manoeuvre for benefits and privileges, they are generally not even able to get for themselves what they are entitled to by law.

Sometime after the Payment of Fair Rent Act was passed in 1956, some of the small tenants in Sripuram made an attempt to have it enforced. The Brahmin mirasdars found themselves in a difficult situation, as they had by then lost the power to enforce their decision against strong opposition from the other villagers. But on this issue they were joined by the farmers and owner-cultivators, the new men of power in the village, because the latter, largely as intermediaries, had as much to lose as the rentiers, or perhaps more, by the enforcement of the act.

Although legally the position of small tenants has been strengthened considerably, there are still many loopholes in the law which can be used to advantage by an enterprising miradar. The law allows the latter to resume for personal cultivation land
up to a maximum of 6\% acres. Even the big mirasdar often has his land under the names of several members of his family, any one of whom rarely has more than the stipulated maximum. It is always possible to take advantage of this provision in the law to evict tenants if their demands are pitched too high.

In actual practice some compromise is generally reached. The mirasdars by and large have allowed their tenants to keep a slightly higher share of the produce than they did before 1956. But their success in getting round the law was due in no small measure to the support which they received from the politically powerful owner-cultivators and big tenants.

In Sripuram tensions between people occupying different positions in the agrarian system tend to be seen as issues between individuals. There is a good measure of discontent all around. The agricultural labourer feels that he has no security; the small tenant feels that he is being cheated; the landowner feels that his rights are being increasingly curtailed and that peasants are being taught by politicians to make unreasonable demands. But, by and large, conflict, bargaining, and adjustment are not organised, and are matters between one individual and another.

Agricultural labourers do not have much experience of organised political action. In the main, their efforts to improve their position in any big way have been thwarted. In a neighbouring cheri a number of agricultural labourers got together and made a threat to their landowner of stopping work unless their wages were increased. The landowner, a Non-Brahmin with high political connections at Tanjore, secured a lorry to transport labourers from outside to work in his fields. The local agricultural labourers were starved into capitulation.

Generally in Sripuram the individual agricultural labourer tries to bargain for a slightly higher wage for himself. Wages are sufficiently variable and dynamic to allow each person the hope that he may be able to make a certain gain for himself. And, most important, the agricultural labourer wishes to keep himself in the good books of the mirasdar in the constant hope of being able to gain from the latter a piece of land to cultivate on his own as a tenant.

The agricultural labourer has been tied for generations to a particular way of life, and he does not normally fix his aspirations
beyond a certain level. A secure and stable source of livelihood for himself and his family is his immediate objective. As he generally sees it, the best and the most obvious way of achieving this is by acquiring a lease through the favour of some mirasdar. The idea of patronage, as an exchange of favour for service, is an important legacy of the traditional system. The thought of organising political action does not come easily to the landless labourer, particularly if he happens to be of the older generation.

Lessees or tenants are of various kinds, and their attitudes depend upon their legal position, the amount of land which they hold on lease, and whether they own any land themselves. An individual often has a plurality of roles; he may be a lessee vis-à-vis somebody and have, in addition, lessees of his own. In such cases his attitudes will be shaped by a delicate balance of specific personal interests. Tenants with big leases may identify themselves more closely with landowners than with small tenants.

Not all lessees have a very secure legal position. The more powerful ones among them are often intermediaries; as such, their position is ambiguous. Intermediaries do not have the same economic interests as tenants who are tillers of the soil. In fact, the intermediaries would generally stand to lose by a lowering of rents. As a result, there is limited scope for the two to come together for common political action.

Thus, classes—as categories of persons having similar positions in the system of production—are not politically organised for a variety of reasons. The separation of the different classes is, in reality, not sharp enough for each to have a feeling of identity in opposition to the others. Individuals have multiple positions, and their loyalties are divided. There are risks involved in challenging established economic interests. The agricultural labourer may find it difficult to secure employment, and the tenant may find himself evicted through manipulation by the landlord of some loophole in the law.

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Political conflicts seem to have followed more closely the cleavages of caste than those of class. The division of society into
Brahmins, Non-Brahmins, and Adi-Dravidas has been of more immediate relevance in mobilising political support than its division into landowners, tenants, and agricultural labourers. To a large extent, of course, conflicts between castes subsume within them conflicts between classes, since there is a considerable measure of overlap between the two systems.

One important difference between caste and class is that castes, at least at the level of the village, constitute communities, whereas classes do not. In Sripuram all Brahmins, for instance, live in one place; all landowners do not. As a community of persons living together, constantly interacting with each other, and being shaped by the same general values, Brahmins are more likely to develop common political attitudes than are landowners or members of any agrarian class.

In the traditional set-up political power in Sripuram was in the hands of the Brahmins. The Non-Brahmins, with the exception of the Maratha family, did not enjoy much political power. Major decisions affecting the village as a whole were in general taken and implemented by the Brahmins. This, as we have seen, has changed considerably. Power has now gone into the hands of Non-Brahmins, and Brahmins tend to play a smaller part in deciding the fate of the village.

One of the most important political phenomena of the past three decades, in Sripuram as well as in Tamilnad as a whole, has been the shift of power from Brahmins to Non-Brahmins. This has not necessarily or always meant a shift from landowners to tenants or cultivators. The new men of power in Sripuram cannot adequately be characterised as tillers of the soil. More important, they owe much of their power to connections with influential Non-Brahmins outside the village who in many cases happen to be big landowners.

In Sripuram the transfer of power from Brahmins to Non-Brahmins was symbolised by the shift of the panchayat office from the agharam to the Non-Brahmin quarters. This was associated with the replacement by a Non-Brahmin of the Brahmin panchayat president in the mid-forties. Today guests of the panchayat, including state ministers, are received in the new panchayat office and do not have any occasion to visit the agharam.

The relationship between caste and political power has to be
examined in the context of change, because change has been an important feature of this relationship over the last few decades. Further, such changes as have been taking place within the village are, in many cases, reflections of shifts in power in regional society. It is necessary, therefore, to undertake a broad survey of the changing role of caste in the politics of Tamilnad over the last forty years in order to place in their proper perspective the events which are taking place in Sripuram today.

The Brahmins have occupied a rather ambivalent position in the politics of Tamilnad since the end of nineteenth century. Their changing fortunes in Sripuram reflect their general decline in the state as a whole. Yet the superior position which Brahmins enjoyed in traditional society had been further strengthened during the earlier years of British rule, when they added Western education to the high economic position and ritual status which was already theirs.

Till the outbreak of World War I, Western education in Tamilnad was almost a monopoly of the Brahmins. This was particularly true of the Tanjore Brahmins. It had the consequence, at least initially, of further widening the gap between Brahmins on the one hand and Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas on the other. We have seen how this happened in Sripuram. The Brahmins turned themselves towards urban life, and there was a corresponding loss of interest in agriculture. The Non-Brahmins, on the other hand, remained firmly rooted to the village and its agrarian economy.

Western education not only brought social prestige on its own right, but also opened the way to new economic opportunities. The new urban jobs—clerical, executive, and professional—became a virtual monopoly of the Brahmins. Brahmins in important executive and managerial positions used the ties of caste and kinship to recruit more Brahmins. The Non-Brahmins found themselves virtually excluded because of their belated start.

Western education, and employment in important managerial and administrative positions, brought the Brahmins close to the new rulers of India, the British. Brahmins entered the highly prestigious and powerful Indian Civil Service, and government bureaucracies of all kinds became their strongholds. They also dominated the professions of law, medicine, and education. Since
nationalist awakenings first found expression among members of the professions and the urban middle classes in general, the leadership of the Congress party came to be dominated by the Brahmans.

The Non-Brahmins, however, did not for long remain reconciled to their inferior position. Those among them who were able to acquire Western education soon set about organising themselves politically and appealing to the British for a more equitable distribution of opportunities. The Justice newspaper, a vehicle of Non-Brahmin demands, was launched in 1917, and at about the same time the Justice party. The stage was set for the struggle for power between Brahmans and Non-Brahmins.

In the early decades of the present century in Tamilnad the Brahmans dominated the Congress party, by far the most influential national political organisation. The Non-Brahmins, including Muslims and Christians, rallied round the Justice party. The latter gained important advantages by cooperating with the British over the Government of India Act of 1919, which the Congress decided to boycott. The struggles between Brahmans and Non-Brahmins were initially confined largely to the urban middle classes, but they soon pervaded wider areas of society.

The leaders of the Non-Brahmin movement expressed the fear that the transfer of power for which the Congress was agitating might lead to the domination of the people by a small elite composed of Brahmans. They argued, therefore, for preferential treatment of Non-Brahmins to make up for the advantages which the Brahmans had secured over them in the fields of education and employment.

After the Congress boycotted the Government of India Act of 1919, the leaders of the Justice party managed to have discriminatory measures favouring the Non-Brahmins built into the administration. Posts in the government as well as seats in the institutions of higher learning came to be reserved for Non-Brahmins. For those aspiring to pass into the new middle classes it became important at every stage whether they were Brahmans or Non-Brahmins. Discrimination continues against Brahmans to this day and is a major factor in their feeling and consciousness of unity.

In the twenties the Brahmans began to lose ground in education
and administration. In the thirties the Self-Respect movement started carrying anti-Brahmin feelings to the masses. Newspapers were started in English (The Liberator) and in Tamil (Swayamariyadai) in which Brahmins were denounced for their arrogance and the pursuit of their narrow group interests. Brahminism as a way of life came in for attack for its bigotry and duplicity, and for the exploitation which it practised and encouraged.

Attempts were made to do away with the service of Brahmin priests. The Purohit Maruppu Sangam ("Association for the Elimination of Priests") was formed, and Self-Respect marriages (without the service of Brahmin priests) began to be performed. A general attitude of hostility towards Brahmins came to be built up on the social plane, and feelings ran high against them.

The leading figure in the attack against Brahmins over the last thirty-five years has been the one-time Congress leader, E. V. Ramaswami Naicker. In the thirties and early forties he spearheaded the Self-Respect movement and trained a band of educated young men with idealistic fervour as his disciples. In the forties he formed the Dravida Kazhagh (D.K.), a militant organisation devoted to anti-Brahmin and anti-North Indian activities. In 1949 some of the ablest young men split from the D.K. and formed a separate party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagh (D.M.K.), which has now emerged as the leading opposition party in the state. Though also rooted in anti-Brahminism, the D.M.K. is more moderate in its programmes, even admitting Brahmins within its folds. It claims to be hostile not to Brahmins as such, but to the elements of obscurantism and exploitation in the Brahminical way of life.

The wave of anti-Brahmin feeling which swept through the state found its echo in Sripuram. At Thiruvaliyar leaders of the D.K. burnt copies of the Ramayana and threatened violence to the Brahmins in political speeches. Films preaching the D.M.K. ideology and heaping scorn on Brahmins drew large audiences from the village at cinema halls in Thiruvaliyar and nearby places. The Brahmins found themselves politically isolated and the target of attack from forces of various kinds, some of them politically organised.

The Congress itself, which in the early decades of the present century was largely dominated by Brahmins, gradually passed
under the control of Non-Brahmins. In 1942 the “August movement” provided a major breakthrough for the Non-Brahmins, whose support became increasingly important, if for no other reason than the strength of their numbers. After Independence the political influence of the Brahmins dwindled rapidly. Today in Tamilnad the ministry and the Legislature as well as the Congress party are dominated by Non-Brahmins. The Congress has, to some extent, been forced to transform the character of its leadership in order to hold its own against parties with a Non-Brahmin background such as the D.K. and the D.M.K. With the replacement of C. Rajagopalachari by K. Kamraj in the fifties, the political influence of the Brahmins has been more or less effectively neutralised.

Political events of the last forty years have given the Tamil Brahmins a strong feeling of identity as a minority. The traditional quarrels between Smartha and Shri Vaishnava, let alone Thengalai and Vadagalai, have been largely forgotten. In general the feeling is strong among the Brahmins of Sripuram that they should be united if they are to survive. This feeling of unity among the Brahmins, their consciousness of a common destiny, is in considerable measure a response to the political challenge of the last forty years.

In the village the Brahmins have gradually come to accept their social and political isolation. They have been singled out for attack by leaders of the D.K. and the D.M.K., through the press and the films. Their social exclusiveness, once jealously guarded in the interest of “culture,” refinement, and ritual purity, has now been turned against them. Although there has been bitterness against landowners and moneylenders, it has never been organised in the way in which hostility towards Brahmins has been. The anti-Brahmin movement is not in its practice an attack against a particular economic class, but against Brahmins in general, whether they are landowners, schoolteachers, clerks, or temple priests.

It is the anti-Brahmin movement rather than class conflict between the landowners and the landless that has dominated political life in this area over the last forty years. No doubt, the anti-Brahmin movement has been viewed by many in the idiom of a class struggle. And, in fact, the Communists in the early fifties
drew the support of the D.K. to launch their attack against the landowners, who in the Thiruvaiyaru area often happened to be Brahmans.

The Brahmans have not fared very well in the hands of the Congress party, or the government either. We have seen that discriminatory measures against the Brahmans have been built into the administration since the twenties. The Congress party, when it came into power after Independence, continued with the policy of preferential treatment of the backward communities. A Brahmin today, as before, finds the odds against him when applying for a job in the state government or a seat in some technical institution.

As victims of discrimination in various forms, the Brahmans tend to develop a high degree of political consciousness. When the results of the degree examinations were published in 1961, two Brahmin boys from Sripuram sought admission in various engineering colleges in the state, but were unsuccessful. Their parents and the community as a whole held this against the discriminatory policy of the government. In various ways the Brahmin from Sripuram is thwarted in the pursuit of his career. Rightly or wrongly, he attributes his misfortune to the government and the ruling party, from which he becomes progressively alienated.

The Brahmans, thus, are in a political situation which is, in many ways, unique. From being a political elite in the first part of the present century, they now find themselves in the position of a political minority. The forces of democracy have turned the tables upon them. What has happened in Sripuram is only one instance, and to some extent it follows from what has been happening in the state as a whole. But although the Brahmans have lost much political ground, they have not entirely withdrawn from political activities within the state. We shall examine presently the changing relationships between the Brahmans and a variety of political parties.

The political fortunes of the Non-Brahmins have also been rather varied, and perhaps even more complex that those of the Brahmans. We have noted that the Non-Brahmins first organised their political interests around the Justice party. The Justice party, however, was a platform for only a small section of the Non-Brahmins—the urban, educated middle classes among
them. Its impact on the rural masses was negligible, and it became virtually extinct after its rout in the 1937 elections.

The Justice party served one important purpose. It served to bring into focus the conflict of interests between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins, and to organise this conflict politically on a state-wide basis.

The Non-Brahmins had, in the meantime, found a new sense of identity and a new ideology in the Self-Respect movement. This movement called upon Non-Brahmins to rid themselves of their ritual dependence on Brahmins and to stand on their own feet. It tried to create for the first time a feeling among Non-Brahmins that they were equal to the Brahmins, if not superior. And the Self-Respect movement was not confined to the cities; it spread to the rural masses. Even as late as 1961, Self-Respect marriages were being conducted in Sripuram, among both Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas, without the service of Brahmin priests.

The political fate of the Non-Brahmins was not decided by the defeat of the Justice party in the elections of 1937. The Congress, which was successful in the election, began to draw increasingly upon the Non-Brahmins for its leadership. We have seen how in Sripuram the 1942 movement paved the way for the emergence of Non-Brahmins to positions of influence in the Congress. What happened in Sripuram was taking place in the state as a whole. Independence in 1947, and the first General Elections in independent India in 1951/52 saw the Non-Brahmins forge further ahead in their control of the Congress and of politics in Tamilnad as a whole. By the mid-fifties the Non-Brahmins were in a commanding position in the Congress party, the state Legislature, and the cabinet. They have more or less effectively maintained their control till now.

Non-Brahmin control is not confined among political parties to the Congress alone. New parties which arose as successors to the Justice party made their appeal to Non-Brahmins in particular. The Congress, at least, has expressed itself in a universalistic idiom, and has not come out explicitly for any particular community, however much it may have been favoured or controlled by that community in practice, and neither has it come out openly against any.

In the mid-forties the D.K. emerged as a champion of Non-
Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas. It has been militant in its approach, openly preaching violence and directing its attack and virulence against Brahmins in particular. By the mid-fifties, however, with the Non-Brahmins gaining effective control over the Congress, the D.K. had become a spent force as a separate political entity. In 1951/52, when the veteran Brahmin leader C. Rajagopalachari was still at the helm of Congress affairs, the D.K. supported the Communists. In 1957 and 1962 the D.K. joined hands with the Congress, taking active part in its campaigns, particularly in the districts of Tanjore and Trichy.

Although the D.K. has become politically a spent force, this is by no means true of its offshoot, the D.M.K. The D.M.K. separated from the D.K. in 1949. It has been, on the whole, less militant than the parent body and less aggressive in its attitude towards Brahmins. In theory, at least, membership is open to Brahmins, although they have not shown much keenness to join the party.

In spite of the relatively moderate policies of the D.M.K., its anti-Brahmin background must not be lost sight of. Many of the present leaders of the party had their apprenticeship under Ramaswami Naicker and have a number of anti-Brahmin activities to their credit. Through the medium of films the party leaders have made attacks on religious orthodoxy and on the Brahminical social order with which orthodoxy has been associated. Sporadically the party members are known to have participated in outrages against the Brahmins. In practice the leadership of the D.M.K. has been almost entirely Non-Brahmin.

There is one other party whose position in relation to the caste structure must be examined. This is the Swatantra party, which has entered the field recently. In Tamilnad the Swatantra party is known fairly widely as the "Brahmin party." This is due, in part, to the fact that its founder and most influential spokesman is C. Rajagopalachari. There is also considerable correspondence between the aims and policies of the party and the social situation of the Brahmins in contemporary Tamilnad. This is not to deny that even in Tamilnad the Swatantra party has many Non-Brahmin members and leaders.

Having examined the correspondence at the state level between caste groups on the one hand and political forces and parties on
the other, we turn briefly to a consideration of the situation at Sripuram. Party loyalties there show in many cases a close correspondence with membership in one or another caste group. In many ways such loyalties follow the lines of caste much more closely than those of class.

The most striking case of correspondence is the one between Brahmins and the Swatantra party. Many of the Brahmins of Sripuram are members of this party, and most of them express support for it. In the village the party has made practically no headway among the Non-Brahmins, not to speak of the Adi-Dravidas. Not only do others see the Swatantra party as a Brahmin party, but the Brahmins themselves tend to feel that it answers specifically to their needs.

One day, while on my way to Thiruvaiyaru, I observed the Brahmin Swatantra party leader of the village engaged in what appeared to be a very confidential conversation with an important Non-Brahmin businessman from Tanjore. I casually asked my companion, a Brahmin from Sripuram, whether the Non-Brahmin businessman was a member of the Swatantra party. His answer, a mixture of surprise and bitterness, was characteristic. "Don't be absurd," he said. "He hates Brahmins like anything. Do you think he will join the Swatantra party?"

The identification of the Brahmins with the Swatantra party is a conscious one. It cuts across the boundaries of class, occupation, income, education, and generation. Whether he is a mirasdar or a server in a coffee shop, college-educated or relatively unlettered, an orthodox elder or a "progressive" young man, the Brahmin in Sripuram feels it his duty to be loyal to the Swatantra party. Exceptions are very few and are based mainly on personal association with the Congress.

Although the Swatantra party in Tamilnad has been largely identified with the Brahmins, this does not mean that it has no relationship with class factors. Its appeal in Tamilnad has so far been largely confined to landowners, business people, and professional men; it seems to have made little headway among industrial workers or landless labourers. In Sripuram, however, what strikes one particularly is its much closer identification with the Brahmins than with any specific economic class.

The Brahmins' uniformity of political opinion and their
massive support of the Swatantra party are a consequence of their political experience in the state as a whole over the last forty years. Singled out for social criticism, political attack, and administrative discrimination, they feel a strong sense of urgency to be united politically and to support the party of their leader, Rajagopalachari, irrespective of differences which may exist within their ranks. Brahmins in Sripuram, when questioned about their support of the Swatantra party, emphasize the need for unity at all cost.

In Sripuram the relationship of the Brahmins to the Congress party is now a purely negative one. It is, nevertheless, important, because their attitude towards the Congress has led them to support parties to which they would be otherwise hostile. We have noted that in the 1962 elections the Brahmins of Sripuram voted for the D.M.K. candidate for the Assembly seat. This support was based explicitly on hostility towards the Congress and not on any appreciation of either the policy or the leadership of the D.M.K.

The importance of caste loyalties among Brahmins manifested itself in an interesting manner in the 1962 elections. The Brahmins of Sripuram, for the reasons just mentioned, had taken a more or less collective decision to vote against the Congress. For the Assembly seat they voted almost en masse for the D.M.K. candidate, who, like all the other candidates for the seat, was a Kalla by caste. For the Parliamentary constituency, however, the Congress had put up a Brahmin candidate, C. R. Pattabhiraman, the son of a very distinguished Tamil Brahmin, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer. In spite of their firm resolve to vote against the ruling party, a large section of the Sripuram Brahmins changed their mind at the last moment and voted for the Brahmin Congress candidate.

Non-Brahmins have a choice of associating themselves with a number of political parties. In Sripuram and the surrounding area, the most important of these are the Congress and the D.M.K. The Swatantra party has made practically no headway among them, although it has done so in other areas. The D.K. has a number of sympathisers, but since it does not contest elections on its own, it is not always possible to separate its supporters from those of the Congress.
In Sripuram during the 1962 elections Non-Brahmin support was divided between the Congress and the D.M.K. But it is very difficult to infer any pattern on the basis of this. Those who voted for the Congress, or even took part in its election campaign, might in many cases switch over their support to the D.M.K., depending upon a variety of personal and local factors. Political opinion among the Non-Brahmins of the village is not as sharply defined as it is among the Brahmins. This is, no doubt, due largely to the much lower proportion of literacy and education among them, and to their greater diversity.

Class differentials among the Non-Brahmins of Sripuram do not today play a very important role in determining party support, although they may do so elsewhere. There seems to be a generational difference, but this, too, is not very sharp. On the whole, the older, better-established Non-Brahmins in the village tend to support the Congress. The D.M.K. is run by younger people, some of whom are sons of fairly well-to-do farmers and owner-cultivators.

The Adi-Dravidas are, on the whole, supporters of the Congress. Thus, Congress support cuts across both caste as well as class. Support of the Congress by the Adi-Dravidas is closely related to the policies which the ruling party has been following. Indeed, there is some criticism by both Brahmins and Non-Brahmins that the Congress has been nursing the Adi-Dravidas at their expense and with the political objective of keeping itself in power by ensuring massive support from the Adi-Dravidas.

By virtue of their position as Scheduled Castes, the Adi-Dravidas enjoy a number of privileges which are embodied in the Constitution of India. In addition, they are believed to enjoy certain political advantages in Tamilnad in particular. Both Brahmins and a section of Non-Brahmins think that Congress ministers and M.L.A.s are generally more easily accessible to the leaders of the Adi-Dravida community and that they tend to take a more sympathetic view of its grievances. This attitude is often interpreted in terms of political motivation. To what extent the sympathetic attitude of the Congress leaders at the top actually benefits the rank and file among the Adi-Dravidas is, however, open to question.

Although it is quite likely that the government would continue
to provide benefits to the Scheduled Castes irrespective of the party in power, these benefits tend, in practice, to be attributed to the Congress party. Leaders of the Congress, in their turn, do not hesitate to claim for themselves the credit for improving the position of Adi-Dravidas. The latter, being largely illiterate, are not always able to see the finer distinction between the government and the ruling party, and tend to support the Congress. In the 1962 elections most of the Adi-Dravidas in Sripuram voted for the Congress.

It should be reiterated that the Adi-Dravidas enjoy their special position by virtue of their caste, and not their class position, although it is true that the two overlap to a considerable extent. Adi-Dravidas who own land, although they are few in number, enjoy special benefits in spite of their economic position; a landless Non-Brahmin is not entitled to these benefits. It is thus caste, and not class, which is decisive in shaping the political attitudes of the Adi-Dravidas.

It will have been noted that political attitudes and party support are least clearly defined among Non-Brahmins. This is, to some extent, explained by the fact that they constitute the largest and the most heterogeneous of the three principal divisions. Whereas Brahmins as well as Adi-Dravidas evince a degree of political unity and cohesiveness, internal conflicts are common among the Non-Brahmins. Power tends to be divided between several dominant castes which operate at the district level, or at the level of the Assembly constituency. These dominant castes today all belong to the Non-Brahmin division.

The last three elections have made it clear that local politics is controlled fairly effectively by one or more dominant castes which have to be taken into account even when the state cabinet is being constituted. District dominance of castes is a well-known phenomenon and can easily be demonstrated by making a study of the caste composition of candidates who have sought election from different constituencies. Padayachis in North and South Arcot, Mudaliyars in Chinglepet, Kallas in certain areas of Tanjore, Gaundas in Coimbatore and Salem, and Vellalas in Tinnevelly dominate local politics and also find representation in the leadership of the state.

The tie-up between dominant caste and political representation
can be illustrated with reference to the Thiruvaliyar Assembly constituency. In the three General Elections held after Independence only Kalla candidates have been returned. The Kallas constitute about thirty per cent of the electorate in this constituency.

Not only has the sitting member always been a Kalla, but the overwhelming majority of candidates who have contested the Thiruvaliyar seat have been of this particular caste. In the 1951-52 elections the Congress party set up a distinguished Muslim candidate who was defeated by an Independent Kalla. In 1957 the Congress won the seat by putting up a Kalla candidate. In 1962 there was a triangular contest between Congress, D.M.K., and P.S.P., and all three parties put up Kalla candidates. It is now more or less generally acknowledged that any candidate to be successful from this constituency has to be a Kalla. Party affiliation, though important, does not constitute a guarantee for success. The Thiruvaliyar constituency demonstrates a pattern which is fairly general in Tamilnad.

VI

We have in the foregoing examined the three principal dimensions of social stratification—caste, class, and power—and have sought to bring out their interrelations. An attempt was made to view these interrelations in dynamic terms. Granting that change has been pervasive in nature, it seems to have affected the different subsystems in different degree. Changes in the distribution of power seem to have been of a more radical nature than those in the caste structure.

Within the caste system there has been a general trend towards the contraction of structural distance between proximate segments. Thus, marriages take place today between the two subdivisions of the Brihacharanam segment, commensal relations are common between Smarthas and Shri Vaishnavas, and the Brahmans in general show a greater measure of unity in their style of life in comparison with the past. This contraction of structural distance is largely a consequence of the two closely related processes of secularisation and westernisation.
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Contraction of structural distance has not, however, taken place in a uniform manner at every level. Thus, the cleavage between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins may, in some ways, be regarded as having deepened. This holds true particularly of political relations.

Whereas in the caste system the tendency has been towards a certain convergence of adjacent segments, the class system has shown increasing mobility. Ownership of land passes more easily from one set of people to another, and new classes tend to develop. Further, the class system has progressively detached itself from the caste structure, although there is still a high degree of correspondence between the hierarchies of caste and class.

The distribution of power has acquired a very dynamic character over the last two decades. In some ways the traditional relationship between caste and power has been reversed. Whereas in the past power was concentrated in the hands of Brahmins, today the village panchayat is controlled by Non-Brahmins and the traditional elite is being pushed into the background.

Power has also become independent of class to a greater extent than in the past. Ownership of land is no longer the decisive factor in acquiring power. Numerical support and a strategic position in the party machinery play an important part. Adult franchise and Panchayati Raj have introduced new processes into village society. The struggle for power has become a pervasive phenomenon. This may partly be due to the fact that today much more power is accessible to the common man than was ever the case in the past. Mobility in the caste system has always been an extremely slow and gradual process. To acquire land and move up in the hierarchy of class also takes a generation or two. Shifts in the distribution of power under the new set-up are, by comparison, quick and radical in nature.

VII

Viewed over a period of time, the social world of Sripuram is seen to have expanded considerably and still seems to be in a process of expansion. Enough evidence exists to show that Sripuram has never been a wholly self-sufficient unit in the thousand years or so
of its history. But the degree of its articulation with the outside world has increased at a rapid pace over the last six to eight decades.

There has been much movement of population to and from the village. Subcastes, lineages, and kin groups have become widely dispersed. Territorial dispersal is particularly marked among the Brahmins. Among them networks of kinship and affinity not only cut across the boundary of the village, but also of the district and the state. Western education and the availability of professional and white-collar jobs in towns and cities throughout the country have been the principal factors behind the territorial mobility of the Brahmins.

The village has become articulated with the outside world not only through the dispersal of its population, but in other ways also. The economic system of the village has become more closely integrated with the wider economy. Economic relations today transcend more easily and more extensively the boundary of the village. Land has come into the market. Every year some amount of land is bought and sold in the village. Many of the buyers live in other villages or in adjacent towns. The cash nexus plays an increasingly important part in the village economy. Money comes into the village every year, every month, through the sale of land, through the sale of agricultural produce, and by way of cash incomes from white-collar jobs and remittances from relatives outside. Much of this money is spent in the purchase of mass-produced consumers' goods.

The village is also becoming progressively politicised. It is being drawn more tightly into the web of district and state politics. The new panchayat system links the village to a hierarchy of territorial units. Political parties relate local tensions and conflicts to wider ones. Political networks of various kinds link individual villagers to party bosses, M.L.A.'s, and government officials.

Social mobility, economic change, and political modernisation lead to the creation not only of new relations, but also of new values, new attitudes, and new aspirations. Some of the contours of the traditional structure tend to be blurred, and new ones tend to emerge. It has been shown how, for instance, the process of political modernisation provides scope to the individual to enter
into networks of interpersonal relations in which village, caste, and other traditional bonds are not wholly decisive.

In a sense the traditional structure had a simpler character. It was made up largely of systems of groups and categories whose boundaries were relatively clear and well defined. The caste structure provided the fundamental cleavages in the village. The entire population was divided first into Brahmans, Non-Brahmins, and Adi-Dravidas, and these divisions were further subdivided. Membership in one or another of these subdivisions was the basis of the individual's identity, not only in ritual contexts, but also in the economic and political spheres.

The caste structure subsumed within itself, to a much greater extent than it does today, both the organisation of production and the distribution of power. The division of the village into landowners, tenants, and agricultural labourers corresponded to a much greater extent with its division into Brahmans, Non-Brahmins, and Adi-Dravidas. Class positions had only a limited autonomy. Being a landowner was, to a large extent, only one aspect of being a Brahmin. Similarly, being an Adi-Dravida fixed, by and large, one's position as an agricultural labourer.

Today class positions have acquired a certain measure of autonomy. The class system has in part detached itself from the caste structure, although, as we have seen, class positions in the village are by no means entirely, or even largely, "caste-free." Numerous factors have contributed to the dissociation of class from caste. Land has come into the market and is in process of changing hands; not all Brahmans are now landowners, nor are all landowners Brahmans. New occupations have emerged which take the villager right out of the productive organisation of the village. The penetration of a cash economy and the increased geographical mobility have also loosened the economic system. Finally, political and legislative changes have altered the bargaining positions of the old economic classes.

Just as there was greater overlap in the past between the broad hierarchies of caste and class, there was also greater correspondence between the caste structure and the distribution of power. In the village, caste was traditionally the only important locus of power: this was, no doubt, because class itself was largely subsumed under caste. In Sripuram important decisions concern-
ing the village as a whole were taken largely by Brahmains; Non-Brahmins played some part in implementing these decisions; and Adi-Dravidas had very little say in matters not specifically concerned with their internal system.

Although in the past power in Sripuram was largely controlled by the Brahmains, the Non-Brahmins also enjoyed some power; however, as far as village affairs were concerned, Non-Brahmins enjoyed power largely by delegation. In a general way they were engaged by Brahmains for keeping the Adi-Dravidas in order. Brahmín mirasdars had in the past very little direct dealings with the Adi-Dravidas. The cheris were inaccessible because of ritual considerations. When an Adi-Dravida was to be punished, this was done either directly by the Non-Brahmins, or by Non-Brahmins acting under instructions from Brahmín mirasdars.

The materials presented in this chapter and the preceding one make it clear that power has, to a considerable extent, detached itself from the matrix of caste and has, in a manner of speaking, become more “free-floating” than it was formerly. Two things have happened which are of considerable importance. First, the older balance of power between caste groups has been altered; Non-Brahmins have wrested a good deal of power from the Brahmains. Second, new loci of power, based on factors other than caste, have been built up over the last few decades.

It must not be inferred from what has been said above that there is little relationship today between caste and power. The point is that because power has been partly disengaged from the matrix of caste and has acquired independent loci, the relationship between the two is now much more complex than before. One’s caste continues to be an important basis of power, and an important factor in taking political decisions, although other factors are also acquiring importance.

The growth of new political organs and institutions and the entire process of political modernisation are likely to render still more complex the relations between caste and power. In this context the question as to whether a caste continues to be a caste when it acts in a political context seems a little naïve. Clearly, castes as status groups do continue to have a virile existence. The question is not whether, as status groups, they provide a basis for political mobilisation—for this they evidently do—but what
other factors in addition to caste are of importance to the distribution of power, and how such factors interact with one another and with caste.

In the sum, the processes of economic change and political modernisation have led the productive system and the organisation of power to acquire an increasing degree of autonomy. In the concrete, the overlap between the hierarchies of caste, class, and power has been progressively reduced. A new economic order is emerging in the towns and cities which is not based upon caste in the same way in which the traditional order was. The economy of the village is drawn increasingly into the orbit of this new economic order. Similarly, the new political order is at least formally independent of caste, and it too has an important effect on the social life of the village.

It would seem that a certain measure of "discreteness" is enjoyed by each of the three orders considered: caste, class, and power. One can vary independently of the other—up to a point. But the limits within which variation is possible in one of the orders, the two others remaining the same, cannot obviously be determined here. This can be done only on the basis of comparable studies carried out in different parts of the country.

Caste has been the fundamental institution of traditional India, and its importance has been particularly great in the area considered. Traditionally, most important cleavages and alignments have been embedded in the matrix of caste. With the change from a static, traditional social order to a more dynamic one, the economic and political systems gradually detach themselves from caste and acquire a relatively autonomous character. To what extent they have done so in the different parts of the country would be an interesting question to answer by empirical research. An attempt has been made here to provide an analytical scheme for the study of social change in India.