REVISITING SRINIVAS'S 'REMEMBERED VILLAGE'

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Introduction

Srinivas had the rare opportunity to call both Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard his supervisors. He arrived in Oxford, in the academic year 1945-46, Radcliffe-Brown's last at the university, after first completing his PhD at Bombay University, where he worked under Ghurye. It was Radcliffe-Brown who repeatedly suggested to him the scientific importance of making a field study of a multi-caste community in India (p. 1).[1] The existing body of writing was, he felt, mainly concerned with the institution of caste at the all-India or at least provincial level, and it did not reflect day-to-day social relations between members of different castes living in the same community. When Radcliffe-Brown retired from the Chair in July 1946, Srinivas was transferred to Evans-Pritchard, and in his own words, 'no two teachers were more different' (p. 2). Srinivas writes about Evans-Pritchard's highly personal and unorthodox but effective teaching methods and says that he was 'generous with his time and ideas' (p. 2). In the end it was Evans-Pritchard who offered Srinivas a University Lectureship in Indian Sociology and Anthropology, with the additional 'payment' of being allowed to spend his first year in post carrying out field research in India (p. 4). It was in this year – after finishing his doctorate in Oxford, in which he completed his analysis of the South Indian Coorgs, but before taking up his lectureship – that Srinivas carried out field research in a village in Karnataka, South India, which in 1948 he baptized 'Rampura'. This would result, almost thirty years later, in his monograph, *The remembered village* (1976).

This somewhat quaint title demands a brief explanation. In 1970 Srinivas joined the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University as a fellow, with the aim of completing a 'much-postponed' (p. xviii) monograph on his field study in Rampura in the late 1940s. On 24 April 1970 the Center was set on fire by an arsonist, and all three copies of his fieldwork notes were reduced to ashes. Modern technology enabled some fragments to be recovered, and luckily his original field diaries, though without the data being processed and analysed, were still intact in Delhi. Depressed by the loss of his precious notes, Srinivas decided to abandon his undertaking altogether. It was Professor Tax who deserves to

[1] Pages references are to Srinivas 1976 unless otherwise stated.

be thanked for reassuring Srinivas that the book was potentially of such value that it had to be written, albeit, due to the circumstances, largely based on memory: hence the title *The remembered village* (p. xiv).

Professor Tax's remark about the potential importance of Srinivas's pursuit proved correct. *The remembered village* has turned into a hallmark of post-colonial Indian sociology and anthropology. Through this book, Srinivas introduced, or at least popularized, what are now influential ideas and concepts like 'the dominant caste', 'sanskritization' and 'westernization' in the context of inter-caste relations. Generations of Indian sociologists and anthropologists have been educated with Kulle Gowda, Nadu Gowda and the headman, the three main figures in Srinivas's monograph. His book is still widely taught in universities in India and abroad and remains a 'must-read' for all social scientists studying the subcontinent in one way or the other.

The approximate location of Rampura can be guessed by the few directions Srinivas provides in his book: 'a few hours from Mysore', 'located on the Mysore-Hogur bus road', with 'an official population of 1519 people'; a small map added by Srinivas shows that the village is bounded to the west by a canal and is in the vicinity of a big tank. However, the real name of the village and where it was located were for long known only to a few individuals like A.M. Shah, who accompanied Srinivas during his second visit to the village in 1952, Srinivas's student and research assistant V.S. Parthasarathy, Srinivas's nephew and former Professor of Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Panini, and of course Srinivas himself. Many anthropologists from Mysore in the state of Karnataka reportedly asked Srinivas for the real name and exact location of the village, but they failed to obtain the necessary information from him. These details remained 'unknown' until a group of anthropologists working with the Department of Anthropology, Mysore University and the Anthropological Survey of India's Southern Regional Office in Mysore were finally able to identify the village.[2]

Not too sure yet about the 'discovery', one of the present co-authors travelled with a group of anthropologists from Mysore down to the 'discovered' village to see if it was really the village where Srinivas had done his fieldwork from January to November 1948. The

[2] There appears to be an element of heroism in the claims made by some anthropologists in Mysore. It is true that Srinivas was reluctant to divulge the real name of the village and its exact location for whatever personal or professional reasons, but his former assistant A. M. Shah, now a well-known professor of sociology at Delhi University who accompanied Srinivas to the village in 1952, or Professor Panini, Srinivas's nephew, could certainly have been contacted for this information too.

famous 'pipal' tree that Srinivas mentions nostalgically in his book did not exist anymore, but he was more than convinced that Kodagahalli was none other than Srinivas's Rampura. The sketch maps of the village and the house where he lived inserted between pages 10 and 11 of his book were a great help in this regard. Srinivas's house had not changed structurally, although the post office had moved out of the house, which itself had deteriorated considerably because no family was living there any longer. The area where bullocks were sheltered at night at the time Srinivas lived in the house was now used to store bamboo wickers used in the growing of silkworms, but the rooms occupied by Srinivas and his cook and the veranda where he received the villagers and interviewed them were still clearly identifiable. As if all this was not enough, an old man living next to the house remembered enough about Srinivas to confirm the village as the location of Rampura.

On 1 January 2008, a group of 29 students under the supervision of one of the co-authors boarded a train in Guwahati in India's northeast to travel south to Kodagahalli, Srinivas's Rampura, to carry out fieldwork as part of their MA or MSc degrees in anthropology. Three days in the train passed before a short two-hour bus ride dropped us off at the headman's house, curiously right in front of the house Srinivas had stayed in during his period in the village. Our writing here will be ethnographically informed, comparing empirical observations of Srinivas' with our own , rather than theoretically dense, as we aim to provide some insights about continuity and change in the village sixty years after Srinivas's departure.

Re-studying monographs

Taking a group of students to a distant village and staying there for about a month or so for their fieldwork training as part of their master's degree requirements in anthropology is a practice almost a century old in India, starting with the establishment of an Anthropology department in Calcutta University in 1918. Group fieldwork is also a central tool of the Anthropological Survey of India, the largest government research organization in the world, which has carried out several national projects like the *All India Anthropometric Survey* and *All India Material Trait Survey* after carefully training groups of field investigators on the tools and techniques of data collection and sending them in groups to different parts of the country for the purpose of collecting data. Such fieldwork undoubtedly has its disadvantages. It needs a lot more planning and preparation than fieldwork by an individual does. If the research unit is relatively small there may be researcher overkill, 'the one commits, all suffer'

syndrome may be at work, and there is always the risk that researchers end up interacting more among themselves than with the people they are there to study. On the positive side, group fieldwork can accomplish a lot more work in less time and for less expenditure. When research activities like taking measurements and recording them or interviewing and audio-visual recording of interviews are done by many individuals instead of just one, it can lead to greater efficiency of work. Secondly, provided a research group consists of both male and female researchers, gender issues in fieldwork are largely overcome, as respondents of both sexes are equally approachable for the collection of data, something that an individual male or female anthropologist may not always be able to achieve (for more discussion of group fieldwork, see Subba 2009).

Anthropologists are often better known for the communities they have worked on than for their specific ethnographic and theoretical contributions. Malinowski is associated with the Trobrianders, Evans-Pritchard with the Nuer and Fortes with the Tallensi. In the context of India, Rivers is linked with the Todas, Radcliffe-Brown with the Andaman Islanders, Elwin with the Baigas and the Gonds, Burling with the Garos and Fürer-Haimendorf with the Apatanis and the Konyak Nagas. Indeed many anthropologists prefer to have their 'own' fieldwork site to which they may return, though often for shorter spells than their initial fieldwork, during the course of their professional careers. Re-studying a village has been a popular pursuit in the anthropological tradition, although an anthropologist re-studying his own field site is more common than an anthropologist re-studying someone else's. This is evident from the rather long and vibrant tradition of re-studies or diachronic studies, or as Firth called them, 'dual synchronic' studies in anthropology found in the works of Carstairs (1983) and Gowloog (1995). Their reflections on their own diachronic studies in anthropology clearly show that such studies differ not only in terms of who conducted the re-study and after how many years, but also in terms of the number of field trips made for the re-study. It is also apparent that there is no uniform method or technique followed in such studies, whether by the original anthropologist or by a new one.

Diachronic studies have some marked advantages (Sarana 1973, Epstein 1978). They provide us with ethnographic data, which, in comparison with the initial work, can be analysed diachronically and may therefore be a useful tool for investigating social change. Furthermore, a re-study may provide multiple perspectives on the same research unit. Especially in caste India, it makes quite a difference whether an anthropologist studies a village through the eyes of the Brahmans, the dominant caste, or, for example, a low caste. A re-study of the same village but from a different angle may provide illuminating additional

information. Of course, an embarrassing situation may arise if the re-studying anthropologist comes up with totally different conclusions to the original one, especially if the time-span between the two studies is not very great.

One factor a re-studying anthropologist may have to cope with is the image which his predecessor has left behind. In the case of our fieldwork, there were not many people who remembered Srinivas, and even fewer, if any, who had read his book on the village. Thus, we were not constrained by what Epstein writes – 'wherever possible it is desirable to have the same researcher conduct the later restudy' – because, according to her, a new investigator takes time 'to develop full empathy for the society he studies' (Epstein 1978: 128-9). Furthermore, Epstein writes that the new investigator should contact the original researcher and make use of his unpublished materials, but when we arrived in Rampura Srinivas had long been dead, and his unpublished materials had been consumed by the fire that broke out at Stanford University mentioned earlier in this essay.

On the other hand, if the time span between a study and a re-study is quite short, and if local people have been able to read what has been written about them, the re-studying anthropologist may end up carrying the burden of his or her predecessor's behaviour and writings, especially if the former anthropologist was not that popular or if the locals do not agree with what has been written about them. In building rapport with the villagers, a re-studying anthropologist may have to mediate between existing memories and contributions of his predecessor, and his own unique background, personality and research interests.

Re-studying a monograph also appears somewhat like a flash-back. Although none of the students had been in the Indian state of Karnataka before, when our bus passed a big pond on the right of the road and a Hindu temple on the left we knew, having read about Srinivas's arrival in the village, that we had arrived. Wandering through the village with every detail Srinivas had written carefully ordered at the back of our minds was indeed an extraordinary experience. We could name the various temples without asking the villagers, we knew how many acres of land the headman was supposed to have, or at least had in his possession in the past, and we already had some idea about which castes had settled in the village and their traditional occupations. Furthermore, we could tell when the school had shifted from the *panchayat* building to its present location, locate the mosque and the Urdu school, and easily identify the Harijan ward. Moreover, we already knew that *ragi* (a kind of millet) was the staple food and oxen a valuable possession.

A central question we asked ourselves was whether Rampura and Kodagahalli were indeed the same village. Geographically speaking, Kodagahalli and Rampura are the same

village, although as a settlement Kodagahalli is considerably bigger than was Rampura. The other methodologically important question was whether we were studying the same people that Srinivas had studied? Most people alive in the village today are the children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren of the people Srinivas writes about in his monograph. Although striking continuities may abound, we cannot fully assume that, six decades after the initial research took place, we are studying the same people. Furthermore, the village does not exist in isolation of wider developments, and indeed much has changed in India over the past sixty years or so. There are theories suggesting that the caste system is weakening if not dying out. Other voices suggest that processes of sanskritization, secularisation and modernisation have transformed the caste system. Furthermore, there are claims that Harijans, Untouchables, Dalits, Scheduled Castes or whatever other name be given to them have enjoyed upward mobility, or that caste is gradually being replaced by class. At the same time, there are counter-claims stating that caste rigidity is not declining but reinforcing itself, though perhaps in novel ways. All of this made it improbable that social relations in Kodagahalli have remained unchanged since Srinivas studied the village in 1948.

Arguing that Rampura and Kodagahalli are no longer the same, however, does not mean that we entered the field as if it had not been studied before. The ultimate purpose of our study is to compare present-day findings with those recorded by Srinivas sixty years earlier. Secondly, and perhaps somewhat debatably, Srinivas has set the agenda for our research: since we selected those aspects of village life which Srinivas extensively writes about as the focus of our own re-investigation, we may have missed some new phenomena in the village simply because they did not occur to or were not noted by Srinivas. One example might be the presence of labour migrants staying in make-shift camps in sugarcane fields a mile or so from the village settlement, who come to the village when local landowners are in need of labour and depart when their presence is no longer desired. However, we hope that, by focusing on the same topics that Srinivas did sixty years ago, we are able to provide some indications of continuity and change in the village.

Categorizing outsiders

Srinivas writes that without categorization social relations in the village are not possible (p. 165). He narrates how, during a visit of the Adult Literacy Council to the village, the castes of the two delegates were identified within seconds and food preparations arranged accordingly (p. 37). However, if social categorization was of such importance, then how should we cast Srinivas in the village? First of all he was a Brahman, and not one from a

distant, anonymous part of India: indeed, his ancestral village was less than ten miles from Kodagahalli (p. 8). Due to this spatial proximity, it did not take the villagers long to find out that Srinivas belonged to a landowning family. Together this made Srinivas a landowning Brahman, which elevated him straight into the highest socio-economic stratum of the village. The fact that he had spent many years in Bombay and abroad did not alter his caste position, at least not according to the villagers. It had affected Srinivas himself, however, and he defined himself as an 'odd kind of Brahmin' who did not perform daily rituals, did not uphold the custom of painting the *namam* (the caste-symbol of the Iyengars or Sri-Vaishnava Brahmans) on his forehead and had broken, while in England, the dietary rules of vegetarianism and teetotalism (p. 34). Srinivas had to deal with a sharp disjuncture between his perception of himself and the role of an orthodox landowning Brahman in which he was cast by the villagers. This disjuncture not only occasionally translated itself into Srinivas being laughed at and at times even reprimanded for his indifference to rules of purity and pollution (p. 35), but more seriously it prevented him from building a rapport with the Harijans[3] and Muslims in the village, as this, Srinivas thought, might not be appreciated by the village establishment (p. 47).

In contrast with the rather straightforward way in which Srinivas could be categorized by the villagers, our own arrival in Kodagahalli created a problem of categorisation for them. Whereas Srinivas arrived with Nachcha, his personal cook, and twenty-six pieces of luggage (p. 11), we arrived in a group of thirty researchers and had arranged a whole bus and a van for the occasion. Our arrival must indeed have been a much more impactful event than when Srinivas quietly stepped off the Hogur-bound bus. Our group consisted almost entirely of Mongoloid tribes from northeast India, and we were all initially mistaken to be some of the Tibetan refugees who have been living in the Mundgod and Bylakuppe settlements in Karnataka since 1959, whom the villagers had seen before they met us and who very much resembled most of us. As we started to interact with the villagers, one of the first things they wanted to ascertain was our community backgrounds, but when they realized that they had not heard of names like Khasi, Mizo, Hmar, Ao and Tangkhul, they soon gave up and categorized us into Hindu and Christian only. They also soon came to know that several of us ate the meat of cow, dog, snake, pig and frog. The villagers may have taken this information

[3] We are aware that the term 'Harijan' is regarded as somewhat old-fashioned these days, and over the years many other names have been coined to label the lowest ritual layer of the caste system. However, we have opted to use the term in this article for conceptual clarity, precisely because Srinivas consistently applied it in his monograph.

with a pinch of salt, but what really shocked them was their discovery that one of the female students smoked, as did the sight of the male students taking a bath in just their underclothes at the Kaveri River Canal that separates the settlement area of the village from its cultivation area or at the huge lake where Srinivas went to enjoy the beauty of the setting sun. One of the elderly villagers requested the professor in charge of the students to ask them to wear proper knee-length shorts while bathing. Whereas Srinivas was blamed for not behaving as a landowning Brahman ought to do, some of our habits and practices were ridiculed as not abiding with Hindu customs in the first place, despite the fact that we were there six decades after Srinivas first lived there. In a little while, however, the two sides became acquainted with each other, and as soon as the villagers realized that we had humble and good intentions, we were categorized as 'respectable outsiders' and treated as such.

The changing village

Srinivas devotes a whole chapter to 'the changing village' and reflects: 'looking back, I find that I was lucky to have lived in Rampura at a crucial period in its history. In 1948, it still retained enough continuity with the past while the potential was building up for radical change' (p. 232). It was indeed an eventful period. India had just won its independence, Gandhi had called upon all Hindus to embrace Harijans, and the state and politics had started to impact on villages in a big way. However, the discussion of what is traditional and what may be called modern, or in other words the mingling of forces of continuity and pressures for change, is not, of course, restricted to the first years of India's independence. Riding a bicycle or listening to film music over the radio (p. 253) was considered modern in Srinivas's time, but these activities are now associated with earlier times. Today it is motorcycles and cable TV that are judged modern. It is true that Srinivas lived in the village at a rather unique time in history, yet one could claim that, with market capitalism, identity politics, technological innovations, reservation policies and mass education all having entered the village on an unprecedented scale in recent years, the interplay between tradition and modernity is as 'real' now as it was during Srinivas's time.

Srinivas observes that, although villager's relations with the external environment were mediated through agriculture, relations with other human beings were mediated through caste (p. 164). It was not caste in the sense of the all-India category of *varna* that mattered in the village, but caste in the sense of *jati,* local endogamous groups. A stranger's caste was immediately inquired about, and this little piece of information determined, to a large extent, how the villagers behaved towards him (p. 164). Knowing a person's caste, Srinivas

continues, was enough to know about his occupation, diet and life-style. While not every caste member was able to make a living out of his traditional occupation, there was a general feeling in the village that fulfilling one's ascribed occupation was the proper, if not natural, thing for any person to do (p. 165). Further, Srinivas writes about the omnipresence of ideas of hierarchy. Each person belonged to a caste, which, in turn, formed part of a system of ranked castes, which together constituted a local hierarchy. Srinivas observes how cultural elements such as diet, occupation, custom and ritual were distinguished between higher and lower. There were thus higher and lower diets and superior and inferior occupations (p. 167). Contacts between castes were regulated by ideas of pollution and purity, the widest ritual distance being between an orthodox Brahman and a Harijan: for the former, even the presence of the latter was considered polluting. When castes occupied ritual positions relatively close to each other, the structural distance between them was usually emphasized less (p. 187). Although notions of purity and pollution were all-pervasive in the village and, to a large extent, determined the movements of the villagers, Srinivas notes that they were gradually relaxing. He discovers, for example, how inter-dining between Brahmans, Lingayats and Vokkaliga Gowdas on occasions such as weddings had become more frequent (p. 275) and how a few Brahmans had even developed a taste for meat, a departure from tradition that was not appreciated by their orthodox counterparts (p. 276). However, this relaxation primarily concerned the higher castes of the villages and not the Harijans, who were treated differently from every other caste group in the village (p. 198).

This division seems to hold still today, though an ethnography of a village teashop reveals how caste discriminations have been remapped. Whereas Harijans were earlier excluded by teashop owners, these days they are allowed to order tea in one of the stalls located on the Mysore–Hogur road. Some Harijans have grasped this opportunity and can be found near the tea stalls early in the morning. Caste discrimination is reproduced, however, in them not being allowed to sit on one of the wooden benches inside the teashop but being obliged to sip their tea standing outside. Further, the low castes are served in disposable plastic cups which are thrown away after use, as opposed to the high castes, who are served in glasses which are cleaned and reused. The compounds surrounding the tea stalls in the village are dirtied by an enormous amount of plastic waste, revealing an unexpected link between caste practices and environmental pollution.

Not all shopkeepers in the village follow caste practices, however. A few months before our arrival, a Keralite entrepreneur opened a bakery-cum-tea shop in the village. He has a keen eye for business opportunities as his *badam* (almond) milk and pastries have proved

very popular, and throughout the day a quite sizable crowd can be spotted around his shop. For commercial reasons – or perhaps, being an outsider, he did not know who was of high caste and who low – he serves all his customers in disposable plastic cups. Most villagers do not object to his indiscriminate service, yet for a few high-caste individuals the idea of being served in the same manner as the low castes is too radical a change. They demand special treatment, which the shopkeeper satisfies by rushing to a nearby teashop to borrow some glasses.

Talking about religion, Srinivas was confident that the villagers lived in a theistic universe in the sense that all the villagers had a deeply grounded belief that gods, deities and spirits existed. Faith in a particular deity might occasionally be shaken, for example, after prolonged misfortunes despite extensive ritual sacrifices, but that merely prompted individuals to worship another deity, not to abandon their beliefs altogether. Any atheistic argument in which deities were rejected did not make sense to the villagers (p. 323). In fact, Srinivas annoyed his friend Nadu Gowda by countering his religious inquiries with questions such as 'Why should people believe in God?' (p. 323). On the whole the theistic universe as Srinivas describes it appears to have remained generally unchallenged. However, a number of outspoken atheists have come to the village, among them a secondary school teacher who argues without hesitation that Hinduism is only meant to serve Brahmans in order to safeguard their authority and status at the expense of lower castes. Hence a lower caste person like himself, he argues, is better off without Hinduism. Keshavam, a self-proclaimed film-maker, may be regarded as another 'odd' figure in the village. He is outspoken in his detestation of village life and claims to live there only because he is financially broke, supposedly due to his having been cheated by a co-producer. For Keshavam there are only two castes: men and women. Existing caste boundaries in the village, he maintains, are no longer enforced upon Harijans: on the contrary, Harijans are placing restrictions on themselves by not interacting with higher caste villagers. Keshavam substantiates his rejection of caste discriminations by maintaining friendships with Harijans, including visiting their houses, although his views are not widely shared in the village.

Turning to technological changes, Srinivas mentions the establishment of two rice mills, the construction of a middle school (p. 233) and plans for a hospital (which has never materialized, a modest health centre having been built instead). He also talks about how the villagers were overawed when they saw a bulldozer levelling six acres of land belonging to the headman (p. 238). He further describes how motorized vehicles started to contest the monopoly of the ubiquitous bullock cart as a principal means of transportation. An increasing

number of bus lines had started linking rural and urban areas, and Srinivas writes with anticipation that 'it looked as though the day was not far off when Rampura would be a dormitory of Mysore' (p. 233). Srinivas's prediction has turned out to be correct, and further technological innovations, despite the aggravating side effect of traffic jams, have reduced the distance from Kodagahalli to Mysore to just one and a half hours or so. Regular buses between the village and the city have further reduced the structural distance between them. For the bulk of villagers in Srinivas's time, Mysore was seen as a faraway, unknown if not somewhat dangerous place. Srinivas narrates how a villager named Kulle Gowda had created a job for himself as a broker between the village and urban areas. Villagers entrusted him with buying city goods such as saris and jewellery, and it was Kulle Gowda who often accompanied them to Mysore if they wished to see a lawyer, doctor or government official. He calculated a commission for his work and made quite good money at it (p. 83). Brokers between the individual and the government still exist, yet someone like Kulle Gowda, personifying the extension of the rural into the urban, would be harder to conceive today. Students in Kodagahalli usually take a morning bus to their colleges or Mysore University to return by the late afternoon bus that arrives home just in time for dinner. The same goes for those villagers who are employed in Mysore or the other nearby urban centre called Bannur. Furthermore, housewives know where in Mysore the cheapest goods can be found and which sari-maker has the reputation for using fine materials for a reasonable price. If they are not going to the city for purposes of education or employment, many men in the village can tell you where the best meat is served or in which 'teashop' you can drop in for a cheap local brew. Knowing Mysore has ceased to be an opportunity for a privileged few. It has become a place next door, a place to roam around in one's free time, a place from which new ideas and products filter down to the village.

Nor has agricultural mechanization passed Kodagahalli by. The declining utility of bullocks may be seen as an indicator of this process. Srinivas writes about the importance to the villagers of possessing a handsome pair of bullocks. Without bullocks, a man was just a labourer or a servant placed in the lowest category of the rural economic hierarchy. Possession of a pair of bullocks brought social prestige and was vital for an individual aiming to climb the social ladder (p. 131). Possessing a healthy and muscular pair of bullocks still brings social prestige and status in the village, but now more on the symbolic and ritual level. At the yearly Sankranti festival, bullocks are gaily decorated, paraded through the village and forced to walk over burning straw as a form of ritual cleansing, thus acknowledging their social and ritual significance. A good pair of oxen cost a fortune even today. Some small

farmers continue to use bullocks for ploughing and to transport materials from their fields to the village and vice versa. However, they are regularly pushed aside by motorbikes and cars, which are present in moderate numbers in the village. Also their agricultural utility is increasingly being taken over by tractors, while trucks arrive empty but leave the village crammed with sugarcane or other harvested crops.

However, not all technological innovations have been readily adopted by the villagers. Sanitation is one such area in which age-old habits are not being replaced by modern technology. Srinivas was told to answer calls of nature under the protective shade of a big tree about two hundred yards behind his house. This was therefore not meant to be a private affair, and Srinivas was rather astonished when villagers kept asking him at what time of the day he went to the toilet. This experience, among others, made him conclude that the human biological dimension of life characterized rural culture (p. 16). Today some houses have an attached bathroom, yet most of the men, though less so the women, continue to prefer to defecate in the open. Early morning at dawn you find men squatting down on either side of the highway with their lungis lifted up and a piece of cloth covering their heads, sitting side by side answering the calls of nature, as well as queries and jokes from one another. A World Bank development project provided free-standing bathrooms to a number of houses in the village some years ago, yet most of them are not used for their intended purpose but as storage rooms instead. Indeed, the World Bank has probably overlooked Srinivas's conclusion that the biological dimension of human life is an important aspect of rural culture in the region and treated the village as a model village instead.

The foot of the ritual hierarchy in Kodagahalli

Srinivas devotes a separate section of his book to the Harijans because they were treated differently from all other caste groups, particularly where ritual matters were concerned. At the same time, he was clearly aware that his was a high-caste view of the village. At different points in his monograph he admits his shortcomings in not having built enough rapport with the Harijans and Muslims of the village (pp. 49, 319), a lack he regrets but could not avoid, as he needed to preserve cordial relations with the headman and other high-caste villagers to ensure a smooth stay in the village (p. 49).

The headman may have been a source of technological innovation in the village. He was a conservative in social and religious matters and vehemently disapproved of Srinivas when the latter, upon being asked by the headman whether he thought Harijans should be allowed inside temples, replied in the affirmative (p. 65). Their eating of beef alone, the

headman argued, was already reason enough for excluding them from temples (p. 65). Since the Mysore Government had passed the Mysore Temple Entry Authorization Act in 1948, which legally granted Harijans access to any temple (p. 200), this was not just a random discussion: the headman's reaction may have reflected a widespread feeling of anxiety among upper-caste individuals.

Despised yet vital was how Srinivas saw the position of Harijans in the village. An aura of ascribed pollution floated around them, which made even their physical nearness inauspicious for the higher castes. From an economic point of view, their contribution to the village economy was important, if not crucial. Harijans provided an abundant supply of agricultural labour, while in the off-season they were employed in carrying out canal and road repairs and all other off-season chores (p. 199). Furthermore, they performed certain essential services during festivals such as whitewashing the outer face of the temple walls, beating the drum and removing the leaves on which the villagers had dined (p. 198). Their economic significance notwithstanding, it was their perceived polluted being that largely structured their movements in the village. Their polluting touch had to be controlled, which resulted in restrictions and prohibitions being placed upon them (p. 186).

Nor can the Muslim community in the village be excluded from this discussion. Srinivas notes how relations between Muslims and Hindus were intimate if not occasionally so close that Srinivas wondered how much Hinduism had gone into them (p. 204). Most of the Muslims were landless and made a living out of trade, which made them dependent on their primarily Hindu customers (p. 205). Not all was tranquil between them, however. Muslims were criticized for their indifference to pollution because of their willingness to visit the Harijan ward (p. 207). Although relations between individual Muslims and Hindus were ones of trust, relations between them as collective groups were occasionally marked by suspicion in light of the Indo-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir and the Indian army marching into the princely state of Hyderabad (p. 210).

Their separate Muslim identity was, and still is, partly reproduced by the enrolment of all Muslim children in the small Urdu primary school in the village. The right of Muslims to be taught in Urdu is recognized by the government, yet Srinivas notes that resources for such schools were often too meagre to provide satisfactory teaching. In 1948 the Urdu school had fewer than thirty children and only one teacher (p. 250). These days the number of teachers has doubled, from one to two, yet with classes one to five all taught at the same time in the same room, it is no secret that the quality of education is lower than in the general primary school in the village. The village Muslim community is aware of this, yet providing their

children with Urdu education is prioritised, even if that implies their children receiving a relatively lower standard of primary education. The location of the Urdu school, at the end of the Harijan ward, appears symbolic of their ritual status in the village. They are categorized as a caste, well below the Shudra artisan castes yet above the Harijans. The Muslims in the village seem to occupy a non-existent category in the all-India *varna* system, yet this is not something the villagers seem to be worried about. *Jati* hierarchies are sufficiently localized and flexible to incorporate any group, be they Hindu or non-Hindu. Srinivas's observation that the distinction between Muslims and Hindus is occasionally blurred holds true still today. When, during our brief farewell ceremony, a Hindu devotional song was performed, no villager was surprised that the singer was actually a Muslim. He was acknowledged as the best singer in the village, and this was, at least on this occasion, more important than his Muslim background. On the whole it seems that the mutual cordial relations noted by Srinivas may have declined somewhat. Though our time in the village was not long enough to make a profound judgment, on several occasions we heard Hindus talking in a negative, if not insulting terms about Muslims, we heard Hindu peasants saying that they do not appreciate their children hanging around with Muslim children, and we witnessed a Muslim boy being chased away by a Hindu peasant for playing in front of his house, whereas he did not object to a group of Hindu boys doing the same.

On the whole, Srinivas describes inter-caste relations in the village as cooperative, if not friendly (p. 245). Although we are not in a position to dispute his claim, the life-histories of elderly Harijans made us wonder whether the phrase 'cooperative relations' was not a euphemism for the practice of the higher castes in enforcing docility upon Harijans. Now in his eighties, Ramanma was a young man in the late 1940s. Like many other Harijans, he worked as a *jita* servant[4] for a high-caste patron. For most of the time he was employed in the fields, but he also narrated how he had to clean his master's house, take care of the buffaloes, collect firewood and perform all other sorts of chores. Ramanma remembers the working conditions as harsh and recalls how he was beaten when he did not complete his allotted tasks in time. It was his patron's duty to give him food, yet it was usually 'yesterday's food', and

[4] Srinivas defines *jita* servants as having a 'contractual' servantship. 'Under it a poor man contracts to serve a wealthier man for one to three years. The terms of the service, including the wages to be paid by the master, are usually reduced to writing. His master advances, at the beginning of the service, a certain sum of money to the servant or his guardian and this is worked off by the servant. […] Frequently, before the period of the service runs out, the servant or his guardian borrows another sum of money and thus prolongs the service. Formerly it was not unknown for a man to spend all his working life between ten and seventy years of age in the service of one master' (p. 13).

the portions bore no relationship to the drudgery of his labour. It is fair to say, however, that Srinivas was aware of the depressed working conditions of many Harijan *jita* servants: 'both Nachcha and I woke up to the headman giving instructions in the raspy tone reserved for them. Occasionally there was a burst of abuse including the usual obscenities' (p. 59); 'I could not help watching how they were being treated and the more I watched the more I realized how wretched their condition was' (p. 60). Turning our conversation to rules of purity and pollution, Ramanma calls to mind how he was obliged to squat with his head bowed almost to the ground in front of his patron. Furthermore, he was not allowed to wear sandals, was compelled to wear black clothes only, and was not allowed to use Gudi Street, the main road in the village. Reflecting back, Ramanma told us that, although untouchability was still an everyday reality in the village, changes for the better had taken place, and Harijan youngsters today, he felt, enjoyed certain freedoms which were beyond the imagination of their grandparents half a century ago.

Pressures for change, forces of continuity

Srinivas notes how the potential for radical change was building up in the late 1940s (p. 233), and not infrequently Harijans were the subjects of those changes. With the introduction of the adult franchise, politicians started to see Harijans as vote-banks, and voices for caste-equality grew louder. Progressive reformers were urging Harijans to refuse to remove the carcasses of dead animals, not to beat the drums during festivals and not to perform any other degrading tasks (p. 201). The by now independent government of India judged caste discrimination to be a problem, and efforts were made not only to abolish untouchability, but also to facilitate Harijans in improving their often poor economic conditions. These ideological changes, which manifested themselves in pro-Harijan policies on the part of the government, percolated all the way down to Rampura, but they were resented by upper-caste villagers, who felt their dominant position being threatened. Srinivas narrates how the headman manipulated a government scheme directed at the Harijans. The scheme was intended to fund Harijans in replacing their thatched roofs with tiles, and the budget was to be disbursed through the headman. Instead of providing the necessary budget at one go, however, the headman distributed only tiny sums of money at a time, which the Harijans used for their most pressing needs, and in a few instances for toddy (a local alcoholic brew). The government scheme did not deliver, and Srinivas reports the talk among the villagers that the Harijans had misused the money (p. 255). Caste foundations were seen as being shaken and

harbingers of change as abounding, yet the proposed reforms had not quite materialized in the village.

Pro-Harijan legislation and voluminous government schemes have continued ever since, yet legislative changes and public opinion on the state level still seem far ahead of the everyday practices and ideas held by most villagers in Kodagahalli. Upper-caste villagers, particularly the educated ones, are quick to assert that untouchability has retreated somewhat into the distant past. They explain it as something which took place in earlier times but which has been eradicated by the advancement of education and modernisation. A number of college students belonging to the locally dominant Vokkaliga Gowda caste supported their claim that this was an untouchable-free village by offering to assist us in collecting our census data from the Harijan ward, and, indeed, they did not seem to have any reluctance to enter lower-caste houses. This does mark a significant shift from earlier times, of which Srinivas writes that upper-caste villagers rarely if ever visited the Harijan ward, but rather used Muslim mediators if an important message, usually a call for labourers, needed to be conveyed there (p. 208). However, the fact that upper-caste individuals may today enter lower-caste houses should not come as too great a surprise because what was not possible in the past and still is largely not so even today is the entry of the lower castes into the houses, and even the tea shops, of the upper castes. If upper-caste members did not enter the houses of the Harijans, as Srinivas notes, it was not due to any restriction but was a choice they exercised. Srinivas's comment on the use of Muslim mediators thus seems to reflect a Brahmanical concern. Some visible changes notwithstanding, in more general terms there seems to be a disjuncture between public opinion as expressed and daily practice in the village. Most villagers condemn untouchability, and indeed it is punishable by law today, yet restrictions and prohibitions on the lower castes abound to the extent that, if the law were to be strictly enforced, the majority of the villagers would be convicted for practising it in some way or the other.

The most visible form of caste discrimination in the village is the spatial separation of the Harijan ward from those of all the other castes in the village. Located at the opposite side of the Mysore-Hogur road, the Harijan ward is situated on the outskirts of the village, where members of higher castes need not be and need not pass through. Indeed, the road seems to function as a line of pollution manifested in asphalt. True, the question is valid whether Harijans are still largely living separately together because caste rigidity requires them to do so or because people cannot easily move house, particularly where an ancestral house is concerned. Either way, the pervasiveness of spatial exclusion seems to have a rather

singularizing effect. When evening falls, all Harijans, regardless of their educational achievements, forms of employment and social status in the village, return to the same colony from which the stigma of inferiority and pollution has still not been removed.

In addition to the spatial division and the restrictions in the tea shops mentioned earlier, Harijans are prohibited from using the big tank a short way outside the village settlement or any well not located inside the Harijan ward. They are only allowed to wash their clothes downstream so that they do not pollute the higher castes, who wash upstream. Moreover, the village washerman and barber continue to refuse to render their services to Harijans, so that a haircut usually means a trip to Bannur, the closest urban centre, were anonymity allows them inside a barber's shop. One can occasionally also come across passionate caste orthodoxy in the village. A Harijan interpreter was once assisting a group of students during a village census, but when they approached a house which obviously belonged to an upper-caste family, he insisted on waiting outside on the veranda. The students went inside and left after obtaining their data, followed by the Harijan interpreter. Soon afterwards a lady marched out of the house with a bucket of water in order to purify the exact spot on the veranda where the Harijan had squatted. That caste rigidity is not merely in the past was also pointed out by the only Harijan shopkeeper in the village. Describing his business, he sadly admitted that his clientele was rather small: 'higher castes only occasionally buy some *beedies* (tobacco wrapped in leaves for smoking) here, but for all their other necessities they turn to shops owned by upper-caste villagers'. Yet another observation concerns the secondary school in the village. The headmaster claims that as soon as students enter the school compound they shed their caste identity and become equals. A look at the school register, however, revealed that two colours of pen are used to register the pupils: red for Harijans and blue for all others. The headmaster explained that the names of Harijan students need to be marked so that educational officials visiting the school can easily count the number of Harijans enrolled there and dispense grants meant for them. Although his explanation sounds practical enough, one should not forget that discrimination starts with identification and with openly marking the names of Harijan pupils, even though it is supposedly meant for their own benefit.

Significant continuities notwithstanding, some tangible changes in social relations seem to have taken place in the village. However, Harijan 'uplift' movements are patchy and affect individuals rather than the caste as a whole. The Indian Constitution treats all Harijans equally and has allocated benefits and reservations to them as a group. However, they have not all been able to grasp the benefits assigned to them. This is perhaps nothing unusual, as achievements are made by individuals, and a community receives its socio-economic status

depending on the number of such achieving individuals. Furthermore, not every member of a caste can benefit equally because people always outnumber the available resources, and the benefits allocated to a Scheduled Caste are no exception. What remains at the village level is that, although a number of Harijan individuals have been able to improve their social-economic status, as whole castes Harijans are still far behind their upper-caste counterparts. This is an important observation to keep in mind when discussing the multiple changes that may nonetheless have taken place at the lowest ritual layer of the village.

When looking at the question of Harijans and literacy, a trend is found in the village in which Harijan grandparents are illiterate, Harijan parents finished primary school and some of them a few classes higher, while a rather large number of the present generation have passed the SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) and have been, or presently are, enrolled in colleges or universities. Srinivas writes that prior to 1948 Rampura had produced four graduates (p. 250). Today a couple of dozen are enrolled in higher educational institutes, among them a sizeable number of Harijans. This boom in education, combined with reservation policies and other acts of positive discrimination, has resulted in a rising number of Kodagahalli Harijans holding government jobs, something largely reserved for the higher castes in earlier times. However, this does not necessarily mean that they hold high and influential posts. Most of them are employed in petty jobs at the lower levels of the bureaucracy. Nevertheless Srinivas was confident enough to write that Harijans were chiefly landless labourers (p. 169), whereas today we find them holding diverse jobs such as train conductors, teachers, forest rangers, office clerks and various other blue collar jobs, although a large number continue to hire themselves out as agricultural labourers as well.

Some Harijans in the village have visibly fared well. Having benefitted from the jobs and government schemes on offer to them, they have been able to use their newly earned financial resources in the acquisition of land. Hence the distinction between the upper castes as landowners and lower castes as landless labourers, noted by Srinivas, has become somewhat blurred, and occasionally even turned upside down. One or two Harijan families have even acquired more land than they can cultivate themselves, and during the agricultural peak season they need to employ people to get the work done. Labourers have to be hired, and these are not necessarily fellow Harijans but may include upper-caste individuals, something that would have been practically unheard of in Srinivas's time. This was not only because Harijans were predominantly landless, but also because it was considered natural that Harijans labour for the upper castes in what usually took the form of patron-client

relationships[5] (p. 216), and certainly not the other way around. Nonetheless this changing economic reality does not entail the the blurring of caste boundaries as such. Although it is customary for a landowner to provide lunch for his employees, an upper-caste person working for a lower-caste one will generally not accept food from the latter but rather bring some 'clean' packed food from home. Indeed, the mingling of economic forces with the caste system is not to be equated with a proportional decrease in notions of purity and pollution.

Economic changes may not parallel changing perceptions of purity and pollution, yet socio-economic upward movement does not come in isolation. Rather, it provides achieving lower-caste individuals with proportionally more social space and prestige than those of their caste fellows who have remained largely impoverished. Srinivas already had this in mind when he wrote that landownership and wealth could occasionally mitigate if not overcome the effects of birth in a low caste (p. 111). Revanna, a Harijan college graduate, may illustrate the point Srinivas made, and we wish to follow it up here.

Having graduated, with Russian language as his major, Revanna is not only among the most highly educated Harijans, he also belongs to the upper intellectual layer of the village as a whole. With his family possessing a few acres of land and living in a concrete, well-furnished house, Revanna's educational achievements seem to match his economic position in the village. At the time of our field research he happened to be jobless, yet he was busy commuting back and forth to Mysore to apply for various government jobs and was quite confident that it would not take him long to find one. Despite his low inborn caste status, Revanna seems to enjoy a considerable amount of recognition and respect in the village, and his movements are not confined to the Harijan ward alone. He seems to be well acquainted with many villagers and in good standing with the headman, while he also maintains multiple inter-caste friendships. These observations are particularly relevant when one sees the opposite happening with 'un-achieving Harijans'. They do not enjoy the same social freedoms as are granted to Revanna, and Harijans employed as agricultural labourers largely move between the fields and the Harijan ward alone, hardly ever crossing over to the main village. Arguing that Harijans are restricted from entering the main village might perhaps be rather strong a statement, as the higher castes claim that Harijans are not prohibited from

[5] Patron-client relations emerged out of the possession of differential rights in land, and although the client was inferior if not often subordinate to his patron, the latter did have obligations towards his clients. As Srinivas put it, 'a big patron attracted clients as a magnet attracted iron filings. The poor and the weak felt unsafe without a patron. The latter provided a source of livelihood as well as a sense of security. Forces in the local culture were such as to encourage the weak to seek protection from the strong' (p. 217).

doing so. Harijans may nonetheless hesitate to enter the main village because as a self-imposed restriction, a remnant of years of suppression.

A conclusion one may draw from the above is that Harijans are, contrary to Srinivas's observations in 1948, by no means homogeneous. Of course internal differences have always existed, yet these diversities were largely ignored or did not make any sense from the point of view of the upper castes, for whom the Harijans were, so to speak, principally a uniform labour force. This perception seems to have altered, and although as a caste group the latter are ritually looked down upon, room for individual recognition and upward socio-economic movement has opened up. For the achieving Harijans themselves this may not all be a matter of satisfaction, and they may actually find themselves in an ambivalent situation, but being the most educated, they may also be the most critical of caste practices. A number of them have not only abandoned beef-eating and drinking toddy, they are also urging their caste-fellows to do so, and they may blame them for 'backwardness' and 'stubbornness' when their pleas are not followed. Srinivas's concept of sanskritization applies here, and it is ambitious Harijans who attempt to set this process in motion. They may also resist existing caste practices by, for example, refusing to drink tea in one of the teashops or by using razors to shave themselves rather than travelling to the next urban centre to have it done for them. This is not the whole story, however, and we heard Harijans accusing the higher castes, though covertly, for being hypocrites by condemning Harijans for their habits of eating beef and pork and for drinking alcohol, while they themselves are supposedly at least as fond of meat, not to speak of their taste for alcohol. We noticed this when Raghunath, a dominant caste member living in front of the Rama temple and working in the alcohol factory in the village, actually drank alcohol manufactured in the factory every evening and sometimes even during the day sitting at his home and in full view of his wife and daughter. However, most upper-caste individuals, some Harijans argued, do not dare to drink or eat forbidden meat in the village, but travel to Mysore where they can satisfy their needs in anonymity. Being progressive, critical and eager to move upwards, achieving Harijans may find themselves in an 'in-between situation'. By criticizing, if not at times accusing, their own caste fellows, they may have disentangled themselves somewhat from their caste roots. Nonetheless, although upper-caste villagers may be quite willing to make some concessions to them here and there, they are still not quite ready to accept them on a totally equal footing.

Encapsulated change

Changes have taken place in the village, and, as mentioned above, certain technical innovations which the villagers in Srinivas's time considered modern are today thought of as traditional. Furthermore, caste restrictions seem to have loosened, and an individual's potential and achievements are bound less by his caste background today than they were during the late 1940s. On the whole, however, it was not the changes that struck us so much as the striking continuities, though some of them have been remapped between Srinivas's description of the village and 'our' village sixty years later. Local hierarchies and notions of purity, pollution and untouchability may now be reproduced differently, but they continue to shape the social landscape of the village. Nevertheless the reproduction of social boundaries today might not be as obvious and self-evident as it was in earlier times, when Srinivas could generalise the Harijans as impoverished, landless and generally immobile. Today the Harijans in Kodagahalli can no longer be seen as a homogeneous group: mass education, reservation policies and other government schemes have percolated down to the village, yet their effects are patchy, and only a privileged few have been able to grasp some of the benefits assigned to them as a group. Nonetheless individual achievements and merits can, to a certain extent, overcome one's birth in a low caste, and a number of achieving Harijans enjoy proportionally more social freedom and status in the village than their uneducated caste fellows

Yet socio-economic upward movement does not amount to the total abolition of caste practices. There seems to be a disjuncture between the public rhetoric of politicians and government officials, as well as of the villagers themselves, in which untouchability is condemned, and the everyday practices by which Kodagahalli Harijans still remain excluded from certain social spaces. It seems that the caste system, at least on the village level, has to a certain extent been able to absorb wider changes within Indian society. Changes in both the economic and social spheres are affecting the village, yet the path chosen, or more accurately perhaps the path into which these changes are being directed by the upper castes, is rather a long one. Being ranked at the foot of the ritual hierarchy in the village, the Harijans are not in a position to control the changes they desire themselves but still seem to be largely dependent on the social space that has been granted to them by higher castes. It may therefore take another few generations or more before the forces of ritual exclusion become negligible, or at least less effective, in governing the destinies of Harijans in the social and ritual structure of the village. Although greater social freedom has been granted to the Harijans of Kodagahalli, the changes taking place are encapsulated in an upper-caste framework that still does not

enable them to change their ritual position in accordance with their educational, economic and political achievements.

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