

HINDU CASTES AND SECTS.

PREFACE.

IN the last edition of my "Commentaries on Hindu Law" I devoted a chapter to the Hindu Caste System which attracted the attention of the Publishers, and they suggested that the subject might well be expanded so as to be brought out as a separate volume. They suggested also that, in order to make the book complete, I should give an account not only of the Castes, but also of the important Hindu Sects, some of which are practically so many new Castes.

As I had been already engaged in writing a book about the history and philosophy of religions, the proposal, so far as the sects were concerned, was welcome indeed. About the Castes I felt very considerable diffidence; but it seemed to me that, in a town like Calcutta, where there are men from every part of India, it might not be quite impossible to collect the necessary information. When, however, I actually commenced my enquiries, then I fully realised the difficulty of my task. The original information contained in this work has been derived from a very large number of Hindu gentlemen hailing from different parts of India. I here

gratefully acknowledge the kindness that they have shown in according to me their assistance. I feel very strongly inclined to insert in this book a list of their names. But the publication of such a list is not desirable for more reasons than one. To begin with, such a list would be necessarily too long to be conveniently included. Then, again, the subject of castes and sects is, in some of its aspects, a very irritating one, and if I were to give publicity to the names of the persons who have assisted me, it might place them in a very false position. So I thank them generally without mentioning any names.

In connection also with this part of the work, I must acknowledge my obligations to the works of Risley, Wilson and Sherring, and to Mr. Narsimayangar's Report of the last Census of Mysore. As to the last of these, which is compiled by an educated native of the country, it is hardly necessary to observe that it is very reliable, though not very complete. Mr. Risley's "Tribes and Castes of Bengal" is an exhaustive treatise, and is, generally speaking, reliable also. If there had been similar works for the other provinces, then the task of taking a bird's-eye view of the whole would not have been quite so arduous to me as it has actually been.

With regard to the part of the book devoted to the Hindu Sects, I may mention that the greater portion of it had been written originally for my promised work on the philosophy of religion which I hope to bring out

PREFACE.

before long. For the sake of many of my friends and relations near and dear to me I hesitated to give publicity to my views before ; but it seems to me high time now that I should speak out and do what lies in me to set forth the true character of the cults that the majority of those who profess to be Hindus believe and practise.

The religions of those who are not regarded as Hindus do not come within the scope of this work. But the position which I assign to Christianity, Mahomedanism, Zoroastrianism, &c., must appear clear enough from what I have said in the Introduction to my account of the Hindu Sects, about the evolution of human faiths, and about the different principles on which they may be classified. I have tried my best throughout to avoid irreverence and offensive expressions, and the reader, who is not altogether blinded by orthodoxy, will, I hope, admit that, even with regard to the worst of the abomination-worshipping sects, I have nowhere been harsher than the nature of the case absolutely required. Reverence ought to be by all means shown to persons and institutions that have a just claim to it. But nothing can, in my opinion, be more sinful than to speak respectfully of persons who are enemies of mankind, and to whitewash rotten institutions by esoteric explanations and fine phrases.

It is no doubt extremely difficult to get rid of the effect of early training and associations. But those who claim to be educated and enlightened will, I trust, give

me an impartial and patient hearing. However strong their faith in Saivism, Saktaism and Radha worship may be, they cannot be altogether blind to the real character of these creeds. One of the greatest thinkers of modern times has, in connection with certain questions of political economy, said :—

It often happens that the universal belief of one age of mankind—a belief from which no one *was*, nor, without any extraordinary effort of genius and courage, *could*, at that time be free—becomes to a subsequent age so palpable an absurdity, that the only difficulty then is to imagine how such a thing can ever have appeared credible.

This, I am sure, will before long be the feeling of every honest Hindu with regard to some of the most important features of his so-called religions, and I shall feel I have performed an almost sacred duty if this work promotes in some degree that end.

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CONTENTS.

HINDU CASTES.

PART I.

INTRODUCTION.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Origin and Nature of the Hindu Caste System	1—8
II.	Whether Caste is a Religious or a Social Distinction	9
III.	The Regulations by which the Castes have been made Exclusive	10-12
IV.	The Origin of the Additional Castes and the Sub-castes	13-15
V.	The Authorities by whom the Caste Rules are Enforced	16, 17
VI.	Nature of the Penalty of Exclusion from Caste	18

PART II.

THE BRAHMANS GENERALLY.

I.	The Position of the Brahmans in Hindu Society	19-23
II.	The Brahman's Proper Professions	24-26
III.	The Modern Hindu Gurus	27-29
IV.	Enquiries by which the Caste Status of a Brahman may be Ascertained	30-32
V.	The Sub-divisions among the Brahmans	33, 34

PART III.

THE BRAHMANS OF NORTHERN INDIA.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Brahmans of Bengal	35-45
	1. The Pâschâtya Vaidikas	36, 37
	2. The Rârhiya Brahmans	37-42
	3. The Bârendras	42-44
	4. The Dâkahinatya Vaidikas	44
	5. The Madhya Sreni Brahmans	45
II.	The Brahmans of Mithila and Behar	46-48
	1. The Maithilas	46-48
	2. The Sakaldipis	48
III.	The Brahmans of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh	49-51
	1. The Kanojias	49, 50
	2. The Sarujuparias	51
	3. The Sanadhyas	51
IV.	The Gaur Brahmans of the Kurukshetra Country	52, 53
V.	The Brahmans of Kashmir, Panjab and Sindh	54-57
	1. The Brahmans of Kashmir	54, 55
	2. The Brahmans of the Panjab	55-57
	3. The Brahmans of Sindh	57
VI.	The Brahmans of Assam	58, 59
VII.	The Brahmans of Orissa	60-64
	1. The Brahmans of Southern Orissa	60-62
	The Vaidikas	60, 61
	The Adhikari, Pujari or Vaishnava Brahmans	62
	The Mahajan Panthis	62
	The Pandas	62
	2. The Jajpuria Brahmans	63, 64
VIII.	The Brahmans of Rajputana	65-69
	1. The Srimalis	66, 67
	2. The Pallivals	68, 69
	3. The Pokaranas	69
IX.	The Brahmans of Central India	70

PART IV.

THE BRAHMANS OF SOUTHERN INDIA.

I.	Preliminary Remarks	71, 72
II.	The Brahmans of Gujrat	73-81

CHAPTER		PAGE
III.	The Brahmans of Maharashtra and Kan- kan	82-89
	1. The Desastha Brahmans	82, 83
	2. The Kankanaesthas	83-85
	3. The Yajurvedis	85, 86
	4. The Karhades	86-89
	5. The Shenavis of Kankan	89
IV.	The Middle Class and inferior Brahmans of Maharashtra	90, 91
V.	The Brahmans of the Karnatic	92, 93
VI.	The Brahmans of Dravira	94-97
	1. The Smarta Brahmans	94, 95
	2. The Vishnuvite Brahmans of Southern India	97
VII.	The Brahmans of Telingana	98-101
VIII.	The Brahmans of the Central Provinces ...	102, 103
IX.	The Brahmans of South Kanara ...	104, 105
X.	The Brahmans of Kerala, Cochin, Malabar and Travancore	106-108

PART V.

THE SEMI-BRAHMANICAL CASTES.

I.	The Bhuinhar Brahmans	109-113
II.	The Bhats and the Charanas	114-7

PART VI.

THE DEGRADED BRAHMANS.

I.	The Hossainis and Kuvachandas	118
II.	The Pirāli Tagores of Calcutta	119-124
III.	The Barna Brahmans	125, 126
IV.	The Brahmans connected with the public Sbrines	127, 128
V.	The Brahmans degraded by accepting forbid- den Gifts and officiating as paid Priests at Cremations	129, 130
	The Mahā-Brahmans	129
	The Agradānis	129
	The Agra Bhikshu	129
	The Sawalakhis	130

CHAPTER	PAGE
The Bhattas	130
The Maruiporas	130
The Acharyas of Western India	130
The Sanichar <i>alias</i> Dakot of Rajputana	130
VI. The Brahmans degraded by Menial Service	131

PART VII.

THE MILITARY CASTES.

I. The Rajputs ... ..	... 132-137
II. The Kshettris ... ..	... 138-144
1. The Sereen Kshettris ... ..	... 140-142
2. Kukkurs ... ..	... 142
3. The Borhas ... ..	... 142
4. The Banjai Kshettris ... ..	... 142-144
III. The Jats ... ..	... 145, 146
IV. The Khandaits of Orissa ... ..	... 147, 148
V. The Marattas ... ..	... 149, 150
VI. The Nairs of Malabar ... ..	... 151, 152
VII. The Maravans, Ahamdians and Kallans ... ..	... 153, 154
VIII. The Poliyas and the Koch of North Bengal.	155
IX. The Aguris of Bengal ... ..	... 156-158

PART VIII.

THE SCIENTIFIC CASTES.

I. The Vaidyas or the Medical Castes of Bengal	159-171
II. The Bez of Assam	172
III. The Astrologer Castes of Bengal and Assam	173, 174

PART IX.

THE WRITER CASTES.

I. The Kāyasthas generally ... ..	... 175-177
II. The Kāyasthas of Bengal ... ..	... 178-185
1. The Dākshina Rarhis of Bengal ... ..	... 178-180
2. The Uttara Rarhi Kāyasthas ... ..	... 180-183
3. The Bangaja Kāyasthas ... ..	... 183, 184
4. The Bārendra Kāyasthas ... ..	... 184
5. The Golam Kāyasthas of East Bengal	185

CONTENTS.

XI

CHAPTER		PAGE
III.	The Kāyasthas of Upper India ...	186-191
	1. The Srivatsa Kāyasthas ...	186-188
	2. The Ambastha Kāyasthas ...	188
	3. The Karan Kāyasthas ...	188, 189
	4. The Sakya Seni Kāyasthas ...	189, 190
	5. The Kula Sreshti Kāyasthas ...	190
	6. The Bhatnagari Kāyasthas ...	190
	7. The Mathuri Kāyasthas ...	190
	8. The Suryadhaja Kāyasthas ...	190
	9. The Balmiki Kāyasthas ...	191
	10. The Ashthana Kāyasthas ...	191
	11. The Nigama Kāyasthas ...	191
	12. The Gaur Kāyasthas ...	191
	13. The Kāyasthas of Unao ...	191
IV.	The Writer Castes of Southern India ...	192, 193
V.	The Prabhus of the Bombay Presidency ...	194, 195
VI.	The Kolitas of Assam ...	196, 197

PART X.

THE MERCANTILE CASTES.

I.	The Baniyas of Bengal ...	198-202
	1. The Suvarna Baniks of Bengal ...	199-201
	2. The Gandha Baniks of Bengal ...	201, 202
II.	The Baniyas of Northern India ..	203-217
	1. The Agarwāls ...	205-207
	2. The Ossawals ...	207-209
	3. The Khandelwals ...	209, 210
	4. The Srimali Baniyas ...	210
	5. The Palliwal Baniyas ...	210
	6. The Porawal Baniyas ...	211
	7. The Bhatiyas ...	211
	8. The Mahesri Baniyas ...	211
	9. The Agrahari Baniyas ...	212
	10. The Dbunsar Baniyas ...	212
	11. The Umar Baniyas ...	212
	12. The Rastogis ...	213
	13, 14. The Kasarwanis and the Kasana- dhans ...	213, 214
	15. The Lohiya Baniyas ...	214
	16. The Soniyas ...	214
	17. The Sura Senis ...	214
	18. The Bara Senis ...	214

CHAPTER		PAGE
	19. The Baranwals	215
	20. The Ayodhya Basis	215
	21. The Jaiswars	215
	22. The Mahobiyas	215
	23. The Mahuris	216
	24. The Bais Baniyas	216
	25. The Kath Baniyas	216
	26. The Raoniyars	216, 217
	27. The Jameyas	217
	28. The Lohanas	217
	29. The Rewaris	217
	30. The Kanus	217
III.	The Baniyas of Gujrat	218
IV.	The Trading Castes of Southern India ...	219, 220
V.	The Mercantile Castes of the Telegu Country	221, 222
VI.	The Baniyas of Orissa	223

PART XI.

THE ARTISAN CASTES GENERALLY RECOGNISED AS
CLEAN SUDRAS.

I.	General Observations	224-226
II.	The Weavers	227-236
	1. The Weavers generally	227-230
	2. The Tantis of Bengal	230-232
	3. The Tatwas of Behar	232, 233
	4. The Kori and Koli of Upper India ...	233
	5. The Tantis of Orissa	233
	6. The Koshti of the Central Provinces ...	233
	7. The Weavers of Gujrat	233
	8. The Weavers of the Dravira Country ...	234
	9. The Weaving Castes of Mysore ...	234, 235
	10. The Weavers of the Telegu Country ...	236
	11. The Jugis	236
III.	The Sweetmeat-making Castes	237-239
IV.	The Kumar or Potter	240
V.	The Ironsmiths	241-243
VI.	The Goldsmiths	244, 245
	1. The Sonar and Shakra of Northern India	244, 245
	2. The Panchanam Varlu of the Telegu Country and the Kammallars of Dravira ... ..	...

CHAPTER		PAGE
VII.	The Carpenters ... ..	...246, 247
VIII.	The Braziers and Copper-smiths ... ..	...248, 249
	1. The Kansa Baniks of Bengal ... ..	...248, 249
	2. The Kasaras and Thatheras of Northern India ... ..	... 249
	3. The Gejjegora and Kanchugora of Southern India ... ..	... 249
IX.	The Sankha Baniks of Bengal ... ..	... 250
X.	The Grain Parchers... ..	...251, 252
XI.	The Dirjis or Tailors ... ..	... 253

PART XII.

THE MANUFACTURING AND ARTISAN CASTES THAT ARE
REGARDED AS UNCLEAN SUDRAS.

I.	The Brewers, Tadi-drawers, and Sellers of Spirituous Liquors ... ..	... 254-261
	1. The Sunris of Bengal and Behar ... ..	... 255-257
	2. The Kalwars of Northern India ... ..	...257, 258
	3. The Shanars and Illavars of Dravira	258-260
	4. The Bhāndaris of Western India ... ..	... 260
	5. The Pasis of Behar ... ..	... 260
	6. The Tiyans of Southern India ... ..	... 261
	7. The Idigas of Mysore and the Telegu Country ... ..	... 261
	8. The Gaudla and Gamalla of the Telegu Country ... ..	... 261
II.	The Oil Manufacturers ... ..	... 262-264
	1. The Telis of Bengal ... ..	...262, 263
	2. The Kalus of Bengal ... ..	...263, 264
	3. The Telis and Ghanchis of Upper India ... ..	... 264
	4. The Tel Kulu Varlu of the Telegu Country ... ..	... 264
	5. The Ganigas and Vanikans of Southern India ... ..	... 264
III.	The Salt Manufacturers ... ..	... 265
IV.	The Leather Workers ... ..	... 266-268
	1. The Chamars and Muchis of N. India	266, 267
	2. The Chakilians and Madigs of S. India	267, 268
	3. The Leather-working Castes of Rajputana and Central India ... ..	... 266
V.	The Mat-makers and Basket-makers ... ..	... 269

CONTENTS.

PART XIII.

THE CLEAN AGRICULTURAL CASTES.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Kurmis and Kunbis ...	... 270-273
II.	The Koeris of Northern India ...	... 274
III.	The Malis ...	... 275, 276
IV.	The Kachis ...	... 277
V.	The Lodhas and Lodhis ...	... 278
VI.	The Agricultural Kaibartas of Bengal ...	... 279-281
VII.	The Sadgopas ...	... 282, 83
VIII.	The Agricultural Castes of the Central Provinces ...	... 284
IX.	The Agricultural Castes of the Panjab ...	... 285
X.	The Agricultural Castes of the Telegu Country	286
XI.	The Agricultural Castes of Mysore ...	... 287
XII.	The Agricultural Castes of the Dravira Country ...	... 288-290
XIII.	The Pan-growers ...	... 291-293
	1. The Barui ...	... 291, 292
	2. The Tambuli ...	... 292, 293

PART XIV.

THE COWHERDS AND SHEPHERDS.

I.	General Observations ...	... 294, 295
II.	The Abhirs or Ahirs ...	... 296, 297
III.	The Gujars ...	... 298, 299
IV.	The Goalas of the Lower Provinces ...	... 300-302
V.	The Cowherds of Southern India ...	... 304
VI.	The Shepherd Castes ...	... 305

PART XV.

THE CLEAN AND THE UNCLEAN CASTES EMPLOYED IN PERSONAL AND DOMESTIC SERVICE.

I.	The Barbers ...	... 306, 307
II.	The Washermen ...	... 308
III.	The Castes usually employed as Domestic Servants in Hindu Households ...	... 309
IV.	The Castes of the Domestic Servants in Anglo-Indian Households ...	... 313, 314

CONTENTS.

PART XVI.

MISCELLANEOUS CASTES.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Fishermen and Boatmen ...	315
II.	The Criminal Tribes ...	317

HINDU SECTS.

PART I.

INTRODUCTION.

I.	The Proper Method of Enquiry regarding Religions ...	319
II.	The Evolution of the Theocratic Art ...	325
III.	Classification of Religions ...	335
IV.	Definitions of Religion ...	339
V.	The True Origin of Religion ...	342
VI.	Religion as a Foundation of Ethics ...	344
VII.	General Observations about the Sect Founders	350
VIII.	The Inducements held out by Sect Founders to attract Followers ...	353
IX.	The Methods of Priestly Operations ...	353
X.	General Character of the Hindu Sects ...	359
XI.	Classification of the Sects ...	364
XII.	The Mode of ascertaining the Sect to which a Hindu Monk belongs ...	366

PART II.

THE SIVITE AND THE SEMI-SIVITE SECTS.

I.	The Nature of the Sivite Religion and its great Prevalence ...	367
II.	Probable Origin of the Sivite Religion ...	371
III.	The Sivite Followers of Saukara ...	371
IV.	The Dandis ...	371
V.	The Sunyasis ...	371
VI.	The Parama Hansas ...	371
	Brahmacharis ...	371

HINDU CASTES AND SECTS.

AN EXPOSITION OF THE ORIGIN OF THE HINDU CASTE SYSTEM AND THE BEARING OF THE SECTS TOWARDS EACH OTHER AND TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS.

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