

## CONCLUSION

In the Preface to this monograph I stated that this study being my first venture into anthropological field work I considered it best to give the widest possible scope to the subject rather than confine myself to a particular aspect of Muthuvan sociology, and that, therefore, I have discussed - or, should attempt to discuss, to be precise - habitat and economy, the structure of the hamlet, the clan system, kinship and religion. I have done this, certainly to the best of my ability at any rate, and I can only hope that what I have given in the foregoing pages presents a unified and complete picture of a small hill tribe of Travancore that the Muthuvan is. I must also state, however, that anthropological studies can only too often show themselves to be like the proverbial blind man's elephant. No human society can possibly reveal itself in its entirety to the onlooker, or even to the trained eyes and ears of the anthropologist: if it did it would not be human. For, the most essential characteristic of human societies is that it is dynamic and changing. This is not only in terms of a chronological sequence, but also and perhaps even mo

so, in terms of simultaneous occurrence of ideas, motivations desires and prejudices, and the actions that are deemed appropriate for the testing or fulfilment of these. While on the one hand we have certain grounds for generalisations on the likely or probable behaviour of individuals under a given set of circumstances - subject as they are to the social inheritance of a store of predilections, ideas, values and patterns of customary conduct - , we have, on the other, a large element of the unexpected and the unpredictable in all human behaviour and individual actions. I believe that this necessarily imposes a certain degree of limitation to all generalisations about human behaviour, and would therefore make comparisons rather meaningless. What the anthropologist can in fact do, then, is to try and analyse society and social behaviour of individuals at a given time and place, stepping warily on generalisations.

At various points in the course of my study, I was strongly tempted to seek contrasts and similarities with other societies in certain aspects of Muthuvan life and behaviour. And in fact I have done so at places, but by and large I should think that the attempt to hold one group against another for discovering either contrasts or similarities achieves no more purpose than the satisfaction of a curiosity. It would seem, then, that the anthropologist has done his part when he has described the society he is

studying, with the closest adherence to facts as observed.

Were I to be asked what facts about Muthuvan life that were not already known I have brought to light, they are:

Firstly, the manner in which Muthuvan society has stood up to changed circumstances in their area, these changes, being brought about mainly by the expansion of tea plantation industry. I believe I have shown fairly clearly how the plantations, and, secondarily, the colonisation of plains people in the hills, have affected Muthuvan economy and structure of hamlet. As far as I know, this is a point of great significance, but one that has not been treated by anyone before - at least in so far as Muthuvans are concerned.

Secondly, I have analysed in some detail the structure of the kudi and shown it to be a mobile hamlet unit of co-residential cognates co-operating in economic and ritual functions; it is also the smallest unit of political structure and judicial authority. One important point I have tried to make in relation to the kudi is that while on the one hand there is a emphasis on group living and cohesion among members of the kudi, there is, on the other, the absence of any noticeable degree of compulsion, either overt or implied, in respect of the arrangement of membership and residence, in the kudi structure. This makes for

a considerable ease in behaviour and in freedom of movement facilitating suitable re-arrangement of the composition of hamlets with the minimum of friction. The kudi is, for this reason, an institutionalised way of resolving conflicts. The commonest process by which conflicts are resolved is a simple and speedy bifurcation of the kudi. In discussing Clanship among the Tallensi, Fortes said that observation of the lineage system in action suggested that its distinguishing characteristic, as a regulating factor in the social structure, was its tendency towards equilibrium. This operated in such a way as to leave room for continual internal adjustments without endangering its long-term stability.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to resist the temptation to say the same of the kudi system of the Muthuvans. This is not a similarity between the two peoples, but a certain identity of function in regard to two different aspects of the two societies.

Thirdly, I have attempted to show how the system of heirarchical or pyramidal authority as instituted in the clan structure in Muthuvan society functions as an effective mechanism for the exercise of social control. In discussing

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1. Meyer Fortes, Dynamics of Clanship Among the Tallensi (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. x

this point, I hope I have clarified the distinction between the eastern and western sections of Muthuvan society in relation to the structure of authority. Among the former, the head of the clan is the supreme judicial authority for members of the clan, whereas among the latter the ultimate authority in all matters is the Melvaka who is the spiritual and temporal head, so to say, of all Muthuvans of that section in particular, and of all Muthuvans of ~~that~~ both sections by common acknowledgement. One might say, therefore, as indeed I have said, that among eastern Muthuvans, authority, resting as it does with the head of the clan, is decentralised, and that among western Muthuvans, authority, resting as it does with the Melvaka, is highly centralised. I am aware that this is a rather laboured and tenuous argument, arising more out of an assumed logical sequence of process than out of an abundance of data to prove it to be so, but I thought the point was worth making if only for its sociological interest as a point of distinction between the two sections of the tribe.

It might perhaps be appropriate to add at this juncture an incidental or minor point that I have sought to make though without any systematic adducing of data, namely, the distinction between the two sections of Muthuvans in a number of factors. In certain aspects the difference between the two sections <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ so obvious as to lead some to the belief that the two sections are in fact two different

tribes altogether. While this is admittedly an interesting suggestion, I have found no justification for such an assumption. The differences between the two sections lie only in what may be called the frills and adornments of the social structure of the tribe and not in essential matters. I believe it will be sufficiently clear that the differences are only such as are incidental to the distribution of the two sections - one aligned with the Malayali culture due to its proximity with the Malayalam - speaking region, and the other aligned with Tamilian culture for similar reason.

A fourth important point I have discussed is the place and function of matriliney in Muthuvan society. This is a point of considerable importance, and if I have not made it look sufficiently important, it is the short-comings of the discussion and not the insignificance of the matter in Muthuvan social behaviour. What I have done is to describe four chief crises in the individual's life - birth, initiation, marriage and death - and show how in each of these a person's matrilineal kin have certain rights and duties. This is what I would consider the jural function of kinship in Muthuvan society. Here again, I find a significant similarity in the function of Muthuvan kinship system with that of the lineage system of the Tallensi about whom Fortes said, that every significant activity (among the

Tallensi) is tied up with the lineage system.<sup>1</sup> I would not say the same thing in respect of Muthuvan kinship system, but it comes close to that.

Lastly, I have discussed at some length the religion of the Muthuvans. In explaining Muthuvan deities, I have drawn considerably on Dr. Srinivas' concept of 'Sanskritisation'. It would seem that this is a familiar process in all stages of Hindu religious stratification beneath the Brahminical level. One thing is certain anyway, and that is that even in simple societies like the Muthuvan, a process comparable to Sanskritisation is present, although the individual participants in religious life are unaware of it, and certainly have no consciously formulated concept to further the process. At the end of the chapter I have adduced some purely theoretical discussion on religion in the light of certain well known generalisations on primitive religion. This is perhaps beside the point, but I have had the satisfaction of weighing my material against the theoretical interpretations of great minds.

If I may be permitted to quote once again from Fortes, I want to close this by quoting - without comments - a passage from his Foreword to his book on the Tallensi:

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1. Ibid, p. ix

The writing of this book has been harder than I anticipated when I began it . . . . .  
. . . . . It has taught me that the hardest part of an anthropologist's work begins after he leaves the field . . . . . Writing an anthropological monograph is itself an instrument of research, and perhaps the most significant instrument of research in the anthropologist's armoury. It involves breaking up the vivid, kaleidoscopic reality of human action, thought and emotions which lives in the anthropologist's notebooks and memory, and creating out of the pieces a coherent representation of society, in terms of the general principles of organization and motivation that regulate behaviour in it.

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1. Ibid, p. vii