

PREFACE

This study has its origin in a meeting with Dr.M.N.Srinivas, in June 1951, shortly after both of us joined the teaching Staff of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, he as professor of Sociology in the Faculty of Arts, and I as lecturer in Social Research in the Faculty of Social Work. After this first meeting I attended some of Dr.Srinivas' lectures and seminars for post-graduate students which convinced me that here was a field of study with an intellectual challenge, and a teacher with whom it would be rewarding to work. Luckily I was able to persuade Dr.Srinivas to accept me as a research student in his department. Young Indian scholars from all parts of the country have discovered the same thing year after year, both about the subject and the teacher, and continue to add themselves, in due course, to the as yet small number of social anthropologists in the country.

The emphasis that Dr.Srinivas brought to bear on his teaching in Baroda revealed the unmistakable influence of Professor A.R.Radcliffe-Brown on his thinking and approach in so far as he ceaselessly held aloft the functional approach

to the study of institutions of individual societies as the chief task of comparative sociology. In studying a small hill tribe of Travancore, namely the Muthuvans, I have tried to apply the field methods of social anthropology as well as some of the theoretical contributions of the subject to the understanding of societies. This being my first venture into anthropological field work I considered it best to give the widest possible scope to the study rather than confine myself to a particular aspect of Muthuvan sociology such as rituals, religion, sex and marriage or economy. Hence within the compass of this monograph I have discussed habitat and economy, the structure of the hamlet, the clan system, kinship and religion. I believe that for a beginning, such as I have made, this overall approach to the study of a small society offers greater advantages than the singling out of an aspect of that society for critical subjection to anthropological theories: it offers wider scope for understanding the many facets of social life and for appreciating the essential unity of purpose and function a quality which makes possible the persistence of social groups as interacting units - in these varied facets.

The bulk of the material on which this monograph is based was collected during three field trips to different parts of the Muthuvan region in the Travancore High Range in the years 1951-1953. At the end of 1953 I left Baroda

to become the head of the Madras School of Social Work. My new responsibilities left me little time to concentrate on the writing up of my field data which lay dormant as it were until the autumn of 1955 when, fortunately, I was able to get away to England for a year on a British Council scholarship. This respite from my normal administrative and teaching work in the School of Social Work gave me the welcome and longed-for opportunity to write up my material. Besides, it gave me the added advantage of personal contacts and discussions with several British social anthropologists in Manchester, London and Oxford. Just before leaving for England, I made a fourth field trip to Travancore to refresh my mind on the subject, and to catch up with later developments.

The kind of study I have undertaken on the Muthuvan has not been made previously, and on that account I have the gratification of having broken fresh ground. But I did not by any means start with a clean slate, because I had the benefit of consulting Mr.L.A.Krishna Iyer's well-known ethnographic notes on the Travancore tribes and castes in which a considerable section is devoted to Muthuvans. Mr.Krishna Iyer was Officer in charge of the Ethnographic Survey of Travancore in the nineteen-thirties. His Travancore Tribes and Castes (1939) is a monumental work embodying the results of his extensive ethnographic survey

of the State for nearly a decade, and generations of Indian anthropologists have reason to feel indebted to him for having blazed the trail of anthropological research on the Travancore tribes. My claim to have broken fresh ground is justified only in so far as I have devoted concentrated attention to one particular tribe, and in so doing have tried to treat the subject in the light of modern social anthropology. Barring Mr. Krishna Iyer's account there are few published works to which one may turn for reference on Muthuvans. Edgar Thurston, in his voluminous Castes and Tribes of Southern India (1909), gives a brief, second-hand account of the Muthuvans based on information supplied to him by Mr. Aylmer Ff. Martin of the Travancore High Range. As far as I could ascertain, the earliest mention of the tribe in any published work is that contained in the Memoirs of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States by Lieutenants Ward and Conner (1816-1820). Much of their account of the hill people as they were in their time is quoted in the Introduction if only for its value as a rare and difficult-of-access document. In recent times some reputed Western anthropologists have had occasion to observe Muthuvans, but any materials that they might have collected are as yet unpublished. The names that readily come to my mind in this connection are those of Prof. C. Von Furer Haimendorf of Britain, and Prof. David G. Mandelbaum

of the United States.

I am indebted to many for various acts of kindness shown and help given by them in my field work as well as in the preparation of the thesis. First and foremost I wish to thank Dr.M.N.Srinivas to whom, more than to anyone else, I could apply the description, 'friend, philosopher and guide'. His discriminating scholarship, informal teaching and unobtrusive guidance have always been an example and an inspiration to his students, and I am happy to count myself as one who has been brought under his influence in my theoretical and field studies in social anthropology. I take this opportunity to express my deep indebtedness to him. Next only to Dr.Srinivas I want to thank Dr.I.P.Desai, Reader in Sociology in Baroda. No two men could be unlike each other than Srinivas and Desai: one, the keen Oxford intellectual; the other, the scholar-iconoclast who would call a spade a bloody shovel! In their different ways, these two men have given me more than I can adequately express.

The major portion of this thesis was written during my stay in Manchester in 1955-'56. In the course of writing the first draft I had much help from Dr.Emrys Peters, Lecturer in Social Anthropology in Manchester University, who read the manuscript closely and gave many valuable suggestions. Although Dr.Peters was unable to see through

the entire material as he left for a trip in Cyrenaica before the final draft was ready, I shall remember with gratitude the many patient hours he sat with me reading through the manuscript. I owe much to Dr.F.G.Bailey of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and Mr.R.I.Rooksby both of whom read through my material thoroughly and offered many helpful criticisms. I thank them not only for their suggestions regarding my work, but even more for their friendship that I so enjoyed.

Mr.W.H.Newell of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies in Manchester University read part of the manuscript and offered suggestions for which I am grateful. The fact that these persons have read the material, partly or wholly, must not lead one to infer that the thesis as presented here has their whole-hearted approval, or that they are entirely in agreement with my treatment of the subject or with the opinions expressed; for, I have not been able to incorporate all suggestions made, or change some of my views in deference to criticism.

I also wish to thank Prof.C.Von Furer Haimendorf of the School of Oriental and African Studies for the opportunity he gave me to read a paper on the Muthuvan in his Seminar, and Prof.Max Gluckman of Manchester University for his unfailing courtesy and kind interest in my work.

I owe my deepest thanks to Miss Jean E.Merryweather

without whose meticulous 'proof-reading' of the manuscript, there would have been more errors of language in the thesis than there are now, and who, at considerable sacrifice of her time, prepared most of the maps and some of the other illustrations that follow. I am thankful too to Mr.M.K.Karanja of Manchester University, and Miss Saroja Srinivasan, my erstwhile student, both of whom helped me in preparing the diagrams and charts.

Mr.S.Venkateswaran, Conservator of Forests, and Mr.K.R.Viswambharan, Commissioner for the Development of Backward Communities, in the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin State gave valuable assistance in my field work, and I am thankful to them. I wish particularly to thank two officers of the Backward Communities Department, Mr.M.C.Dhas, Welfare Officer for Tribes, and Mr.P.Velu Pillai, Field Officer for Backward Communities, for their assistance in my work, and for the very enjoyable time I was privileged to spend with them.

Above all, I want to thank my brother Dr.P.T.Mathew, Medical Officer of the Malayalam Plantations' Tea Estates in Surianalle in the Travancore High Range, and his wife Mary, without whose encouragement this work would not have been undertaken at all. It was my brother who first suggested that I may make a study of the Muthuvans many of whom he had known personally in the course of his professional

work in the High Range. To my wife, who unfailingly stood by me so that this work may be completed, I am very grateful.

To many individual Muthuvans, particularly heads of hamlets, I am ever grateful for their kind co-operation, and their admirable hospitality. I think it was Prof. Evans-Pritchard of Oxford who said that the success of anthropological field work can be gauged by the degree of mutual regret that the field worker and his people feel when the time has come for the former to depart from the scene. If this is a criterion of success in field work, I am confident that I have been successful.

To Miss Rosalind Raj who so patiently typed the entire thesis, I am very thankful. I wish also to thank my friend and my nephew Mr. Thomas Mathew, Mr. K. K. Jacob of the Loyola College, Madras, who helped in carrying out the corrections of typing errors in the thesis.

If there are errors still remaining uncorrected, it is my oversight, not ~~his~~ theirs. I must also thank Mr. C. Appa Rao for enlarging the photographs, and the Diocesan Press of Madras for the neat and quick binding.

Lastly, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Syndicate, the Council of Post-graduate Studies and Research, and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, of the M. S. University of Baroda, for so kindly permitting me to submit the thesis after expiry of the period within which it should normally have been submitted.

I present this thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the M. S. University of Baroda.

MADRAS
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