DOES REPLICATION MEAN CONSENSUS?

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Culture and Institutions among ‘Untouchable’ Scheduled Castes in Karnataka

G. K. Karanth*

The publication of the monograph by Michael Moffatt (1979) provided an impetus for revival of studies on the culture and cultural autonomy among some of the very low castes in India. Studies have attempted to find further evidence of, or to question the phenomenon of replication of the dominant social order within the ‘excluded’ communities of the former Untouchables.¹ Much of the literature pertains to the Tamil speaking areas of India and elsewhere (e.g., Caplan 1980; Deliege 1988, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, and 1994; Mosse 1986, 1994, McGilvray 1983; Vincentnathan 1987), although there are contributions from the other parts of the subcontinent as well (e.g., Patwardhan 1973 and Gellner 1995). Despite the contiguity of the two states, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have important differences in the manner in which the ‘social construction of subordination’ (Mosse 1994) of the former Untouchable castes are obtained.

An attempt is made in this paper to draw together some empirical evidence from a Karnataka village, concentrating on the theme of ‘replication and consensus’. The paper argues that by treating institutional similarities among the Untouchable castes and others (mainly the so-called ‘higher’ castes), scholars (e.g., Moffatt) attribute a passive acceptance of low status by the former. Instead, it is intended to show how replication may also be seen as a way of establishing an independent cultural identity as well expressing dissent over the dominant social order. Such a dissent, however, does not have a smooth process and the paper points to the power of dominance of upper castes in maintaining a hegemony on the one hand and the means which are the disposal of the Untouchable castes to attempt cultural autonomy, on the other. The paper consists of four sections. In the following section the hypothesis that Moffatt makes and the critique of it by Deliege is discussed. This is followed by an introduction to the Untouchable castes of Rajapura from where the evidence is brought in support of the
argument. In the third section, I draw upon a few examples to show how replication is not necessarily consensus, and how, even over a period of time, dissent has been possible for the Untouchable castes.

**Replication and Consensus**

During the year 1972 Moffatt studied a village not very far from Chennai (formerly Madras) city, and concluded that within the Untouchable communities there was a replication of the social order from which they were excluded. For replication is a recreation within themselves of the ‘entire set of institutions and of ranked relations from which they have been excluded by the higher castes by reasons of their extreme lowness’ (1979:5). Such a replication takes place when these castes are excluded ‘for reason of their collective impurity from particular relations with higher beings (both human and divine)’ (ibid. 4).

In contrast, when they are included in other relations with these same higher beings, they complement the dominant social order. Following Dumont (1980), Moffatt finds a ‘cultural consensus from the top to the bottom of a local hierarchy, a consensus very much participated in by the Untouchables’ which consists of a ‘deeper and often unarticulated identities of cultural constructions’ (ibid. 3-4). Moffatt further argues that when they complement, it is a weaker indicator of consensus, for they might be acting in accord with the definitions and norms of the total system because of the power of higher castes. The stronger indicator is when they replicate.

There are a few shortcomings in the structural analysis of the Untouchable communities by Moffatt. First, he groups all the Untouchable communities together, as if there is a horizontal solidarity sufficient to replicate that from which they have been excluded. Indeed, one of the bases for Deliege to refute Moffatt’s hypothesis is lack of evidence for such solidarity. If one takes the case of ranked order of status among the different Untouchable castes, one may accept the hypothesis of replication if there had been an agreement among themselves about their status in relation to each other. What one finds is that there is no consensus among the Untouchable castes as to who is higher or lower. Any claim for one’s status is normally in relation to what the ‘higher’ castes consider them to be. Even
if there is a conventional ascription to a particular status vis-à-vis the others, it may not be conceded by those others, who in turn may claim an equal if not a higher status. Deliege (1992) found no evidence of interaction among some of the Untouchable communities, who claimed equal status by saying ‘we are equal’. There is more to be said on Deliege’s interpretation of his ethnographic material. But for the present it is necessary to recognise that the universe of the Untouchable communities generally tends to consist of elements that do not interact with each other. There is no clearly defined rules legitimising the differential status between the different ‘Harijan/Dalit’ and the former Untouchable castes.

Secondly, the problem with the notion of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ has been in treating them as being mutual exclusive experience of certain castes. There are at least two features among the different Untouchable castes that render application of notions of inclusion and exclusion much more complex than Moffatt understands it. Let us first ask what makes up inclusion? Does inclusion of a few households among the different Untouchable castes into the network of exchange of goods and service imply inclusion of the whole community or of a few households? Since Moffatt, Deliege and Mosse use the Jajmani roles played by the different Untouchable castes as evidence either for or against the hypothesis of inclusion, exclusion, replication and consensus, I shall refer to them. Rendering of services and supply of goods are customarily obligatory for different castes in most village communities. If one were to look at the system, all castes, including the former Untouchable castes have a role to play. The Untouchable castes are included in the sense that they have a role to play, while they are excluded in the sense that they do not receive the services from the other castes. One finds certain differences between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, in terms of inclusion and exclusion in the context of the village as a whole and the households in particular. In the old Mysore region, it has not been in evidence that each land-owning upper caste household had an Untouchable caste household customarily assigned to serve in a range of contexts. This seem to be the case in Tamil Nadu, where every single Harijan household had an aiyavitu to which it was customarily assigned, in addition to their serving the village as a whole. The dominant castes in Karnataka did have
an institution of Hale Maga under which a member of from among the Untouchable castes customarily served the Okkaliga landowning households (e.g., Srinivas 1955). But it is doubtful if each land-owning household among the dominant castes had one such Hale Maga in such that all the households of Harijan castes were accounted for. The exception is to be found in the northern parts of Karnataka. In Jenubhavi (See, Kumar 1998: 242-62) in Belgaum district and Nuliyur (see Devi 1998: 107-32) in Bellary district each household of service castes, whether or not of Untouchable castes, is assigned to a household of the other landowning castes.

What did exist in Karnataka, at least the old Mysore region, was a few village-oriented service specialisation assigned to a few Untouchable caste households. The service relationships did not ‘include’ the entire population or households of the caste specialising in an occupation. How does one view such castes? Are they to be seen as ‘included’ in the sense Moffatt does, even if only a few households have a role to play in a village’s equivalent of Jajmani relations? Or, should they be treated as ‘excluded’ since a majority of households in the caste do not have any role to play in it?

Moffatt’s work does not throw light on a paradox in the nature of social change that occurred in Tamil Nadu since the beginning of the century. Many of the dominant castes in Tamil Nadu were non-Brahmans who took an active part in the non-Brahman and Dravidian movements. These movements had questioned and rejected the Brahmanical supremacy and the cultural hegemony of a Brahmanical social order. Yet, the subordination of Untouchable castes and the replication of a social order was based on the principles of caste hierarchy, on purity and pollution notions. How does one explain the replication by the Untouchable castes? Which social order were they excluded from, that leads to replication: the one rejected by the dominant landowning castes in the villages or the one replicated by such castes? These are some questions that remain unanswered in Moffatt’s treatment of Tamil Nadu data.

Finally, the notions of inclusion and exclusion, and the accompanying replication and consensus as outlined by Moffatt, or as critiqued by Deliege (1992 and 1993) blur an important change sweeping the countryside for a few decades now.
Whether or not there are similar or parallel institutions among the former Untouchable castes, a search for replication on the lines that Moffatt does or on the lines that Deliege refutes conceal the rejection of the caste ideology as imposed on the concerned caste. It is perhaps for this reason that Moffatt asserts that the Untouchables do not possess a sub-culture of their own and that they act in accordance with the idea of them being subordinate to the other castes in the dominant social order. It is also perhaps for this reason that Deliege makes sense out of the lack of interaction among the different Harijan communities (notably the Pallars and Paraiyars) as being indicative of absence of hierarchy among them. One may refer particularly some of the comments cited by Deliege (1992 and 1994). Since certain evidences were not found among the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam and Alangkulam in Tamil Nadu, Moffatt’s hypothesis gets invalidated. Deliege does not go beyond Valghira Manickam at the point of time, or go back into ethnographic history of the castes he is studying to assess the validity of the statements made by his informants. Early in his essay he takes note of the observations by the Abbe Dubois, Brigs, Dube, and Bhat on the divisions respectively within the ‘Pariahs’, Chamars, Madigas, and the Bhangis elsewhere. As he proceeds with his own ethnographic data he restricts himself to what his informants have to say. He finds Moffatt’s epistemology failing to distinguish between the norm and the act, between the ideal and the actual practice. Deliege too fails to differentiate between them. To cite an example, he states: ‘Some Pallars claimed that they did not drink water from Paraiyars, but I have observed many instances of Pallars drinking water in Paraiyar house, including a Pallar woman who had vehemently claimed earlier that she did not accept water from Paraiyars’ (1992:162). What in effect Deliege does is to ignore the difference between the actual practice as observed (or as narrated by his informants) on the one hand, and the ethnographic history of the communities in the region, on the other. Thus he too falls a victim of a lapse which he finds in Moffatt, namely ‘relying chiefly on what people told’ (Deliege 1993:167).

Even if the observed behaviour does correspond to what people say, it is necessary also to examine them both in the perspective of change over time. To me this constitutes a major weakness in the refutation of Moffatt’s hypothesis by
Deliege. It is the method with which Deliege refutes Moffatt than the refutation of the hypothesis per se that is being contested. Mosse (1994) is justified in refuting Moffatt on the grounds, among others, that his method is ahistorical. As noted earlier, Deliege's approach too is ahistorical, for in his writings on the theme (1992, 1993 and 1994) there is neither a historical account of the communities he is studying nor a description of the social changes that have been taking place over a period. What we do have, on the contrary, is an image of a community which is basically divided into three: Pallars (with whom the main actors of his observations are not in interaction), the Hindu Paraiyars and the Catholic Paraiyars. These endogamous units are described as not hierarchically ordered, but their members 'even made considerable efforts to prevent inequality from arising within their own ranks' (Deliege 1992:165, emphasis added). What blurs the ethnographic vivacity in Deliege's account of the communities he studies is not only his unwillingness to recognise the fact that people tried to conceal inequality amongst themselves but also his refusal to accept the divisions mentioned as being important since there had been no contact between them. I shall read the people's efforts to conceal a difference as in essence a rejection of a dominant ideology governed by caste principles of superiority or inferiority, purity and impurity. The rejection is of inequality amongst themselves, not of separation. A separation did exist, as Deliege recognises, which in the modern context is not important for the castes. Similar claims for equality and orientation towards other castes are to be found among those in the dominant social order, whether they are non-Brahman or Brahman castes. To make the understanding further complicated we have inconsistencies in Deliege's account of the material from Valghira Manickam: 'Contacts with other Paraiyars (i.e., those from other grades) are extremely limited. Nonetheless, it was said that a Catholic Paraiyar can marry any other, and that all Paraiyars (including Hindu) were brothers' (ibid. 164, former parentheses mine). Elsewhere Deliege informs us that Hindu and Catholic Paraiyars are 'very close to each other, but do not intermarry' (1994:126).

The above questions arise because the discourse on replication and consensus conceals efforts on the part of former Untouchable castes elsewhere to forge a new identity of their
own. Such an effort for a new identity fits the description of dominant social order as one comprising of a ‘hegemony’ that is being dissented over the years.

The ‘Untouchable’ Scheduled Castes in Rajapura

It is evident from the above that there is a need to shift the discourse from ‘replication and consensus’ to hegemony and dissent. Such a shift in orientation provides adequate room for dealing with historical changes, at least within the living memories, and points to the conception of self among the former Untouchable castes both in the past and present. The hegemony that is being referred to is that of the dominant social order. In most South Indian villages, this dominant social order is shaped by the local dominant castes. Despite the several criticisms leveled against the concept of dominant caste in India (see, e.g., Dube 1963; Gardner 1968; Oommen 1970 and Dumont 1980), the phenomenon of castes operating in rural society as dominant groups is well documented. In a recent statement on the concept, the author of the concept wrote, ‘the post-independent India, certainly at the regional if not state level, is an India of dominant castes’ (Srinivas 1987:11).

At the risk of over simplification, it may be stated that dominant castes prescribe and enforce locally a pattern of inter-caste relationships. Such a pattern is not altogether at variance from what is found in the region. More specifically it regulates the internal social order of the village over which its dominance is in operation. These included ensuring that the different designated castes rendered the customary services to the other eligible castes under the Jajmani system of exchange of services and goods; management of the use of common property resources; conducting the village community events such as the festival of the village deity, festival of the cattle etc., and in maintaining the relationship of the community with the external institutions and wider society at large.

An important feature of the dominant castes in multi-caste villages has been that they usually provided for the other castes the model of upward social mobility. The means of social mobility could have been in terms of Sanskritization or through economic opportunities. In terms of Sanskritization the dominant castes themselves may have, as they usually did, had
their own reference model, which in turn became the model for the other castes. As a model in economic terms, it may be argued that it is usually the dominant castes that take first to the innovative methods of agriculture, education and off-farm employment. Their success sets a model for the others to follow. Another important role that the dominant caste played was as arbitrators of disputes between individuals within a caste or between castes. While thus directing the village affairs the dominant caste usually derived the advantages for itself from the subordination of the others. It was, however, not always that a given caste held a decisive dominance: castes that were close to it in terms of numerical and economic preponderance always posed a challenge to the dominance by the other caste. Competition to dominance came from other upwardly mobile castes whose economic fortunes improved through land reforms, or purchase of land, urban education, employment and the new economic and political opportunities. A typical response to the competition for, and challenge to dominance was by way of forging old or new alliances with the other subordinate castes or a 'withdrawal' (Barnett 1973) of the caste from exercising dominance. It is not suggested that castes, dominant or otherwise, had no factions within themselves.

This is an appropriate place to introduce the concept of hegemony, and refer to the hegemony of the dominant caste. The usage of the concept hegemony has been by and large in the context of classes, but is here sued to refer to that of the dominant castes. By so doing, it is not suggested that caste and class are interchangeable. Considering the role and interests of the dominant castes in rural society, it is possible to speak of the hegemony of the dominant castes: for in their doing what they do, they tend to establish a hegemony of the members of the caste to which they belong. According to Gramsci, the hegemony of the ruling class results not only from their domination over the material forces of production, but also by replicating the domination at the level of ideas. Thus the hegemony of the ruling class results not only from their domination over the material forces of production, but also by replicating the domination at the level of ideas. Thus the hegemony of the ruling class controls the 'ideological' sectors of the society: culture, religion, education and media (Femia 1975).
It is possible to apply the notion of hegemony to the consequences of dominance of a caster over the others in a village or a region? If so how and to what extent did the dominant caste establish a hegemony over the others? It is argued here that dominant castes had, and continue even to this day, hegemony over the others. To illustrate this, I shall give an account of the lives of a few former Untouchable castes who are subjected to the dominance of the dominant Okkaliga caste in a Karnataka village. Given their sheer numbers, and the preponderance they have in terms of landownership, and the political representation in the region, they reproduce hegemony over all the others in the village. Rajapura had twelve different castes during the years 1978-84, but by 1987 the number had been reduced to eleven. Okkaligas are the most numerous among them both in terms of households and population: 119 households and 721 persons during 1987. They owned 82.7 per cent of the land.

Okkaligas are are largely agriculturists. In most villages of Magadi taluk, one among them held the hereditary office of the village headman (pate). They take pride in being agriculturists, and having maintained a minimum of ‘gowdaalike’. The term ‘Gowda’ may be seen as suffix of a caste name among Okkaligas, although others also use the term. However, when used as ‘gowdaalike’, it stands for ‘rule by the headman and village elders to maintain a certain village culture and livelihood patterns irrespective of the caste of the headman’. It is useful in describing the cultural management in a village community. For instance it was not uncommon to find the former headman, and the pate to be questioned by a few fellow villagers as to why there had been no annual painting of the temple walls, why contributions of food and money had not been made by certain households for the different temple festivals, or the specialists had not been rendering their services properly. If the responses given by the leaders were not satisfactory, an adverse comment on their style of ‘gowdaalike’ is made. The expression is essentially cultural in connotation rather than economic or political.

In their religious orientation, Okkaligas in this region are affiliated to both Vaishnava and Veerasaiva orders. For instance, their house-gods, names of persons, or the temples to which they were affiliated (’okkalal’) indicate the influence of both Veerasaivism and Vaishnavism.
In either way, their models for religious behaviour were of vegetarian upper-castes (Brahmans or Veerasaivas). Most do not eat meat on Mondays while a few others did not eat it also on Saturdays. I am mentioning some of these features of Okkaligas, the dominant caste in Rajapura, because in turn such orientation becomes the model for the other 'dependent' castes in the village. Thus the festival of Siva (Sivarathri) and of his vehicle Nandi (bull) are celebrated as a community affair, thereby indicating the Siva influence. All the other castes participate in the communal dining on the following day, and each makes a contribution towards the celebration of the festival.

The only castes that were ritually superior to Okkaligas were the Lingayats (three households in 1981 and four during 1994-95) and three Marathas. Notwithstanding their higher ritual status their social and economic position in the village has been most fragile. Ideally the offices of priests in two of the three temples are hereditary. But during the past fifty-sixty years it has not been the practice. The older ones have had to move out owing to one or the other dispute with the dominant caste in the village. Two of the three Maratha households too have lost their land over a period of time since I first went to Rajapura, and it is now being expected by the local people that soon they too might migrate to Bangalore or elsewhere.

Rajapura has five castes that are classified as Scheduled Castes in Karnataka: Lambanis, Oddas (Bovis), Koramas, Holeyas and Madigas. A brief account of these castes is necessary to indicate that although not all of them are Untouchable castes, they too are in varying degrees of inclusion and exclusion in the cultural life of the village. The Koramas call themselves as Korama-settys, and are mainly engaged as basket makers. There were three households of their caste during 1978-81, which had become four with 23 persons by 1994-95. Koramas did not have an obligation traditionally either to serve the village or the landowning households under Jajmani network of relations (locally referred to as adade). Yet they did receive the services of the priest (both Lingayats and Okkaliga), barber, and smiths on payment of money.

Oddas were seven households during 1978-81 whose number and had risen to nine during 1944-95 with a population of 42 persons. They all belonged to the sub-caste 'Mannu
Odds', meaning earth workers. As such they do not suffer Untouchability in the village, although the castes above them in hierarchy do not accept cooked food from them, i.e., Okkaligas, Lingayats, Maratha, Achari (smith), Kumbara (potter) and Madivala (Washermen). Into the Lingayat house they can enter, but not the interiors of the house, such as the kitchen or shrine. A few women among them worked as 'house maids' for wealthy Okkaliga landowners. Their work included fetching water from the well for bathing, and to wash vessels and clean the house. Odds lead a marginal existence in Rajapura, a status born out of their low caste status, and economic dependence on the other upper castes. They are not 'included' in the network of adade relations. Moreover they do not have enough numbers or resources to replicate the services within their caste. However, they are eligible to receive the services on cash payment to the barber, smith and the priests, but not under the system of adade despite their landownership.

Lambanis share a few features in common with the two other Scheduled Castes, namely Holeyas and Madigas, marking them off from the Korama and Odda castes. In the first place, they constitute a sizeable number both in terms of households and population. There were 14 households among them and a population of 43 during 1981, which had risen to 16 and 70 by 1995. Secondly, they too are treated with the same contempt or derogatory reference in inter-caste attitudes by the upper castes, as meant for the Holeyas and Madigas. For instance, the general attitude is that 'anything goes with Lambanis, that which is considered to be amoral', 'the standards of sexual morals are too low among them', 'their women are tomboys', and the like. Thirdly, unlike the Odds and Koramas, the Lambanis constitute one of the main sources of agricultural labour for the landowners in the village, a thing in common with the Holeyas and Madigas. Indeed, long after many Odda and Korama men had stopped becoming attached as bonded labourers, the Lambanis had continued to work as bonded labourers. Finally, the Lambanis did have opportunities to be sought for support in political matters with much more rewards than the Korama and Odds. For two successive terms a Lambani leader had been elected to the village Panchayat and the Mandal Panchayat during 1978 to 1990. The last mentioned aspect had become a source of frustration for the Holeyas and
Madigas. There is a competition among the Lambani, Holeya and Madiga castes for any of them to be sponsored by the dominant caste leaders as a Scheduled Caste candidate for local bodies elections. Just as the Okkaliga factions take a sharp turn during elections, so did the factions within these castes.

One thing they do not share with the Holeyas and Madigas is that Lambanis are not treated as Untouchables. They entered the temples, were served by the local barber, smith and priests, though not under the system of adade. Many men among the Okkaligas eat food cooked by the Lambanis in their house on special occasions like weddings or a festival. The Lambanis do enter the houses of upper castes quite freely, within the accepted norms for any visitor of another caste.

Lambanis have by and large remained free from the cultural influence of the upper castes, including that of Lingayats and Okkaligas. Liquor consumption is indiscreet. Second, among the three castes, Lambanis are least Sanskritized, and show very little concern for it. Their gods are the ones that were traditionally associated with the community, and have by and large retained their Lambani cultural identity: language, dress and festivals. They have no role to play either in the adade system of exchange relations or in the village festivals, a feature they share with the Oddas and Koramas. Finally, they too have a division within the caste based on exogamous norms, but this is a division not restricted to the villages where they live. The caste leader among them is not only the priest but also was responsible for the internal organization of the caste. But he seems to be more loyal to the dominant caste than to the caste to which he belongs.

I have attempted a brief account of these three Scheduled Castes which are not Untouchables, and it had a few purposes. The three castes also refer themselves to as ‘Harijans’, and are entitled to the protection guaranteed under the law applicable to Scheduled Castes in Karnataka. Together they are found to be asymmetrical in regard to cultural exclusion and inclusion. They are excluded in the sense that they cannot be recipients of the services of priests, barber, smith and washermen under the adade relations. They are excluded also in the sense that they have no role to play in the temples and festivals. In contrast, they are included in the sense that they
have always had access to the village water sources and are allowed into the houses of the upper castes. They took part in the village’s religious events like the rest and were served food along with the others in a communal dining, and so on. Further, irrespective of inclusion or exclusion, they too have their caste headman, a person who usually officiates as a priest or as an assistant to a hired upper caste priest, besides having their own internal divisions based on exogamous norms. What may be viewed as ‘replication’ among them is not borne out of being ‘exclusion’. Neither is there an exclusion in virtually every sphere of cultural and religious life of the dominant social order nor is there a replication virtually of every institution despite inclusion or exclusion.

Holeyas and Madigas also call themselves as Adi Dravida and Adi Karnataka, respectively. They also describe themselves as Harijans, or ‘SCs’. However, they are particular in maintaining a distinct identity of their own, marking each off from the other (Holey or Madiga). There is also an identity maintained in terms of their being right or left hand caste, for Holey and Madiga respectively. Holeyas claim to be superior to the Madigas, a claim not conceded by the latter.

Madigas were 27 households and 119 persons, and Holeyas were 15 households and 64 persons. During the 1930s, the two castes owned 40.00 and 51.11 acres respectively (see, Table 1). Holeyas as a caste had improved their land-holding considerably in the decades to follow, while Madigas had gradually lost in the same period. Considering the fact that both had alienated most of the land they had received as land grants in the intervening years, the improvement of Holeyas and decline of the Madigas in landownership pattern speaks of their relative economic strengths and vulnerability in the village.

While most of the prime land was held by the rest of the castes in the village-lands such as irrigated or irrigable, adjoining or nearer the village site, fertile and so on the ones owned by Holey or Madigas are usually former wastelands. I have known several ‘landowners’ among Holey and Madiga castes who did not even cultivate their lands because of the difficulty in access to the land both for themselves and for the cattle. Indeed to a majority of landowners among them landownership in the past was not without an obligation to the
Okkaligas. In the first place, it was with their support and sponsorship that they had obtained land grants through different schemes or by gaining occupancy rights confirmed under the Land Reforms Act. Secondly, they had to depend on landowners, usually from Okkaliga castes, for agricultural implements, plough animals and credit too. When institutional credit was available, it was usually with the help and sponsorship of the Okkaliga landowners, chiefly the leaders among them.

In short, during the period prior to 1930s and until about 1970s, it was the patronage of the dominant castes which had compelled the former Untouchable castes to accept their low status. Patronage was not only political and economic but also cultural in nature. In more recent years this patronage has been more in terms of the distribution of benefits through the state's welfare schemes. If they do culturally subordinate themselves to the social order enforced by the Okkaligas, it is because of their dependence on them for patronage in the modern, and extra-cultural contexts. The state's welfare schemes and development policies have provided an arena in which the dominant castes can play their role of patrons to the dependent castes in the modern contexts. It does not mean to say that either in the past or in the contemporary times dissent has not been expressed, or dominance uncontested.

An important reason why despite a relatively sizeable number, the Holeyas and Madigas (and we may include Lambanis also in this case) did not gain any degree of autonomy is that they neither possessed a ritual status comparable to the other castes nor an economic strength of their own. Mere possession of economic status as landowners did not compensate for the Madiga or Holeya the absence of a ritual status, which in their case was below the 'touchability line'. For the Lambanis their cultural distinctiveness, which in a sense was outside that of the others in the village, was in the way especially since that identity was not favourable viewed by the others in the village. Yet they did not have to experience Untouchability like the Holeyas and Madigas. Although the Holeyas and Madigas were treated as 'out castes' their way of life was very much akin to that of the others in the village, particularly in cultural and religious terms. Yet they were the Untouchables, and not those who were culturally alien to the community as in the case of Lambanis.
Hegemony, Replication and Dissent

I shall now turn to describe some cultural features of Holeyas and Madigas which elsewhere has been viewed as replication, which I shall argue are direct influences of the dominant social order. Some if these and the expressed views as well as actions are also to be seen as strategies of dissenting the hegemony, for that is a first step in their social mobility. In short, I am inclined to view the new social construction of identity among the ex-Untouchable castes as an important strategy for social mobility among them. Its significance is that there is neither a non-government organization (NGO) conscientizing the ex-Untouchable castes nor a religious alternative that Christianity provided in Tamil Nadu as found by Mosse and Deliege.

Two households among the Madigas and four households among the Holeays have a traditional role to play in the village affairs. The former are the hereditary village servants, thotis, who render this service by rotation among themselves. Thoti's duties in the past involved having to accompany the patel, village accountant and the other visiting officials from the government. They are expected to run errands for them and make formal announcements within the village. They had to be present in all the sitting of the council of elders in arbitrating disputes. The thoti is expected to know the boundary markings of agricultural land, and also take possession of stray cattle. In some sense his duties related to being a village watchman as well messenger. Thotis also had certain other ritual roles: they buried the dead cattle, and played the musical instrument 'thamate' during the village festivals. Between the two households, each renders the service in alternative years.

In return for their services the thotis have been given a plot of land (thoti inam). They also annually receive a quantity of ragi and a bundle of straw from all the land-owning households of the village. This payment is referred to as 'acre ragi' since the quantity of grains given is in relation to the total land owned by the patron. Although in principle the payment in kind is to be made on the last day at the threshing floor, the day of kadegana, nearly all the service castes call on their patrons on any day that is convenient to them or the patrons to receive their payment. Reasons for this delay are...
tradition are several. Not all the patrons have *kadegana* on the same day. It would be difficult for the service specialists to keep track of each patron’s harvest activities, who in any case may ask the specialists to approach them on another day. The specialists are also engaged in either harvesting in their own fields, or are hired as wage labourers and are therefore not free to go to the patrons on the designated day. But a most important reason why specialists avoid going on the last day at the threshing floor indicates a strategy of avoiding deprivation for them. The quality of grains separated from the chaff on the last day is not the same as during the early days. This reason is to be noted as a strategy on the part of village service specialists as strategy to avoid having to receive poor quality grains which is what the institution of ‘*kadegana*’ provided for.

Following the abolition of the hereditary village offices during 1967, the *thotis* are not officially expected to serve the village in the manner they do now. Within the village, however, they are expected to serve the village as in the past, which may in part be explained as a result of ‘*gowdaalike*’. It should be stated that they are not happy in doing so, since the number of households who make the grain payment has been dwindling. But they are also aware that if they gave up the office, there are others within the caste who are willing to take it up. This is a tendency which Mosse recognises among the Harijans of lower grades in Alampuram to adopt abandoned service roles for the income of security which they may provide (1994:83). Continuation of the service does not indicate that they are in consensus with the cultural system. However, it should be pointed that the households serving as *thotis* do not experience any lower status within the Madiga community. On the contrary, they seem to derive a sense of importance within the caste by holding the position, which in Rajapur is symbolic for the caste (See, Karanth 1987).

Holeyas serve the village as musicians, both for auspicious and inauspicious events. The former included their playing instruments during the village festival, whenever a patron took out the procession of the images of gods of the three temples, and during weddings. The latter included their playing instruments to accompany the procession of a dead body to the burial place. They served only the ritually upper
caste, such as the Okkaligas, Marathas, Lingayats, Acharis (blacksmiths), and Kumbaras (potters) but not the rest. Nowadays they serve whoever pays them the cash whether during a wedding or a funeral procession. The exception is Madigas, whom they do not serve. In return for their service to the temples (i.e., the village) they received a measure of grain from the land-owning households of all the castes other than landowners of the five Scheduled Castes. In the recent years, i.e., since 1970s, they have also been retained as the village musicians in a few other neighbouring villages. Besides, they have also been hired in Magadi town and the surrounding villages to play music for weddings. Consequently the team of four to six Holeya musicians are found to be constantly away from the village, much to chagrin of the patrons in Rajapura.

The Acharis (blacksmiths) are the only specialists among the service castes who serve the Holeya and Madiga. In fact, there is a caste myth that the Acharis to be the kinsmen of the Holeyas. A similar myth establishes a link between the Madigas and Madivalas (the washermen). The washermen, however, do not serve the two castes, neither for money nor under adade pattern of grain payment. The smith serves both Holeya and Madiga specialists, but does not accept any payment from them. In turn, the two set of specialists serve the smiths without accepting any reward. The barber does not cut the hair of the persons of the two castes, nor does he play any ritual role for them. But he supplies the headband to the bride and bride groom, for which he takes a cash payment.

A question raised earlier becomes pertinent again: do we consider the Holeya and Madiga as being included or excluded in the social and cultural order of society in Rajapura? Recall that it was only two and four households among the Holeya and Madiga respectively who had a role to play in the village festivals and the land-owning high castes compensated them under the system of adade. The rest were excluded. These households did not come to occupy the offices they did by virtue being members of any graded division among the caste. If any among them refused to continue to serve, others are in principle eligible to be commissioned. In this sense the two former 'Untouchable' castes are no different from the other Scheduled Castes in the village, and a few others who are involved in the customary exchange of service relations (Smiths,
Barber, Washerman, et.). That is, these castes are included in certain contexts and excluded in other contexts. Where excluded, they are found not to have replicated services among themselves in all respects. Madigas, for instance, are not required to render either ‘pure’ or ‘impure’ services to the Holeyas, although the former are ascribed a lower status. Kinsmen and women having specific roles to perform during the last rites of a deceased person, or at puberty, is prevalent among the two castes. But this is also applicable to the higher castes in the village. Contrary to the evidence from elsewhere (e.g., Raheja 1988; Mosse 1944) there is nothing to indicate a low status for such kin owing to their performing such roles or accepting gifts. On the contrary, it is considered to be an honour and a right.

There are, for instance, a headman and a priest among the Madigas. The Holeyas do not have similar positions. The present headman and priest among the Madigas have not succeeded to the office on a hereditary or lineage principle. The person who was earlier the headman had left the village for a few years but returned later. Had the office been hereditary, one of his affinal relations ought to have succeeded to the office during his absence. Instead, the present headman who is a maternal kin had been chosen to succeed, and the decision was by the village leaders. Even after the former headman returned to the village, the incumbent did not hand over the office. Consequently the former officiates as the priest. The priest has often complained to the village’s headman and \textit{pate}l that he should be reinstated as the caste headman. It should be noted that the internal authority structure among Madigas was being replicated and arbitrated not by themselves, but the Okkaligas. It needs to be pointed out that the Madiga caste headman and the priest have very little to do in their offices as headman or priest. Almost all members take their disputes or matters directly to the village leaders. If there were to be a dispute, the caste headman is also invited and consulted, but the decision is usually that of the village elders. Likewise the priest has a role to play only during the village festival, when the Madigas erect a temporary shrine to sacrifice the buffalo. Indeed, this is the only occasion when the two have any role to play in their caste affairs. On several occasions during the year when they need the services of a priest they hire the Okkaliga
priest, who renders the purificatory or other rituals outside their door step. The Okkaliga priest may not have served them in the past and it may have been a more recent phenomenon. However, had there been a priest with exclusive claims on the ritual activities, he or his successor should have made a claim for it, which do not seem to have happened.

The internal organization of Holeyas and Madigas has as much elaboration as the other castes in the village. In the first place, there are sub-caste within the Holeya and Madiga castes, which the members of respective castes acknowledge. The Holeyas listed their subcastes as Hagga, Magga, Thigala, Gangadikara, Karad, Rampa and Dasa Holeyas. The Holeyas in Rajapura were all Karad Holeyas, and married within themselves. But they admitted that in recent years there had been difficulty in maintaining sub-caste endogamy, and many preferred not to be worried about it if the match was good. But the practice was not what they were reporting. Nearly everyone was marrying from within their sub-caste. Match making involves as much detail as among any other castes: checking the past record of both the families in terms of sub-caste, grade, compatibility of the names, incidence of marriages, violating the traditional norms etc. This checking is known in the region as verifying the salavali. A man could marry his mother’s brother’s daughter or his father’s sister’s daughter. The notion of ‘a calf to be given in return for a cow’ in marriages was very much predominant until recently.

Both Holeyas and Madigas had several exogamous subdivisions among themselves. Some of the subdivisions among Holeyas were Belli, Kamba, Muchchala, Meenu, Mallu, Baragur, Thamman Kuppe and rampa. But for the Baragur and Thamman Kuppe divisions, the rest indicate objects (e.g., silver, pillar, lid, saw, etc.) Baragur and Thamman Kuppe indicate the origin of the group from a distinct territory. Similar sub-divisions were also found among the Madigas, who listed four such grades. No particular sub-division within the two caste is designated to hold the office of village musicians (among Holeyas) and village servant (thotis). It was already pointed out that the Madiga headman had been replaced by another, from a different sub-division. Likewise, when the former thoti had no male children to succeed, his two sons-in-law were eligible to succeed to the office, there had been many from his own
sub-division (referred to as bedagu) who could have succeeded. In Rateyur in Mysore district, however, the headman and priest among the Adi Karnatakas (Holeyas, but they prefer to be called AKs or Harijans) were from specific subdivisions. The presiding deity of the priest’s Kula (the term applicable for bedagu in Rajapura) was also one of the main gods for the caste as a whole (in addition to Maramma which all the other castes worshipped). There was not one headman, but each kula had a headman and all of them were consulted by the village elders in conducting the village festival. In Rateyur each caste is assigned a sum that is to be contributed towards the expenses of the village festival, and the Harijans also make their contribution. Indeed the sum assigned to them traditionally had been higher than that of Parivara Naikas, another caste in the village (see, Charsley 1998).

The sub-divisions were ranked and one way by which their relative status is to be ascertained is through the system of honouring each sub-division. During the weddings almost all castes in Rajapura have a practice of offering honours to the different caste representatives. A small ritual stage is erected, referred to as gadduge or hosage. As the guests pour milk into the joined hands of the bride and bridegroom, caste elders assemble at the gadduge and call out the names of castes or different offices. Each caste headman or representative is offered a certain number of betel leaves and nuts. It is the order in which the castes are called out, and the number of betel leaves and nuts counted for each caste, division etc., which indicate their relative ranks. It is not only persons outside the caste who are honoured but also the representatives or headmen of the different grades or sub-divisions within the caste. However, the first to be called out are the Headman of the village, headman of the region (Kattmane vajamana), the headman of the caste in this order. Although none among those present may have represented these offices, one of the guests will usually shout to say the offering has been acknowledged. After this the offerings are made to the different intra-subcaste divisions, the girls division gets the first offering, followed by boy’s and both get equal number of betel leaves and nuts. The rest have their designated numbers and order in which they are called out. To my knowledge there has been no dispute about the relative status of the sub-divisions ever registered in
Rajapura. But this relative status has no other significance in their day to day life. In recent years I have found this ritual to go practically unnoticed by the guests.

Are the sub-divisions and their gradation based on the principles of a hierarchy? From the evidence available in Rajapura one could come to such a conclusion. Such a replication is not only among those excluded and included contextually (Holeyas and Madigas, or the former Untouchable castes) but also among the others who are ‘included’ (Okkafigas, Lingayats, Marathas, Kumbaras, Koramas, Madivalas, Lambanis and Oddas). In short there is nothing special about the Untouchable castes in exhibiting internal social organization among themselves. It is the hegemony of the dominant social order that needs to be taken note of in the context of internal organization of the caste. The village headman, the *Kattemane Yajamana* get their honours announced before the caste headman. The power and influence of the dominant social order cuts across the internal hierarchy of a former Untouchable caste. Thus, apparent replication here turn out to be another arena in which the caste’s autonomy is undermined. Moreover, seeming replication of institutions within a caste does not mean that the caste and its members subscribe to the low status accorded to them in the village. On the contrary, replication can also be seen as a challenge to the dominant social order and efforts on their part to pursue that from which they are excluded. To substantiate this claim I shall illustrate a few examples.

The first example pertains to competing claims for relative status between Holeyas and Madigas. The Holeyas claim to be higher because of several reasons: they do not eat beef and particularly not of the dead cow or buffalo. The *thotis* perform ritually impure services for the other castes while the Holeyas do not; Holeyas claim the ‘*chaluvida battalu*’¹⁰, which is in their possession to be a symbol of their higher status. The Madigas, in turn have a myth to say how it was lost from them to the Holeyas. The Madig headman questioned the claim for higher status by Holeyas: ‘if we are said to be lower, then the *chaluvida battalu* ought to have been with us, for we are the lowest and serve all above us. We are the thotis. Holeyas are not. Yet they keep the *chaluvida battalu*. Neither the territorial headman (*Kattemane Yajamana*) is interested in resolving this nor the village headman’. However, the concern that this old
man had was not shared by a majority within his caste. Most others were simply not bothered, and the younger ones among them were even unaware of all these claims and counter claims. What was in evidence was that both Hoelyas and Madigas maintained a relationship in such a way that status claims were not explicitly defined or contested. On the contrary, the thekis and the Holeya musicians had to play their instruments to a rhythmic beat. A few years ago, however, there had been a demonstration of claims and counter-claims, in which the Madigas had an upper hand.

Until 1976, Holeyas and Madigas had separate wells from which they drew water. Neither castes are allowed to draw water from the wells used by the others in the village. It took an urban educated and employed youth of Madiga caste to organize a group of young men to fill with garbage the well meant for Holeyas and forcefully draw water from it. The Holeyas complained to the elders of the village, who advised that discrimination among themselves was not in keeping with the law in force. The Holeyas eventually conceded the right for 'low caste Madigas to draw water' from a well which until then they had used exclusively. A few interesting questions arise out of this episode. A separation that had been maintained in regard to the drinking water well reinforced a ritual separation between the two castes. But by rejecting the separation, one caste (Madigas) had not only claimed an equality with the other, but had demonstrated it by forcibly drawing water from the well which had been out of bounds for them until then. This points to, not a replication of the ritual separation found in the dominant social order, but a rejection of it as applicable to themselves. However, by rejecting it they had not meant to approve the exclusion at the hands of higher castes in regard access to drinking water. Their attempt to forcibly draw water was limited to the well meant exclusively for the Holeyas, and not for all the other castes above them in the dominant social order. Having heard of this episode, I had spoken to the youth who had organized the protest. He asserted that 'between the two castes there were no differences' as a justification for his actions. He was asked why his actions did not apply to the discrimination meted out by the higher castes in the village with regard to water. He had not wanted to disturb the existing harmony in the village by trying to assert their position on par
with the rest. Elsewhere I have cited his response ‘After all, my people live here and I do not want to antagonize the members of the other castes. But I am hopeful that the Okkaligas will realise that the old order is changing and will stop treating us the way they are doing now’ (Karanth 1981:19). It is worthwhile also to note here that this youth’s elder brother is one of the thotis in the village who performs his duties even now, long after the abolition of the village hereditary offices.

A further dimension of the episode is the role played by the members of the dominant caste. Had they wanted to maintain a separation between the two, they could have resisted the move by the Madigas. Instead, in keeping with their own political identities (they were supporters of the party in power then) and their political interests (Madigas have been their best allies, unlike the Holeyas) they gave their consent. By conceding the demand by the Madigas, the dominant caste had also strategically avoided the possibility of turning the protest against themselves. As long as their own interests were not being affected by the move to draw water from the Holeyas’ well, the Okkaligas took a generous view of the situation and sided with the Madigas. The political climate in the state and the country was also one which favoured the actions of the Madigas.

My second example pertains to a religious practice among the Madigas of Rajapura which has all the features of replication. But, as I shall point out, it also contains aspects of dissent. During the annual village festival most non-vegetarian castes make offerings of sacrifice of a goat or chicken to the presiding deity Hatti Maramma. The Madigas traditionally offered a buffalo, but this is not acceptable to the dominant social order. There is also a custom that the meat is not cooked until the procession of the image passes through the different streets of the village. However, the procession does not enter the colonies where the Holeya and Madigas live. Moreover, whatever offerings they make is consecrated only after all the other castes have finished with their offerings. Usually this is early morning of the following day, since the festivities of procession is a nigh long affair. By the time other castes have started feeding their guests, the Holeyas and Madigas only begin cooking food around that time. To avoid this they have found a way out. The two castes erect a small and temporary shrine within their respective keres, and by afternoon of the previous
day they make their offering to the image of Hatti Maramma. In the Madiga colony they sacrifice the buffalo and in Holeya colony they offer goats or chicken. The buffalo meat is also bought by the Holeyas from the Madigas, although they do not like to admit this. Thus, much before the festivities in the village begin the women are in a position to start cooking and not wait until the next morning.

My first impressions on learning of a separate shrine in the Madiga colony was one of replication. But after learning more about the humiliation of having to wait till the following morning to make their own offerings at the village shrine (which they still do), it began to appear that the make-shift shrine in the keri is a rejection of the dominant ideology. They wanted to carry on with the traditional practice of buffalo sacrifice notwithstanding the dominant social order’s definition of it as opposed to Hindu values, and therefore it is practice within their colony. This is not a replication resulting from exclusion, but a reaffirmation of a cultural identity.

The third example relates to the dissent that the ex-Untouchables express towards the low and humiliating status ascribed to them. If at all times they are unable to express it or accomplish redefinition of their status, it is due to a fear of antagonizing the dominant caste within the village or in the region. For, they are often dependent upon the leaders from the dominant caste for securing the benefits from the state, if not benefits from the land-owning patrons within the village. The example I cite is also one in which the Madigas organized themselves for the first time against segregation.

During 1980, a housing scheme for the weaker sections was being implemented. Several among the Holeya, madiga, Lambani, Korama and Oddas were also to benefit from the scheme, as well as the small and marginal farmers, widows, landless labourers, ex-bonded labourers, etc., from other castes. The process of identification itself was typical of dominant caste politics, by which many ineligible persons had been identified as beneficiaries. Let me delve more into the situation of Holeyas and Madigas who had to encounter at least four sets of problems. First, there had been many aspirants to be beneficiaries but they were told that the scheme was for all poor and weaker sections and not just for the Scheduled Castes.
Secondly, the beneficiaries included mainly the known supporters of the ruling faction. Thirdly, the unsuccessful aspirants had been persuaded by the rival faction to make a petition to the officials of the department concerned. Consequently, there had been a delay in approving the list recommended by the ruling faction. The latter therefore feared that their list would not be approved by the officer concerned, especially since he was a Madiga by caste. He had one weakness in his present posting: he wanted to be posted in Bangalore city and could not afford to alienate the dominant caste, from amongst whom the elected Member of the Legislative Assembly was in the ruling party in the state. However, not knowing the mind and weakness of the official, the ruling faction encouraged the landowner in Rajapura whose land was to be acquired for housing purpose to go on an appeal to the court against the land acquisition. A stay order was granted, and the official in question was directed to examine the case by going on a 'spot inspection'.

During the course of all these developments, the Holeyas and Madigas had come to realise that in the new housing colony as proposed also they would be segregated from the beneficiaries among the other castes. When they learnt of the forthcoming 'spot inspection' by the official who belonged to the same caste among them, a few Madigas decided to give him a separate reception in the village. They presented him with garlands and lemon, as is the traditional practice for welcoming a visiting official, as he was passing the entrance of the keri. The official, not knowing the caste dynamics accepted the offerings made to him. But he started shouting at them when one of the enthusiastic on-looker invited him for lunch with them in their keri. This was because, as is the convention, a lunch had been arranged in the house of the headman of the village, an Okkaliga, for the visiting officials. The enthusiastic Madigas had to listen to a small lecture by the official about inter-caste harmony and the need to forget caste differences.

Although they had taken the courage to present themselves before the visiting official to state what they thought was a wrong being committed against them by the dominant castes, they did not have the courage to contest the bureaucrat. Eventually the spot inspection was held, the writ petition by the landowner was withdrawn and the house sites were allotted
to the beneficiaries according to the original proposal. Those who opposed the ruling faction and questioned the segregation learnt a bitter lesson: that, by opposing the ideas of segregation as prescribed by the dominant and ruling faction they are not likely to get what they want.

It is necessary to recognise the implications for cultural definitions of Holeya and Madiga status to be something lower than the rest. Even though the demand for desegregated housing came as a result of factional rivalry among the Okkaligas, the occasion had given rise to a realisation for the Okkaligas that the ex-Uncouchables do not accept their status passively. I shall view the persistence of patron-client relationships involving the ex-Uncouchable castes to be one of the main reasons for their submitting to the humiliating status, but no without rejection of the ideology that they are low or inferior. In Rajapura in particular they have allowed themselves to be subjected to the humiliations in short-sighted dependence upon the dominant castes for receiving the benefits from the state.

An ideal alternative would have been the emergence of a person or a group of persons who would not only stand in opposition to the humiliation but also to related the castes with the outside world of 'development' agencies and institutions. Elsewhere the activists of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS) or any other caste association have been playing this role and quite successfully. But not so far in Rajapura. On the contrary one DSS worker with his base in a neighbouring village is quite well known among the Dalit activists in the region who is seen as a person of nuisance value by most, including those in Rajapura. One late night as I was concluding a session of discussion with a Holeya informant, a messenger from the neighbouring village brought the news of a forthcoming meeting in that village. The meeting was convened by the DSS activist. My informant had been forthright and insightful in discussing the dominant caste attitudes and practices towards the ex-Uncouchable castes of Rajapura until the arrival of the messenger. The embarrassment of my informant was clearly evident. For, not only many in Rajapura knew nothing of his involvement with the DSS leader in question, but also there had been a campaign against him. It was after much persuasion that he revealed the information about the meeting and his association with the DSS. His fear
was that by disclosing his association with the DSS and the leader in question, he would antagonize the members of the dominant caste. It is instructive to note that he belonged to a faction opposed to the ruling faction to the village, and his political patrons were also from the dominant caste. I suspect the fear of antagonizing comes from his knowledge that no matter which faction he was in, the dissent against the hegemony would not be approved by either of them.

With the three examples cited above, I have attempted to show that replication of internal organization within the caste is not peculiar to the ex-Untouchable castes whose inclusion or exclusion is ambiguous. Thus I have tried to show that replication is not merely a result of exclusion. Secondly, I have tried to show that what may appear to be replication is not indicative of consensus, which for Moffatt is a stronger indication of consensus. It is shown to be the contrary, namely a rejection of the dominant values and re-affirmation of one’s own cultural identity. Finally, these examples also go to show that the ex-Untouchables do not passively accept humiliation and subordinate status culturally ascribed to them. Instead they do attempt redefinition of their identities, and protest against the humiliation. The scope and relative success or failure of such protests depend largely upon their abilities to withstand the power of patronage, or acquire ‘patronage which is not patronizing’ (Scott 1990:197, Mosse 1994:87).

There are many instances, increasingly in recent years, of rejecting an ascribed low status by the ex-Untouchable castes. I shall describe a few to indicate the extent to which the dominant ideology which constructed a low and humiliating identity for them is defied, and rejected. Ever since the drinking-water hand-pumps have been erected in different residential localities, it is not uncommon for high caste women to fetch water from the pump located at the entrance of Holeya and Madiga colonies. The upper caste women filling water into their vessels used to resent their vessels coming in contact with that of the Holeya or Madiga women. Some months ago, when there was an argument following the touching of vessels, the women of Holeya and Madiga asked all the upper caste women to fetch water from hand-pumps elsewhere not to depend on the ones meant for Holeyas and Madigas. They were told ‘if you want to keep your pots pure, go to the wells meant for your caste’.
Nowadays, the upper caste women wait until such a time when there are no other Holeya or Madiga women at the hand pump, for they are aware that they cannot enforce their will.

As part of the terms of hiring agricultural labourers, the landowner used to serve one or two meal during the day. The ex Untouchable caste labourers in the past had been complaining about the quality of food served, or the manner in which they were served: often it was stale food, and they had to bring their own plates. While at work, water to drink was poured to their mouth through a funnel made of a leaf lest the contact through water with the vessel and their mouth would pollute the vessel. In more recent years, the workers do not accept to work on the terms that meal is also served besides wages. They prefer to be paid separately towards their breakfast, lunch and tea or coffee.

Most Okkaligas in Rajapura believe that offering milk or milk-based food items to Holeya and Madiga would result in their cow or buffalo going sick. It was thus not uncommon to find a Holeya or Madiga squatting at the door step of a land-owning Okkaliga during 1978-81, while the rest in the house sipped a tea or coffee. If the householder was considerate, a few betel leaves and nuts would be offered to him to compensate. Offering betel leaves and nuts may be seen as a way of substitution for tea or coffee. From the Okkaliga standpoint, this may be a fulfillment of responsibility and kindness within the constraints of caste inequalities. But, increasingly, the ex Untouchable castes resent discrimination and humiliation of a tea or coffee not being offered on the grounds of their caste status being low. In the more recent years I have noticed fewer Holeyas sitting at the door steps of Okkaliga landowners. Amongst those Holeya and Madiga who do sit there, most walk away from their posts the moment coffee or tea is announced or is being served. Their leaving the scene is to be understood as rejecting the idea that they be left out while the others are being served a beverage. Many of them joke about the Okkaliga men who drink liquor in the local shop along with Holeya and Madigas, while refusing to offer coffee or tea at home.

While these are some samples of their rejection of the notion that they are sources of pollution, there are also many occasions when the ex Untouchables themselves show signs
of their accepting a low status. To this day they have not attempted entering the temples and the tea-shops, demanding service by the barber in the village, or wanting to draw water from the well used by all the other castes. In short, rejection of the values that treat them as low has not been uniform, just as acceptance of these values has not been uniform.

Conclusions

Current interest in the culture and cultural autonomy of the ex-untouchable castes has tended to conclude that they passively accept a culturally subordinate status as ascribed to them. It has also been asserted that they replicate the institutions and values found in the dominant social order from which they are excluded, and thereby express a cultural consensus. Such a replication is seen as a stronger indicator of consensus (Moffatt 1973). The foregoing account of a Scheduled Castes in Rajapura points to a contrary interpretation of the cultural similarities found among the ex-Untouchable castes with the castes that are not subjected to humiliation and subordination as are the former. It has been argued that not only 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' of the ex-Untouchable castes are ambiguous, but it is true of the others. Further, it has been argued that 'exclusion' does not necessarily mean replication, and in turn replication does not mean consensus. On the contrary what may appear to be replication is often expression of reaffirming a cultural identity and rejection of the dominant values.

Discourse on 'replication and consensus' has tended to ignore the dissent by the ex-untouchable castes. Absence of institutional replication was emphasised to be evidence against Moffatt’s findings in Tamil Nadu, rather than recognising the dissent that the members of these caste had towards the dominant ideology of caste and hierarchy (e.g., Deliege). Evidence from Karnataka villages has been examined with a view to extend the discourse from 'replication and consensus' to 'hegemony and dissent'. Such a shift provides an opportunity to recognise the active role of the ex-untouchable castes rather than treating them as passive participants in a dominant social order that ascribes them a low and subordinate status. With a few examples of dissent expressed and demonstrated by the ex-Untouchable castes of Karnataka, the paper demonstrates the sue of shifting the discourse from replication and consensus
to 'Hegemony and Dissent'. The limited success that dissent and protest have in redefining their cultural identity has been attributed to persisting patron-client network of interdependence. It is necessary to identify the different forms of expressing their dissent and their limitations, for the ex-Untouchable castes in India today are seeking a patronage that does not reduce them as being culturally dependent population. The Dalit movement and Dalit literature are attempting such a cultural redefinition of their identity through rejection of the dominant ideology as well as economic and political empowerment. That is a theme in itself, which the discourse on replication and consensus nearly ignores.

Notes

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1 No offence is meant in using the term Untouchable. With a view to be precise and enable comparison, the use of caste names has been in the form in which people prefer to identify themselves. No disrespect is intended either to the people of the respective castes or to the law of the land.

2 Mosse (1994: 75) recognises this difference in the context of his Tamil Nadu village.

3 Nanjundayya and Iyer (1930) make a reference to Hale Makkalu, plural for Hale Maga, who had ritual obligations towards the patron Okkaliga households and received gifts of food and clothing on the occasion. However, it is interesting to note that they were from Holeya caste, claiming to be higher in status that the Madigas. Although the duties of Hale Makkalu were considered to be impure (digging the graves, eat the cooked food offered to the spirit of the dead on the third day of death, carry the news of death, etc.), these duties were not assigned to the Madigas. Hale Makkalu were not of any low status than the others in their caste, Holeya.

4 I am thankful to Ruedi Hogger and Ruedi Baumgartner, discussions with whom clarified the notion of gowdaalike for my self.
In several villages that I have visited in the Taluk, I found gowdaalike to be a main concern among those I spoke to. Many lamented that 'nagarikate' (urbanism, but also modernity or civilization) had swept away the old ways of 'gowdaalike'. Likewise, while referring to different village, people often make a comment whether or not 'gowdaalike' had remained there. I must hasten to add that the conception of 'gowdaalike' is not merely of the village leaders, but also of the others, particularly women.

The Odases prefer to call themselves Bovis because the official list of Scheduled Castes includes Bovis and not Oddas. In order that they get caste certificates as Bovis, and therefore be eligible to be SCs, they prefer Bovi as their caste name rather than Oddas. However, the Oddas alias Bovis consist a few divisions based on the work they do: Kalli Oddas are the stone workers, while the Mannu Oddas are earthen workers. Neil Armstrong reports from Mahupura in the district of Chitradurga, that the Oddas call themselves as Sacha Oddas, meaning the pure or the original Oddas. (See, Armstrong: 1998).

Old persons among Okkaligas, however, resent this 'laxity' on the part of younger okkaligas who inter-dine with Lambanis. Women, however, do not accept cooked food from most other castes. I should like to point out here that while considering inter-caste social distance and ranking, it is necessary to note whether women eat cooked food by the other castes, low or nigh to ones own caste. For they represent the more normative picture than the practice by men, who are more prone to change in rural inter-caste matters.

Generally, castes or former tribes which were once nomadic, or have had a recent history of migration into the village, were/are excluded from Jajmani relations.

In some parts of Karnataka, Holeyas call themselves Adi Karnataka, and Madigas Adi Dravida. On the different dimensions of names of Untouchable castes, see Charsley 1996.

A brass ladle connected to a bell, carried by the Holeya to collect the presentations from the members of the community on behalf of the headman of the cultural region 'nadu' (land or territory) within boundary ('gadi'). The headman is either a Lingayat or a Okkaliga and therefore could be any other high caste. The headman is referred to as 'Kattemane Yajamana'.

One of the strategies of the dominant caste hegemony is to discredit the emerging leaders among the ex-Utntouchable castes. Often the means of discrediting an emerging leader is in terms of pointing out to his inefficiency in succeeding to accomplish favourable results in the dealings with the development bureaucracy, and that he is corrupt or misusing his position for personal political gains. The same logic is not applied to the leaders of the upper castes who claim to be the champions of the ex-Utntouchable castes. If nothing works to successfully discredit a leader, then sub-caste favoritism is shown or seen as a means of discrediting the person's commitment to the cause of ex-Utntouchables.
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