

1. Introduction

Much like the “history of India”, and many Indian conceptual categories like “karma”, “dharma” and so on; Indian societal or conceptual categories like *varna* or *jati* or caste, where the three have overlaps but are not entirely synonymous, and with the “translation” and “location” of Indian conceptual categories still being made in the English and other European languages, much of our understanding like the rest of knowledge is a work in progress. The tranquillity of “arrival” can only be at the cost of pedantry. And when it is the “history of varna/jati/caste”, the plot invariably thickens. This is also the case when it concerns the history of a traditionally considered highest social category of Brahmins. In this quest, there was a “native” intellectual named Naurang Rai later Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, a *dashnami sanyasi* of the highest Shankaracharya order of ascetics, relatively uninfluenced by the European intellectual tradition at least as far as his formal educational training is concerned, with just four years of school training but many years of classical learning of all the important branches of Indian philosophy in original Sanskrit, who wrote a history of Brahmins.

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati's¹ work “Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar” published in 1926, is an extended and comprehensive history of Brahmins in India, recording social life and marital relations among Brahmins more particularly (but not exclusively) in the Middle-Gangetic plains of Northern India. This work extensively deals with the history, origin, functions, divisions, myths, legends, genealogical records, marriage relations and so on among Brahmins concerning Sahajanand's geographical milieu though he did make references and drew parallels from across the Indian sub-continent. It was also suitable for him to do so because he was born in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and spent a large part of his life working in Bihar (which included Jharkhand) in the social and political fields. Sahajanand belonged to the Jijhoutia Brahmin sub-branch of Kanyakbja Brahmins from the Bundelkhand region who settled in Deva, Ghazipur in Eastern Uttar Pradesh where they developed numerous marital relations with the preponderant Bhumihar Brahmins to the extent of getting

¹ Sahajanand was a leading figure of India's struggle for independence since 1920 and the most important leader of the first organized peasant movement in the country since the establishment of West Patna Kisan Sabha/West Patna Peasant Union in 1927, then Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in 1929 and then the All India Kisan Sabha in 1936 leading to the abolition of *zamindari*/landlordism without compensation in the country soon after independence. There are many works dealing more specifically with this period of his career. The current work deals scientifically for the very first time with his specific book on the history of Brahmins written in 1926 which is the revised and enlarged version of the one he wrote in 1916. He is a complex figure with multiple roles leaving a huge corpus of writings in a relatively short lifespan of sixty years offering huge scope of research. This article is just one addition on one of his earlier works which has escaped the notice of social scientists.

counted as one among them (Hauser and Jha 2015:7-10). Those Kanyakubja Brahmins who settled in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh and the adjoining regions of Madhya Pradesh are called Jijhoutia Brahmins.² The ancient and Sanskrit references to Bundelkhand is Jajakshuku, the region of India from which the term Jijhoutia emerges. Sahajanand had the highest possible education in the traditional Sanskrit Gurukul method³ and also became an ascetic of the highest order of Dashnami Dandi Sanyasis⁴ reserved for Brahmins (Ghurye 1964:71-72). It is to his credit that he only had four years of education with 'colonial-contact' due to studying in the German Mission High School, making him an 'organic intellectual' coming from rural India and getting trained in traditional scholarship reaching greatest heights in it.⁵

² There are many Jijhoutia Brahmin branch of Kanyakubja Brahmin feudatories in this region including the famous Chaube Jagirs. Sahajanand records in his autobiography, "Like the Sarbariya or Saryupari, the Jujhautiyas are a section or branch of the Kanyakubja Brahmins. The specific place of their origin is Jujhauti or Jajakshukti, hence these Brahmins came to be called Jujhautiya. It is well known, and history bears testimony to the fact, that people of that place were warlike and given to bravery. That is why Bundelkhand was also known as Jujhauti. The Jujhautiya Brahmins are mostly found in that region as well as in Hamirpur, Lalitpur and Jhansi, and near Chitrakut there was a petty raja or zamindar who was Jujhautiya. The Jujhautiyas also have a caste sabha or association and a printed genealogy (Hauser and Jha 2015:9)."

After Maharaja Chait Singh's revolt against the British, he was sent in exile in the Bundelkhand region, where his descendants still live (Bayly 1983, Yang 1989). Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, whose ancestors were also Jijhoutia Brahmins from Malwa, from which they drew their last name Malviya, was close to the Kashi Naresh, a Brahmin king, who gave all the land to build the Banaras Hindu University by him. Most of the finances were provided by Darbhanga Maharaj, another Brahmin king of North Bihar. The great revolutionary Chandrashekhar Azad is also supposed to belong to the Jijhoutia Brahmin branch of Kanyakubja Brahmins.

³ It is an example of societal constitutionalism of education, where well-off members of Hindu society would support free education given by Brahmin scholars, locally called Pandits, and by Hindu sannyasis ("monks"). The students were mostly drawn from the three higher varnas of Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya families.

⁴ Sahajanand writes in his autobiography, "I learned from these sannyasis that though there are ten divisions (Dashnami) or titles of sannyasis, only three – Tirtha, Ashram and Saraswati – are Dandi Sannyasis. The remaining seven, Bharati, Puri, Ban, Aranya, Giri, Parbat and Sagar have no dand, or one might say, they cannot and do not keep the dand, or ritual staff. I was unaware of this, nor did I know that a Brahman, on taking sannyas (celibate monkhood) must take a dand. The non-Brahman varnas who take sannyas cannot do so. Accordingly, persons of all varnas are found among sannyasis with the titles of Bharati, Puri, etc." (Hauser and Jha 2015:42).

⁵ Walter Hauser has rightfully called him an organic intellectual because he came from the stock of 'kore kisans (simple peasants)' and achieved great intellectual, social and political prominence in the country and gave extremely original and rooted viewpoints on varied subjects. But, it must be highlighted both to the credit of Sahajanand as well as to the traditional Indian institutions of scholarship that Sahajanand is also an extremely erudite classical scholar and indeed held the highest esteem as a *dashnami dandi sanyasi*, much like Adi Shankaracharya in the seventh century (Hauser and Jha 2015:104). Among many others recording a similar trait, his life-long associate and follower Pandit Jadunandan Sharma attests to Swamiji's scholarship

As the work is very detailed, voluminous and comprehensive, I am focusing primarily on the aspect of marriage relations among Brahmins as studied by Sahajanand and contextualise it with some relevant aspects of history and culture. It is very striking how he explores into all the classical works and then consults works of history, culture, caste system, including works written in English, apart from recording his observations of the society he was studying because he had no modern European university training. In this, he was the forerunner of field study as pioneered by M.N. Srinivas in the 1940s to 1950s (Srinivas 2002b:641–663). Instead of writing a Sanskrit verse-text on the history of Bhumihaar Brahmins, in line with other caste-community texts, Sahajanand was very scientific and logical in his approach to combine textual references with actual social practices, including marriage relations, the data for which he collected over many years by himself visiting many regions including Darbhanga, Bhagalpur and Monghyr and recording marriage relations among Bhumihaar Brahmins and Maithil Brahmins “numbering in thousands” with exact family details (Hauser and Jha 2015:159-171). In his research and gathering of data through fieldwork he was also helped by Swami Purnanandji who recorded hundreds of marriage relations documenting with names and full addresses between Bhumihaar Brahmins and Kanyakubja and Saryupareen Brahmins in the region of Allahabad, Fatehpur and Gorakhpur in the United Provinces/ Uttar Pradesh (Hauser and Jha 2015:168). It is also interesting to note that this work of sociology and ‘ethnic’ and ‘social and cultural anthropology’ was a revised and a much more comprehensive work compared to the previously published “Bhumihaar Brahmin Parichay” which he had published a decade earlier in 1916 (Pradhan 2018:108). The presence of this earlier 1916 edition also points to the fact of field-work being done by Sahajanand since the early years of the twentieth-century apart from being a “participant-observer” for being born in Jujhoutia branch of Kanyakubja Brahmins marrying into Bhumihaar Brahmin branch of Kanyakubja Brahmins witnessing Brahmin society and its marriage relations first-hand since the last years of the nineteenth-century itself. By his own admission, Sahajanand was a very proud Brahmin and wanted to record the history of his brethren Bhumihaar Brahmins not just based on Shastras and Puranas (original Sanskrit manuscripts) but actual social practice and ‘the experience of people themselves’ (Hauser and Jha 2015:162-163).⁶ The

and intelligence (Kuwanjima 2017). ‘Ji’ is an honorific added after names for respect, in this case and throughout this text, it is used for Swami Sahajanand Saraswati.

⁶ Sahajanand also wrote a massive work running into more than a thousand pages on the performance of rituals called “Karma Kalap” making the complex ritualistic world available in one encyclopaedic compendium which should be studied by scholars working on Hindu rituals. Most of Brahmin priests I have personally encountered who perform rituals in Bihar refer to Sahajanand’s work for performing it. The work contains the structure, the concept and the exact method of its execution. The ritualistic world of Hindus exemplified by its sacerdotal class of Brahmins led to the emergence of a complex and sophisticated school of jurisprudence

great Hindi litterateur for whom there is a periodization in Hindi literature called the “Dwivedi Yug”, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi had written a review of “Bhumihar Brahmin Parichay” in his literary journal “Saraswati”, in which he wrote, “[n]othing has been left out in the book. It is full of authentic and detailed facts and interpretations (Pradhan 2018:108).⁷

On the rationale of the title of his work “Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar” in 1926, Swamiji records in his autobiography:

The first edition of *Bhumihar Brahman Parichay* comprising 1,500 copies was sold out. Thus, a second edition was needed. Then an idea occurred to me that there are Tyagis and Mohiyals who reside in the western United Provinces and Punjab respectively. They are just like Bhumihars. Hence, their relationship with Gaud Brahmins and Saraswat Brahmins should be found out and included in the new edition of *Bhumihar Brahman Parichaya*. Doing this research resulted in the discovery of thousands of such relationships. Then I thought that the old title (*Bhumihar Brahman Parichaya*) did not fit in with the new findings. Hence, the title of the new edition, which included the new material, was changed to *Brahmarshi Vansh Vistar*. There was another reason for changing its title. In fact, it contained a historical analysis of all Brahmins (Pradhan 2018:109–110, emphasis added).⁸

Sahajanand writes in the preface of the 1926 work, which is used for this article⁹, that he had added new points and references, like the relationship between Gaud Brahmins and Tyagi Brahmins, and how he regretted not to include the relationship between Saraswat Brahmins and Mohyal Brahmins which he planned to include in the next and third edition of the book which unfortunately never came out (Saraswati 2003a:156). The revised title of the work “Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar” is also noteworthy as Sahajanand wanted to write the extended or comprehensive (“vistar”/“vistrit”) history, culture and society of Brahmins. “Vansha” literally means genealogy and true to the title, Sahajanand provides an excellent genealogical account including marriage relations of different sub-groups or sub-castes/castes of Brahmins. “Brahmarshi” is an ideal indeed for Brahmins; i.e., to realise the Brāhmānā or the absolute/ab-

called Mimamsa, which is remarkable for its insights into interpretation since the later Vedic age (Sarkar 2009; Ayyar 1952; Staal 2010; Michaels 2016)

⁷ “Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1864-1938) was among the most prominent Hindi literary figures of the time. As the editor of the monthly journal *Saraswati* from 1903-1920, Dwivedi exerted a powerful influence on the very nature of Hindi literature. That he should have reviewed *Bhumihar Brahman Parichay* suggests that Sahajanand, at the age of 27, was a visible public figure well before his political activism of the 1920s and 1930s (Hauser with Jha 2015:187, n.24).”

⁸ Saraswat and Gaud are among the two major geographical distinctions among North Indian Brahmins as mentioned in the *Sahyādri Khaṇḍa* (Pandey 2014). Mohyal Brahmins are Punjabi Brahmins and as such a sub-division of Saraswat Brahmins. Tyagis are more akin to Gaud with whom they have marital relations as well. Bhumihar Brahmins as we would see through the course of this article are either of Kanyakubja Brahmin or Maithil Brahmin descent (Shukla 2022).

⁹ I don't have access to the 1916 volume, but to the 1926 volume which the author informs was a more comprehensive work than the previous edition (Saraswati 2003a:156). It is a pity that this earlier work is not readily available.

solite knowledge, and therefore the first choice of the term “Brahmarshi” in the title of his work. It was both the intention as spelled out by Sahajanand in the preface of the book, and how it is written with the history of Brahmins and not of any “particular group” of Brahmins (though the greatest part of the work concerned Brahmins of the middle-gangetic plain), as well as in the reviews and assessments of the work during his time, most notably by Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi. Therefore, it is quite paradoxical if Babhan/Pachchima/Bhumihar Brahmins name their different community-specific organizations with the title Brahmarshi. Additionally, Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar points to the fact that Swamiji had adopted the same research methodology as well as findings from his ‘field work’, which means he was practising it in the early years of twentieth century, nearly half a century ahead of M.N. Srinivas and couple of decades ahead of G.S. Ghurye, who had never practised it himself, but had encouraged his students to do field-work in Social Anthropology or Sociology as a discipline in India.¹⁰

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati has also provided tables of marriage relations among different sub-castes of Brahmins. This work has been curiously ignored by sociologists, cultural anthropologists, historians and political scientists from India and those working on India. It is quite noticeable because it is written by someone who had no real training in western style institutions in British India and had no formal training in modern ‘European’ methods of research.¹¹ But he had the highest training in the traditional sense and learnt grammar, Sāṃkhya, Nyāya, Advaita Vedānta and other major schools of Indian philosophy both institutionally from the *mathās* (monasteries) where he was trained for being a monk (not just any monk, but a *dashnami sanyasi*, see n.5) and also individually where he used to personally visit scholars and learn from them.¹² Perhaps

¹⁰ “One of the abiding lessons which Ghurye had learnt at Cambridge was the indissoluble link between social anthropology and the fieldwork tradition. While he himself never undertook any serious fieldwork he, more than any other teacher, contributed to basing sociology and social anthropology in India on sound fieldwork. From his Chair in Bombay he directed a one-man ethnographic survey of India, an operation which was conducted with little or no financial resources. The way he went about it was interesting. Bombay being the most cosmopolitan of Indian cities, Ghurye’s MA and Ph.D. students came from diverse regions and economic backgrounds. He encouraged them, wherever possible, to take up the study of problems in their regions for their master’s and doctoral dissertations. This meant that they combed the existing literature in English and in the local language for data, and supplemented it with fieldwork. In this way he managed to get dissertations written on such themes as ‘Hindu Culture in Sind’, ‘Muslims of UP’, ‘Harijans in Bombay’, and ‘Prabhus and Kolis in Maharashtra’ (Srinivas 2002b:648–649).”

¹¹ He only had four years of ‘modern’ ‘Western’ school training at the German Mission High School where he proved to be an exceptionally bright student (Hauser and Jha 2015:36-39).

¹² Swami Sahajanand Saraswati records it in his autobiography, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, “By its side or a little above it, was Kailash (near Rishikesh in the Himalayas, author’s addition)—the *math* of Dhanrajpurī—which was quite big in size. During those days, we used to study *Vedānta Siddhānta Muktaṭī*, a well-reputed book on *Vedānta* philosophy, with an able and serene *Vedānti sannyasi*. It is a very terse and difficult *Vedāntic* book. We started our study

his training in Nyāya, the Indian school of logic, made him such a forceful and logical writer and later articulator of India's independence and the rights of

there with that book, though we had not studied books preceding it till then. A number of people were involved in our learning process. Whenever a question relating to *nyaya* and *mimansa* rose, we would seek clarification from the scholarly sannyasi mentioned earlier. We could easily understand the entire thing by his single explanation, as we were sharp minds. When we used to ask him to explain a subtle point of the *Vedanta*, he would advise us to go to Kashi and study grammar, *nyaya*, and *mimansa*. He would also remind us that without such studies, it is not easy to grasp the subtle points of *Vedanta*. [...] There was a Sanskrit pathashala in *Aparnath Math* (in Kashi/Varanasi), which was a study centre of *nyaya*, grammar, and *Vedanta*. It occurred to me that without a deep knowledge of Sanskrit grammar, I could hardly enjoy Vedantic studies. Hence, I decided to initiate my study with grammar. Let me add that I had already done some study of the *Laghu Siddhant Kaumudi*, a primer of Sanskrit grammar, so I had a good command over the language. I restarted my study of Sanskrit grammar with the *Siddhant Kaumudi*. During those days, Shri Harinarayan Tripathi alias Tiwariji was the most reputed teacher of the *Siddhant Kaumudi* in the entire Kashi region. Fortunately, he was teaching the same book at the *Aparnath Math* pathashala. That was the icing on the cake. I started my study of the *Siddhant Kaumudi* with full concentration. First, I started memorizing and grasping its basic formulations and difficult passages. The text had several *pathas* (versions). I would listen to whatever Tiwariji was teaching with rapt attention and would prepare detailed notes on these at my place of stay. That way, I ended up making extensive and detailed notes. My notes turned out to be very useful to the other students as well. Later, one of my class fellows took them for study and forgot to give them back to me. Thus, that notebook was lost forever. Otherwise, it could have provided a good commentary on the *Siddhant Kaumudi*. It might have even been published in a book form. [] By the middle of 1911, I finished the study of the *Siddhant Kaumudi*. It used to be said that a complete study of the *Siddhant Kaumudi* should take a period of twelve years. In any case, people used to devote a minimum period of six years for its study. A bird's eye view of its study was not that difficult. But the way it was taught in Kashi during those days, particularly the methodology adopted by Tiwariji, involved a longer period of study. It is a bulky book. But, with serious effort and full concentration, I succeeded in completing its study in a relatively shorter period of two and half years. Tiwariji would explain even its intricate passages in an extremely lucid and comprehensible way. Hence, hundreds of students used to attend his classes and listen attentively to his explanations and interpretations. [] But that did not mean that I was involved and satisfied with the study of the *Siddhant Kaumudi* alone. After sometime, I initiated the study of *nyaya*. I carried on both these studies simultaneously. At a still later stage, after the completion of the study of the *Siddhant Kaumudi*, I took up books like *Shabdendu Shekher* and *Paribhashendu Shekher* for detailed study. In due course, the time came for the study of *Bhushan*, *Manjusha*, and *Mahabhashya*. On my own, I simultaneously started studying the works on *Sankhya*, *Mimansa*, *Vedanta*, *yoga*, and so on. Besides, in my spare time during the day, I used to teach the *Siddhant Kaumudi* to my fellow students and others. Even my seniors would come to me for the study of the *Siddhant Kaumudi*. I decided that within five to seven years I should complete a thorough study of all the major philosophical works. Hence, I used to be engaged in my studies day in and day out. [...] I came across three great scholars of *Navya Nyaya*—two of them at Kashi and the third in Mithila. All three were great scholars of their own kind. One of them, Shankar Bhattacharya, was of Bengali origin, and the second one, Jivanath Mishra, was from Mithila. I came across the third one, Balkrishna Mishra, at Darbhanga. For some time, I studied books like *Badh* and *Satpratipaksha* with Balkrishna Mishra. While I have had encounters with other scholars, I was highly impressed by these three. Bhattacharya taught me the largest number of books on *Navya Nyaya*. His skills in teaching and his manner of providing explanations, particularly with respect to intricate issues, were rare. He would give his best to drive the fundamentals of the books under study straight into the heart and minds of the students. I found the same skills in the case of Balkrishna Mishra as well (Pradhan 2018:60–61, 73–74, 78)."

the toiling peasants and agricultural labourers (Pradhan 2014; Kumar 2021). He adopted a very logical and curiously ‘modern’ scientific methodology in writing “Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar”, including recording the marriage relations among Brahmins by making field visits to villages in North India and recording, even tabulating, the names and details of all families from both sides which entered into such a marital relationship. His references and sources indicate he was also a very widely read man which included modern works in the English language. Therefore, it is also an object lesson into the traditional Indian methods including that of *gurukulas* (traditional Indian schools) and the different monastic orders for imparting knowledge (Michaels 2001; Mookerji 2011). Unfortunately, none of these non-western methods of education have actually been revived for imparting, carrying and producing knowledge. In my view, it is one of the main reasons for how an English-educated Indian elite is uprooted from India’s “own” knowledge traditions and has little recourse in accessing it.¹³

¹³ Sudipta Kaviraj’s interesting public lecture “The second Mahabharata” (2016) explores on the idea of ‘what is our tradition’ through the hermeneutic lens of Hans Georg Gadamer, and then goes on to use creatively the work “Kavyaprakash” of the Kashmiri Shaivite aesthetic philosopher Mammatacharya in making interpretations and readings of the great epic Mahabharata. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati as a profound and original intellectual with both classical training as well as field knowledge during his ascetic wanderings, and even for the pursuit of his classical studies as well as his involvement in the freedom movement and organized peasant movement is already able to assess the aftereffects of colonial education policy of discouraging Indian scholarship in the early years of the twentieth century. The decline in Sanskrit scholarship in its greatest centre of Varanasi was noted by him, “Kashi had good scope and provisions for the study of Sanskrit grammar and *Navya Nyaya*. But it was difficult to find able and competent teachers for *yoga*, the ancient system of *Nyaya*, *Mimansa*, and *Sankhya*. The few who were competent were not willing to teach. All this that I am saying is based on my personal experiences. I am saying this in all earnestness in respect of Kashi, which is regarded as a prime centre of Sanskrit learning. While one could somehow manage with Vedantic studies, the study of *Mimansa* and ancient *Nyaya* was really in a bad shape. The study of *Mimansa* does not comprise works like *Apo Devi*, *Nyaya Prakasha*, and *Adhikaran Ratnamala*. The real *Mimansa* works are *Shabarvashya*, *Shlokavartik*, *Tantravartik*, and others. No one in Kashi was actually teaching these difficult works. The few works mentioned earlier marked the beginning and the end of the teachings of scholars. [] The commentary of Parthasarathi Mishra on Kumaril Bhatt’s work, which is known as *Tantra Ratna*, has not been published till now. I copied it in my own hand from a manuscript at Darbhanga. People are hardly aware of the works of Prabhakar. The published version of *Shabarvashya* is full of errors and inaccuracies. There is no competent scholar to correct it. The same is true of the commentaries on ancient *Nyaya* and their *vartik*, and the commentary of Vachspati Mishra on *Tatparya Tika* and other works on those subjects. They are full of errors. It is also impossible to study *Kusumanjali* and *Atmatatvavivek*. The latter is a difficult work and its published version is full of errors. Only the part of the work that is prescribed for the Sanskrit examinations has been published correctly with a commentary on it. Why should anyone be bothered about the rest of it? (Pradhan 2018:79)”.

Hetukar Jha records not just decline in Sanskrit learning, but learning in general, because a lot of the local pathshalas/schools taught in the local languages, in Bihar and Bengal for example, rather than Sanskrit prior to British colonial period. And the British systematically led to their permanent closure. If we couple this with the hostile British colonial attitude to Sanskrit scholarship, with their preference for a limited English education with measly budget

Swamiji's pioneering role in India's struggle for independence is perhaps not adequately acknowledged for his involvement in Brahmin, particularly Bhumihar Brahmin social reform in his early life. And then among social scientists his work on the history, social structure and practices, and marriage relations among Brahmins is curiously ignored for him being in India's struggle for independence and peasants' movement and abolishment of landlordism (*zamindari*) to improve the lot of peasants and workers in the country from late 1910s (overlapping with his Brahmin social reform phase) till his sudden death in 1950 (Kumar 2021). It is rather surprising how when studying caste associations (*sabhas* and *mahasabhas*), there is an epistemic violence in relying on the dubious colonial caste censuses (Samarendra, 2008, 2011) in order to (mis)-characterize the motives for organizing such caste *sabhas*, whereas native works like "Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar" is merely mentioned, if at all, without discussing what is actually contained in the work with a scientific treatment and then it is glossed over in ideological fervour or outright hate (Bose 1991; Mishra & Pandey 1996). One instance of the specimen of creating a new caste-identity due to colonial differentiation, categorization and then enumeration of the Brahmin caste-community into Bhumihar Brahmins and Brahmins by the 1911 census will be seen through the course of this work. This current work is the first such attempt at rectification of this callousness. Another reason for the lack of attention on his works by sociologists and anthropologists could be the non-use of intellectual works in Hindi and in other dialects of the region among the English-educated literate class coming from Bihar and eastern-Uttar Pradesh. Sociologists (to focus on those coming from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh or working on it) like L.P. Vidyarthi or Sachchidanand ignored his writings.¹⁴ So did Hetukar Jha,¹⁵ besides historians writing on the history of modern

allocation to man the lower rungs of British Indian administration, police and the like as clerks and coolies, Sahajanand's assessment comes out to be true (Jha 2011).

¹⁴ L.P. Vidyarthi was born in Bihar and had a distinguished academic career. He was both inspired by India's ancient knowledge system and wrote works on different tribes of India. He never intellectually engaged with the works of Sahajanand. Sachchidanand wrote on the tribal communities of Bihar but made no references to the actual and extensive 'field-work' of Sahajanand from the 1920s to the 1940s in what constitutes Jharkhand today (Hauser 2005).

¹⁵ Hetukar Jha was a prominent sociologist belonging from North Bihar and working in Patna University. Belatedly he did some field work in the late 1980s and published it, though unfortunately it is not of the scale as was done by M.N. Srinivas and carried forward by Andre Béteille and others like T.N. Madan (Madan 1965). He never referenced from works of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati including in his book on Historical Sociology in India, except for a cursory mention while discussing the peasant movement (Jha 2016:77). In any case, he ignored Sahajanand's Brahmarshi Vanshi Vistar and did not reference from any of his original writings which constitute a huge corpus. See also Jha, Sinha and Tiwary (1985) and H. Jha (1991).

Perhaps the best and most comprehensive work on a single village of Bihar after independence by an Indian in any language has been the work of littérateur and historian Prof. Ramnath Sharma on Amhara village lying west of Patna and close to Bihta. He also wrote other works on the history and contribution of people from Bihta who played a prominent

Bihar like K.K. Datta and others of the period of 1950s and 1960s ignored him completely (Datta 1957a).¹⁶ Hetukar Jha was not completely damning of the big Brahmin *zamindari* landed estates, including Hathwa or Bettiah apart from of course Darbhanga with which he was related. His maternal aunt (*mausi*) Maharani Kalyani Singh was the third and last Maharani of Darbhanga and he used to effectively and efficiently run the Maharajadhiraj Kameshwar Singh Kalyani Foundation for as long as he lived. Maybe his personal affinity with the ruling Brahmin families of estates made him dislike the fiery Swami Sahajanand Saraswati to actually ignore him and berate the role of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and his Kisan Sabha played in the only successful organised peasant movement in twentieth-century India leading to the abolition of *zamindari* not just in Bihar but across the country (Jha 1977:558-559; Kumar 2021). It is also paradoxical because Hetukar Jha emphasized on the “field-view of history” and not “the book-view of history” to ignore Sahajanand’s comprehensive field-view of history and society complementing his very comprehensive book-view of history and society, when he recommends, “Regional issues must be studied not only in terms of their present manifestations also but in terms of how those issues have emerged historically. Such historical investigations, however, must depend more on the field-view of history, than on the book-view of history, as the latter does not generally present an account of life actually lived in history (Jha 2005).” B.B. Kumar and Sachchidanand Sinha ignored Sahajanand’s works, including Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar, for ideological reasons.¹⁷ It was sin-

role in India’s independence movement and it doesn’t come as a surprise how Swami Sahajanand Saraswati’s locus of social and political work, Sri Sitaram Ashram was set up in Bihta (Sharma, Ramnath, 2000).

¹⁶ The most authoritative and comprehensive work on the history of freedom movement in Bihar is still the one written in 1957 by Datta. There is no comprehensive single volume or multi-volume work worth the name on the history of the freedom movement in Bihar written since Datta’s work.

¹⁷ B.B. Kumar, the former Chairman of Indian Council of Social Science Research, despite hailing from Bihar and writing a voluminous work on caste with an encyclopaedic list of castes with their mool mentioned in its appendix, failed to make any references to Swami Sahajanand Saraswati’s works (Kumar 2016). Despite his earlier hobnobbing with the Praja Socialist Party, B.B. Kumar in his later years appeared to align with the current trend of what is labelled „Hindu Nationalism“ where Sahajanand would be a misfit. Thus, Sahajanand is ignored by Hindu Nationalists for being left-leaning and by the left-leaning intellectuals for being „too much“ of a Brahmin, maybe even a Bhumihaar Brahmin, or too much rooted to the Indian tradition, to be referred by the suave „westernized natives“.

Sachchidanand Sinha (b. 1928), is a solitary socialist free-thinker from Bihar, and formerly associated with the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) of Ram Manohar Lohia. Sinha is deeper than Lohia in his thought and writings but he owes his political allegiance with Lohia and his narrow brand of casteist politics passed-off for socialism, the likes of which permeated through politics in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and destroyed the socialist party/ies by turning them into caste-linked family fiefdoms. Therefore, because of his political allegiance with lumpen Lohia-ism, if at all such an „idea“ can be characterised, while discussing caste he makes unfounded and incorrect assertions for affiliations and support from the lower castes (Sinha 1982). In the numerous and varied works he has written, he has avoided referring

gle-handedly the work of American historian Walter Hauser whose pioneering work on the “Bihar provincial Kisan Sabha” (a peasant organization formed by Sahajanand in 1929) in 1961 and a life-long interest in the Swami’s works made it difficult for at least historians to ignore him.¹⁸ Hauser’s “Bihar provincial Kisan Sabha” is the forerunner of subaltern history writing led by the eminent historian Ranajit Guha [Hauser 2019 (1961)]. Hauser’s critical translation with detailed and massive notes and commentary of Swamiji’s autobiography “Mera Jivan Sangharsh” (Hauser 2015) has also not received the attention of historians and social scientists which it otherwise eminently deserves.

All *tri-karma*/*Ayachak* Brahmins were Brahmins performing the three essential functions of performing *yajna* (performance of rituals at the sacred fire, Michaels 2016), studying the Vedas (the first hymn of the oldest Veda, the Ṛg Veda, is devoted to sacred fire) and offering alms or liberality as against the six popular functions, which in addition to the three essential functions, included performing *yajna* and rituals for others, teaching the Vedas, and receiving alms (Saraswati 2003a:189-298).¹⁹ Brahmins who took to primarily non-priestly functions were mostly referred to as Babhans, or since Sahajanand, Bhumihar Brahmins in Bihar. Maithil Brahmin scholar Acharya Tareneesh Jha in his afterword to the work “Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar” extracts a classical source pointing to the five branches of Kanyakubja Brahmins, namely Saryupareen, Sanadhya, Bhumihar, Jijhoutia and Kanyakubja proper, ‘*Saryupāreen Sanādhyashcha Bhumihāro Jijhoutayah, Prākritashcha iti Panchbhedāstasya Prakartitāḥ*’ (Saraswati 2003a:518-519).

The ordering of the Indian social system, including that of Brahmins, was first laid out in the Vedas and then in the law books called the Dharmasastras, and then over centuries and millennia it has kept reinforcing itself through different texts and commentaries in a binary code with parallel social practice. Whether social practice always corresponded with the text/principle is debatable but the principle for the ordering of Indian society has remained fixed. It is a classic dilemma of text and practice. If Indian society was “stuck in time” in the four-fold varna system then there would not be thousands of self-sustaining, self-replicating and self-defining endogamous social groups who

to Sahajanand completely, including the work Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar. In the process, despite belonging to an illustrious Pachchima Brahmin family he is ignored by Brahmins for manipulating and misrepresenting the community in his personal quest for being considered a „great egalitarian thinker “ and he is ignored by the backward castes, who dominate politics and run namesake socialist parties as personal fiefdoms/lest one say monarchies, for being a Brahmin.

¹⁸ Copies of Hauser (1961) are available at Teen Murti Library in Delhi and A.N. Sinha research Institute in Patna. Because of the immense importance of his work, Hauser finally agreed to get it published in 2019, the year he departed.

¹⁹ “[...] there had always been two categories of Brahmins— pravrita or yachak (engaged or alms taking) or nivrita or ayachak (non-engaged or non-alms-taking). Thus, on that basis, Bhumihar Brahmins belong to the ayachak category (Pradhan 2018:100).”

are now referred to as “castes”. Louis Dumont is correct on understanding this one aspect of differentiation and hierarchization as a matter of “principle” in the ordering of Indian society (Dumont 1998, Madan: 2006a, 2006b). But soon he falls into the familiar colonial loop when he contrasts this “rigid, hierarchized principle”, which is after all in “his head” (Madan: 2006a, 2006b), or by implication or inspiration in the “Indian head”, to a so-called “egalitarian west”, which “western” intellectuals would agree to be also a matter of principle, “in the head” since the French Revolution. India has its own egalitarian inspirations and practice and west has its own hierarchies and differentiations, though the Varna order is indeed an idealized and perfect theoretical differentiated hierarchical principle.²⁰

It was Swami Sahajanand Saraswati who popularized the name of Bhumihaar Brahmin and solidified them into one concrete and cohesive social group which became the most dominant political group since the days of the Non-cooperation Movement (nationalist movement against British colonial rule led by Mahatma Gandhi from 1920-22) until the days of Mandal politics (populist measure of adding 27 % fixed caste-based reservations for the so-called Other Backward Classes, which is effectively castes, in public educational institutions and public jobs in 1990 by the Government of India (something which was already done in Bihar in the late 1970s; Blair 1980; Frankel 1989: 46-132), over and above the already provided 22.5% fixed caste-based reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution of India since 1950 making half the seats reserved and closed for open and fair competition).²¹

²⁰ The great philosopher Wilhelm Halbfass, who could straddle with ease both Indian philosophy as well as Western philosophy, highlights this aspect of differentiation and hierarchization in Indian conceptual category, whether one agrees with it or not, or whether it was ever a part of Indian lived reality or not, “The ‘homo hierarchicus’ is just a segment of the pervasive hierarchy of living beings, which extends ‘from Brahṁā to the tufts of grass’ (*brahmādis-tambaparyanta*). The Indian authors use a variety of terms to characterize this hierarchy of human, subhuman and superhuman forms of life, for instance *tāratamya* (‘gradation’), *uccanīcabhāva* (‘high and low status’), and *utkarsāpakarsa* (‘superiority and inferiority’). This hierarchy involves different levels of merit and demerit (*dharma*, *adharma*), pleasure and pain (*sukha*, *dukha*), and of the ‘manifestations of knowledge, sovereignty and so forth’ (*jñānaisvaryābhivyakti*), and it provides different stations of *samsāra*, i.e., of karmic reward and punishment. Some authors suggest that mankind alone, and no other species of living beings, is subdivided into further classes characterized by mutual ‘superiority and inferiority’ (*utkarsāpakarsa*). In addition to such vertical hierarchies, we also find ‘horizontal’ schemes of hierarchy, that is, concentric circles of increasing distance from a dharmic centre (Halbfass 1991:349).”

²¹ According to the eminent world-renowned historian Ram Sharan Sharma, the term Bhumihaar Brahmin term gained currency only after 1920 due to Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (A. Kumar 2005). Earlier they were referred to as Pachchima Brahmins (literally meaning Brahmins coming from the west) or Babbhans or by their respective root (*mool/dih*) like Jijhoutia Brahmin for Swami Sahajanand Saraswati or the revolutionary Chandrashekhar Azad or Dronvar Brahmins or Gautam Brahmins for Kashi Naresh, the Maharaja of Benares (Saraswati 2003a; A. Kumar 2005; Qureshi & Pathak 2024).

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati records in his autobiography, '[i]t was also true that seventy-five per cent of the youth from Bihar, who went to jail during the Non-Cooperation Movement were from the Bhumihaar community. It was in that proportion that Bhumihaar boys had left their schools and colleges. I was proud of the fact that the community I claimed to serve was overwhelmingly with me. It had also helped the country hold its head high. People like Sir Ganesh Dutt and his ilk were unhappy with such a state of affairs. But he felt helpless and could hardly do anything about it' (Pradhan 2018:178–179). Therefore, it doesn't come as a surprise when one of the greatest leaders of modern India, Dr. Anugraha Narayan Sinha, and who belonged to the Kshatriya Rajput caste and a close friend and collaborator of Dr. Shri Krishna Sinha since the days of the freedom struggle, records in his essay endearingly titled "Mere Shri Babu (My Shri Babu)", that "since 1921, the history of Bihar has been the history of the life of Shri Babu (Kumar 2013:164)". Dr. Shri Krishna Sinha belonged to a Trikarma/Ayachak/Babhan/Bhumihaar Brahmin of Kanyakubja Brahmin descent who had migrated from Sherpur in the region of Delhi in the medieval period (most likely around 12th-13th century CE) and settled in Maur in Sheikhpura, Monghyr and established their *mool/dih* (root) of Sheriar mool Brahmins in the Sherpur Mauja (settlement) of Monghyr (Singh 2001). Whether the hyperbole with which Dr. Anugraha Narayan Sinha assessed the role and significance of Dr. Shri Krishna Sinha in the history of modern Bihar is concerned, it would be the subject matter of another study, but what it certainly provides is a peek into the significance and role of Ayachak/Trikarma Brahmins in modern India. For the purposes of this work, it additionally shows how Brahmins migrated from the Kanyakubja geographical centre (see the discussion in section 2 below) in North India and spread culture, knowledge, and established settlements introducing new methods of agriculture, opened new means of commerce and trade routes apart from weaving and conceptualising the cultural, spiritual and Dharmic unity of India across centuries and millennia (Upadhyay 1979; Datta 1989; Ram S. Sharma 2006) and playing a crucial role in its spread upto Japan in the East (the Brahmin Buddhist philosopher Bodhisena was requested to be the the Philosopher in residence by the emperor of Japan some thirteen centuries ago taking Buddhism and Hindu gods to Japan; Behl 2019) and Central Asia, Caucasus, Arabia, central Europe upto Greece and Rome in the West (Chandra 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 1998; Dalrymple 2024).²²

²² It is also interesting to note how almost all of Buddha's main disciples were Brahmins and all the Buddhist logistians and philosophers from ancient times were born a Brahmin. It is also a European understanding of looking at Hinduism, or which was earlier referred by Europeans as Brahmanism, and Buddhism as separate as Catholicism and Protestantism and in conflict with each other. In the Indian philosophical tradition, Buddhism is one of the major Indian schools of atheistic philosophical tradition founded by Gautam Buddha as recorded by many Indian philosophers themselves, like Madhavacharya and so on, and

The Oinwara dynasty of Mithila in North Bihar were also Babhans (Diwakar 1959:528) or Pachchima Brahmins,²³ who are today referred to as Bhumihar Brahmins. Babhans or Bhumihar Brahmins of Oinwara root are also spread in some villages of this region in Bihar.²⁴ Therefore, it is quite likely the Babhans

Indian dharmic religions does not restrict multiple religious/philosophical affiliations, multiple forms of worship and respect for multiple philosophical ideas, discrediting any conflict between Hindus and Buddhists in history (Radhakrishnan 2008a, 2008b; Arvind Sharma 2012; Cowell & Gough 2015). Besides, all Ashokan inscriptions and rock edicts (the inscriptions of Mauryan Emperor Ashoka who is reputed to have taken to Buddhist philosophy), recommend respect for Brahmins and Sramanas (Buddhist monks, ascetics and philosophers are referred to as one), in that order, dispelling doubts of any kind of conflict. As with human societies, even with best “orders” established, there could be conflict; and in the philosophical world, for philosophy and knowledge to expand, there were and should certainly have been philosophical disputations between Brahmin and Buddhist philosophers (Nikam & McKeon 1959:31; Tieken 2023).

²³ On the emergence of social stratification in later Vedic society (1000 BCE – 600 BCE), there are copious references of Brahmins settling and bringing new technology of cultivation, including being excellent cultivators themselves. The name Pachchima Brahmins could have later Vedic roots, besides the new name or adjective of Bhumihar Brahmin, being a name developed from having land grants (*agrahar bhumi*) in perpetuity. This trend continued well into the early medieval times with a well-developed feudal system including subinfeudation (Ram S. Sharma 1980, 2005; Choudhary 1999:141–142, 145; Radhakrishnan 2015). Thankfully, another interesting fact of oral history is provided by Kailash Chandra Jha, co-author, friend and long-time collaborator with Walter Hauser, and who hails from Ranti village in Madhubani. He mentions how in his childhood Brahmins from Begusarai, Monghyr and Bhagalpur were referred to as Dakshinaha Babhans instead of Pachchima, probably because Madhubani borders Nepal and is the northernmost district of Bihar. I would like to thank him for bringing this fact to light in the email communication on Oct. 22, 2024.

²⁴ Oinwar, Onwar or Okinwar are root (*mool/dih*) of Bhumihar Brahmins listed out by B.B. Kumar in his nearly ‘encyclopaedic’ annexures in his work (Kumar 2016:290). It is also interesting to note how the later Khandavala Brahmin dynasty deliberately and consciously eliminated records of the previous Oinwara Brahmin dynasty. Therefore, it is quite likely that the earlier Oinwara Brahmin rulers were Pachchima Brahmins whereas the later Khandavala rulers were Srotiya Brahmins who fixed their identity with the *panjis*/genealogical records and the then emerging linguistic identity around *Avahatta*, which then became Maithili. Despite this separation they continued their marital relations. The descendants of Oinwara Brahmins who still reside in Mithila and have marital relations with other Maithil Brahmins are today counted as Maithil Brahmins (Jha 1969:144-150), even though the Khandavala dynasty tried to gradually eliminate their records, in order to validate their rule. This also explains the animosity and frequent conflicts of Darbhanga Raj with the Oinwara Brahmin/Babhan ruling family of Bettiah Raj.

Though Kailash Chandra Jha mentions from his field-work experience how he had heard that *panjis* were initially kept for all castes but the available records show it only for Brahmins and Kayasthas. I would like to thank him for bringing this fact to light in the email communication on Oct. 22, 2024. Though my personal view is because Brahmins and Karna Kayasthas of Mithila were the literate castes of North Bihar so they could maintain a written record of their genealogies in the form of *panji-prabandh* unlike other communities who would keep their record in the oral tradition. Though Mr. Jha has brought out for the first time in public domain how there are *panjis* available also for the Mahapatra/Kantaha Brahmins of North Bihar, who perform the last rituals, and for all practical purposes treated as “untouchables” by everyone, including the so-called lower castes (Singh 2024). Another interesting discussion with Mr. Jha was how Pachchima Brahmins and Rajputs had the resources and wherewithal,

or Brahmins of Mithila when they developed a language in the late middle ages and started keeping their genealogical records (*panjis*) evolved into the linguistic-cultural group of Maithil Brahmanas (Pandey 2014). The Bettiah Raj traces its origin from the Oinwara dynasty (1325-1527), which controlled all of North Bihar, including both Champaran and Darbhanga and had established the Simraon Raj in Mithila (Choubey 2011:1-65; Ansari 2019: 227). With the decline and ensuing chaos from 1527, when Nusrat Shah, the ruler of Bengal, attacked Mithila and killed Kansanarayana, the last Oinwara chief, North Bihar disintegrated into many small feudal principalities, but gradually the two prominent and biggest ones which emerged were Bettiah Raj, as descendants of the Oinwara dynasty and Darbhanga Raj under the Khandavala dynasty (Ansari 2019:227-228). Both these Brahmin dynasties were often at loggerheads with each other but both supported Brahmin scholars, musicians and a courtly culture emerged in Bettiah and Darbhanga which both boasted of Dhrupad singers, the oldest form of Indian classical music. The property of Bettiah Raj was very extensive and spread to different regions including Rajpore Sihoria, Betian, Motihari, Peeprah and Turkaulia alongwith possessing landed property in the districts of Muzaffarpur, Patna, Saran, Mirzapur, Allahabad, Basti, Gorakhpur, Faizabad and Varanasi (Choubey 2011:1-65; Ansari 2019:233).²⁵

No Brahmin sub-caste is older than the late middle ages or at any rate their regional identities started only after Harsha²⁶ and the Rashtrakutas (another Hindu dynasty), ‘The first evidence of a historical understanding about the origins of Brahmin communities appears in a text from the 12th century called the Sahyādrī Khaṇḍa. The Sahyādrī Khaṇḍa states that there are ten Brahmin communities dispersed across India. These ten communities are divided into two groups according to the geography of India. The northern group consists of the Sārasvata, Kānyakubja, Utkala, Maithila, and Gauḍa communities, while the southern groups consists of the Drāviḍa, Tailāṅga, Karnāṭa, Madhyadeśa,

and they could appoint *panjikars*, but chose not to, are themes which require separate research enquiry.

²⁵ Today the “decimated” Bettiah Raj’s property is valued at 8000 crore rupees (around 1 billion euros) with 15358 acres of land in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and which was first controlled by the British by setting up the Court of Wards since 1897 and now the current Government of Bihar is trying to “usurp” the property by excluding the claims of “rightful” Bhumihaar Brahmin descendants of Bettiah Raj through the Bettiah Raj Properties Bill 2024. The court of wards was another legal device developed by the British to disinherit Indian ruling families of their inheritances in order to augment their revenue and exacerbate further exploitation of tenants and peasants in the name of the estate, which for all practical purposes was the British Indian Government. Thus, the British could generate more revenue for themselves without taking the blame for further depredation of the masses. (Yang 1979; Tewary 2024; Dev Raj 2024)

²⁶ Kanauj dynasty, with epigraphical records showing massive land grants to Brahmins, precursor to the emergence of Kanyakubja Brahmins and its five sub-divisions of Sayupareen, Shanadhya Bhumihaar, Jijhoutia, and Kanyakubja proper (Ram S. Sharma 2006; Saraswati 2003a:515-519; Shukla 2022:246-254).

and Gurjara communities (Pandey 2014:4).’ Therefore, from the 12th century onwards, geographical divisions with differentiated polity coalesced with the development of different regional languages to create ten big geographical divisions among Brahmins of the Indian sub-continent who further developed many divisions and sub-divisions among themselves based on professions, scholarship, rituals and so on. And Maithili as a language developed much later from fifteenth-sixteenth century onwards – the first major Maithili poet and writer was Vidyapati Thakur who wrote in the earlier form of Maithili: Avahatta or Desil Baina (R.P. Sharma 2016, M.K. Jha 2017, P. Jha 2018, Kosambi 2009:189-211) which along with the genealogical records called *panji-prabandh* gave a distinct ethnic identity to Maithil Brahmins based on language, genealogy, culture and relative political stability since fourteenth century (Pandey 2014).

Therefore, Brahmins living in North Bihar before the 14th-15th century cannot be referred to as Maithil Brahmins. The distinct cultural identity of Brahmins living in what constitutes Mithila in North Bihar came to be particularly called as Maithil Brahmins only from the 16th century onwards, in the post-Vidyapati period, when Maithili as a language was emerging. Additionally, the region of North Bihar which is popularly named as Mithila today was referred to as Tirabhukti, Tirhut or Videha in the pre-medieval times (Jha, J.C. 1991:1-5). Thus, imputing an ancient history to a specific group/sub-group/jati/caste/sub-caste of Brahmins, including those who are called Maithil Brahmins today, is an act of myth-making. There were just Brahmins before the middle ages and not different smaller well-defined groups/sub-groups/jatis/castes/sub-castes of Brahmins. Upendra Thakur writes, “[...] there was no “Maithila” Brāhmaṇa in Mithilā prior to the consolidation of the Pañjī: they were simply Brāhmaṇas who came to be known as ‘Maithila Brāhmaṇa’ only after the Pañjī system was fully enforced [...] (Thakur 1988:396)”.²⁷

It is also interesting to note how in Bihar, as a significant portion of the middle Gangetic plain, maximum landed estates were owned and run by the *tri-karma/Ayachak* Brahmins popularly called Babhans/Pachchima/Bhumihar Brahmins which included Bettiah, Hathwa, Madhuban, Sheohar, Sursand, Tekari, Amawan, Deo, Maksudpur, Majhwa, Parsa, Chainpur, Dharhara, Budhauli, Bodh Gaya among a host of others in addition to the largest *zamindari* in Bihar, Darbhanga Raj, owned by Maithil Brahmins apart from Banaili and Srinagar estates owned by Maithils (Shukla 1996:509) who were both martially related with Babhans/Pachchima/Bhumihar Brahmins (Appendix I). It is also worth noting how the first work on the history of Tirhut/Mithila or North Bihar in the English language, titled “*History of Tirhut from the Earliest Times*

²⁷ Thakur takes the emergence of the distinct identity of Maithil Brahmins to 13th century which is not tenable (Thakur 1988:376-377), although the general tenor of his argument of all Brahmins being just Brahmins before the emergence of Panjis is correct.

to the End of the Nineteenth Century” has been written by Mr. Shyam Narayan Singh (1883-1948; MBE, Member of the Order of British empire; OBE, Officer of the Order of British Empire), B.A. from Patna College, member of the Bengal Civil Service since 1906 and with the Bihar and Orissa Civil Service from 1912, who was born in Ahiyapur, Aurangabad and was related to the Babhans/Bhumihar Brahmins ruling family of Tekari Raj of Gaya (Jha 2017:270). The book was published by the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta in 1922 and has been reprinted by the Maharajadhiraja Kameshwar Singh Kalyani Foundation, named after the last king and queen of Darbhanga Raj, led by Hetukar Jha in 2012 (Singh 2012). Rajputs, as the quintessential Kshatriya community, were the next biggest landowners in Bihar (Shukla 1996:509).

What is interesting is how there is a professional division of labour among Brahmins inter-se, with those owning land and even becoming kings, *zamin-dars* and landed magnates to support their priestly brethrens as a matter of duty to *Dharma*, and later *Hindu Dharma*. Many of the *Mahanths*/Hindu monasteries with rent-free ownership of vast tracts of land and immense spiritual and social prestige like Bodh Gaya and Bhudhauili have been hereditarily run by Bhumihar Brahmin ascetics (Shukla 1996:509). And there was a free-flowing transformation of *tri-karma*/*Ayachak* into *shat-karma*/*Yachak* and from *shat-karma*/*Yachak* into *tri-karma*/*Ayachak* Brahmins with connubial and commensal ties with each other, keeping their societal constitutionalism and the inner systemic rationality of their social unity intact over the ages. One can draw parallels to the distinction between *tri-karma*/*Ayachak* Chitpavan Brahmins, who were initially land-owning Brahmins in the Ratnagiri hills and also migratory Brahmins in the late medieval and early-modern period to the rest of Maharashtra and also the rest of the sub-continent with the taking up of Peshwa leadership; and the *shat-karma*/*Yachak* Deshastha Brahmins, among Maharashtrian Brahmins (Patterson 1970). The Chitpavan Brahmins are *tri-karma*/*Ayachak* Brahmins and as land-owning Brahmins were political, military, administrative and financial leaders in addition to being profound Sanskrit scholars and with their rule as Peshvas who were drawn from them, the distinction between the two main Maharashtrian Brahmins disappeared; where in the field of scholarship, indeed Sanskrit scholarship, the *tri-karma*/*Ayachak* Chitpavan Brahmins might have outperformed the *shat-karma*/*Yachak* and more priestly Deshastha Brahmins (Patterson 1970; Deshpande 2015). Since colonial times, much stress has been paid on how an ideal Brahmin’s engagement was only with the text and *shastras*, but Brahmins have followed successfully a diverse range of occupations across centuries and millennia. It was a clever colonial device to make the “intellectual class” of Brahmins accept and internalise colonial subjecthood and become docile, passive observers of British colonial pilferage and destruction of India (Metcalf 1995). But historical

evidence, genealogies, personal histories, epigraphical records, manuscripts, legends, tales and oral narratives attests otherwise.

Brahmins have been excellent agriculturalists and military leaders across time and space (Pinch 2006). Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes, “The Brahmin has in him the possibilities of a warrior. The *ṛṣis* of old were agriculturists and sometimes warriors too (Radhakrishnan 2015:81)”. Agriculture is an acceptable and respectable profession of self-preservation, advancement and feudal aristocracy for Brahmins, though they eschewed ploughing themselves, attested to in *Dharmasastra* literature, epigraphic records and land grant inscriptions, and also in medieval texts like in Kavishekharacharya Jyotirishwar Thakur’s *Varna-Ratnakara*, among other sources (Sharma 1980 (1965); Jha 1999:77-94; Jha 2001:193-201; Jha 2023). While writing on the nature of later-Vedic social stratification, B.K. Choudhary writes, “The desire of the *brāhmaṇa* to gain land as a sacrificial fee would suggest that the *brāhmaṇas* owned and cultivated land. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* reveals that the *brāhmaṇas* were skilful cultivators. [...] The legend regarding the migration of *Videghas*, recorded in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, shows that the *brāhmaṇas* played a leading role in settling new lands. The text states that the land east to the *Sadanīrā* (modern Gandak in North Bihar) was marshy and uncultivable before the *brāhmaṇas* settled and made it fully cultivable (Choudhary 1999:141–142, 145).”

Much of the leadership and revolt against colonial subjugation of India was initially and overwhelmingly challenged by Brahmin ascetics and leaders, the most notable being nearly a hundred years *sanyasi rebellion* against British colonial rule on which there is still a dearth of literature or a comprehensive account; the role played by Brahmin and also Rajput soldiers and leaders in the War of Indian Independence in 1857; besides the overwhelming and pioneering role of Brahmins in Anushilan Samiti, Jugantar Party, Hindustan Republican Army or Hindustan Socialist Republican Army as cadres and leaders striving for an armed overthrow of British rule in India show a continued militaristic tradition running simultaneously with shastric and classical learning among Brahmins. Even a perceptive reader of Indian history and a profound scholar of Sanskrit, Prof. Michael Witzel also commits this error when he expresses surprise on the military leadership of Brahmins mentioned by none other than Kalhaṇa in his *Rajatarangini*, when he writes, “Brahmins even joined the army quite frequently, which might surprise in other areas of India. For example, Rakka, a Brahmin living in the house of a local feudatory, was a mere foot soldier but was made chief minister (*mukhyamantri*) because of his valor (5.424-5). Bhujaṅga, son of the Brahmin Samanta, was a commander in Saṅgrāmarāja’s army (7.91). Caṇpaka, Kalhaṇa’s father, was commander of forts under King Harṣa (7.1177). Ajaka, a Brahmin minister of Salhaṇa, died in battle; the Brahmin soldiers Lavarāja and Yaśorāja found their end in the same way (Witzel 1991:54).” On this note, the reference to Babhans/Pachchima/Bhumihar

Brahmins as “military Brahmins” by Francis Buchanan is worth mentioning (Buchanan 1939), and Walter Hauser adds, “It is useful to note that Bhumihaar Brahmins are also called Sainik, or military Brahmins, much as Sahajanand indicates was the case for Jujhautiya Brahmins (Hauser and Jha 2015:26).” It should be added here on how among Kanyakubja Brahmins; court, military service [attributing spirituality with no loss of social status as Brahmins (Bayly 2005:74)] and also trade are mentioned as prestigious jobs by genealogists and old informants (Khare 1970:4n.2). Therefore, Kanyakubja Brahmins are as much “military Brahmins” as their fellow Babhan/Bhumihaar Brahmins making it an additional reason for extensive marriage relations they share with each other (See Appendix III below).

Through the social practice of marriage relations among different Brahmin groups, an additional purpose of this article is to further discredit the colonial caste censuses which could not structure the ordering of Indian society since 1860s until 1931 when it held the last census (Samarendra, 2008, 2011). The categories and names and ordering of caste-communities (for the lack of a better form of expression in the English language) remained unorganized both horizontally as well as vertically (Samarendra, 2008, 2011). Caste-communities were upgraded or downgraded according to politics, convenience and pandering, casting a doubt on the whole exercise as an unscientific project in the first place (Samarendra, 2008, 2011). Colonial caste censuses could never define satisfactorily the terms used to explain Indian social reality like “caste” or “jati” or the classical term “varna” and which term/s satisfactorily and adequately represented Indian lived reality, of text and practice, remained indecisive (Béteille 1966, 1996; Srinivas 2002a; Samarendra, 2008, 2011).²⁸ Coming to the exact social group of “Brahmins”, which is the subject matter of this study, even though it is the highest in the classical social order, its comprehensive history throughout the sub-continent still eludes us, making its ordering of social relations in different regions as one of the methods of recording its social register, to which end this article is a contribution (Witzel 1993). The different Brahmin sub-castes which emerged in the early-medieval period base their individual histories on the works of community-scholars whose works are

²⁸ Varna is the four-fold distinction and differentiation of Indian society since Vedic literature, viz., Brahman/Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Sometimes a fifth is added which is outside the pale of four-varnas. Jati is a much more realistic and lived social fact, where there are thousands of social communities with their own sub-systemic rationality of self-ordering, including regulating the rules of commensality and connubiality. But “jati” itself can take on plural meanings based on the context. Then came the Portuguese in sixteenth century who could predictably not understand Indian society and they named it *cashta* which over time became “caste”. Much like European religion/s and sects with fixed defined social borders, affiliation, dogmas and theology; the British colonial administration tried to define and order Indian society including what they termed as “caste”, law, religion/s, land laws, and so on, based on their own cultural formulations, which has a protracted legacy, and continued misunderstandings, if not complete mischaracterization.

mostly mythical and less historical-sociological or they are again an exercise of textual scholarship and less so the lived reality of people (Hauser and Jha 2015:162-163, 167-171). In the early-medieval period when geographical distinctions and linguistic distinctions were still being formed individual origin-stories of different “castes” and “sub-castes” emulated the ancient format when gods/goddesses readily and regularly intervened in the affairs of humans and provide us with a wealth of stories and legends which are a complex mix of facts, fiction, legend, myth and so on.²⁹ In Brahmin sub-caste origin stories, myth, textual/scriptural/legal Dharmasastra references and social fact, keep merging and diverging at various points. In this respect, “Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar” is a “modern” notable exception as it does not just deal with classical texts and textual exegesis but pans out actual social fact based on field-work over a large geographical region collected over several years of hard work in the early twentieth century. In writing “Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar”, Sahajanand does not just provide theoretical concepts and constructs of “what is a Brahmin” and “who constitutes a Brahmin” but also backs it up with social and historical realities. Therefore, this work is also the work of an “Indian social theorist” developing his social theoretical formulations on “Indian” ideas based on “Indian lived social and historical realities” and not based on some western theorist defining perhaps the “oldest and continuous intellectual community of Brahmins in the world (supposedly ordering a conceptual-theoretical hierarchy *non-pareil*; Dumont 1998)” for themselves.

²⁹ Among the „modern“ western thinkers, Carl Gustav Jung has emphasized how myth helps to keep our sanity and human feelings, and it was the “loss of myth” as one of the possible reasons for the World War and wanton and indiscriminate killings of civilians for no end to be achieved (Jung 1989).

