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Re-Examining Sanskritization: Toward an Alternative Interpretation

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Abstract:

The paper re-examines the concept of Sanskritization; a concept which is one of the most widely influential contributions to the understanding of Indian society and culture. While acknowledging the significance of the mobility aspect of the concept; it tries to bring to the fore a very significant aspect of the concept which has not been given due recognition in the discourse on Sanskritization. Instead of comprehending Sanskritization solely as a phenomenon of social mobility within the Hindu caste system, the paper also analyses Sanskritization from a lesser discussed, though important aspect of the concept: the unification of the Hindu society through the spread of Sanskritic Hindu culture. In other words, Sanskritization is a multi-faceted concept of which social mobility is but one aspect.

Keywords: *Sanskritization, social mobility, unification etc.*

1. Introduction

The concept of Sanskritization was conceptualized by M.N. Srinivas, whose intellect was influenced by influential thinkers such as G.S. Ghurye, Radcliffe-Brown, E.E. Evans-Pritchard etc. Very often, Srinivas' concept is perceived as related only to social mobility within the Hindu caste system, the system that is so integral to Hinduism. Such a perception perhaps, is the result of the significance attached to the association of the concept with the mobility aspect in sociological and social anthropological writings. This concept of Srinivas was proclaimed in his classic, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* published in 1952. It was among the Coorgs whom Srinivas discovered that lower castes had the tendency to rise up in the hierarchical caste ladder and in their attempt to do so, they tended to imitate religious culture, dietary habits etc. of the higher caste (in this case the Brahmins) and discarded those elements of their own customs which were considered as impure by the high caste. And consequently, within a generation or so they could claim higher positions in the hierarchy of castes. To denote this process of mobility Srinivas initially used the term 'Brahmanisation' as Brahmins were imitated in the context of the Coorgs. Later on, he replaced it by Sanskritization to include imitation of not only the Brahmins but also the other twice-born castes by the lower castes. However, Srinivas did not confine his concept to the mobility. Interestingly, the other aspect which he introduced in his Coorg work was the wider aspect of the concept of Sanskritization that explained the unification of the Hindu society through the spread of Sanskritic culture: the Hindu religious culture which came to be shared commonly by Hindus regardless of their regional variations, which connected Hindus with each other. More interesting is the fact that the exploration of this aspect which has hitherto been neglected in understanding Srinivas' multi-faceted concept would provide a new interpretation of the concept which gives equal significance to both the aspects. This would manifest not only the continued relevance of the concept but also the very simple fact that the concept is multi-dimensional, of which social mobility is but one aspect.

2. Unfolding the Concept and the Context

The etymology of M. N. Srinivas' concept was derived from the Sanskrit language and not from Sanskriti (culture). He noted that because Sanskrit was the language of these highest groups, by which he meant the Brahmins (italics mine), this cultural propagation is here called "Sanskritization" (Srinivas 1962: 153). In other words, he places Brahmins at the centre stage as the carrier of the process of Sanskritization (cultural propagation) as they speak Sanskrit language. It is important to note here that the term Sanskritization was also used by eminent linguist and historian Suniti Kumar Chatterji during the same time; a fact which Srinivas himself noted (Srinivas 2002: 221). For Chatterji, the concept signified an interactive process taken place between the Brahmanical and other cultures which eventually led to the creation of a common Sanskritic culture. "It was never a matter of an already formed dominant culture borne by Brahmins and supplanting others" (Chatterji 1950).

M. N. Srinivas' concept was developed while studying the religion, culture and society of the Coorgs of Coorg in South India which is currently located geo-politically in Karnataka state of India. To begin with, Coorgs were the dominant patrilineal society in Coorg which was ruled by the Kannadiga Rajas for two centuries until the British annexed the beautiful region in 1834. The Rajas followed Lingayatism¹, a sect developed in the Kannada country in the 12th century which exclusively worshipped Shiva. The religion and culture of these Rajas impacted on the religion, culture and society of the Coorgs who formed an aristocracy under the Rajas. Srinivas

observed how even Coorgs folksongs and their religious life revolved around the worship of the Lord Shiva. They also used markers of being a Shiva devotee like in other parts of India such as adorning three horizontal stripes of sacred ashes on their foreheads. Moreover, this spread of the culture and religion of the Lingayat Rajas was facilitated by the close contact between the two groups which also occasionally witnessed affinal ties between these groups. In other words, the impact of the Rajas hugely enhanced the significance of Kannada culture in Coorg among the Coorgs even at the expense of Malayalam.

Situating in the traditional hierarchical scheme, the Coorgs were categorized into two groups²: the majority group that considered as Kshatriyas and a tiny group that considered themselves as Brahmins. The attributes of the larger group of the Coorgs and their religious culture provided interesting yet contradictory aspects in their claim for Kshatriya status. Srinivas observed that in addition to their economic and political power, on the one hand, Coorgs also had the warrior qualities and strength; while on the other, neither did they perform rituals nor did they recite Vedic mantras in the life-cycle events. Srinivas also observed that while Coorgs had attributes which resembled the Kshatriya caste; their non-performance of rituals and non-recitation of Vedic mantras simultaneously questioned their claim of the Kshatriya status. Moreover, in their dietary practices, while on the one hand, they objected beef-eating; while on the other, pork eating and alcoholism were practiced. Such dietary habits ideologically opposed Coorgs' claim of being Kshatriyas as there is still strict observation of diet as per one's status in the interior of South India. Such inconsistencies were, however reconciled in the Kaveri Myth³, their myth of origin.

The tiny group within the Coorg society was known as Amma Coorgs or Amma Kodagas. This group practiced a highly Brahmanised way of life within the larger Coorg society which include: endogamy, vegetarianism, teetotalism, wearing of sacred thread, Brahmanised customs and rituals, etc. Amma Coorgs had their own myth of origin⁴ different from the one belonged to the Kshatriya Coorgs.

The patrilineal society of Coorgs thus, classified itself into Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. The impact of Brahmanical way of life and the religious culture of the Kannadiga Rajas on the Coorgs lifestyle had been of huge significance which was manifested very clearly in the Coorgs' considering of themselves as belonging to the two highest varna in the traditional hierarchical scheme. However, Srinivas was more concerned about the case of the tiny group of the Amma Coorgs in describing the social mobility aspect of Sanskritization probably because their case represented a more successful case of Sanskritization than the larger group.

3. Sanskritization and the Social Mobility Aspect

The association of the concept of Sanskritization with social mobility by M.N. Srinivas introduces a fresh lens of understanding the caste system from the mobility aspect; new in the analysis of caste and hitherto unrecognized by the analysts of caste. Caste is the stratification system of the Hindu society, adorned with great complexity and rigidity. On the hierarchical scale of the caste system, Brahmins are placed at the top followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and finally untouchables. Each caste is traditionally entitled to practice particular occupation and a particular way of life consisting of dress, diet, customs, rituals, manners, jewellery, housing pattern etc. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are again categorized as 'twice-born' castes as are entitled to study the Vedas, perform Vedic rituals, undergo the Upanayana ceremony which is considered as spiritual rebirth etc.

Srinivas clarifies that treating Caste based on this fivefold hierarchy is a theoretical framework of All-India application and caste in this sense is referred to as Varna which is different from the real unit of caste system: the Jatis (Srinivas 1952:24). A Jati is a very small local endogamous group that practices a traditional occupation and also enjoys certain amount of cultural, ritual and juridical autonomy. This Varna system gives a framework where the various Jatis can be fitted. Srinivas also notes the difficulties in arranging these Jatis within the framework due to the great confusion in the middle regions of the Varna system, except the Brahmins who are at the top and the untouchables who are always at the bottom.

To put it in a nutshell, hierarchy is the core of the Hindu caste system where the hierarchical scheme on which the castes are hierarchized also serve as the same basis on which the corresponding particular way of life consisting of occupation, dietary habits, customs, rituals etc. observed by the various castes are all ranked. Therefore, the occupation and lifestyle of the Brahmins is therefore, considered as the most superior, most privileged and respected followed by the four groups in the same hierarchical scheme. Since the religious culture of castes higher than one's own are designated as symbols of superior status with the corresponding respect and privilege attached; castes down the ladder are motivated to imitate the religious culture higher than their own in a quest to achieve a status higher than the ones which are traditionally ascribed to them.

Therefore, on the one hand, there is the discrepancy between the Varna aspect and its Jati aspect leading to the existence of confused castes within middle regions of the system itself. On the other hand, there is the tendency to imitate religious culture of castes higher than their own. It is at this juncture that Srinivas develops his concept of Sanskritization to understand the nuances prevalent in the caste system by introducing the social mobility aspect within the system which has hitherto been designated as one of the most rigid systems of stratification. In other words, the tendency to imitate the way of life of higher castes by the various castes in the middle regions of the caste system whose positions are not clear like the positions of the topmost Brahmins and the bottommost untouchables become the breeding ground for the birth of Srinivas' concept of Sanskritization.

3.1. Sanskritization Defined

"The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called Sanskritization in this book, in preference to

Brahmanisation, as certain Vedic rites are confined to Brahmins and the two other twice-born castes” (Srinivas 1952: 30/31). Although, the non-twice-born castes were prohibited from following the customs and rites of the Brahmins, the existence of such a prohibition did not prevent the Sanskritization of the customs and rites of the lower castes.

This movement of the various castes in the middle regions of the caste system, however, does not impact on the structure of the system since it results only in positional changes of the concerned caste. “That is, while individual castes moved up or down, the structure remained the same” (Srinivas 1966: 29).

3.2. *Coorgs and Their Style of Sanskritization*

Srinivas viewed that the claim of the Amma Coorgs, the highly Brahmanised section of Coorgs as Brahmins within the larger Coorg society and practicing a religious culture almost similar to the Brahmins exemplified a general tendency prevalent in the caste system: the tendency to depart from the parent body, Sanskritize their religious culture and way of life and achieved a higher status than the parent body in the course of a few decades. Unlike the rest of larger Coorg society, Amma Coorgs followed certain Brahmanical dietary habits such as vegetarianism, teetotalism; their offerings to ancestors also did not include curried meat and liquor. On the contrary, they followed an offering similar to the Brahmins and other high castes all over India: offering of balls of rice to ancestors on a particular day annually which resembled the high castes’ annual propitiation of ancestors with purely vegetarian offerings with Sanskrit mantras. This formation of a small section within the larger Coorg society itself manifested the high degree of influence of Brahmins on Coorgs.

Therefore, the case of the Amma Coorgs explicated the context in which the concept of Sanskritization was developed to understand the nuances prevalent in the Hindu caste system and the tendency among castes in the middle regions to rise up in the ladder by imitating the ones higher than their own. However, Srinivas realized that this case of the Amma Coorgs was only a special case occurred in a particular context which represented this general tendency among lower castes to imitate the higher ones. In other words, Brahmins were not always the one imitated by lower castes. He found that in various other regional contexts, the higher castes who were imitated by the lower castes were also either Kshatriyas or Vaishyas.

Since, Brahmins were not the sole high caste imitated by lower castes within the Hindu caste system, Srinivas preferred to use the term Sanskritization in place of Brahmanisation, the former subsuming the latter. He clarified that the use of the term Brahmanisation to explicate this tendency would demand more specificity regarding classification of the particular Brahmin group and particular period of recorded history where the case took place.

Since, the term Sanskritization broadened its parameters and incorporated the cases where lower castes also imitated other higher castes such as Kshatriyas or Vaishyas and not always the Brahmins; a very important element developed which added to the analysis of the term: the dominant caste.

3.3. *Significance of Dominant Caste in the Social Mobility Aspect of Sanskritization*

The concept of ‘Dominant caste’ is very important in the analysis of the social mobility aspect of Sanskritization and it helps in broadening the landscape of analysis of Sanskritization. In his later writings, Srinivas gives significance of the dominant caste in understanding the Sanskritization process occurring in various regional contexts in the country. Srinivas stated that “for a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizeable amount of the arable land locally available, have strength of numbers and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy. When a caste has all the attributes of dominance, it may be said to enjoy decisive dominance” (Srinivas 1966: 10). He wrote that “in the study of Sanskritization in a region, it is needed to know the caste which dominates in that region. Thus, if the locally dominant caste is Brahmin or Lingayat, it will tend to transmit a Brahminical model of Sanskritization, whereas if it is Rajput or Bania, it will transmit Kshatriya or Vaishya models”. (ibid: 13) Srinivas clarified that not only the kingly model but also the other models were mediated by the locally dominant caste, and the concept of ‘dominant caste’ supplements in some ways the process of Sanskritization (ibid: 7).

Therefore, in the Sanskritization process occurring in a particular regional context, the higher caste which was dominant in that particular region became the model for imitation by the lower castes and since Brahmins were not always the dominant caste in every region, they were not always the only high caste imitated by the lower ones. The incorporation of the concept of dominant caste in the analysis of the Sanskritization process thus, led to the exploration of various models of the same process.

3.4. *Models of Sanskritization*

a) The Brahminical model, the most valued model: Although there were other models of Sanskritization other than the Brahminical model, the latter model was considered as the most valued model since the highest ritual and social rank given to the Brahmins by the caste system always placed them at the most superior level all over India, even in those places where they were not dominant. Social and ritual superiority of the Brahmins are omnipresent and therefore, other groups have implicitly conceded the superiority of the Brahminical model to the other models. Among the “twice-born” Varnas the Brahmins are the most particular about the performance of these rites, and they may therefore be regarded as “better” models of Sanskritization than the other. (Srinivas 1966: 8)

b) The Kshatriya model—the most popular: The Kshatriya varna of the Hindu caste system had been the most open and accommodating which had incorporated people from all groups who had achieved political power. Very interestingly, Srinivas (1989: 63) noted that to legalize this power into authority, the process of Sanskritization became important and so also the role of the Brahmins. In other words, whatever the origin of a person, when he had acquired political power enough to become a chief or king to exercise his power, certain basic repercussions happened to support his newly acquired status: creating a myth of origin linking him to a well known Kshatriya genealogy; adopting a religious culture and way of life based on the classical Kshatriya style etc. To legalize,

support and proclaim his newly acquired status by performing basic Vedic rites in Sanskrit the new king required the support of the Brahmans. Panikkar (1955: 8) strongly argues that the “Nandas were the last true Kshatriyas in India (fifth century B.C.), and since then all the so-called Kshatriyas have come into being by usurpation of power by the lower castes and consequently the Kshatriya role and social position”.

In addition to these two models, Srinivas also acknowledged the existence of other models of Sanskritization in regions where Brahmans and Kshatriyas were not the dominant although these models were not as influential as the above models since other high castes also followed the Brahmanical model in terms of diet, ritual and certain important religious ideas.

3.5 Sources of Social Mobility

Such movements of castes in the middle rung within the apparently strict caste system were led by many political and economic factors. Srinivas talked about factors such as ‘fluidity of political system in pre-British India’ where it was possible, though not easy, for a person, be it a soldier or an officer or head of the local dominant caste to acquire political power and become a chief or king; ‘the static demographic situation and open agrarian system of medieval India’ which resulted in the availability of usable marginal land.

3.6. Important Steps in the Social Mobility Aspect of Sanskritization

Srinivas however cautioned that simply having the sources of social mobility did not automatically result in the achievement of a higher status for a group. There were certain things which the concerned caste must perform which include:

- a) Putting forward a claim as belonging to a high caste, be it Brahman or Kshatriya or Vaishya.
- b) Imitating the lifestyle and religious culture of the high caste whose status they are claiming by altering their dietary habits, way of life, etc. and also creating a new myth of origin to explain any inconsistencies between what they are claiming and what they are doing.
- c) Waiting for an indefinite period of time, generally for a generation or two until their claim is finally accepted, generally, in their children and grandchildren time.

Even after engaging on these efforts to rise up in the hierarchical ladder and waiting for a long time, there were cases which remained unaccepted.

3.7. Srinivas’ Changing Definition of Sanskritization

M. N. Srinivas has been modifying his definition as well as the parameters of the concept of Sanskritization in the course of his intellectual writing. Yogendra Singh, in his work, *Modernisation of Indian Tradition* (1986), observes that such difficulty in defining the exact nature of Sanskritization lies in the process of cultural interaction which has always existed in India between Sanskrit and what Srinivas calls the non- Sanskritic (those of the lower castes) which Singh calls the orthogenetic traditions (includes both lower castes and tribes).

In the initial pages of his classic, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, he defines Sanskritization as confined to the Hindu caste system. Later, Srinivas re-defines Sanskritisation as “a process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, frequently, ‘twice-born’ castes (Srinivas 1966: 6). Thus, from limiting to the Brahmans as a reference group and the imitation of their rituals and religious practices, the concept by now begins to incorporate new dimensions.

The changing definition of the concept indeed tries to bring many interesting dimensions within the parameters of the concept, making it broader and wider exemplified by the interpretations like the one contributed by Yogendra Singh. However, this does not seal the task of broadening the boundaries of the concept. In fact, a re-examination of the classic work of Srinivas itself contributes a much wider perspective which has not been given due recognition although Srinivas devoted extensively on that domain as well. It is in this context that the neglected though very significant aspect of the concept of Sanskritization needs to be explored to manifest that social mobility within the caste is but one aspect of Sanskritization and that, it is not synonymous with the concept as a whole.

4. The Wider Unifying Aspect

In addition to the social mobility aspect, the concept of Sanskritization also attempts to explain the propagation of Sanskrit Hinduism by the Brahmans who treasure Sanskrit as their language. Sanskrit Hinduism, according to Srinivas, is ‘Hinduism which transcends the provincial barriers and is common to the whole of India’. It is the common Hindu religious culture practiced by the Hindus. Therefore, by inextricably linking the concept with religion, or precisely, Sanskrit Hinduism and its religious culture; Srinivas tries to explain the integration of the wider society brought about by the spread of Sanskrit Hinduism’.

With this notion of Hinduism, Srinivas tries to sieve the common religious culture of the Hindus out of the diverse ways of practicing Hinduism by the Hindus due to their regional variations in order to construct an All-India entity. He tries to construct a pan-Indian perspective which enables the connections of various Hindu communities to one another, making these communities as parts of the whole; those communities practicing diverse Hindu religious culture painted by their geo-political, regional locations. In other words, with this fascinating aspect, he tries to connect the Coorgs with Hindus elsewhere. Such an attempt clearly indicates the theoretical framework which Srinivas deployed in this work—the structural functional framework, the need of that historical juncture when the country got Independence and was embarking on the project of ‘integration’.

This integrating aspect has been elucidated by Srinivas very explicitly and more elaborately than the mobility aspect in his *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1952) itself, though unfortunately it has not given much attention. This aspect is seen throughout this work, with which he tries to connect the Coorgs with other Hindus residing in other diverse parts of the country in

order to construct a common Hindu religious culture under the banner, 'Sanskritic Hinduism'. In short, this aspect serves as a connecting thread of Hindus all over India, taking the Coorg as a special case. This aspect itself widens the apparently limited scope of the concept which has been wrongly considered as a synonym of 'social mobility within the Hindu caste system'. This exploration of the wider aspect is an attempt to show that the concept is not uni-dimensional, while accepting the significance given to the social mobility aspect by both Srinivas and the various interpreters who interpreted the concept.

To unearth this wider aspect, a return to the classic where the concept was born, Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, becomes a necessity. The various instances which manifest Srinivas' effort and attempt to construct Sanskritic Hinduism or All-India Hinduism, which is the basis of this aspect are indeed fascinating. He provides numerous accounts practiced by Coorgs which are followed by Hindus all over India, regardless of their contextual locations. Some of the important fronts which form parts of the various accounts of Sanskritic Hinduism given by Srinivas include:

- a). River worship: This form of worship which holds a significant feature of Sanskritic Hinduism is also found among the Coorgs who worship the Kaveri river which is regarded as a sacred river by all Hindus.
- b). Hindu mythology: The various Hindu Puranas serve as the medium to locate various local communities within the vast landscape of Hindu mythology. To exemplify this, the Coorgs have the Kaveri Purana. Moreover, the two great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata also play an important part in the spread of Hinduism such as the myth of 'Bhima's Pebble', 'the Brahma's dilemma' etc., of the Coorgs, connecting them to these epics.
- c) Sanskritic theological ideas: The core theological ideas which have great impact on the religious life of the Coorgs include the notion of Karma and dharma, heaven and hell, notion of moksha or salvation etc. They believe that after death, a bad man goes to hell (naraka), and a good man to heaven (swarga) and a man is continually reborn till he attains salvation (moksha).
- d). Sacred direction: The Coorgs also believed in sacred directions of the Hindus; treating the eastern direction associated with the Sun-God as a good-sacred direction while the southern direction associated with Yama as the bad-sacred direction.
- e). Mourning related restrictions: Like other Hindus, the Coorgs also follow certain restrictions when death occurs in a family: shaving of heads of the chief male members; dietary habits which do not include meat, alcohol and other things; not attending auspicious ceremonies like weddings and auspicious places like temples etc. They perform certain rituals during this period and this mourning period ends at a pilgrimage centre, which are parts of Hindu custom.
- f). Birth related pollution and purity: Like the Hindus, when a child is born, the entire Coorg family gets polluted for a specific period of time. The mother attains partial purity after a bath on the 12th day, which allows her to enter the central hall and the kitchen and complete purity on the sixtieth day with the 'aruvud' ceremony.
- g) Holy Bath: The idea that bathing in a sacred river not only purifies but also removes the sins of the bather is shared by Hindus all over India, and Srinivas claims that when a Coorg bathes in the Kaveri, also called Dakshina Ganga, which is revered by Hindus all over South India, he participates in a ritual idiom that spreads all over India.
- h) Marriage: The significance attached to enter into the institution of marriage by an adult Hindu, performance of various rites by husband and wife, the subservience of the wife in conjugal bond etc. are also found among the Coorgs.
- i). Vegetarianism during festivals: Although Coorgs offer non-vegetarian dishes and liquor to their ancestors and during worship of village deities; they strictly follow vegetarianism and offer purely vegetarian dishes during celebration of calendar festivals. This is the tradition in the entire South India and also an idea intrinsic to Sanskritic Hinduism.

The idea of All-India Hinduism, thus, attempts to integrate Hindus in Coorg with Hindus in other parts of India and also gives certain common values to all Hindus, thereby knitting the Hindus together into a community. Moreover, Srinivas argued that reformists sects like the Jains and Lingayats ended by becoming castes which resulted in walls being built around them, while at the same time, they remained within the fold of Hinduism (ibid: 213).

4.1. Srinivas' Carving of the Wider Aspect of Sanskritization

Srinivas writes, "Sanskritization provided a traditional idiom for the expression of such mobility... this is not to say, however, that sanskritisation always had a mobility aspect (Srinivas 1989: 144). He argues that although the process of Sanskritization generally explains upward mobility for lower castes, but mobility may occur without Sanskritization and vice-versa. In other words, Sanskritization and social mobility do not necessarily have to go together. Moreover, Srinivas also looked at the concept as consisting of multi-faceted cultural process only a part of which has structural relevance.

In his work entitled, *The Cohesive role of Sanskritisation and other essays*, he further broadened the domain of the concept earlier confined to Hindu fold. By now, he stressed the concept as occurring not only in the remote and forested regions of the country, but also in neighboring countries of Ceylon, Indonesia, Tibet etc., impacting both those who were within the Hindu fold and also others outside it. This wider aspect of cultural propagation of the concept was in similar lines with the perspective of S. K. Chatterji who argued about the significance of the affected people and the way they modified the Sanskritic culture which they were adopting by adding some of their own.

4.2. Sanskritization—Two Way Process

Srinivas viewed that Sanskritic Hinduism was spread in two very interesting ways: one which was spread by extension, of Sanskritic deities and rituals to an outlying group which resulted in assumption of local forms by Sanskritic deities in their travel all over India, for instance, the Vedic deity Kshetrappa became Ketrappa in Coorg. The other way by which Sanskritic Hinduism was spread was by Sanskritization of local deities and their belief system which resulted in local deities assuming Sanskritic labels and forms, for instance, the identification of cobra deity of the Coorg with Subramanya, the warrior son of Shiva. In other words, Sanskritic

Hinduism was spread where Sanskritic deities became localized and also where local deities became Sanskritized. Thus, the local religious and cultural system also had an impact in Sanskritic Hinduism and Srinivas treated Sanskritization as a two-way process where the local cultures also contributed to the Sanskritic; entering into the main body of Sanskritic beliefs, myth and customs. For instance, all India Hindu festival such as Dasara, Deepavali, Holi etc. have many regional differences in their execution. (Srinivas 1962: 59) And Srinivas believed that Sanskritic Hinduism had grown by these additions from the local cults and their religious cultures.

Mckim Marriot (1955) with his twin-concepts of parochialization⁵ and universalisation⁶ during his study of Kishan Garhi village in north India has also similarly explained the consequences when the Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic religious cultures meet. The way in which Sanskritic elements become localized is explained by Marriot as Parochialisation and the way in which local elements become Sanskritized is explained as Universalisation.

Yogendra Singh (1986: 15), however, argues that the Marriot's concept of Parochialisation is similar to Srinivas' concept of de-Sanskritization. Srinivas explained that the process of de-Sanskritization happened when the dominant caste of the region was itself non-Sanskritized as this caste held a very significant role in the Sanskritization process (Srinivas 1989:66). Moreover, irregular contacts with religious centres and towns of the agents of Sanskritization such as Brahmans or other higher castes made them greatly influenced by the local culture, thereby making them imitators of local culture instead of being agents of Sanskritization. However, Srinivas defended that such process occurred only occasionally.

Instead, he further argued about the co-existence of mutually inconsistent Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic customs and belief systems and also the influential power of the Sanskritic customs in absorbing the non-Sanskritic customs of every caste as well as sects and peripheral groups. Splinter groups like the Amma groups are decades if not centuries, in advance of their parent groups: the former have solved their problem by Sanskritizing their customs entirely while the latter are more conservative (Srinivas 1952: 169).

In fact, Srinivas was more optimistic about the further spread of the wider aspect of Sanskritization with the coming of the British. Srinivas viewed that the consequent changes brought about by their rule in the field of communication, transportation, education etc, such as introduction of western technology, railways, planes, press, radio, media etc. had facilitated in the process of Sanskritization in those areas which had hitherto been inaccessible. For instance, he observed the increased importance of harikatha⁷ (public reading of religious stories) in Mysore city, where the narrator now used a microphone to reach a much larger audience than before. Films about saints such as Nandanar, Tukaram, Chaitanya are made (Srinivas 1962: 49). The introduction of a western political institution like parliamentary democracy by the British has also contributed to the increased of Sanskritisation. Prohibition, a Sanskritic value has been written into the Constitution of Republic of India.

5. Contemporary Debates on Sanskritization with the Wider Aspect at the Centre Stage

Srinivas, in his other work, *Caste in modern India and other essays* (1962), acknowledges the complexity and heterogeneous nature of the concept. He argues that the basic thing to remember about the concept is that it is only a name for a widespread social and cultural process, and our main task is to understand the nature of these processes. The stature of Srinivas' concept of Sanskritization is such that it enjoys an important place since its inception till today which is reflected in the contemporary discourses on the concept.

There is no doubt about the significance of the process of emulation as an aspect of Sanskritization. However, it would be a mistake to view it as confined only to the caste order as the re-visit of his classic as well as the elaboration of the concept by Srinivas himself on the unifying aspect in the course of his writing have manifested. Interestingly, Yogendra Singh has viewed Sanskritization as an ideological borrowing process (Singh 1986). He has observed that the concept has also incorporated imitation of ideologies of probably the various thematic aspects of the Hindu tradition. "Karma, Dharma, Papa, Maya, Moksha are examples of some of the most common Sanskritic theological ideas, and when people become Sanskritized, these words occur frequently in their talk" (Srinivas 1962: 48). Singh also explicates that through Sanskritization, often only secular status symbols of the higher castes are imitated by the lower castes (Singh 1986: 7/8). Substantiating this, he takes the example of the lower castes in north-eastern U.P who had imitated only the upper castes' conspicuous style of consumption and living until the abolition of zamindari system.

Similarly other contemporary writings on the concept have also given significance on the wider aspect. Simon Charsley (1998) very lucidly puts forward the argument that the concept of Sanskritization encompasses two divergent theses, both linked by the Brahmans: the first is the social mobility aspect while the other is the integration of the Hindu society, thereby arguing that the concept is not synonymous with social mobility. He rightly argues that even in his classic, Srinivas was discussing more about the integration of Hindu society with the spread of Sanskritic Hinduism while devoting only a tiny explanation of 'Amma Coorgs' Sanskritization, or rather 'Brahmanisation' to explain his famous social mobility aspect. Charsley explains that with this neglected aspect Srinivas analyzed the internal religious practices and organization of the Coorgs not only as a part of local multi-caste society held together by shared religious practices and beliefs, but within regional and wider contexts, right up to religious All-India level (Charsley, 1998: 539).

Viewed in the same vein, A. M. Shah argues that the aspect of the concept related with the structural element of the Hindu caste system is just one part of the concept. As the concept is also inextricably linked with Hinduism of which caste order forms only a part, he argues that the concept of Sanskritization has other religious, cultural and social dimensions to engage with, as Srinivas also viewed Sanskritization as the spread of cultural values which are not directly connected with the caste system.

Shah (2007:356/57) also argues there could be other sources of Sanskritization other than the Brahmans such as the ruling castes and other high castes. He explains that temples and pilgrimage centres where pilgrims from different parts of the country gather during periodic festivals and other religious occasions also serve as Sanskritizing agents spreading Sanskritic ideas and beliefs. The practice of harikatha, bhajan, religious saints, religious literature and its discourses etc, also contributed to the same. Further, he (2005: 238)

contributes some very interesting non-caste agents of Sanskritization other than the conventional agents. Various sects such as Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Chaitanya, Basavanna, Swaminarayan etc.; god-men and god-women who deliver religious discourses to wider audiences; easily affordable religious books and periodicals; films based on religion; programmes such as 'Ramcharitmanas' on All- India Radio; the epic based serials such as 'Mahabharat', 'Ramayana', 'Sri Krishna', 'Jai Hanuman', etc. on Television have all contributed as agents of Sanskritization. The spread of Sanskritic culture abroad reflected in many ways, such as the worldwide interest of Yoga, Ayurveda etc.; popularity of various Indian classical dances, drama, music etc.; Hindu religious preaching abroad etc. is also discussed by Shah.

While Sanskritic Hinduism and its various elements are spread even outside the country, there are nevertheless changes in the way people practice the Sanskritic culture in India. Such a development is, in Shah 's views, the existence of a dialectical relation between Sanskritization and de-Sanskritization which involving a selective attitude which does not, however, reduce the importance of Sanskritization. (Shah 2005:244).

6. Conclusion

Thus, the concept of Sanskritization was born among the Coorgs that remarkably manifested Srinivas' intellect. It was a more refined and broader concept that subsumed his earlier concept of 'Brahmanisation'. Interestingly, the concept of Sanskritization gave birth to another concept of 'dominant caste' which became so integral in understanding the process of Sanskritization. This was, however, the more popular dimension of the concept of Sanskritization: the social mobility dimension, which elucidated how the lower castes tried to raise their position in the traditional caste hierarchy by imitating the lifestyles of the 'dominant upper castes' in a region. This aspect became so overwhelming that the multi-faceted concept of Srinivas' Sanskritization was made to reduce to the mobility aspect. The significance of the caste system in understanding the Hindu society has probably led to the interpretations of Sanskritization as a tool to analyze only its social mobility as this aspect explains movements within the caste system. Moreover, the remarkable perspective brought about by the mobility aspect of Sanskritization also challenged the rigidity of the caste system which also further enhanced the popularity of the mobility aspect. However, Sanskritization does not end with its mobility aspect as Srinivas had also explicated Sanskritization also as a tool to understand the wider integration of the Indian society as whole, particularly the Hindu society. In fact, in his Coorg analysis, although he placed the Coorgs as its focal point, he was not confined to the understanding of the Coorgs' mobility. Rather, he tried to show how the Coorgs case was linked with the Sanskritic culture, what he called the All-India Hinduism. In other words, with the wider, unifying aspect of the concept, Srinivas explicated the general unification of the various Hindu communities which are parts of the Hindu society through the spread of Sanskritic Hinduism. This wider aspect was expressed explicitly since the inception of the concept, though it became more and more apparent in his later writings. In other words, with the social mobility aspect, Srinivas links the concept with the Hindu caste system while with the wider aspect he links the concept with the Hinduism and its religious culture; both aspects are significant and the realization of the significance of both aspects forms the core toward forwarding an alternative interpretation.

7. Notes

1. Lingayatism, also known as Viirashaivism was an anti-Brahmanical faith founded by a Brahman called Basava.
2. As per the 1941 census utilized by Srinivas when he conducted the study, the first division had 41,026 individuals, while the second had only 666 individuals.
3. As per the Kaveri Myth, the Coorgs are known as Ugras. They are believed to be the descendants of a Kshatriya prince and his Shudra wife whom he married to continue his patriline as due to some sins committed in his previous life, the prince could not have children from a wife of his own caste. By making the Coorgs as Ugras who are descendants of an inter-caste marriage and not the descendants of an endogamous marriage of Kshatriya caste, the Kaveri myth cleverly reconciles the inconsistencies between the attributes of Coorgs resembling Kshatriyas on the one hand and their dietary habits and non-conformity with Vedic rituals and mantras on the other
4. There are two myths of origins of the Amma Coorgs. One of the myths believes them to be the descendants of a Coorg man and his Brahman wife from Wynad. The reason behind this inter-caste marriage is explained by the story of how this Brahman woman had been expelled by his father from his house as she committed the sinful act of attaining puberty before marriage. Another myth regards Coorgs as the descendants of the Matsyadesha (name of Coorg in Sanskrit myth) Brahmin disciples of sage Agastya, and her wife Kaveri (before she takes her river form). They even claimed themselves as Kaveri Brahmins during the reign of the last Raja of Coorg.
5. Marriot defines Parochialisation as the process of limitation upon the scope of intelligibility, of deprivation of literary forms, of reduction to less systematic and less reflective dimensions of the elements of the Great Tradition (Marriot 1955: 200).
6. The process by which elements of the Little Tradition, indigenous customs, deities and rites circulate upward to the level of Great Tradition and are 'identified' with its legitimate forms is called Universalisation by McKim Marriot (Singh 1986: 14).
7. Srinivas observed that the traditional institution of Harikatha also helped in dissemination of Sanskritic stories and ideas to wider audience including the illiterate. The sessions of harikatha are generally held in temples during festivals where a priest narrates and explains religious stories to the audience.

8. References

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