Inventing Village Tradition: The late 19th Century Origins of the North Indian ‘Jajmani System’

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Introduction

Many years ago I was asked in a viva voce examination to name the first work which describes the Indian jajmani system. I knew that the jajmani system was of great antiquity, but I had no idea whether it was first described by one of the early European travellers like Bernier, an early 19th century British authority on Indian criminal castes and tribes like Sleeman, or a later authority on castes and folklore like Crooke. So I was rather surprised to learn, after my fumbling, that the first description was that of the Wisers, published in 1930.

Despite this proven area of ignorance, I passed the examination, but the core of my initial puzzlement never left me: how was it that so ancient and widely distributed a social institution had escaped the notice of such acute observers of India as Francis Buchanan, the Abbé Dubois or ‘Thugee’ Sleeman?

About ten years ago a subversive question occurred to me: is it possible that the ‘jajmani system’ rather than being an Indian institution of great antiquity is instead of comparatively recent genesis? Is the explanation for its early 20th century discovery to be found not in the obtuseness of Georgian and Victorian observers but rather its late 19th century origins? As with many deceptively simple questions, finding an answer to this one has been anything but easy. What follows is an account of the current state of my research.¹

¹ The research reported in this paper was supported by grants from the University of Adelaide. I am particularly grateful to Peter Reeves and Joan Wardrop whose generous help in locating copies of Settlement Reports was truly ‘above and beyond
First Descriptions of the Jajmani System

As I indicated in the introduction, my examiners regarded the Wisers’ account of the jajmani system, presented in *Behind Mud Walls* in 1930 (Wiser and Wiser: 1963) as the earliest account of the system and in all probability would have said, if pressed, that William H. Wiser’s monograph *The Hindu Jajmani System* which was published in 1936 was the first systematic scholarly treatment of the topic. Beidelman (1959: 2) concurs: ‘I have,’ he says, ‘found no author previous to Wiser’s book who uses the phrase “jajmani system”’.2

Yet neither my examiners nor Beidelberg were entirely correct. Several earlier observers noticed discrete aspects of the phenomenon. In my own reckoning, the prize for the earliest general description should go to E. A. H. Blunt. In his *Report on the Census of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1911* (1912: 322) Blunt notes that though jajmani refers literally to one who offers a sacrifice ‘it is now extended to include a client of any kind’. ‘These circles of constituents are valuable sources of income, heritable and transferable . . . and as such they are strictly demarcated and to poach upon a fellow casteman’s preserve is an action bitterly resented.’

The very earliest reference which I have located to the modern use of the term jajman to refer to any patron is that given in H. H. Wilson’s *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms* . . . (Wilson: 1855). Wilson (1855: 226) defines jajman as follows:

A person who employs and fees Brahmans for the performance of any solemn or religious ceremony; as it is not unusual for the relation between the employer and those employed to become hereditary, the latter come to regard the former as their pupils or clients, and claim as their right and due the fees that are to be paid on such occasions, although they should not perform the ceremonies: from religious, the term passed to very miscellaneous relations, and barbers, washermen, and sweepers claim, in some parts of Hindustan, a prescriptive or hereditary right to be employed and paid by certain individuals, whom they therefore style their Jajmans.

I am also indebted to inter-library loans librarians at the University of Adelaide and Boston University for their patience and perseverance in seeking out the materials on which this paper is based. Jane Haggis and Pierre James assisted me in examining the U.P. Gazetteers. New Delhi colleagues, especially S. Bhattacharya, heard this paper both in its very infancy and in maturity with patience and helpful suggestions. I also owe debts of thanks to Walter C. Neale and John Harriss for their thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

2 See also (Commander: 1983: 284). For general surveys of the literature concerning the jajmani system see (Beidelman: 1959), (Kolenda: 1963) and (Gould: 1977).
Definitions

What is the jajmani system? Let us begin descriptively with an example taken from Prakash Tandon’s delightful autobiography *Punjabi Century*.

We had a family barber, whose father before him had been our family’s barber, and so the barber’s family and ours were indissolubly bound. Good or bad we could not get rid of him, nor could he refuse to serve us, unless we went to live in another place and adopted a local barber family. But whenever we returned to our home town the old barber was there, and there was no changing him. (1968: 79)

Wiser’s account of the jajmani system is essentially the same; what is original—and almost certainly wrong—is his universalization of the system.

Each carpenter has his own clientele, which has become established through custom, and which continues from generation to generation . . . This relationship once established cannot be broken except by the carpenter himself who may choose to sell his rights to another carpenter. It is heritable and sometimes transferable. The relationship fixes responsibilities both on the carpenter and the one whom he serves . . . This service relationship is established not only between carpenters and other residents of the village, but affects all castes. Each caste in the village at some time during the year is expected to render a fixed type of service to each other caste . . . The carpenter calls his entire clientele his ‘jajmani’ or ‘birt’—these terms being identical in meaning. The individual family or head of the family whom the carpenter serves is called the carpenter’s ‘jajman’. The ‘jajman’ speaks of the carpenter’s family and all other families that serve him as his ‘Kam-wale’ or ‘Kam karne-wale’. (1958: xvii–xviii)

Each serves the others. Each in turn is master. Each in turn is servant . . . This system of interrelatedness in service within the Hindu community is called the Hindu ‘Jajmani sytem.’ (1958: xxi)

The origins of the word ‘jajmani’ are to be found in the Sanskrit word ‘yajman’, meaning the one who employs a Brahmin priest to offer a sacrifice.3 In his *The Caste System of Northern India* Blunt (1931: 242), virtually repeating the words of his report of 1912, notes:

The *jajmans* of a Brahman priest are his parishioners. . . . Similarly, Chamars, Doms, Dafalis, Bhat, Nais, Bhangis, Barhais, and Lohars all have their *jajmani*, or clientèle, from whom they receive fixed dues in return for regular service . . . These *jajmans* are valuable sources of income, both heritable and transferable: they are strictly demarcated, and the crime of poaching on a

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3 Heesterman (1985: 88) disputes this, saying that the ‘connection between the peasant jajman and the Vedic yajamána is at best a flimsy one.’
fellow casteman's *jajmani* is bitterly resented. A Dom, it is said, would not hesitate to hand over to the police such a poacher.

As a working minimal definition of the jajmani system I propose to adapt—with a significant omission—Beidelman's (1959: 6) formulation that the jajmani system is 'a . . . system of hereditary obligations of payment and of occupational and ceremonial duties between two or more specific families of different castes in the same locality'.\(^4\) To that core we must add the observations of Blunt and Wiser that these service relationships were heritable, saleable and transferable by the individual artisan or servant who possessed them.\(^5\) Put in other words, the irreducible essence of the jajmani relationship is the exclusive property right possessed by a member of an artisan or servant caste to serve a specific patron family.\(^6\)

\(^4\) What I have excised is Beidelman's claim that the jajmani system is a form of feudalism. In doing so, however, I do not wish to lose sight of his observation that jajmani relationships 'show not an idyllic mutuality, but unequal relationships based upon power rooted in land tenure, numerical superiority, political connections and the ritual-scriptural sanctions of caste hierarchy' (1959: 6).

I have included reference to those ritual aspects of jajmani which are stressed by Pocock (1962) and Gould (1977), though I will argue below that these were subsequent and thus secondary features of the jajmani system.

In a thought provoking essay Chris Fuller argues that in pre-British India, jajmani payments went to both clients and to the supra-local élites who dominated the villages militarily. Though I reject his use of jajmani here, there is great merit in noting that the existence of these two hemispheres of distribution undercuts Dumont's suggestion that jajmani reflected the encompassed nature of power in an essentially religious system. In Fuller's view the effect of British rule and land settlements was to destroy the second half of the jajmani system, leaving only an artifact: the 'local, caste-based economic system' later studied by anthropologists (Fuller: 1989: 37). Both John Harriss and Burton Stein were kind enough to draw Fuller's work to my attention. Walter C. Neale and John Adams make the important point that the jajmani system is only one of some nine or more village systems of production (Neal and Adams: 1990: 52–4).

\(^5\) How important is the aspect of payments in defining the system? Certainly Benson (1976: 241) is correct in noting that 'Payment in kind is often assumed to be a major characteristic of the more widely reported jajmani systems'. There is hardly a study which I have seen which does not report in detail the quantities of grain which each individual receives. In the interest of brevity, let me state here baldly that I believe that the form of payment is not a defining characteristic of the jajmani system. See also (Pocock: 1962: 85).

\(^6\) I am, for the moment, leaving to the side the question of the interaction between jajmani and the ritual hierarchy of the caste system raised by Pocock (1962) Dumont's definition of jajmani as 'the system corresponding to the prestations and counter-prestations by which the castes as a whole are bound together in the village, and which is more or less universal in India' (Dumont: 1972: 138) is pitched at such a high level of abstraction that it makes further analysis impossible.
The Age and Geographical Extent of the Jajmani System

There are two firmly enunciated core propositions in the literature of the jajmani system: the first is that it is an all-India system; the second is that it is of great antiquity. Let us consider for a moment the first of these. In his preface to The Hindu Jajmani System, Wiser (1936: ix) is suitably cautious:

Just how general this 'Jajmani' relationship is in the villages of India we are not prepared to state . . . [Reference by earlier writers to 'village servants'] indicates that there is in existence in other parts of India something similar to what we find in North India. Just what it is called in the different vernaculars we do not know.

Beidelman (1959: 6-7) supplies the deficiency by equating terms for 'client' from Hindi, Marathi and Tamil such as kamin, balutedar and vettyan or those for 'fee' birit and swatantaram (Hindi and Tamil, respectively). It is from the descriptive evidence, he says (1959: 7) that he is able to determine the essential equivalence of these different terms.

Certainly as anyone familiar with the literature can attest, since the 1950s there is hardly a region of India for which the jajmani nature of patron-client relationships at village level has not been established. [See for example Mayer (1965); Epstein (1962); Benson (1976); Reiniche (1977)]. Simon Commander concludes from his wide-ranging survey of these studies that 'the great majority of instances in which an apparent jajmani structure has been catalogued reveal, on an All-India level, a seeming concentration in areas of predominantly small-holding peasant husbandry' (Commander: 1983: 287).

That the jajmani system is of great antiquity no one doubts. Wiser (1958: xxv) traces its origins to the Laws of Manu which have, he says, 'served as a guide for the Hindu social and economic organization for almost 2,000 years.' Similarly, Gough (1960: 89) suggests that the jajmani system may have survived for 2,500 years. Beidelman, though he offers no estimate for the age of the jajmani system, suggests that it is of feudal antiquity. And Commander (1983), though his focus is upon the last 200 years, accepts, as do Wiser, Gould (1964:

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7 An exception to this generalization is (Harper: 1959) whose work I will consider later. Bronger (1975: 16) rightly notes that 'the impression [is] created by the general studies [of] Beidelman, Kolenda and Mandelbaum . . . that the Jajmani-system has been proven as an overall characteristic of . . . Indian agrarian society [for] the whole of the Subcontinent'.

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13–14) and Beidelman, that the role of village artisans in the jajmani system was largely indistinguishable from that which earlier 19th century authors subsumed under the label ‘village servants’.

There remains, however, the riddle with which we began: why was a system of such antiquity and wide geographical scope not recognized or described before this century? Is the reason simply, as Beidelman (1959: 3) suggests, that previous observers used terms such as ‘village menials’, ‘village servants’ and ‘village artisans’ because they lacked the closer familiarity with village life which the Wisers obtained in the course of their missionary fieldwork?

In what follows I wish to present the evidence which has led me to conclude that neither of the core propositions which I have just outlined is correct and to set out the reasons why I argue that the jajmani system is of relatively recent origin and is essentially a feature of the Gangetic plain. Let me begin by considering the pre-colonial ‘deep south’.

Mirasi, Baluta and other ‘Southern’ Systems

A few years ago I studied the ‘mode of production’ in 19th century Tamilnadu (Mayer: 1980). One of the surprises to emerge from that work concerned the ‘padiyal system’. The ‘padiyal system’ I understood to be a traditional system of labour relations in which workers and their families worked for landowners in return for monthly rations of grain, harvest payments and specified annual gifts. My certainty about the antiquity of the ‘padiyal system’ began to be eroded by the discovery that there appeared to be no references to the system in the records from the earliest years of colonial administration. Those records refer instead to cultivation by hereditary classes of untouchable slaves and by hereditary share-croppers. The ‘padiyal system’ appears to have come into being later in the 19th century, following the outlawing of slavery. And its form I found to be quite striking:

In consideration of an advance of Rs. 28–4 it is stipulated that one of the two executants should do cultivation work in lieu of interest, receive padi

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8 Tapan Raychaudhuri has also noted the puzzle, although the conclusions he draws are very much at odds with those proposed here. ‘Oddly enough, the Persian records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries do not mention the “jajmani system” . . . but the continuity of the system till modern times, however, suggests its unbroken existence down the centuries, and there is no reason to doubt its extensive prevalence in the period under discussion’ (Raychaudhuri: 1984: 9). I am indebted to Andrew Watson for drawing this to my attention.
[unhusked rice] and sireipanam (slave-money). In the event of work not being adequately performed, or in case of absconding, steps will be taken under Act XIII of 1859 [The Breach of Contract Act]. Services may be left after paying the amount advanced and for the loss in cultivation. (Hjelje: 1967: 100)9

This is, of course, an instance of debt bondage. It comes from 1872 and Hjelje's evidence makes it evident that the untouchables who bound themselves were the descendants of former agricultural slaves (Hjelje: 1967: 101). What is striking is the use of quintessentially capitalist laws of property to 're-enslave' the untouchables and the creation thereby of a new form of labour relationship which rapidly comes to be seen as 'traditional' (Mayer: 1980).10

What also emerges from the colonial south Indian revenue records of the early 19th century is clear evidence that 'village servants' were just that, servants of an entire village, which was, as I have shown elsewhere (Mayer: 1980) frequently held in common by the dominant land-owning caste. Their tenure as village servants was denoted by the same term (kaniachi or later mirasi) which applied to the property rights of the village landowners. Their share in lieu of payment was taken from the entire harvest, as were the payments due to temples or the state.

One of the first to mention village servants and their fees was Lionel Place in his original report of 1795 from the Jagir, as Chingleput District was originally known (Bayley and Hudleston: 1862: 17). The first detailed description of 'official mirasi' that is, the ownership as personal property of village offices, is that provided in 1816 by F. W. Ellis in his replies to the Madras Board of Revenue's questions concerning mirasi right (Bayley and Hudleston: 1862: 180-2). Ellis notes that village watchmen held mirasi rights and co-extensive with this, is the Mirasi of the various Village Servants from

9 For an example of a padiyal indenture from the mid-1930s see (Thomas: 1940: 181).
10 I was also struck by how quickly forms of land tenure changed in Bengal after the introduction of the Permanent Settlement of 1793. As early as 1803, for example, H. Strachey observed that 'the operation of our system has gradually loosened that intimate connection between the ryots (peasants) and zamindars (landlords), which subsisted heretofore' (Strachey: 1917: 651).

Similar evidence of the rapid evolution of new tenurial forms exists from the Punjab of the late 1960s. Uppal (1969: 367) reports the emergence of sanjee, a form of concealed tenancy, which arose as a response to laws imposing ceilings on land holdings and which gave rights of purchase to registered tenants. Perhaps in time it too will come to be seen as a tenurial arrangement of great antiquity.
the Panjangen, the Astronomer, who casts nativities and expounds the Almanac, to the Vettyen, who sweeps the village...

In every district wherein...official Mirasi is established...it is always heritable, and in a limited degree transferable... (Bayley and Hudleston: 1862: 182)

Ellis notes also that the 'emoluments of all official Mirasi consist of a certain extent of manyam or rent-free lands...and of a merei, or fixed per-centage of the produce of all Varapet land under cultivation' (Bayley and Hudleston: 1862: 180).

Over a century later, Janet Benson, reporting on the paniwallu ['work people'] system found in Mallannapalle village in Andhra Pradesh, noted that service castes were expected to perform some services for the entire community and were compensated for those services with the allocation of inam land.

Service caste households also had the right to exclusive service of a village. This work-right was, and continues to be, inherited and divided in the same way as other property. It could be sold or given by the possessor to non-relatives. (Benson: 1976: 242) (my emphasis)

Commenting of the distinctive nature of these south Indian service tenures, Gough (1960: 87) remarks:

In Kerala (and probably elsewhere in South India, in those areas where the ryotwari, or familistic, rather than the mirasi, or joint-village, form of landholding existed) many of the castes which [Beidelman] would term kamins, i.e. the village servants, had the hereditary right not only to a share of the general produce of the village, but also to specific plots of land. Each such household held its own orchard, and in some areas also, small rice-plots, by hereditary right (manyam) held not from the village landlord but from the Raja or king. Some village servants retain such plots as their private (capitalist) property today. In the mirasi regions of Tanjore, village servants 'owned' specific fractions of the village harvest rather than special plots. In the Mahratta period they were paid by the dominant landlord caste on the open threshing floor in the presence of the king’s revenue officer, who was responsible for maintaining the law governing the division of shares of grain.

Although in many instances these village services were converted to an individual, 'fee for service' basis during the 19th century, some of them persist into the present or survived until relatively recently. Reiniche (1977) describes kaniachi relations which she found while doing field work in Tirunelveli in the early 1970s.

11 In one village which I studied in 1980 (Mayer: 1984) I was told that collective payment of the village servant charged with the management of irrigation water from the Cauvery canal ended only in the 1940s. One informant told me that in retrospect the decision to abolish the position had been a great mistake!
The balutadari system of Maharashtra is similar to the mirasi system in several respects. It is of particular interest because Wiser (1958: xxv) cites a law report from 1840 as evidence of legal recognition of the jajmani system by British civil law. Like participants in the other 'south Indian' systems, balutadars served the entire village community. Each farmer had to pay the balutadar's fee whether or not their services were required (Fukazawa: 1972: 17 and Fukazawa: 1984: 309). Fukazawa’s study of 18th century disputes concerning balutadari indicates that there were two types of baluti right, one permanent and hereditary (watandari) and the other temporary (upari). Holders of watandari balutas held grants of tax-free land (inams). When rights of tenure, whether of land or service, in these southern systems were divided it was by the subdivision of the original shares. When a village astrologer’s baluta was divided in 1734, the object of the division was not the 'service-sphere' but the 'emolument' comprising house or house-site, inam land, and various remunerations in kind and in cash. . . . they were expected to divide [these things] into two equal shares . . . but nothing is mentioned to the effect that the two families divided the village or the sphere of service into two parts, for instance, according to the number of families of villagers. (Fukazawa: 1972: 34)

That the original service tenure remained intact is indicated by a case in which the village accounting baluta was divided. Those dividing the baluta took it in turns to do the village accounts (Fukazawa: 1972: 34–5).

Fukazawa makes a point which is worth underscoring twice. He argues, correctly I believe, that there is a clear difference between what he terms 'demiurgic' servants of the entire village service [he takes the term from Max Weber] and the dyadic tenure of the jajmani system described by Wiser (Fukazawa: 1972: 14–20). He also makes

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12 Beidelman (1959: 6–7) as we have seen also treats the balutadari system as equivalent to the jajmani system. The earliest account of the baluta system which I have seen is that given by Arthur Steele in his The Hindu Castes, Their Law, Religion and Customs (Steele: 1986: 204–7) originally published in 1826.

13 I must express here my gratitude to Heather Bailey Paull for drawing Fukazawa’s work to my attention.

14 In Tallasingaram village near Hyderabad which was studied by Bronger (1975), the Dhobis [washermen] and the Kummarri [potters] referred to the right to serve certain patron families as their 'watan'. Though this seems clearly different from its Maharashtrian meaning, I believe one finds surviving evidence of an earlier obligation to the entire village in the custom of redistributing patrons between Dhobis every 5 to 8 years (Bronger: 1975: 29 and 31). Similar regular redistributions of village landholdings, called karei edu, took place in Tamil Nadu into the 19th century (Mayer: 1980: 12).
the interesting suggestion that the existence of jajmani relations in many parts of contemporary India ‘may indicate that during the British period the territorial social group called village was greatly disorganized or disintegrated so that village-servants were transformed into family-servants’ (Fukazawa: 1972: 40).

The ‘Malnad’ System

There is one exceptional form of relationship between village landowners and artisans which appears in the literature: Edward B. Harper’s description of the system which he found in Shimoga, North Kanara and South Kanara districts in 1955. There, he reports, artisans such as barbers do not have either hereditary rights of service nor even traditional rights of payment but instead negotiate the terms of employment on an annual basis (Harper: 1959: 772). Harper plausibly relates the Malnad system to the fact that farmers in the region have long grown cash crops such as areca nuts for the market. In practical terms it seems hard to distinguish Harper’s Malnad system from the ordinary contractual relationships of the capitalist market.

The Evidence from North India

Before we look in detail at the north Indian evidence, let me emphasize an important, if obvious, point. The abundant south Indian evidence from the 18th and 19th centuries, such as that assembled in Bayley and Hudleston’s important Papers on Mirasi Right (1862) should serve to make us sceptical of suggestions that the jajmani system was not described until the 1930s because British officials lacked the requisite familiarity with village social institutions. There is, as I shall try to demonstrate, ample evidence of early and detailed familiarity in north India.

Equally, the existence of 19th century (and earlier) court cases relating to village baluta rights in the Marathi-speaking region must make us question suggestions such as that made in 1932 by Brij Behari Lal, Judge of the Small Cause Court of Allahabad—which is quoted approvingly by William Wiser (1958: 105)—that ‘Village carpenters, Dhunias, Manihars, Kumhars etc. are poor people, and are not likely to take the question of their rights to the High Courts’.\footnote{Given the general litigiousness of Indian society, this seems on the face of it a doubtful proposition. Wiser himself notes that ‘the majority of cases in the Law
Nevertheless it must be faced that establishing the negative case, that the jajmani system became widespread only in the final quarter of the 19th century, is methodologically harder and intellectually less satisfactory than its opposite. In Conan Doyle's well known story Silver Blaze Holmes urged Lestrade to grasp the significance of the 'curious incident of the dog in the night time', the dog who did nothing. In this instance, we have to draw our inferences from the observers who saw nothing. In addition, to revert to the Baker Street metaphor, there is always a possibility that the dog did bark, but that the person who heard it has yet to come forward to testify.

Compilations of Traditional Hindu Law

Let us begin our survey of the evidence of the early observers by glancing quickly at the compilations of traditional Hindu law which were made in the 19th century as guides for British jurists. As we have seen from Blunt's remarks, by 1911 jajmani rights were heritable, transferable and justiciable. If jajmani rights are of great antiquity, it is reasonable to expect that these summations of traditional law should offer us 'chapter and verse' on the manner in which this property was customarily inherited. Arthur Steele's The Hindu Castes, Their Law, Religion and Customs, which appeared in 1826 is a typical example of these judicial aids. In his chapters on things which can be mortgaged or pledged he notes land, houses, gardens, animals, slaves, carriages, shawls, cotton cloths, silks, jewels, metal pots, weapons, grain, sugar and books. But not occupational rights. Similarly, though jewels, cloth, grain, animals, slaves, arms, butter/ghee, land, houses, oil and sugar can be sold, no mention is made of jajmani rights, even for Brahmins. Steele does however note that certain 'wuttundars' (i.e. watandari balutadars)—mainly village headmen and accountants—in Poona District had a private property right in their dues of office (Steele: 1986: 204–5).

Report deal with "birt Jajmani" and "birt Mahabrahmani" as referring to the relationship of the hereditary priest, the "purohit" to his client, the "jajman" (Wiser: 1986: 105). Oscar Lewis and Victor Barnouw (1967: 113 and 124) provide evidence of north Indian court cases dating from the 1920s which involved what they term jajmani obligations. In these cases the litigating parties were the Chamars and the Jats of Rampur village collectively. This reflects, I feel, not jajmani relations but rather those which obtained between village servants and the body of village landholders which I shall discuss below. See also Crooke's material dealing with caste panchayats below.
Sir Henry Maine's *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* (1875: 100) touches briefly on the common property of the undivided Hindu family, but there is nothing of jajmani property. Nor have I found anything in his *Ancient Law* (1977) nor in *Village-Communities in the East and West* (1876).

Another Mayne, John D. Mayne in *A Treatise on Hindu Law and Usage*, considers at length the origins of communal property rights. Most to our purpose, he discusses in detail the positions taken concerning the partition of common property by different schools of traditional Hindu law. Under Mitakshara, for example, the moveable property which could be disposed of by the family head consisted of clothes, jewels, household implements and implements of trade or husbandry (Mayne: 1878: 199). 'Even at the present day,' he comments, 'not one Hindu family in a thousand possesses any other species of chattel property' (Mayne: 1878: 199) (emphasis added). Nowhere in these discussions of property, whether fixed or mobile, is there any suggestion that jajmani rights either existed or were recognized as the species of disposable property they clearly were by the early twentieth century.

**Early Travellers**

Let us turn next to the eye-witness accounts of early European inhabitants of the subcontinent. Amongst these early observers was the Abbé Dubois who was fascinated by caste and inquired tirelessly into the details of innumerable Hindu customs. He was an unsystematic but sharp-eyed observer with a taste for the outré, such as the titillating details he gives of a caste in interior Mysore—generally abhorred by others—whose women washed the private parts of their men after the latter had been to the toilet (Dubois: 1899: 19). But, in all that wealth of information, there is no jajmani system.

And much the same is true of the others whom I have consulted. Although Niccolao Manucci’s adventures and escapes took him all over 17th century India, he does not mention jajmani (Manucci: 1965–67). And Peter Mundy, whose graphic accounts of pre-colonial famine around Surat in the early 17th century are equal to any of contemporary journalism, is also silent on the subject of jajmani (Mundy: 1907–36). Francisco Pelsaert (1925) whose career in Jahangir’s India should have brought the phenomenon, if it existed, to his attention is here likewise mute. For many, I am sure, the
account of his harrowing experience of mutiny and brutal murder off the coast of western Australia which are contained in the Remonstrantie must surpass even his vivid Indian narrative. Nor do we find any assistance in the accounts of French travellers of the 17th century. Neither doctor (Bernier: 1968), diamond merchant (Tavernier: 1889) or priest (Carré: 1947) makes any mention of jajmani. And a detailed reading of the three volumes which record the elegant if not always comfortable or safe progress which Bishop Heber made from Calcutta to Bombay in 1824–25 does not, either, illuminate the question of the nature of service relationships in village north India (Heber: 1828).

One of the few of these early observers to give any description of village social relations was Francis Buchanan. In the years 1812 and 1813, he undertook a survey of the Company’s territories in Bihar. He had earlier (Buchanan: 1807) undertaken a similar survey of the ‘dominions of the Rajah of Mysore’. He was, in my opinion, one of the most meticulous and experienced of observers working in India at the time. To be sure, he was moving relatively rapidly, by elephant, in his survey but details of the relations of production did not escape him. In his journal for 26 December 1816, while in Shahbad District, he noted: ‘The people of Porcha are Kanoj [Kanaujiya] Brahmans who cultivate by means of slaves. Their huts wretched, and they seem bad and indolent farmers. They do every kind of labour except holding the plough’ (Buchanan: 1926: 78). On the following day he noted: ‘There are sundry villages, but exceedingly wretched, and chiefly occupied by Sakadwipi Brahmans and their slaves, as bad as the Konjiyas [Kanaujiyas]’ (Buchanan: 1926: 78). But again, there is no mention here of anything like jajmani relationships.

The absence of any mention of the jajmani system in the accounts of early travellers is certainly suggestive even though not all of them had the depth of village experience of the Abbé Dubois, Pelsaert or Buchanan. The failure of compilations of traditional law to mention jajmani rights is even stronger evidence, not least because it is undisputed that the traditional core of the idea derives from the relationship between a Brahmin priest and his ‘parishioners’ (as some 19th century authors term them). There is additional evidence which is yet more compelling both because of its self-evident mastery of the fine detail of rural life but also from the relatively late period in which the works were compiled.
Revenue Glossaries

Sir George A. Grierson' *Bihar Peasant Life* (1926), first compiled in 1885, is a meticulous glossary of the minutiae of rural life. We are given, for example, no less than four local terms for the extra handful of grain which is added in weighing to make up for dust and other adulterants (Grierson: 1926: 196) and 33 words used for payments made to labourers (Grierson: 1926: 315–16). Grierson gives a great many terms for the payments made to 'residential artisans . . . in the village'. Some of these payments are in cash, others in kind; often there are distinct terms for the payment made to different caste specialists (Grierson: 1926: 317–22). None refers to jajmani.

Of interest is Grierson's section referring to free grants of land (generally termed *jagir*). 'These are properly grants for war-like services. They are also . . . applied to the free grants of land for services made to the potter . . . , watchman . . . and other village servants' (Grierson: 1926: 324). Grierson's reference to these grants is consistent with many other accounts we have of 19th century north Indian villages, as is his characterization of them as 'village servants'.

Comparable in scope and detail, and published almost simultaneously with Grierson's study is William Crooke's *A Rural and Agricultural Glossary for the North-western Provinces and Oudh* (1888). It, too, is a trove of terms and definitions applying to the tools of agriculture, pests, crops, wages and so on. Most significantly—for, as we shall see, by 1896 Crooke was using the term—there is no mention of jajmani, jajman or kamin in the sense of Wiser's study.

There is one other term which merits our attention: kamiyauTii [my transliteration]. According to Grierson it is a term used in Gaya (with equivalent terms used elsewhere) for advances of pay or land made to ploughmen and labourers when they are engaged (Grierson: 1926: 316). According to the Purnea District Gazetteer (O'Malley: 1911: 110) the kamiyaa are a class of labourers 'who do not receive a daily wage but are, by custom, bound to serve their employer on nominal wages e.g. of Rs. 6 per annum. These men are well fed and suffer but little in times of scarcity. They get a large proportion of grain during the harvest months . . . '. Though the term shares a common root (kaam = work) with the kamin of the jajmani system, these are clearly agricultural labourers and not village artisans.
In the latter half of the 19th century, especially in connection with the decennial census, studies were made of aspects of the caste system. Eventually these became the well known provincial volumes on castes and tribes. One early study was John C. Nesfield's *Brief View of the Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (1885) which was based on the Census of 1882. The auxiliary title of the work adds 'Being an attempt to classify on a functional basis all the main castes of the United Provinces, and to explain their gradations of rank and the process of their formation.' Nesfield gives a brief account of the usual occupation and rank of the most common castes of the U.P. Of the village watchman (*chaukidar*), scavenger (*chamar*) and potter (*kumhar*) he remarks that they hold a special place in 'the Hindu township or village commune—a kind of municipal and self-sufficing body, which characterized the civilization of the Hindus from very early times, and which is not by any means extinct' (Nesfield: 1885: 24). He adds that 'for ordinary services they receive a stipulated portion of the produce of each of the two annual harvests' (Nesfield: 1885: 24). Of the carpenter (*barhai*) he remarks: 'he is a kind of public servant, and no village would be complete which did not contain one or 'more of such functionaries within its circle' (Nesfield: 1885: 28). The blacksmith (*lohar*) is in much the same position as the carpenter; both are quite different from the brassworkers (*kasera*), goldsmith (*sonaar*), and the glassworkers (*manihaar*) 'which have no place in the staff of the village community similar to that held by the Lohar and Barhai' (Nesfield: 1885: 29). The other necessary castes in the village establishment are the sweeper (*bhangi*) and the washerman (*dhobi*). Only in connection with the Brahmin purohit, the 'mediator between man and the invisible world', does Nesfield comment 'That this is the light in which the laymen of all classes regard him is clear from the fact that, in whatever capacity he may be employed at the present day, he is still invariably called *jatikak* or sacrificer, while the man for whom he officiates is called *yajaman*, or the man who pays for the sacrifice' (Nesfield: 1885: 71).

Nesfield's description of the artisans of the village as being like public servants of all the cultivators of the village, is echoed and amplified by many other contemporary observers. For example,
Theodore Morison, in an admirable textbook first published in 1906, observed:

It is impossible to draw a sharp line of division between the field labourer, who lives on wages, and whose economic position corresponds exactly with that of the English agricultural labourer, and the village servant, who is conceived by Hindu tradition as being in the joint service of the whole village, and who therefore occupies, on a lower scale, the same sort of position as the village artisan... The artisan, the casual labourer, and the village servants are all placed in the same category, because they are all looked upon as employed by the village... (Morison: 1918: 119-20) (my emphasis).

William Crooke gave detailed evidence to the Dufferin Enquiry in 1888 about the living conditions of small farmers, agricultural artisans and labourers. He reported that village artisans and 'village drudges' were remunerated in the following manner:17

When the grain is threshed, the artisans and menials get their perquisites. The man who does blacksmith's and carpenter's work gets in this way 25 seers of grain per plough at each harvest... The Chamár in consideration of repairing the well water-bag, providing leather straps and whips, and helping in cleaning the grain, similarly gets 20 seers at each harvest per plough. The washerman (dhobi) gets the same... Similarly, the potter (Kumhár) in consideration of providing the household with earthen pots during the year gets 10 seers of grain per plough per harvest. (Crooke: 1888a: 24)

One of the clearest early statements of the nature of the payment due from each cultivator to village servants is S. M. Moens' account of 'haqs' and 'chungi haqs' which appears in the Settlement Report for Bareilly (Moens: 1874: 73-80). Other descriptions of village servants are to be found in (Alexander: 1881: 64-7), (Das: 1888: 13), (Wace: 1888: 3), (Narayan: 1888: 4), (Reid: 1881: 145), (Benett: 1878: 80), (Baden-Powell: 1892: 149-51), (Baden-Powell: 1894: 69) and (Baden-Powell: 1972: 16-23).

In some accounts, the common service due from artisans is simply taken for granted, as in H. A. Rose's repeated descriptions of washermen (Rose: 1970: vol. II, 239), potters (Rose: 1970: vol. II, 562), carpenters (Rose: 1970: vol. III, 457), and blacksmiths (Rose: 1970: vol. III, 36) as being 'true village menials'. In other instances the existence of service to the entire village becomes evident only through the presentation of instances of recent change. W. W. Hunter, writing of Bankura in 1877, for example, noted that the older position in village economic relations of the priest, the barber, the washerman, the astrologer and other artisans no longer held true.

17 I am indebted—again—to Peter Reeves for helping me locate Crooke's remarkable paper.
In the old Hindu organization, these persons were looked upon as public servants, and remunerated by grants of rent-free lands from the common lands of the village. They have, however, ceased for a long time to exist as village officials and are now hardly more than private servants carrying on certain occupations, and paid for their work by the individuals on whom they attend. (Hunter: 1973: vol. iv, 243)

Similarly, R. V. Russell, writing in 1916 on the Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India notes that the mode of payment of the potter had come to differ from that of the other artisans in the village. Of the blacksmith he noted: 'In the rural area of the Province the Lohár is still a village menial, making and mending the iron implements of agriculture, such as the ploughshare, axe, sickle, goad and other articles. For doing this he is paid in Saugor a yearly contribution of twenty pounds of grain per plough of land held by each cultivator...'. (Russell: 1916: vol. 4, 125) This was no longer true for the potter: 'The Kumhár is not now paid regularly by dues from the cultivators like other village menials, as the ordinary system of sale had no doubt been found more convenient in his case.' (Russell: 1916: vol. 4, 6)

At the risk of seeming unnecessarily didactic, let me underscore this point: what emerges consistently and clearly from these accounts of the relations between village cultivators and artisans is that the system which prevailed widely in north India, at least until the second half of the 19th century, was one in which the artisans and others like Chamars had *general obligations of service to the entire class of village landholders* and were compensated for those services by all cultivators, either directly by payment at harvest time, or indirectly through grants of village land. Equally, although it is clear that individuals inherited these service relations, there is no evidence that I have discovered that they were either contracted on a dyadic basis, or that they could be mortgaged or otherwise disposed of by the individual possessing them, as they clearly could be by the early 20th century.

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18 See for example Crooke's remark that the rights of village servants to specific payments 'descends from father to son: they greatly resent the intrusion of strange families who might possibly encroach on their rights, and they strictly boycott a man who withholds their perquisites.' (1888a: 25)

19 The sole exception is (Peishcar: 1824: 39'A') who notes in his description of Mouza Rusoolpur, Aurangabad, Meerut district, that one group of village servants alone, the 'hereditary Bullahurs' (sweepers) could 'on emergent cases... mortgage or dispose of their offices'. This seems distinctly like the 'official Mirasi' of Tamil villages. None of the other village servants seems to have possessed a like ability, nor do any of the other village reports which are appended to R. H. Tulloh's Letter to the Board of Revenue of 5 May 1824 mention the possibility.
| General obligation to all village cultivators | north Indian 'Village Servants' | Mirasi, Baluta |
| Dyadic obligation to specific patron families | [classical patron-client relations] | Jajmani |
| No obligation of service | cash sale of services (Malnad) |

The description of such persons as 'village servants' which one consistently finds in 19th century accounts seems to me entirely apt. I belabour this point because it is in precisely these aspects that the north Indian system of village service differed from both the south Indian systems (where mirasi and balutadari rights could be alienated) and from the saleable dyadic bond between cultivator and artisan which characterizes the jajmani system.

It may perhaps clarify the distinctions which I am making if they are presented in tabular form (Table 1).

The Emergence of Jajmani Relations

It is possible, I believe, to discern in the accounts we have from the latter half of the 19th century, something of the chronology of the stages by which village servants were transformed (or more accurately transformed themselves) into the possessors of jajmani ties.

In John Beames' 1869 revision of Sir Henry Elliot's Memoirs on the History, Folk-Lore, and Distribution of the Races of the North Western Provinces of India (Elliot: 1976) the terms for both the old system of village service and jajmani appear commingled. Thus, for example, he gives the following terms for the payments made to village servants:

jeorā 'Perquisites of Blacksmiths, Washermen, Carpenters and other village servants.' (Elliot: 1976: vol. 1, 273)
agwār 'The portion of the corn [grain] set apart for village servants, so called because it is (āge) the first thing to be taken from the heap.' (Elliot: 1976: vol. 2, 210)
kauliha '... bundles of sheaves of corn [grain] given as perquisites to reapers and village servants' (Elliot: 1976: vol. 2, 377)
chāṅk 'In most other places the ceremony of going round the Thāpa, or
heap formed for the village servants, is somewhat different. The man goes from the South to the North, and back again, not placing his foot anywhere on the Eastern side, because that is the aman or kand, which contains the refuse corn belonging to the Chamars, which having fallen behind the winnower, is of a very inferior quality (Elliot: 1976: vol. 1, 238)

Then there are terms which come later to become significant markers of jajmani relationships in U.P. but which did not have them in 1869:

kamin ‘in the plains is applied to village servants, but in Kamáon it is used synonymously with Búrha, to signify a superintendent of village management, whose office is in the gift of Government . . . ’ (Elliot: 1976: vol. 2, 174–5)

hakk ‘share or right’ (Elliot: 1976: vol. 2, 174)

hakk thokdári ‘dues and fees to Kamins, etc., derived, according to old custom, from the inhabitants of villages, and varying in every Patti, but generally equivalent to about three percent on the Government revenue. — Kamáon and Garhwál’ (Elliot: 1976: vol. 2, 174–5)

birt ‘A tenure held on condition of the performance of offices, whether religious or secular. Proprietary right20 (Elliot: 1976: vol. 2, 25–6)

Lastly, there is jajmani itself:

jajmán ‘A person from whom Brahmins, or menials, such as barbers, washermen and sweepers, have an hereditary right to claim certain perquisites, on occasion of any ceremonies or services which they are called upon to perform’ (Elliot: 1976: vol. 2, 362)

This is brief and tantalizing. Taken in the context of the greater weight of references to village servants, it suggests to me that the term was still largely restricted to the classical relationship between Brahmin and parishioner and that its primary sphere of reference was still that of religious ceremony.

That jajman had come to have a similar connotation, at least for barbers, in parts of Bengal is also evident in Hunter’s discussion of village officials in Bankura (Hunter: 1973: vol. 4, 243–5)

William Crooke in his note of 1888 on the economic condition of the labouring classes of Etah district to the Dufferin Enquiry (Crooke: 1888a) gives detailed household accounts for several village artisans. None is described as being in a jajmani relationship. Several of these households had contracted debts. Significantly, though land and jewels were mentioned as the collateral which they had offered, in no case was the right of service noted as having been pledged as security.

20 The succeeding parts of the definition make it evident that all Elliot’s instances apply only to Gorakhpur.
By 1896 it is clear that the situation had changed. Crooke now speaks both of the older form of village service as well of what are unmistakably jajmani relationships, the—no doubt novel—details of which he is at some pains to offer. Thus of the Bhangis he notes the difference between what still obtains in some rural areas and the new practices of the city:

In some places Bhangis are true village menials and receive a patch of rent-free land or some allowances at harvest in return for their services. In our cities . . . where they are not numerous, they are much given to combination among themselves. They resent the settlement of new members of the tribe and allot the houses of the residents into certain beats (halqa, ilāqa) each of which is served by a Bhangi and his wife. They call the occupants of such houses their ‘parishioners’ (jajmán), and fiercely resent the intrusion of any strange Bhangi within the beat; in fact most of the cases which come before the [caste] council relate to disputes of this kind.21 (Crooke: 1896: vol. I, 291–2)

And much the same is true of the Chamars. Among the subjects brought for settlement before their caste panchayats are cases in connection with Jajmání: this last is very common. Every Chamar family has assigned to it a certain number of families of higher caste, which are known as its Jajmán (Sans. Yajamána): for which its members perform the duties of cutting the cord at births, playing the drum at marriages and other festive occasions, removing and disposing of the carcases of dead cattle, and in return for these services they receive money fees, cooked food, and sometimes grain, flour, etc. In return they sometimes supply shoes at marriages, a certain number of shoes annually in proportion to the hides they receive, and also do repairs to leather articles, such as well buckets used in cultivation. These rights are very jealously watched, and any interference with the recognised constituents of a family is strongly resented and brought before the tribal council. (Crooke: 1896: vol. 2, 175)

The status of village artisans is not always so clearly put. Both the blacksmith (Crooke: 1896: vol. 3, 380) and the carpenter (Crooke: 1896: vol. 1, 1945) are described as receiving dues at harvest time from their ‘constituents’, though only in the case of the latter is this clearly equated with the term jajman. Crooke has little to say of the potter, save to quote approvingly from Ibbetson’s Punjab Census Report of 1883 that he is a ‘true village menial’ (Crooke: 1896: vol. 3, 339), and nothing at all regarding patronage for the washerman (Crooke: 1896: vol. 2, 288–92). Of the barber, Crooke notes

21 It is an indication of the restricted spread of jajmani relations in this period that R. Greeven (1892) in his extended notes on the Bhangis of Benares, including their panchayat, makes no mention of disputes over patrons.
The Origins of the Jajmani System

By the time of Blunt’s report on the 1911 Census the term ‘jajmani’ had come into common use in Bihar and U.P. (though not, it appears in the Central Provinces) to describe the emergence of a new relationship of service, one in which those who were once, in Nesfield’s term, a ‘kind of public servant’ had become the owners of an exclusive right to serve individual families of patrons. Though the evidence is fragmentary, I believe we can discern several converging developments which produced the jajmani system.

Paradoxical as it may seem, given the identification of jajmani in the anthropological literature as an exclusively village phenomenon, it seems very probable that its origins were in fact urban. We have seen that Crooke in 1896 distinguished between rural Bhangis who remained ‘true village menials’ and their urban cousins whose spirit of ‘combination’ had led them to divide residential areas into ‘beats’ and to term their customers in those areas as their jajmans. Crooke’s account has much in common with what is perhaps the very first description of the claim to exclusive right of service, that given by W. H. Sleeman in his Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official (1844), most of which was, he notes in his introduction, written in late 1835 and early 1836 (Sleeman: 1844: iv).

It is not perhaps known to many of my countrymen in India, that in every city and town [emphasis added] in the country the right of sweeping the houses and streets is one of the most intolerable of monopolies, supported entirely by the pride of caste among the scavengers, who are all of the lowest caste! The right of sweeping within a certain range is recognized by the caste to belong to a certain member; and if any other member presumes to sweep within that range, he is excommunicated—no other member will smoke out of his pipe, or drink out of his jug; and he can get restored to caste only by a feast to the whole body of sweepers. If any house-keeper within a particular circle happens to offend the sweeper of that range, none of his filth will be removed till he pacifies him, because no other sweeper will dare to touch it; and the people of a town are often more tyrannized over by these people than by any other. It is worthy of remark, that in India the spirit of combination is always in the inverse ratio to the rank of the caste— weakest in the highest, and strongest in the lowest class. (Sleeman: 1844: 64–5)

Washermen will often at a large station combine to prevent the washerman of one gentleman from washing the clothes of the servants of any other gentleman, or the servants of one gentleman from getting their clothes washed by any other person than their own master’s washerman. This enables them sometimes to raise the rate of washing to double the fair or
ordinary rate; and in such places the washermen are always drunk with one
continued routine of feasts from the fines levied. (Sleeman: 1844: 65)

It may be drawing too long a bow to suggest that the demarcation
of urban circles of exclusive service was an Indian response to the fact
of European residence, though Sleeman's evidence concerning
washermen in stations is certainly suggestive. What seems unques-
tionable is that the practice was seen by Sleeman and Crooke, two of
the best informed 19th century observers of north India, as primarily
an urban phenomenon.22

Why was the urban model of circles of exclusive rights of service
adopted in the villages of the United Provinces during this period? My
reconstruction of the process is as follows. Prior to the middle of the
19th century 'jajman' referred, as we have seen, almost exclusively to
the person on whose behalf a purohit performed religious offices.
From the 1860s onward we have increasing evidence, beginning in
Bengal, of the transformation of pre-existing village social relation-
ships. I have mentioned already W. W. Hunter's evidence of the
changes which had already occurred in Bankura by 1877. His discus-
sion of the changes in service tenures of land in Birbhum throws
further light upon the process of change. In Birbhum as in Bankura,
village artisans were already individual entrepreneurs by the late
1870s. They did, however retain small parcels of rent-free village land
to compensate them for the provision of residual village services,
primarily of a ritual kind. Among these vestigial holdings were:

(4) Purohit chakran; lands given to Brāhmans for the performance of pūjā to the
village idols, the charge of which falls on the zamindar. (5) Kāmār chakran;
lands given to the kāmār or village blacksmith, who does smith's work for the
zamindar, and whose duty it is also to sacrifice the goats, etc. at religious
festivals. (6) Kumār chakran; lands given to potters for the supply of earthen
vessels at the village festivals, and to the gumāśhtā, etc. (7) Nāpit chakran; lands
given to barbers for their attendance at pūjās, and for doing sundry duties at
other times,—shaving the gumāśhtā, etc. . . . (8) Máli chakran; lands given to
the mālis or gardeners for supplying garlands of flowers, etc. for offerings to
the village idols. (Hunter: 1973: vol. 4, 368–9)

This retention of essential ceremonial services through the pro-
vision of village land raises an important point. Pocock has argued
that the irreducible core of the specializations which are involved in
jajmani relations are those which are essential to the maintenance of

22 For Sleeman's account of village servants see (Sleeman: 1844: 78).
the pure–impure dichotomy which structures the caste system (Pocock: 1962: 82).

As long as there is a caste system there must be specialists whose business it is to cope with the impurities arising from the natural course of life. The test which divides such religious specialists from others is finally what happens when their secular activities are replaced. The razor-blade may take away the Barber's daily work, it does not destroy the Barber caste. (Pocock: 1962: 85)

One relationship which all our specialists have in common is their employer. . . . the dominant cast[e] is the jajman par excellence. If now we see that religious and secular services are conjunct only through the jajman, the fact accords with the ambivalence of the dominant caste in the caste system. The dominant caste itself maintains its own position and the relationships of service with other castes by the fact of its profane or secular politico-economic power. At the same time it is dependent upon other castes for economic needs and for that status which makes it superior to all except the Brahman. (Pocock: 1962: 89)

The Bengal evidence makes it clear that when the secular aspects of service first took on a dyadic character, the nexus of ritual services was not immediately established through patron families but remained the collectivity of the village. This suggests that we need to stand Pocock's suggestion—that it is the element of religious service which is central to jajmani—on its head. What seems more likely is that essential aspects of religious service came to be associated with jajmani ties only after secular and commodity services did.

Pocock's mention of the Barber and his blade is an apt cue to pursue a somewhat more speculative strand of the sequence by which jajmani terminology was taken up by non-Brahmin castes in the course of the 19th century. The barber traditionally serves the role of intermediary between families. As Crooke puts it, 'He . . . acts as confidential envoy and carries announcements of marriages, invitations and congratulations at pregnancy and child-birth.' (Crooke: 1896: vol. 4, 44) Above all, though, he 'acts as the general village match-maker, a duty which his wandering habits of life and his admittance into respectable households admirably fit him to discharge'. (Crooke: 1896: vol. 4, 44)

His role in marriages did not end with arranging a suitable match. He supplied disposable eating utensils and decorations, lit and bore torches, ushered in guests and handed out pipes and betel-leaf. He and his wife served as guides and prompters to the bride and bridegroom during the marriage ceremony itself (Russell: 1916: vol. 4, 265–
In all, he acted 'as the Brahman's assistant' (Russell: 1916: vol. 4, 265). And from that familiarity sprang no doubt his own priestly role. In the absence of a Brahman he takes up the duties of a hedge priest and can bring a wedding or a funeral to a successful issue. (Crooke: 1896: vol. 4, 44) to the lower castes, who cannot employ a Brahman, he is himself the matrimonial priest. (Russell: 1916: vol. 4, 265)

There can be little doubt that the term which barbers would have used for their principals in such cases would have been precisely those used by the Brahmans themselves. The only caste in Bankura that Hunter suggests refers to their patrons by the term 'jajman' are the barbers (Hunter: 1973: 244). This is confirmed by Gait who notes that in Bengal 'The Nápít often enjoys the exclusive right to work for people in a recognised circle, but this is not usually the case with the other village servants and artisans.' (Gait: 1902: 474) Thus it seems most probable that the barber was the fugleman of jajmani relations.

It is hard to discern from the records we have whether the 'push' of the market was a greater factor in creating the jajmani system than its 'pull'. We have seen already the impact of the 'pull' to urban areas in the creation of Bhangi ilágas. Equally we know from a variety of sources that this was a period of major social dislocation, especially among villages held in collective or bhaiyachara tenure. In many districts of what is now Uttar Pradesh bhaiyachara villages were common and remained so until this period. Thornton (1842: 14) observed that in Muzzafarnagar in the 1840s: 'the tenure of the district [is] to a large degree bhyachara where noone pays rent, but each owner cultivates his own field.' The 'coparceners' of a bhaiyachara village were collectively responsible for the costs of its administration. Mansel (1842: 49) states that in Agra each village shareholder paid 10% of the assessment (jumma) to the lambardar to meet these expenses. The village patwari (accountant) was paid with a share of the jumma while chaukidars (watchmen) had 12 acres of village land set aside for their maintenance.

Although Eric Stokes notes that 'as late as 1940 52% of proprietary holdings in Meerut were classified as bhaiachara.' (Stokes: 1978: 236) this was exceptional. Neave (1910: 102–3) remarks that in Mainpuri,

Both Berreman (1962: 389) and Gould (1964: 16) argue that the adoption by artisans of the term 'jajman' to refer to their patrons appears, in Berreman's phrase 'to be the result of substitution by analogy of a term which is convenient for explanatory purposes because it is understood by those accustomed to the Brahmanical system of client relationships.' (Berreman: 1962: 389). The villagers in Berreman's U.P. hill village did not normally use the term themselves. (Berreman: 1962: 388)
where bhaiyachara tenure holders still made up 57% of the district in 1910,
the feature of the landholding tenures of the district is still the large areas held by large communities, which may be further described as huge, struggling brotherhoods of peasant proprietors, all of them, except a few more fortunate members, more or less permanently indebted or financially embarrassed.

Some of these collective communities had an enormous number of members; in Parujar village in the Jamuna ravines, for example, more than 2,600 co-sharers were recorded (Neave: 1910: 103).

It is clear that these communities were under enormous stress in the last quarter of the 19th century. Stokes cites P. C. Wheeler's settlement report of Jaunpur of 1886 in whose wording the influence of Maine is unmistakable:
The village community, which Sir Charles Metcalfe in sentences of historic fame declared to be phoenix-like and indestructible by outward force, has in these parts destroyed itself. There is no corporate body. There is no absorption of the individual in the group. The unit is now the individual and not the village. That status must succumb to contract is no new truth. The tribe gives place to the clan, the clan to the village, the village to the family, and the family to the individual. (Stokes: 1978: 78)

The District Gazetteer for Aligarh notes that 'Since 1870 . . . partitions [of bhaiyachara villages] have been numerous, owing to the constant increase in the number of co-sharers and to the extensive alienations' (Nevill: 1909: 88). Brown (1939: 7) in his Settlement Report of Bijnor noted 'an immense increase in the number of mahals as the result of partitions'. The Mainpuri Gazetteer noted that 'Most of the proprietary communities are heavily embarrassed, and their ultimate extinction and deposition to the grade of tenants can hardly be averted . . . ' (Neave: 1910: 111). In Muzzafarnagar the number of estates (mahals) rose from 1,146 in the 1840s to 2,992 by the 1890s. In his settlement report Miller observes:
The most important feature . . . is the great increase . . . in the number of mahals . . . . Disputes about the common land or the wish to get possession of it to break it up are certainly a frequent source of partitions, and when an application has been made by one sharer numbers of others think they may as well take the opportunity of having their estate marked off. I see no reason to think that there will be any check in the number of applications for partition; on the contrary they will probably increase . . . . (Miller: 1892: 22)
W. A. W. Last observed that even before formal partitions of estates took place, village shareholders in Shahjehanpur District were being
allowed to pay their taxes on an individual basis, rather than follow the legal requirement to pay the sums to the village lamardár (Last: 1901: 5)

What happened to village servants when these collective tenures were divided can also be glimpsed from what our sources say about their Untouchable labourers. W. H. Smith reported in his settlement report for Aligarh:

In importance as cultivators the Chamars are fourth on the list, for, though very many of them hold land of their own, and in some tahsils have attained considerable prosperity, yet the majority are little more than serfs; they are the hired labourers, who follow the plough, drive the bullocks, and sow the seed of both tenant and landlord; they perform most of the menial offices of a village, and landowners are so jealous of their services that no partition is complete until an adequate number of Chamars have been apportioned off to each co-sharer in proportion to his interests in the estate. (Smith: 1882: 35) [emphasis added]

Nevill (1909: 77) wrote of the Chamars of Aligarh, that they 'were not long ago regarded as mere serfs, tied to particular holdings to such an extent that no partition was considered complete until the sharer had allotted to his share a number of Chamars in proportion to his interest in the estate'.

Thomason (1837: 22) in his report on the settlement of Chukhah Azimgarh observed a comparable process at work on zamindari estates fifty years earlier.

The foundation on which the right of the Zamindar now avowedly rests is that of pecuniary obligation. He spends capital in locating the cultivator in the village; he builds his house, feeds him till the harvest time, supplies him with seed, grain and instruments of husbandry. On all these an exorbitant interest is charged, and in consideration of the pecuniary obligation thus incurred, the services of the man are exacted. Hence the connection is rather personal than resulting from the tenure of the land, and various circumstances support this view. In mortgages those rights are seldom, if ever transferred—in private sales very rarely unless specified,—and in public sales by authority for arrears of revenue, never. Hence an auction purchaser never acquires any rights over the tenants at will of a former Zamindar, and thus the Zamindar always struggles to include all such cultivation under the term of his seer [sir]. In the partition of an estate each Puttee keeps its own Ryots, and sometimes the most violent disputes exist as to the right to certain Ryots. [emphasis added]

As these examples make clear, the division of estates, whether bhaiyachara or zamindari, was a traumatic process which involved the allocation to individual shareholders of the hitherto collectively managed means of production, whether land or labour. Similarly, where estates were purchased by outsiders at auction for failure to pay
revenue, they acquired thereby no right to labour services and had, one must assume, to reach individual arrangements with local artisans.

This was also a time in which revolutionary changes were taking place in the position of village artisans and menials. Crooke observed in 1888 in his evidence to the Dufferin Enquiry that

[The wages of] certain classes of artisans, particularly masons, blacksmiths, and carpenters . . . have gone up by leaps and bounds since employment opened on public works. As far as I can judge their pay has about doubled within the last generation. . . . And this rise in wages has been in some cases accompanied by a desire to claim a higher status than they hitherto enjoyed. Thus quite recently the carpenters of the town of Jalesar held a meeting, declared themselves to be Brahmans, assumed the sacred string, and indignantly refused to defile themselves by repairing the municipal conservancy carts—a class of work to which in former times they never dreamed of objecting. (Crooke: 1888a: 24)

There can be no question but that [village menials] have greatly improved in position, and become more independent under [British] rule. Old Thákur landlords have often complained bitterly to me of the insolence of this class, the fact being that they are no longer inclined to submit to bullying and drudgery. They know their rights, and are determined to assert them. (Crooke: 1888a: 25)

One may be reading too much into the case of the Jalesar brahmin-carpenters if one suggests that one motive behind their act of unilateral sanskritization was that of converting their erstwhile overlords into more genteel jajmans, but the impetus for change which it reflects is unmistakable.

Two central aspects of that impetus are evident from our sources: a general scarcity of labour and high grain prices in this period. Thus E. Rose writing from Ghazipur in 1888 noted that

In cases of illness the zamindar will probably find it in his interest to contribute to the support of his Chamar, for the competition is as a rule amongst the zamindars for ploughmen, and not amongst the ploughmen for zamindars. (Rose: 1888: 138)

H. J. Boas in his Settlement Report for Moradabad noted the disappearance of ‘halbandi’ rentals in kind because of the rise which had taken place in grain prices (Boas: 1909: 15). And A. A. Wace saw in Bhagulpore that village artisans who were paid in kind had ‘benefit-

24 See also (Crooke: 1972: 208). Further evidence of an increase in real wage rates is found in the Etawah Gazetteer: ‘Writing as early as 1867 Mr. Chase noticed a considerable enhancement [in wages], even agricultural labourers, who were paid in grain, receiving a greater proportional renumeration than before.’ (Drake-Brockman: 1911: 50)
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ted from the rise in prices' (Wace: 1888: 3). He reported a significant episode which illustrates clearly that all aspects of production were now mediated through the market:

... I heard of a case lately where a ryot was trying to make the carpenter keep his plough in order for the year for a smaller dole of grain, because the former dole was worth more in the bazars tapped by the railway than the carpenter used to get. (Wace: 1888: 3)

There were thus two forces of change from whose convergence jajmani emerged. The first of these was the growing partition of zamindari and bhuiyachara villages into individual holdings. The second was the mounting pressure on landholders to offer significant incentives to village artisans in order to retain their services.

On its own the partition of villages might well have led to a form of ordinary patron–client ties. In the need to induce skilled artisans to remain in the villages we have, I think, the key to the unique character of jajmani.25 As we have already seen what is striking about the new jajmani relations is that they so clearly took the form of property. Although I took this to be one of the defining characteristics of jajmani in my introduction, it must be said that on the whole this aspect of the system has been neglected by anthropologists. We have seen that in 1911 jajmani rights could be not only inherited but also transferred to another in lieu of dowry. By 1930 the United Provinces Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee found in Meerut that 'no less than 84 mortgages of jajmanis had been registered, most of which belonged to Bhangis, ... some belonged to Mahabrahmans ... , whilst one was the purohiti of a Brahman' (Blunt: 1931: 260).26

This is clear evidence that jajmani rights were now freely saleable, even to moneylenders who would not themselves utilize them. The Provincial Banking Enquiry also found that jajmani relationships had been extended in the course of time to include the relationship between borrower and moneylender.

When the sahukar, as he is there called, accepts a cultivator as his client (asami), it becomes his duty to give advances in money for any purpose

25 It is possible that a principle of symmetry was also at work. In general, the nature of rights in service in India were equivalent to those which existed in land. Thus kaniachi in land in the Carnatic had its equivalent in kaniachi of service and the collective rights of management in villages in the United Provinces were reflected in the collective obligations of service as we have seen. When market forces and indebtedness led to the fission of collective holdings into the private property of individuals, it is possible that a corresponding change was seen as necessary for the sphere of service.

26 Blunt has misread his own report here and added the value of the mortgages to their number. The correct total is 63 (Government of India: 1930: 137).
whatever, and also in any kind in which he deals. The client, on the other hand, undertakes to borrow from no one else and to repay the sakukar's debts out of his produce before he settles the dues of any other person (Blunt: 1931: 260).

The Waning of the Jajmani System

Like many transitional systems of labour relationships, the jajmani system was in dissolution almost from its coming into being. I have argued that jajmani was probably in widespread existence in Uttar Pradesh for less than thirty years when Blunt first described it in 1911. In 1936 William Wiser (1958: 116) noted that the system which he observed in Karimpur had changed within living memory. That has been the consistent finding of all subsequent studies.

Oscar Lewis reported in 1958 that Jats in Rampur had broken off perhaps the most important of jajmani ties: those with the barbers. The Jats were shaving themselves and going to others for haircutting; they were also arranging their own marriages (Lewis: 1958: 66–7). Equally striking, Lewis documented a chain of events, starting in 1933, which led to the abandonment by the village Chamars of their traditional obligations to dispose of dead animals and provide begar or unpaid work (Lewis: 1958: 71–7).

Joseph W. Elder in his study of Rajpur reported widespread abandonment of jajmani ties, initiated both by patrons who no longer needed the service (as in the case of the water carriers displaced by pumps) and by artisans (such as the last blacksmith who regretfully informed his patrons that he could no longer carry on) (Elder: 1970: 109–19).

Sharma (c. 1984) in his recent study of the Jat-dominated western U.P. village of Uttary Ghatayan, indicates that only vestigial jajmani relationships remain. Almost all castes, from Brahmans to Chamars and Bhangis, have experienced significant out-migration and change of occupation. The oilpressers have largely gone into transportation and agricultural labour—work he notes which was formerly done by the Chamars. The latter now prefer to work for daily wages. The Jogis, once beggars, now raise buffaloes and sell milk. The potters still make clay pots 'but have discontinued the jajmani system and sell the pots [for] cash mainly at the time of marriage' (Sharma: c. 1984: 17)

As far as I am aware, no student of village India has made a systematic study of this aspect of the jajmani system.
Only the carpenters retain jajmani relations, and many of them have also left for outside work.28

Conclusion

If, as I argue, the jajmani system is neither an ancient nor an all-India phenomenon, why is it so widely understood to be both? The answer, I believe, lies in recognizing that jajmani, as it exists in the anthropological literature, is largely a special kind of invented tradition. Hobsbawm and Ranger suggest that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries two sorts of traditions were invented in Europe: those consciously created for a specific occasion, such as a coronation, and those, like the practices surrounding the F.A. Cup Final which ‘emerg[ed] in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period—a matter of a few years perhaps—and establish[ed] themselves with great rapidity.’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger: 1983: 1). In the instances which they cite, invented traditions, like quick-setting concrete, froze once fluid practices into codified, prescriptive rights. The value of these instant traditions in a time of great social upheaval and flux was precisely that they gave to new groups, institutions and beliefs the sanction and authority of immemorial custom.

If royal ceremony, national symbols and sporting behaviour were the creative artifacts of Europe, in colonial Africa the scale of invention was breathtaking in its scope. There, as Terrence Ranger notes, the most far-reaching inventions of tradition . . . took place when the Europeans believed themselves to be respecting age-old African custom. What were called customary law, customary land-rights, customary political structures, and so on, were in fact all invented by colonial codification. (Ranger: 1983: 250)

Hence, because ‘Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to’ (Iliffe: 1979: 324 cited by Ranger: 1983: 252). Unaware of the adaptability and mutability of customary practices, colonial administrators, missionaries, anthropologists assumed that the contemporary social arrangements they found exemplified unchanging traditions. By reducing them to writing Europeans conferred upon them an official formality and rigidity which were utterly without precedent.

28 These examples also call into question the arguments of Pocock (1962) and Gould (1964: 31) that ritual services lie at the core of relationships in the jajmani system. See also the remarks of (Commander: 1983: 298).
A similar impulse can be seen at work in India in the formal codification of Hindu law by colonial authorities such as Steele and Mayne. Unlike Africa, however, in India the task of European study, whether of the law or in the realm of village social practice, was not to recover the past from its persistence in present. The orientalist tradition of scholarship had already firmly located the essence of ancient Indian society as well as law in the Sanskrit classics. Texts such as the Laws of Manu became therefore the universal benchmarks against which anthropologists could measure the extent of local deviation and degeneration. The Wisers, for example, were in no doubt that what they had found in Karimpur was the decadent local form of the Aryan original. 'The Hindu Jajmani System is a disintegrated form of the ancient Village Commune . . . in its purest form [it] was a corruption of the ancient system of the “custom of communal ownership” directed by the panchayat.' (Wiser: 1958: 108 and 110)

Where earlier observers of jajmani like Crooke and Blunt had seen it as a discrete and localized phenomenon, Wiser's incorporation of jajmani into the orientalist tradition (subsequently endorsed by Beidelman) was a major act of invention, a fateful and obliterating leap by which jajmani was equated with baluta and the southern systems. In a like manner, when Dumont flung the portmanteau term of jajmani over the many village forms of 'prestations and counter-prestations' (Dumont: 1972: 138) that gesture was part of his broader invention of an orientalist 'sociology of India' in which significant regional differences and historical change itself were rendered subservient to the encompassing ideology of the caste system. Here one must agree heartily with Fukazawa's observation that the works of modern sociologists usually have not much historical perspective. They tend to regard the phenomena which seem old at the time of field work as traditional with the implication that they have continued as if since time immemorial. The 'traditional' systems and institutions, however, may have been historically developed in the unexpectedly recent past. (Fukazawa: 1972: 20)

In the case of the jajmani system of north India the orientalist inventions of scholars have too long hidden from our sight the more significant work of invention: that of the artisans and Untouchables...

29 Good objects (1982) to the use of jajmani for the system he found in Tirunelveli because significant nuances of the Tamil terms are thereby lost. Though I share his rejection of Dumont's presumption of the 'alleged monism of South Asian thought' (Good: 1982: 23) it must be evident that my grounds for so doing go substantially beyond his. For further thoughts on the orientalist nature of the Dumontian enterprise, see (Mayer: 1983 and Mayer 1991).
who in a time of economic and political revolution forged out of dissolution of the old village order new economic and ritual relationships.30

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30 I wish to thank both Walter C. Neale and John Gray for urging me to stress the adaptive and transitional nature of the jajmani system.

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From Jalaun it is reported that Nais will not marry in their own village because they consider residents of the same village brothers and sisters. One origin of this feeling may be the desire so strongly felt by barbers to keep the constituents or persons they serve (jáman) in the same family. . . . (Crooke: 1896: vol. 4, 42)

Besides shaving and shampooing his constituents, he acts as a village menial; prepares the tobacco at the chaupal or village rest house and waits on strangers and guests. (Crooke: 1896: vol. 4, 44)

This last is particularly interesting as it illustrates that in this transitional period barbers had established dyadic (jajmani) relationships with individual client families while still retaining elements of service to the entire village.

At this same period, jajmani and its synonyms were first recorded in the Census of India. E. A. Gait noted in his report on census operations in Bihar in 1901 that

In many districts, the barber, washerman, blacksmith, etc. each has his own defined circle (brit or sarhan) within which he works, and no one else may attempt to filch his customers, or jajmáns, from him on pain of severe punishment at the hands of the caste committee. The exclusive right to employment by the people in the circle constituting a man's brit is often so well established, that it is regarded as hereditable property and, with the Muhammadans, is often granted as dower. (Gait: 1902: 473)

As we have seen, perhaps the first general description of the jajmani system was that written by E. A. H. Blunt (1912) in his Report on the Census of 1911 for the United Provinces. Although Blunt later repeated much of text of the census report in his The Caste System of Northern India (1931) there are two significant passages which were later omitted. In a footnote he comments that 'brit Nai' and 'brit Bhangi'

are common entries in the occupation column and may best be translated by 'caste dues'. Jajmani is also used, but generally it is reserved for the Brahmanical dues and probably includes not only the dues connected with purohiti, but those vaguer sources of income, such as presents received by all sorts of Brahmans at feasts of every kind (Blunt: 1912: 332)

This is, I think, as near as we shall come to a snapshot of the moment of transition in which the new terminology entered common usage to express a changing social reality. Another passage in Blunt's report confirms, briefly and parenthetically, that a significant aspect of the new system was that rights of service could be freely transferred to others by those who owned them: 'the Dom's begging beat and the Bhangi's jajmani are often given as a dowry' (Blunt: 1912: 332).