UNIT 8: RELIGION AND SOCIETY
AMONG THE COORGS
-M.N. SRINIVAS*

Structure
8.0 Objectives
8.1 Introduction to the book
8.2 Chapter 1-Introductory
8.3 Chapter 2- Social Structure
8.4 Chapter 3 and 4-The Ritual Idiom of Coorgs: The Ritual Complex of Mangala and Concepts of Pole and Madi
8.5 Chapter 5-The Cult of the Okka
8.6 Chapter 6-The Cults of the Larger Social Units
8.7 Chapter 7-Hinduism -Religion and Society
8.8 Let us Sum Up
8.9 References
8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will know:
● why this ethnographic work holds significance in Anthropology.
● the generic manner in which the book is written.
● the broad contents of each chapter of the book.
● the theoretical concepts that the book proposed.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Prof. M. N. Srinivas’ book Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India (published in 1952, Oxford: Clarendon Press) was a seminal work in the understanding of the Indian society. It challenged the, then prevalent concept of the Indian Caste system, as perceived by the dominant paradigm of western anthropologists, and brought forth a new intellectual framework for understanding Hindu society under the structural functional school of thought. It raised questions on notion of caste as static and unchanging, and brought the omnipresence of social change into focus.

Srinivas earned a double doctorate, first from the University of Bombay under the mentorship of Professor G. S. Ghurye and subsequently from the University of Oxford under the mentorship of Prof. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Professor Evans-Pritchard. His primary collection of field data (for this book) was for a two-year period under the research grant fellowship awarded to him in 1940, in sociology by the University of Bombay. Majority of data

* Dr. Indrani Mukherjee, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi
collected for this ethnographic description was collected from an ethnological perspective. Later, when he went to Oxford, Srinivas was advised by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown to analyse the same field data with a different theoretical lens, reflecting on the inter-relation between religion and society, instead of choosing a different topic of exploration. While the data collected for the book was from the field work conducted, Srinivas’ understanding of the field came from his long association and belongingness to the geographical region of the study. Radcliffe-Brown reflects in the preface of the book that this gave him a better understanding of the Indian social reality as compared to a western scholar; however Srinivas’ key reflections were for the caste reality in the south of India and then its subsequent association with the overall Indian Sanskritic Hindu ideas.

Radcliffe-Brown in the preface of the book reflects that “one major problem is that of the social function of religion-how religion contributes to the existence of society as an ordered and continuing system of relationships amongst human beings?” (Srinivas, 1952: vii). The book brings to light how religion is intertwined with the social life of people through everyday practices; ideas of purity and pollutions; auspicious and inauspicious; rites, rituals and festivals; inter-caste distance, exceptions and mobility; that create social structural solidarities which are layered as well as overlapping.

The book effectively uses secondary literature and previous scholarly writings of the area and people to map the regions history. It also displays a constructive use of oral tradition, folklores, ballads, metaphors, proverbs and local sayings to breathe life into the ethnography. The ethnography itself is an analytical description, where practice is continuously deciphered and contextualised with the topic under discussion and the larger frames of reference. Further, the ethnography admits to certain generalisations in an effort to simplify the understanding of concepts as well as practices, and also makes a continued effort to quote exceptions to the generalisations being made.

This book is a reflection of an ethnographic present, ie. it is written as an existing social reality; however, it has to be studied in a contextual time frame. Today, it forms a baseline archival work for a comparative analysis of the Coorgs across time, but it is reflective of theoretical concepts that were unique to the then academic sphere and hold relevance in contemporary times as well.

The book is divided into eight chapters. Let us now look at each chapter for its content and theoretical reflection, some key concepts and the manner in which it is written. As the work is “frozen in time” around the colonial and post-colonial period, this unit is also written in present-tense.

### 8.2 CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTORY

The book begins with situating the Coorgs in their geographical locale vis-a-vis the terrain, topography, flora and fauna, pointing at its relative isolation and the fact that regimes of power through history, used this relative isolation to their advantage; and though there has been improvement in the
infrastructure of roads under the British rule, the accessibility to the area remains restricted. In this the Coorgs seem to be a distinct community in occupation of the forested mountains of Coorg for many centuries, and with a way of life of their own, as an agricultural community with rice as their main crop.

Inspite of isolation there is reflection on contact with neighbours and mobility (though difficult) for trade and pilgrimage, on a seasonal basis, over time. The chapter reflects on cultural diversity and contiguity within the small region of Coorg by marking out linguistic areas and shared commonalities between languages. It proposes the conception of the Coorg village in contrast with what is recognised as village in other parts of South India (ie. Kannada, Telugu, or Tamil country), which are cluster villages. The Coorg villages consist of households that are attached to their ancestral estate (with their associated satellite houses and hutments). The households live far from each other, on different hills with valleys in between, creating an illusion that the village lacks boundaries. However, the boundaries are recognised by the people of the village in their sense of unity against other villages, which were in the past entities of feud and by that virtues still carry a sense of rivalry. The significance of villages is apparent from the fact that the 1931 census reflects that majority of the Coorg population was rural in nature (majority being Hindus).

The chapter reflects on the 1931 census to (for the first time) bring forth the idea of social mobility, pointing out that the census enumeration found 44,585 Kodagi-speakers though the total number of Coorgs was only 41,026. Kodagi is spoken by Coorgs at home. As Coorgs are the dominant caste in the area, several castes and tribes have taken over the language, this is followed by an attempt to imitate Coorgs in dress, customs, and manner leading to the subsequent inclusion of non-Coorgs as Coorgs, as was the case in the 1931 census as well.

The Chapter traces the history of Coorg from the 9th century onwards through a close inspection of various volumes of the Imperial Gazetteer of India. It documents the rule of various Hindu kings (and their Chiefs and Nayaks) over different sections of Coorg; and subsequently the incorporation of Coors into i) land taxation, ii) as warriors in the Raja’s (king’s) troop and ii) an administrate system for resolution of disputes. The Coorgs stood strong with the Hindu kings, they rebelled against the Muslims in 1782, for this they were driven out of their land by Tipu Sultan in 1784; however, the Coorgs who had escaped were reinstated in 1799 when the British Occupied the land and handed over its management back to the Hindu king Vira Raja IV. At the time of reinstating the Coorgs were brought under the system of land tenure referred to as the jamma, which along with the allocation of hereditary cultivable land established a liability of military service on the Raja’s troop. Many Coorgs held important position in the Raja’s court and occasionally some members of the royal family married Coorgs. The closeness that the Coorgs enjoyed with the Rajas led to their adopting the Hindu ways (especially the Shaivite influence) and helped in the spread of the culture and religion. The Introductory Chapter thus establishes the historicity of the Coorgs and their indoctrination into the Hindu folds.
The chapter ends with the social change brought about by the shift in agrarian practices from the cultivation of rice towards coffee plantation. Some Britishers also took up coffee plantation in the Coorg region. This along with abolition of slavery by the British rule led to a flux in the social structure. The slaves were from the lower caste while the masters were from the higher caste. Due to better economic prospects the freed slaves chose to leave their associated household (inspite of there being folklores describing strong interpersonal relations between a slave and the master). This led to lack of labour in the Coorg ancestral land as well as a flux in the social structure. However, once an annual remuneration decided for the lower caste labourers the structure re-established itself.

8.3 CHAPTER 2-SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The second chapter introduces the concepts of Sanskritization, Horizontal Solidarity and Vertical Solidarity. The ideas propounded here are carried forward through the rest of the book.

The caste system was hitherto understood by scholars and the western world as a religiously sanctioned Brahminical overarching varna system of fivefold rigid/unchanging hierarchy; with the Brahmmins at the head, followed in order by the Kshatriyas the aristocracy or the warriors, Vaishyas the traders, Shudras the servants and labourers, and, lastly the Untouchables. This is challenged by the concept of Sanskritization. The ideas of social mobility which was pointed at in the first chapter was further emphasised through the reality that castes are in practice divided into sub-castes or jatis “which is a very small endogamous group practising a traditional occupation and enjoying a certain amount of cultural, ritual, and juridical autonomy” (pg. 24) in a linguistic region. Each jati identifies with a broad scale of hierarchy through the caste categories of the Vama system. This helps them define their own identity as well as the hierarchy of social groups from other regions. The subcastes of the middle rungs of the hierarchy (though prohibited in theory) have the possibility of upwards social mobility through the adoption of practices, customs, rituals, pantheon etc. of the higher caste. Moreover, dominant subcastes of a region can also claim superiority over other competing subcastes and over time proclaims higher status in the caste hierarchy. This process of upward social mobility has been called ‘Sanskritization’. The term is preferred to ‘Brahminization’ as the upwardly mobile subcastes may not necessarily adopt vedic rites, as is evident from the Coorgs themselves. Chapter one constructs the incorporation of Coorgs into the Hindu fold through history including their adoption of the Hindu pantheon as Shaivites. Coorgs identify themselves as Kshatriyas (or the warrior caste) which was solidified by their association with the Rajas; through positions in their courts as well as military service in the Raja’s troops. They are now indeed recognised as such, in the caste hierarchy. There are also various myths associated with Coorgs being descendants of caste intermarriages of the higher varnas of the Hindu caste system. However, the Kshatriyas of the varna system are entitled to perform certain rituals at which sacred verses (mantras) from the Vedas are recited by the priests, the Coorgs do not follow these practices during the naming ceremony of the child, marriages, or during ceremonies of death. Thus, inspite of having
a place in the caste hierarchy and a recognition in the overall religious system the Coorgs have not taken to certain ‘caste associated’ Brahmanical practices.

On one hand social groups outside of Hinduism have been assimilated into its folds and in the other the castes in the middle rungs try to move upwards in the caste hierarchy. “The tendency of the lower castes to imitate the higher has been a powerful factor in the spread of Sanskritic ritual and customs, and in the achievement of a certain amount of cultural uniformity not only throughout the caste scale, but over the entire length and breadth of India” (pg.30).

Caste has a tendency to stress horizontal ties that cut across territorial boundaries, this has been recognised under the concept of ‘horizontal solidarity’. It unites members of the same caste living in different villages and distinguishes them from other castes in the same village. Sub-castes enjoy juridical autonomy (though this autonomy can be challenged in the courts, since the British regime). Every jati/sub caste, from a particular village or a group of neighbouring villages, constitutes a caste court which resolves internal disputes and punishes caste offences. Thus, the sub castes are well aware of their norms and values. As, mentioned earlier the jatis are endogamous and monopolise certain economic activities, the skills of which are passed down from generation to generation within the caste boundaries. These skills make them a part of an intersectional social structure ie. the caste hierarchical structure, which is vertical in nature.

The vertical hierarchy created by the caste structure governs the inter-caste relations through the concept of pollution. Contact of any kind, touching, dining (exchange of food and water), sex, and other relations between castes which are structurally distant results in the higher of the two castes being polluted. Pollution can only be overcome through purificatory rites. Contact is culturally defined and might include the maintenance of a prescribed physical distance. Inspite of this, castes occupying different hierarchies share an interdependence. An Indian village usually consists of a few subcastes which are mutually dependent and also possess certain interests in common leading to what is conceptualised here as ‘vertical solidarity’. The Chapter presents the different sub-castes present in a Coorg village and their respective positions with respect to their traditional profession and subsequent social status. However, vertical solidarity is maintained, beyond the mere interdependency of economic needs, through ritual roles in both mourning as well as household and village festivals. The most prominent castes that the Coorgs interact with are the Brahmin or the priest, the Kaniyas who are astrologers, Banna is the caste which usually performs the rites prescribed by the Kaniya; further there are the blacksmith, carpenter, goldsmith, washerman and barber. These castes are again associated with their professional role; however, they also have special significance during festivities like the harvest festival were they provide ritually significant items to be used during the proceedings. The washerman provides ritually pure clothes for different occasions while the barber is indispensable because shaving and cutting of nails is important act of attaining ritual purity for the performance of rites (while the touch of the barber itself is defiling and needs purification). The Meda and Poleya are at the bottom of the caste
Ethnographic Cases

hierarchy. Meda provide artifacts like baskets, fish-traps, and receptacles of cane, vote reed, and bamboo; and are essential for Coorg festival, dance or hunt, where they beat their tom-tom. Poleyas are servants attached to the okka as household servants or agricultural labourers. The castes and professional categories mentioned here are blanket terms and consist of a number of sub-castes. These inter-caste relations are managed through prescribed annual remunerations at the time of harvest.

Sometimes ritual occasions stress the structural distance that prevails between the castes. However, some ritual roles place individuals from a lower caste, temporarily, in a superior position vis-a-vis the high castes. Further, some rites/rituals involve imperative participation and responsibilities of castes with which a social distance is maintained under usual circumstances, thus minimizing the structural distance.

It is important to note that horizontal and vertical solidarity are continuously negotiated to maintain a societal balance. Chapter 6 reiterates this when it mentions that “A village is a multi-caste association and the unity of the village always demands that caste-ties are checked sufficiently to prevent their overflowing the village and that unity with other castes occupying different positions in the hierarchy is stressed” (pg. 200-201).

This chapter continues to explain the social structure of the Coorgs vis-à-vis their inter-caste relations, the primary household (or the okka) and larger social groups like the neighbouring household or okka with whom friendship ties are maintained, the village and the nad (a group of villages). Within the inter caste relationship the chapter defines the role and services of each caste that the Coorgs interact with and draws a brief sketch of the ritual roles/significance that these castes play in various occasions within the Coorg household and the village. The Coorg household is described in relation with its ancestral affiliation and recognised through the bond of agnatic men, attached to the ancestral land, under the headship of a senior; whose wife takes on the responsibility and the management of the household and its women. Coorg being a warrior community (historically) based their relations on friendships and rivalry, in this there is recognition of neighbouring and friendly okkas with respect to a household, while the village is the smallest and most important of the territorial groups, and the nad, consisting of several villages is the next bigger group. This is also highlighted in Chapter 6 ie. “the widespread prevalence of feuds between villages and between nads tended to emphasize the unity of the village and check the segmentary action of caste” (Chapter 6, pg. 201).

While historically created as an administrative unit, nad corresponds to the sentiments of the people. The chapter displays the system of authority within the okka, village and nad and the honour associated with their membership and protection. This honour is propagated through its identification within rituals and epitomised through folklore.

These units of solidarity introduced in this chapter are revisited again in the different chapters that follow.

**Check Your Progress I**

1. What are the key concepts that are introduced in Chapter two that form the mainstay of the book?

.................................................................
2. Which are the prominent castes that the Coorgs interact with?

8.4 CHAPTER 3 AND 4 - THE RITUAL IDIOM OF COORGS: THE RITUAL COMPLEX OF MANGALA AND CONCEPTS OF POLE AND MADI

The third Chapter begins with the observation that “Every society has a body of ritual”. These rituals might consist of individual acts, or a whole body of acts (ritual complexes) that repeat themselves either constantly or frequently and at times occasionally. The two chapters trace the rituals within the social life of the Coorgs, beginning from the routine practice of salutation to more customary occasions as well as festivals. Chapter 3 reflects on significant occasions of life cycle referred to as Mangala which include marriage, the ear boring ceremony (representing social adulthood of males), building of a house, conferring of a bravery honour etc., all of which are performed on an auspicious day and thus recognisable as auspicious occasion. These occasions are marked by certain ritual complexes or murta. The Chapter continues to describing the mangala in detail, especially marriage. In this, chapter cites the ritual complex as a whole with respect to the household structure, the ceremonial rites, role of various household members, the role and significance of other castes and so on.

The chapter also brings out the ritual recognition of auspicious and inauspicious in various realms of life. It speaks of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness with reference to direction (south being inauspicious), place (kitchen, central hall, and south-western room of the ancestral home), food (rice and milk), cloth (cotton and silk), colour (black, white and red), marital status (married woman and a widow), animals (cobra and crow). It also speaks of sacredness or ritual purity which is usually attained through purificatory rites. Purity and pollution is further explained through occasions attached to pollution i.e. women in their periods, the birth of a child and death, which are considered to be defiling. The chapter describes the whole ritual complex around auspicious and inauspicious occasions in a comparative frame. Within the auspicious occasions there are certain rites that bring the individuals central to the rituals in contact with lower castes leading to a state of pollution and thus in need of purification. Similarly, both an auspicious occasion like marriage as well death, demand certain rites that require a state of higher ritual purity. This highlights the fact that even in an occasion of pollution, performance of rites requires ritual purity.

The third chapter keeps shifting between the descriptive nuances of various auspicious and inauspicious occasion, in this it might be a little difficult to follow from time to time.
Chapter 4 elaborates on the concept of ritual purity of madi, and ritual impurity/pollution or pole. These concepts systematize and maintain the structural distance between different castes. One of the most important Untouchable castes are the Poley and Holey as both of which actually have the word pole attached to them. The chapter brings forth the realization that the state of pollution is relative in nature. A lower caste individual is impure/polluted with reference to a higher caste, however within himself he is in a state of relative purity. Thus, an individual of any caste, under normal circumstances, is in a state of relative purity, with reference to his own caste. He has to gain ritual purity in order to perform certain rites, through prescribed purificatory acts. However, if the individual comes in contact with some one of a lower caste, whether in the state of ritual purity or normal state they get polluted, and have to undergo purificatory rites. Thus, “Ritual impurity, normal ritual status, and ritual purity form a hierarchy”.

Further, Ritual purity might include aspects of physical purity or cleanliness, however mere physical cleanliness does not lead to ritual purity which is a culturally prescribed concept. Similar, parallel is also drawn with respect to death and mourning, which distinguishes grief from mourning. The mourning rites and mourning period are ritually prescribed thus an elderly death sees an elaborate ritual and long mourning period as compared to an infant. However, this does not necessarily represent the grief associated with the death.

The chapter builds on the ideas of purity and impurity through death rituals. This is especially significant as the state is of pollution but the individuals performing necessary rites have to be in a state of ritual purity. In this abstinence attached with ritual purity which include dietary restrictions, attire, contact with other caste, spouse etc. Such abstinence is also key to the ritual status of other auspicious occasions as well.

8.5 CHAPTER 5- THE CULT OF THE OKKA

“The okka or the patrilineal and patrilocal joint family is the basic group among Coorgs” (pg. 124). “Membership of an okka is acquired by birth, and the outside world always identifies a man with his okka” (pg. 124). “People who do not belong to an okka have no social existence” (pg. 124), thus if a child is born outside of a wedlock the elders of the community encourage the (allotment of) membership of the child in either the father or the mothers okka.

Chapter 5 brings out the relevance of the okka in the life of an individual. The okka has a continuity with the ancestral realm, where an individual after his death joins the ‘body of apotheosized ancestors’. The ancestors are believed to look over the ancestral land, and are worshiped and propitiated from time to time. The ancestral land which is owned by the okka is held has a combined property and efforts are made to ensure that the land is not divided/split across generations. Thus, if the size of the household becomes too large, some members might construct and move to a subsidiary house on the land but the property remains combined. Every okka has a head, who is a senior agnatic male. The head of the household is responsible for delegation of duties and responsibilities among the men of the household. The household headman’s wife is the mistress of the house and women
The okka is an exogamous group and the marriage of its member is decided by the okka. The women post marriage become members of their conjugal okka however, they retain a symbolic membership in their natal okka as well. This chapter describes the legal aspects of marriage with respect to the rights of the woman and ritual of sammanda that fortifies these rights. There is a description of the rights and responsibilities related to different types of marriage, eventualities in case of widowhood or divorce, marriage for the continuity of an okkas which does not have any male descendants, the respective identity of children born and so on. There is also a reflection on the preference for levirate and cross-cousin marriage and how this leads to a solidarity between okkas. This is especially significant as women’s relationship with reference to daughter-in-law with mother-in-law and sister-in-law’s is seen strained relationships that might lead to a fraction in the okka. This relational struggle between has been referred to by Prof. Srinivas in his previous work ‘Marriage and Family in Mysore’ (1942). The chapter also reflects on the significance of the friends of the okka and continues to the next chapter which represents the village festival as the case example of social solidarity.

8.6 CHAPTER 6-THE CULTS OF THE LARGER SOCIAL UNITS

The village-deity has a significant role in the social life of the Coorgs. Inspite of being referred to as a village deity, the deity in question might be a combined deity of more than one village. The temples of these deities are simple and less ornate as compared to the Hindu temples; and the priest of the village deity may or may not be a Brahmin. There are times when the temple of the village deity might also consist of an outer sanctum of deities belonging to the lower caste. Thus, the religious pantheon is also representative of the social reality of castes. Most village festivals worshipping their deities take place around the same time, but among villages that hold key festivities, there is an understanding that their festivities will be prime on alternate years. The members of every caste in the village, including the Poleyas, attend the meeting or the village-assembly facilitating the decisions related to the festivities, and everyone in the village has to observe certain rules and restrictions during the festival. The festival might at times require the Poleyas to remain indoors and out of view for a period of time, emphasising the social distance between castes. Different okkas have designated duties at times of the festival and the Bannas and Maleyas (castes) officiate as oracles and dancers; and are responsible for the sacrifice of animals. In case of the village temples that have a brahmin priest the rituals related with animal sacrifice is officiated by a non-brahmin priest post which the vicinity is purified and the brahmin priest takes over the proceedings of the rest of the rituals. The festivities are marked by competitions between various villages. There are designated parts of the festivities where the Poleyas join in, ensuring vertical solidarity through a combined celebration. The Poleyas
Ethnographic Cases are usually the receivers of an annual remuneration and goods from the Coorgs, during the festival they make token returns which, while negligible economically, stress on the goodwill prevalent between the various sections of a village community. The festivals of village-deities, the village harvest festival etc. usually culminate with a dinner for the entire village. The village dinner is rightly called ‘village harmony’, as it maintains and increases the harmony of the village. Chapter 6 describes the village festivals in great details, including the popular festivals, the local deities and their hinduised version, the associated rituals and the inter-caste roles. This takes us to the absorption of local deities in the larger pantheon of Hindu deities in the next chapter.

8.7 CHAPTER 7- HINDUISM AND CHAPTER 8 -RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Hinduism like any other religion is not static. It both influences and is influenced by the political and social forces of the time. The process of Sanskritization has continued to entrance outlying group into the folds of Hinduism through the Sanskrit deities assuming different forms in their travels all over India as well as local deities assuming Sanskritic labels and forms. This leads to the spread of Sanskritic rites, and the increasing Sanskritization of non-Sanskritic rites. Sanskritic Hinduism provides certain common values to all Hindus; and the possession of common values knits people together into a community. In case of the Coorgs this is exenterated by their visits to regional shrines and temple and the comparison of Kaveri to Ganga in terms of a pious river.

The complete absorption of any group of people into the Hindu fold is indicated by their becoming a caste. Further, as is mentioned in chapter 2, once the group becomes a part of the caste hierarchy it tries to sanskritize itself further through upward social mobility by the adoption of the customs and rituals of the higher caste. This explanation has been illustrated through various examples in Chapter 7.

Chapter 8, ‘Religion And Society’ sum up the book by reiterating the Coorg social life and the significance of ritual in its every nook and corner, and the myths and folklores that continuously sanskritize the local deities into the Hindu pantheon. The book however has a bit of an abrupt end.

Check your Progress II

3. What is an Okka?

4. How does the process of Sanskritization has continued to entrance outlying group into the folds of Hinduism?
8. 8 LET US SUM UP

This book brings out the reality of how deeply religion is intertwined within the Coorg social life. With Coorgs as the focus of the ethnography the book builds on the structural functional reality of horizontal solidarity and vertical solidarity. It takes a retrospective historical approach to bring forth the ideas of social change and sanskritization which the book elucidates is a continuous process. There are times that some parts of the book are repetitive, but it is essential to create a common bridge between what was placed in a different chapter setting to a greater elaboration of the same idea in another chapter. In this, the book continuously keeps referring to what has been said in order to bring things into context, and remains a must read towards understanding a thorough descriptive ethnography.

8.9 REFERENCE


8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The key concepts introduced in Chapter two, that form the mainstay of the book, are of horizontal solidarity, vertical solidarity, Sanskritization and social change.

2. The most prominent castes that the Coorgs interact with are the Brahmin or the priest, the Kaniyas who are astrologers, Banna or the caste which usually performs the rites prescribed by the Kaniya; the blacksmith, carpenter, goldsmith, washerman and barber and the Meda and Poleyas. The Meda and Poleyas are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. The castes and professional categories mentioned here are blanket terms and consist of a number of sub-castes. Vertical solidarity is maintained with these castes beyond the mere interdependency of economic needs, through ritual roles in both mourning as well as household and village festivals.

3. The okka or the patrilineal and patrilocal joint family is the basic group among Coorgs. It is an exogamous group attached to an ancestral land. The membership of an okka is acquired by birth, and the outside world always identifies a man with his okka. Coorgs who do not belong to an okka have no social existence.

4. The process of Sanskritization has continued to entrance outlying group into the folds of Hinduism through the Sanskritic deities assuming different forms in their travels all over India as well as local deities assuming Sanskritic labels and forms. This leads to the spread of Sanskritic rites, and the increasing Sanskritization of non-Sanskritic rites. Sanskritic Hinduism provides certain common values to all Hindus; and the possession of common values knits people together into a community. The complete absorption of any group of people into the Hindu fold is indicated by their becoming a caste.