**3. Being *Vaishnava*,
Becoming *Kshatriya***

According to the 1901 census, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh combined contained about 72 million people. Of that number, over 44 million were officially classified as *shudra*, untouchable, or, more precisely, according to the very limited degree of social contact they were allowed with the twice-born.[[1](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.1#X)] The Ramanandi sampraday provided in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries an institutional context within which members of those stigmatized communities could acquire a modicum of social and religious dignity. By the late nineteenth century a parallel and qualitatively different brand of social reform had begun to emerge that was, strictly speaking, independent of any direct institutional connection to the Ramanandi or any other Vaishnava sampraday. Rather, this new reformism originated in the jatis assigned shudra status and was for the most part spearheaded by articulate, educated members of those stigmatized communities.[[2](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.2#X)] Whereas shudra and untouchable involvement in Vaishnava religiosity, whether as lay devotees or as sadhus, was predicated on a Ramanandi disdain for status, these new jati reformers sought personal and community dignity on their own by the unqualified assertion of status. Such assertions occurred among a broad range of agricultural and artisanal jatis who had in common an ascriptively shudra past, and the discussion in this chapter reflects that socio-occupational variety. Of particular interest, however, given their centrality to Gangetic agriculture and relative demographic strength, were the kshatriya campaigns mounted by Kurmi, Yadav, and Kushvaha peasants.[[3](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.3#X)] Hence, I pay particular attention to these groups.

Though the various new kshatriya organizations that began to appear after the late nineteenth century were institutionally separate from the Ramanandi or any other Vaishnava sampraday, they did evince, as I will argue, a distinctly religious character in both form and content that can only be described as Vaishnava. This is most evident in the very strategy employed in claiming high status: the ex-shudras asserted kshatriya status on the basis of genealogical ties to either Ram or Krishna, the well-known avatars of Vishnu. In addition, much of the reform urged upon the jati communities by their leaders involved abstinence from meat and intoxicants so as to inculcate a “pure” lifestyle, tactics which echoed those utilized in Buchanan’s day as the hallmark of Vaishnava (particularly Ramanandi) respectability.[[4](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.4#X)] The language and rhetoric of kshatriya reform also reflected an unmistakable Vaishnava texture, which I explore in some detail. Finally, though Vaishnava monasticism was not integral to kshatriya reform, Ramanandis, and particularly Ramanuja-oriented Ramanandis, did on occasion become involved as proponents of kshatriya identity. The intersection between Vaishnava monasticism and kshatriya reform is particularly revealing given the disputes over caste and tradition in the Ramanandi sampraday in the twentieth century.

The most broad-based kshatriya reform movements occurred among Kurmi and Yadav peasants. Yadav and Kurmi-kshatriya advocates maintained important roots in the Gangetic core of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, but gained wide support throughout northern and western India. The less well-known Kushvaha-kshatriya movement, meanwhile, experienced its greatest successes among peasants in the Gangetic core; other analogous peasant and artisan-based reform programs experienced similar regional concentrations of activity. Notwithstanding their broad regional appeal, the Kurmi and Yadav movements have received only limited, descriptive attention in the historical literature.[[5](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.5#X)] By contrast, more attention has been given to the movement to inculcate a kshatriya identity among the smaller but more influential Kayasth community, which has been well represented in the professions, the civil service, and politics.[[6](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.6#X)]

Because many jati reformers encouraged vegetarianism, abstinence from spirituous liquors, Sanskrit education, and wearing of the sacred thread among their members, it is possible to see in the kshatriya reform movements a significant degree of what the anthropologist M. N. Srinivas has called “Sanskritization.”[[7](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.7#X)] However, it can be argued that the focus on Sanskritization has led scholars to emphasize the cosmetics of ritual and behavioral transformation and obscured from view the more significant, underlying meanings of ideological change implicit in social reform.[[8](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.8#X)] Underpinning the ceremonial concerns, emphasis on classical education, and advocacy of pure living that characterized these reform efforts was, I argue, a complex and highly ramified Vaishnava discourse that extended throughout and beyond Gangetic India. Indeed, the history of kshatriya reformism described here suggests that a Vaishnava ethic of reform had become institutionalized in the everyday lives of ordinary people by the turn of the century. Examining the nineteenth-century antecedents of kshatriya reformism, exploring its complex dimensions in the twentieth century and its occasional intersections with Ramanandi monasticism, and discerning some of its broader political and cultural implications, are the objectives of the remainder of this book.

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**Status and the Nineteenth Century**

The concern with personal dignity, community identity, and caste status reached a peak among Kurmi, Yadav, and Kushvaha peasants in the first four decades of the twentieth century. But widespread, though sporadic, apprehensions over such issues extended well beyond those who cultivated the soil and emerged well before 1900. That a concern for status and dignity was not restricted to peasants is evident from the official record: by the end of the nineteenth century two influential, landed communities of ambiguous social rank in the Gangetic core, Bhumihars and Kayasths, had already made claims to superior status, and as a result their official position was in doubt. While the 1901 census was in the compilation stage, Bhumihar associations filed numerous representations with E. A. Gait, the director of census operations for Bengal and Bihar, which argued that, for the purposes of the census, the term “Babhan” should not be used to describe them and instead they should be classified as *Bhumihar*, or landed, brahmans.[[9](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.9#X)] Ninety years earlier, in his survey of what later became Patna and Gaya Districts of Bihar, Buchanan had noted with some disdain that Bhumihars (to whom he referred as Magahi and military brahmans) “have betaken themselves entirely to agriculture and arms, and cannot be considered as belonging to the sacred order.”[[10](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.10#X)] He consequently ascribed to them kshatriya status. Gait followed suit in his census report at the turn of the century, though he left the question of Bhumihar status officially unresolved: “The best opinion at the present time is perhaps in favour of the Brahmanical origin of the Babhans, but it would be incorrect to say that they are, therefore, Brahmans still. In the eyes of the general Hindu public they constitute a separate caste, which is generally, but not always, regarded as slightly superior to that of the Rajputs [regarded as kshatriya].”[[11](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.11#X)] By contrast, Kayasths had been classified as pure shudras by Buchanan in the beginning of the nineteenth century.[[12](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.12#X)] As a result of their very public campaign for kshatriya status in the last quarter of the century, not to mention their substantial economic and political clout, Kayasths were classified along with “Babhans” and Rajputs as “other castes of twice-born rank” in the 1901 census hierarchy for Bihar.[[13](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.13#X)] Herbert Hope Risley, who devised the hierarchy, noted elsewhere that “the social position of the Behar Kayasths is unquestionably a high one,” inasmuch as “popular opinion ranks them next in order to the Babhans and Rajputs.”[[14](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.14#X)]

The problem of ambiguous status implicit in the many claims for high caste was not restricted to Bihar. Risley also designed a complex hierarchy guide for the Uttar Pradesh census that acknowledged disputed claims by delineating such intermediate categories as “Castes allied to Brahmans and who are considered to be of high social standing”; “Castes allied to Kshatriyas, though their claim is not universally admitted”; and “Castes allied to Vaishyas, but their claim is not universally admitted.”[[15](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.15#X)] Additional intermediate categories reflected the broader incongruity between social practice, particularly regarding the consumption of food and water, and varna theory. Such categories included “Castes of good social position, superior to that of the remaining classes”; “Castes from whom some of the twice-born would take water and *pakki* [prepared food], without question”; “Castes from whom some of the twice-born take water while others would not”; “Castes from whose hand the twice-born cannot take water, but who are not untouchable”; “Castes that are untouchable, but do not eat beef”; and “The lowest castes eating beef and vermin.”

Indeed, Risley’s hierarchy for Uttar Pradesh was far more elaborate than that for Bihar, suggesting that contending claims of social respectability may have been more deeply entrenched in the western half of the Gangetic Plain.[[16](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.16#X)] In any case, it is clear from a perusal of Buchanan, writing ninety years before Risley, that status claims predated the creation of the Indian census; neither were they restricted to the powerful landed and professional jatis. For instance, Buchanan observed that in south Bihar,

Although the Rajputs are here universally admitted to be Kshatriyas, there are, as in Bhagalpur, other pretenders to that rank whose claim is not generally admitted . . . *by those who are not in their power*. It must however be observed, that their claims to a descent from the original regal tribe is probably as well founded as those of the Rajputs.…In fact, every military tribe that had sufficient power, seems to have been admitted *by the Brahmans* into the regal caste, so soon as it became subject to their authority, and betook itself to a pure life.[[17](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.17#X)]

These “other pretenders” to rank included, most prominently, Kurmi and Goala peasants. The two italicized phrases point out not only Buchanan’s awareness of the influence of brahman opinion in his depiction of Gangetic social differentiation, but the awareness among those aspiring to elite status that the complicity of brahmans (as venerated scholars) was a valued requisite. Perhaps to redress the brahmanical weight of his own presentation, Buchanan was willing to cite (often with considerable sympathy) cases of dissenting claims to status in the regions he surveyed, noting especially the religio-mythical account given by “Goala” peasants (who would later claim Yadav-kshatriya status) regarding their own origins: “These people, however low they may be held by the Brahmans, pretend to considerable dignity on account of their connection with the god Krishna, who, although a Kshatri of the family of the moon, was adopted by a Goyala, and many of his wives (1600) are said on some authorities to have been of the Goyala tribe.”[[18](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.18#X)]

Buchanan observed similar localized claims to high status among Kurmis in the Gangetic core, based on an Ayodhya-centered consciousness. The significance of Ayodhya here derives not so much from the importance of that site as a growing Ramanandi monastic center as from its position as the mytho-historical kingdom of Ramchandra (though of course the two are closely related) and hence as an increasingly important geocultural hub of Vaishnava belief. Buchanan noted that so-called *Ayodhya Kurmis*, especially in the Bhojpur region of western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, claimed superior status and even spurned certain economic and agricultural roles on the basis of that assertion.[[19](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.19#X)] One case dating from the late eighteenth century concerned a group of influential, land-controlling Ayodhya Kurmis who lived in the Parraona environs of northeast Gorakhpur District and upon whom Asaf ud-daula, the fourth Nawab of Awadh, attempted to bestow the title of “Raja” and thus kshatriya status.[[20](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.20#X)] The Kurmi avowal of noble status ultimately seemed to fail due to united Rajput opposition in Asaf’s court. Ironically, the Rajput constituency of Awadh itself composed a “group of newcomers to the court, who had been peasant soldiers only a few years before. They were called, half sarcastically, the ‘*Tilangi* Rajas’ [or] ‘trooper rajas’—the people described by the shocked Muhammad Faiz Baksh as the new Nawab’s courtiers: ‘Naked rustics, whose fathers and brothers were with their own hands guiding the plow . . . , rode about as Asaf ud-daula’s orderlies.’”[[21](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.21#X)] In other words, the Rajputs of Awadh, who along with brahmans constituted the main beneficiaries of what historian Richard Barnett characterizes as “Asaf’s permissive program of social mobility,” were not willing to let that mobility reach beyond certain arbitrary sociocultural boundaries.

Notwithstanding a lack of success at the nawabi court, however, Kurmis still managed to craft for themselves a sophisticated identity. Indeed, Buchanan’s description indicates that some wealthy Kurmis in the early nineteenth century were on the verge of rejecting entirely the physical labor inherent in a peasant-cultivator existence:

The families most nearly connected with the chiefs of Parraona, and some others, who were *Chaudhuris* [chiefs] of *Pergunahs* [precincts], are reckoned *Ashraf* [high class], and scorn the plow. While a great many of [them] have become ashamed of the term Kurmi, and reject all additions to the names above mentioned, . . . many of them are not ashamed of this name.…The families reckoned Ashraf, perhaps 110 houses, can read and write [and] unless exceedingly poor, will not hire themselves as plowmen, nor on any account act as domestics.[[22](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.22#X)]

Later data, from early twentieth-century village note surveys in Patna District, suggest that Kurmis in Bihar possessed an Ayodhya-centered consciousness as well. According to this detailed survey, *Awadhia* (a Persianized version of Ayodhya) Kurmis were the dominant community in a large tract of villages in the Barh precinct of northeast Patna District; as an example, in one village the surveying officer noted that “there are 9 families / 60 people of Awadhia Kurmis who wear the sacred thread since a long time.”[[23](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.23#X)] Likewise, according to officials northwest of Patna in Saran District, among Kurmis “Ayodhias were particularly singled out as the ‘substantial farmers and . . . the most influential sub-caste.’”[[24](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.24#X)]

Similar claims to status prevailed among many Muslim peasants in Bihar, who appropriated the title *Shekh*, implying highly coveted Arab origins. Buchanan remarked that “even though every low fellow assumes this title, . . . he is [nevertheless] not admitted to any rank.”[[25](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.25#X)] Purnea District, in the northeasternmost section of the Gangetic core, possessed the greatest concentration of Shekhs claiming “descent from the gentry of Arabia.” Buchanan insisted, however, that “a few alone can boast of this distinction, and the greater part are not to be distinguished from the Hindu peasantry of the vicinity. These Sheykhs are in general cultivators, and seem much fonder of the plough than of any other profession.”[[26](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.26#X)] Shekhs were more evenly spread throughout the Gangetic districts to the west of Bihar, and here similar doubts were raised by colonial observers as to their exact history. Of particular note were concerns not unlike Buchanan’s raised in the late 1860s by Henry Miers Elliot.[[27](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.27#X)] Elliot divided Muslims into two large categories, viz., the nobility descended from “foreign invaders” and the commoners who descended from or were themselves Hindu converts, whom he referred to as “Mahommedans.” The nobility comprised four ethnic groups, “Sayyid, Mughal, Pathan, and Shaikh”; but for Elliot, the last of these terms represented a conceptual, classificatory stumbling block: “Any ordinary Musulman who belongs to none of the three above-named classes [Sayyid, Mughal, and Pathan], is called Shaikh. A vast number of the converts from Hinduism give themselves this title, which from being so promiscuously used has long ceased to have any special meaning or value as a title of honour.”[[28](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.28#X)] In a later, more detailed consideration of the subject, Elliot confessed an inability to pinpoint the “true” identity of Shekhs, observing that while many were descended from low-caste Hindu converts, many others could be regarded as “the lowest class of the descendants of the invaders.” Like Buchanan, Elliot was forced to base his conclusions on information provided by informants and on his own first-hand observations of the apparent racial stock of a given community. Hence Elliot observed that “[the Shekh] is often of Affghan descent, though his forefathers were not of sufficient social standing to acquire the title of Khan. There is also much Persian, Bokhariot, and Turki blood in his veins. Judging from the appearance of this class on the whole, one would say that the non-Aryan element preponderated considerably.”[[29](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.29#X)]

Claims of this sort, grounded in the racial assumptions of the nineteenth century, were resorted to as a way of resolving the inevitable ambiguities that plagued colonial classification. In this case, those ambiguities indicate that a significant number of Muslim peasants sought to achieve a modicum of self-respect through the articulation of a noble past, expressed here as an identity with the Arab crucible of Islam, regardless of whether that identity was called into question by colonial observers. This process, boiled down to its essentials, is analogous to the changing identities among Kurmi, Yadav, and Kushvaha peasants, aspirations that begin to crystallize into full-fledged movements by the 1890s.

The divergent claims to status in the nineteenth century (and earlier) illustrate the point that for non-Muslims, while varna was generally accepted as the basis for identity, on the whole little agreement prevailed with respect to the place of the individual and the jati within a varna hierarchy. Srinivas, describing social relations in the mid-twentieth century, regarded such a “lack of clarity in the hierarchy” as “one of the most striking features of the caste system,” adding that “it is this ambiguity which makes it possible for a caste to rise in the hierarchy.”[[30](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.30#X)] Such ambiguity only becomes a striking feature, however, when observers expect to see the opposite, that is, a complete congruity between theory (varna) and practice (jati). Such expectations were increasingly palpable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when India became for nascent (imperial) anthropology a “laboratory of mankind,” wherein scientific methods of observation (anthropometry among them) were expected to produce clear and straightforward sociological (and racial) patterns that conformed to varna-derived theories.[[31](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.31#X)] But if the claims to status confronted by Buchanan were at all remarkable, it is because they appear so commonplace, as if they were not at all unexpected given the all-too-obvious dysfunctions between theory and practice.

What is perhaps more significant, given the foregoing, is that a popular concern with status predated the rise of an imperial census apparatus and the colonial obsession with caste. Rather, claims to personal and community dignity appeared to be part of a longer discourse that did not require European political and administrative structures. This should not be taken to imply that the role of the state generally was of no significance. Status predicated on the presence of an interested state as arbiter was clearly evident in the political culture of Mughal India and Awadhi north India, but only served to give added political credence to attitudes that already possessed substantial popular appeal.[[32](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.32#X)] The role of the British in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to further solidify the discourse of caste into a hierarchical “caste of mind,” at least for those on the perceiving end.[[33](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.33#X)] Even as this occurred, however, kshatriya identities were coalescing in peasant society that would, ultimately, threaten to undermine the systemics (if not the principle) of hierarchy by the middle of the twentieth century.

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**Building a Kshatriya Past, ca. 1900–1940**

“The world is full of change!” declared Dilipsinha Yadav in 1914, as he exhorted his jati brothers to reform their lives.[[34](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.34#X)] The early twentieth century was an age of change indeed, as sporadic and localized claims to status coalesced into regional and national peasant organizations in cities and towns across north India. Such organizations met annually to define their community identities and espouse their reformist causes. Leading members would give speeches in festive gatherings, contrasting past glories with their degraded present; the assembled congregation would pass resolutions expressing the urgent need for social, religious, and educational reform; occasionally a peasant jati *mahasabha* (great association) would mobilize enough funds to build a school to educate its sons (and, sometimes, daughters) or build a press to publish a jati newsletter. Despite their diverse jati nomenclature, most of these organizations articulated a common historical vision: an ancient past of kshatriya distinction that had long since deteriorated into present-day shudra dishonor. The vision for the future was embodied in appeals for a return to the heady days of the kshatriya past.

A striking feature of these peasant-based social movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the quality of their leadership. A new educated elite, which had begun to penetrate the lower and middle rungs of government service, provided the organizational frame for the status claims among communities formerly identified as servile. This is most evident among Kurmis, the first peasant community to organize a campaign for kshatriya identity. By the 1890s the Kurmi-kshatriya movement was being coordinated on a broad, transregional level. The mantle of leadership in this phase befell the well-connected Ramdin Sinha, a government forester who had gained notoriety by resigning from his official post to protest a provincial circular of 1894 that included Kurmis as a “depressed community” and barred them therefore from recruitment into the police service.[[35](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.35#X)] The governor’s office was flooded with letters from an outraged Kurmi-kshatriya public and was soon obliged to rescind the allegation in an 1896 communiqué to the police department: “His Honor [the governor] is . . . of the opinion that Kurmis constitute a respectable community which he would be reluctant to exclude from Government service.”[[36](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.36#X)] Ten years later, Devi Prasad Sinha Chaudhari, a Kurmi-kshatriya writer and lecturer, would make a special point of acknowledging in his work the sponsorship of a large number of wealthy Kurmi kshatriyas, including Kashi Ram Varma, a zamindar of Unnao District on the southwest border of Lucknow; Amarnath Sinha, a zamindar and municipal commissioner in the town of Barh, south of Patna; and Ramkishor Sinha, subinspector of police in Tikari thana, Patna District.[[37](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.37#X)]

Though the official government recognition in 1896 of Kurmi respectability represented a major, and early, victory for the Kurmi-kshatriya movement, especially vis-á-vis its critics, it represented only one component of the complex history of kshatriya identity. The close ties between the new kshatriyas and the colonial government were not restricted to the Kurmis, nor was the battle for respectability fought solely with government petitions and interdepartmental circulars. The peasant communities that would begin to articulate formal kshatriya identities in the early twentieth century had also developed through the nineteenth century distinct ties with the local apparatus of empire. *Gopas, Goalas*, and *Ahirs*, who would by the early 1900s begin referring to themselves as Yadav kshatriyas, had long sought and attained (after 1898) recruitment as soldiers in the British Indian Army, particularly in the western Gangetic Plain.[[38](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.38#X)]*Koiris* and *Kachhis*, who would identify themselves as Kushvaha kshatriyas after about 1910, had long been the preferred cultivators of government poppy (and consequently the recipient of many interest-free government loans) for the production of crude opium in the Patna and Banaras regions through the nineteenth century.[[39](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.39#X)]

Kurmis, whose local conferences in the 1870s and 1880s coalesced into a pan-Gangetic phenomenon in the 1890s, expressed kshatriya status in terms of Vaishnava mythology.[[40](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.40#X)] At an 1895 meeting in Lucknow, for example, one Ganesh Swami Sadhu traced the genealogical descent of Kurmis from his study of the *Skanda Purana* and argued that the terms *Kurmi*, *Kunbi*, and *Kanbi* all derived from the name *Kurm*, the tortoise incarnation of Vishnu who supported the earth while the gods churned the ocean of milk for the nectar of immortality.[[41](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.41#X)] Unlike Yadav and Kushvaha kshatriya reformers, the Kurmi reformers in the early twentieth century did not specify a single genealogical line but rather many lineages through which Kurmi kshatriyas could have descended. Thus Devi Prasad Sinha Chaudhari, an early Kurmi publicist of Lucknow, listed in 1907 over sixty kshatriya lineages denoting Gangetic and Maharashtran lineages “in which Kurmis are found.” Chaudhari based much of his discussion of what he termed the “famous kshatriya branches” almost entirely on “Kitts’ Compendium of Hindu Castes and Tribes and other English books.”[[42](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.42#X)]

Advocates of Kurmi-kshatriya identity broadened their social base to include influential agricultural communities throughout India, most notably *Kunbis*, *Kulambis*, and *Marathas* of Maharashtra; *Patidars* and *Patels* of Gujarat; and even *Naidus*, *Reddis*, and *Okkalingas* of South India.[[43](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.43#X)] Chaudhari maintained in his 1907 tract that most Kurmis descended from Ramchandra’s two sons, Kush and Lav. He added, however, that some Kurmis were descended from Krishna and other notable chiefs involved in the epic Mahabharata wars.[[44](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.44#X)] Given the relatively early date (1907) of Chaudhari’s booklet and the emergence as early as the 1870s of diverse Kurmi organizations, it is likely that Kurmis were simply amassing the maximum number of possible routes to kshatriya status. In later years, Koiris, Kachhis, and Muraos (as Kushvaha kshatriyas) would assert genealogical links with Ramchandra via his son Kush, while Goalas, Ahirs, and Gopas (as Yadav kshatriyas) would likewise affirm a descent from Krishna.

As with Kurmis and the early expression of an Awadhia/Ayodhya consciousness, the Goala association with Krishna and his Braj homeland was evident long before the formal articulation of a Yadav-kshatriya movement in the early twentieth century.[[45](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.45#X)] By the 1910s, however, the diffuse assertions of Krishna kinship had coalesced into a concerted call for kshatriya status based on a claim of descent in the ancient lineage of Raja Yadu (hence Yadav), of which Krishna was the most famous progenitor.[[46](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.46#X)] As with Kurmis, the newly delimited Yadav-kshatriya community expanded its geographical horizons to incorporate not only Goalas of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, but Ahirs, Gops, Gopals, and Sadgops—closely related and/or synonomous jati communities throughout the Gangetic north that combined cultivation with the herding of cattle and dairy farming.[[47](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.47#X)] By the 1930s, Yadav-kshatriya historians held that “Yadavs [were] the ancient citizens of the land of the Aryans [and] have their origins in the main *Chandravamsh* [lunar line] branch of kshatriyas, . . . and as the *Suryavamsh* [solar line] is known for its original ancestor Ramchandra, the Yadu line is famous for its original progenitor Lord Krishna.”[[48](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.48#X)] In the reconstructed history of the Yadav kshatriyas, the devastation of the Mahabharata wars signaled the onset of jati decline, Yadav unity began to give way to factionalism, and drinking and gambling corrupted once-noble jati morals. The standard Yadav-kshatriya account concluded with the final stages of cultural decline, marked by mass conversions to Buddhism and the requisite repudiation of the sacred thread.[[49](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.49#X)]

The Kurmi and Yadav-kshatriya movements of the twentieth century both possessed distinct early nineteenth-century antecedents in the form of a geocultural association with historical manifestations of Vishnu—Ramchandra and Ayodhya in the case of Kurmis, Krishna and Mathura-Vrindaban in the case of Yadavs. By contrast, the nineteenth-century antecedents of the Kushvaha-kshatriya movement reveal distinct cosmological associations with Shiva and his divine consort, Parvati. Kushvaha-kshatriya identity was espoused by agricultural communities well known throughout the Gangetic north for an expertise in small-scale vegetable and (to an increasingly limited extent after the turn of the twentieth century) poppy cultivation. Prominent among them were *Kachhi* and *Murao* agriculturalists of central Uttar Pradesh, *Kachhvahas* of western Uttar Pradesh, and *Koiris* of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh.[[50](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.50#X)] Made up of such skilled agriculturalists, these communities had long since come to the attention of colonial administrators and ethnologists. Both W. W. Hunter in the 1870s and H. H. Risley in the 1890s recorded the legend that Koiris and Kachhis were created by Shiva and Parvati to tend the vegetable (Risley mentions in particular radishes, *murai*, hence *Murao*) and flower gardens of Banaras, a mythological reflection of the importance to their identity of both agricultural skill and Shaiva belief.[[51](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.51#X)] Indeed, Risley characterized the majority of Koiris in Bihar as Shaiva or *Shakta* (followers of *shakti*, the female personification of cosmic energy) and observed that “Vaishnavism has hitherto made little progress among them.” Buchanan, eighty years earlier, had noted that most Koiris in Bihar followed Dasnami sanyasis, while many in the Gorakhpur region adjacent to Ayodhya as well as in Purnia in the east had already begun to look to Ramanandis for spiritual guidance.[[52](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.52#X)]

By the early 1920s, the ideology of social reform began to displace the commitment to Shaiva-Shakta origins and replace them with a kshatriya identity based on an historical association with Ramchandra. According to Gangaprasad, a resident of Banaras and an outspoken proponent of reform, Koiris, Kachhis, Muraos, and Kachhvahas were inexorably connected to the roots of Vaishnava history through linear descent from *Kush*, the son of Ramchandra. Gangaprasad argued therefore that the proper designation of the greater north Indian jati should be *Kushvaha* kshatriya.[[53](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.53#X)] The early twentieth-century reconstruction of the past, here recounted by Gangaprasad, linked the history of the jati with the ill-fated cause of the defense of Hindu India. The descendants of Kush, the reader was told, eventually found military service in the courtly ranks of Raja Jaichand, whose north Indian armies were subsequently defeated in battle by Sultan Shahabuddin Ghuri at the close of the twelfth century, during the consolidation of Muslim rule based in Delhi. Gangaprasad blamed all the ills of the subsequent eight centuries on Muslim persecution, citing particularly the fear of Muslim atrocities as the sole reason Kushvaha kshatriyas fled to the forests in disarray, discarding their sacred threads, so as not to be recognized as erstwhile defenders of the “Hindu” faith. The jati history concludes with a rueful account of social degradation, disorganization, and dispersal throughout north India; Kushvaha kshatriyas then became known by the more familiar local designations of Kachhvaha, Kachhi, Murao, and Koiri.

Movements for kshatriya identity were by no means restricted to the major peasant jatis, but included a wide range of less populous communities that often combined “traditional” occupations with agriculture. Examples include *Kahar*s (palanquin bearers and household servants), *Tanti*s (weavers), *Sonar*s (goldsmiths), *Mali*s (flower-gardeners), *Tambuli*s (betel-leaf traders), *Kalwar*s (distillers), and numerous others.[[54](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.54#X)] This fact was not lost on Nirgun Sinha “Khali,” author of several Yadav kshatriya tracts, who by the end of the 1930s called repeatedly for greater ideological flexibility in allowing these claims on the grounds that an augmented kshatriya population would “bolster the defense of Hinduism.”[[55](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.55#X)] His comments on the plethora and diversity of jati reform movements in the early twentieth century give some indication of the heady transformations that marked this period: “In these changing times jatis that we would have considered shudra twenty or twenty-five years ago are now educating scholars who are proving that their communities are not only vaishya and kshatriya, but even brahman! Only a few jatis today fail to become agitated when called shudra; most become quite stern and angry at the mere mention of the term.”[[56](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.56#X)]

A heightened sensitivity to caste, identity, and the past marked the social and cultural transformations of this period. A popular verse of the time, attributed to one Bharat Bharati and cited in at least two reform pamphlets, urged its audience to reflect,

Who were we, what has happened, and where are we going now?
Gather round everyone and ponder these questions together.
If we fail to appreciate the entirety of our past,
we may never realize who we really are.[[57](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.57#X)]

Jati reformers of the early twentieth century took this poetic counsel particularly seriously and spent endless hours reconstructing, indeed reinventing, the pasts of their communities. But what they were saying and the ways in which they were saying it are two distinct and equally significant phenomena. On the surface these publicist-reformers understood, or at least represented, the past in terms of a familiar Vaishnava mythological framework; the myth-history that resulted began with the primeval battle between good and evil that set the groundwork for the cosmological origins of the Hindu world, continued with the epic lineages of Vishnu’s avatars, and concluded with the alleged civilizational chaos that accompanied the Muslim invasions and the rise of British power. However, the rhetoric beneath the profusion of mytho-historical detail can tell us a great deal more about the quality of social and cultural change in this period.

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**Rhetoric and Reform**

Kshatriya reform depended not simply on a Vaishnava mythological framework, but on the institutionalization of a belief in Vaishnava morality, pervading day-to-day affairs. The repeated references in kshatriya reform literature to Vishnu, Narayan, Rama, Krishna, and related Vaishnava personages (such as Lakshmi, Sita, Radha, Hanuman, etc.), the frequent use of Vaishnava terms in common discourse, and the occasional allusions to the changing institution of Vaishnava monasticism (particularly the Ramanandi sampraday), all reflect this institutionalization process. And from the perspective of the new kshatriyas, the central social imperative of Vaishnava morality was caste reform. An example of this can be seen on the cover of a 1920 pamphlet advocating the kshatriya status of Kahars, where the maxim, “This world faces innumerable challenges, but no one of them is greater than jati reform,” is attributed to Ramchandra himself.[[58](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.58#X)]

The lives of Ramchandra and Krishna were frequently held up by jati reformers as the standard for morally correct attitudes and behavior, even at the risk of criticizing contemporary Vaishnava institutions. A didactic technique often utilized by the jati publications was a mock dialogue between two or more people. One particularly telling “conversation” was contributed to the *Kurmi Samachar* (“Kurmi Newspaper”) by a correspondent in 1895. The piece portrays a discussion between a social critic by the name of Vichar Sinha and one Bhagat-ji, meant to represent mindless obedience to religious custom.[[59](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.59#X)] The dialogue begins with Bhagat-ji’s enthusiastic description of a lavish wedding he has just had the pleasure of attending. Sinha responds by attacking the “foolish expenditures” and “corrupt practices” seen during marriages, such as the spectacle of fireworks and, especially, dancing girls:

***VS:***

You surely have read in the Ramayan that all the gods, sages, seers, and great men came and attended the grandeur of Raja Ramchandra Maharaja’s wedding. Well how could they possibly stomach seeing those prostitutes flaunt themselves and hearing those filthy songs they sing at our weddings today?

***Bh:***

I suppose you’re right. But nowadays people even arrange for dancing girls in the temples. In fact, they even perform on the birthday celebrations of Krishna and Ramchandra. Nobody goes if there aren’t any dancers.

***VS:***

Exactly. By constantly allowing these dancers to perform we have allowed our judgment to become perverted, and now we can’t seem to enjoy worshipping God without them. Oh, what a state our country is in!

This portrayal of the corruption of temple worship, whether real or imagined, was gauged to shock the Kurmi kshatriya readership into promoting prudent expenditures during family ceremonies such as weddings; the financial savings that would thus accrue could then be directed toward the betterment of the jati as a whole. The editor of the Kurmi Samachar, Babu Bhagvandin, may have been troubled by the risqué content of the criticism and prefaced the dialogue with the cautionary note that “the editor chooses to make no comment here.” Nevertheless, the puritanical Vaishnava tenor of the piece reflects the willingness of kshatriya reformers to address religious issues directly, even to the extent of caricaturing contemporary religion itself as little more than mindless custom.

Also typical of kshatriya reform were frequent textual allusions to Vaishnava festivals and Ram and Krishna bhakti. For example, Nauvat Ray, a proponent of Kahar status in western Uttar Pradesh, noted the significance of the publication day of his 1920 jati-reform booklet with the declaration, “Today is the great day of *vijay dashmi*—this is our special festival, the auspicious day that commemorates the victory of the stately and revered Bhagvan Ramchandra-ji. It was on this day that he killed Ravana, the very embodiment of evil, and hoisted the banner of victory.”[[60](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.60#X)]*Vijay dashmi*, literally “victory on the tenth,” also refers to the tenth day of the moonlit half of the lunar month of *Ashwin* when, during the annual performance of the Ram Lila, or the “play of Ram,” Ramchandra destroys the evil king Ravana in a dramatically reenacted battle.[[61](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.61#X)] Nauvat Ray and his publisher, Fakirchand, incorporated the historic meaning of Ramchandra’s epic battle against the forces of evil directly into the struggle for kshatriya status. In a supplicatory aside, the publisher also noted the auspicious date and prayed to Ramchandra to support their cause, identifying the opponents of the Kahar movement for kshatriya status with the evil Ravana:

Then [when Ramchandra defeated Ravana] it was *tretayug*, now it is *kaliyug*. Since then our condition has deteriorated. At that time you killed the evil Ravana, freed the world from sin, restored the dignity of *dharma*, and spread contentment and tranquility. Why will you not come back now, when *dharma* has all but disappeared from the world and we are oppressed by Ravana in the form of our detractors? Bhagvan! Please come, slay the demon, and restore completely the dignity of *dharma* and hoist the banner of victory. Unite through love brahman, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra, fulfill your own visions, and everyone will extol you and abide by your directives.[[62](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.62#X)]

The commitment of Kahars to Ram was equally powerful in south Bihar. In 1906, the Kahars of Gaya—who styled themselves *Ramani* Kahars—organized a *Ramani Dharma Pracharani Sabha* (Association for the Spread of Ramani Dharma) and, under its auspices, produced a short pamphlet of rules, regulations, and fines to counter the “many crude practices that had, over time, corrupted the jati.”[[63](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.63#X)] More interesting than the elaborate punishments prescribed for offenders of jati dignity are the names printed on the register of officers and members of the jati sabha itself.[[64](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.64#X)] Listed as vice-chairman of the organization was one Ram Das, “a noted resident of the neighborhood of Geval Bigha in Gaya.” Others included a bookseller named Ram Kishan Das who was listed as the consultant for the association, and *Chhote* Ram Das,[[65](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.65#X)] both of the same neighborhood. As noted in chapter 2, “das” means “servant” or “slave” and was commonly assumed as a suffix by many Ramanandi sadhus (especially prior to 1918) to signal their symbolic relationship to Ramchandra; here it would appear that Kahars had begun adopting the suffix for their own purposes, regardless of any connection to the sampraday. Even more remarkable were the names of many of the remaining members. The associate chairman, his assistant, and fully forty-nine of the fifty-eight general and associate members possessed the surname *Ram*.[[66](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.66#X)]

The institutionalization of Vaishnava language was not restricted to personal nomenclature, however. The author of a 1924 publication, again from Gaya, which advocated the Kanyakubja-kshatriya status of Sonars (goldsmiths), pointed out that the universal importance of Vaishnava belief could even be seen by the frequent colloquial use of the names of Vishnu’s avatars in popular language: “Let us now turn to the subject of popular language. Even the most boorish peasants, who don’t know anything, immediately cry out ‘Ram Ram’ upon meeting one another. The Thakurs say ‘Jay Radho-ji ki’ [victory to Radha]. When this spread into popular usage among the four varnas is not in fact known.…If someone stumbles while walking along, “*aré* Ram” [oh Ram] immediately escapes from his lips.”[[67](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.67#X)] Such terms were also brought to bear in peasant politics, most notably during a tense three-year period of peasant activism in Awadh beginning in 1919. Baba Ramchandra, who both espoused Kurmi reform and came to lead the peasant outcry against landlord tyranny, introduced the language of Vaishnava devotion in Awadh peasant politics to advance the notion of a just political economy crafted around the ideal of Ramchandra’s Ayodhya. According to historian Gyanendra Pandey, Baba Ramchandra recalled some years later that he actively promoted the use of the egalitarian greeting, *Sitaram*, in the place of the hierarchical *salaam*, an act that was soon to earn him the ire of “many of the praiseworthy and respectable folk of the upper castes.”[[68](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.68#X)]

Similarly, Vaishnava symbols and vocabulary adorned the textual frame of jati reform literature, including such literary constructions as the names of publishing houses, illustrations, dedications, and prefatory benedictions. A typical example was a collection of exhortational songs and prayers on the subject of social reform among Goalas. This short tract, entitled *Jatiya Sandesh* (Jati Message), was published by one Swami Nathu Bhagat Yadav and printed by the *Haribhakt Narayan Raja* Press in Darbhanga, North Bihar.[[69](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.69#X)] The facts that the publisher was himself a Yadav and a religious figure (as reflected in the title “Swami”) and that the name of the press was composed of a phrase signifying devotion to Vishnu (*Haribhakt Narayan*) only serve to underline the complementarity of peasant-kshatriya reform and Vaishnava rhetoric. Inscribed on the cover page is the initiatory *mantra* or chant for worshipping the conjoined image of Radha-Krishna (*Shri Radhokrishnabhyanamah*) followed on the inside cover by a picture of the divine couple. Likewise, a compendium of social rules for Yadav kshatriyas was published in 1928 from the *Gokul* Press, Gokul being the remembered home of Krishna, Radha, and the cowherds around Vrindaban and Mathura in western Uttar Pradesh. And, as a final example, separate editions of a prominent historical tract on Yadav-kshatriya history were published in Etawah and Lucknow from the Krishna Press.[[70](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.70#X)]

The reformist kshatriya dedication to a Vaishnava ethic even extended, in some cases, to pugnacious attacks against competing religious traditions. Jamuna Prashad Yadav, in a 1927 pamphlet published in Jhansi and directed at caste members in his native Chhattisgarhi region as well as “for the benefit of the entire Ahir jati,” condemned what he termed the “lewd, sex-ridden” rituals and practices of “*vam margis*” (a pejorative term for practitioners of a particular kind of Shaiva-Shakta tantra) and exhorted Yadavs to follow the correct worship of the Vaishnavi *devi* (goddess).[[71](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.71#X)] Although Chattisgarh in what is now Madhya Pradesh is some distance removed from the Gangetic core, J. Yadav’s remarks mirrored in tone as well as content a Ramanandi polemic directed against the so-called vam-margis published in Prayag (Allahabad) ten years later and widely available in north Bihar. In this publication, entitled *Devivali Pakhand* (The Heresy of Sacrifice to the Goddess), Janki Ballabh Das launched a thoroughgoing invective against Shaiva-Shakta tantra, with particular criticism of the worshipers of the goddess Durga (the main proponents of which he alleged were *Maithil brahmans*, that is, belonging to the dominant land-controlling jati of North Bihar) for their animal sacrifices, but shifted quickly to accusations of everything from pedophilia, ritual sex, and incest to the consumption of beef, alcohol, and far more reprehensible substances, all allegedly performed during tantric rituals.[[72](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.72#X)]

However, the most explicit indication of the Vaishnava rhetoric of social reform in the early twentieth century was the affirmation by kshatriya ideologues of the upright morality of their jati constituents. This was best expressed by Gangaprasad, the Banaras-based proponent of Kushvaha-kshatriya identity, who described his jati brothers as “followers of the Vaishnava path” and noted that “devotees made certain their children received proper spiritual initiation and education.”[[73](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.73#X)] Gangaprasad added that all Kushvahas “receive the mantra from their family gurus and sing those verses every morning and evening” and that “in the month of *Kartik* or *Shravan* they worship *Mahabir* [Hanuman, the embodiment of true devotion to Ram and Sita], wear the sacred thread, and offer bread and sweets.” Similarly, Baijnath Prasad Yadav’s compendium of rules for Goalas not only prescribed upright decorum and proper methods of celebrating a variety of household and public festivals, but also condemned the various “evil” attitudes and practices of caste members such as illiteracy, child marriage, drinking, gambling, and wasteful expenditures.[[74](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.74#X)]

When reformers were not citing the extensive Vaishnava credentials of their jati members, they were marshaling a wide array of sectarian institutional sanction to back their claims of kshatriya status. In Maharashtra and Gujarat, associated Kunbis and Kanbis solicited and received this certification from the head abbot of the Dasnami order in Nasik, northeast of Bombay, and from his Ramanuji counterpart in Kanchi, southwest of Madras.[[75](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.75#X)] Kurmis of the Gangetic north, however, sought the Vaishnava backing of Radhacharan Goswami of Vrindaban, who presided over a debate of Banaras scholars on the subject of Kurmi status that took place under the auspices of the Kurmi association of Bharehta village south of Banaras in 1907.[[76](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.76#X)] In defense of the Kurmi claim to kshatriya status, Radhacharan Goswami cited a range of positive attributes, including the fact that “this jati has built many temples in which brahmans have performed the image consecrations and wherein all people pay respectful homage to God by taking the water with which the feet of the image has been washed.”[[77](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.77#X)] Caste-based temple construction occurred most prominently in the major Vaishnava pilgrimage centers. In Ayodhya, for instance, a multitude of “caste temples” erected in this century would buttress the kshatriya status claims of jati organizations; these include temples built by Kurmis, Yadavs, Kahars, Kayasths, Barhais, Malis, Murais (Kushvahas), Sonars, and many others.[[78](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.78#X)]

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**Kshatriya Reform and Ramanandis**

Kshatriya reform in the early twentieth century was built on a Vaishnava mythological foundation, espoused a strict Vaishnava morality, employed a rich Vaishnava symbolic vocabulary, and even contributed materially to the success of Vaishnava pilgrimage centers. Taken as a whole, then, the history of kshatriya reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflects the institutionalization of Vaishnava belief as a generally agreed-upon Hindu framework for social change, regardless of one’s specific sectarian commitments. In this sense, the kshatriya reform campaigns as a whole can be seen as ideological heir to the Vaishnava reform mentalities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly as manifest in Ramanandi liberalism with respect to caste. But while the Ramanandi sampraday has long evinced a marked disdain for questions of status, particularly in the twentieth century, the whole point of kshatriya reform campaigns was the enhancement of status. This major ideological difference, I would suggest, explains the unevenness of Ramanandi participation in the forefront of kshatriya reform campaigns.

However, as I have noted in the previous chapter, the Ramanandi sampraday was not ideologically monolithic, and many Ramanandis harbored views on caste wholly divergent from what became the dominant position in the sampraday in the twentieth century. More precisely, those sadhus who chose not to accept what I have termed the “radical” Ramanandi guru parampara after 1921 and who consequently were labeled Ramanuji, not only took a conservative approach to the question of Ramanand’s monastic antecedents by insisting on the retention of Ramanuja in their guru parampara, but insisted on the maintenance of caste boundaries in monastic life. Based on their willingness to admit the relevance of varna in religious affairs, it would not have been ideologically inconsistent for a “Ramanuji Ramanandi” to promote the pursuit of status implicit in movements for kshatriya reform. In this section I examine two such individuals, kshatriya ideologues with Ramanuji links to the Ramanandi sampraday, to throw light on how the travails of being Vaishnava informed the politics of becoming kshatriya, and vice versa.

The first of the two, Raghunandan Prasad Sinha Varmma, a proponent of kshatriya status for Sonars (goldsmiths), published a booklet from Gaya in south Bihar in 1924, three years after the Ujjain decision, which declared that Ramanuja was not included in the guru parampara of Ramanand. Even though his name suggests a nonascetic status, Varmma’s lay partisanship in the parampara dispute is made immediately clear in his work: both above the title on the cover page and prior to the introduction are dedications to Ramanujacharya.[[79](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.79#X)] In addition, he notes that he received the help of one Babu Aditya Narayan Sinha (of Chaudharani Tola, Village and Post Office Mokama, District Patna), a devotee of Swami Ramprapann Ramanujadas.[[80](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.80#X)] Ramprapann Ramanujadas, it may be recalled, represented the south Indian Shri Vaishnava side in the debate against Bhagavadacharya at the Ujjain kumbh in 1921. Varmma also assured the reader that in addition to shedding light on the “ancient pedigree of the Sonar jati,” he would “elaborate some of the mysteries of *Shri Vaishnava dharma*.”[[81](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.81#X)] After devoting the next forty-six and a half pages to the “Kanyakubja-kshatriya” identity of Sonars, Varmma turned to “the importance of *Shri Vaishnava dharma*,” prefacing his remarks with the core Ramanuji tenet that “the swami of *Shri Vaishnava dharma* is Vishnu and the *acharya* is Shri Lakshmiji.”[[82](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.82#X)] This was certain to enrage any radical Ramanandis who happened to read the tract, inasmuch as the 1918–1921 dispute was sparked by the unwillingness of Ramanujis to worship the images of Ram and Sita.

Varmma was only warming to his Ramanuji task, however; he next made reference to the universal acceptance of Shri Vaishnava symbols by “other sampraday”: “Regardless of membership in any particular sampraday, the obligation of any auspicious ceremony, such as marriage or the birth of a child, requires the correct application of *tilak* [a marking of vermilion or sandal] powder in a vertical fashion [on the forehead].[[83](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.83#X)] This is inevitably called the marking of Shri Vishnu. When followers of other sampraday follow such obligations they take that very name, they wear his very sign.”[[84](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.84#X)] Varmma chose not to mention Ramanandis here by name; however, since Ramanandis and Ramanujis employ nearly identical tilak markings, it is clear that this was a calculated affront and that radical Ramanandis were the main target. His objective was to position those loyal to the memory of Ramanuja as “high” Vaishnavas, within which exist the various—and by implication hierarchically inferior—sectarian divisions. To this end, Varmma hypothesized that since “so many other sampraday rely on our literature (Gita, Ramayan, Bhagvat, etc.) and we read or take no interest in the literature of any other sampraday, we must be the most superior.”[[85](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.85#X)] He asserted, in addition, that no other sadhus were so pure, a reference no doubt to the “acharya” status long maintained by Ramanujis and to the commensal restrictions that were alleged to have been the cause of Ramanand’s expulsion from the fraternity of Raghavanand’s disciples in the fourteenth century.

Far more detailed mention was made of Ramanandi-Ramanuji divisiveness by Swami Dharnidharacharya, the author of a 1930 history of Bihar-based Kurmis who styled themselves “Awadhvamshiya” (of the lineage of Awadh) kshatriyas. Prior to addressing the subject of kshatriya identity in his booklet, Dharnidharacharya focused on “sampraday matters,” citing his guru-given name as Dharnidhar Ramanujadas, his guru’s place as the Totadri Math (the center of south Indian Vaishnavism), and finally his guru-parampara, which includes Ramanuja but makes no mention whatsoever of Ramanand. The actual text begins with supplications to Ramchandra and Ramanuja, followed by a few words on the author’s name and village; Dharnidharacharya then takes up a detailed disquisition on the history and religious dimensions of the Awadhia kshatriyas. Included here are such topics as the origin of kshatriyas; the genesis of the kurmm vamsh; the spread of the kshatriyas from Ayodhya to modern Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh; the tale of Ramchandra’s birth and the birth of his two sons, Lav and Kush; the correct ritual observations for pregnancy, birth, menstruation, eating, sacred thread investiture, marriage, and death; and the traditional roles of each of the four varna.[[86](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.86#X)]

The author then returns to matters of personal and sampraday concern, the narrative of which I shall recount here in some detail.[[87](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.87#X)] Dharnidharacharya was born in 1891 to an Awadh-kshatriya family of Patipur village, not far from the town of Nandalalabad in Patna District, south Bihar. He reveals little of his youth, aside from the fact that his given name was Dhanraj Sinha Varmma and that he was married at the age of fourteen. Soon thereafter and against the wishes of his parents, Dhanraj (the young Dharnidharacharya) left home. Crossing the Ganga, which forms the northern border of Patna District, he wandered northward for about one hundred miles and eventually found himself in a village near the town of Sitamarhi in north Bihar; there he remained for six months, in a small establishment of a local naga *jatadhari* (a sadhu who wears long, matted hair). Finally, afraid that his parents would be able to locate him and force him to return home, Dhanraj set off for Nepal with a group of wandering monks and from there undertook a lengthy pilgrimage route that led him all over north India. He visited such sites as Mukti Narayan, Damodar Kund, Tansen Pahar, Gangasagar, Puri, Prayag, Chitrakut, and finally ended up in Ayodhya, by then well known as one of the most important pilgrimage centers in the Gangetic region. At this point in his life, probably around 1910, Dhanraj decided to remain in Ayodhya and began the study of *nyaya* (logic, one of the six traditional schools of Indian philosophy) and related subjects under the tutelage of Saryudas, a noted Ramanandi scholar.

Dhanraj passed the next several years furthering his studies under various teachers connected to the rasik strain of Vaishnava bhakti, when in 1918 the controversy over Ramanuja and the Ramanandi parampara erupted in Ayodhya and, subsequently, throughout north India. The ensuing debates were particularly all-consuming in Ayodhya, and few if any there remained aloof from the turmoil. The author was certainly no exception: the ties Dhanraj formed with individuals in the south Indian Vaishnava tradition at this time ensured that he would be caught in the throes of sampraday discord. Dhanraj eventually supported the Ramanuji view and even went so far as to become the disciple of a major Shri Vaishnava figure from south India visiting Ayodhya at the time; indeed, it was during his initiation that he even was given the name *Dharnidhar Ramanujadas*, or “Dharnidhar, slave of Ramanuja.” If Dhanraj had achieved by this time a fraction of the scholarly respect he was to garner in the 1930s, the new title of this young Vaishnava intellectual—not to mention his recent initiation with a south Indian guru—was sure to have raised the ire of more than a few Ramanandis. Dharnidhar itself means “mountain”; as a result of the author’s growing prominence in the 1930s, he became regarded generally throughout Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh as Swami Dharnidharacharya.

By the 1920s prevailing opinion in Ayodhya had tipped in favor of the radical Ramanandi view, and the memory of Ramanuja was being purged (at least officially) from sampraday records. Naturally, Dharnidharacharya was deeply disturbed by this development, and his recollections of Ayodhya in this period are full of bitterness. But it is his response to the radical position that is of particular interest, because the evidence he marshaled to prove that Ramanuja, and not Ramanand, was the founder of the Shri Vaishnava sampraday consisted primarily of prophetic Sanskrit hymns composed by ancient *rishis* (seers) well before the advent of either Ramanand or Ramanuja. These texts shared in common the prediction that the four main divisions of Vaishnava sampraday, or *chatuh-sampraday*, would be founded by Vishnuswami, Madhvacharya, Ramanujacharya, and Nimbarkacharya.[[88](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.88#X)] Dharnidharacharya warned that “anyone who opposes such proof would in the end come to ruin.”[[89](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.89#X)] In response to the Ramanandi claim that the literature of the Ramanujis offended Ramchandra, he asserted, on the authority of the *Brihadbrahm Samhita* (part 2, section 7, verses 1–71), that “it is well known that Shri Ramanuja Swami is the originator of the *Ramtarak* mantra [an invocation to Ram as savior].” Dharnidharacharya urged Ramanandis to “renounce obstinate factionalism.…If not, the loss will be on their own heads, since it is well known that ‘the mantras of the man who is without a sampraday will bear no fruit.’”[[90](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.90#X)]

Notwithstanding these remonstrations, however, there was little Dharnidharacharya could do to check the gradual rise to prominence of radical Ramanandis in Ayodhya. In fact, he was so dismayed by the turn of events that at some point in the early 1920s he contemplated leaving Ayodhya altogether and undertook another lengthy pilgrimage to put the controversy behind him. Again his travels took him all over the northern half of the subcontinent, but also to Totadri and Venkatesh, the former his guru’s place and both important Ramanuji sites in the southern peninsula. Nevertheless, Dharnidharacharya found himself yearning for Ayodhya, which had become a home to him notwithstanding the many reminders of the quarrel that had disrupted his life, and he returned there in 1924. Eventually, with the assistance of a friend, Dharnidharacharya took up residence at the *Uttar Totadri Math* (the northern branch of the south Indian Totadri math) in Ayodhya, an institution clearly in sympathy with the Ramanuji position. Ensconced in the idyllic setting of the monastery’s *Venkatesh* temple bordering on *Vibhishan* pond, and thereby insulated from the haughtiness of predominantly Ramanandi Ayodhya, the author gained a reputation of high scholarly ability and began to accept students, to whom he devoted his full attention.[[91](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.91#X)]

It was in all likelihood the reputation as an energetic young Vaishnava intellectual of Ayodhya that attracted to Dharnidharacharya the attention of kshatriya ideologues in the late 1920s, and by 1930 he had published his jati study. The boy who had run away at the age of fourteen or fifteen thus found himself returning home, both geographically and genealogically, in his thirties and forties. Dharnidharacharya’s role as a monk addressing issues of caste status for individuals outside the world of sampraday was an appropriate one and, indeed, was endorsed and even emulated by a number of Dharnidharacharya’s peers throughout the Gangetic region. Three individuals in particular who appear in the prefatory pages of Dharnidharacharya’s *Shri Awadhvamshiya Kshatriya Martandah* merit a brief mention here: Ramtahaldas, Hanuman Sharan, and Videhanandani Sharan. The first, Ramtahaldas, in a letter expressing his deep appreciation for the work that Dharnidharacharya had done in advancing the cause of the Awadhvamshiya kshatriyas, described himself as a “Shri Vaishnava pandit” of Daraganj near Prayag.[[92](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.92#X)] The others, Hanuman Sharan and Videhanandani Sharan, were described in an adjoining felicitation as the successive heads of the Rajapur *Thakurbari* (abode of god) in Patna and praised for their work on behalf of both Vaishnava belief and the Awadhvamshiya kshatriya sabha; the former, Hanuman Sharan, was in all likelihood born an Awadhvamshiya kshatriya. It is also worth noting that Hanuman Sharan claimed guru-parampara descent from Swami Balanandacharya, the eighteenth-century Ramanandi of Jaipur who is credited with organizing the Vaishnava naga armies.[[93](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.93#X)] This conforms, incidentally, with the suggestion (see chapter 1) that soldier monasticism in the eighteenth century drew on a nonelite, shudra base; in the early twentieth century, Awadhvamshiya kshatriyas would refute the imputation of shudra-ness and, indeed, would use the Rajapur Thakurbari in Patna (along with the Uttar Totadri Math in Ayodhya) as informal distribution centers for Awadhvamshiya-kshatriya propaganda.[[94](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.94#X)]

Besides providing a recollection of the Ramanandi crisis of memory and ensuing Ramanandi-Ramanuji animosities that bears striking, if predictable, contrasts to that given by the radical Bhagavadacharya (recounted in the previous chapter), Swami Dharnidharacharya’s reminiscences afford a sense of the networks that allowed him and others of the north Indian Ramanuji mold to remain active in Gangetic Vaishnava culture. Perhaps more importantly, the experience of Swami Dharnidharacharya leads to broader speculation regarding the intersections of sampraday and caste in the Gangetic region. According to Dharnidharacharya, an extensive Ramanuji network spanned the religious topography of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, a network that eventually supported and sharpened the identity of reformist kshatriyas claiming Awadh as a place of origin. Indeed, a similar network seemed to be in place as well to nurture a Kanyakubja-kshatriya identity for Sonars, and it is likely that there were other examples of Ramanuji sadhus involved in kshatriya reform, because those Vaishnava monks who became Ramanuji by force of circumstance after 1921 were by definition more attuned in general to the ideological demands of varna commensality. While all Ramanujis were not invariably enmeshed in the kshatriya campaigns of the early twentieth century, Ramanujis were more likely to respond positively to the concerns being raised by the widespread kshatriya movements of peasants and artisans long labeled shudra by the social elite. Others less concerned about jati, varna, and personal purity—whatever their imputed status—and more interested in developing an aggressive, egalitarian social vision within the dominant monastic order of Gangetic India (the Ramanandi sampraday) could be expected to have sided with Bhagavadacharya and the radical wing. These latter, of course, would not be and were not precluded from advocating the cause of jati reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but they would have been less likely to do so given their disdain for issues of status in general.[[95](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.95#X)]

While I have argued that the crisis of tradition that divided the Ramanandi sampraday after 1918 can only be understood in terms of caste in colonial India, it would be difficult to make a related argument, namely, that kshatriya reform in the early twentieth century can only be understood in terms of caste attitudes expressed in the Ramanandi sampraday. However, it is clear from the foregoing that attitudes toward caste expressed in north Indian Vaishnava monastic circles were not restricted to the realm of sampraday but were applied to the “outside” world. Hence, not only was an institutionalized Vaishnava discourse inherent in the dialogue of social change, certain Vaishnava monks were willing and able to act as intellectuals on behalf of agricultural and artisan communities. Indeed, kshatriya identity seemed at least as important to Dharnidharacharya and his associates as their status as Ramanuji Vaishnavas. The eventual dominance of radical Ramanandis in Ayodhya may also help to explain the overt dedication of Ramanujis to the cause of kshatriya campaigns. Men like Dharnidharacharya probably saw the growing kshatriya movement as an outlet for political and intellectual expression, which for them had been quashed to a large extent within the sampraday by the group of young Ramanandi radicals spearheading the “Gangeticization” of Vaishnava tradition. Kshatriya reform gave Dharnidharacharya and other Gangetic Ramanujis the opportunity to organize, to espouse a group identity, and perhaps most significantly, to express their own opinions regarding the crisis in the sampraday itself through the forum of local jati publications.

Before concluding this section, it is important to note that the involvement of Vaishnava monks in kshatriya reform was not restricted to the Ramanandi sampraday. The other mainstream Vaishnava orders in Gangetic north India were oriented primarily toward the worship of Radha and Krishna and included the relatively small Radhaballabhi community and the more populous Gauriya (followers of Chaitanya) and Nimbarki sampraday. These sampraday were concentrated in western Uttar Pradesh, particularly the Mathura-Vrindaban region, and Bengal proper and were only very sparsely represented in the central and eastern Gangetic districts between Lucknow and Patna, what I have referred to generally as the Gangetic core.[[96](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.96#X)] If kshatriya reformers, particularly those claiming descent from the chandra-vamsh (lunar lineage) of Krishna in western Uttar Pradesh, wished to enlist the intellectual and religious sanction of Vaishnava sadhus, they would have been as likely to turn to these sampraday. However, if kshatriya reformers in the Gangetic core required Vaishnava monastic confirmation of their kshatriya status claims, they would have to seek out sadhus from what was essentially the dominant Vaishnava order there: namely, the Ramanandi sampraday.[[97](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.97#X)]

Likewise, there is no reason to presume that Ramanandi devotion to Ram and Sita would have restricted their kshatriya reform activity to those movements that sought a genealogical link with Ramchandra’s suryavamsh (solar lineage). Though Ram and Sita were central to Ramanandi identity, Radha-Krishna bhakti also figured prominently in Ramanandi worship and literature. Buchanan noted on several occasions that Ramanandis were willing to instruct lay followers in the worship of any of Vishnu’s avatars, most particularly Ram and Krishna.[[98](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.98#X)] Such devotional flexibility was evident even in Ayodhya itself, where, Buchanan observed, the Ramanandis “do not scruple to deliver the form of prayer, by which Krishna is addressed.”[[99](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.99#X)] The Ramanandi focus on Krishna extended as well to hagiographic and mythological literature; for example, the Bhaktamal, a text of major importance for all Vaishnavas, recounts numerous stories and legends pertaining to saints famous for their vigorous devotion to Ram as well as Krishna and their attendant pantheons. The main Bhaktamal scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as noted in the previous chapter, were associated with the Ramanandi sampraday, most notably, at the turn of the century, Sitaramsharan Bhagvan Prasad. Indeed, Bhagvan Prasad was also well known for his poetry describing the life of Mirabai, the legendary Rajput princess whose adorations of Krishna superseded her matrimonial obligations. In addition, Ramanandis in Bihar have long considered the *Bhagavata Purana*, which among other things recounts the life of Krishna, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, comprising Krishna’s discourses to Arjuna on the battlefield, texts of major doctrinal importance.[[100](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.100#X)]

Hence, chandra-vamshiya kshatriya reformers could partake of the monastic and religious world of Ram without compromising their commitments to a social identity focused on a descent from Krishna and his historical antecedents. The most articulate, numerous, and best-organized kshatriya reformers claiming descent from Krishna in the early twentieth century were Yadavs, and indeed there are indications of strong Yadav involvement in both Ram worship and the Ramanandi order after 1900. For example, van der Veer lists a number of “caste temples” built in Ayodhya in this century, among which is one founded by Yadavs. Freitag notes that during the annual Ram Lila festival in Banaras in the early twentieth century, Yadavs were prominent among those who served to carry the huge images of Ram and his brother Bharat in the *Bharat Milap* (reunion with Bharat) procession.[[101](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.101#X)] And I have cited in the conclusion to the previous chapter a 1935–1936 poem published in a Ramanandi magazine and authored by one Ramavatar *Yadav* “Shakta” Visharad (or Ramavatar Yadav, learned in Shakta doctrine), which praises Ramanand’s efforts on behalf of the downtrodden masses.

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**The Ancient Present: Race, Dignity, and Labor**

A compelling theme addressed by much of the kshatriya reform literature through the early twentieth century was the redefinition of agricultural labor in terms of ancient pedigree and personal dignity. The ideas formulated in this literature challenged the brahmanical notion of physical work that girded the notion of a “plowman boundary” separating the shudra and untouchable mass from the varna elite. The rhetoric employed by the jati reformers bore a relationship to that devised by Swami Dayanand in his attempt to cast a new *Arya Samaj* (literally, “Aryan society”) according to what he saw as the “original” meaning of the ancient Vedic corpus. Dayanand posited a varna system based not on birth but merit that, according to the historian Kenneth Jones, held great attraction for those “frustrated by the conservatism of the Hindu world.”[[102](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.102#X)] However, notwithstanding these and other shared themes (most notably around the idea of an “Aryan” people) between kshatriya reform and Arya Samaji ideology, the relationship between kshatriya reformers and the Arya Samaj was often troubled.

For kshatriya reformers, the arguments for a reconsideration of social differentiation and dignified work were woven together with protohistorical accounts of the influx of an Aryan race into the south Asian subcontinent. As a Kushvaha-kshatriya ideologue put it,

The country we live in is named *Aryavarta*; it is called Aryavarta because in the beginning the Aryas settled here.…The place of origin of the Aryas is Tibet, and the Aryas that crossed the mountains did not discriminate among themselves. Rather, those who worshipped and sang hymns to god received great respect and were called rishis. There were also those who ruled, handled administrative affairs, and fought wars, and those who practiced agriculture, while those who were stupid did daily work. *They were chosen to serve*. Over time the priests were called brahmans, the rulers were called kshatriyas, agriculturalists were called vaishyas, and the stupid who could not learn *were given the name shudra.* However, they were all sons of the same father, and to facilitate the smooth functioning of Aryan society the names of these four varna—brahman, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra—were institutionalized.[[103](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.103#X)]

The articulation of Aryan racial origins would commingle with that of Vaishnava genealogies and would vary only in detail, not in scope. Hence the reconstellated Kurmi-kshatriya identity of the 1920s extended the genealogy back into the Vedic age to include descent from the so-called *Indra* jati, that is, partisans of the Vedic god Indra. The Indra jati, it was contended, was one among several semidivine communities who inhabited the Tibetan plateau in the north and fought incessant wars against hideous demons to the west.[[104](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.104#X)] The conclusion inevitably reached following this representation of the “golden age of Aryavarta” held that originally one’s varna was determined by one’s abilities, not by one’s deeds in a previous life (*karma*).[[105](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.105#X)]

This rendering of “Hindu” history and the aggressive interpretation of varna in racial terms were hallmarks of Arya Samaji reform in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh.[[106](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.106#X)] In fact, one such Kushvaha-kshatriya pamphlet was authored by a teacher of the local Dayanand Anglo-Vedic high school in Banaras.[[107](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.107#X)] Not surprisingly, that work’s overtly Arya Samaji stance in no way contradicted the standard Vaishnava conception of varna and labor outlined in the jati reform literature of the early twentieth century. Significant inroads had been made by Arya Samajis into the Yadav-kshatriya movement as well, especially in western Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, where many villages and towns with large Yadav populations came to have Arya Samaji temples, priests, schools, and publicists.[[108](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.108#X)] A close inspection of the Gangetic reform literature reveals, nevertheless, a great ambivalence on the part of most jati reformers regarding the proper role of the Arya Samaj in Indian society in general and in social and religious change in particular. The comments of two jati reform authors reveal the conflicts between what they and others were beginning to define as *sanatan dharma*, the “eternal religion” to which they avowedly subscribed, and what was increasingly being characterized as the offensive, “non-Hindu” programs of the Arya Samaj. Dilipsinha Yadav, whose writings were influential among Yadav kshatriyas throughout U.P, attacked Arya Samajis as “Vedic believers in name only, who have, for the sake of their own greed and self-aggrandizement, granted initiation to Chamars and Muslims.”[[109](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.109#X)] While the propagation of Arya Samaji ideas by men like Swami Krishnanandji, a self-described Yadav kshatriya, who toured the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, certainly must have had a significant impact on jati reform rhetoric, it would be an overstatement to contend that the Arya Samaj was a leading force in kshatriya reform.

Raghunanandan Prasad Sinha Varmma, the Kanyakubja-kshatriya ideologue on behalf of Sonars (cited in the previous section for his views on Vaishnava sampraday), was more explicit in his condemnation of the followers of Dayanand:

These days Dayanandis, also known as Arya Samajis, are secretly gaining entrance into all jati mahasabhas, are gradually scandalizing the sanatan dharma, and are devoting all their efforts to the subversion of the varna system. The varna system is the very foundation of sanatan dharma. The important point is that these atheists have even worked their way into the Kanyakubja-kshatriya jati society and are very influential; their articles have already been published, the name of one is “*Svarnakar Koi Jati ya Varna Nahin Hai* [Sonar is not a Jati or Varna].” It is with great sorrow that I must report that . . . our Kanyakubja-kshatriya brothers pay not even the slightest heed to this [threat]. It is impossible to gauge the effect these godless essays will have in the future. We hereby inform our Kanyakubja-kshatriya brothers—whosoever should read such an article or hear such a speech should immediately refute it![[110](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.110#X)]

From the tone of these remarks, published in 1924, it is clear that while the Arya Samaj had made significant inroads into the jati reform movement, those inroads were severely resented by what had become, by the early twentieth century, “orthodox” opinion. This, of course, begs the questions of what constituted orthodoxy and how certain elements of Hindu belief came to be considered orthodox. In partial answer, Philip Lutgendorf has recently described the bland, universally acceptable Hinduism that was being promoted as sanatan dharma in north India by such men as the Hindu nationalist Madanmohan Malaviya, the publicist Din Dayal Sharma, and the *Ramayana* scholar Pandit Jwalaprasad Mishra.[[111](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.111#X)] Lutgendorf’s main emphasis here is on the overriding importance of the immensely popular *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas to the success of the sanatan dharma agenda, an agenda closely allied to the desire to create an Indian identity built on Hindu ideas. Tulsidas’ *Manas* thus became

the Sanatani scripture par excellence—a devotional work which still preached reverence for cows and Brahmans; offered a veritable catalogue of sacred rivers, pilgrimage sites, and popular rituals; presented a harmonious synthesis of Vaishnavaism and Shaivism; and in the minds of devotees managed at one and the same time to stand for religious egalitarianism, the maintenance of the social status quo, and (later on) even nationalism and swadeshi (the boycott of British products, especially textiles), since it offered an inspiring vision of a powerful and self-sufficient Hindu state.[[112](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.112#X)]

Sanatan dharma was (and remains) a loose enough amalgam of religious concepts to represent all things to all Hindus, for Lutgendorf an “old-time religion” of sorts, self-conscious, conservative, vague, and, most importantly, exclusivist, by enabling adherents to delimit those who were not “orthodox.”

On the question of the acceptability of certain forms of labor, however, kshatriya reformers unambiguously asserted that actual agricultural work was in no way undignified, a conclusion of no small significance given the elite aversion for physical labor—an aversion only reinforced by colonial replications of varna as irrefutable caste hierarchy. Ascriptive caste based on a principle of social hierarchy was attacked in the name of a distinct kind of racial equality, the logic of which dictated that since all Hindus are of the same race (i.e, Aryas), all Hindus are equal. Devi Prasad Sinha Chaudhari asserted in 1907 that “Kurmi kshatriyas practice agriculture as a livelihood and since it is associated with the earth it is therefore a noble vocation.” According to the *Rgveda*, he continued, “in ancient times well-born men took up the plow, cultivated, and were known as Aryas.”[[113](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.113#X)] Swami Abhayananda Saraswati elaborated on this sentiment twenty years later when he noted that according to the *Ramayana*, “Maharaja Janak and his queen [i.e., Sita’s foster parents] practiced agriculture and protected their subjects” and that therefore farming “cannot be considered an obstacle to being kshatriya.”[[114](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.114#X)] J. Chaudhari of the Anglo-Vedic High School in Banaras insisted that “there is nothing undignified about plowing a field,” and suggested that people who argue otherwise are either exposing their ignorance of the ancient texts or, more likely, “simply do not want to work.” He further noted that “in Bihar Rajputs and in some places even Bhumihars plow the fields. Konkani brahmans and farmer brahmans of Mewar also work the plow. Rajputs plow in Rajputana [Rajasthan] and Garhwal as well.…So long as these brahmans and kshatriyas don’t become shudra by plowing, Koiris will not relent [in their demands for kshatriya status].”[[115](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.115#X)] At the 1907 debate over the viability of a Kurmi-kshatriya identity, the Vrindaban scholar Radhacharan Goswami even cited the fact that Kurmis were “almost entirely landowners and cultivators, and are quite powerful,” as evidence of their kshatriya status.[[116](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.116#X)]

Similar arguments were constructed for nonagricultural and marginally agricultural communities claiming professional dignity in this period. Raghunandan Prasad Varmma urged his jati brothers not to be at all ashamed of their scientific and technical skills as goldsmiths and pointed to the scientific achievements that made America and Germany great. He added that three out of four of Kush’s sons (i.e., Ramchandra’s grandsons) were said to have become skilled in handicrafts and architecture.[[117](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.117#X)] Lalji Lal of the Tanti (weaver) community in Bihar argued that cloth production was a noble occupation, especially given the efforts by Mahatma Gandhi to elevate the practice of spinning to a patriotic pastime—a campaign that made the spinning wheel the symbol for the nationalist movement.[[118](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.118#X)] Likewise, the tedious profession of hauling water received critical consideration by Kahar reformers. Nauvat Ray refused to refer even to water-hauling as an occupational birthright (*pesh*) but insisted on it as professional wage labor (*mazdur*) because he did not consider it an act that only a certain section of society had the ability to perform. His argument employed and inverted classic varna logic:

These days, a section of uneducated people in this jati provide the service of drawing and carrying water, and this is a kind of task that everyone in Hindu society himself must perform every day to some extent at one time or another.…And yet this is not even degraded work, because high jatis in Hindu society also perform this very mazduri. On railway station platforms and in temple water-booths one can hear the pandit calling for water. How could a brahman perform this task if this is such lowly work?[[119](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.119#X)]

This argument may appear simplistic, but its implications were to prove enormous for the political economy of varna in the village: by consciously rejecting the assumption that the physical act of hauling water (or palanquins, for that matter) was an inherent corporeal component of being Kahar, Ray rendered impotent the claims of elite society on Kahar labor as a matter of varna prerogative. Rather, Ray demanded that a hauler of water should be rewarded not with the satisfaction of knowing that he has lived up to his full potential in life as a Kahar, but with hard cash, and then should be left to pursue other callings. Ray added that many Kahars were cultivators, others had found employment in the military and in commerce, and those who were educated had attained high rank in civil and military service.[[120](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.120#X)] He encapsulated the Kahar struggle for noble kshatriya origins in an allegorical tale of a prince who, through a turn of fate, was raised in a poor family and unaware of his true origins. The prince grew up learning how to farm and do physical labor when, one day, his true identity was revealed to him. The prince’s whole bearing immediately changed as he assumed the mantle of dignity; yet he remained a peasant, well-versed in the art of cultivation.[[121](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.121#X)]

If the twice-born held sway over shudra and untouchable by virtue of their greater control over the product of the land, the hierarchy such an ideology implied had long been reinforced by an ideology of physical work. Indeed, the stigma attached to labor was so powerful in Gangetic India that the very act of ploughing (*chasa*) constituted an important social delimiter, distinguishing the upper classes from the lower in the early nineteenth century.[[122](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.122#X)] The many descriptions in the district gazetteers of Gangetic Uttar Pradesh and Bihar make it abundantly clear that the elite prescription against ploughing held through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. For example, in Ballia District in eastern Uttar Pradesh, H. R. Nevill noted that “high caste tenants seldom do the actual cultivation themselves, generally sub-letting their lands”; he added, however, that “they get less out of the soil, whether they sublet it or cultivate it themselves or employ hired labour, than do the Koeris and Kurmis.”[[123](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.123#X)]

Physical labor represented the point of convergence between social identity and economic exigency; as such, the simple act of cultivating a field—and the logic of agricultural production to which that act is inexorably tied—constituted the arena of historical possibilities for both economic and social change. It is not surprising, then, that the idea of labor was of such great importance to kshatriya reformers. As is evident in the leadership ranks of their various organizations, increasing numbers of first-line tenant cultivators were acquiring productive power and occasionally property rights over increasingly larger amounts of land. Now, in the early twentieth century, the physical boundary that upheld political, cultural, and social hierarchy was being questioned by reform-minded intellectuals. Indeed, some radicals went so far as to dispense with the boundaries entirely. Examples of the profound—and often violent—economic, political, and social consequences that would ensue are provided in the following chapter.

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**Conclusion**

The profusion of jati reform movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries implies a changing universe of political and ethical concerns, expressed nevertheless in terms familiar to the Vaishnava religious milieu. The most explicit Vaishnava contour of kshatriya reform was the detailed cooptation of the dynastic genealogies of Ramchandra and Krishna, both as historical figures and as gods in their own right. But the articulation of kshatriya identity went beyond the reification of a specific Vaishnava historical framework. The very language, rhetoric, and texture of kshatriya reform reflected the institutionalization of Vaishnava belief, so much so that in some cases the kshatriya reformers themselves emerged from the universe of Vaishnava monasticism, in particular, from the monasticism centered on Ayodhya, the Ramanandi sampraday. This is not surprising: the Ramanandi sampraday was and is north India’s largest Vaishnava monastic community, and Ramanandis had long been known for their open-mindedness on the question of caste. As we have seen, however, not all Ramanandis were inclined to lend their support to social movements whose ideologies, by implication, reinforced caste attitudes.

If the assertions of kshatriya identity, the claim to uniracial (Aryan) equality, and the insistence on the dignity of physical work (not to mention the recognition of the fundamental economic necessity of labor) cannot be understood independently of Vaishnava reform, neither can it be understood independently of the economic expansion of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many peasants and artisans appear to have been edged (if not catapulted) into positions of financial prosperity and were able thus to mount coordinated kshatriya identity campaigns. Ultimately, the dignity-of-labor rhetoric, grounded in a racial interpretation of varna, would constitute a significant challenge to the political economy of caste hierarchy. To many observers within and beyond kshatriya reform, the political economy of caste was predicated on a moral understanding of physical work—particularly the act of preparing a field by maneuvering a plow while walking behind a cow or bull—as personally degrading. However, an ideological redefinition of labor would eventually pose a philosophical dilemma for kshatriya reformers themselves (not to mention their communities), forcing a choice between kshatriya status (and the continued systemics of varna that such a status implied) and the Vaishnava assertions of the dignity of labor (which ultimately undermined the systemics of varna and rendered the need for a kshatriya identity obsolete). Such choices would be made in the context of dramatic political change, as nationalist and peasant politicians would look to the kshatriya organizations after 1920 in an effort to cultivate a rural base. The trajectories of such ideological and political movements and the manner in which they intersected are explored in the remainder of this study.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that as kshatriya identities centered on Ayodhya gained ideological and organizational strength in the early twentieth century, and particularly among the sizable Kurmi and Kushvaha peasant communities, Ayodhya also began to emerge on the north Indian political landscape as the place where God was born as Ramchandra. It has been argued recently that the current political turmoil over Ramchandra’s birthplace (*Ramjanambhumi*) has its roots in a colonial historiography that was all too quick to perceive and assert an age-old enmity between Hindus and Muslims as the driving force of Indian history.[[124](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=d0e5697&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=bn3.124#X)] Overlooked in this argument are the social and religious contexts of the early twentieth century: the ideological need for a birthplace of Ramchandra can also be understood as symptomatic of the historiography of kshatriya ancestries grounded in a Vaishnava discourse. In other words, at some point claims of genealogical descent from God demand the physical presence of the remains of God. The recent controversy over a mosque built in Ayodhya in 1528 by the Mughal emperor Babar and the allegation that it not only occupies the site of Ramchandra’s birth but was built with construction materials taken from the ruins of a temple marking that birth, demonstrates the extent to which the heightened communal consciousness of the twentieth century bleeds into debates over status in society, monastic or otherwise.

**Notes**

1. H. H. Risley, “Ethnographic Appendices,” in GOI, *Census of India, 1901*, vol. 1: India (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1903), 55–57. Shudras and untouchables were listed under “Hindus”; the analagous terms for Muslims, according to Risley, were “*ajlaf*” and “*arzal*,” respectively, which together made up approximately 56 percent of the Muslim population—itself 15 percent of the total population. The numbers I have given in the text are for Hindus only; if we include ajlaf and arzal jatis, the actual size of the stigmatized population in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar would be much greater. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=ch3&toc.id=&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4824#X)]

2. See James Hagen, “Indigenous Society, the Political Economy, and Colonial Education in Patna District: A History of Social Change from 1811 to 1951 in Gangetic North India” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1981), on the increasing levels of education and literacy among peasants in Bihar. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=ch3&toc.id=&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4827#X)]

3. As a general rule, I employ the jati nomenclature prescribed in the reform literature itself; often, as is the case here, I simplify the jati names by dropping the term, “kshatriya.” Kurmi, Yadav, and Kushvaha should thus be read as Kurmi kshatriya, Yadav kshatriya, and Kushvaha kshatriya; together, they accounted for nearly half of the “shudra” population listed in the 1901 census. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=ch3&toc.id=&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4830#X)]

4. This theme is touched upon in virtually every jati reform pamphlet of the period. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=ch3&toc.id=&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4835#X)]

5. And mostly by way of sociology and anthropology: the organizational history of the Kurmi-kshatriya movement has been presented in K. K. Verma, *Changing Role of Caste Associations* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1979), esp. chapter 2, “The All-India Kurmi Sabha: Historical Perspective,” 13–35. On Yadav kshatriyas, see M. S. A. Rao, “Yadava Movement,” in his *Social Movements and Social Transformation* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1987), esp. part I (chapter 4), 123–48. More recently, reference to these movements appears in Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, 90–94. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=ch3&toc.id=&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4840#X)]

6. The Kayasths were among the first to organize publicly for social and educational reform. See the work of Lucy Carroll, especially “Caste, Community and Caste(s) Association: A Note on the Organization of the Kayastha Conference and the Definition of a Kayastha Community,” *Contributions to Asian Studies* 10 (1977): 3–24; for an early consideration of Kayasth identity, see R. M. Shastri, “A Comprehensive Study into the Origins and Status of the Kayasthas,” *Man in India* 2 (1931): 116–59. See Karen Leonard, *The Social History of an Indian Caste: The Kayasths of Hyderabad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), on Kayasths in the Mughal and post-Mughal period. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=ch3&toc.id=&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4843#X)]

7. See M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952). For a theorization of Sanskritization as a historical process, see Srinivas, “Mobility in the Caste System,” in Milton Singer and Bernard Cohn, eds., *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 189–200. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=ch3&toc.id=&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4847#X)]

8. There are, in addition, a host of other, primarily semantic, objections to the idea of Sanskritization. Some have questioned the appropriateness of a term associated with brahmanical elitism to describe what was, in many cases, a radically anti-Brahman phenomenon; see, for instance, Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930* (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976). Others have objected to the epistemological misappropriation of the term Sanskrit; see J. F. Stahl, “Sanskrit and Sanskritization,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 22, no. 3 (May 1963): 261–75. As Stahl notes (p. 275), Srinivas himself was the first to encourage a move away from the oversimplified notion of Sankritization and toward a more culturally relevant terminology. On the inappropriate general usage of the term, see Lucy Carroll, “The Temperance Movement in India: Politics and Social Reform,” *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 3 (1976): 419. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=ch3&toc.id=&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4850#X)]

9. E. A. Gait, “Report,” in GOI, *Census of India, 1901*, vol. 6: *The Lower Provinces of Bengal and Their Feudatories*, part 1 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), 379. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4861#X)]

10. Buchanan, *Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:325. Buchanan’s remark implies that they thought of themselves as brahmans. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4864#X)]

11. GOI, *Census of India, 1901*, vol. 6, part 1, 379. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4867#X)]

12. Buchanan, *Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:329. Notwithstanding his categorization, Buchanan noted (p. 329) that Kayasths in Bhagalpur District professed high status on the basis of their claim to descend from the holy dust that covered the body of *Brahma*. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4870#X)]

13. Risley, “Ethnographic Appendices,” 56. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4873#X)]

14. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, 1:452. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4876#X)]

15. Risley, “Ethnographic Appendices,” 55–56. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4880#X)]

16. Risley’s Bihar hierarchy comprised “Brahmans, Other castes of twice-born rank, Clean Sudras, Inferior Sudras, Unclean castes, Scavengers and filth eaters”; “Ethnographic Appendices,” 56–57. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4888#X)]

17. Buchanan, *Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:326–27 (my emphasis). [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4900#X)]

18. Ibid., 337. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4903#X)]

19. Buchanan, *Shahabad, 1812–1813*, 198–99. Buchanan (in Martin, *Eastern India*, 2:468–69) describes these Kurmis as *saithawar* and equates them directly with Ayodhya Kurmis of Bihar, noting that they constitute fully 52 percent of the Kurmis in Gorakhpur District. The exact meaning of the term *saithawar* is unclear: *saita* translates as auspicious moment, *sai* meaning prosperity; in Urdu *sa’i* describes one who is hard-working. The common Persian suffix, *war*, denotes having or possessing, suggesting that saithawar is more of a positive adjectival term describing one who is prosperous, diligent, or auspiciously born. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4910#X)]

20. Buchanan in Martin, *Eastern India*, 2:468. The less-detailed observations of Henry Miers Elliot in the mid-nineteenth century resemble those of Buchanan three decades earlier. In his *Memoirs of the History, Folklore, and Distribution of the Races of the North Western Provinces of India* (London: Trubner, 1869), Elliot notes (1:157) that among the several Kurmi geocultural subidentities “in Oudh [a corruption of Awadh] . . . , the notorious Darshan Singh has ennobled his tribe by the designation of Raja.” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4913#X)]

21. Richard Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720–1801* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 135–36. The more recent arguments of Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, are of relevance here as well. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4919#X)]

22. Buchanan in Martin, *Eastern India*, 2:468–69. Similarly, of the Kurmi population in Shahabad District, Buchanan, *Shahabad, 1812–1813*, 198–99, commented that “200 families perhaps can read and write, and 150 of them do not cultivate with their own hand, being descended of persons, who with the title of Chaudhuri managed the divisions into which the immense barony (Pergunah) of Chayanpur [in the southwest of the district] was divided.” Unfortunately, Buchanan failed to specify here the Kurmi subgroups from which this heightened concern with identity emerged. By the early twentieth century, kshatriya reformers would recognize and emphasize the dignity of labor and plowing, in contrast to this early rejection of shudra status. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4936#X)]

23. VN, Patna District, Thana Barh, no. 200 (village Berhua). A general sense of the local political and economic influence of awadhia Kurmis in this region can be gleaned from village nos. 200–20. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4942#X)]

24. Anand A. Yang, *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793–1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 47. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4945#X)]

25. Buchanan, *Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:310–11. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4952#X)]

26. Buchanan, *Purnea, 1809–1810*, 196–97. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4955#X)]

27. Elliot was secretary to the Sudder Board of Revenue, in what was then the North Western Provinces, and compiled a “supplemental glossary” designed for incorporation into a larger glossary of judicial and revenue terms then being assembled by Horace Hayman Wilson, entitled *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms, and of Useful Words Occurring in Offical Documents Relating to the Administration of the Government of British India* (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1855; reprint, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968). [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4958#X)]

28. Elliot, *Memoirs of the History, Folklore, and Distribution of the Races of the North Western Provinces of India* (reprinted under the unfortunate title, *Encyclopaedia of Caste, Customs, Rites and Superstitions of the Races of Northern India* [New Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1985]), 1:185. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4961#X)]

29. Ibid., 187 [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4964#X)]

30. M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), 66. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4970#X)]

31. See Christopher Pinney, “Colonial Anthropology in the ‘Laboratory of Mankind,’” 252–63. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4973#X)]

32. On Awadh, see Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 135–36; on the bestowal of kshatriya status by the Mughal emperor on “a spurious Rajput clan,” see Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, chapter 4. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4978#X)]

33. See Dirks, “Castes of Mind.” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.13&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4981#X)]

34. Dilip Sinha Yadav, *Ahir Itihas ki Jhalak* [A Glimpse of the History of the Ahirs] (Lucknow, Allahabad, and Etawah: Krishna Press, 1914–15), 1. A sense of the overwhelming atmosphere of social and economic change is reflected in this phrase, *yeh samsar parivartanshil hai*, which was employed repeatedly by jati reformers throughout the early twentieth century. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4989#X)]

35. See Verma, *Changing Role of Caste Associations*, 13–14; and Swami Abhayananda Saraswati, *Kurmi Kshatriya Itihas* [The History of the Kurmi Kshatriyas] (Banaras: Shivaramsinha, 1927), 114–17. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e4997#X)]

36. Government Order No. 251/VIII-186A-6, dated 21 March 1896, to the Inspector General of Police, Northwest Provinces and Oudh. Cited in Swami Abhayananda Saraswati, *Kurmi Kshatriya Itihas*, 117. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5000#X)]

37. Devi Prasad Sinha Chaudhari, *Kurmi Kshatriyatva Darpan* [Reflections on Kurmi-Kshatriya Valor] (Lucknow: Kashi Ram Varma, 1907), cover and ii. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5003#X)]

38. See M. S. A. Rao, “Yadava Movement,” part 2, 150. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5013#X)]

39. See John Richards, “The Indian Empire and Peasant Production of Opium in the Nineteenth Century,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15 (February 1981): 59–82. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5022#X)]

40. Swami Abhayananda Saraswati, *Kurmi Kshatriya Itihas*, 3–4. According to Saraswati, local meetings had been held in Danapur (the site of an important British garrison just west of Patna) in 1870, and Sonpur (the site of an important annual cattle festival just north of Patna) in 1890. Verma, *Changing Role of Caste Associations*, 13, mentions intermittent Uttar Pradesh meetings in Lucknow, Pilibhit, Barabanki, and Etawah. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5026#X)]

41. See Verma, *Changing Role of Caste Associations*, 14–15 and 41. Verma cites Ganesh Swami Sadhu, *Kurmi Bansabali* [Kurmi Genealogy], but gives no bibliographic information. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5044#X)]

42. Chaudhari, *Kurmi Kshatriyatva Darpan*, 7. The full bibliographic citation is Eustace J. Kitts, *A Compendium of the Castes and Tribes Found in India: Compiled from the 1881 Census Reports for the Various Provinces, excluding Burmah and Native States of the Empire* (Bombay: Education Society Press, 1885). Most authors of jati reform pamphlets relied in part on British surveys, gazetteers, and antiquarian compendia for historical and ethnographic detail in their efforts to revitalize their communities and, indeed, accorded those European texts nearly the same degree of authoritative respect as they would a textual source in Sanskrit. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5047#X)]

43. In this context, Kurmi-kshatriyas claimed links with the Maratha Shivaji. See Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low-Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), on one important proponent of social reform in Maharashtra. Cf. also D. F. Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar: A Study of the Patidar Community of Gujarat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). Notwithstanding the links with Kunbis claimed by Kurmi kshatriyas, the ideological content of Phule’s writing and that of kshatriya reform in north India was markedly different. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5075#X)]

44. Chaudhari, *Kurmi Kshatriyatva Darpan*, 8–11. The author argues that the true name of Ramchandra’s *Suryavamsh* (solar lineage) was *Kurmvamsh* (Kurm lineage) and that the Kurmi descendants of Kush and Lav were in Gujarat described as *Kushvamshi Kurmis* and *Lavvamshi Kurmis*, respectively, whereas in Awadh they referred to themselves indiscriminately as *Kurmvamshi Kurmis*. Chaudhari further describes an ancient sage named Kurm whose descendants merged with the *Chandravamsh* (lunar lineage) of Krishna. According to Chaudhari Dipnarayan Sinha, *Kurmi Kshatriya Nirnay* [Rulings of Kurmi Kshatriyas] (Chunar: n.p., 1937–38), 81–83, this particular legend was also cited in support of Kurmi kshatriya identity by Radharcharan Goswami, who is described as the chairman of *pandits* (scholars) of Banaras and Vrindavan: “‘In the beginning a king named Prannath was born into the lineage of a sage named Kurmm. . . .’ From this 64th verse of the 33rd section of the *Sahyadrikhand* of the *Skanda Purana*, the Kurmvamsh is counted among kshatriyas.” Chaudhari, *Kurmi Kshatriyatva Darpan*, 11, also includes as Kurmi progenitors Raja Kuru and Raja Yadu, whose early descendants (the Kauravs and Yadavs, respectively) figure prominently in the Mahabharata; he details (11–12) several other miscellaneous lineages specific to western India. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5078#X)]

45. Between 1810 and 1813 Buchanan made frequent reference to the genealogical ties to the “kshatriya tribe” of Krishna and Radha claimed by Goalas. Buchanan, *Bhagalpur, 1810–1811*, 234; *Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:338; *Shahabad, 1812–1813*, 204; and Buchanan in Martin, *Eastern India*, 2:467–68. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5083#X)]

46. See, for instance, Yadav, *Ahir Itihas ki Jhalak*; and *Yadavesh* (a quarterly newsletter of the Yadav kshatriya jati), first published from Banaras in 1935–36. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5086#X)]

47. Yadav, *Ahir Itihas ki Jhalak*, 2–3, 16. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5089#X)]

48. Kedarnath-ji Rohan, “Yadavon ka Itihas” [The History of the Yadavs], *Yadavesh* 1, no. 2 (1935–36): 3. It is possible that the Yadav focus on Krishna as a progenitor of a kshatriya lineage contributed to the martial reinvigoration of the Krishna myth, which, it has been argued, evolved into a nonpolitical tale of religious erotism-cum-pastoralism as a result of Muslim political dominance in north India; see David Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Raganuga Bhakti Sadhana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 43–50; see also Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 310. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5098#X)]

49. For example, Rohan, “Yadavan ka Itihas,” 3–4; and Yadav, *Ahir Itihas ki Jhalak*, 7–16. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5101#X)]

50. As evidenced by the title of a tract by one Gangaprasad, *Kushvaha Kshatriya, urf Koiri, Kachhi, Murao, Kachhvaha (Vivaran)* [The Kushvaha Kshatris, also known as Koiri, Kachhi, Murao, and Kachhvaha (An Account)] (Banaras: Adarsh Press, 1921). [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5117#X)]

51. W. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. 12: *Gaya and Shahabad Districts* (1875–77; reprint, Delhi: D.K. Publishing House, 1973), 195; Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, 1:501. For the following sentence, see Risley, 1:503. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5126#X)]

52. Buchanan, *Purnea, 1809–1810*, 228; *Bhagalpur, 1810–1811*, 253; *Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:354; *Shahabad, 1812–1813*, 198; and Buchanan in Martin, *Eastern India*, 2:469. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5135#X)]

53. Gangaprasad, *Kushvaha Kshatriya*, 2–3, 23; see also 21–24 for the portions cited below. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5145#X)]

54. See the discussion regarding “memorials” received by E. A. Gait’s highly skeptical ethnography staff, GOI, *Census of India, 1901*, vol. 6, part 1, 378–84. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5168#X)]

55. Nirgun Sinha (“Khali”), *Varnashram Vichar-Dhara* [Varnashram Ideology] (Maner, Patna: Nirgun Singh “Khali”, 1938–39), 74–75. The author cites (84–85) a speech by Dr. Munje, chairman of the Hindu Mahasabha, on the need for military training for kshatriyas, calling to mind Vinayak Damodar Savarkar’s famous slogan, “Hinduize all politics and militarize Hindudom!” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5171#X)]

56. Ibid., 71. For a brief synopsis of the life of Nirgun Sinha (“Khali”) see Shivpujan Sahay, *Hindi Sahitya aur Bihar*, 3:206–7. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5174#X)]

57. Cited in Lalji Lal, *Tantuvay Anveshan arthat Tanti Jati ka Itihas* [A Study of the Tantuvay, or the History of the Tanti (weavers) Jati] (Sandalpur, Monghyr: Lalji Lal, 1929), 67; and in Nauvat Ray, *Kahar Jati aur Varnavyavastha* [The Kahar Jati and the Varna System] (Firozabad, Agra: Fakirchand, 1920), title page. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.14&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5190#X)]

58. Ray, *Kahar Jati aur Varnavyavastha*, cover page. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5200#X)]

59. “Contribution,” *Kurmi Samachar* 1, no. 2 (May 1895): 5–9, and esp. 7–8. This Lucknow publication only survived into its second volume (1896) before fading; see Verma, *Changing Role of Caste Associations*, 36. Vichar means “idea” and, since it is not generally employed as a name, suggests that the anonymous author of the dialogue designed that character as an ideologist for Kurmi reform. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5207#X)]

60. Ray, *Kahar Jati aur Varnavyavastha*, 7. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5236#X)]

61. For a classic description of this intensely popular festival, performed annually all over North India, see Norvin Hein, “The Ram Lila,” in Milton Singer, ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959), 73–98; on vijay dashmi, 88. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5245#X)]

62. Ray, *Kahar Jati aur Varnavyavastha*, 14–16. According to Hindu mythology, *tretayug* is the second (silver) and *kaliyug* the fourth and last (vice-ridden) age. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5266#X)]

63. Karu Ram, *Ramani Nirnay* [Rules of the Ramanis] (Gaya: Magadha Shubhanker Press, 1906), 1. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, 1:371, speculated that the designation *Ramani Kahar* is a geographic one referring to the headquarters of the jati in Ramanpur near Gaya. However, given the personalized nomenclature described ahead, it seems likely that Kahars began to link the fortuitous term Ramani to the identity of Ramchandra himself. *Ramaraman* means the beloved of Lakshmi, i.e., Vishnu; *Ramaiya* refers to Ramchandra, his avatar. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5276#X)]

64. The former listed in Ram, *Ramani Nirnay*, 6–17, the latter listed on 2–5. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5279#X)]

65. Kishan is colloquial for Krishna; “Chhote Ram Das” means either “little servant of Ram” or the “servant of the child Ram.” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5285#X)]

66. Among those which conveyed the greatest meaning were Ayodhya Ram, Ramsharan Ram (*Ramsharan* meaning he who takes refuge in Ram), Sahai Ram (Ram’s helper), Keval Ram (only Ram), Lachhman Ram (*Lachhman*, colloquial for Lakshman, Ram’s devoted younger brother), Tulsi Ram (*tulsi* meaning basil, charged with important Vaishnava ritual connotations), Ganga Bishan Ram (*Bishan*, colloquial for Vishnu), and Narayan Ram (*Narayan* meaning Vishnu). [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5291#X)]

67. Raghunandan Prasad Sinha Varmma, *Kanyakubja Kshatriyotpatti Bhushan* [The Noble Origins of the Kanyakubja Kshatriyas] (Gaya: R. P. S. Varmma, 1924), 56–57. The term *kanyakubj* implies a geocultural tie to Kannauj, a town on the Ganga east of Etawah in western Uttar Pradesh. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5298#X)]

68. Baba Ramchandra, cited in Pandey, “Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism,” 169. Although Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest*, 112 n. 29, cautions us not to make too much of the salutation “Sitaram,” his observation that “even Muslim peasants used this greeting in certain parts of Oudh, especially southern Oudh where the legend of Ram and Sita is widely prevalent,” speaks volumes for the extent to which Vaishnava rhetoric permeated the region. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5307#X)]

69. Nathuni Prasad Yadav, *Jatiya Sandesh* (Darbhanga: Swami Nathu Bhagat Yadav, 1921). [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5317#X)]

70. The publication in question, *Ahir Itihas ki Jhalak*, was authored by Dilipsinha Yadav and published simultaneously in Lucknow, Allahabad, and Etawah in 1915. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5332#X)]

71. Jamuna Prashad Yadav, *Ahiroddhar, arthat Ahir Kul Sudhar* [Ahiroddhar, or the Reform of the Ahir Line] (Jhansi: Jamuna Prashad Yadav Ahir, 1927), 38–39. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5342#X)]

72. Janki Ballabh Das, *Devivali Pakhand* [The Heresy of Sacrifice to the Goddess] (Prayag: J. B. Das, 1937), see esp. 19–22, 38–39. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5351#X)]

73. Gangaprasad, *Kushvaha Kshatriya*, 27. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5355#X)]

74. Baijnath Prasad Yadav, *Ahir-Jati ki Niyamavali* [A List of the Rules of the Ahir Jati] (Varanasi: B. P. Yadav, 1928), 4–40. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5367#X)]

75. Sinha, *Kurmi Kshatriya Nirnay*, 77–79. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5371#X)]

76. Ibid., 79–83. Unfortunately, I have been able to turn up little more than this brief mention of this event. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5374#X)]

77. Ibid., 80. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5377#X)]

78. See van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 275–76, who lists thirty-seven such caste temples, mostly belonging to jatis formerly regarded as shudra and untouchable in the nineteenth century. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.15&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5380#X)]

79. “*Shrimate Ramanujaya namah*.” Varmma, *Kanyakubja Kshatriyotpatti Bhushan*, cover and i. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5391#X)]

80. Ibid., 2. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5394#X)]

81. Ibid., ii. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5400#X)]

82. Ibid., 47. Though Varmma describes in detail the miraculous life of the child Krishna, he emphasizes that Krishna’s true identity as Vishnu is more important as a religious concept (48–49). Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is Vishnu’s consort. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5412#X)]

83. The application of the tilak on the forehead in a vertical parabola is one of the most visible symbols of being Vaishnava. By contrast, Shaivas employ a marking of three horizontal lines. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5420#X)]

84. Varmma, *Kanyakubja Kshatriyotpatti Bhushan*, 57. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5423#X)]

85. Ibid., 58–60. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5426#X)]

86. Swami Dharnidharacharya, *Shri Awadhvamshi Kshatriya Martandah*, xvii-xviii, 1–140. See Appendix 2 for a discussion of Dharnidharacharya’s tract. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5431#X)]

87. The brief life narrative that follows is based on ibid., 140–61. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5435#X)]

88. See, e.g., ibid., 149–50, citing the *Garg Samhita* (Ashvamedh Khand, section 61, verses 24–25). [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5457#X)]

89. Ibid., 149. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5460#X)]

90. Again Dharnidharacharya cites the *Garg Samhita* (Ashvamedha Khand, section 61, verse 26). [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5469#X)]

91. *Venkateshwar* is an epithet of Vishnu; Vibhishan*Vibhishan*—a particularly apt title for a Ramanuji setting—is a younger brother of Ravana (and therefore a southerner) in the epic *Ramayana* who emerges as one of the more remarkable devotees of Ramchandra. This information is taken from an address given on the inside cover page of Dharnidharacharya, *Shri Awadhvamshi Kshatriya Martandah*. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5482#X)]

92. Ibid., vi. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5489#X)]

93. All this emerges in a letter from one Pandit Shri Dharmanath Sharma of Chapra, ibid., xiii. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5495#X)]

94. The reverse side of the title page of *Shri Awadhvamshiya Kshatriya Martandah* gives the addresses of these institutions, in addition to the Awadhavamshiya Kshatriya Sabha office in Chapra. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5498#X)]

95. Nevertheless, the complexity of sampraday boundaries makes any strict correlation between religious identity and social ideology difficult in the extreme. Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 106, observed, for example, that while brahman as well as shudra Ramanandis chose to align themselves with the Ramanuji view, many brahman monks, “who might secretly have preferred to be Ramanuji, did not disown their Ramanandi affiliation, since that would have incurred considerable disadvantages in North India, where only the Ramanandis are strong.” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5502#X)]

96. See Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 153–65; Growse, *Mathura: A District Memoir*, 184–240. The Nimbaraki sampraday seems to have undergone ideological transformations not unlike those experienced by Ramanandis in the early twentieth century and that I have described in the previous chapter; see Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 153–55. As with Ramanand, there has been substantial disagreement in this century regarding the identity and dates of Nimbark (he is usually placed in the twelfth century). Writing in the 1870s, F. S. Growse, *Mathura*, 194, claimed that Nimbarkis had “no special literature of their own, either in Sanskrit or Hindi.” By contrast, eighty years later Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 153–54, would report that “Nimbarka was a great writer but he always wrote in Sanskrit. It was Sri Bhatta, 31st in the apostolic succession, who wrote in Hindi,” and “Harivyasadeva, 32nd in the list, turned his entire attention to promulgating the doctrines and observances of this sect into Hindi.” At the very least, the contrast between Growse’s and Ghurye’s observations suggests some major Nimbarki reinterpretations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps more importantly, in this century there have emerged elements within the sampraday that encourage greater religious liberalism with respect to untouchables; see Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 155. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5508#X)]

97. Indeed, an analogous situation is evident as early as 1810–13 in the surveys of Francis Buchanan, who noted that despite their genealogical affinity for Radha and Krishna, Goalas in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh looked for the most part to the demographically powerful Dasnami order for religious guidance. See Buchanan, *Bhagalpur, 1810–1811*, 234; *Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:337–38; *Shahabad, 1812–1813*, 204; and Martin, *Eastern India*, 2:467–68. It is significant that the Shaiva orientation of their Dasnami gurus did not normally lead Goalas to abandon their Krishna-centered identity. Only on one occasion did Buchanan note otherwise, in Purnea district (*Purnea, 1809–1810*, 226–27) where Goalas had rejected “the worship of that deified hero [Krishna], and have adopted as guides the Dasnami Sannyasis, who teach them the worship of Sib [Shiva].” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5511#X)]

98. Buchanan, *Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:374: “The Ramanandis indeed will instruct their followers in the worship of any god of the side of Vishnu, such as Rama, Krishna, Nrisingha, and Bamana among the Avatars, or Narayan, and Vishnu among his heavenly forms. Although all these are considered as various forms of the same god, yet the mode of worshipping each is different; Vasudeva is considered as the same with Krishna. No separate worship is by this sect offered to the spouses of these gods; but their worship is always conjoined with that of the male, so that Krishna is never worshipped without Radha, nor Rama without Sita.” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5515#X)]

99. Buchanan, “An Account of the Northern Part of the District of Gorakhpur, 1813.” The entire quote is from the topography and antiquities of Khamariya thana: “6/16 of the Hindus worship Rama, and 3/16 prefer Krishna; of these 4/16 are the followers of the Brahmans, and 5/16 of the Ramanandis, who even at Ayodhya do not scruple to deliver the form of prayer, by which Krishna is addressed.” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5518#X)]

100. Jagannath Das, according to Buchanan “the only mahant in these districts who has studied grammar, or can be called a man of learning,” maintained “that the proper study of the Mahantas ought to be the Ramayan of Valmiki, the Sri Bhagawat [Purana], and the Bhagawat Gita” (*Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, 1:375). [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5527#X)]

101. Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 276; Freitag, “Introduction” to part 1: “Performance and Patronage,” in Freitag, ed., *Culture and Power in Banaras*, 26. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.16&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5534#X)]

102. See Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Punjab* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 204. Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824–83), a Gujarati brahman, established the Arya Samaj at Bombay in 1875 and at Lahore (in the Punjab) in 1877. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5548#X)]

103. Gangaprasad, *Kushvaha Kshatriya*, 3 (italics are added). Similar accounts can be found in Saraswati, *Kurmi Kshatriya Itihas*, 3–11, and 23; Ray, *Kahar Jati aur Varnavyavastha*, 7–13; J. P. Chaudhari, *Kushvaha Kshatriya—(Kuiri, Kachhi, Murao, Kachhvaha) Parichay* [An Introduction to Kushvaha Kshatriyas—(Koiri, Kacchi, Murav, Kachhvaha] (Banaras: Chaudhari and Sons, 1926), 1–5; Varmma, *Kanyakubja Kshatriyotpatti Bhushan*, 1–7; and Dilipsinha Yadav, *Ahir Itihas ki Jhalak*, 1–2. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5565#X)]

104. Saraswati, *Kurmi Kshatriya Itihas*, 23, 27–28. Saraswati devotes 17–23 to an etymological/grammatical exposition of the word “Kurmi” and concludes that it is equivalent to *bhupati*, or noble; upon further examination he identifies the term *kurmah* with Indra and *kurm* with Brahma. (A similar argument is put forth by Chaudhari Dipnarayan Sinha, *Kurmi Kshatriya Nirnay*, 4–6.) Asking why members of the reputed Indra jati would begin referring to themselves with the word “Kurmi,” Saraswati notes (28) that “the scholars of this jati thought long and hard and decided to begin to refer to themselves by this Vedic term, a term denoting a kshatriya varna.” [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5571#X)]

105. For instance, Gangaprasad, *Kushvaha Kshatriya*, 3–4, 7. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5577#X)]

106. See Jones, *Arya Dharm*, 202–5. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5581#X)]

107. J. Chaudhari, author of *Kushvaha Kshatriya—(Kuiri, Kachhi, Murav, Kachhvaha) Parichay*. Dayanand Anglo-Vedic schools sprang up throughout much of north India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of the efforts of the politically oriented Arya Samaji of the Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai. The schools combined Western learning with the study of Sanskrit and the Vedas. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5584#X)]

108. Rao, “Yadava Movement,” part 1, 134. Rao interprets the widespread practice of investiture with the sacred thread, however, as evidence that the Arya Samaj had gained significant inroads among Yadav kshatriyas in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the 1910s and 1920s. I argue that such an assessment may be premature. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5587#X)]

109. Yadav, *Ahir Itihas ki Jhalak*, 15. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5593#X)]

110. Varmma, *Kanyakubja Kshatriyotpatti Bhushan*, 20–21. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5604#X)]

111. See Lutgendorf’s discussion of the “eternal religion” in *The Life of a Text*, 360–70. Jwalaprasad Mishra, incidentally, also directed his attentions to questions of jati and varna status. See his *Jatibhaskar* [Illuminations on Jati] (Bombay: Khemraj Shri Krishnadas, 1917), a conservative work which comprises extracts from Sankrit texts on the strict divisions and social duties of Hindu society. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5610#X)]

112. Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 367. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5622#X)]

113. Chaudhari, *Kurmi Kshatriyatva Darpan*, 17. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5630#X)]

114. Saraswati, *Kurmi Kshatriya Itihas*, 110. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5636#X)]

115. J. P. Chaudhari, *Kushvaha Kshatriya* Parichay, 44, 45. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5639#X)]

116. Sinha, *Kurmi Kshatriya Nirnay*, 80. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5642#X)]

117. Varmma, *Kanyakubj Kshatriyotpatti Bhushan*, 16–173, 31. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5646#X)]

118. Lal, *Tantuvay Anveshan arthat Tanti Jati ka Itihas*, 39–40. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5649#X)]

119. Ray, *Kahar Jati aur Varnavyavastha*, 17. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5661#X)]

120. Ibid., 17–18. Ray made no comment whatsoever regarding the question of palanquin-bearing, the occupation often attributed to Kahars. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5665#X)]

121. Ibid., 1–3. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5668#X)]

122. Hagen, “Indigenous Society,” 93. Hagen’s argument relies on Buchanan’s description of the political economy of Bihar in the early nineteenth century. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5675#X)]

123. Nevill, *Ballia: A Gazetteer*, vol. 30 of the District Gazetteers of the *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1907), 106. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.17&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5678#X)]

124. See the historiographical discussion in K. N. Panikkar, “Historical Overview,” in Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi Issue* (New Delhi: Viking, 1991), esp. 28–33; and Pandey, The *Construction of Communalism*. [[BACK](https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft22900465&chunk.id=s1.3.18&toc.id=ch3&toc.depth=1&brand=ucpress&anchor.id=d0e5694#X)]