CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing account of the success of the Chettiar economic activity in the traditional trade and moneylending business as well as in modern industry, and their equally impressive devotion to Saivism as manifested by their construction, renovation, and maintenance of temples both in India and overseas strongly runs counter to the repeated allegation that the Hindu religious values and the allied rigidity of the caste social order, are the most impregnable barriers to the economic development of India. Rather, at the first glance, the concurrence of economic success and religious zeal in the case of the Chettiar is strongly suggestive of a positive connection between Saivism or Saiva ethic and economic enterprise, offering a parallel to Max Weber's thesis on the Protestant ethic and 'Spirit of Capitalism'. And it will not be difficult to discover or derive elements of a this-worldly asceticism of the Calvinistic kind from Saivism's theistic, realistic and pluralistic conception of God, of the phenomenal world and the individual souls and its insistence on the doctrine of the inscrutable Grace of God (anugraha) as the prime condition of salvation, so that the Chettiar's economic success is derived as the consequence of the behavioural and psychological traits
following from their religious beliefs and interests. Here we would be following Weber. For, strangely it was Weber who was the first to concede that the elements of 'ascetic Protestantism of the Occident' could be found in the doctrines of certain Hindu sects both orthodox and heterodox. In particular, he found Jainism's objection to 'joy in possession' (parigraha) and not to possession of gain in itself, and its insistence on honesty (satya) and non-violence (ahimsa) made it possible for the compulsory 'saving' of asceticism familiar from the history of Puritanism, to work also among them toward the use of accumulated possessions as investment capital rather than as funds for consumption or rent. Curiously enough, Weber found the mildly hedonistic Hindu sect of Vallabha-charya Vaishnavas also attracting to itself a large number of traders and businessmen. And this was by no means a result of any 'this-worldly' asceticism derived from its sectarian doctrines. On the contrary, Weber explained the complex network of relations between groups and centres which involved a lot of travel by the disciples made it congenial for business and religion to combine. The Gosains were indeed permitted to marry.... but were obligated to continuous inspection journeys in their dioceses. Since they were themselves mostly important business people, the ambulatory life was favorable to the development and extension of business relations. The established inter-
local organization of this sect in general was of some importance for it served the immediate business operations of its members. This is a tacit acceptance of the possibility of a religion accommodating itself to the business interests of its followers. For, the sect became popular only among those who were already successful traders and businessmen.

Following Weber, attempts have been made to explain or link the success of the Parsi and Jain entrepreneurship to their religious doctrines by deriving a set of psychological and behavioral traits akin to the Protestant ethic or the 'spirit of Capitalism' from them.

The outstanding role the Parsis played in the development of Modern industry in India especially during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries as shippers, ship-builders, traders, financiers, and textile manufacturers is well established. But what is not so widely recognized is the fact that their eminence was not sustained and it started diminishing even before the First World War. It is precisely because of this decline in their eminence that any explanation that attributes their early eminence to the psychological and behavioural traits derived from the peculiarities of their religious doctrines becomes untenable. A better explanation for the Parsis' early eminence and later erosion lies as Desai and Bagchi have convincingly argued, in the more crucial factors in
in the historico-political environment, such as:

1. the shifting of the centre of commerce from Surat to Bombay,
2. the early migration of the Parsis from Surat to Bombay,
3. the special relationship between the Parsis and the British, that facilitated Parsi collaboration with the British are well-known.

Similarly, Gillion points out that since the Banias of Ahmedabad were drawn from diverse groups like Gujarathi Jains, Gujarathi Vaishnavites, Parsis, Bohras etc. and they exhibited the same business traits that it appears more likely that their success in business was rather due to the general environment than due to the peculiarities in their religious doctrines. The description of the typical Ahmedabadi merchant based on the oral and written accounts as drawn by Gillion could be true of any business man be he a Puritan, a Chettiar, a Marwari, a Jain, or a Vaishnav Gujarathi, or a Brahmin or a Parsi. "He was

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Not all Jains have taken to trade. The Jains of Karnataka practise agriculture. Gillion, op.cit., p. 23.

The Parsis took to Westernization quite early and the Parsi loyalty to the British Queen and her ancestors are well known.
industrious, shrewd, practical, patient, self-reliant but co-operative, and thrifty at home but charitable. He was austere and matter-of-fact and had simple manners and a quiet dignity. He was not excitable, vain, or quarrelsome, but if a dispute did arise, he would try to bring about a peaceful compromise so that work could proceed. He was adept at not committing himself in advance, at knocking down a price, and at wriggling out of uncomfortable positions, but scrupulously honest once he had made a bargain. He was normally calculating and unimpetuous, but his desire for money could lead him into speculation, a fault which has lost more fortunes in the city than extravagance ever has. With all the so-called Puritan virtues, he was well suited to the new industrial age and had a talent for survival which would serve him well."

Recent Studies of the economic history of India in the nineteenth century and during the 'high noon' of the British empire have not only called off the myth of the Hindu or Jain religious values as being the most severe obstacles to India's economic development but have further shown that under the inimical policy of the British colonial administration, it was only those elitist groups as adopted the value system of the alien rulers and collaborated with them, as the Parsis did, that gained the most. Bagchi points out in the case of the Parsis, "this relative importance of Indian businessmen and their collaboration on a basis of something like equality in western India
is often obscured by extolling the virtues of the Parsis and the descriptions of the evils of the caste system or the other-worldly values of Hinduism or Jainism.\textsuperscript{10}

Another feature of the Indian enterprise that has remained relatively obscure is the fact that the modern industry in India has never been the exclusive enclave of any particular caste, nor even the traditional business castes. Rather the early entrants to modern industry i.e. before the First World War, came from the educated professional classes, Indian doctors, lawyers and landlords. Dr. Nilratan Sarkar in Bengal started the National Tannery, Dr. P.C. Roy started the Bengal Chemical Pharmaceutical Works. In Bombay Dr. Bhalachandra Bhatwadekar and Laxmanrao Kirloskar had been associated with industrial enterprises. In the Punjab Lala Har Kishan Lal, an Arora by caste and a lawyer by profession founded the Bharat Insurance Company and a host of other ventures, including cotton mills, and the Lahore Electric Supply Company, Limited. In Bengal again Maharaja Mahindra Chandra Nundy started Calcutta Pottery Works in collaboration with Baikunthnath Sen.\textsuperscript{11}

The Brahmin participation in Indian industry right from the beginning is also in utter contradiction to the much stressed caste inhibitions and prescriptions. Sir Rajendra Nath Mookerjee in Calcutta had made a name for himself in the construction of water works in Calcutta.\textsuperscript{12}

The first textile mill in the second largest textile manu-
facturing centre, Ahmadabad was set up in 1861 by Nagar Brahmin.\textsuperscript{13}

In a study of 52 medium-scale industrial entrepreneurs in the State of Madras in 1953 the Nayudus, a warrior sub-caste from Andhra domiciled in Madras, predominated. Brahmins topped as the second and the Chettiars held the third position as the following table shows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Frequency$^a$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nayudu</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahman</td>
<td>12$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chettiar</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayakkar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>2$^c$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2$^d$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarathi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaundan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A study by Milton Singer, of the leading industrialists of the City of Madras in 1965 showed the exceptional predominance of the Brahmins.

\begin{itemize}
\item[a] refers to number of firms established by entrepreneurs in each category.
\item[b] includes one partnership between two Brahmins and Chettiars.
\item[c] established by some individual.
\item[d] one of these is a European permanently settled in India.
\end{itemize}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahman</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chettiyar</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mudaliyar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kammar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarathi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Christian</td>
<td>[\frac{1}{15}]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participation of the Mudalayars (an agricultural caste), Kammar (an artisan caste) and others like Muslims and Syrian Christians in the modern industry is a clear pointer that the spirit of capitalism does not possess any exclusive affinity to Calvinism and Puritanism alone. Rather, the fact seems to be that either all religions, occidental or oriental irrespective of their doctrinal differences, are capable of generating this spirit or that this spirit is a product of the economic enterprise itself. Further the fact that the observed behaviour of all businessmen, Parsis, Jains or Chettiars are similar suggests that the latter is most probably true and that the business ethic of the businessmen irrespective of all caste and creed is one and this can or may be different from their personal ethics that may be derived from their religion. This is what our study of the Chettiars' view of religion also suggests.
All the industrialists we interviewed consider themselves as good Hindus, and believe that God's grace is an essential factor for success in business. They seem anxious to retain their image as religious and pious men by building temples in their factories, conducting pujas, offering special prayers, observing festive days like Vijaya Dasami (Dassera) in the factory conducting religious instruction classes in Tevaram, etc. for workers, undertaking pilgrimages, participating in the management of the temples and connected festivals or functions in the cities they live in, and consulting astrologers for auspicious time and day for beginning a new venture. But when asked to name the essential qualities for success in money making and business they named all secular virtues like courage and persistency, undaunted will, self-confidence, honesty, hard work, knowledge of the world and affairs and market conditions, the courage and foresight to calculate risk, efficiency, punctuality, etc. To none of them including the 'Leather King' and the film producer, did their entry into new and not-so-welcome ventures create any soul shattering conflict.

To conclude our discussion, our study of the religious beliefs and practices, (the charya and kriya) of the Chettiar's and their economic activity support our view that religion instead of having been a serious impediment to accumulation of wealth and profit seeking has been a hand-
maid in the Chettiar case, serving to aid their wealth accumulation. In their heyday as indigenous bankers the temple served as the 'Chettiar-exchange', helping them to maintain a steady supply of liquid capital and trained apprentices, and community sodality. Under the vastly changed economic, political, and social conditions the temples have ceased to be such a central business institution. The Nagarathar Sangams that are springing up in every city where the concentration of Chettiars is high are replacing the temples in helping the richer Chettiars to be recognized and revered as leaders of community.
REFERENCES


(2) Ibid., p. 316.


(6) Ibid., p. 245; See also Desai, op.cit., pp. 310-313.


(8) Ibid., pp. 35-36.

(9) Raychaudhari, T. "A Re-interpretation of Nineteenth century Indian Economic History", The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vols. V No. 1, March 1968. pp. 36-77; Bipan, Chandra. Reinterpre-
Private Investment in India 1900-30, Cambridge, 1972;

(10) Bagchi, op.cit., p. 245.
(11) Bagchi, Private Investment in India, 1900-30, p.206.
(12) Bagchi, op.cit., p. 226.
(13) Ibid., p. 246.
(14) Bemal, James. Industrial Entrepreneurs in Madras State, Madras, 1953. Table 11, p. 43.