RECASTING CASTE

From the Sacred to the Profane

HIRA SINGH



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Recasting Caste

From the Sacred to the Profane

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Hira Singh

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To my family
Raghunath Singh and Dhanwanti Singh (parents);
Alakh Narain Singh (brother);
Chhabi, Shyama, Mulhura (sisters); and Frehiwot

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Preface

Growing up in Caste, Studying Caste—A Personal and Professional Story

I was born and grew up in a multi-caste village in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. All social intercourse in the village was organized in terms of caste. The zamindar (landlord), barber, washerman, priest, artisan and the ploughman—each belonged to a particular caste: that is how people in the village were seen, and that is how I saw them while growing up in that environment. We were told that is how we were made (by God) and well, that was their karma (result of we did in the past) and dharma (what they are destined to do in this life). That was the dominant view of caste, and that is how I understood it. That is what I internalized. What I was not aware of then was that it was the dominant caste's view of caste. Little did I realize that behind caste identities were concrete material interests embedded in dominant economic–political relations, most importantly land relations, which determined the role a caste played and the position it occupied. It also conditioned our consciousness of caste. In other words, caste consciousness in the village was a product of the caste structure and the foundation of the caste structure was the relationship to land.

The village was residentially segregated. At the centre were three Rajput families. There was a cluster of Brahman families. In between there were Banias, goldsmiths, ironsmiths, barbers, *Kahars* and a *Kayasth* family, a cluster of *Ahir* (peasant) and *Gaderia* (shepherd) families. Segregated from these were the two settlements of *Chamar*s known as *Chamrauti*. While we were allowed to move freely in most parts of the village, it was not the same with the *Chamrauti*. What was particularly conspicuous about it that we played together with kids from the Rajput and non-Rajput kids, but not with kids from the settlements

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of the *Chamar*s even though we saw those kids almost on a daily basis as they were always present around our houses usually accompanied by their parents or elder sibling. We never felt it awkward that we did not play with them. In her seminal work on whiteness as privilege, Frankenberg (1993) argues that physical distance between white and black settlements in the Unites States is the marker of social distance between the two. The material boundaries were also the symbolic boundaries. She also shows how the social landscape of childhood shapes one's consciousness in which boundaries of race—both material and symbolic—are naturalized. It is equally true of the caste. The social landscape of growing up in the village shaped my caste consciousness in which material and symbolic boundaries of caste were naturalized.

Growing up in the village, I also saw that the Rajputs and the Brahmans did not engage in manual labour, particularly labour in agricultural production, the main economic activity and the main source of subsistence of all in the village. In particular, neither the Brahmans nor the Rajputs will ever touch the plough. *Ahir*s and *Chamar*s, on the other hand, always used the plough; *Ahir*s on the lands either owned or leased and the *Chamar*s on the lands owned by the Rajputs or the Brahmans. It was presented as 'natural' order of things, and that is how I understood it. To engage in manual labour was derogatory to the caste status of the Rajputs and the Brahmans while it was normal for other castes. Much later when I read Max Weber, I could reflect back that to engage in or abstain from manual labour was a matter of 'status disqualification–qualification' associated with 'negative' and 'positive' honour. It did not occur to me that the Rajputs and the Brahmans, particularly the former owned most of the lands including the commons in the village which in turn made it possible for them to abstain from manual labour, while the *Chamar*s did not own any land and had to work on lands owned by the Rajputs and the Brahmans in order to survive.

The family and the village environment I grew up in was very religious. Within my family compound, there were installations of three gods: first, Thakur Jee inside the house. No adult was served a meal before the Puja for Thakur Jee was performed. Then, there was a small shrine for Shiva under a big Peepal tree adjoining the family well. Little ahead, there was the temple of Hanuman (the monkey god). The festivals of Dussehra, Diwali and Holi had religious legends and rituals associated with them. The only books in the house were

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religious texts—Ramcharitmanas (a Hindi version of Ramayana), Mahabharata, Prem Sagar and the Gita. Once a year, the family used to make a pilgrimage to the temple of goddess Durga in the district town some 20 kilometres from the village. Once a year, the family priest used to visit and stay over a week or so. Then, there were roving Sants and Sadhus. They used to come, eat the food they cooked themselves (using the provision supplied by the host), talk about gods, goddesses, heaven, hell, piety and sin. I grew up believing in what I listened to. The first books I read were Ramcharitmanas and Mahabharata believing that Ram and Krishna were gods incarnate. We were told that the rain was brought by god Indra and the wind by god Pawan (progenitor of god Hanuman). Later on in the school when I heard the scientific explanation of rain, I had difficulty to relate to that. What makes the story of religion relevant to the present context is that the caste was embedded in the idiom of religion. We were taught to respect and bow to the Brahman. We were told that the Rajputs (Kshatriyas) were created to rule and all other castes had to obey them. I was told that the caste rights and obligations were divinely ordained. I had no way to believe otherwise. It was natural if I grew up believing that what held different castes in the village together was religion since caste rights and obligations towards one another were couched in religious idioms. The land was not missing from the story of the caste in the village. Like all other rights and obligations associated with particular castes, for example, land rights of the Rajputs (owning most of the lands including commons) and landlessness of the lower castes, were held as given by God.

Leaving the village did not mean leaving the caste behind. Going to the primary school, I confronted caste. The school was located in another village about a kilometre walk from our village and we (children from different castes) walked together. There was a sense of group identity based on belonging to the same village, but overriding that was the sense of our distinct caste identities that determined how we were related to one another. The children of the upper castes had a sense of entitlement to deference that was not formally defined but taken for granted. Caste distinctions were further visible in the classrooms, on the playground and during lunch breaks in the school. There were other markers of caste. The terms used to address the teachers were marked by caste distinction. A teacher belonging to the Brahman caste was addressed as 'Pandit Jee', a Rajput as 'Babu Saheb', and all the rest

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as 'Munshi Jee'. Muslim teachers were called Maulvi Saheb and the Christians as Master Saheb.

Thinking of experiencing caste during my elementary school days, I must mention a particular incident that left a long-lasting imprint on my consciousness. One day coming back home from the school, I saw some adults of the Rajput caste sitting outside the house (as a rule, among the Rajputs in the village, men stayed outside and women inside the house), with their heads bandaged. They were surrounded by other men from the same caste. It was a very sombre setting. A bit frightened, I ran inside the house curios to know what had happened. The atmosphere inside the house was even more sombre, and no one wanted to tell me anything about it. Slowly, I found that there was a dispute over a piece of land claimed by one of the Rajput families as its ancestral property that was challenged by a former tenant (of a lower caste) who had acquired independent proprietary right in the same piece of land on the basis of long-term tenancy under the provision of the abolition of landlordism legislated by the new government that came into power following the end of the colonial rule. The members of the landlord family accompanied by other members of their caste (other Rajput families in the village) had gone to take possession of the land in dispute. They were taken by surprise when rather than showing deference, which the Rajput landlords anticipated and were accustomed to in the 'natural' order of things, the former tenants and their supporters physically attacked and assaulted them. Thus, humiliated and injured, these Rajputs sought their revenge the very next day. Decades after the incident, I still have the memory of what I witnessed that day. The story of that incident, along with that of another incident of a similar nature I witnessed as a child growing up in the village, is narrated in Chapter 6.

Caste remained a factor in the High School and the Intermediate (between the High School and the Undergraduate). There was tension (sometimes hidden other times open) between students of the Brahman and the Rajput castes for domination that occasionally erupted into physical fights. During this entire period of schooling lasting five years, I lived in the boarding house where we had to eat together in the common mess. The cook in the mess was invariably a Brahman. We addressed him with respect as Pandit Jee. There was not a single student from any of the lower castes, particularly the Schedule Castes, in the boarding house. But that was normal and we paid no attention to it.

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Caste followed during my time as student at the university. It remained a factor when I started and continued to teach at the university and moved on from one university to another (Lucknow to Jaipur to Delhi). It remained a factor in my research not only my research on princely states of Rajasthan in India, but also on Indian indentured labour in South Africa.

The purpose of briefly stating my experience of caste through various stages of my growing up is to acknowledge that caste is a reality of Indian life. My question therefore is not whether caste is real rather, what is the reality of caste, and how it has been presented in mainstream sociology from the classical tradition to the present?

I Became Sociologist by Default

My schooling started in the early days of independent India following the end of the colonial rule, when there was much emphasis on natural sciences with the prospect of getting into medical or engineering school. I did study general science and agriculture in High School and joined the Intermediate grade (between High School and undergraduate) to study agriculture, with physics, chemistry and mathematics as supplementary subjects. I soon realized that I was falling behind in agriculture, science and mathematics so much that I started losing interest in the school altogether. Dropping out of science and mathematics meant giving up on the idea of a future in engineering or medicine. The choice for me, however, was to either drop the science and mathematics or drop out of the school altogether. The idea of sitting in science classes and feeling lost every day of the school was getting increasingly unbearable. It was not so much the prospect of a future career but to find something I could relate to and feel good about being at school that was predominant in my mind and I switched over to the liberal arts—against the will of my family. That was not easy, since the family was the sole source of support—emotional, social and financial. But I survived, with the support of the family, of course. For the undergraduate studies at Lucknow University, I took Anthropology, but quit it at the Masters level. By that time, the only option in social sciences available at the university was sociology, and I became a sociologist by default.

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Transition from Sociology to Political Economy

The focus of sociology at the Lucknow University was on classical theory (mostly Durkheim and Weber) and social philosophy, with components of Hindu social theory. We had to read Kane's *Dharmasastra*, Radhakrishnan's *Hinduism* and A. K. Coomaraswami's *Hinduism and Buddhism*, along with commentaries on the *Manusmriti*, among others. Moving to Rajasthan University as a Lecturer, I got interested in development studies. From Rajasthan, I went to McGill for graduate studies in the area of development, but had to quit after one year. It was a turning point in my academic (and political) orientation—beginning of skepticism not only towards my sociological orientation, but much more (as it unfolded later on). Until then, I had no awareness of political economy, mainly because I was never exposed to it. It was, however, after I joined the Delhi School of Economics first as a National Fellow and then as a Lecturer that I began moving away from sociology towards political economy. The experience during the emergency rule and its aftermath set me irreversibly on path to political economy that provided the conceptual tools and the critical vantage point to look at society and history and also at the mainstream sociology. This work is a critical interrogation of the mainstream sociology of caste from the vantage point of political economy.

Moving to Canada

My interest in caste goes back to my very initiation in sociology. For my degree in sociology at Lucknow University, I had to read caste. My interest in caste got deeper when I wrote my Master's thesis on 'Sanskritization and Westernization'. The very first article I published was on caste. It was followed by a 'Comment' on another author's work, which was on caste. I kept on writing on caste directly or indirectly as the time passed, but never ever thought of writing a book on caste. Moving from India to Canada, particularly the struggle to enter the academic job market had a detrimental effect on my interest in caste. There was very little interest in Canadian universities in any particular issue relating to Indian society in general let alone caste,

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which dampened my interest in caste. At the same time, I found another problem, which was very Western, very Canadian as well. It was ethnicity and race. The very first teaching job I got was to teach ethnicity at one of the universities in the Maritimes. It was an interesting experience. I spent three years in the Maritimes teaching at two universities and each year I taught a course on race and/or ethnicity. It was the same when I moved to the University of Victoria, Wilfrid Laurier and finally to York where each of the first five years I taught a course on race or ethnicity. By now, I had enough exposure (and some stability) to start thinking of race, ethnicity and caste comparably. It was, however, not until I started teaching 'social stratification' that I inserted caste in my teaching for the first time and rather hesitatingly. And it has been an interesting experience. Most importantly, for me, it revived my interest in caste.

Serendipity in Research

I remember talking to Dipankar Gupta in Toronto on the eve of my departure to South Africa when he told me that given the constraint of time and resource, I may not be able to find much about Indians in South Africa, but I may be surprised to find there something interesting about India. It turned out to be prophetic. I did discover something interesting about India in South Africa, that is, whatever happened to caste and the caste system during and after the end of indenture. I did not go to South Africa to study caste, but ended up doing just that (Chapter 7).

Why This Book?

It was sometime back I met my friend and former colleague Abdul Kalam (then Professor and Chair of Anthropology, Madras University) at a conference and we conversed about sociology of caste. In particular, we talked about the regional and temporal variations in caste, which is rather conspicuously missing in sociological accounts that impose uniformity on caste built around certain ideas. We planned to write an article to address this and some other issues in

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sociological studies of caste. When I started reading some of the old and new works on caste for our article, I was suddenly struck by serious gaps. It led me from one issue to another and I realized that it was not possible to capture the gaps in mainstream sociology of caste in one single article. This is not to say that there are no differences within mainstream sociology of caste. Notwithstanding the internal differences though, there is something important missing there. This book is about what is missing in the mainstream sociology of caste and the alternative.

Invitation to Debate

In my writings on caste spread over several years, I have suggested that there are serious issues—theoretical and methodological—in the study of caste, which call for debate (Singh 2008). When it comes to caste studies, there are two solitudes: (1) mainstream sociology and (2) Marxism. The former shuns history and studies caste mainly at the level of ideas in isolation from material conditions. Marxists, on the other hand, have, by and large, stayed away from studying caste. According to sociologists, Marxists do not study caste because they consider it as 'superstructure' determined by 'infrastructure' hence, secondary and less important. That is not even vulgar Marxism rather vulgarization of Marxism. The question whether caste is infrastructure or superstructure is redundant. It is both infrastructure and superstructure intersect in caste. However, in their ideological battle against Marxism, sociologists have erred on the other side, focusing on the superstructure to the exclusion of the infrastructure. This is most clearly the case with Louis Dumont. Critics of Louis Dumont from within mainstream sociology have not adequately addressed this critical issue. The other serious problem in sociological studies of caste is the neglect of history. Finally, the mainstream sociology has dubbed Marxism as ideology, but it does not recognize its own ideological orientation and how that has shaped its perspective on caste. My book is, however, not a denunciation of the mainstream sociology of caste, but an invitation to debate caste.

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Chawla listened to my random ideas off and on and tried to make sense out of them. Peter Landstreet roped me in to teach the foundation course on social structure and social change and allowed me to use the latest versions of his manuscript *The World of Sociology* year after year, which proved very helpful in understanding the transition from egalitarian to class societies. Thanks to Mark Goodman, David Toews, Lorna Weir and Philip Walsh for the help I sought and got from them. My colleagues listened to my unorganized presentations at the departmental meetings and the Research Colloquium with patience and courtesy. Nancy Mandell and Larry Lam accommodated my teaching schedule, committee work and other obligations to allow me to continue writing while teaching full time. Tony Turrittin, (and Jane Turrittin), Gottfried Paasche (and Carol Paasche) listened and gave feedback over lunch, supper and coffee after the movies easing the pressure of writing. Among the administrative staff, Jacqueline (Jackie), Debbie, Caroline, Joni, Rita, Elizabeth and Monica deserve all thanks for creating a cheerful and supportive environment to make the routine work fun.

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Introduction

Interrogating *Homo Hierarchicus*

There are many studies but fewer theories of the caste system in India. *Homo Hierarchicus* by Louis Dumont is an important work as it claims to provide a theory of the caste system. Criticized by many and admired by many more, it still occupies a place of prominence in caste studies. My book is a comprehensive critique of Dumont's theoretical–methodological framework for the study of the caste system. This critique is justified on the ground that existing critiques of *Homo Hierarchicus* do not question its basic theoretical premise in which ideas isolated from their material context are given primacy. Dumont borrows all the important elements of his theory from Max Weber. I critically examine Max Weber's writings relevant to the study of caste. As the mainstream sociology of caste has not gone beyond Weber and Dumont in terms of its basic theoretical premise, my work is a critique of the mainstream sociology for its tendency to study caste in isolation from economic–political relations. As a result, the relationship between economic, political and ideological in the caste system is mystified.

There are other problems with *Homo Hierarchicus*, which are either ignored or dealt with inadequately in critiques within mainstream sociology and need critical scrutiny. I briefly mention them as follows.

Neglect of Historical Approach

Homo Hierarchicus neglects history, and the existing critiques from within mainstream sociology do not interrogate that mainly because the mainstream approach is indifferent or opposed to the historical method.

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To the contrary, historical approach is indispensible to the study of caste. The limitation of mainstream sociological studies of caste due to the neglect of history is a recurring theme in my book. The book makes a strong case that overcoming the separation between sociology and history is a much needed corrective to ahistorical and transhistorical views of the Varna and the jati pre-dominant in mainstream sociology.

Varna–Caste Confusion

The confusion between the Varna and the jati (caste) examined here goes far beyond what is found in the existing literature on caste. This examination is critical to understand the transition from the Varna to caste. There are serious inconsistencies in the homology between the Varna and caste insisted upon by Dumont. One particular inconsistency not yet noted by any study is that in the original three or fourfold Varna division, there was no distinction between traders and agriculturists since they were both classified as the Vaishyas. Subsequently, the Vaishya category is appropriated exclusively by the traders expropriating the agriculturists who in turn do not fit any of the four Varnas. The separation (economic, political and cultural) between these two groups originally belonging to a common Varna has innumerable implications for caste hierarchy, intra- and inter-caste relations and the caste movements of the past and present. Failure to even raise let alone answer this question is the black hole of caste studies.

Social Division of Labour

The social division of labour in the caste system is a critical and controversial issue. The controversy over the division of labour in the caste system as religious or economic–political goes back to Hegel and Marx. To Hegel, it was religious. To Marx, it was economic–political. Weber and Dumont followed Hegel in opposition to Marx. They present the caste division of labour as essentially religious, albeit sacred. Also missing from their accounts of the caste division of labour

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are exploitation and extra-economic coercion in the caste system. By locating exploitation and extra-economic coercion in the caste system in the social relations of production, it is argued that the division of labour in the caste system is not incidental but systemic.

Caste and the Land Question

Failure to understand the centrality of land rights in the caste system is the single most serious limitation of *Homo Hierarchicus*, and it is by no means a solitary instance. Treatment of land relations in the caste system is a major challenge to mainstream sociology in general. Even when land relations are brought in, the relationship between access to land and caste status is turned upside down, that is, rather than seeing caste status as a consequence of access to land, the latter is explained as a consequence of the former—a Weberian legacy in which status (cultural power or lack of it) is the cause of economic power or powerlessness. In the case of caste, this view finds support in religious texts. Historical–empirical evidence, on the other hand, tells a different story.

Hindu dietary rules—what may be eaten, and who may eat together—these two points are covered by strict rules. Whose mere glance upon the food is to be excluded? All these are status characteristics of ritual caste rank. The social rank position of all castes depend upon the question of from whom the highest castes accept *kaccha* and *pakka* food and with whom they dine and smoke. Brahmans are always at the top in these matters, wrote Weber (1958b: 43). Mainstream sociology's obsession with commensality in the caste system is understandable in that light. We have elaborate accounts of rituals of eating: who eats with whom, who does or does not accept *kaccha* (uncooked) or *pakka* (cooked) food from whom, with no question about where the food comes from, who gets what to eat and why? Leo Huberman (1968: 3) writes that in good old days, the movie directors did interesting things like 'showing…people riding about in a taxi, then piling out and walking away…They'd ride all over town, have fun… and that was the end…No payment necessary'.

One-sided focus on commensality (and endogamy), the symbolic boundaries of status stressed by Dumont and Weber, has resulted

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in little attention paid to the grim reality of the caste system over millennia that those who worked to feed the higher status groups, whose rituals of food are often the focus of sociology of caste, were, as a rule, kept ill-fed by the same very status groups, and that was justified from the highest religious pulpit and by the sacred texts—in the name of god, dharma and karma. The story of food in the caste system is important, arguably the most important. Sociologists have, however, turned it around and avoided serious engagement with the most important question about food—the production and distribution of food determined by the land relations in the caste system.

Intrinsic connection between land rights, political power and status in the caste system is the central theme of the book. In discussing various issues—transition from the Varna to the jati, hierarchy, status and power, inequality between and within castes (and kin), caste consciousness and caste movements, inter-caste and intra-caste tensions, and caste conflicts at the micro and the macro level—the question of land is at the very centre.

Priest (Status)–Prince (Power) Muddle

The relationship between priest (religious power) and prince (political power) in the caste system is a controversial issue. Although it is one of the most, if not the most, discussed issues in caste studies, there are important questions that are not adequately addressed. The critique of status–power distinction in Weber and Dumont offered here is different from other critiques, which argue that in the caste system political power (represented by king) is more important than spiritual power (represented by priest) (cf. Dirks 1987; 2001), but evade the question of the basis of political power. While apparently critical of Dumont, these critiques have more in common with the former in so far as they disconnect political power from economic power and then cultural power from economic and political power, essentially affirming Weber's distinction between class, status and party.

Another problem related to status–power distinction is the question of feudalism (and caste) in India discussed in particular by Weber and accepted uncritically by Dumont. No mainstream sociological study of caste has addressed this question. This question

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is, however, important for a theory of caste. The absence of feudalism meant that India remained stuck at the level of lineage (tribal) society (with no private property, no class and no state). Weber attributes the superiority of priest (status) over prince (power) to the absence of feudalism in India. Given the absence of economic–political differentiation in lineage society, there was no other group (e.g. landed aristocracy in feudalism) between priest and prince rendering the latter dependent on the former in dealing with public affairs—religious and secular.

The question of development or otherwise of feudalism in India is, in the last analysis, a matter of development (or non-development) of feudal property rights in land. Based on ethnographic and historical evidence, Weber's views on the development of the property rights in land in India are critically examined and refuted.

Priest and Legitimation of kingship

Eminence of priest over prince in India is commonly attributed to the role of priest as the final authority of legitimation of kingship. In the first place, this view is based on a purely textual reading of priest–king relationship transhistorically. Many scholars (Dumont included) trace the eminent position of priest going back to the Rig Vedic age when there were no kings and no kingdoms. The most prized possessions in the Rig Vedic age were the cattle—cows, camels—and other objects like garments and gold. In the Rig Vedic hymns, land is not an item of gift and the 'king' [chief] is not a protector of land but of cattle and the source of inter-tribal conflict was cattle and maidens, not land. Cattle and maidens were also common gifts the Brahmans received in return for praying for the warrior chiefs (Thapar 2000: 524). The Rig Vedic society was predominantly pastoral which had chiefs—*gopatis* (owners of cowherds) not kings—*bhupatis* (owners of land). The transition from *gopati* to *bhupati* (with king as eminent owner of all land in his territory), critical to the development of the state and kingship, is post-Vedic (for transition from *gopati* to *bhupati*, see Sharma 1979 cited by Thapar 2000: 622).

Based on ethnographic and archival evidence relating to the princely states of Rajasthan, I argue that the role of priest in legitimation

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of kingship was rather limited overshadowed by the role of peers (fraternity of feudal landlords). In some cases (involving some of the largest and historically important states), local tribal chiefs (who were outside the caste system) had important role in legitimation of kingship.

Religion (Hinduism) and Caste

Dumont argues that the central question is whether caste is religious. There is a popular perception cutting across the specialists and non-specialists that caste is religious and Hinduism and caste are inseparably linked: one cannot exist without the other. Inseparability of Hinduism and caste is further echoed in the views of many of the prominent political thinkers including Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar, among others. To the contrary, it is argued that caste is not central to Hinduism just as Hinduism is not sufficient and enough to create and sustain caste. Based on historical and ethnographic evidence relating to indentured Indians in South Africa and the Caribbean Islands, it is shown that while religion (Hinduism) among indentured Indians and their descendants was entrenched, the caste dissolved.

The case of indentured Indians and caste is further used to highlight contradiction in Mahatma Gandhi's position on caste. In South Africa, he holds indentured Indians and their descendants as bearers of 2,000 years of Indian culture in spite of the latter having abandoned caste. Repatriated back 'home' in India, the same very bearers of the age-old Indian culture are held by him as to have lost Indian culture since they had lost caste.

Modern West as Egalitarian

No other critic of *Homo Hierarchicus* from within mainstream sociology has seriously examined the other leg of Dumont's theory, that is, modern West as egalitarian. Beteille (2006) refers to this aspect in his controversy with Dumont. The critique offered here is basically different. The assumption of modern West as

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egalitarian is critically examined to stress two basic points. Firstly, the fundamental conceptual and historical error in assuming that modern West developed in isolation from the rest. Secondly, and more importantly, inequality is the very foundation of modernity (modern West). Inequality in modern West is not anomic, but normal. It is its very starting point and a fundamental condition of its continued reproduction. Modern West preserved inequality at home and globalized it. To the existing inequalities of class and gender, it added inequality of race, a unique creation of modern West. By positing egalitarian societies against modern West, it is argued that the latter is indeed, the very antithesis of egalitarianism both structurally and ideologically. Like hierarchy in the caste system, Dumont takes egalitarian ideology in modern West on its face value and treats it as the whole of social reality.

Objectivity and Social Justice

Finally comes the questions of objectivity, ideology and social justice in the mainstream sociology of caste. Sociologists claim to study caste objectively. They use the shield of objectivity particularly in their fight against Marxism. The question to ask is: Why the objective studies of caste have consistently ignored the questions of exploitation and coercion, the most stubborn objective reality of the caste system over millennia?

Commonsense View of Caste as Ritual

In deciding the status of backward castes, the Supreme Court of India held on the ritual notion of caste excluding the access to economic–political resources and interests. In arriving at their decision about caste as essentially ritual, the Honourable justices relied on the dominant view of caste in mainstream sociology citing the authority of Professor M. N. Srinivas, an eminent sociologist (cf. Dixit 2009). Sociologists have legitimate reason to celebrate the fact that their view of caste could influence the judgement of the highest court of the land on a matter of national importance. It is, however, not so

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celebratory if we consider that ritualistic view of caste popularized by mainstream sociology does not represent the reality of caste. Disconnecting ritual from economic–political relations characteristic of mainstream sociology mystifies caste.

Alternative

My aim is not limited to only providing a critique of the mainstream sociology of caste. I suggest an alternative approach, which studies caste (and the Varna) as intersection of economic–political relations and ideology (with religious and secular components) in historical perspective. Continuity and change in the caste system can thus be viewed in terms of continuity and change in economic–political and ideological conditions of the time and place. Unlike mainstream sociology, which tends to focus on normative and ritual aspects of caste in isolation from economic–political relations, in the alternative approach suggested here norms and rituals are integrated with economic–political relations in the system as a whole. The concept of whole suggested here is essentially different from the one used by Dumont in which the 'whole' made of ideas alone externalizing the economic and political is only a part.

Chapterization Scheme

A brief summary of the chapterization scheme provided below outlines the main themes to further highlight what is distinct about the book and why it is relevant and necessary. The first three chapters deal with questions of theory and method in the study of caste. The following four chapters provide empirical–historical substantiation of the main arguments made in the first three chapters. No other book on the caste system combines the above three components: (1) critique of the mainstream sociological theory and method, (2) an alternative approach and (3) theoretically grounded empirical–historical studies at the micro and the macro levels affirming the critique and the alternative. That is what justifies this exercise.

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I. Studying Caste: Ideas, Material Conditions and History

Dumont's construction of caste distorts Indian and modern Western society and history. Rather than treating caste as a product of Indian society and history, Dumont reduces Indian history and society to caste, presenting caste as static and transhistorical, inscribed in sacred scriptural texts. His construction is based on an eclectic reading of religious texts torn out of their historical context. If the historical reality of the caste system does not corroborate his construction of caste, he dismisses it. Thus, rather than proposing a theory open to modification in the light of evidence, he recommends a modification, or outright dismissal, of evidence to defend his theory. Dumont, his supporters and most of his critics tend to replicate the idealist view of caste in isolation from its material context. They start from the abstract and the general, and move to the concrete and the particular. As an alternative, I suggest starting from the concrete and the particular, and moving to the abstract and the general. I start by studying caste, as it actually existed in a particular region at a particular time and show how it changed as a result of shifts in its material context, that is, land relations. I then compare features drawn from other regions and historical periods in order to build solid generalizations about the nature of caste inequality.

Dumont also distorts matters in portraying the modern West as egalitarian. First, he is unable to see the connection between the modern West and the rest. Yet the two are intertwined. Second when facts about the modern West fail to support his views, he ignores the facts. The main source of Dumont's distortions is his theoretical commitment to the primacy of ideas isolated from their material context. One may sympathize with Dumont's choice of a comparative method to study caste inequality. However, for a comparative theory of caste, it is important to compare the structural basis of caste inequality in India with the structural basis of pre-modern, pre-capitalist inequalities in the West. Dumont does not do that. Instead, he contrasts the modern West to pre-modern India, the latter identified with a fictitious view of caste. In both cases, he confines himself to ideology isolated from practice. Just as it is not possible to understand caste inequality by studying the ideology of caste in isolation from its practical material context,

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it is equally uninformative to study the modern West by focusing on the ideology of equality divorced from its material–historical context.

II. Priest and Prince: Status–Power Muddle

At the core of the idealist view of caste are the twin notions of status (used by Weber) and hierarchy (used by Dumont). Weber conceived of status as a source of power based on social honour in opposition to class as a purely economic category. No study of caste has seriously examined the anomalies in Weber's distinction between status and class. Gupta (2000) mentions the status–class distinction but leaves it unresolved. Milner uncritically applies the notion of status to explain caste. Dumont takes the notion of status from Weber and further distorts it by transforming it into an exclusively religious category, denying the secular notion of status as a stratification marker. Status in its transformed, religious sense is the core of Dumont's notion of hierarchy used to represent the essence of caste that can only be sustained by consistent denial of both logic and empirical reality. In the idealist view, caste is religious and sacred, while as empirical–historical reality, caste is secular and profane.

Alternatively, I argue that caste is not status or hierarchy as outlined by Weber and Dumont but a system of inequality based on unequal access to the material conditions of existence—most importantly, land. Status and hierarchy fictionalize caste. As conceptual tools, they mask the foundation of caste inequality—inequality of land relations (and corresponding inequalities of access to political and cultural resources)—perpetuating the mystification of caste.

The central argument in Dumont's notion of caste hierarchy concerns the relationship between the dominant priest (spiritual power) and subordinate prince (political power). Despite his repeated assertion of commitment to ethnography, Dumont does not examine the actual relationship between a single priest and prince in a real princedom. There were about 500 principalities in India until the end of the 1940s, but rather than examining any of them, Dumont examines the relationship between prince and priest at the village level through dominant caste, thus, incidentally, subverting his avowed method of not seeking to understand the whole (kingdom) by examining its

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constituent parts (a village). Dirks (1987), apparently disagreeing with Dumont's subordination of prince to priest, does examine the relations between prince and priest in a 'little kingdom'. However, while Dumont assumes that political power is subordinate to spiritual power, Dirks spiritualizes political power. Between Dumont and Dirks, there is an ideological kinship—they isolate caste from its real basis: land. Their view of caste is normative and ritualistic. Contrary to Dumont and Dirks, I show the relationship between land rights and caste inequality, supported by historical–empirical evidence from the princely states of Rajasthan.

In addition to the relationship between hierarchy of land rights and caste inequality, this chapter also examines the legitimation of kingship. Both Dumont and his critics note that the priest's role in legitimizing kingship helped to secure the priest's spiritual superiority. In contrast, I show that the decisive factor in legitimizing kingship was the legitimation of the authority of the prince by his peers—the fraternity of landlords, members of his own caste and kin group, who were different and distant from the priestly caste. Instances occurred where a prince was able to overcome the obstacle to legitimation put up by a priest, either by removing the priest or creating a new priesthood. However, there is not a single instance where a prince was able to overcome the resistance to legitimation by his peers. The story of legitimation was shaped, in part, by the historical context of territorial conquest. Misplaced emphasis on legitimation as exclusively or predominantly spiritual rests partly on a lack of understanding of the real nature of kingship and its historical context. Based on evidence from the princely states of Rajasthan, I show that the legitimation of kingship was in its essence a political rather than a religious phenomenon. Kingship was not sacred, but profane.

III. Varna to Caste: Religious and Economic–Political

Confusion between the Varna and the caste (Varna–caste conundrum*)* is a much recognized issue in sociological studies of caste. Weber uses them interchangeably, while Dumont insists on homology between the two. Notwithstanding the wider areas of disagreement over the Varna–jati relationship, there is a general agreement that the

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Varna preceded the caste. An important, if not the most important, question here is the transition from the Varna to the caste. What was the driving force behind this transition? Dumont consistent with his approach finds the answer to this question in the development of a new idea—purity–impurity. To the contrary, following the lead by Indian historians (Kosambi, Sharma, Thapar), I argue that the driving force behind transition from the Varna to the caste was economic and political evolution, not the religious idea of purity–impurity. Some scholars who also disagree with the idea of purity–impurity as the driving force have tried to explain the change from the Varna to the caste in terms of transition from the Asiatic mode to feudalism (the Varna as a feature of the Asiatic mode, the caste that of feudalism) (cf. Gupta 2000). I disagree with this explanation for a number of reasons (see Singh 2008) most importantly, for the fact that the very idea of the Asiatic mode is theoretically and historically–empirically problematic (for more, see Sharma 2009; Singh 1986; Thapar 2000).

One of the anomalies of the Varna–caste homology discussed here is the differentiation of the Vaishya Varna into traders and agriculturists which were originally classified as the Vaishyas. As the Vaishya is subsequently appropriated by the traders separating themselves from agriculturists, the main agriculturist castes do not fit any of the four Varnas. The enormity of this problem can be realized if we are reminded that in a predominantly agrarian economy and society, agriculturist castes occupy a significant place. Inability of the fourfold Varna division to account for this critical category raises serious questions about continuity–discontinuity between the Varna and the caste and more importantly about the driving force behind the transition. It is rather astonishing that no study of the Varna and caste has even raised this question.

Two key questions about the caste system are ownership and control of land, and the division of labour. The treatment of both these questions by Weber and Dumont is problematic. Contrary to the position taken by Weber and Dumont that the division of labour in the caste system is demiurgic, I argue that it is economic–political. In Weber and Dumont and, by and large, mainstream sociology, the emphasis is on interdependence and reciprocity. As a corrective to this imbalance, I argue that interdependence fails to account for exploitation intrinsic to the caste system. Given the centrality of exploitation, harmony and consensus emphasized in mainstream sociology mask

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the fact of coercion in maintaining the caste system, a point made earlier by Bailey (1963: 28). The secret of the division of labour in the caste system lies not in ideas—religious and secular, but in the social relations of production, that is, ownership and control of land. Inability to deal with the land question in the caste system taking account of regional and temporal variations is the weakest point of mainstream sociology in general.

IV. Caste and Subaltern Studies: Elite Ideology and Revisionist Historiography

The idea of caste in subaltern studies is particularly interesting insofar as it deals with the caste system in relation to agrarian structure and resistance. The starting point of subaltern studies is a critique of the Marxist view of caste, which allegedly reduces the caste system to a superstructural epiphenomenon, a system of ideas with religion as a constitutive force. In assigning a central place to religion, subaltern studies emulates revisionist historiography of the French revolution, which recast the motivational force of the revolution as quintessentially religious rather than social or political. Understandably, subaltern studies ends up endorsing Dumont's claim that it is the ideological force of religion (dharma) that binds castes together. In this chapter, I analyse evidence from agrarian relations and subaltern resistance in the princely states of Rajasthan and indentured Indians in South Africa to demonstrate that religion is not in fact the force holding castes together in a system of persistent inequality. Rather, castes were cemented by differential access to land and political sanctions by landowners. I show that in the absence of control over means of subsistence supported by extra-economic coercion, the caste system withers away.

My critique of subaltern studies (like that of *Homo Hierarchicus*) is still relevant even though the former has now changed course claiming that it was relevant to its times and served a useful purpose (Chatterjee 2012). One can see a similarity between Chatterjee's claim on behalf of subaltern studies to Khare's claim on behalf of *Homo Hierarchicus* (Khare 2006). My question to Chatterjee is the same as to Khare: What purpose considering that by treating religion as central to

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caste subaltern studies evaded the most important question of the relationship between land and the caste system?

V. Inequalities between and within Castes: Kin, Caste and Land

While studies of inter-caste inequality are common, studies of intra-caste inequality are few. Yet the prevalence of intra-caste inequality is a serious challenge, particularly to the idealist notion of hierarchy since members of a caste are assumed to share an equal degree of social honour and purity (or lack of purity). Notwithstanding their equal share of purity, unequal access to land created enormous intra-caste economic, political and social inequality. This chapter examines how inequality of land rights penetrated not only the caste but also the kinship structure of the dominant caste in the princely states and the implications of this process for collective mobilization in the face of mobilization based on class interests. This approach permits me to interrogate and challenge Weber's flawed understanding of class mobilization for social action as opposed to collective mobilization for communal action.

VI. Changing Land Relations and Caste: View from a Village

This chapter presents a micro view of the caste system and its internal dynamics at the village level. Based on empirical observations of emerging caste contradictions in the aftermath of the abolition of zamindari (landlordism) in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, it shows how loss of monopoly of landownership allowed the landlords' centuries-old authority to be challenged by their former tenants (members of peasant castes occupying the middle stratum of the local caste hierarchy), who in turn had acquired ownership of lands they formerly held of the landlords. This analysis leads me to reiterate that the basis of caste inequality lies in land monopolization supported by political power and cultural sanctions. Loss of monopoly creates conditions for the authority of the dominant caste to be challenged from below.

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What changed the position of the dominant caste was not a change in status or religion but government legislation forced by a movement from below. New laws ended monopoly landownership of the landlord caste (and class), undermining its authority and status.

VII. Indenture, Religion and Caste: The Twin Myths about Hinduism and Caste

The two most persistent myths about the caste system are: first, that caste is a creation of Hinduism and second, that caste is essential to Hinduism. Based on archival and ethnographic evidence about indentured Indians and their descendants in the far-flung colonies of the British Empire, I challenge the above twin myths.

Between the 1830s and 1910s, hundreds of thousands of Indians were transported to alien lands in distant colonies of the British Empire. The export of Indian indentured labour to replace the slave labour on the colonial plantations of the Empire in the Caribbean, Fiji and South Africa was a quintessentially colonial–imperial project. Indian indenture originated in the process of the colonization of India and it ended in the process of India's decolonization. It is a sad commentary on the historiography of Indian colonization that little attention has been paid to Indian indentured labour, which sustained the plantation economy of the empire for over 90 years.

As a sociological project, one can look at indentured emigration as a movement from community to commodity to community. Uprooted from their community moorings, indentured emigrants were turned into a commodity, a unit of labour on the plantation. After completing indenture in 5–10 years, they reconstructed their community in the colony. Significantly, while religion remained strong during indenture and played a cohesive role in the transition of indentured diaspora from commodity to community, the caste system simply vanished.

If religion were a key element in the story of caste, the caste system would have been reconstructed, if not during indenture, then in the process of community reconstruction following indenture. After all, an analogous process occurred in the case of the monogamous family, which all but ceased to exist during indenture, when the ratio of men to women was three to one, but was reconstructed following indenture. Why then did the caste system vanish? Raising this question encourages

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the search for the economic and political basis of the caste system. As I show, the caste system disappeared and could not be revived because the economic and political conditions that created and reproduced caste ceased to exist: monopolistic landownership combined with political power in the hands of the dominant caste legitimized by religious and secular ideas.

Epilogue: The Secret of the Caste System

Sociologists of caste have invoked religion, cognition, cosmology, heaven and hell to find the secret of the genesis, growth, and survival of caste and the caste system. In the process, they have missed the real secret of caste and the caste system, which lies in the intersection of political economy and ideology.

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1

Studying Caste

Ideas, Material Conditions and History

Studies of the caste system easily outnumber those of any other particular subject undertaken by sociologists (and social anthropologists, hence, used interchangeably)—Indian and non-Indian—interested in Indian society and culture. Even those scholars whose main subject is not pertaining to caste are often confronted to deal with it. Going back to the classical tradition, Max Weber in his study of the religions of India, which was part of his larger project why capitalism developed in modern West but not in India, eventually turns to caste. While caste has been a favourite subject of choice for sociological studies, there is as yet no theory of the caste system. It is because of a serious disconnect in sociological studies of caste, that is, disconnect between economic–political reality and ideology in the caste system. It is this disconnect that inspires my study to begin with.

The most influential sociological work on the caste system so far has been Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (Dumont 1970, 1980). It has won wide acclaim 'I have chosen…Dumont's book as the most influential and theoretically sophisticated construction of the synthetic theory of caste' (Chatterjee 1996: 171); '*Homo Hierarchicus* is a most impressive achievement and shall long remain a basic work for the students of Indian society'. I consider Dumontian approach to the study of civilizations the most valuable and novel contribution (Madan 2006: 47). It has been hailed as 'galvanizing' in effect by some (Banerjee-Dube 2008: xxi), praised for its 'simple, elegant

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and internally consistent formulation' by others (Appadurai 1988: 42–43, Banerjee-Dube 2008: xxi, Quigley 1993: 30), and considered as of 'incomparable influence and importance' by yet others (Smaje 2000: 10). It has also been frequently criticized for distorting the comparative method and forging a flawed view of modern West and traditional India in the process; imposing an artificial unity on diversity (Beteille 2006); blurring the distinction between the Varna and the jati (Srinivas 2006); emphasizing hierarchy and ignoring difference (Gupta 2000); privileging the ideal over the material (Beidelman 1959), focusing on consensus ignoring coercion (Bailey 1960); hearing the Brahmans and ignoring the Untouchables (Berreman 1963). The list is long. Those who agree with Dumont do understandably endorse his basic approach. Even his critics notwithstanding that much of their criticism is valid and valuable, have, by and large, remained within the same basic framework in which caste is seen primarily ideological. If non-ideological factors are brought in, they are not systemically connected to ideology in a historical perspective, excepting studies that have taken alternative (political economy) approach, far less in number.

Homo Hierarchicus is a polemical work. Written at the time of the height of the Cold War, it has a particular ideological target—'the endemic materialistic tendency, strongly enforced by Marxism's hold over many minds' which may account, at least partly, why 'the work—condemned…here, extolled there…has been granted an honorable place in the history of caste studies' (Dumont 1980: xiii). I propose to critically examine here the main components of theory and method in Dumont's work. Since the main source of his theory is Max Weber's seminal essay on class, status and power, a theme further pursued in his study of the religions of India, my critique is extended to an examination of these works by Weber. While some of my criticisms are specific to *Homo Hierarchicus*, others are addressed to the mainstream sociological approach to the caste system in general. It is so since the mainstream sociological studies of caste are confined to the terrain defined by Weber and Dumont, particularly the former. It is rather curious that compared to Dumont, Weber has received rather scant attention in sociological studies of the caste system.

In this chapter, I examine the issues of method and theory in caste studies, followed by some other related questions.

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Method

Comparative Method

Dumont claims that in studying the caste system in India, he applies comparative method. The paradigm of inter-civilizational comparison—hierarchical India in contrast to egalitarian West—is the central point in Dumont's enquiry, says T. N. Madan. Continuing further, '…I consider Dumontian approach to the study of civilizations a most valuable and novel contribution' (Madan 2006: 81, 85). The main source of inspiration for Dumont's methodological choice was, as he admits, Tocqueville's study of the egalitarian mentality as contrasted with… the hierarchical mentality in the *Ancient Regime* in France. Tocqueville with his experience of the French aristocratic society was able to see an egalitarian society in America. Dumont, with his lived experience in egalitarian society (modern France) looks at (traditional) India—a hierarchical society, because he could not find better introduction for the readers in modern West to the universe so different from their own. That defines his interest in studying the caste system (Dumont 1980: 15–18).

One may be curious as to why Tocqueville found egalitarianism in the United States, not in modern France or Europe? Dumont, however, finds egalitarianism in modern West in general, modern France in particular, but no hierarchy in pre-modern France (or pre-modern West). In his search for hierarchy in pure form, he discovers traditional India of the Rig Vedic age. In the Brahman of the Rig Vedic age, he finds a substitute for the aristocracy in Ancient France. One may still ask as to why, unlike Tocqueville (his main source of inspiration), Dumont does not consider hierarchy in pre-modern France (or Europe) to contrast with egalitarian modern France (or Europe)? This choice is not arbitrary, but purposive. Hierarchy in traditional India, according to Dumont, was purely religious; hierarchy in pre-modern France was not. What Dumont is interested in is to establish the reign of religion in Indian society and history, which explains his choice of traditional (pre-modern) India in preference to pre-modern France (or pre-modern West). Theoretical, methodological and substantive choices made by sociologists are not arbitrary. They are dictated by their ideological commitments. Dumont is ideologically committed to contrast traditional India to modern West and to present Indian

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society and history as the history of the caste system essentially as (non) history of ideas, religious idea in particular.

Dumont's paradigm of inter-civilizational comparison, albeit contrast, is not novel, as claimed by Madan (see the aforementioned text). It is part of an established tradition of thinking in the West. Method of inter-civilizational comparison deployed by Dumont is continuation of an established tradition in the Occident (Beteille 2006: 111). As Thapar (2000: 11, 23) points out that Mauss and Bougle were interested in the difference per se between Indian society and the West: 'Caste society was for Bougle a contrastive study in a wider area of sociological concern—the study of egalitarianism', she observes. It is relevant in this context to mention that this approach is central to Max Weber, from whom Dumont borrows almost every single major element of his theory of the caste system. We may briefly touch on Weber's comparative, albeit contrastive, approach outlined in his 'Introduction' to the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1958b: 13–31), one of his most important, if not the most important, contributions to sociology, and unarguably one of the most renowned and controversial works of modern social science (cf. Giddens 1972).

In Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared that characterize the development of universal significance and value, claims Weber. Continuing further, he points out that valid science, architecture, printing, institutions of high learning, the modern state, rational law, jurisprudence and bureaucracy existed in some form elsewhere, particularly in the Orient, but in a contrastive form: unlike the West, they lacked rationality. He finds the same in philosophy and theology which in the Orient, unlike the West, was not systematic. Same in political thought. India, he says, had Machiavelli, but not Aristotle. In all these areas, he says, one may find some 'superficial similarities' with the West, but fundamental difference in terms of systemic rationality in the West and its absence in the Orient is not to be missed. Finally, the 'most fateful force' in modern life, capitalism, developed only in the West. Rationality of capitalism is in tune with systematic rationality historically present in the West. Conversely, its absence in the Orient explains the absence of development of capitalism there. In fact, he goes a step further to explain what he calls the anthropological side of it:

> When we find again and again that certain types of rationalization have developed in the occident and only in

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> there, it would be natural to suspect that the most important reasons lay in the difference of heredity. The author...is inclined to think the importance of biological heredity very great. (Weber 1958c: 30–31)

As Paul Hayes (1989: 187–192) points out, in the age of colonialism–imperialism, the importance of biological heredity had become part of thinking in the West, and even liberal thinkers like Weber were not immune.

Like Max Weber, Dumont's comparative approach is in fact a method of contrast: contrasting hierarchy, dominant ideology of traditional India, to egalitarianism, dominant ideology of modern West. It is thus understandable that he highlights difference and discontinuity while ignoring similarity and continuity between the two (Beteille 2006: 118, Khare 2006: 88–89). Eric Wolf points out that a tendency in sociology and social anthropology to emphasize cultural distinctiveness and mutual separation as hallmark of human kind is in the first place, historically inaccurate. He argues that even among the so-called primitive people 'without history' one can easily find evidence to the contrary (Wolf 1982). Moving forward, he raises an important question: 'If there are connections everywhere, why do we persist in turning dynamic, interconnected phenomena into static, disconnected things'? His answer is that this is perhaps because of the way people in the West are taught and learn their own history. He writes:

> We have been taught, inside the classroom and outside of it, that there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and civilization independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. (Wolf 1982: 5)

Many in the West, Wolf further points out, grow up believing that the West has a genealogy with the renaissance, enlightenment, democracy, industrial revolution, rights to life and liberty that sets it apart from the rest. This view of history, he says, is misleading to begin with, because it turns history into a morality tale. What is particularly missing in this account of history as a moral success story is the other, amoral, side of the very same story. Ancient Greece, the land of Miss Liberty, a part of the genealogy of the West, was founded on slavery, the opposite of liberty, for instance. Such instances can be multiplied. The main thrust of Wolf's argument is that 'by endowing societies or

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cultures with the qualities of internally homogenous and externally distinctive and bounded objects…a quintessential West is counterposed to an equally quintessential East'. These reified categories, he says, become intellectual instruments with serious implications, theoretical and practical. Most seriously, the tendency to treat these blocks as 'fixed entities opposed to one another…interferes with our ability to understand their mutual encounters and confrontations. Arranging imaginary building blocks into pyramids called East and West…merely compounds that difficulty' (Wolf 1982: 5–7). Acclaimed virtue of Dumont's comparative method of cultural opposition (Khare 2006a: 15; Madan 2006: 81, 85) should be viewed in that light.

Disparaging or Vindicating India

Dumont (1980: 21) says that *Homo Hierarchicus* does not praise or disparage India, rather seeks only to understand it. As for the latter, it is an exaggerated claim. If anything, his method is a hindrance to an understanding of India in general and the caste system in particular. As for the former, one may agree with Beteille (2006) that Dumont vindicates India in the very aspects that made her looked down upon by many in the West. It is an interesting question of world history as to why the West looks down upon India, the very same India it was so keen to 'discover' that wherever it 'discovered' peoples resembling Indians of its imagination, it was hailed as cause for celebration. In the process, it created numerous Indian identities that we are still living with ('discovery' of Indians by Columbus). To look down upon India (not in particular aspects, but in its totality) was part of colonial–imperial mentality. The West in the process of modernization needed colonies to use them and at the same time place them at the bottom of a new global hierarchy, a creation entirely of modern egalitarian West. In the age of empire, egalitarianism at home was used by the West to rationalize inegalitarianism in practice globally.

It is no surprise that Dumont does not only compare but hierarchizes societies being compared: traditional India and modern West are not on the same plane (Beteille 2006: 17). The tendency to hierarchize human cultures is indeed intrinsic to colonial anthropology. As noted by Frantz Fanon, in the process of colonial domination of the rest by

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the West, colonial anthropology hierarchized the cultures of colonizer and colonized putting the latter at the bottom. 'The unilaterally decreed normative value of certain cultures…is the rebound of egocentric, sociocentric definitions', he writes. Continuing further, he explains that in this scheme of colonial cultural order, there was assumption of the existence of human groups having no culture and then a hierarchy of cultures, finally relativity of cultures: 'We have here a whole range from overall negation to singular and specific recognition…a fragmented history…on the level of cultural anthropology' (Fanon 1967: 31).

Devaluation of Empirical Evidence

In the first place, primacy of ideology in Dumont's theory of the caste system is an assumption that is immune to contradiction by empirical evidence to the contrary. If there is no confirmation of his assumption by empirical evidence, he discards the latter. He writes that 'on specific points, concrete examples will be given…But…we must to a large extent sacrifice the factual side of things as they are actually experienced' (Dumont 1980: xlvii–xlviii). There are other inconsistencies in his position with regard to empirical (ethnographic) evidence. At one point he writes that '…without…ethnographic grounding we build on sand…Then, he shifts: …seeing, as times went on, the general orientation of my colleagues in Paris, I lost faith in the immediate usefulness of detailed ethnographic description' (Dumont 2006a: 246–247). How to understand this inconsistency, excepting that he has little regard for ethnographic–empirical evidence as such. His position on the relation between ideological and empirical aspects is unambiguous: 'the ideology takes no account of the territorial factor, it ignores it and encompasses it' (Dumont 1980: 45). Theory in his model encompasses empirical evidence, says Madan (2006).

Devaluation of empirical–historical evidence compared to evidence in religious texts is intrinsic to Dumont's work. Hierarchy of pure and impure, a religious notion, central to his theoretical model is extended to hierarchize the evidence, valuing evidence from religious texts higher than empirical–ethnographic evidence. He is irked by demand to put empirical traits on the same plane, and accord the same weight as traits in religious texts. He calls it 'the fallacy of equal traits' that is widespread

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in social sciences. Devaluation of empirical data is consistent with status–power distinction in his theory. Just as status trumps power in his theory, traits in religious texts trump empirical traits in his method. There is certainly devaluation in the sense that not all the empirical data are situated at the same level of ideology, he asserts (Dumont 1980: xxi–xxiii). R. S. Sharma's interesting observation that some scholars look down upon facts the same way as a Brahman looks down upon manual labour (Sharma 2009: 19) is very relevant here.

There are other inconsistencies in Dumont's application of the empirical–ethnographic method. He prefers to study a single-caste settlement in South India rather than a multi-caste settlement (36 sub-castes in a single village) in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, because he could not fit all existing castes in the latter into fourfold Varna scheme. This raises some interesting questions about theory and method. First, over and over he asserts that we should study the caste system and not a caste. Doesn't that require that he should have chosen to study a multi-caste village in East Uttar Pradesh rather than a single-caste village in South India? However, apart from the 'inherent difficulty' of studying a multi-caste village, he had additional reason to prefer a single-caste settlement in Tamilnad, '…for someone who comes from Tamilnad, Eastern Uttar Pradesh looks rather drab. The Tamils are born sociologists and the culture is beautiful' (Dumont 2006: 248). When a trained anthropologist finds 'born sociologists' as a more attractive subject of study, it is difficult to argue with that in terms of methodological rigor.

There is another and a more serious problem at a different level, that is, homology between the Varna and the jati (caste) central to his theory (more about it later). Since he has assumed that Varna is jati, so if the latter does not neatly fit the former, he abandons the latter. Normally, if the real situation does not fit *a priori* theoretical assumption, the latter should be modified or abandoned. Dumont turns it around, and calls it scientific method.

It has been pointed out that the only empirical or ethnographic evidence against Dumont's theory (in which the secular is encompassed by the religious) thus far has been Srinivas' study of the dominant caste at the village level (Khare 2006a: 19). One may agree, by and large, with Dirks' cautionary note that 'the problem of anthropological theorizing has been the translation of the very specific to the most general, in which the experience of a village over a year

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becomes the basis of generalizing for a subcontinent over millennia' (Dirks 2001: 79).

Ignoring History

Defending against accusation by his critics of 'unjustified use of ancient Indian texts of 'esoteric' nature, Dumont's response is that 'they (critics) are misled by a milieu dominated by present-day synchronic structuro-functionalist analysis which rejects speculation on origins, but excludes history'. The inference is that he is taking historical approach to make up for its absence in structural–functional approach. One example of the historical approach taken by him is the precedence of the Brahman (priest) over the Kshatriya (king) that can be inferred from the ritualistic formulation of the Vedic times—'a continuity or rather a permanence between the present and a very ancient period'. Another example is the homology between the four classical Varnas of the Vedic period and innumerable castes of today. The resulting theory, he claims, is complicated and goes beyond the synchronic plane…though it has irritated some, it has yet to be replaced (Dumont 1980: xxiv–xxvii).

In the first place, if a flawed theory is not replaced, it is not a testimony to the strength of the theory concerned rather a testimony to the state of theory in the discipline concerned. Secondly, in claiming to provide an account of the relations between priest and king, he is confined to studying the norms and values in short, ideas about these relations. To the contrary, a truly historical approach is not confined to the history of ideas alone. As noted by Thapar (2006: 36), social history involves investigating the organization, as well as rituals, technologies and economies of the peoples concerned. More importantly, it requires accounting of the broader framework within which these individual aspects are organized. Generalizing the relationship between prince and priest based on inferences drawn from the rituals of the Vedic period is a violation of historical method for a simple but important reason, that is, transporting the ideas of a particular socio-economic formation to another organized on a fundamentally different basis. Early Vedic society was dominantly pastoralist. It did not have the institutions of the state and kingship mainly due to the absence of the private property in land, the fundamental condition for the development of the

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state and kingship (territorial lordship). Ignoring the particularity of different epochs in Indian history for the sake of grand generalization is endemic to Dumont's transhistorical approach. Sociologists given their aversion to history do not question that.

In his attempt to bring history to synchronic anthropology, Dumont relies on the *dharmasastras, samhitas and smritis* selectively, of course, but does not consult the archival sources to find out how princes and priests, palaces and temples were intertwined. There were over 500 princely states in India until the end of the 1940s and the National Archives of India and many of the state archives have enormous material on the various aspects of the relationship between prince and priest, for example, land grants to priests, temples, and other religious institutions, intermeshing of the religious and the secular in the rituals of kingship, including those of legitimation. Dumont ignores all that and relies exclusively on the sacrificial rituals of the Vedic age to support his thesis about the relationship between prince (power) and priest (status)—central to his theory—for all time and place. His historical approach is flawed.

As noted by Romila Thapar, Marcel Mauss and Henry Hubert (relied upon by Dumont) were interested in the study of religion, specifically sacrifice. The Vedic literature on the sacrificial ritual, the central ritual of Vedic life, was valuable to them. The Vedic texts were sacrificial manuals per se. Western scholars interested in magic, in addition to religion, were also attracted to these texts (Thapar 2000: 22). Centrality of religion in Dumont's theory of caste hierarchy makes his preference for ancient religious texts a logical choice in that light. If one follows Thapar's distinction between *itihas* (history) and *puran* (epic) in Indian historiography, Dumont ignores the former, relying almost exclusively on the latter. Indeed, the problem of history in his approach is more serious.

Denial of history to Indian society in general and to the caste system in particular central to Dumont's theoretical assumption and method is conspicuous in his views regarding change in the Varna and the caste. Why is anthropologist motivated to study change, he asks? One reason, he speculates, is a

> philosophy of history that is largely materialistic, whether 'dialectical' or not (to him that makes no difference). Pursuing what appears as a crusade against historical materialism, he adds that question of change is about how

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> changes in the 'infrastructure' of the society are related to changes in the 'superstructure'. This tendency, he says, has scored little success in science. Moreover non-modern societies do not lend themselves easily to the primacy of productive forces. He stresses that 'Hegelo–Marxian dialectics have on the whole been more useful as a deductive theory of movement than as a tool for discovery and analysis'. (Dumont 2006: 219)

Hence, it was his aversion to study change in the caste system.

It is utterly unproductive to engage in any meaningful discussion with the caricature of the dialectical and historical materialist approach presented earlier by Dumont. What we must add though is that a flawed notion of the caste structure built on the assumed centrality of ideology developed in antiquity is mainly responsible for a flawed methodology in his work. Historically speaking, whatever change, if any, did ever take place in the caste system, was, according to him, confined to the exterior—economic and political—leaving the interior, the essence of the caste system—ideology founded on the opposition of pure and impure—unchanged (Dumont 1980: 228). The main problem here is twofold. First, to treat economic–political as 'exterior' is theoretically misconceived. Secondly, the assumption that ideas are immune to change in economic–political factors is historically and empirically inaccurate. As pointed out by Sharma (2009: 1), sociological generalizations that transcend time and place to claim the unchangeable character of Indian society or of the caste system pose a real danger to historical method.

Romila Thapar, going back to the founding fathers of mainstream sociology, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, notes that in their studies of India, the social institutions from the past were believed to persist virtually unchanged into the present. She also points out that Durkheim himself did not pay much attention to India, but Marcel Mauss (in his study of the *Mahabharata*), Henry Hubert (study of religion—specifically sacrifice—its structure and function), Dume'zil (study of Indo-European society and mythology), and Bougle (study of caste) were influenced by Durkheim's ideas of community, religion and stratification (Thapar 2000: 21–23). Influenced by these thinkers, as acknowledged by him, Dumont brings the notion of changelessness with full force to the study of the caste system. He writes: 'If, to be called historical, a study has to be aimed primarily at detecting changes between one period and another, then this study should not be called

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historical, for, on the contrary, it is concerned in the first place with something permanent' (Dumont 1980: 21–24, 287).

In his quest for the permanent he ends up freezing the caste system in time and space. To their credit, sociologists engaged in ethnographic research have rightly questioned the notion of unchanging and unchanged existence of caste, corroborated by immensely rich and valuable empirical data. They have, however, failed to provide a historical account of structure and change in the caste system. As discussed ahead (as and when relevant), ignoring history is a major problem also in Dumont's work. It pervades the mainstream sociology of caste.

Contrary to the popular misconception, 'unchanging rigidity' is not characteristic of caste society. However, preoccupation with caste customs synchronically is a major obstruction to the study of change (Thapar 2000: 11). As Sharma points out, it is indeed a mistake to emphasize the 'vigour' and 'persistence' of the caste system overlooking the processes and forces of change. Even when change is described, the problem remains. It is so since the explanations based on synchronic studies may appear to be correct about the structure and function of a particular institution at a particular moment, but they leave the fundamental problem of change from one social formation to the other unresolved (Sharma 2009: 1–2, 7).

In a recently edited volume, interestingly entitled, *Caste in History*, it is stated in the 'Introduction' that the book 'redresses the imbalance in caste studies by tracking the chequered career of caste…in distinct regions of India from the seventeenth to the twentieth century' (Banerjee-Dube 2008: 15). This is no doubt an important period in Indian history to cover; the question, however, remains that if caste, as claimed by Dumont (stressing the homology of the Varna and caste), is as old as the Rig Vedic period going back to millennia BC, a study of caste in history beginning with the 17th century will miss out the substantial part of that history. However, in talking about a lack of historical perspective, I am not referring to a particular period a study is concerned with. Rather, it is about the historical conjuncture of economic–political conditions and ideology that gave birth to caste in the first place, and more importantly, how variations in that conjuncture account for variations in the caste system. Mainstream sociology has refused to adopt this perspective apparently to maintain its disciplinary boundary to distinguish itself from the history. Dumont is particularly defiant in his disregard for history. He insists that the

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basic principle of hierarchy—absolute distinction between priesthood and kingship and the priesthood encompassing the kingship—has continued being unchanged from the time of the Rig Veda down to the present-day village. In this lies the 'utmost interest regarding the universal value of an Indian study' (Dumont 1967: 34). Transhistoricity of caste is thus the real value of Indian study.

Change in economic–political aspects of the caste system is not denied, argues Dumont, but the question is what position this domain (economic–political) occupies within the 'whole'? The answer, according to him, is that the political–economic does not govern the rest of social life, rather it is 'encompassed in an overall religious setting…everything happens as if the system tolerated changes only within one of its secondary spheres. This, he claims, is the secret of the caste system's plasticity' (Dumont 1980: 228). It is not the secret of the plasticity of the caste system, rather the secret of the plasticity of the misconceived idea of hierarchy in which the 'whole' made exclusively of ideology is unaffected by change in the economic–political treated as external to the 'whole'. The problem of method here is indeed the problem of his theory. More on this is given later.

Sanskritization and the Dominant Caste

The twin concepts, Sanskritization and the dominant caste, introduced by M. N. Srinivas are significant contributions to modifying the Brahmanocentric view of caste and the notion of changelessness in the caste system (cf. Thapar 2000: 11). These concepts have served an important function. In the first place, they provide empirical refutation of the Brahmanocentric view of the caste system premised on the universal supremacy of the Brahman by showing that the dominant caste varies from region to region. Secondly, a lower caste aspiring to move up in caste hierarchy emulates the style of life not of the Brahman, but of the dominant caste in the region. Dumont's response to Sanskritization and the dominant caste has been disparaging to evasive: '…how it is that all Hindus are not completely 'Sanskritized' if the tendency has been at work for millennia', he asks (Dumont 1980: 192). The answer lies in the lack of economic—political opportunity for the lower castes stuck at the bottom for millennia.

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It may be added that the dominant caste and Sanskritization have not caught the imagination of sociologists. In fact, Srinivas himself was restricted in making full use of his twin innovations, mainly because he could not break with his commitment to structural–functional tradition of British anthropology, which precluded the use of historical method. The critics of Srinivas, on the other hand, rather than overcoming the limitation of ahistorical structural functionalism have dismissed the very idea of Sanskritization as of no value. Much criticism of Sanskritization is focused on Srinivas being a Brahman rather than his sociological approach (structural–functional) and its limitations. Edmund Leach asks if Srinivas' narrative would have been different were he not a Brahman (Pandian 2010: 104)? The problem is not that of Srinivas being a Brahman, but that his approach is a historical and idealist treating caste as a system of beliefs and rites isolated from economic–political interests. Whether a Brahman or non-Brahman, or non-Hindu (Christian, Muslim or Jewish) scholar takes that approach, her/his narrative of Sanskritization or caste, for that matter, will not be essentially different. In fact, the credit goes to Srinivas that he de-Brahmanizes Sanskritization by relating it to the dominant caste rather than confining it to the Brahman. Leach calls Srinivas's view of caste Brahmanocentric. Indeed, his own approach is not different. Brahmanocentric view of caste is not a matter of identity of sociologist but of sociologist's identification with a particular approach cutting across the Brahman and non-Brahman divide. It is a serious problem and I return to it later (in Chapter 3).

The criticism that Sanskritization is elitist (Ilaiah 2013) is well taken. It is no doubt elitist in the sense that it comprises of lower castes emulating the lifestyle of the dominant caste (elite) in place and time concerned. It is, however, not elitist to take note of historical–ethnographic evidence if it shows that lower castes or outside groups having attained economic (political) power emulated the lifestyle of the dominant caste (class) in order to claim status parity with the latter. That is what happened, for instance, in the case of various non-caste groups who claimed the Kshatriya status to legitimize their status as rulers of the territories they conquered. The Rajputs of northwest India were not the descendants of the original Kshatriyas, but Sanskritized tribals who conquered lands and claimed the status of the Kshatriyas, a claim that was legitimized by the Brahmans, wrote Weber (1958b: 65). To suppress historical–ethnographic evidence showing lower castes

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or outside groups having attained economic–political power emulating the lifestyle of the dominant group of the time and place on the ground of elitism is violation of the very basic principle of research. It does not serve the cause of subaltern. Studying Sanskritization is not to be confused with prescribing it as the only way out for 'non-Sanskritized' of the caste system.

A basic feature of Sanskritization that has not been adequately explored is that the basic precondition of Sanskritization is change in the economic situation of the aspiring caste. It is interesting to mention in this context that long ago Max Weber talks about the process, generic to the caste system, in which

> a particular caste renounces old rituals and assumes new ones, mainly due to differentiation of property within a caste making it possible for the propertied segment to adopt the rituals of the upper caste and breakaway from social intercourse with the non-propertied segment of its own caste.

Continuing further '…simple property differentiation quite often is…the occasion for splitting the community [hence]…of greatest interest to us are the economic reasons for caste and sub-caste origins' (Weber 1958b: 103). Later sociologists—even those who follow Weber—have not built on his important insight.

Borrowing from the West and Class Theory

It has been argued that to talk of the political, economic and religious dimensions of the caste system as separable and then to see how they are interrelated as a mode of analysis is Western, borrowed from social-class theory (Tambiah 1967: 25, see also Khare 2006: 206–207). Social-class theory, it is further argued, is very utilitarian or instrumental in its orientation, with scant regard for the sacred in society. Exploitation in the class system is economic and political, whereas exploitation in the caste system being related to the sacred is less direct (De Vos 1967: 21). One wonders whether the objection to Marxism as a Western product is equally applicable to mainstream sociology and social anthropology of caste that are equally reliant on Western concepts, albeit non-Marxist? The problem here is that we do not have non-Western sociological concepts or mode of analysis to apply to the

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study of non-Western societies and cultures. The search for national sociology is another matter and I do not want to deal with that here. What I do want to emphasize though is that dwelling on Western–non-Western divide is unnecessary distraction. More important than national or geographical divide is the ideological divide—idealist and materialist, historical and ahistorical. Interestingly, those who object to using class categories as Western use the very same Western categories to frame their objections. In the last analysis, Western category is used in the mainstream sociology as euphemism for Marxism. Opposition to Marxism has strongly influenced mainstream sociology of caste and I want to discuss it briefly as follows.

Anti-Marxist Rhetoric

In a lead article written for a symposium on caste and race sponsored by CIBA foundation in 1967, alerting against the danger of confusing caste with class and exploitation, Edmund Leach wrote, 'Marxism has so infected our thinking' that we are inclined to believe in equality, freedom and a society free of class struggle: 'Freedom and class are political ideas: they have no place in sociological analysis, which must necessarily be concerned with…status differences', he declares. Continuing further: '…as an anthropologist I would urge my sociological colleagues to pay more attention to endogamy and less to economic factors when they are considering these matters' ('these matters' refer to caste, race, class) (Leach 1967: 14–15). As discussed later, Dumont makes repeated references to our inability to understand hierarchy due to the infection caused by Marxism. It is important to note here that mainstream sociology—from Max Weber to Dumont—has, by and large, used caste and the caste system in India as antidote to Marxism, class analysis in particular. Caste has been used as prime example of devaluation of the economic and political factors compared to cultural (read religious) factor. In that lies India's uniqueness and its unique value to sociology. Dumont writes

> I have proposed to show in the caste system devaluation of power in the common sociological sense of the term. This feature runs counter to modern thought…economic viewpoint predominant in modern ideology subordinates relations between men to relations between men and things

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> (property, etc), we see clearly the possibility of assembling the traditional Indian traits to form precisely the opposite of this configuration: here relation to things are used for the expression of relations between men. (Dumont 1980: xiii)

In the first place, it is not true that the 'economic viewpoint'—euphemism for Marxism (indeed, vulgarization of Marxism)—is predominant in modern ideology. It has certainly never ever been predominant in sociology in general, sociology of caste in particular. To the contrary, if anything, it is marginal to the study of the caste system. That is, however, not the point. The point is that Dumont borrows a phrase from Marx and distorts it to give credence to his viewpoint that is contrary to the Marxist approach. It is an important point and needs further clarification. First, Marxism is not an economic viewpoint. As Amin (2004) points out, the category of purely economic belongs to the classical political economy. Marxism, to its credit, demonstrated how apparently purely economic categories of the classical political economy (labour and capital) are indeed social: economic relations between labour and capital are social relations between labourer and capitalist, which are unequal and exploitative). Applied to the caste system, it means that the basis of unequal relations between men of different castes lies in their unequal relation to 'things' (the means of production) maintained by monopoly of political power and rationalized by dominant ideology (e.g. opposition of the pure and the impure). Whether the impure have no access to the means of their subsistence because of their impurity or the other way round is the question. I return to it later.

Objectivity–Subjectivity

It is said that 'the exploited were blissfully ignorant that they were the victims of exploitation and exploiters thought they were doing what God had decreed' (Aiyappan 1965, cited in Mayer 1967: 27). One may accept that the exploited were ignorant—blissfully or not. That, however, raises an important question: what was/is the role of sociologist who is not ignorant and committed to objectivity? If exploitation was/is the objective reality of the relations between castes who monopolize economic–political resources and those who work

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for them in order to remain alive, do sociologists have obligation to recognize that? Did they do that? The commonplace argument for not highlighting exploitation in the caste system is that we should look at the system not from outside but from inside, not objectively but subjectively, that is, from the point of view of the people involved. Even then, as Berreman points out, more often, Brahmans (read dominant castes) were heard, but not Untouchables (cited in Dumont 1980: xxi). We may add that burgeoning literature on Dalits in recent decades has made a significant breakthrough in, in addition to adding the voices from the bottom to the previous discourse dominated by the voices from the top in which the voices of the bottom and also the middle of the caste hierarchy are muted. Integrating the two voices in a theoretical framework for the study of the caste system, however, remains a challenge. One may agree with Pandian in questioning the 'authorial neutrality and objectivity' of mainstream sociological studies, but not necessarily with the alternative he suggests (Pandian 2010: 102–104). The problem of theorizing caste is not the site of institutional discourse rather the theoretical–methodological framework in which the discourse is often divorced from the real intercourse of life.

Theory

Hierarchy as a 'Whole': Hole in the Whole

Hierarchy as the basic principle of the caste system is Dumont's starting point. According to him, it has to be so for two reasons. First, it is the conscious form of reference of the parts (castes) to the whole (the caste system). He defines hierarchy as a ladder of command in which the lower rungs are encompassed in the higher ones in regular succession. It is in that sense a systematically graduated authority, for example, military hierarchy, with progressive subordination from commander-in-chief to private soldier. The hierarchy in India (meaning the caste system; reducing India to the caste system is commonplace in Dumont's work) is distinct in that it involves gradation, but is neither power nor authority. To communicate the meaning of hierarchy in the Indian sense, he uses the definition of hierarchy that is theological comprising of angels, dominion in holy things, organized body of clergy, and a

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body of persons or things ranked in grades (Dumont 1980: 65). As discussed later, the starting point of hierarchy in the caste system as angelic and sacred is no coincidence.

He argues that there are two 'different senses' to look at caste as a system. One, empirically and the other, theoretically. Empirically, caste refers to 'actual castes…found together in a territory'. The problem, according to him, is that theoretically, the empirical view is neither sufficient nor primary. Theoretically, the caste system is pan-Indian—'a system of ideas and values…a system in the intellectual sense of the term…Our first task is to grasp this intellectual system, this ideology'. The scientific principle invoked to justify this view is that we cannot understand the whole (the caste system) by starting to study the part (caste), hence, the need to start with the whole. It is for this reason that he prefers Bougle's approach against Hutton's; for Bougle's starting point is the whole, Hutton's, the part (Dumont 1980: xlvii–xlviii, 34–35).

What constitutes the whole in caste hierarchy? Dumont's answer '*The whole is founded on the necessary and hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites*'. The three attributes of the caste system, defined by Bougle, hierarchy, separation and interdependence, are derived from this fundamental opposition—the opposition of the pure and the impure—which is religious. Hierarchy in the caste system is therefore religious. Preoccupation with the pure and the impure, we are told, is constant in Hindu life. If modern man in the West is skeptical about the place of religion in social life, it has already been established beyond doubt by Hegel, Durkheim, Weber and the whole of ethnology (Dumont 1980: 43). Religious nature of caste hierarchy stressed by Dumont finds strong support among several eminent Indian scholars. In majority of societies it is religion that provides the view of the whole. Hence, the ranking of castes in India must be religious (Madan 2006: 80). The unity of identity and difference—the unity of purity and pollution—provides adequate ground for defining the totality of caste relations as a system (Chatterjee 1996: 170–71).

There is a hole in Dumont's structural 'whole'. The 'whole' (the caste system) in his theory is made of ideas externalizing the material conditions. The justification for this provided by him is that

> Actual men do not *behave*: they *act* (italics original) with an idea in their heads…Man acts as a function of what he thinks…It is the prime merit of

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> French sociology to have insisted…on the presence of society in the mind of each man. (Dumont 1980: 6)

To begin with, society is not purely or primarily a mental phenomenon. It is a serious error to reduce society to ideas in people's heads. Social relations, basic units of social formation, exist objectively outside men's and women's head. It is rather curious that Dumont counts it as the merit of French sociology to see the presence of society in the mind of each man. If so, then Durkheim has no place in French sociology given his opposition to seeing society in the mind of each man. That is, however, not my concern here. What I want to emphasize is that hierarchy made of ideas (purity and impurity), excluding economic and political, does not constitute the whole. It leaves a hole in the whole. Alternatively, the whole consists of economic and political, along with ideas as intrinsically connected. As suggested by Andre Beteiile, among others, Marx's statement that 'in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will' must be the starting point sociological analysis' of a social system (Beteille 2008: 21, see also Wolf 1982). It is so since social relations in the process of production internalize economic–political relations and ideas as integral to the system as a whole. Durkheim, as Beteille rightly points out, stresses the exteriority and constraint of social facts similar to the indispensability and independence of social relations identified by Marx. However, the problem with Durkheim's conceptualization is that social facts in his case, like that of Dumont's, consist only of collective representations (ideas).

Dumont draws a distinction between the two complementary components of social reality 'one of which (ideology) is present to the light of the day, the other (economic–political) accompanying it as its vague yet vital shadow' (Dumont 1980: xlviii). Reducing economic–political to the shadow of ideology is vulgar idealism. It is rather ironical that Dumont is repeatedly accusing the Marxists of reducing ideas to material conditions (he is not alone) and then ends up reducing the material conditions to the vague shadow of ideology. Reducing society to the shadow of ideology misses out the objective reality of social relations. Significantly, among the trinity of classical thinkers, Marx, Durkheim and Weber (the founding fathers of sociology), Marx alone emphasizes the centrality of social relations.

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Durkheim and Weber, on the other hand, emphasize collective representations and meaning in social action as central to society and the main concern of sociology. It is no accident that caste studies in sociology focus on norms, values, and meanings, in short, ideas. To construct the caste system as a whole in terms of ideas excluding economic, political relations is flawed starting point.

Eric Wolf points out that the tendency to study norms, values and meanings, in short, ideology, in isolation from economic and political aspects can be traced back to a 'fateful critical turning point' in social sciences in the middle of the 19th century that split inquiry into the nature and varieties of human kinds into separate specialties and disciplines. This split, he argues, was essentially ideological, but justified in intellectual terms, and 'nowhere was this more obvious than in the case of sociology' (Wolf 1982: 7). The origin of sociology initiated by Saint Simon and Auguste Comte (a French physicist turned philosopher, who coined the term sociology) came up with the idea of a new science of society whose main objective was to find an 'antidote against the poison of social disintegration' (Shaw 1972: 37) referring to social disruption and disorder caused in transition from feudalism to capitalism. This transition was chaotic and confusing best captured by Marx and Engels in their famous statement, 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned' (Marx and Engels 1987: 24). Emphasis on 'integration', disregarding the internal contradictions of capitalism and the new industrial order by Comte and Durkheim, like those of the caste system by Dumont, is in tune with mainstream sociology's preoccupation with integration.

Severing the field of social relations from political economy in sociology continues. Paraphrasing Marx, Wolf summarizes what may be called the main postulate of sociology:

> In the course of social life, individuals enter into relations with one another. Such relations can be abstracted from the economic, political or ideological contexts in which they are found, and treated sui generis. They are autonomous, constituting the realm of their own, the realm of the social. (Wolf 1982: 8)

It has been pointed out that sociological positivism (identified with the French tradition), the starting point of sociology, was created by the dispossessed aristocracy, a marginal group that was dissatisfied with transition from feudalism to capitalism. Auguste Comte wanted

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to revive medieval hierarchy and religion in a scientific disguise (Shaw 1972: 35). Dumont's emphasis on hierarchy in the caste system (as essentially ideological isolated from political economy) is continuation of this particular French tradition. The real problem, which this tradition has in common with mainstream sociology is the assumption that social relations can be analyzed and understood without relating them to economic and political. This position, as noted by Shaw (1972: 35), is profoundly ideological.

It must be added though that mainstream sociology does not explicitly deny the economic–political component in the caste system. The problem is that it does not have conceptual and theoretical framework to analyse the relationship between economic, political and ideological in the caste system in historical perspective. It rejects the Marxist approach allegedly for being one-sided economic, and replaces it with one-sided idealist approach with no historical context.

There are other problems with Dumont's notion of hierarchy. I briefly deal with them as follows.

Hierarchy and Modern Man

It has been argued that one of the problems encountered in general is that modern man is virtually incapable of recognizing hierarchy. Hierarchy is 'at the heart of the "unthought" of modern ideology', writes Dumont. For a start modern man simply fails to notice it. If it does force itself on his attention he tends to eliminate it as epiphenomenon. Hierarchy has become alien particularly to man in modern West (Dumont 1980: xvi, xlvii). It is important to be reminded that *Homo Hierarchicus* was written for Western audience, French to be precise, not Indians, a payback for the French public money Dumont spent pursuing his research (Dumont 1980: xiv). One may be reminded that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written for the white, not black, readers. Dumont attributes all criticism of hierarchy to a particular mental attitude, a mindset of man in modern West. If it does not make sense to man in India, he is not Indian anymore: he has been westernized, secularized, or worse, opiated by Marxism (Dumont 1980: xi–xvi, 66).

If Dumont's objective, as he says, was to remind man in modern West of hierarchy because it had become alien to him on account of prevalence of egalitarianism, why not compare hierarchy in pre-modern

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West to egalitarianism in modern West (cf. Beteille 2006)? Durkheim did exactly that—he compared organic solidarity in modern West to mechanical solidarity in pre-modern West and elsewhere. Similarly, Tocqueville, the main source of inspiration for Dumont's work, compared egalitarianism and hierarchy within the West—modern America and pre-modern France. If man in modern West does not understand hierarchy, will he ever understand his own past, that is, pre-modern West? Why is it necessary, if one may ask, for man in modern West to be educated in hierarchy in traditional India, while he is allowed to remain ignorant of hierarchy in his own past?

Hierarchy and Stratification

Dumont argues that the caste system is not a case of stratification but that of hierarchy. Hierarchy, as defined by him, is the opposite of social stratification. Social stratification, he points out, is set in opposition to the idea of social hierarchy borrowed from India with the main objective 'to give primacy to meaning over the mere external form stratification'. Dumont argues that to consider the caste system an extreme form of 'social stratification', as done by many contemporary sociologists, is borrowing a label from Western society and is facile. Hierarchy in the caste system means the primacy of religion that makes it uniquely Indian. In every case in which caste is taken as an extreme form of something, which exists in the West (meaning stratification), the religious aspect of the system is made secondary. Confusion between hierarchy and stratification, he stresses, is a result of naïve egalitarianism, prejudice against other ideologies, and the claim to build a science of society straight away on this basis: these are the elements of smug sociocentricity or superficial sociology. To use caste for a general classification is to sacrifice the development of science to the convenience of immediate discourse. Questionable as the expression social stratification is, not all the authors who use it share the tendency of sociocentrism or superficial sociology, he adds. The exception is Talcott Parsons who uses the term stratification but genuinely recognizes hierarchy (Dumont 1980: xx, 3, 19, 26–27, 66, 410).

It is no coincidence that the only conceptual scheme Dumont finds relevant to his notion of hierarchy as the opposite of stratification is the one developed by Parsons. The problem with Parsonian terminology,

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as Mills points out, is built on the assumption of value hierarchy, complementarity and role expectations. Parson's conceptual scheme of social stratification is too inadequate to address the issues of structural antagonism, conflict and coercion. To accept his conceptual scheme, one has to exclude the 'facts of power' embedded in economic, political structures, in short, all structures of domination. Parsons fetishizes his concepts. As a result, we are unable to see the social world in terms of the specific historical reality in which human beings and social institutions have their concrete existence. His conceptual scheme is evaluative consisting of 'sponge words' that obscure rather than explain the problem being studied. Finally, his view of society is ideologically conservative (Mills 1958: 42, 43, 48).

Martin Shaw wrote that 'the youthful Talcott Parsons, high priest of modern sociology' was a champion of counter-revolution in sociological thought. His conservatism, unlike that of Hegel, had no 'rational kernel'. Parsons' concern with equilibrium and integration in stratification was a conservative response to the anxieties of disequilibrium of the capitalist order of the 1930s. The emphasis on the moral and ideational elements in what Alvin Gouldner called 'Parsonian structural-functionalism' was meant to serve an important ideological function, that is, to mask the internal contradictions of social systems of inequality. It was also supposed to provide an alternative to Marxist theory while avoiding direct confrontation with Marxism (Shaw 1972: 39–40). It is this ideological affinity that explains Dumont's preference for Parsons' concept of stratification.

Hierarchy as Necessity

Hierarchy is natural and a necessity, argues Dumont. In Talcott Parsons, he finds the universal rationale for hierarchy: 'to think is to have value and to adopt a value is to introduce a hierarchy as indispensable' (Dumont 1980: 19–20, see also Dirks 2001: 4). In the first place, whose necessity is hierarchy? It is a necessity of the dominant group. To generalize it for the society as a whole is to confuse the particular necessity of the dominant group (here dominant caste) with general necessity of all groups (here all castes), a reiteration of the dominant ideology. Secondly, hierarchy is not natural. It is social and historical. If to think is to have value, and to have value is to have

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hierarchy, then egalitarian societies (not to be confused with society in modern West which, as discussed below, is the very opposite of egalitarianism), must have been without values. Citing Timothy Ingold, Thomas Widlik writes 'if society is defined as bundles of relations organized on the premise that there are offices of power and authority, then…many hunter-gatherers, according to this conceptual definition, do not live in societies' (Widlok 2005: 3).

Essence of Hierarchy: Opposition of Pure and Impure

It is claimed that the opposition between pure and impure is not the 'foundation' of society except in the intellectual sense. However, it is by implicit reference to this opposition that caste appears consistent and rational to those who live in it. This fact is central. Opposition between pure and impure is manifested in the contrast between the two extremes of caste hierarchy: (1) Brahmans and (2) Untouchables. The Brahmans, as priests, occupy the supreme rank with respect to all other castes. The 'Untouchables, as very impure servants', are lowest in rank, segregated outside the villages proper and saddled with multiple disabilities like access to wells used by the upper castes for water, to enter temples and many more disabilities. Why this separation of the Untouchables, he asks? Is it due to the nauseating smell of the skins they are accustomed to treat? Hygiene is often invoked to justify ideas about impurity. But impurity is not hygienic: it is religious (Dumont 1980: 44–49).

To begin with, obsession with purity and impurity was the concern of those whose subsistence, indeed much more, was assured without them ever labouring for it. The same social rules that gave them ritual and secular entitlement to consume more than their share also freed them from labour. On the other hand, those who laboured and were in return left with little to eat did not, and could not afford to worry about impurity: impurity was the very condition of their existence. The ideas of purity and impurity in this case are reflection of the real life conditions of the pure and the impure. The religious theory of caste turns things up side down and makes purity and impurity the basis of their life conditions.

Emphasis on ritual purity and impurity is common to mainstream sociology going back to Weber (1958b: 43) focusing on who eats with

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whom—not who gets what to eat and why? That is a serious lacuna. The claim that those who live in the caste system make sense of hierarchy in terms of the pure and the impure is empirically unfounded. As shown by Dipankar Gupta, among others, the lower castes do not believe that the upper castes are where they are because they are pure. The lower castes, he points out, are aware of the (economic–political) power of the dominant caste—far more than the opposition of purity–impurity. They can, and do, deny the notion of their impurity as much as the purity of those on top. That does not, however, enable them to alter their status and its reality for their daily lives and struggles (Gupta 2000, see also Gupta 2006). Gerald Berreman draws a similar conclusion based on his empirical investigation of the caste system in a Himalayan village. If one talks to the Shudras or Harijans in the village, he writes, they do not ever believe that their position vis–à–vis that of the upper castes is a result of any sacred rule (of purity–impurity). Rather, they see it as strictly a matter of economic exploitation (Berreman 1967: 26). Purity–impurity is the ideology of the dominant caste. For the lower castes, it is pure fiction.

Dumont's argument that the skepticism of modern man about the place of religion in social life has been answered by Hegel, Durkheim, Weber and the whole of ethnology (cf. aforementioned text) is a reiteration of ideology. The place of religion in social life is a controversial subject. Notion of the religious essence of humanity (Hegel), religion as the basis of social bond (Durkheim), religion or religious ideas as the driving force of history, or the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (Weber) have been debated over and over again. Apart from its theoretical weakness, the religious view has been questioned on the basis of empirical–historical evidence to the contrary. That has, however, not dissuaded the enthusiasts of the religious view. For now, my main concern is the validity of the dominantly religious view of the caste system premised on the opposition of the pure and the impure. I pursue it later.

Banality of Pure and Impure

Barbers and washermen, given their social function, enter into temporary impurity but they get out of it thanks to…'terminal bath', says Dumont. In India, he argues, the king or his equivalent is indeed the main employer, but the Brahman, the priest, is superior to him, and correspondingly the pure and impure are opposed. On the other

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hand, 'the king is never impure, as he must not be reduced to idleness even temporarily…The case of the king is striking. One sees here that the Indians are realistic….' (1980: 48–51). All this is part of theory, a scientific exercise, in which hierarchy shuts its eyes as and when observed reality does not fit the assumption; the pure can enter impurity and get out of it by taking terminal bath—the water for which is drawn from the well dug by the Untouchable, the permanently impure. Indians are pragmatic in one instance and just the opposite in another. Gupta makes a valid point that the attribute of hierarchy… does not belong to the essence of caste, and in any case, where hierarchy exists it is not necessarily based on purity–pollution (Gupta 2006, see also Gupta 2000). As Sharma (2009: 7) points out, the theory of the formation and growth of the caste system attributed to notions of purity and impurity is 'old hat, which has been mended to serve those who find themselves fascinated by the outer manifestations of caste'. To the contrary, he argues, only a historical approach based on considerations of time, place and social situations can explain the causes and character of outer manifestations. Interestingly, Sharma points out that crafts connected with leather did not bear any stigma of impurity in early Vedic times. What does that say about the *Chamar*s (Untouchables) of Uttar Pradesh, and the nauseating smell of the leather they work with which, according to Dumont, makes them permanently impure, not for hygienic but religious reasons (Dumont 1980: 49). When did the leather workers become permanently impure and why? It is a historical question that cannot be answered by the religious theory which transhistoricizes impurity.

Hierarchy in Downward (or Upward!) Spiral: From Sociology to Theology

Hierarchy in Dumont's theory is fundamental not only to the caste system but also to Indian civilization, Indian culture and Indian tradition (Dirks 2001: 5). Rather than being confined to caste, it penetrates the domain of kinship. In the evolution of Hindu law, the father–son relationship has been modelled on the interdependence that obtains, in terms of castes, between a superior and an inferior person, claims Dumont (Dumont 1980: 36). Contrary to Dumont's argument, the principle of hierarchy in the caste system did penetrate the family system, but it was not religious, rather secular—economic, political

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and cultural. The determining factor in father–son relationship at the level of the dominant caste (also the dominant class) in princely states of Rajasthan was the father's control over the family estate and the political power and social esteem associated with it as I discuss later (see Chapter 5). As Engels observed, with the development of the private property in the means of production and the means of subsistence, the wife and children were reduced to wards of the patriarch, the head of the family. That was the secret of father's superiority over wife and children in all societies founded on the private property in the means of production. To the contrary, father–son, wife–husband relations in egalitarian societies, with common access to the means of production, were not relations of superiority and inferiority, but of equality (cf. Engels 1972, Lee 1981). We return to it later.

Following the chosen path of hierarchy, Dumont's sociology of caste reaches its logical end: it merges into theology Beteille (cf. Beteille 2006: 112–113). Explaining the characteristic feature of hierarchy, Dumont writes:

> As the mantle of Our Lady of Mercy shelters sinners of every kind in its voluminous folds, so the hierarchy cloaks, among other differences, its own contrary. Here we have an example of the complementarity between that which encompasses and that which is encompassed…. (Dumont 1980: 78, 212)

It is made more explicit later on when he writes that hierarchy

> is not, essentially, a chain of superimposed commands, not even a chain of decreasing dignity…but a relation that can succinctly be called the encompassing of the contrary…The best example [of this relation] I have is biblical. It is the story of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, in the first book of Genesis, chapter 2. (1980: 239)

Finally, in hierarchy we have the confluence of the Vedas and the Bible.

Modern West as Egalitarian

There are two legs to Dumont's comparative method—traditional India (identified with the caste system) as hierarchical and modern West (read capitalism) as egalitarian. I have examined earlier

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Dumont's notion of hierarchy in traditional India. I want to briefly examine the problem of egalitarianism and modern West. Beteille points out that despite formal equality, large inequalities in fact continue to exist in modern West. Contemporary economic doctrine of modern West, he stresses, is most opposed to substantive equality (Beteille 2006: 114–115). In response, Dumont writes, Beteille admits that individualism and equality existed together in the 18th century and that these ideas spread far and wide, including to 20th century India, but 'this coupling' came apart in the passage from 18th to 19th century. Dumont finds this statement'staggering' and asks rhetorically, did the West turn its back on the appeal of the American and French Revolution? Continuing further he writes '…the claim to equality is as alive as ever, whether regarding Blacks or women, not to speak of homosexuals or schoolboys'. He asks 'on which level the coupling came apart' (Dumont 2006: 229–30)? It is an understatement to suggest that to anyone familiar with the history of modern West, Dumont's response must sound rather odd (cf. Habib 2003: 164).

To claim that modern West is egalitarian is to ignore the fundamental condition for the development of capitalism, the economic foundation of modernity. As Marx wrote, the economic structure of capitalism grew out of the economic structure of feudalism. For this to happen, the direct producer (the serf, the bondsman) had to be freed from bondage to the lord to be converted into wage labourer, a prerequisite of genesis of capitalism. In the process, he was also freed from land, the means of his own subsistence reducing him to servitude in a different form, different from servitude of serfdom in the previous regime: 'The starting point of the development that gave rise to the wage-labourer as well as to the capitalist, was the servitude of the laborer. The advance consisted in a change of form of this servitude….' (Marx 1965: 147). Thus 'the claim to equality' in modern West is incongruent with the reality of servitude of labour comprising of the majority in modern West. Inequality in capitalism (modern West) is neither a later development nor an aberration, but its very starting point and a prerequisite. Modernity created and is continuously expanding the growth of inequality of capital and labour globally (cf. Hobsbawm 2008: xi, xiii, 79). As with hierarchy in the caste system, Dumont detaches egalitarian ideology in modern West from its economic foundation and presents it as the whole truth.

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'How and why has this unique development that we call "modern" occurred at all, asks Dumont'? It was, according to him, the result of a revolution of values (Dumont 1977: 7; Madan 2006: 81–82). The readers will have no problem recognizing that Dumont is only repeating what Weber laid out in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. As discussed later, the problem with the explanation of the origin of the unique development of 'modern' in the West in terms of revolution of values is that it is one sided: it leaves out the revolution that took place in production and property relations—replacement of feudal relations of production with capitalist relations of production and power structure. Apart from being partial, the attempt to explain the genesis of modern West in terms of values sanitizes the entire process of modernization, eschewing class struggle at home, a process that was bloody and violent. Dumont's view of Western modernity is skewed in yet another sense. He ignores the other important fact of the history of modernity in the West, the intrinsic connection between the West and the rest in the process of the development of modernity. That is what Adam Smith referred to when he declared that

> the discovery of America and the Cape route to India are 'the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind' (cited in Williams 1966: 51). Modernization of England cannot be seen in isolation from colonization of India by England. As Hamza Alvi (1973: 36) wrote, the structure of the contemporary Indian or English society was shaped by centuries of colonial experience. As Eric Williams shows, the triangular trade connecting Europe, Africa, and the Americas in which Europe and colonial America supplied the capital, Africa the 'human merchandise', and the plantations (in the Americas) the colonial raw materials was 'the first principle and the foundation of all the rest, the mainspring of the machine which sets every wheel in motion'. By 1750, Williams writes, there was hardly a trading or manufacturing town in England which was not in some way connected with the triangular…trade. The profits obtained provided one of the main streams of that accumulation…which financed the Industrial Revolution. (Williams 1966: 51–52)

As Andrea Stuart (2012), the author of *Sugar in the Blood* notes, the majestic Harewood House in Leeds was built with money from Caribbean sugar plantations. So was the Codrington Library of All Souls College in Oxford and Bristol's mansions. Wilentz (2013) writes 'How rarely we acknowledge that Europe's great cities were built on profits from the labor and blood of slaves cutting sugarcane half a world

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away…Without them, the vast empire that gave the world Victoria and Dickens might never have existed'.

Like the process of transition from pre-modern to modern at home, the global development of modernity—slave trade, colonialism—was a bloody process. According to a local annalist, 'There was not a brick in the city (Bristol) but what is cemented with the blood of a slave' (Williams 1966: 61). Add to this the war, destruction and dehumanization of colonialism to make sense of Dumont's idyllic representation of modern West: 'In effect, if the whole of humanity is deemed present in each man, then each man should be free and all men are equal. This is the foundation of the two great ideals of the modern age' (Dumont 1980: 11).

Economic–political inequalities between colonizer and colonized in the process of modernization were further entrenched by inequalities of race, a uniquely modern Western phenomenon. It was a process which created Kipling's 'lesser breeds without the law', a process in which a black man was reduced to 'black ore' (Ki Zerbo 2001), a process in which white men assumed 'automatic superiority for themselves and their arrangements to those of other skin colors'. In the United States of America (Tocqueville's model of Western modernity), the indigenous peoples and slaves were 'by definition outside the Founding Father's definition of the people'. Inequality in early periods of modernity was not only material but also symbolic mimicking the preceding era of feudalism. As Leo Huberman writes, in Colonial America, if you might have liked the gold and silver girdle your neighbour wore and you had enough money to buy it, you could not wear it, unless you belonged to the right class. In Massachusetts, in 1653, two women were arrested for wearing silk hoods and scarfs, but were allowed to go free only because their husbands were worth 200 Pounds each: 'But woe betide the luckless poor person who dared to wear silk' (Huberman 1940: 45). That is very comparable to the peasant women in princely Rajasthan not being allowed to wear gold or their men being barred from riding a horse or an elephant without the permission of the landlord. That is how egalitarianism of the modern West unfolded on a world scale.

What is particularly interesting to mention in this context is the fact that the same very ideology of egalitarianism at home was used over and over again to rationalize the global inequalities of class, race, religion and ethnicity in interaction between the West and the rest in the process of modernization representing the latter as undeserving

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of equal treatment. In the age of globalization, the current phase of modernity, there is 'a spectacular and potentially explosive rise in social and economic inequality within countries and internationally' (Hobsbawm 2008: 67, 79; Noah 2012).

Modern West and the Division of Labour: Contradiction of Egalitarianism

Dumont writes that the individualistic tendency of the modern man that became established from the 18th century was in fact accompanied by the modern development of the social division of labour what Durkheim called organic solidarity: 'The ideal of the autonomy of each person became established among men who were dependent on one another for material things to a much greater extent than all their predecessors' (Dumont 1980: 11). Durkheim's organic solidarity referred to the division of labour in capitalism. What Dumont ignores is Durkheim's predicament that the division of labour in capitalism was pathological, according to Durkheim himself. And the root cause of pathology is to be found in what he called the 'external conditions'–inequality between those who had property and others who did not. The latter do not have freedom of choice in the division of labour that is dictated by the former. Thus rather than being based on free choice, the division of labour in modern society is forced by the propertied on the non-propertied–anomic division of labour. What Durkheim calls inequality of 'external conditions' responsible for anomic division of labour is nothing other than the capitalist social relations of production, the starting point of capitalism and a fundamental condition for its reproduction. It is not possible to do away with the basic inequality in 'external conditions' without abolishing the capitalist relations of production, that is, abolishing the capitalist system itself. Durkheim could not conceive of that as a possibility. That is Durkheimian predicament. As Giddens says, Durkheim's treatment of anomic form (les formes anormales) of the division of labour carries a 'sting in the tail' (Giddens 1978: 30). The sting is fatal.

Equality and liberty are not mental but material phenomena. Equality and liberty in the minds of people have no real existence if the material conditions do not allow them to be realized in practice.

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In a system (modern West) where the majority of population must remain dispossessed and dependent for its very subsistence on a minority which monopolizes the means of production and the means of their subsistence, equality, freedom, and individual autonomy exist only as half-truths. Durkheim was at least aware of that. Dumont overlooks that.

Modern West: Anti-thesis of Egalitarianism

To conclude this discussion, we must add that not only modern West is not egalitarian, rather it is the very opposite of egalitarianism both structurally and ideologically. Dahrendorf wrote that questions about the 'inequality among men' were historically among 'the first questions asked by sociology' (Widlok 2005: 1). Inequality was near to zero in the earlier stage, but became legitimate with the establishment of property and the laws to regulate it: 'the first man who, having enclosed a piece of land [claimed] "This is mine"' (Rousseau 1994: 54, cited in Widlok 2005: 1). While Dahrendorf stresses that inequality in social order is inevitable, Talcottt Parsons turns inequality into a 'functional necessity of society' (Widlok: ibid). On the other hand, Morgan, Marx and Engels, among early thinkers, recognized the existence of societies in which inequalities characteristic of class societies were absent, a fact corroborated by succeeding anthropologists who highlighted the basic conditions (material and ideological) under which equality is possible. Their findings challenge the notion of social inequality as universal and even necessary.

Anthropologists interested in the questions about equality and inequality make a distinction between what they call societies of immediate return (egalitarian societies) in opposition to those of delayed return (modern capitalist society). In societies of immediate return, direct and immediate access to food and other resources is enjoyed by all members of society. Access rights of all to material and intellectual resources at the disposal of society are taken for granted. On the other hand, there are restrictions on accumulation, along with obligation to share. Taken together these elements of the system guarantee a high degree of personal autonomy while pre-empting the development of dependency and inequality. These societies do

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have a notion of property rights, which are communal or collective, not private. As a result, property per se is not a cause of inequality compromising individual freedom and autonomy. The relation between property, equality and individual autonomy is mediated by the various cultural (ideological) strategies (Widlok 2005: 11; Woodburn 2005: 19).

Richard Lee points out that in egalitarian societies, unlike society in modern West, not only is there a high level of sharing and a low level of tolerance of personal accumulation but ideologically, there is emphasis on egalitarian social relations. Like equality guaranteed by equal access to material resources in economic sphere, in political sphere there is 'a positive insistence on the essential equality of all people'. Leaders do not

> make demands of others and their accumulation of material goods is never more…than the average accumulation of the other households… their material simplicity' leads us to conclude that equality in real life is not an utopia, to be endorsed in theory but unattainable in practice. (Lee 1981: 97, 99)

Beside equality in material spheres, ideologically, egalitarian societies actively promote equality as much as they actively resist inequality in all its dimensions: 'Equality is perceived as meritorious, worthy, and honorable and inequality as unacceptable, as disreputable and even as evil and dangerous' (Woodburn 2005: 21). Dumont's assertion that 'as opposed to modern society, traditional societies… know nothing of equality…as value' (Dumont 1980: 8) needs scrutiny in the light of ethnographic evidence of equality from pre-modern egalitarian societies briefly presented above. It is interesting to note that much earlier Durkheim (1972) had noted the features of egalitarianism among the Iroquois of North America (cf. Woodburn 2005).

Contrary to egalitarian societies, in modern West, individuals use property to create distinctions: 'People are known for what they own' (Widlok 2005: 7). The political system and ideological devices, contrary to those in egalitarian societies, rather than discouraging and levelling inequalities encourage, protect and reward inequality and distinction. In a stark contrast to the basic norms of egalitarian societies, which restrict accumulation structurally and discourage it ideologically, accumulation, as Weber (1958c) writes, is the very spirit and the driving force of the economic foundation of modernity

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and capitalism. Thus, materially and ideologically, modern West is the very antithesis of egalitarianism.

Colonial Rule and Caste

Colonial rule and caste is an important area of enquiry in the discussion of caste in the history. There are many studies dealing with this question. I do not claim my discussion to be exhaustive or representative of various studies of colonialism and caste. Rather, it is confined to issues that are relevant to my present discussion, most importantly, colonialism, caste and land.

Orientalism and Beyond

As noted by Romila Thapar, the notion of Oriental Despotism was central to thinking about Indian society and history in the West in the age of colonialism–imperialism. Rooted in the ancient Greek depiction of the Persian system as despotic, the notion of Oriental Despotism in the West acquired a new significance in the 18th century context of the European colonial rivalry. The notion of the Asiatic mode comprising of the absence of the private property in land, despotic form of governance and social stagnation, is found in the works of Mill, Marx, Weber and Dumont, among many more. Thapar identifies two main trends in orientalist writings on India, the caste system in particular, during this period. While in Mill and Marx, the focus is on the nature of property in land and the form of governance (this is not to ignore the basic difference of perspective between the two), while in Weber, Dumont and others it shifts to the place of religion in society. Property right in land and right to extract the surplus as the central theme in one are replaced by spiritual power and religiosity in the other. Instead of rules of governance the focus shifts to rituals of governance; the locus of power shifts from the prince and the court to the priest and the temple. This shift could not have been accomplished without right to land and form of governance being taken out of the picture or being reduced to residues of ideology, religion in particular, she argues (Thapar 2000: 7–8). The emphasis on religion, rituals, purity

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and impurity in the caste system in the works of Weber and Dumont has to be seen in that light.

Thapar mentions yet another trend in the historiography of colonialism and caste, the one adopted by Indian historians of nationalist school which accepted the idea of the Aryan[ness] of Hindus found in Orientalism. She thinks that internalization of the notion of Aryanness as 'scientific' explanation of caste by [some] Indians 'exonerates' *Homo Hierarchicus* (ibid). In my opinion, it is not so much the idea of Aryanness, but the primacy of ideology unaffected by economic–political power, the main theme of *Homo Hierarchicus*, that finds accord in the wider section of Indian academics, not just the nationalists. What is, however, interesting about the nationalists in particular is how the racial subtext of Aryanness as signifier of superiority was at the same time used by colonizers to inferiorize and dominate all Indians as Aryans who have been tainted due to interbreeding. Ironically, that does not dampen their enthusiasm to take pride in the idea of Aryanness, albeit of a tainted variety.

Weber and Marx on Colonial Rule and Caste

It is interesting to mention that both Marx and Weber commented on caste and British colonial rule in India. Weber does not deal directly with colonial rule and caste. Colonial context is, however, important in his discussion of certain issues relating to caste, for example, caste and industrial development in colonial India. Interestingly, he does not argue that ritual antagonism of castes might have prevented the development of large-scale enterprises in colonial India, because the caste was elastic enough to adjust to the requirements of labour in domestic or public domain: '...the artisan's hand is always clean in his occupation' (Weber 1958b: 111). Then he adds that the 'core of the obstruction' was not in specific ritualistic prescriptions or proscription of the caste system. It was rather 'embedded in the spirit of the whole system'. Even though Indian labour has been employed in modern industrial enterprises imported from Europe, he writes, '…it must be considered extremely unlikely that the modern organization of industrial capitalism would have ever originated on the basis of the caste system'. Caste rituals were too prohibitive to allow the birth of

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economic and technical revolutions from within, or even 'facilitating the first germination of capitalism in its midst'. The proof: 'After several hundred years of English domination there are today only about 980,000 factory workers, that is, about one-third of 1 per cent of the population' (Weber 1958b: 112–114). The dismal figure of factory employment after centuries of English domination is a rich tribute to de-industrialization under colonial rule. Weber turns it around to attribute it to the spirit of caste.

There are other inconsistencies in Weber's position on caste, colonial rule and industrial labour. Thus he says that it was difficult to find labour in manufacturing industries even with the highest wages in India. At the same time, he mentions the recruitment of 'coolies' for labour on the plantations in India and the far flung colonies of the Empire in South Africa, the Caribbean islands and Fiji. It was a form of labour characteristically the lowest paid, hardest work and the lowest esteem. His explanation, however, was that among the 'coolies' there was a strong representation of the lowest castes (Weber 1958: 115). In the first place, as discussed later (Chapter 7), the coolies (a generic term for indentured labour) comprised of all castes with a strong representation from the middle to the lower castes—not the lowest castes. More importantly, if Indians notwithstanding the caste system were available (and were indeed employed for over 90 years) for the most demeaning form of labour in alien lands farthest from home, how seriously should one take the idea of the spirit of the caste system obstructing industrial employment or aborting the spirit of capitalism at home? If the case of coolies is any guide, industrial employment might have contributed to the erosion of the caste system altogether—as it did happen in the case of coolies in colonies outside India. It was thus not the spirit of caste that prevented industrial employment. Rather, it was lack of industrial employment thanks to centuries of colonial rule that allowed the spirit of caste to prevail.

Both Marx and Weber had similar anticipations that the caste system will erode due to the impact of colonial rule. There is, however, a difference between the two as to why and how this impact will unravel. This difference is again derived from their different theoretical perspectives. For Marx, it was the impact of colonial rule on the foundation of the village community (communal possession of land) which will dissolve the caste system. For Weber, on the other hand,

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it was desegregation of castes in the railways bringing the Brahmans and the Untouchables physically close and thus violating the rules of purity and pollution, the foundation of the caste system, according to him (Weber 1958b). The railways did not dissolve the caste system. As discussed later, transgression of rules of purity and pollution by the upper castes, particularly upper caste men in relation to women of otherwise Untouchable castes, was part of latter's daily practice. But they had already found creative ways to purify themselves as and when they voluntarily compromised their purity. As for Marx, contrary to his anticipation, colonial rule did not (or could not) dissolve pre-colonial land relations, the foundation of the caste system, and the caste survived. Why was colonialism not able to dissolve the pre-capitalist relations of production is a question that I have dealt with at length elsewhere (Singh 1998) and cannot discuss it here in detail. In short, the colonial state was too weak to overcome the resistance by the landed gentry, then the dominant class, instead made compromise and accommodation to win latter's support in return for non-interference with its traditional economic–political–juridical rights. Interestingly, many sociologists have referred to how Marx's anticipation of colonial rule and caste did not come true, which they hasten to add, is a proof that caste is too complex for Marxism to come to grips with. That Weber had similar anticipation of colonialism and caste, albeit via another route, is somehow overlooked by them.

Caste as the Central Symbol of Indian Society during the Colonial Rule?

Nicholas Dirks has dealt with the question of colonial rule and caste at some length. He cautions that his view is 'far more complicated than that the British invented caste, though in one sense this is precisely what happened'. They invented caste as cultural technology of rule, which demonstrates the hegemonic character of colonial rule on the history of the colonized, an insight, he acknowledges, he got from subaltern studies. Continuing further, '…the death of kings cleared the way for the transformation of caste under colonial rule' (Dirks 2001: 9, 12). Important as these observations are, they are problematic. First, he makes colonialism one-way street in which colonizers are active agents

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and colonized are passive subjects. Colonialism was not one-way street: it was not totalizing. Resistance by colonized forcing accommodation and compromise is a fact of colonial rule (for more on this see Singh 1998).

Secondly, Dirks is in a hurry to declare the death of kings prematurely. To begin with, it is factually incorrect. Over 500 or so of the princely states presided over by the kings remained alive during the entire span of the colonial rule. It was through collaboration between the East India Company and Indian kings that colonial rule was established in the first place and it remained a precondition for its survival until it finally ended. Secondly and more importantly, the foundation of kingship was the system of land tenure in kingdoms, with king having eminent right of ownership of all lands in his territory. That right was not interrupted by colonial rule, not because it did not want to, but it could not. Contrary to Dirk's claim, the kings remained alive during colonial rule. It is no accident of history that colonialism and kingship died together. It was not the end of colonialism that killed kingships. It was the other way round: the weakening and impending death of kingships that spelled the end of colonial rule, and the agency of that belongs to popular movements (Singh 1998). Inspired by subaltern studies as admitted by him (Dirks 2001), Dirks attributes the agency of death of kings to colonial power eschewing the resistance to colonial power by the then dominant class in India and more seriously, denying the struggle of subaltern classes in ending colonial rule and kingships.

Dirks argues that Permanent Settlement introduced in Bengal in the last decade of the 18th century resolved the land question and freed colonial authority to turn its attention to innovate caste as technology of colonial rule (2001). Contrary to his claim, land remained the core concern of colonizers as well as that of colonized throughout colonial rule. For colonizers, land was their primary concern. For colonized, on the other hand, as Fanon (1968) wrote, it was their everything, their source of subsistence, their identity. Were the land question resolved with Permanent Settlement, how can one make sense of the land settlements following the Permanent Settlement—the *roytwari, mahalwari, pattedari, taluqdari, jagirdari* and zamindari—not to mention non-interference in lands of princely states covering two-fifth of India. Land was the question in the Revolt of 1857. Land was the question in the renewed alliance between the

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Crown and the kings in the aftermath of 1857. Land was the main question in peasant movements of the 1910s to 1940s. Like the death of kings, Dirks is in a hurry to resolve the land question prematurely with Permanent Settlement to clear the runway for caste to take off. He writes: 'Colonialism purposefully preserved many of the forms of the old regime, nowhere more conspicuously than in the princely states, but in few respects more insidiously than in the construction of caste as the core symbol of Indian tradition' (Dirks 2001: 79–80). As discussed later, 'construction' of caste in princely states was an important concern, but much of it was outside colonial jurisdiction. If caste appears to be important, it is because it was embedded in land relations, the main concern and the main point of contest between colonizer and colonized. Colonial anthropology removed land from the caste and made the caste core concern of colonial rule.

Dirks continues: '…caste remained, and was in fact recast, in ways that have provided the basis for new forms of social mobilization… uniquely…caste is a specter that continues to haunt the body politic of postcolonial India…it has become the subject of national shame' (Dirks 2001: 17). Caste in Indian politics is a national shame, very much like race in politics in America, ethnicity and religious identity in politics in Europe today. Political mobilization along ethnic, race, religious and regional lines is common not only in new democracies outside the West but very much so in mature democracies of the West. Indian uniqueness due to caste is in that sense exaggerated and misconceived. In denying the uniqueness of India due to caste, my intention is not to cast India in the image of the West. It is rather to argue that the role of caste in politics in modern India, like that of race in America, ethnicity and religion in Europe calls for reconfiguration of the relationship between economic–political interests and caste, ethnicity, religion and race across north and south or east and west rather than attributing it to Indian uniqueness due to the caste system. Tirthankar Roy refers to a particular scholarly tradition of the cultural history of colonialism that is popular among scholars interested in South Asian studies in the West. He calls it 'a Brahmanic enterprise confined to exegesis, one that considers the murky world of economic and social history too polluting to merit respect'. While strong in sophisticated textual analysis, it cherishes a disregard for the material and the social conditions—and agency—of the real people, particularly those at the lower end of hierarchy, he writes (Roy 2011: 34).

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Missionaries and the Caste System

Dirks provides an interesting account of the role of the missionaries, accompanying the East India Company in conceptualizing caste. It was the convergence of problems at home and colonial interest abroad that provides the historical context. As Dirks points out, Abbe Dubois, a missionary, went to India to escape the ravages of the French Revolution, and became an anthropologist for the East India Company. Given their main interest in proselytization, missionaries looked at caste as a feature of Hinduism. Understandably, Hinduism and the caste system were united in their view. It is no surprise if colonial administrators were advised to conclude that there is nothing more important to the Hindus than recognition of caste distinctions. Dubois warned that 'it is in the nature of the Hindus to cling to their civil and religious institutions [caste]…no human effort will persuade them to give them up…let us take care lest we bring about, by some …imprudent course of action, catastrophes', as a result of Government interference in caste and religion. Attachment of purity and impurity by birth made caste essentially religious. That was the missionary view. Missionaries exaggerated the influence of religion on caste, because they believed that caste was the reason for the Hindus' resistance to conversion. This perception grew stronger in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857 (Dirks 2001: 24–26, 131–32).

The company whose main interest was the conquest of territory created, with the aid of the missionaries, the myth that Indians are more interested in preserving their caste distinctions than protecting their lands, the means of their subsistence and identity. In order to give myth a life, caste was divorced from land and wedded to Hinduism never to be separated. Many sociologists and anthropologists following in the footsteps of the missionaries perpetuated the myth of caste as essentially religious, the myth persists.

The Revolt of 1857

The Revolt of 1857 and its aftermath hold immense sociological significance for caste (and class) in Indian history and society, mainly so since they highlight the intrinsic connection between land and caste

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during colonial rule. At the ideological level, the 'mutiny of 1857 was a violent reaction against an imaginary threat of subversion of the social order', writes Dumont (1980: 229). He is uncritically reproducing the colonial view of the Revolt, including the label, 'mutiny'. It may be noted that around the same time as Dumont was writing *Homo Hierarchicus*, another eminent historian of comparative study of modernization, Barrington Moore, characterized the Revolt of 1857 as a religious reaction of the Hindu priestly class. Religious reaction as the sole or the primary cause has indeed become the staple of the folklore of the Revolt. The Revolt did have a religious aspect to it. However, it was not exclusively or primarily a religious uprising—a Brahmanical reaction to the violation of religion and caste. If anything, it was an example of religious tolerance, understanding and cooperation when the majority of rebel Hindu soldiers marched hand in hand with their Muslim comrades to Delhi, put the Muslim ruler back on the throne and bowed allegiance (cf. Joshi 1957).

The Revolt was primarily a response of the landlord class (in alliance with peasants), to an attempt by colonial authority (in alliance with merchants–moneylenders) to expropriate the traditional land rights and political authority of landlords. Peasants joined landlords to protect their own customary rights in land threatened by the same very changes in agrarian relations introduced by the East India Company. What role did caste play in the Revolt and conversely what was the impact of the Revolt on caste is surely an important subject of sociological investigation. In short, while both class and caste factors were important in the Revolt, class interests (involving landlords, peasants and merchants) were dominant in causing the Revolt in the first place, and in the compromise and accommodation in the aftermath of the Revolt. Caste and class were intersected in the Revolt. The dominant class was also the dominant caste. In fighting to protect their class interests, landlords were at the same time protecting their caste privileges. Similarly, the decline of the landlord class and rise of the merchant–money lender class in alliance with peasants after the Revolt had serious implications for the caste–class reconfiguration resulting in the decline of the landlords as dominant class and caste. The abolition of landlordism following the end of colonial rule ended the dominance of landlord class and also eroded their caste dominance. Conversely, the peasants acquiring independent land rights gained both class power and caste esteem vis–à–vis the former landlords. By the same token,

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the merchants–moneylenders cum manufacturers (capitalists) emerged as the dominant class which also enhanced their caste status relative to that of the former landlords—the Rajputs.

Sociology of Caste and Social Justice

R. S. Khare raises an important question: how does *Homo Hierarchicus* cope with *homo justus*—struggling to find his rightful place in India? Since Dumont has been mostly silent on the social justice issues in India, this problem area should particularly challenge those following and intending to strengthen Dumont's long-lasting contribution, he writes (Khare 2006: 32). In the first place, Dumont has not been 'silent' on these issues. When Dumont quotes Manu's prescription that the Shudras should eat only left-overs and should not be allowed to read or listen to the Vedas (imagine a Christian not being allowed to read or listen to the Bible) as the ultimate source of caste hierarchy, it is not silence, but complicity. It implicates us if we remain silent on Dumont's 'silence' on this question. Secondly and more importantly, a theory that rules out the possibility of raising the question of exploitation and injustice in the caste system, how can it address the issue of *homo justus*? The notion of hierarchy premised on encompassing–encompassed eschews exploitation, contradiction, struggle and resistance. Should we leave that theory, its conceptual framework, its epistemological formulation, its social implications untouched, because it has served its purpose for the time? What purpose, if one may ask, considering that it is theoretically flawed, methodologically inconsistent, historically inaccurate and ideologically regressive?

The problem of Dalits mentioned by Khare is not new: it is as old as the caste system itself. The sufferings, pain, agony, misery, humiliation, exploitation and inhuman treatment the lower castes (referred to as Dalits) have been subjected to, is as old as the caste system itself (Kumar 2012). Why is it that sociologists are waking up to the problem of Dalits now (if they are)? Is it because Dalits themselves have begun to speak against the dominant view of the caste system? It is no surprise that those (Dalits and non-Dalits) who identify themselves with the cause of Dalits are vocal about their dissatisfaction with 'the deficiencies of dominant modes of theorizing in the social sciences' (Pandian 2010: 97). They wonder about '…the prevailing and worrying disjuncture

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between the more avant garde practices of the social sciences and the grim Indian political reality that awaits transformation…that the social sciences, such as they are, can exist, even flourish, in such a context is itself a telling statement' (Malik 2005: 107).

The disjuncture between theory and the material reality of caste is central to *Homo Hierarchicus* that obscures our understanding of the source of *dalitization* of Dalits—part of the larger question of the caste system as a system of inequality and exploitation. Mainstream sociology may not have followed Dumont literally in using the terminology of the sacred and the profane, but in practice, as noted by Pandian and Kumar above, it has avoided the question of exploitation in the caste system as if it were profane. We need an alternative framework that allows us to tell the story of the disprivilege of Dalits and the privilege of the upper castes as intrinsically linked. As Frankenberg (1993) demonstrates in another context, disprivilege and privilege in systemic inequalities (e.g. race, gender, class to which one may add caste) are systemically interconnected. As noted by Pandian (2010: 97), abstraction is not innocent of power.

To pursue it further, shutting the Shudras off education in the caste system lasted for a period longer than the combined period of slavery in antiquity and modernity in the West, which excluded slaves from education. It criminalized an attempt by slaves to educate themselves as much as a non-slave trying to educate the former. What was crime in slavery was turned into sin in the caste system, sanctioned by the sacred texts. Ironically, the same sacred texts that sanctioned the exclusion of the Shudras from education also held that it is education that makes us human and hence the respect for the educator, the guru. Is it mere coincidence, if we may ask, that far fewer sociologists have stood up against the injustice of the systemic exclusion of a substantial proportion of the caste population from this critical resource as a sacred principle for millennia compared to their passionate opposition to accommodating that same very historically deprived population to the provision of affirmative action in admission to educational institutions and employment in India today. The question of *Homo Hierarchicus* and *homo justus* should be reviewed in that light.

Recently, talking about continued discrimination against the Dalits not only in rural but also in urban areas even when apparently it is against the economic–political interests of the discriminating groups, Sukhdeo Thorat points out that the neoclassical theories have to

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address these issues in the Indian context. It is here, he suggests, that Ambedkar's (and Phule's and Periyar's) contributions provide insights into understanding the formation of attitudes, prejudices, stereotypes and the resultant behaviour of the higher castes. Ambedkar, he says, attributed the discriminatory behaviour to the ideology—religious and social—which determined the rules and norms of discriminatory behaviour of the higher castes towards the lower castes. It is this philosophical support, he concludes, that gives solidity to the caste system (Thorat 2012: 34).

While recognizing the significance of the philosophical support by religious and social ideology to solidify the caste system, one must not lose sight of its material aspect: the basis of the caste system is not philosophical, but material. Fighting against discrimination in the caste system without fighting against the real basis of the caste system is a self-defeating exercise. In different ways, Gandhi and Ambedkar did exactly that. They fought against the assumed philosophical basis of the caste system leaving its real basis unchanged and discrimination continues. On the contrary, Indians in indenture did not have to fight against caste discrimination or its philosophical justification, because in the absence of its material basis the caste system evaporated taking along the caste discrimination. The neoclassical theories, like their classical counterparts, recommended by Thorat are not up to the task if they remain hostage to the 'philosophical basis' of the caste system. As Zelliot (1972: 95) writes:

> Gandhi may have softened the Hindu heart, Ambedkar may have awakened self-respect and an interest in politics among Untouchables, but economic dependence upon others continues to restrict the upward movement of the Untouchable.

Alternative Approach

The difference between the West and the rest was essentialized in the dominant discourse during slave trade, colonialism and imperialism constitutive of modern West. Identification of India with caste and reduction of caste to its religious essence is a product of the colonial process of essentialization. Interrogating the [mis]identification of India with caste and the reductionist view of caste as essentially

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religious or ideal going back to the classical roots of mainstream sociology is a necessary step towards decolonizing sociology of caste. Decolonization here is not being used to draw distinction between Indians and non-Indians or between East and West. Decolonization I talk about is not related to cultural or national identities of scholars or scholarships. Rather, it is related to an alternative perspective. Sociology of caste has followed the classical sociological tradition which, as discussed above, originated in ideological opposition to Marxism in the 18th-century Europe. In extending that framework to the study of the caste system in India, it had two main objectives. One, it used the caste system to critique Marxist interpretation of society and history, the notion of class in particular, at home. It was simultaneously used to argue that India remained stuck at the stage of status opposed to contract, mechanical opposed to organic, lineage opposed to state, despotic opposed to democratic, irrational opposed to rational, static opposed to dynamic and savage opposed to civilized modern West. That was the dominant discourse of modern West in the age of colonialism–imperialism. Dumont extends that, in a reinvigorated form, at a time when colonialism–imperialism was in the decline, but the struggle between Marxism and mainstream sociology in the West (and the East) had acquired a new vitality in the background of the ideological divide of the Cold War. Theoretical–methodological framework used by mainstream sociology is a hindrance to produce a theory of caste. To develop a theory of caste, we need an alternative approach that enables us to see the intersection of economic, political and ideological in the origin of the caste system, its reproduction, continuity and change in historical perspective.

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2

Priest and Prince

Status–Power Muddle

Status and Class

The distinction between status and power, central to *Homo Hierarchicus*, is originally made by Max Weber in his seminal essay 'Class, Status, and Party' (Weber 1958a), hailed as 'perhaps the most influential single essay in the sociological literature...the embryo of…a multidimensional approach to social analysis'. Weber is regarded as primary alternative and antidote to Marx's strong emphasis on material factors in social economic formations. His main concern in this essay, it is claimed, is 'to avoid confusing different forms of power that served as the *bases* for different types of social formation' (Milner 1994: 7).

I begin with a critical review of Weber's conceptualization of class and status. I present Weber's main argument (using mostly his own words) followed by a critical appraisal. Weber's main concern in the aforementioned essay is the distribution of power in society. He identifies class (economic), status (cultural) and party (political) as three different phenomena of the distribution of power. He argues that economically conditioned power is not identical with 'power' as such. On the other hand, economic power may be the consequence of other sources of power. Furthermore, man does not strive for power only to enrich himself, but frequently so also for social honour. Now, not all power entails social honour. More importantly, in general, 'mere' economic power is by no means a recognized source of social honour. To the contrary, social honour may even be (and has been) the basis of economic and political power (Weber 1958a: 180).

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Class

To Weber, class belongs to 'economic order', concerned with the distribution of goods and services. Status, on the other hand, belongs to 'social order', concerned with the distribution of social honour. The social order and economic order are not identical, although the latter is conditioned by the former, and in turn reacts upon it. Class, according to Weber, refers to a group of people found in the same class situation based exclusively on common economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets. Property and lack of property are the basic categories of all class situations, and class situation is ultimately the market situation. Those who cannot have a chance of using goods or services for themselves on the market (e.g. slaves or serfs) are not classes, but status groups (Weber 1958: 181). Thus, for Weber, class is exclusively economic independent of political and cultural power. It is important to take note of this here for two reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, the common refrain of the mainstream sociology is that Marxism is economic reductionism. It is so since class is central to Marxist analysis of society and history, and class in Marxism is purely economic. To the contrary, the credit rightly belongs to Weber (not to Marx) to reduce class to exclusively economic. In Marx, class refers to social relations—social relations of production—in which economic, political and cultural (ideological) are inextricably intertwined. To reiterate the obvious, economically reductionist view of class is Weberian, not Marxist. I am not interested here in pursing Weber's misconceptualization of class any further and return to my main concern, status group, which is identified with caste.

Status

In contrast to classes, status groups are normally communities. As opposed to the purely economically determined class situation, status is determined by social honour. Social honour attached to a status group can be positive or negative (e.g. Brahman and Shudra, as examples of positive and the other as negative honour). Property as such is

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not always recognized as a status qualification, but in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity. However, status honour need not necessarily be linked with a 'class situation'. It is so since both propertied and property less can belong to the same status group. This equality of social esteem (without equality of property) may, however, in the long run become quite precarious (Weber 1958a: 186–187). To begin with, if property becomes a status qualification in the long run, does it mean that status, albeit social honour without property is a phenomenon only in the short run? Same about status equality between propertied and non-propertied: What happens in the long run when it becomes precarious? As discussed later, there is no satisfactory answer to these and other—more serious—questions arising from Weber's distinction between class and status.

Status as Style of Life

It is further clarified that the status group is not to be confused with the 'occupational status group'. The style of life, not the occupation, distinguishes the status group. The style may be associated with certain profession, but again, it is not the profession per se rather the style of life that is decisive, for example, military service as a knight is status, but military service as a mercenary is not. The difference between the two lies in their style of life (Weber 1958: 39, editors' footnote). What is missing here is that the difference in a knight's and mercenary's lifestyles was based on their differential access to economic–political power. A knight lived off his estate. As an estate holder, he had monopoly of economic–political power (and social esteem), which was not available to a mercenary. Weber provides two other examples of status group—blacks during slavery in the United States and nobility in medieval Europe. The lifestyle of blacks during slavery in America, like that of nobility in medieval Europe, was determined by their differential access to economic–political power. If we focus on style of life ignoring the basis of the style of life concerned, something important is lost. Style of life and social esteem (cultural), the quintessence of status, are intrinsically connected to economic and political power.

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Status Usurpation

Weber argues that usurpation (status groups setting themselves apart by adopting any characteristics or badges) is the normal origin of all status honour. Usurpation may begin in convention, but it must be converted into legal privilege which, we are told, happens only after it has become a 'lived in' reality by virtue of a stable distribution of economic power (Weber 1958: 188). It is not clear whether usurpation of status occurs only after the economic power has already been usurped, or prior to economic power having been usurped first. If usurpation of economic power leads to usurpation of status, doesn't that make the distinction between class and status rather problematic in the sense that cultural power is a result of economic power? If stabilization of economic power is a condition for transition of usurpation by convention to usurpation by law (as argued by Weber), what does that say about status without property, the basis of distinction between status and class, to begin with?

According to Weber, usurpation of status in the caste system is religious that sets it apart from other status groups where usurpation is legal. The distinction between usurpation as legal or religious is surely important. There are two problems in distinguishing usurpation in caste on this basis. First, the role of religion in usurpation in the caste system is exaggerated, ignoring usurpations that were purely secular. In the princely regimes of Rajasthan, the peasant women were not allowed to wear gold. Similarly, peasant men (or women) were not allowed to ride a horse or an elephant (even though they had obligation to provide for their maintenance). It was all a matter of status usurpation, which was enforced by coercion. These usurpations had nothing to do with religion per se. To reduce the symbolic boundaries of status in caste to religion is too narrow and skewed. Secondly, while it is important to recognize the difference in the form of usurpation, it is a mistake to ignore the basis of usurpation. The basis of status usurpation in caste is the same as in class. The examples of status usurpation in princely states cited above are comparable to similar instances in feudal societies in Africa, Asia and medieval Europe. If they appeared in a religious garb at one place, customary in another, and legal in yet another, it should not make one lose sight of their common basis in hierarchical system of economic–political–juridical rights. It is a mistake to turn

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things around and make the appearance as the basis of reality in the caste system in order to make it unique.

Status: A Feature of Non-market Societies

Very frequently every rational economic pursuit, especially entrepreneurial activity is looked upon as a disqualification of status, writes Weber. More significantly, status stratification is opposed to stratification by market. Market and its processes know no personal distinctions; only functional interests dominate it. If mere economic acquisition and naked economic power bearing the stigma of extra-status origin could bestow upon anyone the same honour as enjoyed by those who have earned it by virtue of style of life, the status order is threatened to its very core. Precisely because of the rigorous reaction against the claim of property per se, the 'parvenu' is never accepted, without reservations, by the privileged status group. However, succeeding generation of the 'parvenu' faces little resistance to acceptance by the status group. Having been educated in the conventions of their status group, they are easily assimilated provided that they have never besmirched status honour by their own economic labour (Weber 1958a: 192). What does that say about the relationship between one's position in economic–political order and status? What it means is that admission to the status group is premised on stabilization of a family's position in the existing economic–political order. Weber's argument about education in the convention of the status group as a condition of admission is well taken. It should not, however, detract us from the preeminent condition, that is, stabilization of the economic position, which makes training in the convention of status necessary and possible. Slave and serf could not be educated in the convention of the master and the lord. A landless labourer could not be educated in the convention of the Brahman whose status qualification was to abstain from physical labour to earn his subsistence.

The hindrance of the free development of the market, the argument goes on, occurs first for those goods which are monopolized, and withheld from free exchange, by status groups, for example, the inherited estate in Hellenic cities and in Rome during the epoch of status, such as estates of knights or the clientele of the merchant guilds in medieval Europe.

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The principle at work is that the market is restricted, and the power of naked property per se, which gives its stamp to 'class formation' is pushed into the background. Where stratification by status permeates (antiquity and the Middle Ages), one can never speak of a genuinely free market competition, as we understand it today (1958a: 192–193). If Weber is saying that status is a feature of non-market societies, it is well taken. If, however, he is saying that status is independent of property per se, that is problematic. Status in premarket (feudal) society was based on feudal form of property as opposed to bourgeois form of property characteristic of the market (capitalist) society. The basic principle of property and social honour at work in pre-market society is not fundamentally different from that of market society: the group having monopoly of economic and political power is also most honourable. Weber is able to disconnect class from honour in pre-market societies (naming it status) only by [mis]conceptualizing class exclusively as a market phenomenon. What is involved here is, however, more than a quarrel over a name. The problem is not how to name class. It is also not whether caste is class. It is about the determinants of social honour in a society, which is economically, politically and culturally differentiated. In a society thus differentiated, which includes antiquity and medievalism, beside capitalism, in the West and the caste system in India, social honour without economic–political power is fantasy.

Disconnecting Consumption from the Relations of Production

The distinction between class and status comes out sharply in Weber's concluding remarks. He writes: '…classes are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas status groups are stratified according to the principles of their *consumption* of goods as represented by special "styles of life"' (1958: 193). The problem here is that consumption and style of life of the status groups are inconceivable in isolation from production and acquisition of goods. Production, acquisition and consumption of goods are determined by the social relations of production, which bind the producers and consumers in unequal economic–political relations justified by dominant ideology. It is as true of class society as that of status society.

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There is inconsistency in Weber's attempt to separate status from economic power; they are separate at one point, connected at another and separate at yet another. As he writes, the differences between classes and status groups frequently overlap. It is precisely those status communities most strictly segregated in terms of status honour (e.g. the Indian castes) there is a high degree of indifference to pecuniary income. However, the Brahmans seek such income in many different ways, he admits (1958a: 193). The Brahman, barring an ascetic or renouncer, indifferent to pecuniary income is a mythical creature. In the Vedic times, the Brahmans took their share of cows, maidens, gold and garments acquired by warrior chiefs in return for praying. They were the first recipients of land grants once land became the private property of the king or the landlord for not only praying but also for expanding agricultural production (Sharma 2009). In addition, they monopolized or had a dominant position in education, a perennial source of pecuniary income. In accounting for the eminence of the Brahmans in Indian society and history, their spiritual eminence is disconnected from their privileged access to material resources. Social honour of the Brahman in the caste system was not without economic power.

The other examples of status group cited by Weber—estate holders in antiquity and medieval times—are of course distinguished by their consumption and special style of life. The question that is not raised is why it is that those who produce (slaves and serfs in the West and lower castes in India) do not consume, while those who do not participate in production (slave masters, lords and the upper castes) consume? The answer lies in the social relations of production. Weber disconnects social relations of production from consumption to make status independent of economic power. Slave masters in antiquity, lords in medieval times and the upper castes in India were classes. Their monopoly of the means of production allowed them to consume without participating in labour (counted by Weber as status privilege).

Finally, Weber writes, 'as to the general economic conditions making for the predominance of stratification by status, only very little can be said' (1958a: 193–194). We may be reminded that separation of cultural power from economic power is the very starting point of his distinction between status and class. What should then one make out if there is very little he has to say about the general economic conditions in stratification by status? Separating cultural power from

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economic power and disconnecting consumption from production and acquisition, the core of status–class distinction, is problematic—logically and historically.

Status Privileges and Status Disqualifications

Weber writes that for all practical purposes, stratification by status goes hand in hand with a monopolization of ideal and material goods or opportunities, in a manner we have come to know as typical. Status privileges may consist of the privilege of wearing special costumes, eating special dishes taboo to others and of carrying arms. Material monopolies provide the most effective motives for the exclusiveness of the status group. Although, in themselves, they are rarely sufficient, but almost always they come into play to some extent. Furthermore, certain goods become objects for monopolization by status groups. Typically, these include entailed estates and frequently also possessions of serfs or bondsmen and, finally, special trades. This monopolization occurs positively when the status group is exclusively entitled to own and manage them; and negatively when, in order to maintain its specific way of life, the status group must not own and manage them. The decisive role of a style of life in status honour means that status groups are the bearers of all conventions. All stylization of life either originates in status groups or is at least conserved by them, writes Weber (1958a: 191). In talking about those who own and manage and those who do not own and/or manage, isn't Weber is talking about slaves and slave masters in antiquity, landlords and serfs in medieval Europe, or landlords and peasants in princely states of India until the 1940s, who were products of production and property relations of their times? They were a class. One may call them by any name so long as it is remembered that positive and negative status honour associated with masters and landlords, slaves, serfs in the West, and upper castes and lower castes in India has its foundation in monopolization of economic and political power by the former. About stylization of life by status groups (with positive honour) (1958a: 191), no dispute with that, if we remember that before they become bearers of convention and stylization of life, they must have already become bearers of exclusive rights to economic–political power.

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Among privileged status groups there is status disqualification that operates against the performance of common physical labour, says Weber. Any activity, including artistic and literary, is considered degrading if it is exploited for income or connected with hard physical exertion. When in human history did physical labour become associated with negative social honour? Only when the means of production became the private property of a particular class, the class without property rights was compelled to engage in manual labour freeing the other class to devote itself to mental labour and the symbolic boundaries between the two types of labour with their roots in the material conditions of existence were drawn. Manual labour became the condition of status disqualification and mental labour of status qualification. As Richard Lee writes, 'For most of the long history of human society, however, there were no leisure class, few machines and no distinction between the mental and manual laborer. Everyone worked and everyone used both hands and mind' (Lee 1990: 250).

A digression: status disqualification is now setting in America against the old tradition of esteem for labour, writes Weber (1958a: 191). The tradition of esteem for labour in America noted by Weber is interesting. How well does that sit with the real history of degradation of labour in America—degradation that was extended to labourers, slaves—indentured servants including indentured whites, immigrants including the Irish, Jewish and Russians at the turn of the 20th century America (cf. Brodkin 1998)? What masters in antiquity, landlords in medieval Europe, dominant castes in India, and bourgeoisie in America have in common is their disdain of (manual) labour in the process of production—a disdain that is extended to the labourer, as rightly noted by Sharma (2009: 7) in the specific context of the caste system in India.

Status and Sex

There is an intimate connection between status and sex. Status with honour came with the privilege of greater access to sex. Tambiah writes that the classical theory enshrines timeless truths about certain basic features of the Indian caste system. One such timeless truth he mentions is the differential privilege and dominance coded in the traditional theory in terms of sexual access to women of different Varna status.

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Hypergamy (*anuloma*) and concubinage prevalent in different parts of India at different times were among the institutionalized forms of this privilege, he writes. Going back to ancient days, Manu prescribed that a Brahman may take three more wives, in addition to one from his own Varna (primary marriage), and three from the other three Varnas (secondary marriages); Kshatriya two more, Vaisya one more, and the Sudra only one (from his own) (Tambiah 1973: 197).

Weber writes that status honour is associated with a style of life that is expected of all those who wish to belong to the circle. There are restrictions on social intercourse (which is not subservient to economic or any other of business's functional purposes). Due to these restrictions, normal marriages are confined to within the status circle and may lead to complete endogamous closure, writes Weber (1958a).

What Tambiah and Weber write about marriage—endogamy, hyergamy–hypogamy and concubinage—is well taken, excepting that marriage among status groups was for the preservation of economic–political privilege, in addition to cultural distinction. I have briefly discussed that earlier (Chapter 2; see also Chapter 5). Marriage and concubinage were class affairs. How many slaves and serfs in ancient and medieval (and modern) West or Untouchables in India had concubines? Their real struggle was to protect their women from being taken as concubines by the status groups with 'positive honour' as Weber will characterize them.

Yes, the latter were especially concerned about the regulation of 'intimate expressive' relationships—often symbolized by sex and eating together, as observed by Milner. He argues that mating and eating are the ways humans are reproduced. In most cultures, eating together and mating are considered intimate activities. In both situations, something is shared. In sex, physical appendage of one body enters another body and provides satisfaction of a basic need. In most societies sexual relations and sharing a meal are signs of social intimacy. While many status groups are concerned about regulation of sexual relations in general, they are especially concerned with the regulation of marriage. They may, however, be excused for sowing 'wild oats' but they are likely to be excluded or degraded if they marry beneath their rank, writes Milner (1994: 39–40).

I have dealt with the first half of the reproduction story—eating—in the aforementioned caste system. The story of the other half of reproduction mentioned by Milner—mating (between men of the

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status group with positive honour and women of the status group with negative honour) without marrying—part of sexual privilege enjoyed, but not acknowledged (to borrow an expression from Ruth Frankenberg), is of particular sociological interest. Sociologists have written ad infinitum about marriage and mating ignoring, by and large, the other side of mating—mating outside the marriage—mediated by power relations in the caste system—upper caste men mating lower caste women notwithstanding untouchability, with no obligation to marry. As Rajshekhar (1983: 4) puts it, 'while our men are untouchables, our women can be enjoyed by the high caste men'. Milner calls it sowing 'wild oats' meaning individual deviance. To the contrary, it was not individual deviance, but norm. It was a systemic problem—a problem of power relations. It happened in medieval Europe, antebellum South, and in the caste system on a daily basis. The fact was that the status groups—upper castes in India, slave masters in antebellum South, aristocracy in medieval Europe—given their control over the means of subsistence of the lower castes, race and class—'usurped the privilege' (to borrow Weber's words) of access to the female bodies of the latter, while zealously guarding the sexuality of their own women, particularly against the access by men of the latter. In the theoretical framework of sociology, status disconnected from economic–political power treats this as a matter of individual aberration—'sowing wild seeds'. To the contrary, as a systemic issue, it was embodiment of asymmetrical power relations between the higher and the lower in the caste system (very much like the race and class in slavery and feudalism). Status privilege in caste with regard to sexual access of upper caste men to lower caste women in India, comparable to similar privileges in slavery and serfdom in the West, was a phenomenon of intersection of economic, political and cultural power.

Status: A Consequence or the Cause of Power?

In distinguishing status from class, Weber argued that economic power rather than being the cause of social honour (status), may in some cases be the consequence of social honour: 'Indeed, social honour, or prestige, may even be the *basis* of political or economic

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power, and very frequently has been' (Weber 1958a: 180). This argument is commonly used in mainstream sociology that it is not economic power (or a lack of it) that makes a particular caste higher or lower in status. To the contrary, it is their status (with positive or negative association with honour), which determines their access to economic (and political) power or a lack of it. It is thus argued that Marx on occasion overstated the effect of people's relationship to the means of production. In doing that, we are told, he did not give adequate attention to the reverse causal relationship, that is, the way social–cultural factors determine the available resources (Milner 1994: 7). Now, in order to determine whether social honour (ritual status) results from, or results in, economic power, one has to study caste hierarchy not as it exists at a particular point of time, but in times of change. Take, for instance, the case of the Rajputs and the Jats in Rajasthan until 1940s and after. Until end of the 1940s, the Jats (peasants) were dependent tenure holders in subordination to the Rajputs (landlords) and consequently lower in status. Following the abolition of the age-old land tenure system, the Jats became independent proprietors of lands under their occupation, which also enhanced their political power and social honour. It is the same with the *Ahirs* and *Kunabis* in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Historically, the most obvious case of economic power resulting in social honour is that of the *Kshatriyization* or *Rajputization* of the various groups of amorphous origin who after establishing dominion over a territory staked claim to the Kshatriya (Rajput) status and found pliable Brahmans or bards to legitimize their claim in return for material gain. Romila Thapar points out that the rise of families of relatively obscure origin to high social status, usually through the channel of land ownership and administrative office, is amply shown by historical records. Those who became powerful had genealogies fabricated for themselves, bestowing on the family Kshatriya status, linked with royal lineages (Thapar 2000:13; see also Weber 1958b: 65; Bandyopadhyay 2004: 51).

Hierarchy of economic–political power was the fundamental condition for the creation and reproduction of status hierarchy masked by purity and pollution. It also split society into those who had social honour and the rest who did not. As argued by Sharma (2009: 7), the members of the higher castes could claim a number of exploitative privileges only when manual work was separated from non-manual

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(religious, intellectual and administrative) work. The main condition for that to occur was to separate the labouring groups from the land, the chief source of production, which allowed the higher castes to perpetuate their power and position by socially-culturally distancing themselves from the former—artisans and agricultural labourers. Rituals of purity and pollution were devised to mask the division of property and political power turning a social–historical process into a divine creation. Historically, only after particular castes were dispossessed of the means of their subsistence that they were associated with negative social honour and a lower rank in caste hierarchy which became self-perpetuating with passage of time. Sociological studies confined, by and large, to studying caste, as it exists at a particular period rather than over a course of different periods turn the relationship between dispossession and lack of honour in the caste system upside down making the latter cause the former. Ironically, this is presented as a corrective to Marx's allegedly one-sided emphasis on property and social honour.

Caste as Status Group: Indian Exceptionalism

A status group can be open or closed. Caste is beyond doubt a closed status group, wrote Weber. Caste as a status group has a specific feature that makes it rather distinct from other types of status groups. Status distinctions in caste are guaranteed not only by conventions and laws, but also by rituals. This occurs in such a way that every physical contact between members of higher and lower castes results in ritualistic impurity (of the former)—a stigma that must be expiated by a religious act (Weber 1958a: 189; 1958b: 39–40). Here one finds in Weber the seeds of Dumont's sociology of caste—caste as status and status as religious. Before I proceed further, it is important to note that while Dumont borrows from Weber the basic idea of status as cultural power, distinct from economic and political power, there are significant differences between Weber and Dumont in their interpretation of caste as status group. Status in Weber is power—cultural power—different from (or opposed to) economic and political power. In Dumont, status is religious, distinct from power, albeit political power, unrelated to

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economic power. The distinction between status (priest/Brahman) and power (prince/Kshatriya) is at the core of *Homo Hierarchicus*.

Subordination of Power to Hierarchy: The Caste System

The distinction between status and power, and the subordination of power to status are the two distinguishing features of the caste system. Dumont writes: some eight centuries perhaps before Christ, Hindu tradition established an absolute distinction between power and hierarchical status. Indian culture, it is argued, is characterized by the probably unique phenomenon of a thoroughgoing distinction between hierarchy and power. As a result, hierarchy appears there in its pure form (Dumont 1980: 37). Milner (1994: 16, 28) echoes Dumont in saying that strange as it may seem, the culture of pre-modern India has been relatively successful over a long period of time in insulating status from economic–political power. Status and moral worth have been less directly dependent upon economic and political power than in most other complex societies. Hence, the question, is status more important in India than in most societies, asks Milner? It is back to Indian exceptionalism.

Dumont argues that there are two main conditions necessary for pure hierarchy to emerge. First, status and power (combined everywhere else) must be separated. Second, power must be 'absolutely inferior' to status. These two conditions are fulfilled not so much in the caste system, since the opposition of pure and impure (which constitutes the whole of hierarchy) being purely religious, tells nothing about the place of power in the society. But he discovers an explanation of power early on in the relationship between Brahman and Kshatriya in the Varna system, hence, the emphasis on the homology between the Varna and the caste. But then there is a contradiction. As Dumont is forced to admit, the king, man of royal caste, a meat eater, takes precedence over a vegetarian merchant or peasant, which contradicts the hierarchy in the caste system 'beyond accommodation'. That does not, however, contradict his theory. It is so since hierarchy in the caste system gives place to power without saying so, and closes its eyes, as it is obliged to do so 'at the pain of destroying itself' (1980: 74–77). Apart from the

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triviality of reducing caste inequality to a distinction between the meat eaters as opposed to the vegetable eaters (a problem we have referred to above), hierarchy here is vested with conscious agency of its own: it closes and opens its eyes, it makes accommodation and compromise, it feels pain and pleasure; it destroys and recreates itself.

Dumont argues that by keeping up to the level of power, one is prevented from understanding the essential (read unique) characteristic of the Indian system. This characteristic is the subordination of power (economic–political) to hierarchy (religious), which is intellectually absolute and practically limited (Dumont 1980: 76). In the first place, if the gap between the intellectual and the practical repeats itself again and again for millennia, how credible is the option to stick to the intellectual (theoretical) and ignore the practical (empirical–historical)—a point raised by several critics (see Srinivas 2006: 93–109)? This inconsistency is not accidental. It is intrinsic to the inherently flawed theoretical framework premised on the primacy of ideas. The very idea of separation between the extremes and the median zone is rather eccentric. The criss-cross between two levels of analysis (intellectual and practical) and two zones of hierarchy (extremes and median) is symptomatic of a seriously flawed theory and method. As discussed later, the problem with status–power distinction is far more serious.

Priest and Prince: *Purohit* ahead of Prince?

Dumont argues that the Kshatriya and the Brahman are united and separated. The Brahman does not fall under the jurisdiction of the *kshatra*; the Brahman, being the source, or rather the womb, from which the *kshatra* springs, is superior; the Brahman could exist without the *kshatra*, not conversely. For, while both the Brahman and the Kshatriya can offer the sacrifice, only the Brahman can operate it. The relationship between the spiritual principle and the principle of imperium is fully seen in the institution of the *purohit* (priest) with whom the king must have a 'permanent personal relationship'. *Purohit* literally means 'the one placed in front'. Gods do not eat the offerings of a king devoid of a *purohit*. The king depends on him for all the actions

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of his life, for these would not succeed without him. *Purohit* is to the king as thought is to will. Temporal authority is guaranteed through the personal relationship in which it gives pre-eminence over itself to spiritual authority incarnated in the *purohit* (Dumont 1980: 289–290)

First, there is a semantic or conceptual confusion. If the Brahman was the womb, where did the Brahman come from, excepting immaculate conception? If, on the other hand, the Brahman means the First Man (the Creator), then both the Brahman and the *kshatra* came out of the same womb. So the superiority of the Brahman on account of his betwixt character of being both the womb and the embryo at the same time is rather confusing. Second, could the Brahman exist without the *kshatra* if, as Dumont and Weber admit, he was materially dependent on the *kshatra* for his bread (Weber 1958b: 61)? Indeed, the survival of both the Brahman and the *kshatra* depended on those who laboured to feed them, but they are excluded from the sacrificial order, central to Dumont's and Weber's Brahmanocenric view of caste. Thirdly, to look at society of the later period from the lens of sacrificial rituals of the Rig Vedic age is turning history upside down. As discussed earlier, sacrificial rituals of the Vedic period were part of the then economic, political and cultural order. They disappeared with change in the economic–political system of the later periods. Treating Vedic rituals as the basis of social organization not only for the early Vedic period but also for the post-Vedic period over millennia is misconceived.

If one goes by historical and ethnographic evidence, there is scant support for the position of *purohit* ahead of prince as claimed by Dumont and Weber. The prince was not dependent on the *purohit* for 'all actions'. In economic, political, juridical and military matters—the main spheres of kingly duty (*rajdharma*)—there was no involvement of *purohit*. *Purohit's* activities were confined to rituals. Kingdom was not founded on rituals or for rituals. It was founded on land and its main function was the administration of the land and the people within its territory. In administering the land and people, the king was dependent on peers—the fraternity of landlords—who were members of his class and caste. In matters relating to land administration, the *purohit* was not in the front, not even in the back. The *purohit* was in the temple and the prince in the court. Yes, the temple and the court were united and separated. The court provided for the temple in return for the spiritual and ideological service it rendered—service that was necessary

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for the court and the king. But the court and the temple belonged to two separate spheres when it came to the main affairs—economic, political, juridical, military and social–cultural—of the state. To collapse the court into the temple in order to privilege the temple over the court and the priest over the prince is distortion of historical reality of kingship and kingdom. To encompass the court into the temple is logical outcome of the illogical theory in which the sacred encompasses the profane.

Duality of Priest–Prince Relationship

Dumont does recognize that the relationship between king and priest has a double aspect. Spiritually, absolutely, the priest is superior, but temporally or materially, he is 'subject and dependent'. The *purohit*, he admits, was dependent on king for livelihood and protection under law:

> he 'walks behind the king, among his suite. Ideological aspect of the relation between the king and the priest, he admits, is not unknown in the West on the level of values, but it takes on in India a particular form, largely because the spiritual element here is embodied in a person. (see Dumont 1980: 288–292)

One may ask whether the spiritual element in the West was embodied in the priest? If not, who then embodied the spiritual element, and what was the basis of priest's authority?

It is argued that what is unique in the caste system is that the king is first subordinated to the priest (since it is a requirement of hierarchy), he is then allowed to partake of the dignity of the latter resulting in an alliance between priest and prince against the rest: Kshatriya (prince) and Brahman (*purohit*) cannot prosper separately but only in close association (Manu ix, 322, cited in Dumont 1980: 288). The driving force behind alliance is the opposition of purity–impurity (a religious idea), which separates the Indian case from the rest. I disagree. Contrary to Dumont's assertion, alliance between prince and priest in the caste system was not basically different from alliance between king and priest in feudal societies in Africa, Asia and Europe. The driving force behind alliance was not religious, but secular. It was king's eminent ownership of land, political power and social honour supported

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by the priest in return for material gain and social recognition. The two together constituted the dominant class (and caste) in alliance against the rest. As Huberman writes about the Middle Ages in Europe, the Church and nobility were the ruling classes, who seized the land, and the power that went with it. The Church provided spiritual aid and the nobility military protection. In return for this they squeezed the labouring classes (Huberman 1963: 15). As in the case of the Church and nobility in Europe, the prince and the priest in India seized the land and the political power to squeeze the peasants and artisans in the caste system. To mask this fact with religious principle of purity and impurity enshrined in the *puran*s and the *smriti*s to the exclusion of historical–empirical evidence is mystification.

The gradation of status in caste hierarchy, we are told, is rooted in religion. The first rank goes, not to power, but to religion, simply because to those societies (the 'other' of the West) religion represents what Hegel has called the Universal, that is, absolute truth (Dumont 1980: 292–293). The gradation of societies in terms of primacy of religion is colonial anthropology in which primitive societies (savages) with religion as primary reality occupy the bottom, and modern, civilized and secular societies (modern West) the top. The colonial mission was to spread secularization and civilization among the darker (biologically, culturally and metaphorically) peoples to liberate them from the hold of religion. Understandably, colonial anthropology reduced India to caste and caste to its religious essence. Later sociologists looking for the explanation of caste in the *puran*s and *smriti*s contributed to the strengthening of the religious view of caste at the cost of the historical reality of caste.

It is argued that kingship in India was exceptional. In most of the societies, for example, ancient Egypt, Sumerian kingship, Chinese Empire in which kingship is found, it is a magico-religious as well as a political function. Because '…in India the king does not exert the religious function, he depends on the priest and puts him in front of him, and *then* [original] he loses his hierarchical preeminence in favor of the priest, retaining for himself power only'. This is the point, he argues, which most modern philologists have failed to grasp and they are not alone. Contemporary anthropologists have also mistakenly thought that the rank of the king depended more on his exercise of power than on his religious qualifications (Dumont 1980: 293). Was the king in medieval France or England a magician–priest? If not,

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was he subordinate to the priest? If separation of the secular and the religious powers made king in the West preeminent, why did the same very separation in India make king subordinate to priest, excepting that in India things must be opposite of the West—traditional or modern? The question is not that India is like the West or vice versa. Rather, why the same principle has one meaning for the West and another (opposite) for India?

Weber provides another reason for the superiority of priest over prince in India. The hereditary noble-priest of the ancient Greece (comparable to the Brahman priest-nobility in India)—representative of the 'stupidity of rural gentry'—he writes, was divested of all substantive influence due to the development of city. The Brahmans by contrast preserved their connection with magic and sacrifice albeit rural stupidity in the service of the princes (Weber 1958b: 139). As discussed later, there are serious problems with Weber's understanding of the relationship between priest and prince in India.

Priest and Prince: The Land Question

Dumont admits that the appropriation of the land in the widest sense of the term is important in the consideration of power and territory. Land is the most important possession and is also closely linked with power over men. This is generally so in complex traditional societies. He also notes that the question of rights over the land, whilst amply discussed in the 19th and 20th centuries (by colonial administrators), has scarcely been related to the caste system. Having admitted that, he hastens to add that to look for the 'ownership' [original] of the land in India is a false problem, since everything shows a complementarily between different rights over the same object, for example, those of the community and those of the king. A given piece of land was not exclusively related to one person. Each piece of land was the object of different rights relating to different functions, expressed in the right to a share of produce or some due from the cultivator. The king's share in particular, far from representing a kind of salary for the maintenance of order, expressed an overall right over all land. Just as the distribution of the grain on the threshing floor showed us a series of rights over the harvest, so the sometimes lengthy chain of intermediaries between

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the king and the farmer shows a superimposition of rights, which are not only interdependent but even susceptible of variation (Dumont 1980: 156–157).

Multiplicity of rights in the same piece of land is not uniquely Indian. It was a recognized feature of the feudal system of land tenure, as Huberman points out about medieval Europe:

> The lord of the manor, like the serf, did not *own* (italics original) the land, but was himself a tenant of another lord higher up in the scale. The serf, villain, or freeman 'held' (original) his land from the lord of the manor, who in turn 'held' the land from a count, who in turn 'held' the land from a duke, who in turn 'held' the land from the king. And sometimes it went even further, and one king 'held' the land from another king. (Huberman 1963: 10)

The existence of complementary rights, Dumont argues, is the expression of interdependence of the castes where rights of the king and that of the cultivator are only the main links in a chain, which was sometimes 'complex'. The caste system is strongly contrasted to what we call the land ownership. What takes place in this domain could almost have been deduced a priori from the general characteristics of the system. The caste system would not relate land, which in a complex traditional society is of the greatest importance and is intimately linked with political power, exclusively to an individual or a function but rather to the whole set of functions comprised in the system. The customary rights in practice will be fragmentary and mutually complementary. No doubt there will be an eminent right, but this will be a right subordinated to values and therefore subjected to its function (Dumont 1980: 157–158).

Feudal land rights were not 'exclusive'. This was as true of non-caste societies as that of caste society. That did not, however, obscure the hierarchy of land rights in feudal systems in which the king's rights were the highest, and everyone in the kingdom, including the priest, was his tenant, a dependent holder and subordinate. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of rights in land, there was no ambiguity whatsoever about the rights and obligations of the landlords and the tenants—the principal classes—of the kingdom. The basic principle of landholding in feudal system (applicable caste and non-caste societies alike) is summed up by Huberman as follows:

> The feudal system in the last resort rested upon an organization, which, in return for a protection…placed the working classes at the mercy of the

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> idle classes, and gave the land not to those who cultivated it, but to those who had been able to seize it. (Huberman 1963: 16)

Seizure of land in India was not negated by the caste system. To the contrary, it was the basis of hierarchy in caste system, very much like the way it was the basis of hierarchy in feudal regimes elsewhere. Indian exceptionalism due to the caste system—allegedly a product of religious ideas—is a myth.

It needs to be reiterated that land rights in the caste system (rights between landlords and peasants) were not complementary, but unequal and exploitative which were legitimized by religious and secular sanctions, supported by the priest and the temple, and enforced by extra-economic coercion. These rights were not determined a priori by the movement of ideas in the mind of the legislators. To the contrary, they entered the legislator's mind only after they were materialized on the ground outside. The notion of complementarity of land rights eschews exploitation and excludes extra-economic coercion, the daily reality of the land relations between landlords (the king being the highest landlord) and peasants in little kingdoms. This was as true of India (a caste society) as of England (a non-caste society). The *kathi* in Rajasthan, the lathi in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, and the medieval instruments of torture kept in the London Tower (England) for tourist attraction tell the story of extra-economic coercion, characteristic of the feudal relations of production cutting across caste and non-caste societies supported by the temple and the Church in return for material rewards, most importantly, land grants. In the fairy tale of the caste system eschewing exploitation and extra-economic coercion, land relations are presented as following the order created in the mind of the legislator oriented to the 'whole' which is sacred. To the contrary, the reality of caste hierarchy determined by hierarchical land relations was unambiguously profane.

We are told that the majority of the British administrators tackled the question of land relations in India more in terms of the philosophical concepts of the West rather than the concepts of English law which apparently obscures the peculiarity of the Indian case (Dumont 1980: 157). It is not the Western philosophical and legal concepts, but the Indian—the Hindu and the Islamic—philosophical and legal concepts of land rights that existed prior to the landing of the British and the French on the Indian soil which need to be understood for making sense of the land relations in the caste system. *Daybhaga* and *Mitakshara*

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are about the land rights. The story of the Ramayana is the story of primogeniture, a feature typical of the land rights in feudalism. The story of the Mahabhrata is the story of land rights and the struggle (war) over land rights sanctioned by no lesser authority than that of God incarnate, Lord Krishna himself! The horoscopes of the elder and younger sons of the kings and the estate holders—zamindars, *taluqdar*s, *jagirdar*s and *thikanedar*s—tell the complex story of land rights in India. The inscriptions of the early medieval times, the land records of the Mughal India, along with those of the princely states (the little kingdoms), before and during the British rule tell the tale of land and caste, independent of the Western philosophical concepts and the English law. While Dumont and Weber focused on the religious texts to find support for their theory of the caste system in which religion reigns supreme, they paid scant attention to land records.

Preoccupied with religion, the only land right where Dumont finds some degree of relative clarity is in the case of 'certain religious donations' (Dumont 1980: 157). The rest of the history of land and the caste system of over a thousand years is summed up in the 'complementarity' of the relations, with the pronouncement: '… the relation [of caste] to the land is less fundamental than has been supposed' (Dumont 1980: 157, 160). Had he seriously pursued the case of religious land grants and compared them to variety of secular grants, for example, *thikana* grants (in return for military service), maintenance grants to *chhutbhais* (younger brothers of landlords), genealogists (*Charan*s, *Bhat*s) or concubines, it would have been helpful in understanding the relationship between religious and secular in caste hierarchy mediated by land, but he did not.

Devaluation of land rights in caste hierarchy is further found in Dumont's argument that since the function of the Kshatriya is related to 'force' (power), it is easier to become king than Brahman. Kshatriya and Untouchable are the two levels on which it is easy to enter the caste society from outside, he argues (Dumont 1980: 74). In the first place, given the choice between being a king or a Brahman, who would have liked to be a Brahman is an open question. That apart, was becoming a king really just a matter of choice? No one in history has become a king by choice, without the foundation of kingship, which was an objective and not a subjective reality, and it involved, above all, suzerainty over a territory. How much easier was that compared to becoming a Brahman by adopting Brahmanical style of life—vegetarianism and avoidance

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of taking uncooked or cooked food from other castes, sprinkled with occasional terminal baths to remove temporary impurity contracted through contact with members of untouchable castes, often sexual in nature involving women of the latter?

The argument that one could enter caste from outside either as Kshatriya or as Untouchable is interesting and historically verifiable. The question that is important but not raised by Dumont is, whether it was just a matter of choice to enter caste from outside as Kshatriya or Untouchable? Obviously not. What were then the conditions of entry to these two points? Historically speaking, those who entered caste from outside as Kshatriyas comprised of those who were able to establish dominion over a territory through conquest, which brought with it economic, political, juridical power and social honour—the hallmark of status. Those who entered as Untouchables, on the other hand, were dispossessed of their own means of subsistence, and were, as a result, devoid of economic–political power and social honour. Here the similarity between the two entry points takes on a different meaning. To talk of the similarity and ignore the basic difference in necessary conditions of the two entry points is evading the most important question about status and power in caste—centrality of land rights.

It will be interesting in this context to study the system of tenure in lands granted to temples. Whatever information that I have on this subject from field research in erstwhile princely states of Rajasthan is that in administering the lands they received as grants from kings and landlords, the temples followed the kings and the landlords. Most importantly, the relations between temples (as landlords) and tenants on temple lands were the same as the relations between king and tenants on crown lands. The hierarchy of the durbar (royal court) was replicated in the durbar of the royal temple. After all, king was the God—owing to his eminent right in all lands of the kingdom. The priest preached day and night to perpetuate the image of the king as God in return for the lands granted to religious institutions he presided over. A comparative study of the relations between temples and tenants on temple lands with the relations between landlords and tenants on secular lands will be of great sociological interest. A comparative account of temple as landholder with the Church as landholder in medieval Europe will be very useful in countering the myth of Indian 'uniqueness' due to the caste system. On the Church as landholder

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in medieval Europe, the following citation from Huberman is very relevant to the issue under discussion:

> The Church was part and parcel of the feudal system. In some ways it was not so important as the king, but in other ways it was much more important. The Church was an organization which extended over the whole of the Christian world. It was more powerful, more extensive, more ancient and continuous than any Crown. This was a religious age, and the Church had tremendous spiritual power and prestige. But besides that, it had wealth in the only way it existed at that time—in land. The Church was the largest landowner in feudal times. Men who were worried about the kind of life they had led and wanted to get on the right side of God before they died, gave lands to the Church, people who felt that the Church was doing a good job in caring for the sick and the poor and wanted to help in that work, gave lands to the Church; some nobles and kings made it a practice, whenever they won a war and took over the conquered lands, to give part of those lands to the Church…the Church was the richest and most powerful landowner of the Middle Ages. (Huberman 1963: 14–15)

It has been argued that one of the prime concerns of the patrons of the sacred monuments—Buddhist, Jain or Hindu—was the acquisition of *punya* (religious merit) that would bring divine favour on matters of state, and more significantly, would ensure favourable conditions in future birth. This aspect of patronage of temples and other structures in the Indian subcontinent would seem to place patronage in a category distinguishing its basic issues from those of the Western world (Daheja 1988: 4). How credible is this claim in the light of what Huberman says above? We should reiterate that comparative (read contrastive) studies of the East (here India) and the West are characterized by twin distortions: religious character of Indian society is overstressed suppressing the secular aspect, while in the case of Western societies, secular aspect is overstressed suppressing the religious aspect.

In fact, the religious and the secular intermingled in the relationship between king and priest, court and temple. Daheja writes that as a political cultural statement the temple was a royal assertion of ruler's personal power. The great monuments brought added renown to the crown, a compliment to his military prowess and statesmanship. When emperor Rajraja consolidated the Chola Empire in the 11th century, he built the royal temple in the capital Tanjore, the largest yet ever in South India. He blessed the temple with lavish endowments of land and money. Four hundred dancing girls were brought to the temple to serve the Lord of Rajraja [the deity in the temple] (Daheja 1998: 4, 6).

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In projecting the prowess of the divine, the temple projected the power of the ruler, the divine on earth. The sacred and the secular were intermeshed. The royal temple (status) complemented the royal palace (power). Absolute distinction between status and power in the caste system is misleading.

Problem of Economics

While discussing the problem of status and power, Dumont rises the 'problem of economics'. There are three main points he makes in this connection. First, whether the very category of economics is applicable to traditional India? Second, we are told that it is possible to find something in the Indian tradition, which corresponds with the politico-economic domain, namely the domain of *artha* (economic), but economic and political were not separated since '…even in our [Western] society, it was only at the end of the eighteenth century that economics appeared as a distinct category, independent of politics'. In India, however, 'just as religion…encompasses politics, so politics encompasses economics within itself'. Finally,

> No doubt there is in India today a distinct sphere of activity which may properly be called economic, but it was the British government which made this possible. However, there are many authors who do not hesitate to speak of the economy in traditional India, without always saying how they define it. (Dumont 1980: 164–165)

To begin with, it is inconceivable to talk of a society without economy if we define economy (as it is defined in political economy) to refer to the process of production; human beings must engage in to produce their subsistence, the very condition of their survival. However, my concern here is to deal with 'economics' as it is understood and used by Dumont himself. Thus, we are told that economy discussed in the *Arthashastra*, king's right in land in particular, is like manorial right in the West, that is, 'combination of a right in land and a power over men' (Dumont 1980: 308). Was manorial right in Europe economic? If yes, could we then say that there was economy in India in the time of the *Arthashastra*, that is, more than a thousand years before the British discovered India? If king's land rights in India (going back to the time of the *Arthashastra*)

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were like the manorial (kingly) rights in Europe, what then is the basis of denying the very idea of 'economic' in pre-British India? Second, in pre-modern, (medieval) Europe, there was what Perry Anderson (1978) calls the 'organic unity' of economy and polity: monopoly of economic right (ownership and control of land) was combined with monopoly of political (and juridical) right vested in the ruling class—landlords (including the king, the highest landlord in the kingdom). Contrary to what Dumont says, economic power in India was not encompassed in political power. Rather, economic power was the basis of political power (represented by the landowning class). It was so in pre-capitalist (feudal) Europe. It was so in the caste system.

Finally, a question of terminology. *Arthashastra* literally means economics. If economic is encompassed by political in theory (and in reality, as argued by Dumont) why is political encompassed by economic in naming? What is involved here is more than a quarrel over a name, that is, the unity of economic and political power in pre-capitalist (feudal) social–economic formations, including India. Denial of this common historical reality is necessary in order to make India 'unique', essentially different from the West (due to the caste system), the main objective of *Homo Hierarchicus*.

To sum up, a 'theory' of caste premised on absolute distinction between status and power unrelated to land relations—the foundation of status and power—lacks credibility. Sociology of caste has been indifferent to land relations. In the process, caste has been ritualized, fantasized, made sacred and mystified. *Homo Hierarchicus* is the epitome of ritualization and mystification of the caste system. Its treatment of the relationship between caste and land—the most crucial aspect of the caste system—is its weakest point—its Achilles heel. The protagonists and the critics of *Homo Hierarchicus,* alike, have not adequately addressed this single most serious lacuna in Dumont's and Weber's studies of the caste system.

Dominant Caste and Brahman

We are told that 'the system does not take cognizance of force except when subjected to it; it is defenceless on this quarter, this is its Achilles heel' (Dumont 1980: 158). Unable to resolve the question of 'force' at

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the level of the little kingdom (which according to his own admission is the territorial unit of the operation of the real caste units) and the king, Dumont chooses the village, and the position of the dominant caste in the village, as a substitute. What is the justification for doing that? First, 'India appears to be a worm whose segments are villages'. Second, 'we cannot observe a kingdom, but we have in the village a reduced version of it: the principle of the royal function [in the dominant caste]'. Third, there is a 'homology between the function of dominance at village level and the royal function at the level of larger territory: the dominant caste reproduces the royal function at village level' (Dumont 1980: 159–162).

We may be reminded that in the first place, in moving from kingdom to village and from king to dominant caste, Dumont is violating the very basic principle of theory and method he champions throughout, that is, we cannot understand the whole by studying the parts. Kingdom and king are the whole, village and dominant caste parts. Why then study village and dominant caste in lieu of kingdom and king?

Secondly, it is rather curious why it was not possible for Dumont to observe a kingdom if we are reminded that until the end of the 1940s, there were over 500 kingdoms in India, occupying two-fifth of the territory consisting of over one-quarter of the population of the country. Indeed, they were observable, and being observed by the political scientists (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, 2002), historians (Sharma 1977) and sociologists (Singh 1998) in the 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s. Dumont chose to bypass them in favour of the village and the dominant caste.

There are other problems in replacing the king by the dominant caste. King was the eminent owner of all land in his territory that also gave him the highest political power and juridical authority. The dominant caste did not have any of these attributes. In a kingdom all but the king were king's tenants and subordinates. It was not the same in the case of the dominant caste, the village and the villagers. The dominant caste had no sovereignty. The village was not dominant caste's eminent domain. The dominant caste was not the highest court of appeal. The headman (a member of the dominant caste) had the right to collect taxes (Srinivas 2006: 102), but not to levy taxes, which was exclusively king's domain. The rites of succession and inheritance, the rituals of legitimation of kingship were symbolic and legal expressions of kingship as public domain. As noted by Srinivas, at the level of the dominant caste there

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was no legitimating ritual as coronation essential to kingship. Since there was no ritual of legitimation, it left the status of the dominant caste vis–à–vis the Brahman (priest) ambiguous (Srinivas 2006: 102).

Status–power muddle remains unresolved even if we accept substitution of village and dominant caste for kingdom and king as suggested by Dumont. It is so since not all dominant castes accept subordination to the Brahman. Such for instance, is the case of the Jat peasantry (cf. Srinivas 2006: 97). But he dismisses the Jat peasantry 'representing a deviant type with respect to India in general' (Dumont 1980: 163). It may be noted that the Jats and their equivalents (peasants or principal agriculturist castes) were widespread in the princely states of Rajasthan and Punjab (now Punjab and Haryana). If we include their equivalents outside the domain of princely states in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and the southern provinces, the rank of the 'deviant' type gets very substantial. The problem is indeed more serious. To exclude the class of peasants as 'deviant' in order to defend the Brahmanocentric theory of caste is indefensible. In the first place, to dismiss the evidence that contradicts the main assumption of one's theory as 'deviant' is problematic. Secondly, and more importantly, a theory of the caste system that dismisses the agricultural producers in a predominantly agricultural economy as a 'deviant' type is indeed a deviant type of sociological theory.

Status and Cultural Construction of Power

Nicholas Dirks confronts the question at the core of Dumont's thesis whether the priest (Brahman) or the prince (Kshatriya) had precedence in caste? Rejecting Dumont's argument that economic–political domain of life (the domain of prince) in India is encompassed by religion (the domain of priest), Dirks argues that caste was embedded in a political context of kingship. Hence, ideologically, it was not the religious principle of purity–impurity rather secular notion of royal authority and honour associated with power that was determinant of caste hierarchy. This view of caste, he claims, contradicts and provides an alternative to the dominant theory of caste proposed by Dumont (see Dirks 1987: 4, 7, 10, 55, 278; see also Dirks 2001: 4–7). We have reviewed Dirks' position on this question at greater length later in the

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book (Chapter 4). Suffice it to mention here is that while apparently contradicting Dumont's thesis in which priest takes precedence over prince due to dominance of religious principle, Dirks ends up endorsing the view of kingly power as essentially religious. The caste system, he argues, was ordered in relation to the king (Dirks 1987: 5–6, 259–61), which is well taken. The question is what was the basis of king's power (royal honour)? Dirks skirts this question. He does criticize Dumont for excluding territory and politics from organizing Indian society, caste in particular. In dealing with king's power, however, Dirks himself excludes the role of territory (for more on this see Singh 2007b).

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (who, like Dirks, treats power as cultural construction) writes that Brahmanic fiat in order to be effective had to backed by sufficient power. According to the Bengal Puranas (early medieval period), the role of the king, he argues, was to maintain the discipline of the Varna division of labour according to the advice of the learned Brahmans, patronized with generous land grants, and punish the violators of the normative order of Brahmanism. Having recognized the centrality of the king in the maintenance of the social order, the argument goes, the king had the coercive power (*danda*), which was instrumental in maintaining social order. And the source of coercive power of the king was supposed to be Vedic worship which could only be accessed through the mediation of the Brahman (Inden cited in Bandyopadhyay 2004: 50).

It must be stressed that the source of ultimate power of the king was not Vedic worship. Rather, the real source of king's power was eminent ownership of all lands in his territory. Maintenance of the Varna order was not maintenance of Brahmanical order but that of the economic–political order which was the foundation of the Varna order, in the first instance. The Brahmanocentric view of caste collapses economic–political order into Brahmanical order and makes the maintenance of the latter king's highest duty—his dharma. Bandyopadhayay's argument that Manu prescribes among king's duties protection of the Brahmans and the cows is well taken. What, however, enabled the king to meet these sacred obligations was his control over land and people (who laboured to feed the king, the Brahman and the cow). The problem of dealing with power (meaning political power in isolation from economic power) in caste is that it recognizes the power of the prince against the priest, but misplaces the source of kingly power in the realm of religion—sacrifice (Hocart, Inden) or worship (Dirks)

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or the norm of Brahmanism (Milner). It thus takes religion out from the front door and brings it in from the back door.

Caste and Feudalism in India

Weber relates the peculiarity of the caste system to the absence of feudalism in India. How does he establish that relationship? The Hindu social order, he argues, more than anywhere else in the world (another instance of Indian exceptionalism!) is organized in terms of the principle of clan charisma. The West was not free of charisma. Hereditary divine right of kings and the legend of blue blood are the examples of charisma in the West, he admits. However, in the West the charisma was routinized and institutionalized in the office of the prince, elector and cardinal. To the contrary, in India it was confined to the sib. The sib charisma prevented the development of feudalism in India (Weber 1959: 50–51).

In order to show how sib charisma prevented the development of feudalism in India, Weber discusses the 'peculiarities' of the development of feudal ties in Europe. Thinking of feudalism in the West primarily as a system of socio-economic and political ties leads one to overlook its 'peculiar' origins and their significance, he argues. According to him, feudal ties in Europe developed in response to the military need of the time: feudal relationships were made by a 'free contract' among sib strangers. Increasingly, feudal lords developed the 'in-group feeling of a unitary status group and eventually into the 'closed hereditary estates of chivalrous knights'. This relationship grew on the basis of sib estrangement among men who viewed themselves not as sib, phratry or tribe, but simply as 'status peers'. Indian development, to the contrary, took quite a different turn. There the feudal status formation did not rest on land grants. Rather, it was derived from the sib, clan, phratry and tribe as correctly emphasized by Baden–Powell. The conquering classes in India comprised of a circle of phratries and sibs of lords dispersing over the conquered territory under the rule of the tribe, writes Weber. Feudal prerogatives were enfeoffed by the head of the phratry (raja) or a tribal king (maharajah) only, as a rule, to his agnates. It was not a freely contracted trusteeship. Fellow sib members claimed their land grant as a birthright (Weber 1958: 53–54).

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Romila Thapar points out that Weber ignored the evidence showing that land grants in India were feudal rather than prebendal. The *dharmsastras* and *arthashastra*, she points out, discuss the laws and regulations for the sale, bequest and inheritance of land and other forms of property. Inscriptions on stone and copper plates after AD 500, recording the grant of land to religious beneficiaries by the king or wealthy persons, are even more precise. So are the secular grants made by the king in return for service. These inscriptions were deciphered in the 19th century, but read primarily for chronology and dynastic purposes. Land grants in India broke the clan charisma going back to the first millennium AD, she writes (Thapar 2000: 12, 41).

As noted by R. S. Sharma, early Christian centuries in India were a period of transition when land and other agrarian resources came to be privately controlled by a considerable class of beneficiaries—religious and secular which resulted in a division of society into two basic classes: (1) landlords having titles to land grants and (2) peasants, the basic producers. The landlords restricted the free access of the peasants to lands. This led to the emergence of the two principal classes—(1) landlord with monopoly of economic–political powers and (2) dependent peasantry having the right to possess lands in return for rent and tributes. This led to the development of feudalism in India. Feudalism developed unevenly in different regions. Rajasthan was highly sub-infeuded, while tribal, communal and familial agrarian relations continued to exist in many regions (Sharma 2009: 18–19).

There are other problems with Weber's position on feudalism in India. In the first place, he confines himself to considering the relations among landlords ignoring the relations between landlords and peasants, the two principal classes. The relations between landlords and peasants were the foundation of feudalism. Instead, consistent with his approach, he isolates a particular cultural feature (fealty) from its structural roots and turns it into the defining feature of feudalism. Dumont replicates Weber:

> If, following Max Weber, we take the contract of fealty as an essential element of the feudal system, its total absence here means that one must avoid using this word: we shall speak of benefice rather than fief, of relationship of subordination rather than vassalage. (Dumont 1980: fn 73b, 390)

Whether feudalism ever developed in India depends on an answer to the most important question, were the relations between lords

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and peasants in India feudal? As Sharma and Thapar point out above, feudal relations between landlords and peasants developed in many parts of India long before Baden Powel and Weber undertook their investigations. Secondly, even at the level of the ruling class (landlords) Weber's argument that sib and clan (with or without charisma) obstructed the development of feudal relations in India is not corroborated by historical evidence.

One may briefly refer in this context to the famous controversy between James Tod and Alfred Lyall roughly a century before Weber's work under review. Tod maintained that the relations between rulers and landlords in the princely states of Rajputana (now Rajasthan) were analogous to the relations between lords and vassals in medieval Europe (an argument that contradicts Weber's key argument). Lyall, to the contrary, argued that Tod failed to make a distinction between two forms of society, tribal and feudal, and mistakenly introduced into his writings on Rajputana such medieval terms as 'feuds', 'sub-infeudation', etc. Rather than comparing 'the Rajput tribal system' to that medieval Europe, it should appropriately be compared to the system of kindred tribes like Pathans and Afghans or a widely spread tribe of professional thieves, the Meenas of Rajputana (Lyall 1931: 170). As one can see, Lyall's argument is supportive of the argument subsequently made by Weber that the Indian princely states were tribal polities—not feudal states.

Very much like Weber, Lyall's argument was that lands held by the sub-chiefs of Rajputana must not be confused with the service grants—the fiefs—of medieval Europe. Lands held by the Rajput sub-chiefs were part of the clan occupation. The clannish origin of their tenures makes them tribal, rather than feudal. The sub-chiefs rather than being the dependent tenure holders of the ruler of the state were indeed their co-parceners—exactly the argument made by Weber subsequently.

Land Grants in India as Feudal

Contrary to the argument made by them, land rights of the chiefs (rulers) and the sub-chiefs (landlords holding land grants from rulers) of the Rajput states in Rajasthan were not equal. The evidence from

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the 1870s (precisely the time when Lyall was assigned to the princely states of Rajputana) onwards I have collected is unambiguous about the chief's superior rights in land. The landlords in princely states of Rajputana held their grants as service tenures, the most important being the military service. The subordinate status of the sub-chiefs was clearly demarcated not only by the inferior economic, political and juridical rights they held at the sufferance of the chief but also by the symbolic boundaries that set the chiefs and sub-chiefs apart, notwithstanding their common kinship and caste ties. Referring to the obligations of the land grantees (sub-chiefs) in Rajasthan, Tod wrote that they involved the duties of kindred in addition to those of obedience ranging from attending the court, guarding the fort to giving themselves as hostages for their lord (Tod 1920: 146). It contradicts Weber's claim that the position of landlords in India was dependent upon sib/clan charishma—not on a feudal hierarchy (Weber 1958b: 63). We pursue it later.

Sub-chiefs as Dependent Landholders

Feudal character of the relations between chiefs (rulers) and sub-chiefs (landlords holding military grants) was embedded in dependent status of the latter in personal, social–cultural, in addition to economic and political, aspects. Paraphrasing Engels (1974a) from a different context, a sub-chief was not allowed to move, marry or die without ruler's permission. In June 1927, a landlord in the state of Marwar went on a visit outside his territory after obtaining 15 days' leave from the ruler of the state, but failed to return for another three months. In addition, it was found that he was spending too much time in the zenana (secluded area inhabited by women of the landlord's household) on one pretext or the other, and was, as a result, not available whenever summoned by the ruler to accompany him to go on shikar (hunting). He was warned several times but had paid no heed. As a consequence of these series of transgressions, three villages of his estate were confiscated.

In 1920, another sub-chief of the same state made the following petition before the resident of the Western Rajputana States:

> I am a *thikanedar* (local term for landlords holding land grants in return for military service), and there are 15 villages under my jurisdiction. I have

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> been married with the daughter of a *thikanedar* of the neighboring state. My age at present is 42 years. Some 10 years ago, owing to the necessity absolutely felt for my comfort and happiness, I had to take a respectable concubine, as every *thikanedar* can do. Upon this my father-in-law who is an influential *thikanedar* in his state is bent upon ruining my estate and myself completely. First, I was subjected to all kinds of insult by my in-laws. Then, the Maharajah Regent of Marwar (the ruler of the state in which the landlord held his estate) kept me in confinement in his bungalow for two-and-a-half years. Lately, my wife and her father betrothed my son to the daughter to the *thikanedar* of another state against my will and without even obtaining the permission of Sri Durbar (the ruler of my state). All this is being done with the malicious purpose to coerce me to throw out the poor concubine…. (Jagir and Thikana Files, Nos 12, 17 (Management of Thikanas, General), Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner)

The aforementioned example can be multiplied (for more on this, see Sharma 1977, Singh 1998). 'If…the theory (of feudalism) is that no one save the king has land that does not belong to someone else…Everyone has some superior, some lord (and) in every case the tenant owes some service to the lord' (Maitland 1946: 24–25), and if a fief was a 'delegated grant of land, vested with judicial and political powers, in exchange for military service' (Anderson 1978: 140), then land grants in Rajasthan's princely states were feudal centuries before Max Weber wrote.

Public–Private Distinction

There were other features of land grants that made them feudal, important among them being primogeniture (briefly discussed earlier). The land grants in return for military service (*thikana*s) were not allowed to be partitioned among the descendants of the grant holder. They were instead governed by the rule of primogeniture, a feature of feudalism. Primogeniture in feudalism was a device to prevent parcellization of the estate to enable it to meet the public obligations attached to the land grants (Ganshof 1964: 45). More importantly, it was indicative of the precedence of class interests over those of kinship (Bloch 1961: 204). The justification of primogeniture in Hindu Law rested on a distinction between private property and a chiefship. In the case of the former, all the sons had equal share in family estates but this did

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not apply to chiefships. As a chiefship it was a public estate and the owner had to discharge the responsibilities of kingly office (Jagir and Thikana File No C/4/7, Vol I, General [Succession], RSAB). It was for this reason that a *thikana* (land grant in return for military service) was not allowed to die: '…[sub]chief, like his sovereign never dies… The great fiefs of Rajasthan never become extinct' (Tod 1920: 153). The distinction between private and public is absent in social formations based on the sib.

Basis of Unitary Status Group

The sub-chiefs in princely states did develop 'in group feeling of a unitary status group' based on their common interest in maintaining their economic, political and cultural interests. They related to one another as status peers and not as members of the sib, phratry or tribe. What is important to note is that the 'in-group feeling of a unitary status group among sub-chiefs in princely states in India had the same foundation as that among the feudal landlords in medieval Europe, that is, monopoly of economic–political–juridical power vested in land grants (estates) they held in return for military service. Consistent with his general approach, Weber attributes the basis of unitary status group to cultural factor (oath of fealty) in isolation from economic and political factors.

Fealty and Gratitude

It may be pointed out that the spirit of fealty (treated by Weber as a marker of distinction of fiefs in Europe) was not absent in Indian feudalism. The relations between the ruler of the state and the holders of military grants were characterized by a sense of reciprocity: fidelity by the latter was reciprocated by a sense of gratitude on the part of the former. As narrated by one of the erstwhile premier *thikanedar*s of Marwar during my fieldwork, the following couplet tells the story of landlord's fidelity to the ruler:

Karta lekar palari, tolo sabhi karam
Sau sukarat ek palari, eko hi swami dharma

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> (The creator [God] when evaluating the relative value of human virtues, put all other virtues on one side of the scale leaving only one for the other side, that is, fidelity to the lord).

Stories relating to the sacrifices made by landlords in order to protect the person, property and honour of their rulers (of whom they held their grants) in the princely states of Rajasthan are legion. Almost every single landlord household has the story of some supreme sacrifice someone somewhere in its long history has made for the sake of its lord. The *Bhat*s and *Charan*s (bardic castes) attached to the big landlord households kept the tales of heroic sacrifices—real or mythical—by their patrons alive which were passed on from one generation to another through the various processes and agencies of socialization. A bardic saying, 'You enjoy your *patta* (land grant) as you give in your lord's cause your body and the sword' (cited by Tod 1920: 45) is the tale of fealty.

Fidelity on the part of sub-chiefs was not one-way street. It was reciprocated by gratitude on the part of the chief. A narrative relating to reciprocity by the chief in return for fidelity of the sub-chief was provided by an erstwhile landlord (Umed Singh of Neemaj) during my fieldwork. It goes back to the reign of Maharaja Man Singh (1803–1843). Umed Singh's grandfather (a sub-chief of Maharaja Man Singh) had a beautiful horse. A Nath priest took a fancy for the horse and asked him to hand it over to him. The sub-chief was enraged at the audacity of the priest, and rather than handing over his favourite horse, he whipped the priest. Thus humiliated, the priest approached the Maharaja to ask him to punish the sub-chief. The Maharaja humbly pleaded helplessness:

> How can I go against the thakur (sub-chief), he exclaimed, 'his father was beside me in war, he fought for me; he died for me. I have cremated him with my own hands. The smell of his burning corpse is still fresh in my nostrils'.

To contextualize the moral of the story, Maharaja Man Singh was particularly indebted to the *Nath*s. The story goes that before he became the ruler of Marwar, Man Singh was besieged by the enemy troops inside a fort. He was about to surrender when a *Nath* priest prophesied that he was destined to become the king only if he could hold on. By some unexpected turn of events, the story goes, Man Singh was rescued. On his succession to the throne, Man Singh elevated the *Nath* priest to the status of *Raj Guru* (royal priest) and the *Nath*s were henceforth treated as the spiritual guardians of the state.

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The above narrative is the story of the tension between the religious and the secular in matters relating to the position of the prince and the priest, the Brahman and the Kshatriya, the religious and the secular in the caste system. The rulers and the landlords belonged to the same caste (Rajput/Kshatriya). The *Nath* priests were the Brahmans. They were valued not only for their spiritual and religious functions, but also for their role in political affairs. They were needed not only for worship and presiding over rituals in the temples, but also for prayers and prophesies relating to the secular affairs of the state—in war and peace. The priests thus combined the religious and the secular. They counselled the prince in political, in addition to religious matters, as rightly noted by Weber. At the same time, the chiefs (rulers) had to abide by the norms governing the relations between them and sub-chiefs (landlords)—peers, members of their own caste and class (the ruling class). In dealing with the priest and peers, the ruler could not violate his obligations to his peers to privilege the priest. The relationship between the religious and the secular (Brahman and Kshatriya) in the caste system was not as bland as it is made out in idealist (religious) narratives of caste in which religion is supreme and absolute.

Our basic disagreement with Weber and Dumont is on the wider implications of their argument in this context that Indian society organized by the caste system did not move beyond tribal stage, while society in the West, moved from tribalism to slavery to serfdom (feudalism) finally culminating in capitalism. To the contrary, as Kosambi wrote, the introduction of plough agriculture in various regions marked the transition from a clan based to a class—and caste-based society going back to the millennium BC. The Mauryan Empire controlling the Indian subcontinent, contemporary of the Hellenic Regime, was not a tribal polity and economy. As shown by Sharma and Thapar, the evolution of the state proper (premised on the disintegration of the sib and clan as the basis of socio-economic organization) took place in the Ganga Valley in the Mid-first Millennium BC (Sharma 2009: 34–37; Thapar 2000: 377–395). The most important change in transition from the clan to the state society was the dissolution of the communal property and its replacement by hierarchical rights in land (the main form of property in a dominantly agrarian economy that replaced tribal economy), with the ruler of the state having acquired the highest rights. Weber does recognize the difference between tribe and caste in terms of different modes of subsistence (based on different property rights), but in distinguishing

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the tribe from the caste he shifts the focus to rituals in isolation from the mode of subsistence and property rights (cf. Weber 1958b: 30–31).

Legitimation: Limited Role of the Priest

The role of the priest in legitimation of kingship in India is relevant to the question of status and power in the caste system. It may be said at the outset that the role of the priest in legitimation of kingship cannot be understood in isolation from land relations, the foundation of kingdom. Historical records show that families of relatively obscure origin rose to high social status by conquest of land. Having conquered the land, they had genealogies fabricated to raise them to the Kshatriya status, linked with royal lineages (Thapar 2000: 13). In this process, the Brahmans played a crucial role as legitimizers of royal status. It has been argued that legitimation by a recognized religion has always been decisive for an alliance between politically socially dominant classes and priesthood. It provided the barbarians with recognized rank—Kshatriyas—in the cultural world of Hinduism. By transforming the barbarians into castes it secured their superiority over the subject classes with an efficacy unsurpassed by any religion. The Brahmans (priests), motivated primarily by material interests, served as intermediaries in providing the necessary proof of genteel descent for the Hinduized ruling stratum (Weber 1958: 16). At the royal or kingly level, the ceremony of coronation is essential, and once that is performed no one can question the legitimacy of the king. Brahman priests have to perform the rituals and the king wants them to perform. There is no ambiguity about the status of the Brahman (priest) relative to the Kshatriya (prince) given that coronation is essential to the king and only the Brahman could and did perform that.

The role of the priest (Brahman) and the religious nature of coronation of the king and legitimation of the kingship are exaggerated suppressing the secular and contingent character of kingly power, most importantly, the role of peers—the fraternity of the landlords. A king could not rule without the consent of his peers on whom he was dependent for the military support to conquer and defend the kingdom in the first instance, and subsequently for their political support to administer it. In the Rajput princely states of Rajputana, the coronation

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ceremony was not complete in spite of the ritual performed by the priest until and unless the peerage (the fraternity of the *thikanedar*s) took the oath of allegiance. If a prince had problem with a priest to perform coronation, he could always find another priest to perform the priestly role at coronation. But no king could ever dispense with or replace the peerage—the fraternity of landlords (members of his class and caste)—on whom he was dependent for the military and political support. The legitimacy in coronation was not only, not even primarily, religious. It was eminently political. As a result, just as the king had a special role in the succession of a *thikanedar*, the *thikanedar*s had a special role in the coronation and legitimation of the king and kingship. The *thikanedar* of Bagari (in Marwar) had the privilege of putting, with the blood of his thumb, the tilak or tika (the red mark of sovereignty) on the forehead of the ruler at the time of coronation. The reason why the house of Bagari had that special honour, we were told, was in recognition of their service and loyalty to successive rulers of Marwar.

In Mewar, the privilege of putting the tilak with his blood on the forehead of the king at coronation belonged to the Bhil (a tribe) chief. The story goes that the founder of the ruling family of Mewar, Guhil, named after its founder Guha (literally cave), was born in a cave. While returning from pilgrimage, his mother found out that her husband was killed in war. As she was pregnant, she found shelter in a cave until the child, Guha, was born. She left the newly born child to the care of a Brahman before committing sati (self immolation), following the Rajput tradition. Guha grew up in a forested area populated by Bhils (a tribe) and became so popular among them that they 'elected' him as their 'king' when a Bhil chief cut his finger to use the blood to apply the tika on his forehead (mark of coronation) (Lindsey 1992: 28). When Guha became the ruler of Mewar, the Bhil chief was invited to apply the tika with the blood from his thumb at the coronation. Ever since, customarily, in Mewar, the Bhil Chief had the honour to apply the tika with the blood from his thumb on the forehead of the king on the occasion of coronation. Kingship was a bloody affair. The blood in kingship was profane.

Another version of the story is that the rulers of Mewar held the state in the name of Lord Shiva. The Bhils were Shiva's offspring who must approve of the successor to the throne. Applying the tika with the blood from the Bhil chief's thumb was a mark of approval. Historically, the Bhils of Mewar had very close links with the ruling

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lineage of Mewar. The story of Rana Pratap being sheltered by the Bhils during his rather prolonged exile after losing the battle to the Mughal emperor is one of the many tales of closeness between the Bhils and the Ranas of Mewar. There are similar stories about special relationship between the Meenas (a tribe) and the ruling lineage of Jaipur. The story we heard from the Meenas during the fieldwork was that they were the rulers before the Rajputs conquered them and laid the foundation of the state of Jaipur. In order to pacify the Meenas, the rulers of Jaipur agreed to give them the privilege of guarding the treasury of the state, in addition to their special role in various rituals including that of coronation. The story of coronation was deeply implicated in the multilayered contingencies of territorial conquest and resistance in the process of the foundation and the administration of a kingdom. Legitimation by the Brahman priest was not the whole, not necessarily the most important component, of the story.

It is important in this context to note that in the princely states of Rajasthan the Jain monks of the monastic lineage, in addition to the *Charan*s and the *Bhat*s, had a prominent role in royal affairs including coronation and legitimation. The Brahmans, Jain monks, *Charan*s and *Bhat*s competed in providing alternative narratives of major historical events relating to the kings and kingdoms (Sreenivasan 2007: 77). James Tod published his famous *Annals and Antiquities of Rajputana* with the help of Gyanchand, a Jain scholar, who presided over the body of learned *pandit*s and enjoyed royal patronage. Bards—*Charan*s and *Bhat*s—were the grand record keepers of Rajput rulers in Rajasthan. The compilation and recitation of *batan* was the domain of the *Charan*s, who maintained hereditary attachments to particular Rajput royal (and landlord) families whose histories and traditions they were responsible for preserving. In return, they (like the Brahman priests) enjoyed hereditary rights to customary gifts—including *sasan* (revenue-exempt) land grants. It is important to note that land grants to Brahman priests, like those to *Charan*s and *Bhat*s were called *sasan* denying the Brahmans special status in terms of land grants. *Sasan* as maintenance grants were inferior to grants in return for military service held exclusively by the Rajputs—a confirmation of higher status of Rajputs compared to that of Brahmans, *Charan*s and *Bhat*s. Genealogies kept by the Jain monks, *Charan*s and *Bhat*s asserting antiquity and purity of descent of the ruling families were useful in negotiating status with the Mughal emperors. They remained relevant

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for the Rajput rulers in the 19th century in bargaining over rank and entitlements with the East India Company. Tod recognized the works of the native bards, though confined, by and large, to the martial exploits of their heroes, as 'historical evidence'. Brads, he remarked, were 'the primitive historians of mankind'. The Rajput pasts were narrated in a range of genres—royal inscriptions, chronicle histories in prose (*kyat*), narratives about legendry or historical figures (*raso*), genealogies of ruling lineages (*vansavali*), and anecdotal traditions (*batan*) (see Sreenivasan 2007: 77, 80, 119, 129–132, 138–139). To privilege the singularity of Brahmanical religious narrative over the diversity of the historical narratives of kingship is too narrow.

As noted by Sreenivasan, Osval Jains controlled great wealth at centres like Udaipur, Jaipur and Bikaner. They patronized Jain scholars and monks, and aligned themselves closely with the rulers as ministers (Bhama Shah was the Chief Minister [*pradhan*] of Mewar during the reign of Rana Pratap), financiers, and even leaders of military expeditions. Jain monks exercised considerable influence as wizards, royal preceptors, and legitimizers of ruling lineages. What else is interesting is that Osval Jains modelled their culture on the pattern of their Rajput patrons. When Tarachand died, his four wives and one concubine committed sati in the manner of Rajput women of the ruling strata. Jain lineages built memorial stones (*juhar*) for warriors killed in battle. Members of Jain mercantile community claimed Rajput origins (Sreenivasan 2007: 77–79). In addition to the testimony to close affiliation between prominent Osvals (supplanting Brahmans) and the Rajput ruling lineages, as rightly claimed by Sreenivasan (earlier), Osvals emulating the culture (lifestyle) of the Rajputs was testimony to the highest status of the Rajputs—the ruling caste (and class)—in princely Rajasthan. The relationship between status and power in the Brahmanocentric theory of caste (Weber, Dumont and Milner) is at odds with the empirical–historical reality of caste.

Arbitration of Caste Ranks

Who arbitrated [the] rank contests, and who made decisions on matters related to rank among castes, asks Weber? In general, he says, the Brahmans 'to this day' are theoretically, the final authorities

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on questions of rank. However, the Brahmans alone did not have the authority to settle these matters. Generally, the king, advised by the Brahman, the official advisor on matters relating to rituals, settled these issues. Alternatively, the king advised by the Brahman, had authority to decide these matters: 'In short, religious and secular power cooperated in the interest of the legitimate order', he writes (Weber 1958b: 48).

The ruler in a Rajput princely state of Rajasthan had the right to grant a *thikana* (land grant in return for military service), in exceptional circumstances, to a non-Rajput. But that did not automatically raise the grantee's caste status. If the ruler, having made the grant of *thikana* to a non-Rajput, wanted the latter to be admitted to the community of the Rajputs, he did not have the authority to do that entirely on his own. In medieval Europe, the king as the bestower had the authority to exercise the extraordinary power of dispensing with customary rules: he was empowered to confer membership of the knightly order on someone who did not belong to that order (Bloch 1961: 322–323). In India, the prince did not have the power to dispense with customary (read caste) rules to confer the status of Rajput on a non-Rajput even after he had granted the latter the estate which he had right to do under special circumstances. Instead, he had to win the approval of the Rajput community, particularly the fraternity of peers—landlords holding estates in return for military service. That was, however, not an easy task.

During the fieldwork, we were told a story that is relevant to the present context. It happened during the reign of Maharaja Takhat Singh (of Marwar). The story goes that when Takhat Singh was adopted from another state (Idar) in Gujrat, he was accompanied by a loyal companion, a non-Rajput, belonging to a peasant caste. The Maharaja felt a particular gratitude to his non-Rajput companion when the latter helped him escape to safety from a fort where he was besieged by his enemies. Dressed as a peasant driving a bullock cart loaded with hay with the Maharaja hiding inside, he succeeded in getting out of the fort with his royal companion without being suspected. In recognition of his valuable service, the Maharaja granted his non-Rajput companion a *thikana* (special land grant in return for military service exclusive to the Rajputs). The next task was to get the non-Rajput *thikanedar* admitted to the community of the Rajput *thikanedar*s. There were two conditions essential to that—marriage and commensality. The Maharaja tried to meet the second condition

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rather surreptitiously when on a festive occasion where all Rajputs (irrespective of status) shared the same carpet, drank from each other's glass, and ate from each other's *thal* (plate), with no non-Rajput being allowed to touch the carpet, the glass or the *thal*. Seizing the opportunity, the Maharaja offered to serve the food to the brethren Rajputs as the rulers customarily did on occasions like that. After serving the food, the Maharaja joined the *thal* of a premier *thikanedar* of the state and invited the non-Rajput *thikanedar* to join the same *thal*. The *thikanedar,* stunned by the stunt of the Maharaja, invited the *nautch* girl (professional dancer) to join the *thal* with them. The Maharaja got the message and never again for the rest of his life did he ever try to mix the non-Rajput *thikanedar* with the Rajput *thikanedar*s.

It was much after the Maharaja and the original grantee were gone that a *thikanedar* of another premier *thikana* was able to persuade his peers to allow the descendants of the non-Rajput *thikanedar* to share meals with them. Behind this move, we were told, was the latent feat that some lower caste Rajput might feel tempted to marry his daughter to the non-Rajput *thikanedar* which will defile the blood of all Rajputs. The arbitration of rank in the case of the ruling caste (and class) was entirely and exclusively a matter between the ruler and the community of the Rajputs, the dominant caste. The *purohit* (Brahman) had no role whatsoever in that. Between the two purities—purity in religious sense (valorized by Dumont and Weber) and purity of blood (claimed by the Rajputs)—both socially constructed—the latter was the main consideration governing the rank at the level of the dominant caste. Weber's idea that Indian kings followed the unconditional and magically sanctioned principle in which prerogative of the priest breaks the common law (Weber 1958b: 48–49) was not the reality of kingship in which matters relating to the rank of the ruling caste were arbitrated by the prince and the peers, keeping the priest out.

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3

Varna to Caste

Religious and Economic–Political

Confusion between the Varna and the jati (caste) is a serious problem in the study of the caste system. Dumont insists on a basic continuity between the two, while Max Weber uses them synonymously. Going beyond the academic circles, identification of the Varna with the jati has become part of the popular consciousness. However, the homolgy between the Varna and the jati is not accepted by all among the sociologists (cf. Srinivas 2006: 93–109). By and large, the sociologists who subscribe to the scriptural view of caste tend to identify the Varna with the caste. Those supporting the field view, on the other hand, differentiate between the two, but are unable to trace the evolution of the Varna and the caste mainly due to the neglect of history in addition to their tendency to focus on rituals of caste in isolation from economic–political relations. I propose to critically examine the relationship between the Varna and the caste focusing mainly on the works of Louis Dumont and Max Weber. The inferences drawn are relevant to other sociological works sharing their framework.

Misconceived Continuity

The ancient Indian name for caste is Varna, 'colour', writes Max Weber (Weber 1958b: 30). Dumont argues that the basic principle of hierarchy is common to the Varna and the jati, hence, his stress on the homology between the two. His quest for the homology between the Varna and the jati is necessitated by a serious problem confronted

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in his conceptualization of hierarchy, the very essence of his theory of the caste system (discussed in Chapter 1). Hierarchy assumes subordination of power to status in the caste system (which makes the Kshatriya, the king, subordinate to the Brahman, the priest) but is unable to account for it in terms of the opposition of purity and impurity, the quintessence of hierarchy. The anomaly of hierarchy is that the Kshatriya, who is impure compared to the Vaishya, rules over all (including the Brahman, the purest). Dumont argues that resolution to this problem is found in the ancient scheme of the Varna division, hence, the homology.

He is aware that many scholars consider the Varna classification nothing but a survival without any relation to contemporary social reality of caste. Hocart, for instance, argues that the Varna bears no resemblance to reality. To identify the fourfold Varna division with actual caste divisions is a 'pure figment', he wrote. Similarly, Senart held that the Varnas represent an antiquated system with no relevance to the present reality of caste. As mentioned earlier, Dumont himself admits of the distinction of the Varna from the caste yet disagrees with others taking the same position and argues that there are good reasons for studying the Varna in ancient India and the relationship between Varna and caste in order to make sense of power in the caste system. The classical theory of the Varnas, which does not deal with caste in the strict sense of the term, is needed to explain the place of power in the society not adequately explained by the opposition of the religious categories of pure and impure, he argues. This argument, he claims, is consistent with his approach which looks at the caste system the way Hindus themselves see it. Hindus, he points out, frequently attribute castes to Varnas (Dumont 1980: 66, 363, fn 32b). If one really takes seriously Hindus' frequent reference to the Varna while talking about jati, one should not fail to notice that no single jati accepts its Varna status attributed to the lower castes even less to the lowest. While Dumont claims to being faithful to what Hindus frequently practice and believe in, he shortcuts them eclectically in his theoretical framing in which hierarchy is consensual. As Beteille (2006) points out, Dumont is particularly fond of imposing conceptual uniformity ignoring empirical–historical diversity.

Dumont argues that the transition from the Varna to the caste is quite comprehensible in view of the homology between the two systems, both of which are structural, and both of which culminate

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in the Brahman. The Varnas provide a model which is both universal throughout India, and very simple compared to the proliferation of castes and sub-castes. The Varna model can facilitate the comparison between different regions. This is so since castes vary from region to region and within the same region, while the Varnas (as constructed by him on the basis of evidence from selected religious texts) are universal for all of India and all time. He says that there is nothing unusual in his attempt to seek the basic principle of the caste (contextual) in the Varna (textual). Something of the kind, he says, is found in Marx: 'on the one hand there is the antithesis between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, as described in his political writings, while the picture of social classes which emerges in his historical works is more complicated' (Dumont 1980: 67, 72–73).

In the first place, it is factually incorrect that the fourfold Varna division existed all over India all time. As noted by Kosambi, no generalization about ancient India can cover the entire subcontinent since the conditions varied from region to region (Thapar 2000: 67). As further shown by R. S. Sharma, in Northern India in the post-Gupta period there were middle castes between the Brahmans and the Shudras, but not in Bengal and South India, accentuating social polarization between top and bottom. It was so since the absorption of foreign invaders and outlying tribes into Kshatriyas/Rajputs was confined to the North and did not extend to the South and the East. Considering that, one of the problems in the regions consisting of the Brahmans and the Shudras only will be to interpret the relative status of the Kshatriya (prince) and the Brahman (priest) central to Dumont's notion of hierarchy. One might be tempted to think that Dumont's insistence on the superiority of the Brahman, the priest, may have been partly because of his focus on South India, excepting that empirical–historical reality is of little significance to his theory. What is, however, more important is that diffusion of fourfold Varna system, which originated and developed in the central part of the Indo-gangetic plains, was not an all-India phenomenon. Two further developments in medieval times are noteworthy. One, the decline of the Vaishyas and two, the emergence of the Rajputs, originally a diverse group who successfully claimed the Kshatriya identity, with the compliance of the Brahmans in return for land grants and other material gains (Sharma 2009: 256–257). Pan Indian uniformity of the Varna, leave alone caste, across time and place is thus at odd

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with regional and temporal variations resulting from a wide variety of historical factors.

Dumont's allusion to class theory in Marxism to justify his attempt to establish homology between the Varna and the caste is disingenuous. The contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in Marxism does not apply one logic at the extremes and another in the middle of class division. There is no fragmentation between the ideology and the structural basis of class division. There is no contradiction between theoretical assumption and empirical–historical reality in class theory. Empirical–historical reality in the theory of class is not treated as of lower value compared to evidence from the holy texts. Theory of the Varna and caste in Dumont is transhistorical. Theory of class in Marx (Marxism) is historical. Marxist theory of class does not look for a surrogate for itself. Dumont uses the Varna as surrogate for the caste. His theory and method of the Varna and caste analysis are exact opposite of the Marxist theory and method of class analysis. His reference to the Marxist theory of class to justify his torturous route to find in the Varna a resolution to the contradiction in his theory of the caste system premised on the subordination of power to status—a logical and historical quandary—is out of place.

It has been argued that the classical texts described in terms of the Varna what must surely have been at that time a caste system in embryo (Dumont 1980: 71). One may accept the aforementioned as a proposition. The main question then is the condition required for the mutation of the embryo. As discussed later, this condition was the transition from pastoralism to settled agriculture as the dominant form of economy. It was also the transition from communal to the private property in land, the most important means of production and the most important source of subsistence for the majority of population in an agrarian economy. In the religious theory of caste, on the other hand, it is the development of a new idea: in transition from the Vedic to the Hindu period the sacrificial function of the Brahman is replaced with the idea of purity (ibid: 70). What were the conditions—material and ideal—that made the sacrificial ritual and the ideas associated with it redundant replacing it with the idea of purity? The religious theory is silent on this critical question. As noted by Romila Thapar, the seemingly egalitarian distribution of booty among clansmen after a raid, with more substantial share for the priest and the prince (raja) prevalent in the earlier period, was gradually replaced by wealth resulting from

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the induction of labour in agrarian production rather than raids that in turn changed the social relations in a fundamental way. By the time of the Upanishads (from eighth- to sixth-century BC), she says, there was a marked departure from the Vedic–Brahmanic tradition. The Vedic texts emphasized the centrality of the sacrificial ritual. On the other hand, in the Upanishads, representing a new ideology, there is an absence of rituals. The main reason behind that, she argues, was change in the production system, most importantly, introduction of the surplus production (Thapar 2000: 32, 809–831). The ritual of sacrifice practiced in the age of pastoralism was incompatible with settled agriculture, and it vanished over time. The problem we face here is intrinsic to the idealist approach. Given its ideological aversion to relate ideas to the material conditions of their time, the real context of the origin and change of ideas and replacement of an old idea with a new one remains mystified.

R. K. Mukherjee argues that the Varna classification was not the cornerstone of the emergence of the caste structure as illustrated by the evolution of castes in Bengal. The caste structure in North Bengal, he points out, began to develop during the Gupta period when various tribal groups were turned into castes termed as *asat-sudra* in the Varna classification. As the division of labour developed further, many other tribal groups were turned into separate castes (*antyaja*, *mlechha*, *yabana*) based on particular crafts they practised. The caste structure of Bengal was thus made up of imported Brahmans from West, hence, north India and of local people following various crafts who were all turned into sudras. There were no Vaishyas and Kshatriyas (as noted above). Yet the caste system with all its rigidity developed in Bengal on the basis of the *jatidharma* (caste religion). The evolution of manifold castes and the caste structure in the absence of two of the Varnas in the region, he argues, shows that the evolution of castes and caste system was not dependent on the representation of the fourfold Varna division. Most importantly, the driving force behind the evolution of the caste system was the penetration of agrarian economy in the region (Mukherjee 1974: 159–161).

What are the main features of the relationship between classical theory of the Varnas and the caste system as it can be directly observed, asks Dumont. His answer is that the classical authors only speak of the Varnas and even nowadays Hindus often speak of castes in the language of the Varnas. So the Varna and jati are not completely heterogeneous.

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Rather, certain features of the osmosis between the two are noticeable. In particular, the theory of caste resorts implicitly or obliquely to the Varnas in order to complete its treatment of power. In the theory of purity, a vegetarian merchant ought logically to have precedence over a king who eats meat. But this is not the case, since the theory of the Varnas, whilst it subordinates king to priest, power to status, unites them in opposition to the rest: 'This is a subtle and important point' (Dumont 1980: 73–75). Here the line between the 'subtle' and the absurd is blurred. The main reason why we must accept the idea of homology between the Varna and the jati is that there is no adequate explanation of why the Kshatriya, the meat eater (hence impure), is higher than the Vaishya who, like the Brahman, is vegetarian (hence purer)? As discussed later, what united the Brahman and the Kshatriya against the rest was their common class interest, notwithstanding their contradictory dietary rules. The problem I must emphasize is not simply that of the relationship between the Brahman (status) and the Kshatriya (power). Rather, it is the reductionist view of the caste system as a bundle of dietary rituals.

Varna as Divine: The Creationist View

There are other problems with the homology between the Varna and the caste. To begin with, is the fourfold Varna division Rig Vedic? The only reference to four Varnas is the origin of the Varnas from the four body parts of the First Man claimed to be found in the *Purusha Sukta* of the Rig Veda—the most persistent myth about the Varna (extended to the caste). In the first place, the very authenticity of this reference in the Rig Veda is far from established. Secondly, there is no elaboration of the fourfold Varna division in the Rig Veda other than the reference to the origin of the Varnas from the body parts of the First Man, as noted earlier. As Sharma (1990: 133) points out, early Vedic period was basically a kin-based society in which kin groups were engaged primarily in cattle rearing and secondarily, in agriculture and war. The economic, political and cultural conditions prevalent during this time did not allow the development of hierarchical Varna order, let alone caste. As further noted by Habib (2003: 104), it is vain to expect a social institution like caste to exist before society had reached

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the stage of surplus production. Rig Vedic society had not yet reached the stage of surplus production. As pointed out by Thapar, 'this would query the simplistic understanding of caste as Varna and applying the norms of the later *dharma-sastras* to earlier times…the relationship was more ambivalent than has been granted so far' (Thapar 2006: 34). Varna as status group, rudimentary forms of kingship, and even of the state begin to appear only in the period of the other three Veda (ibid: 3). It has been further pointed out that there was not even sedentary priestdom in early Vedic society when priests were attached not to temples, but to wandering families (Ratnagar 2006: 174). It may be mentioned that much later in the Gita (the age of the Mahabharata, post-Vedic), there is a reference to the four Varnas based on guna (innate traits) and karma (vocation): '*chatrvarnam maya srista gun karm vibhagashah*' roughly translated as 'I created the four Varnas according to guna and karma' says Krishna to Arjun. It is interesting to note that the Varna division in the Gita is described to be based not on religion but on vocation, according to innate traits.

The genesis of the Varna mentioned in the Rig Veda and the Gita is what I call the creationist view that must be rejected in favour of the evolutionary (historical) view. Varna was not created. It evolved. It was not a creation of the divine, rather a result of human agency under specific historical conditions. In the first place, the creationist view distracts our attention from investigating the conjuncture of economic–political and ideological conditions of the origin and evolution of the Varnas. The homology between the Varna and the caste from the early Vedic period onwards ignores the basic differences between the early Vedic and the later periods—the two belonging to two different political–economic and cultural systems. The principle of the division of labour in societies based on the private property in the means of production and the surplus extraction are basically different from those without these features. The Rig Vedic society belonged to the latter. Dumont collapses them together. Arguably, so does Weber. Mainstream sociology has not addressed this question. To the contrary, this question is critical to an understanding of the evolution of the Varnas and the castes as a historical process.

It has been noted that in earlier period there were only three Varnas. In fact, as Thapar (2000: 382) points out, initially there was only a twofold division consisting of the *Arya* and the *Dasavarnas* out of which develops the fourfold division by the later Vedic period.

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Max Weber writes of three Varnas as 'ancient castes'—priest, warrior and merchant (Weber 1958: 32). Similarly, Dumont writes that the earlier hymns refer to only three Varnas (triad)—Brahman, Kshatra, Vis—who differ in their sources of income: the Brahman by teaching, performing sacrifices and receiving gifts; the Kshatriyas by protecting all creatures; and the Vaishya by the land, commerce, grazing and usury. The fourfold Varna division appears in the later hymn of the Rig Veda. Absent in earlier texts, the Untouchable (*asprs'ya*) begins to appear not before by 500 BC when the Shudras had become in fact members of the religious society, and those excluded were now the fifth category. Then, he reverts back and asserts that the ancient conception of four Varnas has been preserved in its essentials: the order of increasing status comprises service, economic activity, political domination, priesthood. At the same time, he dismisses the argument that the fourfold division—an occupational classification scheme—evolved over time (a socio-historical process) and quotes Manu that these functions were 'allotted at the first creation' (1980: 68–71, 363, fn 32d). In the first place, the 'first creation' is theology—not sociology. Secondly and more importantly, there is inconsistency within his shifting positions: if the four Varnas are allotted at the first creation, how then to explain the existence of the three Varnas and movement from three to four Varnas and then the fifth Varna comprising of the Untouchable noted by him? This is not the only instance of inconsistency in his position. That is, however, not the main problem. As discussed later, the problem is more serious.

We begin with the question of the three Varnas in the earlier period. Not only that there were only three Varnas, but the three Varnas—'different sorts of twice-born'—were essentially homogenous. They are characterized as alike in virtue of a threefold common duty: study, sacrifice, gift (Dumont 1980: 68–69). If they are alike at one stage and then different at another stage, as they do, it calls for an explanation. It is not that no explanation is ever provided. It is not even recognized as a problem requiring of an explanation. That is problematic. We suggest that the three-Varna division refers to the pastoralist stage when the division of labour is limited to the priest (Brahman), the warrior (Kshatriya) and those looking after the cattle, the main form of wealth, in combination with other economic activities (the Vaishya). At this stage, there was no need for the fourth and the fifth Varnas that emerged under new conditions later on.

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The three Varna stage precedes the development of settled agriculture resulting in further division of labour comprising of a new category of agricultural labourers (Shudras). As argued by R. S. Sharma, the expansion of the Varnas (rise of social classes and emergence of the state) is chiefly dealt with in the Puranas (post-Vedic era) coinciding with the dissolution of the tribal (egalitarian) mode of subsistence as a result of the development of the 'art of cultivation'. The rulers no longer dependent on uncertain and irregular tributes due to regular payments from agriculturists and artisans were now able to support a large number of priests to develop rituals for the king, court and the state. Only when the means of subsistence had been acquired, people were divided into four Varnas*:* Brahmans for praying*;* Kshatriyas for fighting; Vaishyas for producing; Shudras for manual tasks, he writes (Sharma 1968: 53, 272). The dissolution of the tribal mode of subsistence and its replacement by dominantly agrarian economy and a new form of social organization and the division of labour following the introduction of plough is also noted by Kosambi (Thapar 2000: 59). The idealist view in which the Varna and the jati are products of movement of ideas is ill-equipped to explain the evolution from the two to three, four and the five Varnas. This problem gets even more serious when it comes to explaining the transition from the Varna to the jati. The homology between the Varna and the jati based on religious ideas is too simplistic.

Differentiation of the Vaishya: Separation of Commerce and Cultivation

In the Varna–caste conundrum, much attention has been paid to the relationship between the first two Varnas, the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas, in an attempt to prove the superiority of the religious over the secular domain in Indian society and history. In the process, the problem of the third category, the Vaishyas, has been overlooked, particularly the differentiation of the Vaishyas, separating those engaged in commerce from the others engaged in cultivation and cattle rearing. In the earlier stage, the Vaishyas were inclusive of cultivators and cattle grazers, in addition to traders (Dumont 1980: 67). The Vaishyas of the later period are not cultivators and cattle raisers. Instead, they take to trade and commerce leaving the function

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of cultivation and cattle raising to the broad category of the peasant or agriculturist castes. The two are separated economically, politically and ritually. They have two different sources of income, and there is no social intercourse—commensality, intermarriage—between the two. They have evolved into distinct enclosed groups—separated from each other economically, politically and culturally (each being further divided into innumerable subgroups or sub-castes). That raises two important questions. One, how to explain this differentiation? Secondly, how to determine the Varna position of the peasant castes engaged in cultivation and cattle raising, since the Vaishya category of the Varna system has been appropriated exclusively by the traders and merchants-moneylenders of the later period excluding the peasant castes once and for all. It is further interesting to note in this context that the peasant castes in turn seldom identify themselves with the Vaishyas, or with the Brahmans or the Shudras for that matter. Their location in the fourfold Varna scheme remains anomalous to date.

One may still insist on the continuity of the Varnas tracing it to ancient Vedic period if one so wishes, but that does not provide an explanation for the decomposition of the earlier Vaishya category splitting into two separate enclosed groups. Taking a historical view, it is possible to argue that with further development of economy, the Vaishya category split. As Sharma points out, according to the Dharmasutras the Vaishyas (agriculturists and secondarily as traders) as taxpayers were the main source of the surplus to maintain the two upper Varnas (Sharma 1990: 102). The surplus left over after paying the taxes was invested in exchange and trade which multiplied with increase in commerce. The section engaged in investment and trade gradually separated itself from other Vaishyas still engaged primarily in cultivation and cattle rearing. The functional separation in economic sphere led to adoption of separate rituals and rules of social intercourse completing the enclosure of the Vaishyas as traders separate from cultivators. Interestingly, Max Weber recognizes the process of fission in the Varna (or caste—he uses them interchangeably) categories driven by economic change eventually evolving into an enclosed group (see Weber 1958: 103).

What happens to the peasant castes following the fission in the Vaishya category, on the other hand, is an interesting historical question. It seems that their position has varied from Shudras to non-Shudras from time to time and from one region to another. As noted by Irfan Habib, the status of many of the prominent peasant castes

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has varied from Candalas (in eighth century Sind) to Vaishya by the 17th century (they had become peasants by this time) finally aspiring to the position of the zamindars and Rajput status (Habib 2003: 175). It may be useful to note that the position of the Shudras itself has not been static in all places and at all times. Shudras in different times and places have comprised of both the possessors of their own means of production—land, cattle, tools—and those dispossessed of any means, excepting their labour. Shudras in ancient (post-Vedic) India could be warriors and could use weapons. In the Mahabharata, there are descriptions of armed soldiers belonging to the Shudra Varna, along with those of the other Varnas. In the later Vedic period, the Shudras had share in political power. At the same time, there is evidence showing the emerging tendency to exclude them from participation in public life, which they seem to have lost by the period of *dharmasutra*s. Similarly, in the later Vedic period, they were not subjected to especially harsh punishment highly disproportionate to other three Varnas as, for instance, one finds in the *Manusmriti*. There is also a reference in the *yajus* collections which states that the Vaishyas and Shudras were created together, which interestingly enough contradicts the commonly held view of the *Purusha Sukta* of the Rig Veda where the Vaishyas by origin belong to a higher order (Sharma 1990: 62–68).

Reverting back to the Varna identity of the peasant castes, they stand outside the Varna system since, as mentioned above, they do not appropriately belong to any of the four Varnas. On the other hand, as direct agricultural producers (dependent or independent peasant proprietors) their economic, political and cultural significance in a dominantly agricultural economy (the foundation of Indian society and the caste system for millennia) cannot be overemphasized. Need not add that in postcolonial India, their economic–political standing as well as their cultural ranking has gone up, with their position as the dominant caste in many regions. The differentiation of the Vaishya—separating traders–merchants–moneylenders (subsequent manufacturers) from cultivators and cattle herders turning them into enclosed groups—raises several questions. In the first place, it refutes the static view of the fourfold Varna division frozen in time from the early Vedic period to the present. Secondly, and more importantly, the decomposition of the original Vaishya category and variations in the position of the peasant castes cannot be explained within the sociological framework which studies caste in isolation from the process of production and ignores history. The driving force behind

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differentiation of the Vaishya and variations in the position of the cultivators–cattle raisers was not the movement of ideas—religious or secular. Rather, it was driven by a change in production forces, social relations of production and corresponding change in the political and cultural realms. As discussed later, it is no surprise that Dumont dismisses the position of the peasant castes as anomaly.

Varna to Jati

It has rightly been argued that the concept of Varna was retained as a label for a system interlocking various types of stratification that evolved in the process of changing production system, property relations and the division of labour. Its usage was more theoretical than a description of concrete ethnic or class groups (Thapar 2000: 383). As Sharma (2009: 257) points out, by the early medieval times there was the implosion of the fourfold Varnas into the manifold jatis, which were, however, still labelled as Varnas as shown by a copper plate of the 10th century describing a village in Bengal consisting of 36 Varnas. The main question here is what caused this implosion? The main factor behind the implosion was the development of new areas of specialization and the division of labour as a result of developments in political economy. What we can infer from the above is that in order to understand the evolution of the Varna categories from two to three to four (to five) and the transition from the Varna to the jati we must relate the Varna and the jati to the changing economic–political conditions in historical perspective. To narrate the story of the Varna and the caste, we need more historical studies to fill in the gap left by overreliance on religious texts. Lacking in historical specificity, the narratives of the Varna and the caste based on religious texts tend to generalize the specific features of a particular time and place for all times and places.

Untouchability: Ideal and Material

In addition to the four categories discussed earlier, Dumont talks of a fifth category, Untouchables, in ancient India. It is important to discuss this category, because as discussed above, hierarchy, the very essence of the caste system, according to him is premised on the opposition

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of the Untouchable (the impure) and the Brahman (the pure). To begin with, while he insists on the presence of this category in ancient period, he finds no mention of Untouchables in the classical texts and says that these texts were to 'mask the…the factual accretion of a fifth category' (Dumont 1980: 68). One wonders why? More importantly, the main question is how to account for this category? Dumont says that this category emerged only after the Shudras were absorbed into the fold of Hinduism (Dumont 1980: 74). That does not, however, answer the question, why the fifth Varna? R. S. Sharma points out that the *dharmasutra*s attribute untouchability to intermixture of castes. Others have argued that those who accepted and supported Buddhism were isolated and labelled as Untouchables following the decline of Buddhism. Sharma disagrees with both and argues that untouchability appeared in the Pre-Mauryan era before Buddhism (Sharma 1990: 144). His explanation is that the groups treated as Untouchables were materially and technologically backward (tribes). It was the emergence of contempt for manual labour in the post-Vedic times (as it was in the contemporary Greek society) that accounts for untouchability attached to groups who deprived of any other means of subsistence engaged in manual labour in order to survive. The upper Varnas who had withdrawn from labour extended their contempt for manual labour to the manual labourers, he writes. Another factor to cause untouchability was the impurity of certain occupations assigned to particular castes. So he attributes untouchability, the 'unique' phenomenon, to low material culture (dispossession), contempt of manual labour, and primitive ideas of taboo and impurity associated with certain objects (Sharma 1990: 146).

One must admit though that the above conditions were not 'unique' to India. Why then, the unique phenomenon of untouchability? It is particularly intriguing if one compares caste inequality to serfdom and slavery which were in some respects more extreme, particularly the latter. Yet there was no untouchability. In that sense, untouchability is caste system's—and India's—unique cultural contribution. Having said that, one may agree with Sharma that 'it would be superficial to suggest that mere ideas of ceremonial purity and cleanliness led to the exclusion of the Shudras from the table of the higher Varnas'. To the contrary, following Sharma it can be argued that the idea of untouchability developed as symbolic expression of the material conditions of subsistence only after a section of society, dispossessed

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of the means of its subsistence, was forever condemned to the position of a hereditary working class. The contempt for physical labour of the lower orders degenerated into untouchability (Sharma 1990: 153).

There is another reason for untouchability noted by R. S. Sharma. The *dusadh*s in Bihar are agricultural labourers and Untouchables. How did they become Untouchable? It was because they seem to have resisted the rulers in the early days of conquest of their area. The term *dusadh* is derived from the term *duhsadhya*, meaning difficult to control. It may be that *dusadh*s descended from those who resisted the rule of outside conquerors and defied the norms of the *dharmasastra*s—the ideology of the dominant class. Ironically, once subdued and dispossessed, they were also assigned the task of controlling the members of their own caste against possible rebellion (Sharma 2009: 289). Particular significance of this lies in highlighting the fact of resistance in caste formation. The dominant classes invariably abhor resistance, an abhorrence that is passed on to the resisters. Naming resisters as barbarians or savages was a commonplace during European colonial–imperial expansion. In India those who resisted the expansion of settled agriculture and the Brahmanic culture that accompanied it in the earlier stage of colonization of new lands were understandably labelled as Untouchables. Dispossessing them of their means of subsistence in the process of colonization made them particularly vulnerable to be assigned to lowly forms of labour further demeaning their status. The relationship between dispossession and untouchability in the caste system is a moot question.

Is it mere coincidence if one may ask that Untouchables of the caste system are universally dispossessed, while the possessors everywhere, freed of labour, particularly manual, unclean (polluting) labour, escape untouchability? Is there an equation between dispossession and untouchability? If so, can untouchability be understood as purely ideal? Dumont's answer is yes. He attributes it to their overwhelming religious inferiority which in effect expresses and encompasses strict secular dependence upon the dominant castes. Hence, the lowliest suffer the greatest subjection. The hierarchical solidarity between the two highest Varnas is here reflected in the fact that those who are more oppressed materially are at the same time supremely impure (Dumont 1980: 173; see Srinivas 2006: 106–107). To reduce untouchability to ideas, particularly religious ideas alone, is to mask the material conditions that produce untouchability in the first place and continue to

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reproduce it unless there is a fundamental change in those conditions. The hierarchical solidarity between the two highest Varnas is based not on the commonality of purity but on their common material interests masked by the dominant ideology, for example, purity. If the change of name, conversion to another religion or the constitutional provision has not done away with untouchability, it is because these measures notwithstanding their symbolic significance (which is not to be undervalued) leave the material conditions of untouchability untouched. On the other hand, untouchability among indentured Indians and their descendants vanished while religious consciousness was strengthened and remains strong to date, mainly because the material conditions of untouchability could not be replicated by religious consciousness in their new settings. Religious consciousness is a poor explanation and even poorer measure of resolution of untouchability.

Puran over *Itihas*

Romila Thapar distinguishes between two traditions of narrating the past, *itihas* (history) and *puran* (epic). One is specific, the other general. One is open to verification, the other not. One is historical, the other transhistorical. Weber, Dumont and their followers in the mainstream sociology have followed the latter in preference to the former. The result is a static view of the Varna and the caste system. Historically speaking, the Varna and caste have been anything but static. Whether it is the rank of the Brahman in relation to of the Kshtatriya or the position of the Vaishya or the Shudra, it has not been immune to change. In the beginning, social organization was communal and Varna ranks were open, not determined by birth. There was no prevalence of endogamy. It was the same with regard to participation in religious rituals including yajnas (sacrifices) which were communal. The Rig Veda refers, with respect, to the *dasi-putra* (son of female slave) Brahmans. As the time passed, economy developed, political power began to concentrate along economic power, communal character of society weakened, Varna distinction began to appear with growing social distance between the Shudra and other three Varnas. By the close of the Vedic period, the communal

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society disintegrated and was replaced by rank order—the hierarchical order of the Varnas. It was not yet a caste society (Sharma 1990: 88; Thapar 2000: 34). To the contrary, in the Puranic view, the fourfold Varna division is born of the Creator's (First Man's) womb or the Brahman's mind as far back as the Rig Vedic period and mutates into manifold jatis driven by the movement of ideas in legislators' (Brahmans) minds and continues unaltered in its religious essence for millennia. Puranic view is static; historical view is dynamic. One is sacred and the other profane.

To conclude, it must be emphasized that the Varna was not divine or natural but social–historical. It evolved at a particular stage in the process of production. The homology between the Varna and the jati premised on a continuity of the basic principle of hierarchy rooted in ideology from the early Vedic period onwards is misleading. Finally, the Varna (like the jati later on) was not static, but dynamic and the driving force behind dynamism was not religious, but economic and political. The Varna was not sacred but profane. The clue to transition from the Varna to the jati lies not in scriptures but in history. Critical examination of the narratives of the Varna and the jati in Puranic texts in the light of historical evidence will go a long way to demystify the Varna–caste conundrum.

Defining Caste

What Caste Is Not, According to Dumont?

We begin with a brief review of what, according to Dumont, caste is not and why? He divides the various views of caste into two categories: studies advanced before and after 1945. De Nobili, an Italian missionary, viewed caste only as an extreme form of distinctions of rank and estate well known in the west and is therefore essentially a social, not a religious, matter. Max Muller viewed caste as essentially a particular form of distinction relating to birth, social situation and education—known in all societies. The contrast with Europe consists in religious justification, added to the social rules for the greater profit of the Brahmans. He also noted that contrary to what Hindus often imagine, caste has no place in the Veda (Dumont 1980: 25). We are

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not sure whether all Hindus imagine caste as Vedic? Possibly, some lawmakers in the past (belonging to particular caste or castes) imagined it and sociologists (and orientalists) borrowed it from there, translated it uncritically into sociological terms to present it as general perception of caste. The basic idea of Max Muller's view of caste is found again in Max Weber who saw caste as a status group comparable to the three estates of the *Ancient Regime* in France. Interestingly, Dumont, who borrows from Weber every single important element in his theory of caste, including the notion of caste as essentially religious, is unhappy for latter's treatment of caste as status group comparable to similar groups outside India including the West. Weber, along with others, who find caste comparable to anything in the West, stands accused of suffering from Western socio-centrism that has prevented them from seeing the uniqueness of caste making it an ideal case of contrast (misnamed as comparison) to the West. This point is important to note in order to dispel the idea that Dumont is contrasting traditional India only to modern West. Were it so, he will not be so fiercely opposed to Weber's comparison of caste to estate in pre-modern West. This opposition is particularly significant considering that it is Weber's notion of status that is central to Dumont's distinction between status and power, the core of his theory of the caste system. We will discuss more about it later.

Kroeber's idea that caste is 'limiting case' of social class is criticized by Dumont for the reason that social class tends to be defined by economic characteristics, and an economic grouping should not be confused with a status group which is what caste is. What else is wrong with Kroeber's identification of caste as class is that consciousness is reduced to an epiphenomenon, which allows the religious justification of caste to be eliminated. There is no point in commenting on Dumont's caricature of epiphenomenon and phenomenon which is, to borrow his phrase, a residue of the Cold War. Instead, we should pay attention to his claim that Kroeber, like many more, is misguided by the theory of social stratification, which conflates all social distinctions stamped with inequality, and is in this sense socio-centric. What Dumont is driving at is that caste distinctions are not to be confused with social inequality. Caste is hierarchy and hierarchy is not inequality. Inequality existed in (pre-modern) West, but not in India, past or present. West had inequality, but it moved from inequality to equality (egalitarianism!). India, defined by caste, had hierarchy and is stuck there, thanks to

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plasticity of the caste system. Inequality is secular; hierarchy is religious. Inequality is profane; hierarchy is sacred. Caste is sacred.

There is another point of contact between caste society and modern society which, Dumont admits, allows a continuity to be seen between the two. This is the division of labour. Nesfield's view of caste belongs to this category. This view, he admits, is particularly seductive to the Western reader to think that caste is 'separate from religion'. This view is also seductive to the educated Hindus (read Indians: the two are often conflated in his writings) motivated by a desire to find Western justification for an Indian institution. James Mill, like Nesfield, discussed above, saw caste as the division of labour, a historical development born out of transition from a pastoral to an agricultural life. He did recognize though that the legislator attributed the caste division to the divine will. He also said that the institution caste was widespread in antiquity (in Egypt, Greece and Iran). Dumont rejects Mills' explanation, mainly because of his failure to reconcile the duality of technical and economic aspects and the religious aspect. More importantly, Mills, unlike Dubois, attributes 'residual' role to the Brahman (the legislator) as if the 'division of labour comes about by itself' (Dumont 1980: 24–26).

The division of labour does not come about by itself, and Mills did not say that. Instead, what Mill said was that the caste division of labour was a result of change in political economy—change from pastoralism to settled agriculture. One may agree with him on that. Historically, a particular stage of economic development is associated with a specific form of the division of labour. Hunting-gathering societies had one form of division of labour (egalitarian), which changed with change from hunting gathering to pastoralism (in which division of labour became more specialized). It changed, with transition from pastoralism to agriculture based on slavery (division between master and slave), which changed again with transition from slavery to serfdom in feudalism (division between lord and serf), and yet again in transition from serfdom to free wage labour in capitalism (capitalist and worker). With each transition, there was a change in legislation. That is the real history of the relationship between change in the division of labour and corresponding change in legislation. Dumont turns it around and makes the caste division of labour a function of the will of the legislator. We will discuss more about it later.

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Endogamy

In addition to treating the caste division of labour as secular, another problem with Nesfield, according to Dumont, is that despite his attempt to present caste as purely secular, he mentions ceremonial functions. Furthermore, he has no explanation of endogamy: why caste forbids all outside marriage (Dumont 1980: 26–27)? Dumont will perhaps agree that inequality between lords and peasants in medieval Europe was not based on religion, but they were endogamous—a case of class endogamy. On the other hand, caste endogamy in India was not exclusively or even primarily religious. It was economic–political. Marriage among the Rajput landlords and rulers of Rajasthan was primarily political and economic—not religious. Varsha Joshi writes that theoretically, a system based on kinship should be a close-knit unit. The reality of the Rajput states was, however, different. The instances of revolt by clansmen and kinsmen aspiring for enhancement of their economic–political power were not uncommon. One interesting development in reaction to this threat was that the rulers provided grants (*thikanas/jagirs*) to their kin by marriage known as saga or *genayat*, who as a consequence of clan exogamy, were invariably external to the clan. This was a delicate act of kin–clan balancing by extra-kin, -clan connections. The contradictions of blood and land contributed to shaping of the institution of marriage in the Rajput ruling class. The marriage among Rajputs in princely states, she argues, was not governed by purely ritual considerations. Rather, it was crisscrossed by political–economic considerations (Joshi 1995: 15–16).

At the level of the dominant caste (the ruling caste) marriage was, above all, a class phenomenon. Endogamy among the Rajputs had more in common with endogamy among the aristocracy in Africa, Asia and medieval Europe. As discussed later, endogamy among the Rajputs accommodated the economic–political interests and caste identity through intra-caste hypergamy–hypogamy. Dictated by economic–political interests, they had marriage alliances not only outside the caste but also outside the religion: Hindu rulers marrying their daughters to Muslim rulers. As Joshi (ibid.: 14) notes, Akbar concluded treaties and established matrimonial alliances with Rajput rulers as a means to establish suzerainty over Rajasthan. Even among the Rajput commoners, marriage was economic, political and

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social–cultural comprising of religious and non-religious. It is not our intention to make light of caste endogamy rather to argue that caste endogamy was not exclusively or primarily religious.

There was a consideration of purity in marriage among the Rajputs. It was the notion of purity of blood. Evidently, the notion of purity of blood was not religious but secular, with political–economic content. Very much like religious purity, purity of blood was a social construction, since the origin of the Rajputs has mixture of many bloods, to begin with. Nonetheless the Rajputs took the notion of purity of blood seriously. They did pay respect to the religiously pure, the Brahman, but did not ever consider religious purity as superior to purity of blood or the religiously pure as ever superior to those who were pure by blood. They could sacrifice their life to maintain the purity of blood, but violated the religious notion of purity in their daily practice—eating, drinking, meeting and mating. Reducing caste endogamy to religious purity is oversimplification.

It may be added that much of the generalization about normative aspects of caste, such as commensality and endogamy, is based on what happened at the upper layer of the caste ladder ignoring the bottom and, by and large, middle layers. If we include the latter, secular character of marriage will stand out more prominently. In the idealist framework dominant in mainstream sociology of caste, there is a tendency to generalize the behavioural characteristics of the upper castes as the universal values of the caste system impervious to time and place.

Caste as Religious

For Dumont, the real question is whether caste is religious or social? We may add that religious and social are not mutually exclusive. Caste as religious is still social. So the real meaning of Dumont's question is the relationship between religious and non-religious (economic–political) in caste. According to him, the relationship between the religious and economic–political in caste is unique which makes it incomparable to anything in the West, notwithstanding the fact that he claims it to be a comparative study. In every case, he argues, in which caste is taken as an extreme form of something, which exists in the West, the religious aspect of the system is made secondary. Seen from that

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point of view, all explanations of caste, past and present, reviewed above have the following limitations: reduction of the religious to the non-religious, taking the part (caste) for the whole (the caste system) and underestimation of hierarchy (as essentially religious). He finds some progress in post-1945 studies in terms of the detailed consideration of the various aspects of the system, obstacles remain. These include persistent lack of understanding of hierarchy as essentially religious, along with the widespread fashion [!] in this period for the theory of social stratification which, according to him, blocks all understanding of hierarchy and of the caste system. Caste is not stratification for the same reason as hierarchy is not inequality. Stratification is secular and it is found in the west. On both counts, it is distinct from the uniqueness of caste and India. Treating caste as secular is to rob caste and India of their uniqueness, their distinctness from the west (1980: 26–32).

Two brief comments are as follows. First, Dumont's criticism of post-1945 (ethnographic) studies on the ground that they are ahistorical due to a neglect of Sanskritic, albeit religious texts is misplaced. Religious texts deal with normative aspects of caste, which as discussed above are transhistorical. There is thus nothing to choose between transhistorical and ahistorical. Second, and rather ironical, studies of caste before and after 1945 have more in common than what Dumont is prepared to concede. They share a common ideological perspective, which studies caste essentially as a system of ideas in isolation from economic–political relations. It must be added though that post-1945 ethnographic studies provide useful information on castes as they operate at a particular place and time. They are in that sense more concrete than studies of caste based on religious texts. However, the information provided by ethnographic studies focused on ideas disconnected from their material context and history is of limited value.

Consistent with his basic assumption that caste is religious, Dumont looks for studies that support his assumption. That explains his preference for Bougle's definition of the caste system:

> The caste system divides the whole society into a large number of hereditary groups, distinguished from one another and connected together by three characteristics: *separation* [original] in matters of marriage and contact; *division of labor*, each group having, in theory or by tradition, a profession

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> from which its members can depart only within certain limits; and finally *hierarchy*, which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to one another. (Dumont 1980: 21)

Caste and Hinduism

It has been argued that caste and Hinduism are inseparably connected. 'Without caste there is no Hindu', wrote Weber (1958b: 29). Caste, we are told, has had a civilizing influence on the Hindus (read Indians). Without caste, Indian people 'endowed with the peculiar characteristics of the Hindus' left to itself would tend to barbarity' (Dumont: 23). Were that so, Indians in South Africa, the Caribbean islands and Fiji (descendants of indentured Indians) must be roaming barbarians. They are Indians without caste. Indeed, worse, they are Hindus, without caste. In reality, however, if anything, losing caste helped them unite in the past in their collective resistance and struggle against colonial attempt to barbarize them during and after their contract of indentured service, a colonial–imperial device to reproduce unfree labour as replacement for slave labour needed for the plantation economy in the colonies following the abolition of slavery in the British Empire (see Chapter 7).

Weber relates caste to Hinduism through belief in the doctrine of karma and transmigration, the two basic principles in their interrelatedness summing up the 'unique Hindu theodicy of the existing social, that is to say, caste system…The inescapable on-rolling *Karma* causality is in harmony with the eternity…of…the caste order'. The idea of compensation was linked to the individual's social fate and thereby to the caste order. The Indian views birth in a caste due to merit of the conduct in previous life. The fauna and the coexistence of different 'coloured races' (!) may have facilitated the origin of the idea of the transmigration which, he says, was also present in Hellenic antiquity. The army of monkeys accompanying Rama in his fight against Ravana in the South refers to the Dravidian people—'the black peoples' who looked like apes to the Aryans, he writes. Further, '*Karma* doctrine transformed the world into a strictly rational, ethically-determined cosmos; it represents the most consistent theodicy ever produced in history'. Finally, paraphrasing

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Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, he says '…they [lower castes] have nothing to lose but their chains, they have a world to win'. For the pious Hindu of the low caste too can win the world—not in this life but in the next. The lowest castes had the most to win through ritual correctness by not deviating from their caste duties (Weber 1958b: 121–123).

Weber argues that the doctrine of karma [based on] the principle of compensation for previous deeds explained the caste organization and much more: 'Men were not…in principle equal, but for ever unequal… all men, however, had equal opportunities, but not in this life—only through rebirth…There simply was no "natural" equality of man before any authority, least of all before a …god' (Weber 1958: 144). There was no doctrine of karma in Christianity. Notwithstanding that, however, there was no natural equality of man in medieval Europe. Was there natural equality of man in modern west—wedded to Christianity in its treatment of slaves? The reason for the absence of the idea of natural equality of man in medieval Europe, antebellum South, and caste in India is to be found not in religion but in political economy. The basis of serfdom (which made serf and lords 'naturally' unequal) in medieval Europe, of slavery (which made slaves naturally unequal) in antebellum South, and of caste inequality (which made castes 'naturally' unequal) is found in contemporary production and property relations. Its justification by the dominant caste and its ideologues in terms of religious ideas should be recognized but not to discount the real basis of caste inequality in order to represent India as unique—standing outside the world history—indeed, having no history. In terms of legitimizing ideology, religion was not absent in the dominant ideology of feudalism in medieval Europe or antebellum South. As Engels (1974) points out, the force of religious ideology was so powerful that even the counter-ideology of the oppressed classes tends to take on the same form. Similarly, Rodney Hilton (1974: 212) writes that even in times of revolt, the popular masses in Europe 'found it impossible to break away from the tripartite image of society which was promulgated by the hegemonic ideology mainly through the church'.

Caste is uniquely a product of Hinduism. There is no caste in Islam and Christianity or any other religion for that matter. Properly understood, the so-called Islamic castes are essentially status groups and not castes, says Weber. The main reason for that is the absence

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of the notion of ritual defilement, especially defilement through commensalism with non-caste members, 'the most important (sic!) characteristics of the Hindu caste system'. The religious equality before Allah provides no space for this or an equivalent notion of defilement in Islam which rules out the possibility of development of caste in Islam. Commensalism and social intercourse among different social strata may be avoided and rather rigidly so even in western society, but not on religious grounds (Weber 1958b: 132). Notion of ritual defilement in commensalism as a special feature of caste is well taken. As mentioned before, the problem is to reduce caste to ritual defilement. It gets only worse when caste is treated as the essence of India. Seen thus the history of India is summed up as the history (read non-history) of caste, which in turn is the history of ritual defilement.

Weber uses an interesting citation from *Manu-Bhasya*, when does a conquered 'barbarian' territory become ritually pure suitable for sacrifice? Answer: 'when the king establishes the four castes and reduces the barbarians to 'Tshandalas' (Weber 1958: 7). Weber interprets it to show the primacy of rituals in the caste system. There is, however, another possible interpretation. In the early days of conquest and territorial expansion, it meant conquest of hostile territory and establishment of the production relations and the caste division of labour then known to the conquering group. It was a process of expanding agriculture and culture together. As mentioned above, caste was born in the process (as was class) transition from pastoralism to agriculture. A territory becomes ritually pure for sacrifice only after it has become available for the impure business of agriculture. Seeing acquisition of enemy territory solely for the purpose of ritual performance ignoring the real purpose that is to expand agricultural production is a serious disconnect. Purity of rituals and impurity of agriculture were intrinsically connected. The barbarians in this case were the original inhabitants with a different form of economic, political organization and different values, resisting the expansion of agriculture that threatened their traditional way of life. Weber sees in all this only the ritual aspect, not because that is what he finds in the *Manu-Bhasya* but because that is what is important in his theoretical scheme—study of ritual in isolation from its material context. Barbarian (impure) *tsandala* of the *Manu-Bhasya*

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is the barbarian of the Roman Empire or the savages of European colonialism—who were pacified (or exterminated) in order to clear the land for the expansion of capitalism, part of the civilizing mission. The Hindus had their own civilizing mission called purification. The driving force behind the two missions was the same—need for material resources required for contemporary economic–political system camouflaged as a higher mission.

In treating ritual defilement as the essence—uniqueness—of caste, Weber anticipates Dumont. The common link between the two is identification of caste with the social system as a whole and finding the basis of caste in religious ideas. There are two problems with their formulations. First, reducing Indian society to caste and reducing caste to religion (and magic) turning India into the garden of enchantment. Caste is a product of Indian society and history and should be seen as such, not the other way round. Second, rather than reducing caste (and India) to religion, caste should be seen for what it is in reality, that is, a product of economic–political conditions and ideologies that developed at a particular stage of Indian society and history. As Weber admits, the Vedas do not have the ideas of transmigration of souls and the karma-doctrine, nor for that matter the notion of nirvana (Weber 1958b: 28). That raises an interesting question as to when did these ideas come into existence to serve as the basis of the caste system? What was the main form of property and production relations and what was the main form of the social division of labor, when the doctrines of karma and nirvana came into being? Religious theory of caste evades these pertinent questions. That leads one to ask whether the doctrines of karma and transmigration created the caste system, or they were later developments following the emergence of the hereditary rank order (first, the Varna then the caste) rooted in unequal access to economic–political and cultural resources.

In reality, the dominant castes used the ideas of the karma and transmigration to legitimize and justify the inequities and exploitation inherent in the caste system. Confusing legitimation and rationalization of the caste system with its basis is a serious error. As discussed earlier (Chapter 1), sociologists who have listened to the lower castes report that the latter do not ever think that their position in the caste system is a result of the past karma. Even less they do look up to transmigration for deliverance.

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Caste as a State of Mind?

As a closed system, the caste order is a product of consistent Brahmanical thought and could have never come to power without the intensive influence of the Brahmans as house priests, advisors in all situations of life and princely officials, writes Weber (Weber 1958b: 130). He does admit that ancient Indian conditions provided the structural elements for the caste system. These were the interethnic specialization of labour, hereditary basis of the organization of the village crafts and hereditary status segregation based on occupational specialization, and monopolization of patronage. But for Weber while these structural conditions were necessary, they were not necessary and sufficient to give rise to caste. What was lacking was the religious factor that was decisive in the last analysis. It is interesting to note that in privileging religious ideas not much attention is ever paid to wider implications of monopoly of patronage in the genesis of caste. Weber himself moves on to highlight the ultimately determining role of ideas in the caste system. He writes that all factors for the development of the caste system operated singly elsewhere in the world. Only in India, however, they did operate conjointly under special Indian conditions: a conquered territory within ineffable, sharp 'racial' (!) antagonisms made socially visible by skin colour. More strongly than anywhere else, magical as well as social rejection of communion with strangers—that combined with sib charisma created insurmountable barriers between strange ethnic subjects even after their integration into the local economic community. Finally,

> We repeat, however: this well-integrated, unique social system could not have originated…and lasted without the pervasive and all-powerful influence of the Brahmans…The combination of caste legitimacy with *karma* doctrine, thus with the specific Brahmanical theodicy—in its way a stroke of genius—plainly is the construction of rational ethical thought and not the product of any economic conditions. (Weber 1958: 131)

In conceptualizing caste as a product of ideas to the exclusion of economic conditions, Weber is accomplishing his principal ideological objective, that is, as a product of ideas, caste refutes the doctrine of historical materialism, the focal point of Weber's ideological struggle at home. Simultaneously, it meets the other major ideological objective relating to the primacy of ideas in social transformation outlined by him in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*—why capitalism

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developed in the West, not in the East, here India (see Thapar 2000: 40), which had the necessary material but not the ideal conditions. The reason for the latter was the hold of the magico-religious phenomenon of caste, which aborted the spirit of capitalism. In the ideological battle between Marxism and mainstream sociology, caste has been a valuable resource at the service of the latter. It is relevant to mention here that mainstream sociology in India has, by and large, followed Weber in taking it axiomatically that caste refutes not only class but Marxism in general, hence, its avoidance of the Marxist approach in the study of the caste system.

Dumont follows Weber in reducing caste to a mental phenomenon:

> …far more than a 'group' in the ordinary sense, the caste is a *state of mind* (original) which is expressed by the emergence, in various situations, of various groups of various orders generally called castes. It is this aspect—caste as a system of ideas and values—which led Abbe Dubois to consider caste as conscious creation of legislators of times past, argues Dumont. Hence, his concern 'first and foremost with a system of ideas and values'. (Dumont 1980: 34–36)

Contrary to Dumont's argument, far from being a state of mind the caste system is an ensemble of social relations rooted in political economy—social relations people entered into in the process of production—and corresponding ideologies. Shaped by circumstances, which were not of their choosing, these relations were independent of their will. Caste relations are not mental but material; they are not subjective but objective. One should not ignore the subjectivity, the 'state of mind', Weber and Dumont talk about. The problem, however, lies in reducing the real people, their real life conditions, and their materiality to subjectivity—mental state. Those who criticize materialism for its alleged one-sidedness are incognizant of lopsidedness of idealism they embrace.

Caste and Rank: The Brahmanocentric View

In defining the caste system, Bougle identifies ranking as one of its three main characteristics. Caste is a rank order. In idealist theory, ranking in the caste system is Brahmanocentric. Dumont's repeated

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assertion that Brahman everywhere is at the top follows from his view of caste as essentially religious. Dumont is anticipated by Weber. Caste, Weber argues, is and remains essentially social rank. By its very nature, caste is inseparably bound up with social ranks within a larger community, and social rank of a caste is determined by its positive or negative relation to the Brahman and that is what distinguishes the Hindu caste system from the caste system among non-Hindus—Muslims, Christians—the latter do not have the equivalent of the Brahman to serve as the standard of measurement of social distance (Weber 1958: 29–31).

The prestige of the Brahmans, which was behind the development of the caste system, is in part purely magical and in part cultural—as a stratum. Brahmans represented a special quality, writes Weber. The *purohit* was the princely court magician. As discussed earlier, Weber admits that the West had its share of rural stupidity: the hereditary noble priests of the ancient Greece comparable to the noble Brahman priest in India were representative of the 'stupidity of rural gentry'. They were, however, divested of all substantive influence due to the development of city. The Brahmans in India, by contrast, given their connection with magic and sacrifice were able to preserve the rural stupidity in the 'service' of the princes (Weber 1958b: 138–139). If Brahmanism is the repository of rural idiocy, then caste, a product of the Brahman's mind, represents rural idiocy in a pure form. This argument is consistent with Weber's wider objective, that is, ideas as the motor force of history, which was as true of the East as of the West. The difference between the two being that ideas, religious ideas in particular, in the West were rational, while in India they lacked rationality. It is understandable in that light how caste as a magico-religious phenomenon, a repository of rural stupidity, obstructed the development of capitalism (the highest point of rationality) in India.

In distinguishing the caste system based on the centrality of the Brahman's position, Dumont imitates Weber and defines caste in terms of ritual rights and duties. The problem, however, is that caste is more than a bundle of ritual rights and obligations. Caste rights and obligations comprise of the economic, political and ritual. As I have argued above, the ritual and the political–economic in the caste system are mistakenly separated in the mainstream sociology going back to Weber, while they are turned upside down in Dumont. The position of the Brahman as central to caste ranking is a logical outcome of the

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illogical theoretical assumption which views caste as a bundle of rituals in isolation from economic–political relations. Once it is assumed that caste is ritual, it follows that the caste in charge of rituals will be at the centre of caste ranking. The authority of the Brahman was supreme only in ritual and doctrinal matters. So the Brahman ranks supreme in a view of caste in which rituals and doctrines are supreme in the system as a whole (Ambedkar 2003). Supremacy of the Brahman was by no means essential to the caste system, writes Habib (2003: 173).

Historically, the Brahman is not central to caste ranking in all places all time. As discussed later, Weber (who was sensitive to history, unlike Dumont and others who tend to view caste mainly in terms of Puranic ideas impervious to history), admits that the position of the Brahman was not central during the Mauryan period. As I discuss later (Chapters 4 and 5), the rank of a caste in Rajasthan during princely rule was determined not in relation to the Brahman, but in relation to the Rajput, the dominant caste and class. As Mayaram (2008) (points out, erstwhile independent communities in Rajasthan (Meenas, Bhils and Meos) who had been subdued and reduced to lower status during Mughal rule and further stigmatized and criminalized during colonial rule identified themselves as Kshatriyas, the dominant caste of the region, to assert their identity as one time rulers of their respective territories (see also Mayaram). The concept of the dominant caste is of particular significance in this context in that it shows the diversity of caste dominance in different times and places rather than perpetuating the myth of the Brahman as universally dominant caste since it is so inscribed in selected sacred texts of Hinduism.

Monopoly Rule of Caste: A Misconception

The problem with Brahmanocentric view continues. Weber recognizes that traders and their 'guilds' (remember that the spirit of caste had crippled the spirit of guild, according to Weber, 1958b: 34) during the Mauryan period won the recognition of the princes and rose in esteem on account of their functional importance at the time. The Brahmans, on the other hand, suffered a loss in social esteem. Then, he turns it around and says that it happened because the power of castes was undeveloped and Buddhism and Jainism (new religions) were hostile

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to Brahmans. Later on (following the end of the Mauryan period), we are told that the monopoly rule of the caste system increased the power of the Brahmans (and also of the princes) and broke the power of guilds (Weber 1958: 38).

In the first place, it is assumed that the spirit of caste is alive only if the Brahman is strong. Conversely, if the Brahman is weak, the spirit of caste is weak or even dead. It is a fallacy of Brahmanocentric view of caste in which eminence of the Brahman irrespective of time and place is assumed a priori. Contrary to Weber's argument, the traders acquired economic–political power, gained recognition by the princes and moved up in social esteem during the Mauryan period not because the caste rules were weak and undeveloped, but because of the growing significance of trade and commerce—internally and internationally. If one looks at the pre-Mauryan (pre-Buddhist) period, the caste rules privileging the Brahmans compared to traders were indeed strong which changed during the Mauryan period because of a fundamental change in political economy. Later on (post-Mauryan period), when trade declined (Sharma 2009: 17), the traders lost economic and political power, and their status declined. Conversely, the Brahmans gained recognition from the princes, benefited materially and recovered their social esteem. The reason for that, however, was not the return of 'monopoly rule of caste', as argued by Weber, but emergence of a new economic–political order in which economy became dominantly agrarian and rural, the central authority disintegrated and it was replaced by little kingdoms. Kings became eminent owners of all land in their respective territories. The Brahmans received generous land grants from kings springing from a mixed ethnic stock seeking the status of the Kshatriya, the traditional ruling caste. It was a result of economic–political favour, in addition to social recognition, by the king in return for service the Brahmans provided that the latter recovered the status they had lost in the past. Weber ignores changes in political economy from the pre-Mauryan to the Mauryan and from the Mauryan to the post-Mauryan period and their impact on the relative ranking of the trading castes and the Brahmans from one period to another. Instead, he explains the variations in their caste ranks in terms of the 'monopoly rule of caste' (in which the Brahman reigns supreme) supposedly eternal in nature.

As noted by Sharma (2009: 248), the most significant change in the early medieval period (11th and 12th centuries) was the

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large-scale transfer of land revenue to religious grantees by princes and their vassals in the Rajput kingdoms of northern India in return for their wider ideological role in legitimizing the rule of the former, the dominant caste (and class). That was indeed the basis of unity between the Kshatriya (prince) and the Brahman (priest) against the rest, a characteristic of hierarchy much discussed by Dumont. Rank in the system was dependent upon economic and political power. The rank of the Brahman was no exception. The so-called 'monopoly rule of caste' was the rule of monopoly of economic–political power. Sociology of caste turns it upside down to privilege the 'monopoly rule of caste' rooted in religion over the rule of monopoly of economic–political power. Separating the rule of ranking in the caste system from the rule of political economy is an exercise in ideology, with no empirical–historical substance.

There is yet another problem with the Brahmanocentric view of caste. It equates the eminence (or a lack thereof) of the Brahman in the caste system with the strength or weakness of the caste system per se. Eminence of the Brahman in the caste system is assumed as given. It does not have to be empirically–historically verified. An assumption that is not open to historical–empirical verification is not theory.

Caste Hierarchy and the Human Ends

In order to establish the centrality of religion in the caste system and the superiority of the Brahman in caste hierarchy, Dumont brings in the question of human ends in Hinduism. The argument is that there are three 'human ends' [original], dharma, *artha,* kama (duty, profit, pleasure). All three are necessary and lawful and they are graded in hierarchy: dharma (conformity to the world order) is above *artha* (power and wealth—collapsed in one), which in turn is above kama (immediate enjoyment). It is further argued that the analogy of the hierarchy of three human ends with the hierarchy of the Varna is apparent: dharma corresponds to the Brahman, the priest; *artha* to the Kshatriya, the king, the temporal power, and kama to the others, the Vaishya and the Shudra. The only conceptual scheme in sociology to appropriately deal with this issue, we are told, is found in Talcott Parsons' structural analysis, in which dharma is moral action, *artha*

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instrumental action and kama expressive action. The opposition of dharma to *artha* and kama is the opposition of the 'sacred to the profane' (Dumont 1980: 271–272).

The analogy of hierarchy of human ends with caste hierarchy is seriously flawed. According to this scheme, the Brahman in charge of dharma should stay away from enjoyment. Did he? Similarly, the Kshatriya ought to ideally engage in *artha* (pursuit of wealth), but he was far removed from *artha*, which was the domain of the Vaishya. In the traditional cultural scheme, engaging in *artha* was against the *kshatradharma* (religion of the Kshatriya, the warrior and the ruler). A Kshatriya concerned with *artha* was for that reason ridiculed and labelled as Vaishya, symbolic of lower status. The common refrain of the Rajput (Kshatriya) *thikanedar*s (feudal landlords), princes, and regents of Rajasthan's princely states encumbered with heavy debts was 'we are not Banias' (Vaishyas). Mentalities of aristocratic (Kshatriya) and trading (Vaishya) castes—like those of the aristocratic and trading classes in the age of aristocracy in Europe—set them apart. On the other hand, political or temporal power—Kshatriya's main sphere—is not even mentioned as a separate end; there is no term for political power in the trilogy of the human ends. That is not all.

In Dumont's (and Parsons') scheme, kama belongs to the Vaishya and the Shudra. That is problematic. Ideally and practically, *artha* belonged to the Vaishya who was ascetic (the opposite of kama)—ideally and practically. Kama (enjoyment) is thus left to belong to the fourth Varna (Shudra) engaged in manual labour—clean and unclean. The problem was that he had very little left for him to enjoy. His labour (the only resource at his disposal) or the product of his labour was siphoned off by the Kshatriya (the ruler) to be shared with the Brahman (the priest) for their enjoyment leaving barely enough for Shudra's survival. Supposedly ascetic, the Brahman was entitled to unlimited consumption, with ritual sanction. Similarly, the Kshatriya had cultural sanction to engage in conspicuous consumption, while the Varna attached to labour (Shudra) was denied all pleasure and enjoyment as norm, according to Manu, the author of the sacred law of caste. The analogy between the hierarchy of the human ends and that of the Varna order does not hold. And the secret of a lack of analogy is to be found not in religion, but in political economy. It is understandable in that light why the analogy between the hierarchy of the human ends and that of the Varna order eventually ends up

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in merging sociology with theology. Using his theoretical scheme of encompassing–encompassed, Dumont argues that in trilogy of human ends dharma encompasses *artha* and kama. The best example of this, he says, is biblical: 'It is the story of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib' (Dumont 1980: 239).

The problem with Weber, Dumont and their followers—Indians and non-Indians alike—is that they treat religion as the basis of rank in the caste system in order to make India unique in contrast to the West. Caste was a rank order. So was the aristocratic order in the West. One may extend it even further back in history to cover the rank order of the citizen and slave in antiquity. Role of religion in justification of rank in caste is well taken, but to say that religion was uniquely the basis of rank in caste is factual distortion. Mainstream sociology ignores the real—economic–political—basis of rank in caste to replace it with religion turning the profane into the sacred. It is not my contention or intention to claim that India was, is or ought to be like (or unlike) the West. Rather, to argue that the basis of rank in the caste system was not religion. Furthermore, the basis of rank in caste was not fundamentally different from the basis of rank in pre-modern, pre-capitalist West, that is, unequal access to economic–political resources masked by cultural sanctions—religious and non-religious. It is admittedly a mistake to draw a forced analogy (unsubstantiated by fact) between India and the West. By the same token, it is no less a mistake to distort facts to make India unique, distinct from the West. It makes no difference whether it is done by Indians or non-Indians.

Caste, Social Distance and Development

The 'spirit of caste' was totally different from that of the merchant and craft guilds in the West: caste system entirely displaced the other organizations or crippled them at least 'in part' (Weber 1958: 34). Weber in his search for the 'spirit' of capitalism had to find something spiritual that obstructed its development in India. He finds that in the spirit of caste, and then by equating caste with religion he completes the circuit of the religious ethic and the spirit of capitalism: caste in India, a feature of Hinduism, crippled the spirit of capitalism (on the main objective behind Weber's study of the religion and caste in

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India to round out his thesis on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism in the West, see Thapar 2000: 24). Continuing further, Weber differentiates caste in India from guild in the West. Caste created the 'magical distance' between social groups in their mutual relationships. Ritual barriers, absolutely essential for caste, belong to the *basis* of caste, writes Weber. Castes are completely oriented towards social rank which results in profound estrangement between castes even without antagonistic economic interests. Questions of etiquette and rank in caste are in sharp contrast to those in the West because in caste they are religiously anchored (Weber 1958b: 34–38).

Contrary to Weber's argument, the distance between castes was not magico-religious. More importantly, ritual barriers were not the basis of social distance in caste. Magico-religious is India's distinctness from the West. There was no magic in the West, but social distance between masters and slaves (separated by class and race) was in no way less rigid than distance between castes. To this one can add the social distance not only between serfs and lords but also between merchants and lords in medieval Europe. Did that obstruct economic development in the West? Indeed, slavery—characterized by extreme social distance—was the engine of economic development of the modern West. Social distance in racialized slave–master relationship in modern West (US) was so pervasive that more than 150 years after the abolition of slavery, 50 years after the Civil Rights Movement, it continues to exist in the discourse and daily intercourse. That did not, however, obstruct economic development in the United States. To the contrary, it was central to the making of America (cf. *Slavery and the Making of America*, PBS series).

Rather than being inversely related, capitalism in the West developed (and continues to develop) by creating and exploiting social–cultural distances. Social–cultural distance between capitalist and worker (the foundation of capitalism), white and black (inclusive of all people of colour), male and female, colonizer and colonized, white settler and the indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand and the Americas are prime examples of social distance based on rank that contributed to capitalist growth of the West. Locating the spirit of capitalism in commensal fraternity of guilds and the Lord's Supper (Weber 1958: 38) serves a particular ideological function: it cleans capitalism of its violent and bloody history at home and in colonies. Conversely, it serves another ideological function: it holds social distance in the caste system

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responsible for obstructing capitalist growth in India not due to but in spite of colonialism (on Weber ignoring the role of colonialism in India's failure to develop capitalism, see Thapar 2000: 44–45).

Caste and the Social Division of Labour: Sacred and Profane

The caste system comprises of specialization and interdependence, one of the three characteristic features recognized by Bougle, the main source of Dumont's definition of caste. He argues that specialization entails separation between the groups, but it is oriented towards the need of the whole. This relationship to the whole links the division of labour with hierarchy. At the same time, it sharply distinguishes the Indian form of social division of labour from the modern economic form, which is oriented towards individual profit in which the market is left to regulate the whole (Dumont 1980: 92). One finds here the same problem that is endemic to Dumont's approach—comparing two different historical species. The right comparison to the caste division of labour is the division of labour in pre-capitalist—feudal—societies in Europe and elsewhere in which right to land, the main form of property and the main source of subsistence for the majority, is central to the division of labour. Comparing the division of labour in the caste system with the division of labour in modern industrial West is misapplication of comparative and historical method. That is, however, only one, and by no means the most serious, of the problems.

In order to explain the division of labour in the caste system, Dumont turns to the *jajmani* system—the particular form the division of labour in the caste system takes at the village level. Before we proceed, it is important to take note of an observation made by Sharma that is particularly relevant to the problem under discussion, that is, the *jajmani* system may explain the social–economic relations (read–caste relations) of the feudal phase but not of the earlier (pre-feudal or for that matter post-feudal) phase (or the later phase, for that matter). Kautilya's *Arthasastra*, he points out, has no mention of the *jajmani* system (Sharma 2009: 2). Dumont, on the other hand, is using the *jajmani* system to explain the division of labour in the caste system for all time which according to him stretches back to the Rig

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Vedic period (if one accepts his homology between the Varna and the caste) and continues until the present. This is not the only example of insensitivity to historical specificity in Dumont's discussion of caste. He is, however, not alone.

It has been argued that the caste system is not purely and simply a professional system. The caste is not the same as a trade guild. What distinguishes caste, according to Hocart, which Dumont agrees with, is that caste and profession are linked through the intermediary of religion, which is obvious in the case of the ritual specialists like the barber and the washerman (Dumont 1980: 92–93). He finds support for this distinct division of labour in the caste system in Bougle: 'In the Hindu civilization it is above all religious views, rather than economic tendencies, which determine the rank of each group'. This cautious remark, he says, is his point of departure (ibid.: 369).

What is the real problem here? Focused on religion and ritual, Dumont focuses on castes involved in rituals bypassing the most important aspect of the division of labour, that is, between caste which owned and controlled land and those who worked the land, which was the very foundation of the caste division of labour. The rank and function not only of the barber and the washerman, but also those of the prince and the priest, the landlord and the peasant, the craftsmen and the concubine were governed by this most important aspect which cannot be understood or explained by the religious framework focused on the ritual obligations of particular castes governed by considerations of purity–impurity. Why is there so much emphasis on the (ritual) functions of the barber and washerman in mainstream sociology ignoring the function of agricultural producers who provided for the barber, washerman, priest and their patron (prince)? Dumont admits that only in certain cases does religion clearly account for the link between caste and profession. There are some (indeed many) religiously neutral professions which are followed by a number of different castes, he writes. It is in accounting for these religiously neutral professions that the forced relationship between the division of labour and religion gets really problematic. Dumont writes that one fact stands out immediately: most of the occupations are distinctively religious, the exception being commerce in general and, above all, agriculture, particularly so far as labour is concerned (ibid.: 93–94).

If commerce in general, agriculture in particular, is taken out, what is left there in the caste division of labour if we are reminded

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that agriculture was the main form of economy on which depended the existence of all castes? It makes sense why a theory which treats religion as the most important element in the caste system leaves out the most important element of the social division of labour in the caste system—commerce in general and agriculture in particular—because they are not religiously determined. Once sociology of caste excludes the division of labour in agriculture what is left there for it to focus on is the division of labour in rituals—rituals of eating, feasting, fasting, shaving, bathing and washing pervaded by purity and impurity. No wonder the essence of the caste system is reduced to who takes food from whom, who eats with whom, who is pure, who is impure, and how terminal bath can remove (temporary) impurity of the pure but not of the impure.

Dumont's view of the division of labour in agriculture needs further scrutiny. The most important division of labour in princely states (little kingdoms recognized by Dumont as appropriate territorial units for the operation of the caste system empirically–historically) of Rajasthan was the division between landlords and peasants. Landlords owned the land. Peasants cultivated the land in return for rent, cess and free labour (*begar*) on particular occasions. All other service castes, including the Brahman (the priest), who served the landlords (the king being the biggest landlord of the state), were paid for by the peasants. This division of labour was not mediated by religion but by the system of land tenure. There were surely some caste functions of religious nature, but they did not determine the division of labour in the areas of principal concern—agriculture and commerce—which paid for the ritual division of labour, the main preoccupation of sociology of caste. The division of labour between the two principal classes—those who owned the lands and those who worked the lands—put its print on the entire social–economic formation including the social division of labour in the caste system (see also Meillassoux 1973: 99).

The ideas of purity and impurity were there, albeit in proportion to the nature of the occupation and access to the means of subsistence. The groups deprived of access to any other means and dependent for survival entirely on professions considered low, demeaning and dirty were impure. On the other hand, the Brahmans serving as priests, taking care of temples, gods and goddesses, and ritually disengaged from manual labour and assured of livelihood (indeed more than that), were vested with purity, social esteem and dignity. It must be reiterated

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though that central to the social division of labour in the village and the caste system (in princely states of Rajasthan and the zamindari villages in Eastern Uttar Pradesh I am familiar with) was not the Brahman, but the landlord. The ritual division of labour in culture was dependent on the social division of labour in agriculture—the foundation of the caste system and the village community. For Weber, Dumont and their followers, the division of labour in the caste system was sacred. In reality, the division of labour in the caste system was profane.

It must be clarified that not all sociologists agree with Weber and Dumont on the nature of the division of labour in the caste system as essentially religious. Beidelman points out that the traditional system of allocation in the caste system (*jajmani*) involved inequality based on unequal relation to the land. Dumont rejects it as 'dogmatic and blind materialism', which fails to grasp hierarchy. He is equally dismissive of Ornstein's argument that interdependence between those who dispose of the means of production and those who do not is in the end to the advantage of the latter. Dumont is dismissive of political economic inequality in social division of labour in the caste system. Commenting on Kathleen Gough's work, he writes that just as previously the religious aspect of the system was often reduced to an epiphenomenon, here there is at least an attempt by anthropologists to reduce hierarchy to relations of power. He writes that the study of the system of division of labour in the village shows an incapacity to grasp hierarchy in its true perspective. He is thus critical of Wiser who, according to him, 'counter to all evidence' (!) insists on seeing reciprocity in the *jajmani* system. He is equally dismissive of Biedelman since drawing only on secondary sources he confuses it with exploitation. Finally, both Wiser and Biedelman, he concludes, failed to see that 'the system assures subsistence to each *proportionally to his status*' (Dumont 1980: 31–32).

The argument that the system provides some security for the lower orders needs scrutiny. It can be said in that light that slavery in antiquity (and modernity) and serfdom in the middle ages did provide 'some security' to the lower orders as does the wage labour, including the lowliest form, in modern times. The security of the lower orders is indeed a fundamental condition for the security of the higher orders whose very survival is dependent on the surplus labour of the former. Exploitation is intrinsic to all these forms of the division of labour. The dialectical unity of those who have the means of production and

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those who have only labour to dispose of is unequal and inherently exploitative. The caste system is no exception.

Finally, Dumont confronts the question of the relationship between the religious and the economic in the division of labour in the caste system. He cites the case of the *Chamar*s (leather workers) who, in addition to leatherwork, are agricultural workers in northern India. They are also Untouchable. '"Should one say", he asks rhetorically, …that the "ritual" [original] theory is a rationalization of their "exploitation" [all quotation marks original]' (Dumont 1980: 103)? The answer is yes. Dumont disagrees because, according to him, it does not address 'the question of the system as a whole'. As discussed earlier, the 'whole' in his theory is ideological. We pursue it later.

To address the question of the whole, Dumont introduces the distinction between two approaches: one by Mauss (defining the economy by value and the market), the other by Marx (defining the economy by need and utility). To begin with, his interpretation of Marx's definition of economy in terms of need and utility is problematic in so far as it ignores the centrality of social relations in Marx's conceptualization of economy and society. But that is not the main point here. The distinction between the market and value societies made by Mauss is indeed distinction between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. The so-called value society was a product of feudal property and production relations just as the market society is a product of capitalist relations of production. That is what accounts for difference in the social division of labour between the two. What are its implications for the social division of labour in the caste system? According to Marx himself,

> under the patriarchal system, under the caste system, under the feudal and corporative system, there was division of labor in the whole of society according to fixed rules. Were these rules established by a legislator? No. Originally born of the conditions of material production, they were raised to the status of laws only much later,

he answers.

Dumont cites the threshing floor in the village in traditional India to explain the distribution of produce between the landlord and the various categories of functionaries of the *jajmani* system, including the priest. He argues that transactions at the threshing floor appearing as economic are in substance religious. To treat them as economic is to

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give priority to a 'vague exterior'. To substantiate this claim, he finds support in Weber who sees a profound difference between a market and non-market society, the latter being characterized by the majority of personal relationships, 'oriented towards the satisfaction of the needs of all those who enter the system...What is effectively measured here is…interdependence' (Dumont 1980: 105).

What is the problem with the above? True, the relations between the landlord and the peasant (or agricultural labourer) in pre-market, pre-capitalist societies were personal and there was systemic interdependence. Notwithstanding that, these relations were blatantly unequal and exploitative. Most importantly, the mechanism of distribution of the produce—the extraction of the surplus—was determined by pre-capitalist property and production relations. Inequality and exploitation inherent in pre-market societies were built in into these relations supported by the value system of the time. Emphasizing the personal nature of relations and systemic interdependence to mask the inequality, exploitation and extra-economic coercion in the extraction of the surplus in non-market societies is ideology—ideology of the dominant caste (and class).

Dumont continues: '…while directly religious prestations and economic prestations are mingled together, this takes place within the prescribed order, the religious order. The needs of each are conceived to be dependent on caste, on hierarchy…distribution on the threshing floor is essentially different from a market….' (Dumont 1980: 105). One wonders how values, religious values in particular, defined the need not only of the members of the landlords' households but of their horses, elephants, dogs, cats, birds or whatever pets caught their fancy as higher than the subsistence needs of the peasant households or agricultural labourers and their dependents who produced for all and were at the end left with hardly enough for bare survival. What is important here is not the moral sentiment, but the fact that the needs (and the ranks) of different castes were mediated not by religion but by the existing property and production relations. As noted by Irfan Habib, the caste system, in its classic form, could function with as much ease in a natural economy as in a market economy. In either, its main function was 'essentially to maintain not a fabric of imagined purity (if it did it was incidental) but a system of class exploitation as rigorous as any other' (Habib 2003: 170–173; see also Mencher 1974: 478).

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What took place at the threshing floor was the extraction of the surplus, and it took place within an economic–political order in which owners of the means of production (princes and landlords) and their allies (priests) claimed the major share of the produce (cf. Meillassoux 1973: 92–93). In that sense it was not fundamentally different from what took place in pre-capitalist, albeit feudal, regimes everywhere. It may be added that the economic–political system, which gave rise to and reproduced caste, was endorsed by values—secular and religious. These values enacted by the royal court, approved by the assembly of peers (landlords), and were propagated through the temples (that dotted the landscape of princely states) from which the priests prayed day and night for the well being—physical and spiritual—of the king and the landlords reiterating latter's inviolable right to appropriate the surplus which in turn entitled them to their own share without ever participating in labour to produce it. Prestation in the caste system was not religious but secular, not consensual but coercive, not sacred but profane.

Making a distinction between modern economic system in which an individual pursues his own gain and the caste system in which the interest of the *hierarchical collectivity* predominates, Dumont argues that the farmer (peasant) in the caste system parts with significant proportion of his crop for the benefit of a whole series of others in the system 'in a sort of cooperative where the main aim is to ensure the subsistence of everyone in accordance with his social function' (Dumont 1980: 105). Is his argument here any different from the functionalist theory of stratification discounting the fact that he rejects both the concept of stratification and functionalist theory, and method for the study of caste? That aside, one may ask as to why is it the peasant and not the king and the priest, the highest in hierarchy, who part with their share for the benefit of the whole? Instead, prince and priest as members of the ruling class (and castes) appropriate the major share of the harvest, which distinguishes their mode of living from that of the rest. Paraphrasing Dumont, it can be said that the king and the priest are united in their opposition to the rest in appropriating the surplus from the direct producers, which distinguishes their particular style of life (status symbol, according to Max Weber) paid for by the latter (read exploitation). True, what the farmer pays is oriented to the whole. The whole in this case is, however, not religious, not ideological to which the economic–political is external, but economic–political to which ideology (including religion) is internal.

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Finally, in order to understand the division of labour and distribution of the surplus, one has to see the land records in the archives, courts, forts and the temples supplemented by ethnographic evidence and to examine in that light the relationship between religious and economic–political in the caste system. An approach, which treats archival, historical and ethnographic evidence as of lower value or of no value at all, albeit profane, compared to evidence from religious texts (treated as sacred), is singularly inadequate to understand the social division of labour and the extraction of the surplus (prestation) in the caste system.

Change and Continuity in the Caste System

Finally, the question of change and continuity in the caste system today. As discussed earlier, the Varna and the caste were not immune to change. To the contrary, they evolved according to changing economic–political conditions and ideologies. The transition from two Varnas to three and then to four was a process of change. The rise and fall in the relative ranking of the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras in different epochs of Indian history (pre-Mauryan, Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods) is the story of change. The differentiation of the Vaishya separating the trader from the cultivator and cattle herder was a fundamental change. The transition from the Varna to the jati was a change. Kshatriyaization (or Rajputization) of amorphous groups after they were able to establish dominion over a territory was a change. Changelessness in the caste system is not corroborated by historical and ethnographic evidence to the contrary.

There has been a fundamental change in the caste system in postcolonial India. As noted by Irfan Habib, modern conditions have greatly shaken the economic foundation of the caste system. It is because the current economic system has destroyed the crafts of a whole series of professional or artisanal castes (Habib 2003: 178).

The caste system of the past is gone (but not caste per se). Princes are gone, landlords are gone. So are the peasants of the past. Gone are also the priests, pandas, and the *purohit*s, bards, barbers and the washermen of the past. They are not gone physically, but the social relations that bound them and values that defined their rank and

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function in the old system, are gone because the foundation of those social relations and values—traditional land tenure system—is gone. Inter-caste relations in the village in the 1950s (described in Chapter 6) are radically changed from what they were until the end of the 1940s. Abolition of the zamindari rights and the introduction of the universal franchise changed not only economic–political relations between the former landlords (Rajputs) and tenants (*Ahir*s, *Kurmis, Koeris* and *Pasis*), artisans and other functionaries, but also the notions of status and esteem. While almost all the castes of the past in the village are still surviving physically, inter-caste relations of the past are fundamentally altered. It is the same in the former princely states of Rajasthan. The landlords (Rajputs) lost monopoly of economic–political power they had in the past and experienced a relative decline in the status. The peasants (Jats, *Sirvis*, *Dhakad*s and *Bishnoi*s), on the other hand, gained economic–political power they did not have in the past and experienced upward status mobility. The Rajputs and the Brahmans in U.P. felt honoured to be invited to Mayawati's residence (during her tenure as Chief Minister) for *chai*, the same very Mayawati, a scheduled caste and a woman, they would not have allowed in the 1940s to touch their cup of *chai*. It may not be the 'the world turned upside down' in real sense (mainly because there has been no fundamental restructuring of property and production relations: the majority of lower castes are still denied access to the means of their subsistence and other productive resources and opportunities, for example, modern education and employment), but change in the caste system as a whole is undeniable, and it is not a change in the 'periphery' or 'secondary' spheres tolerated by hierarchy. To the contrary, it took place at the very centre.

Irfan Habib raises an interesting question: If the economic basis of the caste system has been shaken, can the same be said of its ideology? He is rightly sceptical about the disappearance of ideological aspects of caste (e.g. endogamy) following the dissolution of traditional economic system (Habib 2003: 178). In the first place, we must distinguish between his observation from the observations made by many sociologists (including Dumont) who talk about resilience and plasticity of the caste system without recognizing particular aspects of the system that are resilient and others that are transformed. As noted by R. S. Sharma (mentioned above), that is a problem for social historians interested in change. We may be reminded that the system that had been in existence for millennia and the institutions

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(e.g. endogamy) and ideas (e.g. purity–pollution) associated with it having been codified in the religious scriptures, legends and myths of both the great and the little traditions and reiterated day and night from every temple, every pilgrimage, schools and civic organizations will not disappear soon. It may not disappear completely even after a long time. Part of the reason for that is to be found in the current structures of inequality that continue to discriminate against traditionally disprivileged castes of the past while safeguarding the privileges of traditionally and currently privileged castes (Teltumbde 2012). In that respect, the caste in India is not an exception. One has to look at what is happening to race in the West. Race relations in the West have been changing, but structures of racial inequality are still in place and so are many of the privileges and disprivileges associated with racial identities—whiteness as privilege and non-whiteness as disprivilege. And the struggle continues.

The change in the caste system, it must be admitted, has not been idyllic: it did not come immediately or automatically. It was, and continues to be, resisted by the upper castes often, violently. The story of the village in Eastern Uttar Pradesh in the 1950s narrated in the book (Chapter 6) is repeated over and over again, on a much larger scale and in more violent forms, in one part of India or the other. As noted in a recent article by Tharakam (2012) 'be it Belchi, Pipra, Deoli-Sadhupur, Kilavenmani, Villupuram, Kanchikacherla, Karamchedu, Chundur, Laxmanpur-Bathe, Bathani-tola, Jajjhar, Khairlanji, Kambalahalli, any name. The story is the same…Names and numbers can change. The pattern and the power structure remains the same'. Tharakam was writing particularly about the recent killing of five Dalits in Laxmipeta village of north coastal Andhra Pradesh. It is the story of the dominant castes willing to use the most extreme forms of violence to preserve their monopoly of land ownership, political power and status. On the other hand, the struggle continues (Ilaiah 2005). The traditionally excluded groups remain excluded from land, political power and status notwithstanding the formal provision of representation in the administration and government (see John 2005; see also Kapadia 1995). They are still dependent for their livelihood on those who control the means of their subsistence and are thus forced to continue to engage in occupations associated with material deprivation and lower status (see Sainath 2005). In the annals of mainstream sociology, caste is idyllic. The real history of caste is anything but. The readers can make

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out that I am only paraphrasing an expression used by Marx (1975: 736–739) in a different context.

Finally, what do these stories have to say about the caste system per se? These are stories of 'caste struggle' comprising of struggle over land, political representation, access to educational–occupational opportunities, and yes, ritual inclusion–exclusion. The story of the caste system is thus the story of intertwining of economic, political and ritual. Sociology disconnects the ritual from the economic and political and presents the former as the whole story. Not surprisingly, the struggles over economic and political are construed as caste taking on non-caste roles—a deviation or defect of modernization. Ironically, sociology claims its representation of the fragmented story of the rituals as complex and multidimensional and dismisses the Marxist approach, which argues for seeing the economic, political and ritual in the caste system as intrinsically connected, as unidimensional, simplistic and reductionist.

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4

Caste and Subaltern Studies

Elite Ideology, Revisionist Historiography*

'A collective of social scientists initiates with this volume a significant school of militant historiography ... *It deserves careful consideration by all those concerned with peasants* or Indian society'. (emphasis added)—A claim made by the blurb on the back cover of *Selected Subaltern Studies* [Guha and Spivak, 1988].

> The intangible world of information merges with the material world of money, and new phrases that combine the two ... come into vogue. So the people who thrive in this period are the ones who can turn ideas and emotions into products. These are highly educated folk who have one foot in the bohemian world of creativity and another foot in the bourgeois realm of ambition and worldly success ... they are Bobos ... These Bobos define our age.—David Brooks in *Bobos in Paradise* [2000]

The issue of peasants and peasant movements is undoubtedly one of the most important, if not the most important, questions in the historiography of colonial India. This is because India at the time of the colonial conquest was predominantly an agrarian society, and the pre-colonial agrarian structure—an internal differentiation between landlords and peasants—put its stamp on the entire social structure, and accordingly shaped the dynamics of the colonial social formation. Viewed thus, the emergence of the Subaltern Studies project that focused on the historiography of the peasant and peasant insurgency

* Adapted from 'Caste, Class and Peasant Agency in Subaltern Studies Discourse: Revisionist Historiography, Elite Ideology', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2003.

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in colonial India as seen 'from below' [Guha, 1983] was a welcome development. The attention the Subaltern Studies framework has attracted, both inside and outside South Asia, is therefore well deserved and understandable. Now that the project has moved on to other things—without, however, abandoning an interest in agrarian issues—it is time to review the contribution it has made in restoring peasant (= subaltern) insurgency to its rightful place in the colonial historiography of India [Guha, 1982–89; 1983; Guha and Spivak, 1988; Arnold and Hardiman, 1994].

Accordingly, I propose to critically examine the main assumptions, arguments and evidence (whatever there is of it) on the subject of class and caste in peasant insurgency in the light of my own research on peasants and peasant movements in the princely states of Rajasthan during the period from the late nineteenth century until the end of colonial rule in the 1940s. As the Subaltern Studies approach gained popularity and recognition in certain academic circles, it was subjected to a critical scrutiny from various quarters, including some of those who, having agreed with its epistemological premise and collaborated with the project initially, later on expressed disagreement with and then departed from it. Tom Brass [2000] provides a succinct account of the competing claims now made by critics of Subaltern Studies, their accomplishments and—more significantly—their inconsistencies. My approach differs from these critiques, since it seeks to evaluate claims made by the project with regard to peasants and peasant movements in colonial India on the basis of empirical evidence about agrarian conditions in one particular context: the princely states of Rajasthan from the 1870s until the 1940s. The focus of analysis which follows is on two of the weakest points in the project. First, an issue that is central to Subaltern Studies discourse on the peasantry, but has not been subjected to in-depth critical enquiry: the relationship between caste and class in agrarian social structure and movements. And second, a context—the princely states—that remained outside the domain of direct jurisdiction by the colonial state, and where pre-colonial economic-political structure and ideology continued to prevail until the end of the colonial era.

Such a focus permits in turn two things. First, the interrogation of what is one of the basic assumptions made by the Subaltern Studies project: namely, the communal character of pre-colonial Indian society, and particularly the connection between land and power in

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the countryside. And second, the empirical evidence presented here underlines not only the limitations of the project but also its affinity with elite ideology and revisionist historiography.

Caste, Class and Subaltern Studies

One of the more important issues raised by Subaltern Studies is the significance of the caste system in agrarian structure and resistance. The adherents of the Subaltern Studies approach have dealt with the caste question in different contexts, and it is crucial to pay attention to what they have to say on this central issue in dealing with Indian society and culture, particularly peasants and peasant movements in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era.

It is no exaggeration that the caste system is the most studied yet misunderstood problem in Indian society and history. Caste features inescapably in the historiography about the subcontinent, whether this relates to India's 'Oriental exceptionalism', cultural uniqueness, peasant passivity/insurgency, anti-colonial struggle or post-colonial politics. Ironically, the more central caste is discursively, the more it is enigmatized and mystified. The story of social scientists and the caste system in India is reminiscent of nothing so much as the tale of the blind men and the elephant, where each person holding a particular part of the beast thinks it to be the whole animal. Few studies attempt to contextualize, either locally or at an all-India level, the complex interrelationship between landownership, a particular caste (or castes), and the position of the latter in the caste hierarchy, at a specific conjuncture or over the long term.[1] For this reason, the intention behind the presentation of empirical evidence about Rajasthan is to emphasize the relationship between landownership and caste hierarchy.[2]

Partha Chatterjee, one of the key exponents of the Subaltern Studies framework, has dealt with the caste system in various contexts [Chatterjee, 1983; 1988; 1989; 1996], and his work is therefore a convenient starting point to begin an analysis of the sub-alternist interpretation of the caste system and the peasantry. His point of departure is a critique of the Marxist approach, which according to him reduces the caste system to a superstructural epiphenomenon [Chatterjee, 1989: 174–5]. To correct what he sees as a Marxist

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distortion, therefore, Chatterjee examines the relationship between base and superstructure in order to demonstrate their equal contribution in shaping the caste system. His caricature of the Marxist approach in terms of structure and superstructure needs no comment.[3] Instead, the focus here will be on his understanding of caste. In keeping with the ideological perspective of the Subaltern Studies approach, Chatterjee confines himself to a treatment of caste as a system of ideas, a phenomenon of consciousness, with 'religion as a constitutive force' [Chatterjee, 1989: 169]. He argues that religion consists of two opposite tendencies. On the one hand it provides the universal code for society as a whole, while on the other it is a form of consciousness that enables the subaltern to resist domination [Chatterjee, 1989: 174]. What such a perception overlooks is the role of religion as a tool of domination used by the elite to justify subaltern inferiority in one situation after another: for example, slavery, serfdom and gender oppression, not to mention the innate inferiority of lower castes in India (on which more below). Insofar as it ignores or downgrades this disempowering role, therefore, religion is theorized by the Subaltern Studies framework in a necessarily one-sided (and thus misleading) fashion.

On the important subject of the relationship between the whole (= caste system) and its parts (*jatis*), Chatterjee [1989: 180] makes the following two claims: first, that the parts are held together only by the mediation of force (original emphasis); and second, that this force is religion. On this point he finds support in Dumont [1970], who claims that it is the ideological force of *dharma* (religion) that binds the *jatis* (castes) together by defining the place of *each jati* within the system, connecting them with one another and separating them at the same time. Chatterjee [1989: 180] endorses Dumont's work as 'the most powerful and constructive construction of the synthetic theory of caste', but rejects its totalizing character in order to make room for those classified as subaltern, who according to him 'have their own ideology within the universalizing ideology of the upper castes'. The tension between the two antinomic processes is, according to Chatterjee [1989: 184], the dialectic that Dumont has missed. There is a further difference between him and Dumont, who separates religion (*dharma*) from economy (*artha*), the former encompassing the latter. Dumont accepts that economic (and political) considerations play a residual role in the middle of the caste hierarchy, but the two extreme

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poles—highest and lowest—are determined solely by considerations of purity/pollution. Chatterjee extricates the political from the all-encompassing religion in Dumont's thesis and re-presents these relations of power as the centripetal force which negates oppositions within (and thus unifies) the caste system. In this way, Chatterjee combines Dumont, Weber and Foucault in the analysis of the caste system, which oscillates between religion and politics untouched by economics. Caste and class are posited as opposites, notwithstanding his initial claim to see a unity between structure and superstructure in the caste system [Chatterjee, 1989: 181].

Another member of the Subaltern collective, GyanPrakash [1992], has argued that the 'mode of production' discourse mistakenly puts class in opposition to the caste system, patriarchy, race, ethnic relations, whereas in his view class is articulated with these other determinations. He cites Dirks's [1987] study as an appropriate treatment of class and the caste system [Prakash, 1992: 176]. The difficulty with this is that Dirks, very much like Chatterjee and other exponents of the Subaltern Studies approach, scrupulously avoids the issue of class. His main concern is the relationship between caste and power in isolation from economic relations. In Dirk's ethno-historical account of Pudukkottai, a kingdom in South India, the history of the peasantry is conspicuous by its absence. This point is important, since the central element in the social structure of the kingdom was the relationship between peasant and landlord, the two principal agrarian classes, the king himself being the biggest landlord of the kingdom. Pudukkottai was founded on the labour of the peasantry, and a monograph about the kingdom that has no room for them cannot seriously be considered to be a study of class.

Having sidestepped the interrelated questions of peasant and class, Dirks presents his argument about the caste system in apparent opposition to that of Dumont, according to whom the spiritual (= religious) element in the caste hierarchy encompasses the economic and the political. Like Chatterjee, Dirks is opposed to Dumont's conceptualization of the relationship between religion and politics, and consequently inverts this so as to argue that in the caste hierarchy the political encompasses the religious. Accordingly, Dirks presents the political hierarchy—as peasants appear only marginally in his work, a link between ruler and the ruled involving relations within the landlord class only—as one between deity and devotee. Significantly, land, which is the basis of the relationship between king and landlords

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(and, ultimately, also peasants), is missing from Dirks's account. In this respect, there is an epistemological overlap between Dumont and Dirks, notwithstanding the latter's claim to opposition: in effect, Dirks ends up by validating Dumont's principal claim. By defining political hierarchy as a relationship between deity and devotee, therefore, Dirks allocates determination to the domain of the spiritual. Dumont empowers the spiritual, while Dirks spiritualizes power. Dumont, Dirks and Chatterjee exhibit a common ideological approach: all of them regard power as essentially spiritual/religious. Notwithstanding Prakash's claim to delineate the relationship between caste and class, therefore, class is absent from Subaltern Studies discourse on caste: in its discourse caste hierarchy is religious. Here I agree with Dipankar Gupta [1984: 183] that religion (purity/impurity) is not of itself the basis of caste hierarchy. Much rather, religion is the legitimating principle—not the basis—of caste hierarchy. As will be seen below, separating caste from class is an ideological exercise that violates material reality, and thus corresponds to myth-making reification.

Subaltern Studies as Brahmanical Ideology

Accordingly, Subaltern Studies' synthetic theory of caste accepts the fundamental premise of purity/impurity advanced by Dumont, and then combines it with a notion of subaltern resistance. Thus, for example, Chatterjee maintains that Balramis engaged in the act of resistance invoke Hadi Mehtar (an untouchable), whom they then promote in the caste hierarchy to the position of the purest, and correspondingly reduce the Brahmin to a particularly impure and degenerate lineage. By means of this inversion, we are told, the Balramis 'subvert the very claim of the dominant *dharma* that the actual relations of caste are in perfect conformity with its universal ideality' [Chatterjee, 1989: 203]. However, since this act of subversion takes place exclusively in the realm of ideas, which according to Subaltern Studies is internal to the logic of pure consciousness, it is necessary to ask what—if anything—has actually changed at the grassroots. That is, has this 'act of subversion' made any difference to the real life situation of the subaltern, in terms of transforming extant relations between Brahmins and Mehtars?[4] In this connection it is important to remember that where the caste system is concerned, just such an ideological 'act of subversion' was

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undertaken—fruitlessly, as it turned out—by Mahatma Gandhi. He renamed the untouchables (shudras/dalits) who occupy the bottom of the economic/political hierarchy, and are accordingly among the most impure, as *harijans* (= children of God). This renaming, however, did not change raise their status in caste hierarchy, and in economic terms Gandhi's *harijans* are still struggling to improve their situation. In short, there is no causal link between the ideological inversion of caste hierarchy in the mind of the subaltern and the undermining of its material reality.

Where such an idealist concept of caste leads, and why, is not difficult to discern. For Chatterjee [1989: 203], caste results from the fact that, in order to protect the purity of his body, a Brahmin must avoid engaging in defiling acts of labour; the latter tasks must as a result be performed by unclean (= impure) castes. In effect, it required the manual labour of a host of workers from the impure castes in order to reproduce the ritual purity of the few. The grains consumed by the pure were produced by the impure, the wells from which they drank water and washed their bodies to keep themselves pure were dug by the impure, the cloth they used to cover their pure bodies was spun by the impure, and the houses they lived in were built by the impure. Despite all this, the impure were not allowed even to cast a polluting shadow on anything they produced. This was the reality of *jatis* in India that has not completely disappeared even today.

The question, therefore, is not that the pure abstain from defiling occupations so as to protect the purity of their bodies, making such work the vocation of the impure, but what dynamic reproduces this division of labour? What precisely makes it possible for the pure to abstain from unclean occupations, and what compels the impure to undertake such tasks? The answer to these questions is clear. It is not the force of the sacred *dharma*, but much rather the structure of *karma*: the division of labour associated with caste is dictated not by the realm of the sacred so much as by the monopoly of economic and political power exercised by the upper castes in the profane, material world. It is, in short, the dependence of impure castes on the pure for their means of subsistence that compels the former to do the unclean jobs.[5] Religion only legitimates this arrangement. No wonder that Brahmin apologists such as Kane [1974] treated the differences between *jatis* as differences between natural species [cf. Chatterjee, 1989: 183]. Dominant ideology represents the social difference between unequal groups—caste, race,

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gender—as natural and thus unchangeable [Beteille, 1981]. However, taking the principle of legitimation at its face value is to confuse the appearance with reality. Subaltern studies, like mainstream sociology, takes the dominant ideology, the religious principle legitimizing the caste system, at its face value, and then adds to this its own populist notion of an empowering subaltern consciousness, all of which is decoupled from the social conditions of existence.

Perhaps because of its parochial Indocentric emphasis, the Subaltern Studies approach overlooks the existence of similar kinds of discourse legitimizing similar kinds of working arrangements elsewhere. Citizens in antiquity, the landed aristocracy in Medieval Europe, and the slave holders in the New World all abstained from unclean work, which was done by the labouring classes, slaves and serfs, who—like impure castes in India—were dependent on the former for their economic survival. This comparison is important, because the purity/impurity opposition is invariably represented as being culturally unique to India, where it is rooted in religion and socially embodied in the caste system.

Caste as Community

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that exponents of the Subaltern Studies approach also depict caste in a symptomatically harmonious and benign fashion, as community [Chatterjee, 1996]. Community is used here in a Weberian sense of 'status group' marked by an equality within the group that is independent of economic position or political power (on which see Weber [1958b]). Since a caste was/is not a self-contained unit, confusing one with community is not only theoretically misleading but also empirically untenable. Although in certain limited areas of commensality and endogamy, a caste was/is relatively autonomous, when the wider social context is taken into account—including the modes of subsistence and power relations that were central to the reproduction of a caste—it is necessary to consider a caste as part of a system: that is, the caste system, which was/is *not* communal. The caste system was/is an inherently unequal structure, and in this sense Dumont is correct to emphasize the hierarchical character of the caste system. The problem with Dumont, however, is that analytically he stands the hierarchy of the caste system on its head. As a unit of hierarchy, caste in the caste system is both a point

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of unity and simultaneously also a marker of the material and symbolic boundaries separating the castes from one another. The element of untouchability innate to and licensed by caste makes problematic the desire by those Indianists and Indian scholars (Ashish Nandy and other scholars, mentioned by Chatterjee [1996: 289]) who wish India to 'create its own brand of modernity' on the model *of jatis* as the embodiment of organizational and moral solidarity.

Because the Subaltern Studies framework locates the basis of community in caste, yet delinks the latter from property and production relations, its attempt to equate this with an empowering subaltern consciousness operating at the grassroots in India cannot but fail. Simply put, community in caste lacks empirical reality, and thus constitutes a fiction. More broadly, this problem stems from the failure on the part of exponents of the Subaltern Studies framework to distance themselves from essentialist concepts of caste. Having subscribed to the notion of purity/impurity as the basis of the abstention by upper castes from manual work, they then advance this not only as the reason for India's cultural 'uniqueness' but also, and more problematically, as the source of mutuality and community benefiting those at the bottom of the hierarchy. In this way, caste becomes the locus of an empowering identity by means of which the subaltern expresses his/her resistance. Abstention from manual work is common to upper classes in all socio-economic formations characterized by class inequality, but without the benefit of India's cultural uniqueness (the idea of purity/impurity). It follows that abstaining from manual work is a matter of class inequality, and is empowering only for those who benefit from this. For agricultural workers and peasants, by contrast, such legitimation of the division of labour is—and cannot be other than disempowering. Purity/impurity may be a culturally specific form of legitimation for the caste system in India, but this is very different from the claim—made by Subalternists and others—that it is the *cause* of what they take to be India's 'uniqueness' or 'exceptionalism'.

Peasants and Political Economy

Paradoxically, the concept of 'peasants' utilized by the Subaltern Studies project—according to which the subaltern is defined as people 'of inferior rank, a name for the general attribute of subordination in

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terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way' [Guha, 1983: 35]—is so all-embracing as to be almost meaningless. Like class, caste and gender, the subaltern is a relational category defined in terms of subordination; the *basis* of this subordination, a characteristic feature of the subaltern, is found in the relations—economic, political, cultural—between it and an elite. Although Guha [1983: 35] recognizes that 'subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even in moments of rebellion', the concept of a ruling group composed of landlords and/or rich peasants *within* the ranks of the subaltern is a possibility that the Subaltern Studies project overlooks [Bayly, 1988: 16]. In short, the exclusion by the Subaltern Studies project of economically dominant elements from the ranks of what it conceptualizes as a uniform category of subordinated rural producers is, it will be recalled, what populists also do (and have done historically) in many other contexts [Brass, 1991]. It is a methodological procedure that fails to ask questions about the presence and effects of distinct production relations and an internally differentiated agrarian structure. Not only is the material basis of subaltern subordination masked, but masking the basis of subordination/domination in this manner is also in essence no different from what dominant (elite/ruling class) ideology seeks to do.

During the era of colonial rule, Guha [1983] states, rents constituted the most substantial part of income from property in land. The landlord/tenant link, he rightly notes, was the predominant kind of agrarian relationship, and extra-economic coercion rather than free market exchange determined the process and level of surplus extraction. With these points it is impossible to disagree. More controversially, however, he then moves on to say that this 'was a relationship of dominance and subordination—a political relationship of the feudal type appropriately described as semi-feudal' [Guha, 1983: 6].[6] A landlord–tenant relationship was undeniably one of dominance/subordination, but it was based on a monopoly over land exercised by a landlord, and a corresponding economic dependence on the latter of a peasant for his/her means of subsistence (and survival). Guha is not alone in ignoring the basis of the dominance/subordination that structures agrarian relations: the resulting absence of class, a central feature of Subaltern Studies epistemology, cannot but have a serious impact on the understanding of the peasantry and peasant movements in colonial India.

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Much the same kind of difficulty informs the analysis by exponents of the Subaltern Studies approach of coercion employed in the process of surplus extraction. Thus, for example, Guha [1983: 8] writes that coercion 'was so explicit and so ubiquitous in all their [landlords'] dealings with the peasant that he could hardly look upon his relationship with them as anything but political'. The use by the landlords in Rajasthan of extra-economic coercion in the process of the surplus extraction was a common practice, and Guha is right to categorize this process as ubiquitous.[7] The problem, however, is that he treats coercion as purely and simply a political act, and thus as a relation wholly divorced from the economic. Although the use by landlords of what is termed extra-economic coercion is an integral part of agrarian relations in pre-capitalist/feudal social formations, such relations excluded the market exchanges that characterize capitalism and not economic considerations *per se.* As Maurice Dobb [1976] pointed out, 'direct politico-legal compulsion' for the exploitation of peasants under a feudal mode of production is necessary as long as they are not dispossessed of land—the means of production and subsistence. Perry Anderson [1978] has argued similarly that landownership under feudalism carried with it politico-juridical authority because of the need of the landlords to exercise extra-economic coercion. The economic right of landownership, he points out, and the extra-economic rights of politico-juridical authority were together constitutive of the 'totality of the production system'. Hence, the 'organic unity' of polity and economy under feudalism. The problem faced by Guha and other exponents of the Subaltern Studies approach is that, because they downplay or deny the significance of the economic, they split the organic unity of economy and polity. Consequently, they overemphasize the primacy of the political, which (as will be seen below) is a characteristic of revisionist historiography.

The same problem surfaces with regard to the way in which Guha accounts for the kind of power exercised by the triumvirate composed of *sarkari* (government), *sahukari* (moneylending) and zamindari (landlordism). The collusion between *sarkari, sahukari* and zamindari, he argues 'was a part of the common experience of the poor and the subaltern at the local level nearly everywhere', forming a 'composite apparatus of dominance over the peasant' in colonial India. He then adds that the subjection of the peasantry to this triumvirate was

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primarily (emphasis added) political in character [Guha, 1983: 8]. Again, with Guha's observation concerning the dominance exercised by this triumvirate over the peasant it is impossible to disagree. However, this agreement does not extend to his contention that this dominance was 'primarily political'. The basis of the dominance/subordination he outlines was political and economic. Indeed, insofar as it was part of the system of land tenure, the political in this case was an instrument of the economic.

Evidence for this claim about the inextricable nature of the political and economic is contained in my study of Rajasthan [Singh, 1998], where usury was an integral part of agrarian relations in princely states. The moneylender occupied a very important place in the general economy of the village, acting virtually as banker to and manager of the peasantry, lending them money for a variety of agricultural and non-agricultural purposes on interest rates ranging from 25 to 100 per cent. In return, he possessed the right to appropriate part of their produce—their surplus labour, in other words.[8] One implication of this arrangement was that in addition to being economically dependent on the landlord for access to land—the main source of his subsistence – a peasant was also dependent on the moneylender, often remaining indebted (and thus bonded) to the latter on an inter-generational basis. The most significant contributory factor to the debt bondage of the peasant, however, was the landlord practice of charging *shukrana* (= admission fee) when the lease had to be renewed, cash for the payment of which the peasant had to borrow from the moneylender. In addition to *shukrana*, there was also the practice of *sad* (= guarantee or surety), under which the peasant had to offer a cash surety for a regular payment of rents and cess. Customarily, it was the moneylender who would offer the surety on behalf of the peasant. If the peasant failed to pay the dues he owed his landlord, the latter could then hold the moneylender responsible. The subsequent claim made by a moneylender against an indebted peasant for this surety was recognized by law and sanctioned by the state. When a lease was renewed, therefore, the interest on the loan made to the peasant by the moneylender was deducted and repaid before the landlord received his payment. Similarly, land under mortgage could not be leased by a landlord to another tenant before debts owed to the moneylender were cleared [Singh, 1983]. Caught between a rock and a hard place

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(the landlord and the moneylender), the peasant lived in a state of perpetual poverty. The predicament confronting a peasant bonded by debt is aptly captured in the following couplet:

> *Pahle looten shah ji, duje jagirdar*
> *bacha-khucha so le gaye, in se manganhar*
> [The peasant is robbed first by the moneylender, then by the landlord, and whatever is left after that is taken away by the beggars]

Thus, the triumvirate that Guha writes about was very much part of the agrarian relations in the princely states of Rajasthan. Contrary to the claim made by Guha, the domination/subordination in this case was rooted in the Rajasthani system of land tenure, and as such was not primarily political but a consequence of the economic. The real issue, however, is not primacy, either of the political or of the economic, but the unity of the economic and the political, which is consistently denied in Subaltern Studies discourse. Guha's argument is that 'economic exploitation was *only one*, albeit the most obvious, of its several instances' [Guha, 1983: 8, original emphasis]. This essentially Weberian argument [cf. Weber, 1958b: 180–94] misses the point: namely, it is not that economic exploitation was *only one* of its several instances, but rather that the economic and the political are inseparably connected.

The Political Economy of Resistance and Power

Since the triumvirate composed of landlord/moneylender/government was essentially a political relationship, insists Guha [1983], insurgency aimed at destroying its power was equally essentially a political undertaking. According to this argument, the main aim of grassroots rural resistance was 'to turn the existing power nexus on its head' as a necessary precondition to the resolution of any problem. Against this view it is possible to make the following point. In the first place, the Subaltern Studies project presents no case where the aim of the insurgents was 'to turn the existing power nexus on its head', let alone one in which they succeed in achieving this. Instead, those engaged in subaltern agency are shown to be seeking redress for an immediate grievance caused by some 'excess'

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on the part of the dominant group. More importantly, what is at stake in turning 'the power nexus on its head' is not—as Guha and the exponents of subalternity imagine—merely a redress of 'excesses', but much rather a transformation of the system itself. In other words, the struggle is about the structure of land relations, an issue which is not only not 'an excess' but one that is overlooked by Subaltern Studies discourse.

Like Guha's conceptualization of dominance/subordination in the landlord/moneylender/government triumvirate, Chatterjee's [1988] 'modes of power' typology separates political power from the social relations of production. As a result, it ignores not only the economic, but also the socio-cultural and juridical aspects of subaltern existence. Most problematically, his typology collapses slave and feudal modes of power into one, a conflation which overlooks the fact that the slave (under slavery) and the serf (under feudalism) are two fundamentally different relational categories. To begin with, the slave not only had no property rights but was him/herself the property of a master. As Weber [1976: 397] points out, slaves in antiquity were considered part of the master's extended household (*familia*), were called 'speaking tools' (*instrumentum vocale*), and were housed next to the cattle ('semi-speaking tools', or *instrumentum semi-vocale*). They lived in barracks, and possessed neither property nor family. As they had no *peculium* (property), they had no monogamous relationship either, and consequently 'their sex life was a kind of supervised prostitution' [Weber, 1976: 398]. Slave women produced and reared children, who became in turn the property of her master. It was no accident that, like slaves in antiquity, slaves in the New World reproduced in the interest of their master. Thomas Jefferson, the American icon of freedom, liberty and democracy, used to treat pregnant slave women with special kindness, because in rational calculation, 'a [slave] child raised every two years is of more profit than the crop of the best labouring man' [Wood, 1993: 9].

In the historical transition from slavery (of antiquity) to serfdom (of the medieval era), serfs acquired the right to possess property (land), the means of their subsistence, along with the right to have their own dwelling and family [Weber, 1976]. Their children were no longer bought and sold as one more commodity by landlords. Serfs also had a different legal-juridical status: unlike slaves, they had the right to represent themselves. From being classified as chattels

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(= 'speaking tools'), therefore, those who worked on the land were recognized as 'persons', albeit serfs who were much lower in status than a landlord and dependent on him. Chatterjee fails to recognize both the fact of these differences and also that such distinctions were simultaneously economic, political, juridical and cultural, mainly because he is indifferent to the question of land/labour relations, the basis of the peasant/landlord relationship. When considering the state/landlord/peasant link, therefore, Chatterjee [1988: 384–86] does not even mention land relations. Symptomatically, his modes of power typology theorizes a peasantry without reference to land, and as such is not a particularly useful framework for the study of peasants and peasant movements in pre-colonial, colonial or post-colonial India (or, indeed, anywhere else).

It is perhaps significant that the analytical separation of the economic and the political, together with a consequent downgrading of the economic and an attribution of primacy to the political, is an epistemology that the Subaltern Studies framework shares with the revisionist historiography of the 1789 French Revolution.[9] Politics for the revisionists was a 'high polities' which did not recognize the role of 'subsistence anxiety' or 'guild interests' in the 1789 Revolution. Mixing the economic and political was dismissed by this revisionist historiography as a 'Leninist graft' [Kaplan, 1995: 75], and its leading exponent [Furet, 1981] insisted much rather that the revolution 'founded not new economic relations but new political principles and new modes of governance'. In reality, however, the political and the economic were 'deeply imbricated' [Kaplan, 1995: 78]. Like exponents of the Subaltern Studies approach, revisionist historiographers of the 1789 revolution claimed 'primacy' and 'autonomy' for the political, while their critics emphasized the 'effete, elitist, rarefied nature' of this claim for its failure to recognize the 'complementarity' between the political and the social and the 'fusion of the political with the economic'. The 1789 French Revolution, such critics insisted, which dissolved the existing *ancienrégime* and laid the foundation for the modern (bourgeois/liberal) political order, was 'social', and they rightly emphasized that history 'cannot be cut into slices' [Kaplan, 1995: 106–9]. Subaltern Studies not only slices history and society into discrete political/economic/cultural domains, but also (and therefore) keeps them neatly separate and mutually exclusive.

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Intersection of Economic, Political, and Cultural

That the domains of the political/economic/cultural were inextricable where landlord/peasant relations were concerned is clear from the case of the princely states in Rajasthan, where the land tenure system was structured by an hierarchical system of ownership. Land in princely Rajasthan was monopoly of landlords comprising of the ruler (the biggest landlord of the state) and the landlords holding grants in return for military service. Peasants were dependent on the class of landlords for usufruct rights to land, the main source of their subsistence. It was on this tenure system that all relations between peasants and landlords in Rajasthan were based. Another feature of tenure in the princely states was that landownership conferred on proprietors the additional right to politico-juridical administration. While the jurisdiction of the ruler extended to the entire princely state, the *thikanedars* (landlords holding military grants) were the political administrators and the judges within their respective territories. As landownership necessarily entailed politico-juridical authority—the 'organic unity of economy and polity' referred to above—the dependence of the peasantry on a landlord for land also led to their political and juridical dependence on the same subject.

Extra-economic coercion exercised by landlords in order to extract rental payments and cesses varied, from physical torture and humiliation to the attachment and sale of any movable/immovable property belonging to a peasant. Moreover, peasants in Rajasthan were subjected to a variety of cultural restrictions. For example, women belonging to the agriculturalist castes were not allowed to wear gold.[10] In the event of a peasant having to put in an appearance at the fort or the court of his landlord, he was forbidden from wearing a turban. Nor were peasants allowed to ride a horse or an elephant. Thus a tenant might own hundreds of cows, oxen, goats and sheep, but not a single horse or an elephant. Even though it was the peasant who had to feed all the horses and elephants owned by the landlord, such animals remained the exclusive property of the latter because they symbolized his status. The capacity of tenants to dispute the power of landlords was nonexistent: although courts in the princely state notionally provided tenants with legal protection, these institutional forms were in fact controlled by the landlord class. In effect, therefore, members of the latter had enormous power over peasants and their

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kinsfolk: consequently, peasant movements in Rajasthan between 1910 and the 1940s cannot be understood in isolation from their multiple dependence on and subordination to landlords due to the monopoly by the latter over land, the chief means of production in the princely states and—where peasants were concerned—the sole means of subsistence.

Not the least problematic aspect of the Subaltern Studies framework, therefore, is its failure to take account of regional variations affecting the history of the peasantry in colonial India. Thus, for instance, during the era of British colonial rule in India, peasant history in the princely states of Rajasthan was different from that of the peasantry under the *ryotwari* system in Madras, the *taluqdari* system in Oudh, or the zamindari system in Agra. One reason for this failure on the part of the Subaltern Studies project to recognize the importance of regionally specific variations in the way the peasantry was (or was not) transformed over time is once again easy to discern: its indifference to the land question and property relations linked to this. It is a point to which I shall return.

Subaltern Consciousness and Agency

In the study of peasant insurgency, Subaltern Studies' point of departure is the subjective awareness of those at the rural grassroots in India. Indeed, it has been argued that it is in this very subjectivity that much of what passes for subaltern identity lies: 'It is in order to rehabilitate that subject that we must take the peasant rebel's awareness of his own world and his will to change it as our point of departure' [Guha, 1983: 11]. Subaltern Studies identifies itself as a 'discourse about the properties of mind ... attitudes, ideas, beliefs, etc., rather than about *externalities*' [Guha, 1983: 33, emphasis added].[11] Although subjective awareness is unarguably an important aspect of subaltern (= peasant) identity/agency, any epistemology which decouples consciousness from the objective conditions structuring grassroots existence—the 'externalities' that constitute the 'out-there' material world inhabited by the subaltern, in other words—cannot but result in partial and thus inadequate explanations of peasant agency. Rather obviously, subaltern awareness, like that of elite awareness, is entwined with and necessarily shaped by the real conditions of their respective forms of social existence. Issues of land and livelihood, excluded as

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'externalities' in Subaltern Studies' discourse, are in fact the foundation of peasant 'awareness', and separating them from the latter is to reify consciousness itself.

Subaltern Consciousness

Grassroots subjective awareness in the Subaltern Studies framework is essentially religious, and it has been argued [Chatterjee, 1988: 169] that 'religion is a constitutive force in subaltern consciousness'. The religious character of peasant consciousness has been noted and emphasized by many others [Engels, 1974; Hilton, 1974; Gough, 1974] outside the Subaltern Studies framework. What distinguishes the latter, however, is its view that peasant consciousness and its essentially religious character are both independent of the social conditions informing subaltern existence. In reality there is an intrinsic connection between the religious and non-religious dimension—the material conditions/concerns—of peasant consciousness. That the latter is not only religious emerges clearly from the preoccupation of peasants everywhere with a capacity to obtain their subsistence requirements, on a daily, seasonal or yearly basis. This is movingly depicted in the film, *Tree of Wooden Clogs*, during a scene when the peasant returns home after a hard day's work in the field, and his wife shows him for the first time her newborn child, telling him 'we have a new baby, a son'. The husband takes a deep breath and says, 'one more mouth to feed'. This, too, is also part of peasant consciousness. In the Mexican state of Chiapas, Mayan peasants use corn as a symbol of their life and struggle ('we are people of corn').[12] Corn, their staple food, serves as a symbol for secular as well as religious occasions [Krauze, 1999].

Much the same is true of Rajasthan during the period in question, when religion was a very important element of peasant consciousness. At the same time, however, peasants there were preoccupied with survival needs, and this consideration was an integral part of their consciousness. The following couplets convey the ideas that inform peasant consciousness:

Nai munjari khat ke na chuta pani
Bhasaralyan do char ke duje bapari

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Bajar handa bat dahi me oira
Itha de kartar phir nahin bolna

[A cot with new *moonj* (hemp), thatched roof that does not leak, two-four buffaloes to milk, a potful of ground/cooked *bajari* (corn family) with curd. O Lord! Give me that. I'll ask for no more]

The consciousness of a peasant woman is equally clear about the importance of such mundane issues:

Uethe hi piro hoye, uethe hi sasro
Athune hoye khet, chabe nahin arso
Nara khet nazik, jathe hal kholna
Itna de kartar, phirnahinbolna

[Let my parents' house be in the same village as that of my husband's; let the fields be to the west (so that while carrying food for her husband to the field in the forenoon and returning in the afternoon, she does not face sun); let the thatched roof not leak, let there be a pond near the field, so that oxen may be unyoked quickly for watering. O Lord! Give me that. I'll ask for no more]

In the *real* consciousness of the *real* peasant, religious (sacred) and secular (profane) issues are inextricably linked. By contrast, the Subaltern Studies framework decouples the religious from the secular, and presents subaltern consciousness as wholly sacred.

Elite Consciousness

What exponents of the Subaltern Studies approach seemingly forget, when categorizing religion as a central component of an empowering subaltern consciousness, is that religion is as much part of *elite* consciousness as that of the subaltern. It is a truism, therefore, that in Rajasthan religion was a very important part of landlord life. During my fieldwork there I heard numerous stories about rulers and their military grantees (landlords) going to war—their traditional vocation (= *jati dharma*/'caste religion')—carrying images of their family deities with them on their horses and elephants as they rode into battle. Similarly, when travelling from Delhi to Jaipur it is impossible to miss the fact that many of the hills near Amber (Jaipur) are surmounted by small temples built by former rulers and landlords, a reminder of their

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religious fervour (= awareness). Every royal household and every *thikana* in Rajasthan had its own family temple and family priests, in addition to a number of other small (and sometimes large) temples patronized and protected by them in their respective territories. Landlords also patronized priests and Brahmans who used to visit them regularly, and from afar, so as to collect their alms. The important question to ask in this connection is: what, precisely, did the temples, priests and Brahmans do for their patrons in exchange?

Once again, the answer is clear and simple. Priests and Brahmans, in their temples, reiterated (and thus reproduced) the dominant ideology that it was providence who gave landlords the onerous duty to rule. Landlords in the princely states of Rajasthan, it was claimed, administered justice (a right attached to their land grants) as a duty to God: 'For the subjects whom God has consigned to our care' [Singh, 1998] was the dominant view of justice prevalent in the territories held by the premier landlords of the state. There is—or ought to be—no mystery about the service religion provides for agrarian elites across time and space: the capacity of the dominant landed class to reproduce (and thus retain) its economic/political/cultural power has always been presented by the ideologues of this class as obedience to the will of providence. Brahmins in India, priests in antiquity and the medieval times, and sociologists and historians in the modern era have all found in religious ideas the main justification for the wealth of and rule by ruling classes/castes. This is true even under capitalism, where the pursuit of profit (= 'rational acquisition') by the bourgeoisie is presented as the realization of the Protestant ethic [Weber, 1958c]. The reward/punishment represented by heaven and hell were thus effective ideological methods of enforcing the monopoly by landlords over the political/juridical/military powers necessary for the exploitation and domination of the subaltern [Sharma, 1985]. Thomas Jefferson, who lived off the proceeds of slave labour, considered the maintenance of slavery as a duty assigned to him by providence, noting 'this was one of the times when providence has made our interest and our duties coincide perfectly' [Wood, 1993: 9]. Thus 'providence' is not only the province of rural subaltern, let alone one that empowers the latter. The agrarian elite, too, has a claim to be empowered by 'providence', in a way that is actually disempowering to the subaltern: namely, the deployment of religious discourse in order to legitimate the exploitation and domination of subaltern by attributing this process to divine authority. The irony

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of this situation is unmistakable. Despite the fact that the Subaltern Studies framework is highly critical of what it calls elite historiography (especially of the Marxist variety) for its alleged failure to understand the religious character of subaltern consciousness, exponents of the project end up with an interpretation of religion that is itself no different from (feudal/bourgeois) elite historiography.

Consciousness and Agency

The epistemological difficulties with subaltern consciousness emerge starkly when it calls forth subaltern agency. Identifying peasant insurgency in India with subaltern consciousness, therefore, Guha [1983: 4] writes:

> Hence the word insurgency has been used in the title and the text as the name of that consciousness which informs the activity of the rural masses known as ... revolt, uprising, etc. ... To acknowledge the peasant as the maker of his own rebellion is to attribute, as we have done in this work, a consciousness to him.

Subaltern Studies' stated objective in investigating peasant insurgency is 'to identify some of the "common forms or ideas" in rebel consciousness during the colonial period ... These *elementary aspects* ... recur again and again and almost everywhere in our agrarian movements' [Guha, 1983: 12, original emphasis]. The most elementary aspect of an insurgent subaltern consciousness, it is argued, is its religious character. Hence resistance by the subaltern is categorized as the effect of religious consciousness: 'In sum, it is not possible to speak of insurgency ... except as a religious consciousness ... a massive demonstration of self-estrangement' [Guha, 1983: 34]. The problems with this interpretation (religion = subaltern consciousness = subaltern agency) are as follows.

In the first place, and as has been argued elsewhere [Singh, 1998], to look for the *elementary aspects* of the peasant movements is to transhistoricize the latter.[13] Second, and as has been argued above, although the Subaltern Studies approach is right to emphasize the significance of religion in peasant insurgency, it nevertheless fails to understand three things. First, that where religion can be said to fulfil a progressive role in subaltern insurgency, of which it becomes

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the main discourse, it possesses a socio-economic dimension.[14] More often, however, the role of religious discourse is rather less progressive. The second point misrecognized by the Subaltern Studies approach, therefore, is that religion usually discourages insurgency, and advocates instead the (passive) acceptance of the *status quo*.[15] Third, where religion licenses grassroots mobilization, the object of this agency is to restore the *status quo ante*.[16] In Subaltern Studies discourse, however, religion in subaltern consciousness is divorced from its social context and then presented as a property unique to subaltern mind and exclusively radical. Against the latter view it is necessary to reiterate that religion is neither an exclusive attribute of subaltern consciousness, nor an exclusive instrument of rebellion.

The three points made against the depiction by Subaltern Studies of the peasant consciousness/agency link merit further elaboration. The first—that when it is progressive, religion is about social context (= bread-and-butter issues)—is largely self-evident. Hence peasant insurgency couched in religious idioms will in such circumstances also be about the need for autonomous political representation, bread, shelter, land, employment and wages, together with opposition to labour-rent, cess and forced labour. A crucial factor in this connection is that, in many instances, it is not the religious consciousness of the subaltern *per se*, but rather the application by non-subalterns of religious teachings to the material conditions of the subaltern that makes such idioms relevant to insurgency. This is what one finds in the account of peasant movements in Oudh provided by Gyan Pandey [1988: 258–59], an important figure in the Subaltern Studies group, whose work on agrarian mobilization is also empirically grounded. In this context, the slogan 'Victory to Sita Ram' (Sita Ram Ki Jai)—invented by Baba Ramchandran, who was not subaltern by class or caste—was taken up by peasants, because it symbolized justice with regard to land rights, rents and labour services, all real issues in their social existence.[17] Most exponents of the Subaltern Studies framework, however, refuse to recognize the role of non-peasant elites in the development of subaltern consciousness, a refusal that leads them, erroneously, to attribute autonomy to consciousness and primacy to religion in producing/reproducing this consciousness. The second and third points, that Subaltern Studies underestimate the extent to which religion disapproves of 'from below' challenges to what it sees as legally-constituted authority, and that the insurgencies of which it

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does approve tend to be backwards-looking insurrections aimed at the restoration of a previous 'golden age', are similar and can be covered together. These are characteristics of millennial movements, both in India [Fuchs, 1965] and elsewhere. Thus French peasants who took part in the Vendee insurrection during the period 1793–95 [Godechot, 1972] and Mexican peasants who participated in the Cristiada uprising during the late 1920s [Meyer, 1976] are instances of subaltern mobilization in defence both of reactionary religious beliefs and of counter-revolutionary social forces. Viewed thus, the more religious idioms are specifically about religion itself, the less forward-looking subaltern agency based on them is likely to be. Conversely, the less such idioms are concerned with religious belief/authority, the more forward-looking the subaltern mobilization.

The peasantry in Rajasthan used religious standards to judge the conduct of landlords (the rulers and landlords) and found that the practice of the latter violated the norms that they themselves professed in theory. Pathik, the leader of the Bijolia movements in Mewar (1917–22), who, like Baba Ramchandran in Oudh, was himself not a peasant by caste or class, launched the movement on the occasion of *Ram Nawami*, a time of special religious significance to the members of the main agriculturalist castes in Mewar. He grew a beard and wore saffron-coloured clothing, which were symbolic of a *sanyasin* (renouncer) whose vocation was to work for a just social order. Many of his followers emulated him by dressing in saffron and growing beards. He composed and communicated his message of protest in the form of *bhajanawali* (religious songs), a popular folk medium. The Jats, the principal agriculturalist caste in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan, organized a purificatory religious ceremony, *Mahayajna*, before launching their protest. In these cases, however, the religious consciousness of peasants cannot be seen in isolation from their economic/political/cultural context. Much rather, a discourse couched in religious idioms and involving religious practice was in all these cases embedded in the material interests and political rights and obligations of the subaltern. Issues such as landlord violation of peasants' economic and political rights, and the restrictions imposed by the landlord class on their cultural freedom were projected by the non-peasant leadership of these movements as a violation of the religious order, which in turn attracted massive grassroots support. When Jats in the Shekhawati region of Jaipur state were prevented by the landlord

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from using elephants in the procession marking the conclusion of their ritual purification, it generated a powerful anti-landlord sentiment. In these circumstances, therefore, what makes religious consciousness relevant to grassroots rural insurgency is precisely its connection with the material and symbolic interests of peasants (and landlords). This crucial and complex link—between religion, material interests and symbolic representations—in the shaping of peasant consciousness is erased in the Subaltern Studies framework.

The 1789 French Revolution and the Historiographic Counter-Revolution

In many ways, the recasting by the Subaltern Studies framework of rural grassroots insurgency simply as religious consciousness, and the corresponding attempt to write revolution out of Indian history, mimics a similar attempt by revisionist historians in France to recast peasant agency in and expunge revolution from the meaning of 1789.

Hence the claim by Pierre Chaunu, an important figure of 'the galaxy' of revisionists, that 'it was stigmatization of Christianity that corroded the Old Regime' [Kaplan, 1995: 29]. He argued that all the basic principles of the 1789 French Revolution—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—were in fact part of (and thus not breaks with) the Jewish/pagan/Christian tradition [Kaplan, 1995: 40]. In a similar vein, Francois Furet has claimed that 'everything shows ... that the principal motivating force of the Vendean revolt is religious, and not social or simply political' [Kaplan, 1995: 72], thereby conflating the progressive deployment of religious discourse with its other, non-progressive form (see above). The emphasis placed by revisionist historiography on subjectivity (= awareness) derives—like that of the Subaltern Studies approach—from a common preoccupation with agency informed by discourse unconnected with material issues/conditions at the rural grassroots.[18] In short, a view that 'the gaze beyond the discourse is neither relevant nor legitimate', which in effect denied the social a place in history. Thus, for example, Furet's collaborator Mona Ozouf argued that 'ideas were what mattered ... The ideas had no need of an external contextual incubator' [Kaplan, 1995: 54], while Furet himself proclaimed that 'virtually everything that is not ideological is external

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... and irrelevant'. This idealist epistemology replicates, more or less exactly, the views of Guha and Chatterjee concerning the immaterial role of 'externalities' in the generation of subaltern consciousness/agency in India.[19]

The epistemological overlap between Subaltern Studies and revisionist historiography of the 1789 French Revolution stems in turn from a common antipathy towards class. In refusing to recognize the 'external', therefore, revisionist historians were rejecting the relevance of class formation and class conflict to an understanding of the 1789 French Revolution. Having identified the element of 'the social' with historical materialism and class struggle, Furet abandoned the former so as to get rid of the latter.[20] Treating the element of 'the social' as 'synonymous with a universal explanation predicated on economic factors and the social relations they engendered' [Kaplan, 1995: 100–101], revisionist historians disregarded economic conditions for their alleged irrelevance to analysis and explanation, adhering instead to the view that 'the crucial matter is ideological'. Commenting on this revisionist bias, critics noted that 'instead of saying that the political domain and ideology are social reality as much as the famous infrastructures; in a word, instead of showing the inanity of a reductive materialism, the Furetian method consists in saying that feudalism [in France] is *only an idea*, in denying any reality to the agrarian structures' [Kaplan, 1995: 67]. As a result, it is impossible for revisionist historiography of the 1789 French Revolution—as it is also impossible for the Subaltern Studies approach to the subaltern in Indian history—to admit that 'differences in politics were deeply rooted in social reality' [Kaplan, 1995: 104].[21]

Peasant Insurgency: Caste and Class

Evidence from Rajasthan suggests that, contrary to the assertions by Subaltern Studies about India and by revisionist historians of the 1789 revolution about France, peasant consciousness and insurgency are indeed generated and sustained by material conditions at the rural grassroots. In the case of Rajasthan, such evidence consists of petitions filed by peasants against their landlords, which show indisputably the close relationship between structural conditions,

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consciousness and insurgency.[22] The most persistent issues in these petitions made by peasants during the period between 1910 and the end of the 1940s were the economic, political and cultural grievances arising from the existing system of land tenure: disputes over rents, cess and extra-economic coercion, all had their roots in property relations.[23] Key economic issues in these petitions included the rules of land settlement, renewal of leases, land revenue, and access to pastures, forests and irrigation wells.[24] Peasants in Rajasthan also complained that, in the course of surplus extraction and/or lease renewal/termination, landlords ignored the customs governing these processes.[25] Without exaggeration, therefore, it is possible to state that the land tenure system was at the root of most—if not all—peasant grievances expressed in petitions.

Another key issue, related to land tenure, was the dispute over cash rent and non-cash rent (or cess), especially the latter. In Rajasthan cash/kind/labour rent was the main form of surplus extracted from peasants, in return for the lands they leased from landlords. The fact that neither the number of labour days, nor the amount paid in lieu of a particular form of labour-service, were clearly established, underlined the arbitrary nature of rental appropriation which gave landlords unlimited power. Every major occasion in the life cycle of landlord and peasant alike was marked by a particular cess. It is therefore unsurprising to find that almost every petition relating to land issues also complained about cess, and in particular its arbitrary character.[26] There were also numerous complaints about forced labour (*begar*), one of the three principal obligations owed by peasants to the landlord in return for land.[27] As landlords had the power to employ extra-economic coercion in the extraction of surplus, peasants frequently protested about the brutality and injustice accompanying this process.[28] Based as it was on the economic and extra-economic exploitation of the peasants and other functionaries of the village, and supplemented by forced labour, the ostentatious lifestyle of landlords also came under attack. Hence the emphasis contained in petitions on the contrast between the conspicuous consumption of landlords and the bare survival of peasants: 'whereas the *thikanedars* living in their forts are deep down into the luxuries of dress, diet, drinks, and other indulgences, the *kisans* are finding it difficult to manage bare subsistence'. Acts of physical violence by landlords, especially outrages against female kin in the peasant household, were also the target of condemnation in petitions.[29]

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As discussed later (Chapter 5), in the earliest phase of movement, prior to the 1930s, peasants were apparently prepared to accept what they described as the 'customary rights' of the landlords to realize rents and some forms of cess, and even some kinds of forced labour. However, as time passed, the nature of the protests began to change: from complaints about violation of customs by the landlords, therefore, demands took a progressively more radical form, and from the 1930s onwards peasants in Rajasthan began questioning the very legitimacy of the land tenure system itself. Their slogans during the later stage of the movement were *'thikanedari pratha ka nash ho'* ('destroy the system of *thikanedari* [landlordism']) and *'thikanedaron ke zoolmon ka nash ho'* ('destroy the atrocities of the *thikanedars* ([landlords])'. The economic demands of the movement were accompanied by political and juridical demands targeted against what the peasants perceived as an 'irresponsible form of administration' and the 'arbitrary system of justice' in the 'autocratic and despotic' regime of the landlords. Lest it be thought that this amounted to the invocation of a 'golden age' (the Durbar = just/good ruler betrayed by those to whom he delegated power/land), an attack on the political authority of the *thikanedars* was at root an attack on the authority of the Durbar himself. This was because he stood at the head of the land tenure system in the princely states, and the position/authority/power of the Durbar consequently had no meaning without the *thikanedars*. The authority of the Durbar was in the last analysis a form of politico-juridical power rooted in the ownership by him of all lands in the state.[30]

In addition to these economic and political demands, peasants also asserted their right to cultural autonomy and struggled against various forms of cultural restriction imposed on them by landlords. In the Shekhawati region, therefore, Jats demanded status parity with Rajput landlords, appropriating the latter's status by adding the suffix 'Singh' (literally, lion) after their names—traditionally a prerogative of the Rajputs. The struggle for material rights was thus accompanied by struggle over the symbolic boundaries separating the two principal classes. What these struggles—not just possessing but *combining* economic, political and cultural dimensions—underline is that, except in the idealist epistemology of the Subaltern Studies framework, class interests self-evidently do not (and cannot) operate in a structural vacuum.[31]

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Peasants, Princes and Congress

Through a variety of local/provincial/national political organizations, peasant movements in Rajasthan were linked to agrarian mobilizations occurring throughout British and Indian India. Between the 1920s and the 1930s, local-level political organizations (Praja Mandals and the Lok Parishads) led mainly by educated urban youth, generally from a non-peasant background, came into existence in the princely states of Rajasthan. These organizations linked peasants at the grassroots level with the political organizations at the provincial and the national level, particularly the All India State Peoples' Conference and the Indian National Congress. One of the significant contributions these leaders and political organizations made was to break the insularity of peasant movements in princely states, by linking them with the popular movements in other parts of the country, and creating thereby a sense of unity among peasants that overrode the British-India/Indian-India divide.[32] Conventional wisdom in the historiography of rural India is that peasant movements in the princely states were beyond the reach of the Indian National Congress. Hence the argument that attributes the successes of Congress in British India but not in the princely states to the absence in the latter contexts of civil liberties and a political ban on Congress activity.

Bipin Chandra has used this argument to explain why the communists, and not Congress, succeeded in taking control of the peasant movement in Telangana [Roosa, 2001: 86]. Such an argument is confronted by a number of difficulties. In the first place, the absence of civil liberties would have affected the communists as much as it did Congress. Second, communists were no more welcome in Telangana than Congress. In the princely states of Rajasthan, where civil liberties were correspondingly absent, neither Congress nor the communists were welcome, a fact that did not prevent both from being actively involved in peasant movements there. In fact, rather than being a deterrent, an absence of civil liberties was an incentive for the active involvement of political parties and their local organizations, the Praja Mandals and the Lok Parishads. Congress leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, issued statements from time to time on peasant unrest in the princely states, and Gandhi's position on the latter was that Congress eschewed a policy of rigid and absolute non-intervention under all circumstances and all times.[33]

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Gandhi in fact developed a strategy championing the interests of peasants against the landlords and the rulers on the one hand, and on the other trying to drive a wedge between the Durbars and the colonial state.[34] The political links between peasant movements in the princely states, the All India Peoples Conference (a political organization coordinating agrarian mobilization in princely states at an all-India level), and the Indian National Congress were indeed more substantial than the occasional statements issued by their respective leaders indicate. Increasingly, the landlord class came to be seen as a crucial part of three interconnected problems: foreign domination over India, the underdeveloped nature of what was a backward economy, and the consequent impoverishment of the mass of the rural population. Hence the existence of an organic link—ideologically, tactically and strategically—between anti-landlord movements in the princely states and the wider anti-colonial/anti-landlord struggles led by Congress in British India. United by a common struggle of peasants against landlords that transcended the territorial boundaries between British India and Indian India, these movements were an important factor in the anti-colonial struggle that led to Independence and the creation of the Indian state [Moore, 1983].

There is another, and a more serious, misconception: namely, that Congress followed a strategy of passive revolution that postponed class struggle in the countryside until after the liberation of India from colonial rule. This view has been expressed most recently by Roosa [2001: 88], who notes that in Telangana, 'the Congress strategy [was one] of waiting until after independence to resolve pressing conflicts in the villages over property and grain'. The problem with this argument is that it disconnects the anti-colonial freedom movement from the class struggle over land rights, political representation and cultural reform in the countryside. Moreover, agrarian movements in the princely states of Rajasthan were not initiated from above by Congress, so the latter had no choice over whether or not to postpone them until after Independence. The involvement of communists and Congress in such mobilizations, however, beginning with the Bijolia movements (1917–22), did indeed change the organizational scale, ideological complexion, tactics and strategy of peasant insurgency in Rajasthan. As discussed elsewhere [Singh, 1998], initially the movements were controlled by communists under the leadership of Vijay Singh Pathik.[35] At this stage, they involved a multi-class alliance, consisting

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not only of poor peasants and agricultural labourers, but also of the tribal peasantry, along with rich and middle peasants, all engaged in the same fight against the landlords. Subsequently, Congress under Gandhi's leadership became involved, and—together with its allies (the Praja Mandals and the Lok Parishads in the princely states), and supported by merchants and industrialists of Rajasthani origin who had established business interests in the major industrial centres of India (Bombay, Calcutta, Madras)—succeeded in ousting the left leadership engaged in mobilizing poor peasants, landless labourers, and tribal populations along class lines.[36]

At this stage, there was a significant change in the class character of the peasant movements in Rajasthan: poor peasant and tribal interests were replaced by rich and middle peasant ones. The main slogan 'Land to the Tiller', adopted by rich and middle peasants under the tactical and ideological guidance of the Indian National Congress, in effect excluded poor peasants, landless labourers and the entire group of service castes subsumed under the *jajmani* system, as none of them were considered 'tillers'. Those excluded from the movements in this manner were *ipso facto* excluded from the land reform programmes in post-Independence India. The beneficiaries were the class of better-off tenants who were in the vanguard of these movements, and having acquired a share in state power used this to change property relations in the countryside, becoming proprietors of previously sublet lands. From a dependent peasantry with usufruct rights only, they became an independent landowning class. Erstwhile landlords who were able to accommodate the new conditions joined these rich and middle peasants, but as landowners on a par with their former tenants. The Jats, Sirvis, Bishnois and the Dhakars of Rajasthan, the principal agriculturalist castes during the colonial era, are now independent proprietors, along with their former Rajput landlords, and partners with them in state power at the provincial and central levels.

It is important to note that in its opposition to communists, who were supporting poor peasants and other marginalized groups in the agrarian sector, Congress was backed not just by the rich and middle peasantry in the countryside, and merchants/industrialists in the urban centres, but also by a section of the landlord class and the colonial state. In Rajasthan, therefore, Gandhi and Nehru (leaders of the Congress Party), the Birlas, Bajajs and Suranas (native Rajasthani industrialists), rich and middle

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peasants belonging to the principal agriculturalist castes, a section of the 'enlightened' landlords, and the colonial state, all worked together to prevent the success of *class* struggles in the countryside. What united them was the spectre of communism – that is, the fear of the rural poor and the tribal peasantry claiming a share in the state power and using it to change property relations in their favour. Communists had to be dealt with, and dealt with they were by whatever means it took, from political manoeuvring (in Rajasthan) to military action (in Telangana).[37] National liberation movement and class struggle were thus not two independent processes, where one had to wait until the other was achieved. *National liberation was class struggle, and the victorious class won the nation.* These questions about consciousness/agency—political alliances arising from rural class formation/struggle—are, however, not ones that exponents of the Subaltern Studies framework ask, let alone answer.

Concluding Comments

Subaltern Studies, it has been argued, share some of the basic epistemological assumptions with current revisionist historiography of the 1789 French Revolution. These include the perception of economic/social phenomena as 'external', the separation of the economic from the political, a reductionist view of class as 'economic', the dismissal of class struggle, and the centrality of the political. Above all, both insist on (and thus privilege) the primacy of ideas, especially religious ones, and each regards a de-materialized form of consciousness as the determining factor in social formation and transformation. Luminaries of the French revisionist historiography (Chaunu, Ozef, Furet) espoused these ideas in the 1970s and the 1980s, while in Germany, social historians began to abandon Marx for Weber, soon to be followed by French, British and American social scientists.[38] Like the revisionist historiography of the 1789 French Revolution, the similarly revisionist Subaltern Studies project also surfaced 'at the right time'. Again like their counterparts in France, key figures of the Subaltern Studies approach had once been Marxists who supported Naxalite theories about revolution.[39] In effect, both revisionisms—of French and Indian history—possess a common epistemology because they have identical political lineages.

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The intellectual and political claims made on behalf of the Subaltern Studies project are all problematic. Accordingly, it is not, as has been argued, a new and distinct perspective.[40] Much rather, it is an eclectic combination of various streams emanating from conservative epistemology—Brahmanical, orientalist, structural/functionalist and bourgeois-liberal. Its analysis of caste as essentially religious is Brahmanical and orientalist (= supportive of Dumont and Dirks).[41] What these apparently diverse perspectives have in common is their opposition to the economic/political/cultural emancipation of the subaltern by means of class struggle. Like the refusal to recognize gender identity/agency in a patriarchal society, or race identity/agency in a racist society, this refusal to recognize class identity/agency in a class society is not a value-free exercise. It is, quite simply, a form of elite ideology. The champions of this ideology are 'bored' with class (Singh, 2013).

Subaltern Studies objects to the 'elite' historiography of colonial India for regarding all peasant movements of the colonial period up to the end of the First World War as necessarily prefiguring either the Freedom Movement (liberal historians) or socialist and communist mobilization.[42] Elite historians, so the argument goes, confuse politics with the 'organized polities' of a movement possessing a political leadership and a well-defined political program. Any agrarian movement not conforming to this pattern is dismissed as 'pre-political'. What does Subaltern Studies have to offer to correct this imbalance? It treats all post-1917 movements as the 'post-history' of peasant insurgency, mainly on the ground that these movements were tainted by the involvement of Congress and communists. Does the appearance of Congress and the communists dissolve the peasantry and peasant consciousness in colonial India? It does not. Subaltern Studies, however, refuses to recognize post-1917 peasant movements because these do not fit its conceptual framework: namely, *elementary forms of peasant insurgency* in which subaltern identity and agency remain untouched by 'externalities'. The problem, however, is that any attempt to understand the decline of feudal property relations, the dissolution of colonial rule, and the emergence during the post-1947 era of agrarian capitalism—the real issues of Indian history involving peasants—cannot afford to ignore these movements.

Subaltern Studies' claim to represent the voice of the subaltern in a language which the subaltern cannot understand, even less identify

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with, adds to the mystification, a characteristic feature and function of elite ideology. Such claims to represent subaltern awareness have aptly been taken to task by Hooks [1990: 215]:

> I am sometimes awed, as in finding something terrifying, when I see how many of these people who are writing about domination and oppression are distanced from pain, the woundedness, the ugliness. That it's so much of the time just a subject—a 'discourse'. The person does not believe in a real way that what I say here, this theory I came up with, may help change the pain in my life or in the lives of other people.

Notes

1. Personal communication from Professor Abdul Kalam, Department of Anthropology, Madras University.
2. The basic organizing principle of the caste system (*jati vyavastha*) at an all-India level is found in the *varna* system (*varna vyavastha*). In principle, *varna* (derived from Sanskrit root *vri*) was based on *choice:* that is, individuals belonging to a particular *varna* shared a common *vocation by choice. Jati*, on the other hand, is derived from Sanskrit root *jayte* (born) meaning that one's vocation is determined by birth—a reversal of the *varna* principle. In mainstream sociology, there is no account of how, when and why this reversal took place. As discussed above, it produces no evidence to show when *varna* was an historical reality and when it became only a conceptual scheme of classification of *jatis* (castes). Hence the inference that *varna* is the ideology, the legitimating principle *of jati* that represents what is essentially social/historical as natural or divine.

   The earliest description of *varna* is found in the *rig veda*, according to which the four *varnas* were born out of the four limbs of the Creator of the universe (God): *Brahmin* from the mouth, *kshatriya* from the arms, *Vaishyas* from the thighs, and *shudras* from the feet. One finds an interesting parallel in the notion of the three estates of Medieval Europe, the priest, the lord and the serf, originating from three different parts of the Divine.
3. As Raymond Williams [1976/1983] has shown, a reductionist interpretation of 'determination' is closer to theology than to philosophy. More importantly, determination does not necessarily mean a mechanical or reductionist relationship. The same can be applied to the mechanical or reductionist interpretation of the structure–superstructure metaphor in Marx's writings. If one is unhappy with a Marxist, albeit 'vulgar' or reductionist, interpretation rather than with Marxism *per se*, one has an obligation to examine Marx's own writings to demonstrate that the reductionist—or a particular (theological) deterministic view of the structure/superstructure relationship—is unjustified. None of the scholars associated with the Subaltern Studies framework does that. Instead, they eclectically pick individual scholars or individual pieces of work by a particular scholar as representative of Marxism so as to denounce Marxist interpretation as inevitably reductionist, mechanical or vulgar.
4. It hardly seems necessary to point out that feeling oneself to be empowered is not the same as being empowered.

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5. Pure castes include not only Brahmins but also, and perhaps more importantly, the Rajputs.
6. This is not the place to comment on the appropriateness of the terms 'feudal' and 'semi-feudal' as used by Guha, since I have dealt with this issue at length previously [Singh, 1993].
7. In a petition submitted in 1930 by the *thikna vakils* (legal representatives) to the Durbar in one princely state, it is stated:

> From time immemorial, the *thikanedars*, like the state revenue authorities in the *khalsa* areas, have enjoyed the right to realize the outstanding dues from their tenants directly. If any tenant failed to make the payment, he was summoned to the *thikana* fort/court and was detained until he either consented to make the payment or provided sufficient reasons for postponing it until the next harvest ... It was not uncommon for the *thikana* dues to be recovered through attachment and sale of property of tenants who were otherwise unable to pay. [*Jagir File* C/3/4, Vol. 1., Revenue Powers of *Jagirdars*, RSAB]

8. In a petition filed by the moneylenders in one princely state in 1885, it is claimed:

> We have fed and maintained the *kisans* (peasants) by advancing them money in their needs of marriage, birth and death. We gave them food in famine. More importantly, we gave them every kind of help and thus fulfilled our duty to encourage them to bring the larger areas of land under cultivation, with the result that the *hasil* (cash rent), *bigori* (rent-in-kind) and *lag-bag* (cess) were paid to Shri Durbar (the state). Thus we served our purpose well.

9. For the debate over the meaning of the 1789 French Revolution, see Comninel [1987] and Best [1989].
10. A Jat female student at the University of Jodhpur informed me that she makes a point of wearing a gold anklet in public since it is a mark of freedom from past restrictions that prohibited Jat women from wearing such jewellery. The wearing of a gold anklet symbolized the privileged status of the Rajput (= the caste of *thikanedars* and the Durbar). This privilege was extended by Rajput landlords to favoured concubines, who were also permitted to wear gold anklets.
11. As Kumar [2000] has demonstrated with regard to the role of rumour in colonial Bihar, not only were *kisans* indeed aware of what Guha terms 'externalities' but their agency was largely about such issues.
12. See the 1998 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) documentary entitled *A Place Called Chiapas.*
13. On this point, see also Ranger [1987].
14. As Hilton [1974] notes, religion assumed a special significance in times of peasant insurgencies during the medieval era, because it was in the name of religion that the landlords exercised their economic, political and juridical powers.
15. As Engels [1974] points out, in such circumstances subordinate groups who have internalized the language of religion conform to its norms about those who govern them.
16. This could be termed a 'moral economy' discourse, whereby the subaltern opposes the *status quo* not in order to transcend this but rather to return to a previous situation, when the current undesirable conditions (famine, starvation, war and so on) were absent.
17. There are parallels in other situations. Thus the history of peasant movements in many different contexts and moments—from Medieval Europe through colonial India to

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contemporary Latin America—all show that the religious and the secular together constitute subaltern consciousness. The use of Liberation Theology by Bishop Don Samuel Ruiz, who reinterpreted the Bible to expose the oppression and exploitation of the Mayan Indians in the Chiapas, is a recent instance where religion has been a powerful instrument in the creation of an insurgent consciousness. This underlines the fact that often it is the interpretation of religion by members of an elite group—priests, intellectuals and party workers, all of whom highlight the relationship between the religious and the secular—that contributes to the development of an insurgent peasant consciousness.

18. Chaunu, for example, saw the 1789 French Revolution primarily as 'an intellectual phenomenon' [Kaplan, 1995: 29].
19. Paraphrasing the critics of French historiographical revisionism, it can be said—following Kaplan [1995: 55]—that while it is not possible to explain *everything* by 'the exterior', it is doubtful if one can possibly explain *anything* by 'the interior' alone.
20. Symptomatically, Furet conceived of class as a 'one-dimensional and purely economic' relationship. For his vehement anti-communism, see Furet [1999].
21. Like Subaltern Studies, therefore, revisionist epistemology separated the history of ideas from the history of interests, ignoring thereby the connection between ideas and circumstances, an approach that itself amounts to a 'veiled determinism' [Kaplan, 1995: 112]. Once again, the irony is that, as with exponents of the Subaltern Studies framework, one of the main complaints made by revisionist historians against social history was/is determinism, albeit of an economic kind.
22. The peasant movements referred to in this section all took place in Rajasthan during a 30-year period, from 1910 until the end of the 1940s [Surana, 1983; Ram, 1986]. The first, which occurred during 1917–22 in the *thikana* of Bijolia (the state of Mewar), became the battleground between the Indian National Congress and the Socialists. It was a conjuncture when Congress, rich peasants and merchants—some of whom, such as Birla, subsequently became major Indian industrialists—united with a number of 'enlightened' princes and *thikanedars* to develop a joint opposition to the Socialists. From Bijolia, however, the movements spread to other parts of Rajasthan, covering other princely states (Jaipur and Jodhpur being the most important). Unlike previous agrarian unrest, these movements were not just connected but also organizationally and ideologically under the overall control of Congress. The distinction between earlier and later phases of these movements refers to pre-1930s and post-1930s differences. In contrast to the earlier phase, therefore, during the later one lasting from 1930 until the end of the 1940s, peasant movements in Rajasthan were more organized, more radical and exhibited a greater cohesion in terms of economic, political and cultural demands. For more details about this, see Singh [1998].
23. Such grievances were by no means confined to Rajasthan. In other accounts of peasant insurgency, some of which are provided by members of the Subaltern Studies collective, one finds the same kind of issues surfacing, similarly linked to the central question of land. The main demands advanced by peasant movements in 1920s Oudh were all related to land tenure: thus a CID Memo of 1921 notes that, where tenants are concerned, 'the great outcry is against *bedadakhli* [eviction] ... the word is in every person's mouth ... the idea prevails that the zamindars are avoiding the pinch of rising prices by taking it out on their tenants, both in the form of *nazranas* [admission fees paid by tenants] and by raising rents' [Pandey, 1988: 283]. Similarly, a major reason why the 1940s Telangana Revolt took place was, as a woman activist points out, 'because of paddy' [Roosa, 2001: 67].

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About this movement, Sundarayya wrote in 1949: 'the poor and the agricultural labourers, for the first time in their lives, have eaten two full meals ... This is one of the biggest gains of the struggle' [Roosa, 2001: 77]. The centrality of land and bread as issues in peasant insurgency is aptly put by Subcommandante Marcos, the Zapatista leader in the Chiapas: 'We are fighting for the land ... In the battle for hearts and minds, food becomes a weapon' (See the 1998 CBC documentary, *A Place Called Chiapas*).

24. Thus one petition states that:

> The land settlement rules and orders are not observed by the *thikanedar.* Even after the expiry of the settlement date, the old rates are still enforced. As a result, the *kisans* taking fresh lease are being forced to accept the pre-settlement rules ... Land revenue is levied on a larger portion of uncultivated land than the portion under actual cultivation. [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB]

Another complained that:

> For generations the *kisans* have been in possession of certain wells attached to their agricultural holdings. In the past, they were paying ₹40/- per well as rent to the *thikanedar.* Now, the *thikana* is demanding ₹60/- per well. The *kisans* claim that these wells were sunk by their ancestors, and now they are meeting all the costs for their repair. There is therefore no justification for the *thikana* to demand a higher payment on the wells ... Previously, the *kisans* used to graze their cattle on lands adjoining their wells, for which they used to pay a cess, known as *talai.* The *thikanedar* has now stopped them from grazing their cattle on these lands, and is using them for his own horses. But he still demands the payment of *talai* by the *kisans.* [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB]

Yet another petition complained that:

> The *thikanedar* does not allow us to graze our cattle even on the lands attached to our ancestral wells. There is no other land where we can take our cattle for grazing. As a result, even in the rainy season, we have to feed our cattle on dry fodder. [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB]

25. Hence one petition mentioned the fact in that:

> From time immemorial the *kisans* have been paying *hasil* (rent) in kind, which included only part of the grain. Now, the *thikana* insists on obtaining both grain and fodder as part of *hasil.* In addition, he demands payment in lieu of the grass which we gather by weeding the fields. Formerly, the rent for maize and carrot crops was paid in cash. Now, the *thikana* demands the rent in kind. Consequently, peasants have stopped growing these crops. [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB]

Another petition noted in passing that over 80 per cent of the population of Rajputana consisted of tenants and agricultural labourers. Hardly any princely state, however, had a revenue code worth the name. As a result, the assessment and collection of rents and other exactions depended largely upon the discretion of those in power, mostly the *thikanedars* [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB].

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26. Hence the point made in one petition that:

> The *thikanedar* insists on realizing the *kharkar lag* (cess for grass). In lieu of this *lag* he demands seven persons from each household to cut grass for his horses without paying anything for their labour. If anyone fails to turn up, an amount double the rate of wages payable to a day labourer in the village is recovered from that person. *Kansa lag* (marriage cess) is still levied, even though it has been officially abolished by the Durbar. If anyone refuses to pay this *lag*, the *thikanedar* makes it impossible for him to perform the marriage ceremony. The amount of some *lags* (cess) has been raised recently. [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB]

In another petition, it is complained that:

> Previously the *kisans* were paying cess for the work done for the *thikana* by the various service castes, such as Bhambi (leather worker), Kumhar (potter), Luhar (blacksmith), Khati (carpenter), etc. As a rule, these castes, in addition to working for the *thikana*, were also working for the *kisans.* Now, the *thikanedar* has prevented these castes from working for the *kisans*, yet he wants them to pay for their services rendered to the *thikana.* [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB]

Yet another petition stated that 'The *thikana* realizes the education cess, but our children are not getting proper education' [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB].

27. Petitions relaying complaints about *begar* demanded by the *thikanedars* note that this was done almost as a matter of 'natural' right. Domestic slavery arising from *begar* figures as an issue in many of the complaints. The *zulum* (atrocities) of the *thikanas* in enforcing *begar* is frequently presented as a very grave problem faced by the *kisans.* Hence the observation in one petition that:

> The *kisans* are forced to bring the hay to the *thikanedar's* residence on their bullock carts as part of *begar* (unpaid labour). Should a *kisan* refuse the *begar*, the *thikanedar* threatens to evict him from his lands. The *thikana* wants men with *begar* obligations for carrying letters, etc. In addition, there are various other kinds of *lags* and *begar*, which the *thikana* insistently demands. [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB]

Another petition states that 'We have no objection to performing *begar* for His Highness [the Durbar], but we do object to having to do this for anyone else'. The *kisans* complained that the arbitrary nature of *lag-bag* in Rajputana represented 'amusing and ingenious methods of exploitation' [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB].

28. A petition states:

> Peasants in one *thikana* village, while they were attending the funeral ceremony of a close relative, were surrounded by the retainers of the *thikana.* As soon as the funeral was over, they were dragged away straight from the funeral place to the *thikana kot* [fortress], and were forcibly detained there until the *thikanedar* was assured of payment of all his dues. [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB]

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Another petition from a different *thikana* alleged that 'The *kisans* of the village were surrounded by the armed men of the *thikana* at about 4.00 a.m. and were not allowed to go about their daily tasks until they agreed to pay the *thikana* dues' [*Jagir* File C/4/3, Vol. IV, Complaints Against *Thikanedars*, RSAB].

Almost all the petitions concerning the rents and cess in the *thikanas* make a reference to the use of extra-economic coercion in the process of their realization.

29. *Praja Sewak*, 26 June 1942, File C/4, Newspaper Cuttings, RSAB.
30. John Roosa [2001: 87] has argued that peasant movements in Telangana (part of the princely state of Hyderabad in South India) in the 1940s were initially 'a largely defensive struggle against the landlords and the police', and not against the Nizam himself. It was only after the Nizam's refusal to accede to the Indian state, he maintains, that the movement turned into a struggle against the authority of the state. This argument misses the point that the struggle against the landlords in princely states was at the same time a struggle against the authority of the rulers themselves, in so far as *the landlords and the rulers shared a common basis of political power and judicial authority: that is, the monopoly of landownership that carried with it the right to rule and judge.* Hence, the movement against one was inevitably a movement against the other.
31. I have dealt with this at length in another context [Singh, 1998].
32. This is what one finds in the following statement of the Standing Committee of the All India States Peoples' Conference (an organization coordinating the peasant movements in the princely states on an all-India level):

> It is manifest that the fate of states is indissolubly linked with the fate of India and the peril of India is equally the peril of the states ... In this hour of grave crisis for the motherland, the people of the states must stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of India in the struggle for freedom. [Jai Narain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi]

On 27 September 1937 Jawaharlal Nehru issued the following statement on behalf of the States Peoples' Conference:

> Indian people whether they may be of British India or Indian India, must have rights for full freedom. The sympathy of the people residing in different provinces of India goes wholly with the people of Indian states, and we consider ourselves united with the latter. Our struggle for achieving *swaraj* [self-rule] is certainly one with the Indian states people's struggle to achieve liberation. [Jai Narain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi]

On 15 May 1941 the Standing Committee of the All India States Peoples' Conference issued the following statement:

> Meeting at a time of peril from outside and threatened upheaval within the country, the Committee has given the most earnest consideration to the problem facing it and the nation. It is manifest that the fate of the states is indissolubly linked with the fate of India and the peril of India is equally the peril of the states. Danger and peril have thus demonstrated afresh the unity of India and the comradeship of the people of the states with their brethren in the rest of India. This imminent danger makes the establishment of freedom in the states all the more imperative. The time has come when people of the states should have full Responsible Government with the princes and the people owing allegiance to

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> the free India Government. [Jai Narain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi]

The Committee issued an appeal to the Durbars 'to give up medieval ways of thinking, discard notions of autocracy and recognize people's right to govern themselves'. On 7 June 1942 Nehru issued another statement:

> While mighty armies march to and fro and the fate of the empires hangs in balance, significant happenings are taking place in Jodhpur, the heart of Rajputana ... [these happenings] reveal the nature not only of the Indian states, but also of the British government in India, and how it functions through the native states by preserving their feudal structure. Our demand for complete independence is the only possible way to put an end to all these monstrous happenings. [Jai Narain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi]

33. Gandhi defined the Indian National Congress position on peasant movements in the princely states as follows: 'At a time when the awakening in Indian states is unprecedented, and the people are prepared to fight and suffer for their rights, how could the Congress stand aside and be a passive witness to their sufferings' [Jai Narain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi]?
34. On 2 August 1941 he issued the following statement:

> The Government of Jodhpur must see that rule of law is established in the state, and more especially in the *thikana* areas, and that full civil liberties are enjoyed by the Lok Parishad workers without any fear of intimidation or victimization at the hands of *thikanedars* or their subordinates. [Jai Narain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi]

On 22 May 1942 Gandhi sent a telegram to the Marwar Lok Parishad, followed by an article in *Harijan:*

> In general Congress and I believe in non-interference in the internal affairs of the Indian states. But the things in Marwar have gone too far ... the *thikanas* are like 'states' within a state and the conditions of the people living in their territories are in no way better than those of the slaves of the ancient regimes. [Jai Narain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi]

35. Vijay Singh Pathik, poularly known as Pathik, was a leader of the peasant movements in Bijolia in the princely state of Mewar (Udaipur). Like Baba Ramchandran, the leader of peasant movements in Oudh during the 1920s, Pathik's personal role is shrouded in mystery. It is not even clear if he was originally from Mewar, or from some other state in Rajasthan or perhaps even from some other province. Pathik is not a family name: it does, however, symbolize a status with no fixed residence/settlement. Pathik basically means a permanent wanderer, akin to the *sanyasin* (renouncer), the last phase of the *varna-ashram* scheme of Hindu way of life. A *sanyasin* had no permanent abode, no fixed occupation. It was assumed that he did not live for himself but for the collective good of the society, and it was the latter's obligation to look after his basic needs. The ideological importance of such persons for social movements cannot be overemphasized, as they are assumed to be selfless individuals fighting for justice and collective good.
36. The emerging linkages between Congress and the Indian industrial bourgeoisie during the 1930s are outlined by Markovits [1985].

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37. In a letter to Sir Donald Field, the Chief Minister of Jodhpur, Sir Ganga Singh, the Durbar of Bikaner, wrote:

> Let me tell you, Sir Donald Field, that neither the glorified pillars of the princely order nor the Leftists among the Regency Bucks are going to survive these proletarian firebrands (the leaders of the Praja Mandals and Lok Parishads), ... the mantle of centuries-old sovereignty in India is going to fall upon them, and even some of us will, in all probability, look towards them for justice. The terrors of mob misrule under Soviet Russians have been an eye-opener to the whole world and I am sure you will not like them to be repeated in the Indian states. [Jai Narain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi]

38. For the details of this, see Kaplan [1995: 14]. These assumptions became popular in academia not because of their intellectual merit, but because they were in tune with the reactionary political and intellectual climate in Europe and the US. Furet himself admitted that, 'I arrived at the right time and I fathomed things early on', declaring that the 'social interpretation of the Revolution belonged in a museum' [Kaplan,1995: 60, 104].
39. Some of these ex-Naxalites are now vehement critics not only of Marxism and historical materialism, but even of secularism in any and every form (see, for instance, the exchange between Ray [1999] and Singh [2001]). Furet's disaffection with Marxist historiography, that it did not engage with Marx rigorously enough [Kaplan, 1995: 99], is echoed by the Subaltern Studies' claim that it is only opposed to the reductionist application of Marxism, and not to Marxism as such [Chakrabarty, 1984]. The problem, however, is that none of the exponents of the Subaltern Studies framework has ever attempted to develop theoretically a 'correct' version of Marxism that would be compatible with the Subaltern Studies' approach to Indian history. Another claim made by some members of Subaltern Studies (see for instance, Prakash [1992]) is that there are different (and equally valid) readings of Marx/Marxism, including the one that argues for a conceptual abandonment of class formation/struggle and the mode of production.
40. Claims about a 'new'/'distinct' theoretical perspective are advanced by Guha [1982–89; 1983], Guha and Spivak [1988] and Das [1989].
41. Subaltern Studies borrows from French positivism and functionalism (Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* and Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*), whilst from bourgeois-liberal sociology it borrows the Weberian notion of class as a techno-economic phenomenon, and caste as community. As Chatterjee [1988] admits, it also borrows from the postmodernism of Foucault and Derrida, which Prakash [1992] attempts to synthesize with Marxism ('riding two horses'), a form of 'bobo intellectualism' [Brooks, 2000: 43, 45, 165] that seeks to reconcile what are in fact irreconcilable opposites.
42. This point is made by Guha [1983: 4].

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5

Inequalities between and within Castes

Kin, Caste and Land*

The basic flaw of conventional sociology in India has been that it studies caste and kinship in isolation from the economic and political structure. Consequently, it fails to understand the basis of unity in kin and caste groups. I have argued that unity between members of the same kin and caste groups depends, in the last analysis, on an identity of economic and political interest. Thus when the peasants in Marwar revolted against the landlords the latter could not unite with their own kinsmen and caste men. This was because, while they shared common kin and caste ties, their economic and political interests were not identical. Sociological approach, which sees the basis of inequality in the caste system in the dichotomy of 'Pure and Impure' has proved sterile, since it fails to explain the inequalities within the same caste and even the same kin groups, which had their bases in unequal control over land and unequal distribution of political power.

Conventional sociologists studying Indian society have shown immense concern with kin and caste. At the risk of simplification one may say that conventional sociology tends to maintain that Indian social reality acquires a unique complexion because of a unique, i.e. deterministic, role played by kin and caste—and particularly the latter—in Indian social structure.[1]

An important assumption of conventional sociology is that kin and caste ties simultaneously play a dual role: that is, they unite

* Adapted from 'Kin, Caste, and Kisan Movements: Some Questions to Conventional Sociology of Kin and Caste', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1978.

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the members of the in-group and divide those of the out-groups. This assumption, quite often put forward as the final conclusion of conventional sociology, is erroneous. This error is of a fundamental nature. It is rooted in the main approach of conventional sociology which studies kin and caste ahistoricaily, and in isolation from economic and political reality. As a result, it attributes to caste and kin an autonomy which these structures do not possess. Moreover, since conventional sociology deals with kin and caste mainly in the realm of ideas without trying to relate them systematically to material reality, it finally ends in mystifying the nature of kin and caste. I will return to it later.

The main thrust of this chapter is to analyse the role of kin and caste in one specific situation, namely, the *kisan* (peasant) movements in the erstwhile princely state of Marwar (Jodhpur) between the 1930s and the 1940s. It will be shown that contrary to the common assumption of conventional sociologists, kin and caste do not always unite the members of in-groups, and do not divide the members of out-groups. It is argued that members of the same kin and caste groups fail to unite when their economic and political, albeit class interests are not identical. On the other hand, kin-caste ties can be an additional force of unity among members of the same group if their economic and political (class) interests are identical. Not only this, but even the members of different kin-caste groups may forge a unity provided their economic and political interests are identical. In other words, the factors determining the function of kin and caste are found outside kin and caste, i.e. in the realm of agrarian interests. It is this reality of kin and caste which conventional sociology has failed to grasp.

Towards the end of this chapter an attempt is made to examine the crucial question: what is basis of inequality in the caste system? Conventional sociology sees it in the realm of ideas, i.e. in the opposition of 'pure' and 'impure'.[2] This assumption of conventional sociology has been questioned.

In what follows I propose to present a very brief sketch of the agrarian structure, and an equally brief account of the agrarian movement resulting from its inherent contradictions. The main object of the paper is not to deal with the nature of agrarian structure nor of the movement, but to analyse the response of kin and ties in a specific situation, viz., the peasant movements in Marwar in the 1930s and the 1940s.

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Agrarian Structure of Marwar (Jodhpur State) 1870–1940s

The entire land of the princely state of Marwar fell broadly under two categories, namely, the *Khalsa* or the crown lands and the *jagir* or the grantees' lands. By the 1870s over eighty per cent of the state lands belonged to the grantees and the rest to the crown.[3] Crown lands were under direct control of the Maharaja or the Durbar of Marwar. Being the greatest landlord of the state, he enjoyed the highest rights in land. The grantees (*jagirdars*) enjoyed such rights in land as were delegated to them by the Durbar. *Jagirdar* was a blanket term that was used to cover a diversely structured group. Here we are concerned with one particular category of *jagirdars*, known as the *thikanedars* (landlords holding military grants) who constituted the landed nobility, and hence the dominant class of the state. The *thikanedars*, like all other *jagirdars*, possessed only such rights as were delegated to them by the Durbar. But once the grant was made, a *thikanedar* (hence landlord) exercised all the proprietary rights over lands in his territory and the Durbar could not intervene in his internal affairs unless some extraordinary situation called for it.

Both the crown as well as the landlords' lands were cultivated by tenants, known by various names, such as the *ryot*, *karsha*, *kashtkar* or *kisan* (hence peasants). In the crown areas, the peasants held their tenure under Durbar, i.e. the Maharaja of Jodhpur and in the landlords' areas under the landlords (holding military land grants of the Maharaja of Jodhpur). The landlords and the peasants were the two main classes in the countryside of the state. The landlords had superior rights in land; the peasants had inferior rights in land, and possessed them at the sufferance of the former, the landlord was ruler and higher in social hierarchy; the peasants were the ruled and lower in the hierarchy.

The landlords of Marwar, like their counterparts in other princely states of Rajputana, e.g. Jaipur, Udaipur, Bikaner etc. were not particularly careful about maintaining proper land records. As a result there is very little material available in writing regarding the tenurial rights and obligations of the peasants in the landlords' territories. We may, however, refer to a letter from the Resident, Western Rajputana state Residency to the Agent, Governor General

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of India, dated Feb. 23, 1925 which gives an account of some basic questions regarding tenurial rights and obligations of the peasants in the landlords' territories of Marwar. According to the letter, there were broadly two kinds of tenancies in the landlords' territories:

(1) Occupancy tenancies (locally known as *bapoti*)
(2) Tenancies-at-will (locally known as *ghair-bapoti*)

The occupancy tenancy meant the permanent, heritable, but non-alienable rights of possession and use. A landlord did not have unrestricted rights to evict the tenants from their occupancy lands. If a landlord wished to evict an occupancy tenant, he had to file a suit in the Revenue Courts of the state. This was so to the extent that even for arrears of land revenue and other dues a landlord was supposed to go to the state courts. If, however, the occupancy tenants deliberately did not cultivate the lands in their possession, a landlord was entitled to damages, but even for that he had to file a suit in the Revenue Courts. If a landlord tried to evict an occupancy tenant arbitrarily, the tenant had a right to file a suit in the Revenue Courts.[4]

Whereas the above refers to the theoretical position, in practice the landlords exercised very wide and rather unrestricted powers in the control of lands and tenants in their respective territories. This one can infer, from among many other things, the relative absence of suits in the Revenue Courts of the state from either side. The absence of tenancy suits in the state courts docs does not, however, mean that there were no excesses by the landlords. It only means that the tenants were too weak to protest even legally. On the other hand, the landlord was too powerful. He enjoyed the highest rights in the lands in his territory. He was the highest political and judicial authority in his territory. He commanded the military and police powers. Even the Revenue Courts of the state were controlled by the fraternity of the landlords. Apart from these objective conditions, in those days of 'high massness' and 'low classness', the peasants had not been able to develop a class consciousness which would induce them to organize for a revolt against the landlords. The position of the landlordvis-a-vis his tenants in Marwar was very similar to what Neale has observed about Oudh in the early British days. The tenants were aware that they had a hereditary right of occupancy over the

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lands they tilled. But more than that they knew that the man in power can do anything.[5]

Obligations of the Peasants

In return for the land, which the peasants held under occupancy or non-occupancy tenures in the landlords' territories they had to pay the land revenue (*hasil*), feudal cesses (*lag-bag*), and forced labour (*begar*). The magnitude of the land revenue varied from 1/10th to 3/5th of the actual share of the produce. The magnitude of exactions on these counts varied according to the nature of the soil, availability of irrigation water, the variety of the crops sown, the nature of the tenure and so on. In fact, it is never possible to calculate the exact amount—cash or kind—which the landlords realized from the peasants towards land revenue and other feudal cesses. This is because the revenue records, whatever and wherever available, do not include all the realizations. Even what is mentioned in the records is not wholly reliable (normally the records mentioned only what was legally prescribed, whereas the common feature of feudal societies has been that what is actually realized is always far more than what is ideally prescribed or professed).[6]

Land Revenue was neither the only nor even the main burden on the peasants. In addition to land revenue they had to pay a number of feudal cesses locally known as the *lag-bag* which were proportionately much higher than land revenue. To an extent greater than with the land revenue, it is never possible to know either the exact number of feudal cesses or the exact amount realized in lieu of them. As late as 1884 there was no regular record of the cess even for the crown lands, let alone the landlords' estates. Estimates of the number of cesses vary from 50 to 150. In an Enquiry Committee appointed by the Durbar in the year 1941 to investigate the affairs of one landlord's estate, Nimbod, the Committee finally sanctioned the realization of sixty-four cesses, as legitimate.[7]

In addition, there were a number of exactions, rather arbitrary in character, which were forced on the peasants in the name of forced labour. The peasants were by and large exempt from the forced labour, which required menial or manual labour. Instead they had to render

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certain services and at times make certain payments toward forced labour. Thus, a peasant had to transport to the landlord's granary the latter's share of the produce free of charge. The landlord could demand the peasants' carts or camels any time for any purpose relating to transport or travel. If the functionaries of the landlord visited the village in connection with some official or non-official business, the peasants had to make all the arrangements for their food, bed and stay, etc. Frequently a peasant met these demands by foregoing whatever meagre comforts of living he could afford for himself and his family. A revealing description of this pathetic state of affairs is found in the *Panchheera* a folk song, which became very popular in the early 1920s during the peasants' revolt in Bijolia, a premier estate in the state of Mewar. We note the following extract:

> O peasant! the burden of forced labour is on your head all the time. You flee at the very sight of the landlord's police. Your relations and guests sleep on the floor, while the landlord's men take away your cots and beds. You serve your guests the dry bread, while the landlord's men feast on your curd, milk and butter . . .[8]

Element of Coercion

Coercion was an integral part of the entire system, though it was not always open and naked. Each landlord had his own militia and police force. That apart, a landlord had a band of armed retainers and horsemen, who kept a regular watch on the peasants. Each estate was well-equipped with what were locally known as *kathis.* A *kathi* was a wooden structure made of two parallel bars, in which a man was made to stand with his hands either stretched or tied at the back. It was a very crude device of physical torture, which was frequently inflicted on the 'erring' peasants. Then, landlord's fortress had some secluded part, dark and dingy, where the 'erring' peasants and sometimes not so erring men and women were confined. A landlord had a legitimate right to summon a peasant to the court and make him sit or stand there as long as he wanted, or to put him or his kinsmen in *kathi,* or keep them in confinement on the pretext of realizing his arrears of land revenue or a feudal cess. In addition, the landlord had the authority to attach the moveable or the non-moveable property of the peasant and to auction or to sell it in order to realize dues.[9]

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The Movement: Its Nature and Organization

I have described above briefly the agrarian structure of Marwar in order to show the inherent contradictions of the system which were the main cause of the peasant movements between the 1930s and 1940s. The movements started as a protest against the appropriation of the peasants' surplus by the landlords in lieu of the land revenue, feudal cesses and other arbitrary exactions in the name of *begar* (forced labour). In the beginning the peasants were not protesting against all the estate dues, but only against those which they thought, were 'illegal'. But as the movement gained strength the boundaries between 'legal' and 'illegal', which were never very clearly demarcated, collapsed completely. Since all the exactions—legal or illegal—were made possible by the then existing relations of the production, so the ultimate object of the movement was to change those production relations, even if this was not always proclaimed explicitly.

This becomes clear if one looks at the petitions brought in by the peasants against their landlords. Mostly, these petitions were filed with the state department. Sometimes the appeals were made directly to the ruler of the state. The actual number of these petitions must be very large. I shall give below extracts from one such petition, which may be treated as fairly representative of the sample, in order to show the general nature of the grievances that were being highlighted in the movement. This petition was filed by the peasants of *thikana* Akheli on October 13, 1930. It runs as follows:

> To
> The Hon'ble Chief Minister,
> Jodhpur Government.
>
> Respected Sir,
> . . . that *Las* and *Kharkar lags* (cesses) are levied by the landlord. In lieu of this cess seven persons from every household are required to go for cutting grass for the landlord, and they are paid nothing for their labour. If anyone fails to turn up, an amount double the rate of the wages payable to a day labourer in the village is recovered from that person. The cultivators are forced to bring the hay to the landlord's residence on their bullock carts for free. This burden falls entirely on the peasants. If a peasant refuses the forced labour the landlord threatens to evict him from his agricultural holdings.

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The landlord does not allow the peasants to graze their cattle even on the lands forming part of their ancestral holdings. There is no land in the village, where the cattle can be grazed, with the result that even in the rainy season the peasants are forced to feed their cattle on dry fodder.

(ii) *Kansa* cess is levied on the occasion of marriage. If anybody refuses to pay the cess, the landlord makes it impossible for him to perform the marriage.
(iii) The amount of some cesses has been raised recently. For instance, the cess known as *gaon bhomb* which used to be ₹25/- has now been raised to ₹125/-. Similarly, *talawat lag* which used to be ₹30/- is now raised to ₹101/-. All this means an additional burden on the peasants.
(iv) From time immemorial the peasants have been paying to the landlord only a part of the produce of grain as land revenue (*hasil*). Now, the landlord insists on realizing both the grain as well as the fodder as part of the land revenue. In addition, he also exacts a sum in lieu of the grass, which the peasants gather by weeding the fields.
(v) Formerly one rupee and two annas per bigha (nearly 2/3rd of an acre) were realized as rent for the cultivation of maize and carrot crops. Now, the landlord demands a part of these products. Consequently, the peasants have stopped growing these crops.
(vi) Peasants are compelled to supply their bullock carts as part of the free labour as and when the landlord desires.
(vii) *Fedka* cess in large quantities of grains is realized for the menials of the landlord.
(viii) Formerly ₹3/- were taken for the *kanwaria* (a functionary of the landlord). Now, the landlord claims ₹10/- for the same.
(ix) Landlord wants the peasants to supply men free of charge for carrying the mail.

In addition to the above, various other types of free services and cesses are exacted for potters, barbers and other functionaries of the landlord. If anyone resists these claims, he is assaulted, wrongly confined and maltreated in several ways.[10]

As time passed the movement gained strength and momentum, and its scope enlarged. From relatively lighter economic demands in the form of redressal of some grievances regarding illegal or excessive

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exactions they started demanding greater economic rights, such as the fixation of dues and the security of their tenures. Moreover, in addition to purely economic demands they also began to demand political rights, the most important being a 'Responsible Government under the aegis of the Maharajah'.[11] New political organizations in the shape of the Jodhpur Praja Mandal, the Marwar Lok Parishad and the Marwar Kisan Parishad emerged to lead the movement. These political organizations were working in collaboration with the caste councils (*panchayats*) of the main cultivating castes—the jats, Bishnois, Sirvis, Malis and the Kumhars. While at the grass-roots level they were collaborating with the traditional caste organizations, at the top these new political organizations were in regular contact and communication with the All India political organizations, particularly, the All India Kisan Sabha and the Indian National Congress. Between the mid-thirties and the early forties the following features of the movement had become fairly distinct:

(i) It was a struggle between the two main rural classes, viz., the landlords and the peasants.
(ii) The main issues in the struggle were economic (and political): for example, the exaction of the land revenue and other dues, security of land tenure, etc.
(iii) It was no more a local, sporadic affair confined to a single village or a single landlord. It had embraced the entire state. Not only this but its linkages with All India organizations and movements had become well established.

Role of Kin and Caste

As it is not within the scope of this chapter to elaborate the above points, I shall now address the main problem: that is, the relationship between economic-political interests and primordial ties such as caste and kinship. In order to understand the differential response of kin and caste ties in the movement it is necessary to get an idea of how economic-political factors affected the respective kin and caste structures of the landlords and peasants in Marwar. It may be noted at the very outset that in the case of landlords economic-political factors had created deep schisms in their kin and caste structures. As a result, the landlords failed to unite the members of their kin–caste

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groups against the peasants. On the other hand, among peasants their kin and caste structures remained relatively homogeneous and undifferentiated, because the economic factors which created divisions in the kin and caste ranks of the landlords were absent in the case of peasants. Consequently, all the peasants belonging to the 'principal agriculturist castes', which comprised of at least five different caste groups, united together to fight for their common economic-political interests against the landlords.

A word about 'agricultural castes' and 'principal agriculturist castes' in Marwar may be helpful in clarifying the situation. In Marwar certain castes were treated as agriculturists and other as non-agriculturists. The term agriculturist referred to 'any person, whose livelihood was derived wholly or mainly from cultivation of soil by himself or with the aid of his family or of hired labor'.[12] In a circular of the Revenue Department of Marwar State, dated 8 September, 1933 the following are mentioned as the agriculturist castes—Jats, Bishnois, Sirvis, Malis, Kumhars and Rajputs.[13]

In order to get a more accurate picture I give below a caste-wise breakup of the agricultural holdings for those regions where the movement was relatively strong.

	Area Held (*in Bighas*)	
Caste	*Mushtqil* (*permanent*)	*Ghair-Mushtgil* (*Temp.*)
(i) *Nagor and Deepwana*		
Rajput	227	52,847
Jat	32,167	370,425
Sirvis	135	5,130
Mali	2,377	25,883
Kumhar	145	14,486
Bishnoi	—	29,083
(ii) *Merta*, *Purbatsar and Sambhar*		
Rajput	2,969	31,115
Jat	24,694	227,167
Mali	1,390	7,888
Kumhar	1,768	8,015
Bishnoi	122	5,717

Source—[14]

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It should be noted here that though Rajputs were numerically significant in the ranks of the 'agriculturist castes' they were excluded from the category of 'principal agriculturist castes'. The Survey and Settlement Reports of Marwar State compiled in 1884 mention only Jats, Sirvis, Bishnois, Malis and Kumhars as the 'principal agriculturist castes' but not Rajputs. Instead, Rajputs were, as a rule, treated as 'indifferent-cultivators'.[15]

Schism in the Kin and Caste Structures of the Landlords

The kin and the caste structures of the landlords were highly differentiated in terms of their economic and political interests. The main cause of differentiation in the kin structure of the landlords was the rule of primogeniture, according to which the eldest brother (*patawi*) succeeded to the estate while the younger brothers (*chutbhais*) got maintenance grants. If a landlord's estate was big enough—say, owning 100 villages or more—a younger brother might get a village for maintenance. If the estate was small, the younger brothers were given some land in one or more villages of the estate. There seems to have been no rule for a fixed share of the younger brothers in the estate. Given below is the division of property between an elder brother and younger brothers in one landlord's estate, Badhera, in sub-district Deedwana that may give us a rough idea of the proportionate share of a younger brother in the family estate:

Palawi *Chutbhais*	*Area* (*Bighas*) 11,678	*Income* 647/-
(i) Zor Singh	100	33/-
(ii) Anoop Singh and Satan Singh	500	80/-
(iii) Ram Singh	160	31/-
(iv) Sujan Singh	200	33/-

Source— [16]

A small share in the estate property, just enough for bare maintenance, was only the beginning and not the end of the humbler status of the younger brothers and their descendants. Unlike the eldest

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brother the younger brothers' share was equally divided among his sons, because the rule of primogeniture did not apply there. Thus, with every succeeding generation the gap between the descendants of the eldest brother and those of the younger brothers went on increasing. One remained intact with the nobility, the others were reduced to the rank of the commoners. So much so that it was not uncommon to find the sons or the grandsons of the younger brothers working as servants in the same family.

The quarrel between eldest brothers and their younger brothers over various issues, such as the succession fees, adoption by younger brothers, escheat of their estates etc., was a common-place. Very often the younger brothers received shabby and discriminatory treatment at the hands of their eldest brothers. To this day, many younger brothers nurse a grudge against their eldest brothers for the latters' ill-treatment. The impression that one gets after talking to younger brothers is that the eldest brothers never wanted them to be economically prosperous or politically important. During my interviews many younger brothers of the landlords confided that as far as possible they were given only less fertile lands for maintenance. This was partly because the eldest could not derive any benefit from the younger brothers' lands, whereas if more fertile lands went to a peasant the landlord stood to gain since it always appropriated part of the produce for its dues. Assigning to younger brothers, less productive lands also meant that they could never be economically or politically significant so as to pose a threat to the eldest brother. Potential threat from kinsmen was an integral part of the inherent contradictions of the feudal system of land tenure.

Much has been written on the significance of kinship in the organization of the Rajput princely states of Rajputana. It has been claimed that all the kinsmen were equal. Not only the kinsmen but even the clansmen have been held as equals; so much so that the ruler is supposed to be only a 'superior among equals',[17] something like an elder man of the clan. This view distorts the nature of both the kinship structure and the fundamental principle of the organization of the princely states, which are reduced to mere clannish settlements. If one attempts to pursue the question as to how and why this view was upheld by the colonial academicians and administrators and their followers in the beginnings of the last century, it would certainly be an interesting exercise in the sociology of knowledge. Such an exercise, though immensely tempting is, however, not possible in the present context.

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Here I only want to point out how this view misconstrues the place and role of kinship in Indian society.

It cannot, however, be denied that kinship had an important place in some spheres such as rituals relating to marriage and death etc. But even this superficial ritual equality in some matters on the occasion of marriage and death was heavily countered by the pomp and show that went into the marriages of the eldest brothers and their offspring compared to those of the younger brothers' or of the Rajput tenants, which used to be much humbler affairs. What is being suggested is that as a result of the rules relating to the organization of property, particularly the rule of primogeniture, the kin structure of the landlords developed deep schisms, which had far reaching psychological and social implications for the members of the kin group.

The rule of primogeniture made the distinction between eldest brother and younger brothers pregnant with several consequences. Within the family the distinction between the two was very clear right from childhood. The ceremonies and rituals associated with the births of the two were different. And subsequently, the pattern of their socialization was different. The parents, the relatives, the tenants, even the maids and the servants of the household maintained this distinction and discrimination. The two were brought up quite differently. One was brought up as the ruler, the other as the ruled; one as the master, and the other as the servant of the house. One was sent to Mayo's College, Ajmer (a school for the aristocracy), the other to Chawpasini (school for commoners). Thus, the family worked as the breeding ground for deep psychological and social barriers between siblings of the same generation. These social psychological tendencies had their roots in the differences between eldest brother's and younger brothers' potential economic, political and social status in the system. Paraphrasing Frederick Engels, one can say that the family was the cellular form of the landlords' community which made room for the development of several antagonisms and contradictions within the group.[18]

The schism in the caste structure of the landlords was much deeper and far more elaborate than that in kinship. The caste of Rajputs from which came 262 out of 270 feudal landlords of Marwar[19] was highly differentiated along economic and political lines. The ruler (Durbar) occupying the top position in the state was a Rajput. He was followed in the hierarchy by the feudal landlords (*thikanedars*), *bhomichara* holders (a special form of tenure discussed below), *bhomias* and

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kashtkaran riyayati. Each of them belonged to a separate category of landholders. Their position in society was in many respects determined by the nature of their land rights. We have already shown the position of the *thikanedars.* The position of the other categories needs a brief description.

The *bhomichara* tenure existed in the Mallani regions of Marwar, which comprised 550 villages, covering almost one-third of the entire territory of the state.[20] Mallani was conquered by Mallinath, who was several generations senior to Jodha Singh, who conquered Jodhpur. The descendants of Mallinath held Mallani under a tenure, which was called *bhomichara.*[21] The descendents of Jodha Singh became the rulers of Marwar.

The *bhomichara* holders of Mallani never accepted the complete suzerainty of the Marvar Durbar. Their main contention was that unlike the feudal grants, *Mallani* was not a grant from the Durbar. Instead, it was conquered by their ancestors independently, and, therefore, they had the same proprietary rights over their territory as the ruler of Marwar had over the territory acquired by his ancestors. Their allegiance to Marwar Durbar, they claimed, was only nominal.[22] What is important in the present context is that the nature of the *bhomichara* tenure was different from that of the feudal land grants, and the dispute over this was a source of permanent trouble not only between ruler of the state and *bhomichara* holders, but also between *bhomichara* holders and the feudal landlords. Thus, the ties between the *bhomichara* holder of Mallani and the feudal landlords of Marwar, who were all Rajputs, had several built in contradictions.

Bhomias constituted another separate category within the category of the grantees. *Bhomias* were all Rajputs, and they held their land as grants from Durbar. The *bhom* grants were basically the service grants, i.e. in return for the land which a *bhomia* held, he had to serve the Durbar, normally in the police or the military department. Some of them had to pay a quit-rent known as bhombab, while others held their grants rent-free.[23]

It may be pointed out that James Todd in his monumental work, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* has unduly exaggerated and glorified the status of the *bhomias.*[24] The *bhomias* were purely service grantees, and their status as landholders was far inferior to that of the feudal land grantees (holding grants in return for military service).[25] The majority of the Bhomias in Marwar were of the non-Rathors clans. The Rathors

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had conquered and subjugated them, and retained them as the servants of the state. Another important social function of the Bhomias (who were not Rathors, the clan of the ruler of Marwar) seems to have been that they gave their daughters in marriage to the Rathors.[26] However, the feudal—Rathors or non-Rathors—always looked down on the *bhomias* as their inferiors. Sometimes if the land held by a *bhomia* fell in a *thikanedar's* territory, it was invariably a source of perpetual conflict between the *thikanedar* and the *bhomia* concerned.

The tenants belonging to the caste of the Rajput were known as *Kashtkaran Riyayti* (privileged tenants or the concessionaries). As a rule they enjoyed 25 per cent concession in the land revenue compared to the other tenants belonging to the 'principal agriculturist castes', viz., the Jats, Bishnois etc. Moreover, they were also exempt from many of the *lag-bags* (feudal cesses) and *begar* (forced labour) incumbent on the principal agriculturist castes. Ordinarily, a Rajput tenant was not expropriated from his holding for non-payment of dues, whereas other agriculturist castes were liable to expropriation for a similar default.

The relations between landlords and their Rajput tenants were never smooth. The Rajputs were indifferent cultivators, which meant that their holdings never yielded as much as those of the principal agriculturist castes. This was a direct loss to the landlord, who took part of the produce for his dues. The landlord also suffered a loss on the Rajput holdings by way of concession in land revenue and exemption from feudal tributes and customary free labour from which the Rajput tenants were as a rule exempted. Then, the Rajput tenants were bad payers. This was partly because the Rajput tenants enjoyed certain immunities, which were denied to the other castes. Thus a Rajput tenant was seldom subjected to the punitive measures, which were frequently employed for tenants of the principal agriculturist castes. It was, for instance, relatively unknown for a Rajput tenant to be put in *kathi* for his failure to pay the dues he owed the landlord or the ruler of the state.

Thus, in spite of their belonging to the same caste group the Rajput tenants and the Rajput landlords were likely to be antagonistic to each other in matters relating to economic and political interests. These odds became more pronounced from the 1870s onward, when due to a number of factors alienation between the Rajput landlords and their Rajput tenants grew more and more. In the settlement operations that took place in the areas held by the crown in the 1880s Rajput tenants

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lost many of their time honoured privileges and concessions. Many landlords also followed suit. This heightened the inherent tensions between them and their Rajput tenants.

It follows from the above that the kin and the caste structures of the landlords had developed many cleavages which were based on differentiation in property rights. The distinction between a *patawi* (eldest brother who became landlord) and his *chutbhais* (younger brothers who got maintenance grants) was based on their differential rights in land, which made them unequal in spite of their belonging to the same kin group. Similar was the distinction and inequality between the holders of differential land rights (*thikanedars*, *bhomicharas*, *bhomias* and the *kshtkaran riyayati*), who all belonged to the same caste but to different economic and political categories. These cleavages had far-reaching implications for the landlords confronting the agitating peasants. Above all, they had one important consequence, in as much as they came in the way of landlords exploiting the primordial loyalties of their kin and caste groups in order to enlist their support against the peasants.

This comes out very distinctly if we analyse the structure and functioning of the three different organizations (of Rajputs) which merit attention in the present context. These were the Marwar Thikanedars Association, the Bhooswamis Association and the Rajput Mahasabha. The Marwar Thikanedars Association was an organization of the landlords (*thikanedars*) of Marwar. It represented the interests of the nobility. The Bhooswamis Association was the organization of the humbler nobility, i.e. the *chutbhais*, the lower echelons of the *bhomichara* and the *bhomias*. The Rajput Mahasabha was an organization along caste lines, which tried to embrace all the Rajputs irrespective of their position in the economic-political hierarchy.

It is important to note that these three organizations could seldom work together on a long-term basis. If they came together on one occasion, they parted on another, and eventually they all fell apart. The Thikanedars' Association representing the nobility always rode the high horse. Throughout it remained skeptical about the *chutbhais* and the *bhomias*, and the Rajput tenants. This came to the surface on 17 May 1941, when a number of premier landlords met in Jaitaran (an eminent estate of Marwar). In this meeting some landlords openly expressed their strong resentment against seeking the help of the

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lower Rajputs. They also felt that many Rajput tenants and *bhomias* were in fact instigating the peasants against landlords.[27] This was not all. In some estates the Rajput tenants had openly joined hands with other peasants against the landlords. In July 1941, in Balanda (another eminent estate), the Rajput tenants were subjected to a brutal firing by the landlord's men in which two Rajputs died and six were injured.[28]

On the other side, the rank and file as well as the leadership of the Bhooswami Association and Rajput Mahasabha remained equally suspicious of the motives of the Thikanedars's Association. In an interview, Mr Tan Singh, one of the founder members of Bhooswamis Association in Marwar (now a Member of Parliament) told me that the Thikanedars' Association was always trying to exploit the lower class Rajputs (*chutbhais, bhomias* and Rajput tenants) to strengthen its own position. The contradiction between these organizations, one representing the interests of the higher class and the others those of the lower classes among Rajputs, became more conspicuous on the eve of the abolition of landlordism (the *thikanedari* system), when the landlords realized that there was a parity between their interests as large landholders and those of the rich peasants, who after the abolition of landlordism were going to join their rank. It was at this point that the honeymoon between the three organizations—the Thikanedars Association, Bhooswamis Association and Rajput Mahasabha came to an end.[29]

Compared to landlords the caste and kinship structures of the peasants were more homogeneous and equal. It cannot, however, be claimed that there was a complete quality and homogeneity among the peasants. There were among them many with large landholdings and others with small holdings. There were rich peasants and poor peasants. There were *chowdharis* and *mahatos* among them who enjoyed certain privileges over other members of the class. In spite of all that they were equal and homogeneous compared to the other class, the landlords—the main targets of the movement. This was because the institutional cleavages which divided the kin and caste structures of the landlords were absent among the peasants. In the first place, the rule of primogeniture did not apply to them with the result that the gaps which developed between elder brother and the younger brothers in the kin structures of the landlords were absent among the peasants. Then there was no schism in peasants' caste structure of the kind which

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existed between various categories of landholders among Rajputs. As landholders they were all peasants. And as peasants they were all equal in the sense that they were subjected to common economic, political and social-cultural deprivations, which included the appropriation of their surplus, enforcement of free labour, insecurity of their tenures and so on.

In social and cultural spheres there was a greater homogeneity and equality among peasants, than, say, between a Rajput *patawi* (eldest brother) and his *chutbhais* (younger brothers) or between a Rajput landlord and his Rajput tenants. They all ate simple food, wore simple dress and lived in humbler huts. In their marriage feasts and funerals their expenses did not vary much. Their disprivileges were common and their sufferings the same. And the party which they could perceive as responsible for all their deprivations, disadvantages, and disprivileges was the class of landlords. This gave peasants a greater sense of homogeneity and equality. This also gave them a sense of unity. And that played a very important role in bringing the peasants together against the landlords.

One may particularly mention in this connection the role of the *chowdharis* and of the *Jati Panchayats* (caste councils) of the principal agriculturist castes. Each of these castes had its *own jati panchayat.* The head of the *panchayat* used to be some elderly and prominent member of the same caste. Then, each village had a *chowdhari.* The *chowdhari's* main function was that of a liaison between landlord and peasnts. The *chowdhari* was invariably selected from among the principal agriculturist castes. Often a *chowdhari* simultaneously held the office of head of the caste council. During the movements the *chowdharis* and the heads of the caste councils of the agriculturists became the main mobilizers of the peasants. They acted as mediators between new political organizations, for example, the Marwar Kisan Parishad and the Marwar Praja Mandal, and the common peasants. The *chowdharis* and the *mahatos* had their roots in the village; they were part of the same culture as the other peasants. They occupied a respectable position within the caste. Strategically this put *chowdharis* and the *mahatos* in a position where they could easily exploit the caste loyalties of their group members to accentuate the movement. Thus, in the case of peasants, who were fighting for common economic-political goals, caste and kin ties became an additional force of unity and solidarity against the landlords.

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Before we conclude this section it is necessary to explain the apparent anomaly in the position of Rajput tenants during the movement. Kin and caste ties ought to have united them with Rajput landlords, whereas being tenants themselves they should have joined hands with the agitating non-Rajput tenants (peasants). Instead, they became neutral, i.e., they went neither with the landlords, who belonged to the same caste and sometimes the same kin group, nor with the peasants, to whom they were relatively closer in terms of their agrarian interests.

Rajput tenants did not join hands with Rajput landlords because in spite of their ritual unity their economic-political interests were not identical with those of the latter. They expressed their ritual unity with the landlords on the occasions of marriage and death in the family, when they drank wines from the same glass and ate *kacha* and *pucca* food from the same plate. But they parted company when it came to a fight against the non-Rajput tenants over agrarian interests.

On the other hand, they could not forge a unity with the non-Rajput tenants, to whom they were closer in terms of their agrarian interests. In fact, it would imply a vulgar materialist understanding of history to expect that the Rajput tenants should have automatically joined hands with non-Rajput tenants. The reasons why Rajput tenants did not join hands with non-Rajput tenants were mainly two. The first was that, being concessionaries among tenants, their agrarian interests were not exactly identical with those of the other peasants. The second, and perhaps the more important, reason was that it required the presence of a revolutionary political organization to break the caste consciousness of the Rajput tenants and develop in its place a revolutionary class consciousness so that they could unite with the non-Rajput tenants against the Rajput landlords. It was this second pre-requisite which was completely lacking in this case. It is well known that Marxist forces were not developed in Marwar in the 1930s and the 1940s. That apart, neither the local political organizations, such as the Marwar Praja Madal or the Marwar Kisan Parishad, which were leading the movement directly, nor the Indian National Congress, which had an overall, though indirect control over it, was a revolutionary organization in that sense. Avoiding class struggle and preventing the development of revolutionary class consciousness was the professed policy of the Congress Party under Mahatma Gandhi, whose ideology of non-violence did not

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encompass attacking the foundations of traditional social institutions, such as kinship, caste or religion.

Thus, differences in economic (and political) positions kept the Rajput tenants apart from their kin and caste men, i.e., landlords, while lack of a revolutionary ideology prevented them from joining the non-kin, non-caste tenants, to whom they were closer in terms of their class interests. That is why they remained neutral. One may raise here a pertinent question. Can conventional sociology explain why the Rajput tenants who belonged to the same caste and sometimes the same kin group as the landlords did not join the latter in their struggle with the non-Rajput tenants?

It follows that the economic-political interests of the landlords and other members of their kin and caste groups, namely, the *chhutbhais, bhomias*, and the Rajput tenants were not identical. Hence they failed to unite in spite of their common kin-caste ties. On the other hand, the economic-political interests of the tenants were common. Hence in their case kin-caste ties became an additional force for unity among them. In other words, it is the unity or disunity of agrarian interest which in the last analysis determined the response of kin and caste ties.[30] The failure of the conventional sociology of kin and caste is not that it has not produced this answer, but that it has not even raised this crucial question in a proper perspective.

It may, however, not be out of place to raise here the question: what is the basis of inequality in the caste system? Mainstream sociology holds that inequality between castes is an expression of the same principle as inequality within castes. This principle according to it is found in ideas (e.g. the opposition of 'pure' and 'impure').[31] One may ask here if it would be possible to explain in terms of the opposition of 'pure' and 'impure' the inequality between two groups belonging to the same caste group or even the same kin group, but occupying two different positions in the economic-political hierarchy? Would it be logical to argue, for instance, that a Rajput, who is a landlord is 'purer' than another Rajput, who is not a landlord? How can the eternal principle of 'pure' and 'impure' explain a more dubious distinction between a *patawi* (i.e. eldest brother) who inherited the estate and his *chhutbhais* (younger brothers living on the maintenance provided by the elder brother, and in subjugation to the latter) in the same kin group?

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It may be argued, instead, that the basis of inequality in the family and in the caste system is found in the unequal distribution of labour, and its products i.e., property. Thus the inequality between a *patawi* (eldest brother, landlord*)* and his *chhutbhais* (younger brothers living on his maintenance) is based on their distinctive control over property (i.e. land), which in turn determines their position and function in the system. By the same logic distinction in the status of Rajput landlords and other categories of tenure holders (*chhutbhais, bhomias,* and concessionary tenants) is based on their differential control over land, which again determines their position and function in the system.

It may be remarked, in conclusion, that the basic flaw in the conventional sociology of kin and caste is its attempt to explain social reality in terms of ideas, detaching them from the economic-political reality and attributing to them an independent existence. This brings the conventional approach close to speculative philosophy. It reduces the entire attempt of conventional sociology to an act of mystification.[32]

Notes

1. The main architects of this school are Louis Dumont and David F. Pocock, 'For a Sociology of India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. 1, Mouton, 1957.
   Dumont develops the same argument in his book, *Homo Hierarchicus* (1969). It is interesting to note that in a symposium sponsored by *Contributions to Indian Sociology, New series,* some Indian social scientists have criticised Dumont without, of course, challenging his basic methodological or theoretical premises, Cf. T. N. Madan, et. al., 'Review Symposium on Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*', 1971, pp. 1–81.
2. See, for example, Dumont (1969) *passim*
3. *Jagir* File No. C/3/4, Vol. I, RSAB, pp. 65–67.
4. *Jagir* File No. 28, RSAB, pp. 50–51.
5. Walter C. Neale, 'Land Is To Rule', in *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, R. E. Frykenberg (ed.) Madison, 1969, p. 15.
6. This feature of feudal system has been noted by several historians. See, as instance, Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society,* (1962) for feudal France, E. A. Kosminsky *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century* (1956) for medieval England, and Man Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (1963) for Mughal India.
7. Jagir File No. C/3/4, Vol. I, (RSAB), p. 32.
8. Interview with Mr Tan Singh, a founder-member of the Bhooswamis Association, (nowan ex Member of Parliament).
9. Petition from Thikana Vakils to the Vice-President State Council of Jodhpur, dated Jan. 1, 1930. RSAB

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10. *Jagir* File No. 85, 4/3 RSAB, p. 87, Jodhpur Branch, p. 87.
11. *Jagir* File No. C/4 J 10, Vol I. RSAB, p. 87.
12. Survey and Settlement Reports, Raj Marwar, 1885. RASB p. 102.
13. *Ibid.,* p. 105.
14. Survey and Settlement, Hawala File No. 4, Pan I, RSAB, pp. 78, 98.
15. Survey and Settlement Reports, Raj Marwar, 1885, RSAB, p. 108.
16. Hakumat Cess File No. C/l, Vol. I, RSAB, p. 112.
17. Alfred Lyall, Introduction, *The Ruling Princes, Chiefs and Leading Personages in Rajputana and Ajmer,* Govt. of India, Sixth Edition, Calcutta, 1931, p. 6.
18. F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,* Selected Works, Vol. 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 234.
19. Alfred Lyall, *op. cit.,* p. 104.
20. *Census of Mallard,* prepared by Hardayal Singh, Superintendent, Mallani, 1881, p. 7 (Courtesy Rao Bahadur Rawal Amar Singh Jee of Jesol).
21. *Ibid.,* p. 85.
22. Rao Bahadur Rawal Zorawar Singh vs. The State of Rajasthan. In the Supreme Court of India. At New Delhi, 1957 (Courtesy Rawal Amar Singh Jee).
23. Hawala, File No. 16/2-A, Part I, *Rights of Bhomias,* RSAB, pp. 1–60.
24. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*: K.M.N. Publishers, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 136–38.
25. It may be helpful to present the following documentary proofs from the archival records to show that the status of the *bhomias* was held inferior to that of the *thikantdan.*

    (a) In a petition filed by the *bhomias* of Godwar, dating June, 1893 asking for the right of private distillation—a privilege allowed to all the *thiktaudan*—the Revenue Minister ruled out the claim on the ground that 'under *abkari* (excise) rules the right of private distillation is given to *thikanedars. Bhomias* not being even ordinary *jagirdars* how can their request for private distillation be considered at all' (Hawala File No. 16/2-A: Rights of Bhomial, RSAB, p. 40).
    (b) In Marwar the *thikanedars* were entitled to take possession of the heirless lands in their territories. But when the *bhomias* of Khiwande tried to follow the suit, it was held: 'They (i.e. the bhomias) have posed as the defacto *thikaasdars.* The only thing now is to prosecute the *bhomias* if they take possession of the heirless property', (*ibid.,* p. 47).
26. It is significant to note in this connection that whereas a Rajput landlord could take the daughters of the *bhomias* in marriage, no landlord ever gave his daughter in marriage to a *bhomia.* As the hypergamy among Rajputs of Rajpatana operated strictly along economic-political status, i.e. the higher ones in economic-political hierarchy accepted in marriage the daughters of those who were lower in economic-political status, but never gave them their daughters in marriage. Thus, the fact that *bhomias* only gave their daughters in marriage to the landlords without ever being able to marry latter's daughters shows that *bhomias'* social status was inferior to that of the landlords.
27. *Veer Arjun,* dated August 7, 1940, Paper cuttings, Jodhpur State, File No. C/4, Vol.1, RSAB.
28. Jagir File No. 85, Miscellaneous complaints *Against Jagirdars*, RSAB, p. 85.
29. Interview with Mr Tan Singh.
30. Hamza Alvi has proposed a similar conclusion in his 'Peasant Class and Primordial Loyalties', *The Joumal of Peasant Studies,* Vol. I, Oct., 1973, p. 59.

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31. Dumont, *op. cit., passim.*
32. It may be appropriate in this connection to refer to the controversy between Marx and Engels on the one hand and German idealist and mechanical materialists on the other. Marx and Engels attack the idealists on the ground that the latter consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas—in fact all the products of consciousness—to which they attribute an independent existence—as the 'real chains' of men (New Hegelians) or as 'true bonds' (old Hegelians) of human society.

    In their theses on Feurbach Marx and Engels make it even more clear that the 'fancy' the 'conception' of the people in question about their real practice is transformed into the sole determining and effective force, which dominates and determines their practice, when the crude form of division of labour, which is found among the Indians and Egyptians calls forth the caste system the historian believes that the caste system is the power, which has produced this crude social form (see Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology,* Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 63).

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6

Changing Land Relations and Caste

View from a Village*†

Structural factors play a decisive role in the recruitment of leaders, who perform multiple roles which are functional to the village social system as a whole.

The continuity of traditional village leadership is ephemeral. Exposed to the new political, economic and cultural factors, the village polity is experiencing novel strains in response to which it is gradually acquiring a pluralistic character.

The leadership of the future would be accountable to its followers and would have to accommodate the interests of different groups 'legitimately' competing with one another for leadership positions.

Recent changes, particularly, the abolition of zamindari and the extension of franchise to all adults, have legitimised the leadership aspirations of all the castes in the village. The legitimisation of the

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* Adapted from 'Strains in Leadership: From Status Groups to Pluralism in an East UP Village', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 4, No. 18, 1969.
[The paper was written barely two years after I had finished my studies for masters degree in sociology from Lucknow university. I have deliberately retained the conceptual framework (essentially Weberian, e.g. 'status group' to 'pluralism') and the inferences (essentially functionalist and conservative, e.g. the leadership exercised by Rajputs, former landlords, was functional to the 'unity' of the village as a whole), mainly for two reasons. First, to show how our choices of conceptual framework and theoretical perspective shape our interpretations and inferences. Second, to confess that in terms of conceptual framework and theoretical perspective, I have moved away from where I started].

† The author is thankful to Professor Yogendra Singh for his help and encouragement.

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leadership aspirations of the traditionally dominated groups has many far-reaching implications for the village political structure. These implications have been conspicuously ignored in the mushroom growth of the studies of rural leadership in India in the last decade.[1] Hence the misplaced emphasis on the continuity of traditional leadership.[2] In the present chapter an attempt is made to look beyond the apparent continuity of the traditional leadership by analysing the strains and stresses in the leadership structure of an East UP village.

The leadership structure in the village under study exhibits an elemental continuity in that it has been and is being ruled over by a status group[3]—the one-time zamindar—Rajput caste. This status group is exposed to an unprecedented challenge from the leadership aspirations of the traditionally subservient and disprivileged groups. This challenge, being persistent, is likely to alter not only the relative positions of the different groups in the leadership structure, but also the entire complexion of the village polity.

The Venue of Observation

Some twenty-two miles from the district town of Jaunpur in East UP, the village Mahuari is situated in a relatively isolated locale. Surrounded by paddy fields on three sides and bordered by a small rivulet on the fourth side, the village is absolutely inaccessible to traditional or, until recently, modern means of transport, save elephants (for men) and palanquins (for women), particularly during rains.

Its total population of 1,125 makes it larger than an average UP village with 527 heads. It is a multi-caste village consisting of 14 castes, divided into 156 families.

Rajputs, the Dominant Caste

In the past, the leadership of the village, both formal and informal, was in the hands of three zamindar Rajput families. The scope of formal leadership was formerly extremely limited. There was in the village a statutory *gaon panchayat*—an administrative-cum-judicial

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body. The head of this body was known as *mukhiya*. Both judicial and administrative powers were vested in the *mukhiya*. In his judicial capacity, he had to hear petty suits that fell within the jurisdiction of the *gaon panchayat*. Most of the cases brought before the *gaon panchayat* were, it is said, decided informally. In his administrative capacity the *mukhiya* had to act as an intermediary between Government and the villagers, but such occasions were few. The office of *mukhiya* being hereditary was always held by a member of a single Rajput family.

The scope of informal leadership during zamindari days was quite large, pervading all aspects of village life—economic, political, social and cultural. As noted among others by R. D. Singh[4] and Yogendra Singh[5] zamindari, though essentially an economic phenomenon, had established itself as an all-pervasive pattern. The zamindar commanded the economic, political, social and cultural sanctions in the village. The zamindars thus had two interconnected features, viz. traditional authority[6] and an all-pervasive informal leadership. Rajputs were the dominant caste.

Formal Leadership

Two changes of major importance in the post-Independence period deserve mention. The abolition of zamindari ended the officially sanctioned economic and the political hegemony of the traditionally dominant group. The other significant change has been the extension of universal franchise to all adults, followed by the introduction of new formal political institutions like the *gram panchayat*, the *adalat panchayat samiti* and the *zilla parishad*.

Simultaneously, there have been some important changes in the relative economic and educational positions of the non-Rajput castes. Due to the sheer weight of numbers, they have accounted for the bulk of the exodus to urban industrial towns in search of employment and thereby improved the economic position of their families. The number of school-going Rajput boys is proportionately smaller than that of the other castes. Rajput boys are seriously lagging behind even in educational performance.

The new political institutions have widened the scope of formal leadership. The main formal institutions in the village are the *gram panchayat*, the village co-operative society, and the managing committee

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of the school. Besides, the *adalat panchayat,* the *panchayat samiti* and the *zilla parishad* provide for new formal leadership positions.

The most important formal position of leadership in the village is that of the *pradhan*—the head of the *gram panchayat*. Since the inception of the *gram panchayat* some fifteen years ago the office of the *pradhan* has been held by a Rajput of the former zamindar family. There has never been any contest for this post and this Rajput has been a unanimous choice each time. The village co-operative society is an exclusively Rajput body. The membership of the *adalat panchayat* and the *panchayat samiti* is decided predominantly by the Rajputs. Many in the village are not even aware of the existence of the *panchayat samiti* or the *zilla parishad*. The primary school of the village was started by the Rajputs, and until recognized and aided by the Government, it was financed and looked after by them. Now, a Government grant is available and the Rajputs though absolved from their financial burden, still continue to have a major say in the constitution and working of the school.

In brief, formal leadership is still in the hands of the old rulers of the village.

Informal Leadership

The formal political institutions have not, however, been able to do away with the popularity and sanctity of informal leadership in the village. If we take a day-to-day or problem-to-problem view, we find that the occasions for informal leadership greatly outnumber the formal ones. The informal leadership is exclusively in the hands of three former zamindar Rajput families. The members of these families are the most 'reputed' ones in the village; they have a dominant role in decision making and despite a general setback in their position following the abolition of zamindari, they are the most influential persons in the village.

The scope of informal leadership is very wide. The crucial role of informal leaders lies in the settlement of disputes relating to economic, political, social and moral issues. Economic issues figure prominently at the time of the fission of a family when the joint property is to be divided. These divisions are always informal in the first instance; nevertheless, they are more or less binding. The moral issues involving kidnapping, illicit sex relations and cheating, etc, are decided by the

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informal leaders. Deviations in respect of social relations are brought to the notice of the informal leaders. If a young man, for instance, does not treat his parents properly or if a man behaves atrociously towards his wife or children, the informal leaders try, frequently with success, to correct the deviant.

Except the Rajputs and the Brahmans, each caste in the village has its caste *panchayat*. The caste *panchayats* operate today almost as efficaciously as they did during zamindari days. But they have never been effective for the whole village. Vertically the jurisdiction of each caste *panchayat* is confined to its respective caste, while horizontally it has always extended along caste lines far beyond the village boundaries—which weakened its effectiveness as a village unit.

Challenge from Below

The present leadership of the traditional leaders does not, however, represent a smooth continuity from past to the present. The age-old authority of the Rajputs was seriously challenged by non-Rajputs particularly the lower castes of the village immediately after the abolition of zamindari in the early 1950s. Two incidents are specially relevant to our purpose. In one case, one Bachai Ahir (former tenant and middle caste) used to cultivate a piece of land of a zamindar Rajput, Thakur Kshatra Pal Singh, and the revenue for the same was paid to the latter. After the abolition of zamindari, Bachai refused to pay the revenue to Kshatra Pal Singh, and the latter asked him to quit the land. In reaction to this all the Ahirs of Mahuari and the surrounding villages[7] got together and took possession of the land in dispute by force. They also sent a message to Thakur Bans Gopal Singh, the oldest and most respected Rajput of the village that the Rajputs could come for a trial of strength, if they so wished. This infuriated the Rajputs of the village and in a short time all the Rajputs (and some Brahmans) of Mahuari and also of some nearby villages got together to face the challenge. As soon as the Rajput party marched towards the disputed spot the Ahirs fled away. Subsequently, Kshatra Pal Singh filed a suit in the *adalat panchayat* of the village which was headed by a Brahman. The Rajputs and the Brahmans joined hands and heavy fines were imposed on the Ahirs.

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The other incident took place a year later, when Thakur Basudeo Singh, former landlord, asked one of his former tenants, Pasi by caste, to quit a piece of land under the latter's cultivation which he refused to do. One day while the tenant was ploughing the land in dispute, Basudeo Singh along with a few other Rajputs went there to stop him. No sooner did the Rajputs reach the spot than the Pasis accompanied by some of the Ahirs of the same hamlet and attacked them from three sides. In the fierce fight that followed, both parties sustained injuries. Next morning the Rajputs and the Brahmans of the village organized a raid on the residence of the tenant. The Pasis and the Ahirs involved in the fight a day earlier had already left the village out of fear. The Rajput party burnt the house of the Pasis tenant in broad daylight. The Pasis reported the case to the police and also filed a suit against the Rajputs in the District Court, but it was dismissed as the Pasis failed to produce any evidence against the Rajputs. On the other hand, Basudeo Singh filed a suit against the Pasis in the *adalat panchayat* and once again the Brahman head of the *panchayat* helped the Rajput plaintiff by imposing heavy fines on the Pasis.

Table 6.1: Number of Families and Persons by Caste in Village Mahuari

Caste	*Number of Families*	*Total Strength*
Ahir	54	400
Chamar	42	294
Brahmin	19	137
Pasi	16	105
Nai	9	59
Thakur	3	30
Teli	2	25
Kahar	2	10
Lohar	2	15
Dhobi	2	14
Gareria	2	14
Kumhar	1	10
Gosain	1	7
Kayastha	1	5
Total	156	1,125

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Structural Factors

These two incidents 're-established' the authority and dominance of the Rajputs in the village. Besides, they brought together three Rajput families which were split into three open factions during zamindari days. They also brought the Rajputs of Mahuari closer to the Brahmans and the Rajputs of the neighbouring villages, since they came to realize that they could defend themselves better against the other castes if they stood united. This new unity in addition to the Rajputs' major share in the village lands appears to be the main force behind their dominant position in the village.

Our findings indicate that structural factors play a deterministic role in the recruitment of leaders. Right from the beginning village leadership has been in the hands of the Rajputs. Belonging to the Rajput caste is the most important factor behind an individual's leadership position. A Rajput is invariably preferred to a non-Rajput even if the personal attributes of the two are matching. In other words, a Rajpal is always a leader for a non-Rajput in the village. The situation is essentially similar to that described by Oscar Lewis in his study of a north Indian village, where, 'every jat is a leader for a non-jat'.[8]

The individual attributes are, important, nevertheless, even if they cannot transcend the limits set by the group. There are some criteria, only conventionally implied, which individual leaders or families are expected to fulfil. Thus, among Rajput families, the family which stands higher in terms of wealth, social reputation and social contacts has a greater say in leadership matters. On the other hand, individuals who are supposedly honest, truthful, humble, loyal, hospitable and of known moral integrity become more popular and are easily accepted as leaders. We therefore agree with Wolfe,[9] that the legitimacy of authority or dominance of a particular group in the village cannot be explained exclusively or even mainly in terms of coercion or a major share in the lands. On the contrary, as pointed out by A. K. Singh,[10] the legitimacy of a leader's role is recognized largely to the extent that he fits into the cultural image of a leader held by the people.

The role of leaders in the village is not specific but of a general kind. Leadership does not consist in the performance of any particular task or in the attainment of any specific goal, but in the resolution of issues of a wide variety ranging from the economic, political and social to the moral and cultural spheres. They are not the products of any crisis

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situation but are ones which normally arise in day-to-day dealings. These issues, if not satisfactorily resolved, pose serious threat to the village social order. To the extent that the leaders succeed in solving these problems they contribute to the maintenance of the village social order, and that is the function of leadership.

It follows that the leadership is in the hands of a group of persons who constitute the social core of the village. They perform for the village society a set of multiple functional roles in the economic, political, social and the cultural fields. Functionally they are analogous to Keller's 'strategic elites'[11] although structurally they are the latter's exact antithesis.

Continuity and Change: From Past to Future

Thus, there is an apparent continuity in village leadership from the past to the present insofar as the leaders are of the same caste, i.e. the Rajputs, and the nature of leadership is the same, in that the authority is traditional and the informal leadership is more pervasive than the formal one.

Here, we are confronted with a question of fundamental importance: who will lead in future? And what will the nature of leadership be? The abolition of zamindari and the extension of citizenship with its corollary, civic incorporation of the masses assume a special significance in this context. Formerly, the zamindar was one class; the non-zamindar tenant was another, and between them there was an abyss, the leadership being the prerogative of the former. The zamindar was not only economically but also politically and culturally dominant. The abolition of zamindari has done away with the traditional gap between the zamindars and the tenants thereby ending the leadership prerogative of the former. The antiquity (purity) of blood (ideological justification of Rajputs' right to rule), to use a popular phrase, is finished once for good. The inference that the leadership is no more ascribed but achieved is only too obvious.

On the other hand, the universal franchise and the civic incorporation of the masses have made it theoretically possible for members of all castes to participate in the village polity on an equal footing.

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It implies, above all, that the non-Rajput castes can now legitimately aspire for leadership positions in the village. Any such aspiration in the past was illegitimate. The legitimization of the aspirations of the other castes for leadership is the single most important factor in the context of the village leadership in future. The continuance of old rulers does not mean that they are the accepted leaders for ever. And even if they succeed in retaining the leadership, the nature of leadership will change, simply because the different castes will now compete with one another for leadership in which wealth, education, personal attainments and numerical strength will play a decisive role. The group which excels others in regard to these factors will stand a higher chance for leadership. As these opportunities are open to all, the village polity is more likely to acquire a pluralistic[12] character, in which the leaders will have to take into consideration the interests of the different competing groups with the result that there will be a constant shifting and reshuffling of interests giving rise to and making room for the accommodation of new interest groups and cliques in the village politics.

The changing economic, social and educational conditions are prone to create a climate conducive to the growth and development of pluralistic tendencies in the village polity. Outside employment is improving the economic lot of the non-Rajput castes. Education is making them more conscious. Growing contact with the outside world is breaking through their apathy. With adult franchise numerical strength has already become a major political power.

Under these circumstances, a fundamental change in village leadership is not a mere theoretical plausibility. The process has already set in. Formerly, the Rajputs looked at the non-Rajputs as their subjects thinking of themselves as the latter's 'natural' masters. Now, on the contrary, they look at others as their legitimate competitors and they try, consciously, to retain their hold through 'politicking'. This conscious effort to attain and retain the leadership on the part of the traditional leaders implies a major breakthrough.[13]

In this chapter, I have examined the structure and the function of leadership in an East UP village. I have shown that in the recruitment of leaders the structural factors play a decisive role. The role of the leaders is not confined to any specific problem or field. On the contrary, they perform multiple roles which are functional to the entire village social system as a whole. The structure of village leadership exhibits

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an elemental continuity in that for the past few centuries the village is being governed by the three 'reigning families' to borrow Lynd's phrase,[14] of a status group, the one-time zamindar, Rajput caste. My observations, however, suggest that this continuity is ephemeral; it is a mere survival of the past. Exposed to the new political, economic and the cultural factors the village polity is experiencing novel strains in response to which it is on its way to acquiring a pluralistic character in which there will be more accommodation between the interests of the different groups legitimately competing with one another for leadership positions, and more important than that, the leaders will have to be accountable to their followers.

[I may add that last time when I visited the village (in 2005) *pradhan* of the *gaon panchayat* was a Pasis (formerly an untouchable caste). The idea of Rajputs as 'natural' leaders of the village will sound as most unnatural in the village today].

Notes

1. Cf. 'Leadership and Political Institutions in India' by R Park and I Tinker (eds), Oxford, 1960; 'Emerging Patterns of Rural Leadership in Southern Asia', 'National Institute of Community Development, Hyderabad, 1965'; 'Rural Leadership in India' by Udai Pareek (ed), New Delhi, 1966; 'Leadership in India' by L P Vidyarthi (ed), Asia Publishing House, 1967.
2. Cf. Prabhat Chandra: 'Rural Leadership in India', *The Eastern Anthropologist,* September–November 1959; John T Hitchcock: 'Leadership in a North Indian Village: Two Case Studies' in 'Leadership and Political Institutions in India' by Park and Tinker (eds) 1960; Brij Raj Chauhan: Phases in Village Power Structure and Leadership in Rajasthan' in 'Leadership in India' by L P Vidyarthi (ed), 1967.
3. Status group is used here in the Weberian sense. In Weber's usage status group has three distinct features: (a) peculiar style of life; (b) hereditary charisma, concretised in a claim to a position of prestige by birth; (c) monopoly of political power. See Max Weber: 'The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation', Free Press, 1964, p. 342.
4. R D Singh: 'Social Change in a UP Village', *Far Eastern Quarterly,* December 1956.
5. Yogendra Singh: 'Changing Power Structure of Village Community: A Caste Study of Six Villages in Eastern UP' in 'Rural Sociology in India' by A R Desai, Bombay. 1961.
6. Traditional authority, as used by Max Weber and Talcott Parsons refers to a situation where the area of personal influence is not clearly separated from that of the official authority.
7. Mahuari is surrounded by a few villages where the Ahirs are not only numerically strong, but also known for their notorious activities against the upper castes, the Rajputs and the Brahmins.
8. Oscar Lewis: 'Village Life in Northern India', University of Illinois Press, 1958.

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9. A W Wolfe: 'Concepts of Authority: An African Study' in 'Leadership in India' by L P Vidyarthi, *op cit*.
10. A K Singh: 'Unconscious Image in Indian Leadership' in 'Leadership in India' by L P Vidyarthi, *op cit*.
11. Keller's usage of 'strategic elites' refers to the persons selected on the basis of individual motivation and capacity. Structurally they are diverse in the sense that they may be selected from any class and in this respect they are opposite of the leaders selected from one single caste, See S Keller: 'Beyond the Ruling Class', New York, pp. 30–35, 1963.
12. Pluralism is used in the same sense as used by Wildavski (1964). The core feature of pluralism is that in this system the dominance is essentially persuasive rather than coercive in nature. See Wildavski: 'Leadership in a Small Town', 1964.
13. Opler has taken full cognisance of the changing nature of the village society. In his study of Senapur he concludes with the remark: 'for the first time in the history of the village a respected village elder has gone out to seek honour and support rather than to assume that it would accrue to him in due course. This is a temper that will introduce new blood and will effect a transition from old village administrative structure to the new.' Morris Edward Opler: 'Factors of Tradition and Change in a Local Election in Rural India' in 'Leadership and Political Institutions in India' by R Park and I Tinker, *op cit*.
14. Robert Lynd: 'Power in American Society as Resource and Problem' in 'Problems of Power in American Democracy' by A Kornhauser (ed), 1957.

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7

Indenture, Religion and Caste

The Twin Myths about Hinduism and Caste

Indian Indenture and the Empire

Beginning in 1834, following the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1933, until the end of the World War I lasting roughly over a period of 90 years, 1,336,034 indentured Indians were transported to the British colonies in South Africa, the Caribbean Islands and Fiji (Pool and Singh 1999: 2). Indian indentured labour replaced the slave labour that sustained the sugar plantations of the British Empire in these colonies before. Production and sale of sugar was an important economic enterprise of global nature. And for 90 years, sugar plantations of the empire were kept alive primarily by the indentured labour from India. It was an enormous contribution made by India to the economic growth and expansion of the British Empire. Labour in general was a valuable resource for the imperial economy. As bonded labour, Indian indentured labour was particularly suited to the labour needs of the sugar plantations of the empire. Yet the story of Indian indentured labour is conspicuously buried in the historiography of British colonial rule in India. The silence on Indian indenture in the British Empire gets only more intriguing if it is noted that Mahatma Gandhi's initiation in politics took place in South Africa where the core issue was the status of indentured (and non-indentured) Indians. Mahatma Gandhi became the Father of the Nation. However, the story of indentured Indians, the site of his early political socialization, was all but ignored in the historiography of colonialism.

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Apart from what Mahatma Gandhi did to the struggle over the issue of indentured (and non-indentured) Indians in South Africa and what that struggle did to him, the fight over the fate of indentured Indian men and women emerged as a potent weapon in the freedom movement in India. On the other hand, to the extent that the action and reaction in India to the treatment of indentured Indians abroad weighed heavily with the colonial state in India, the colonial office in London as well as the administration and the planters in colonies, it provided indentured Indians much valuable political and moral support in their struggles in respective colonies. It is rather intriguing in that light that the story of Indian indenture is, by and large, left out of the history of India's colonization and decolonization, including the historiography of subaltern studies.

The case of subaltern studies is particularly intriguing. It claims to give voice to subaltern, the voice which, it claims, has been suppressed in what it calls elite historiography, an omnibus category comprising of conservative, nationalist, liberal and Marxist historians. Indentured Indians were the subaltern of the subaltern. Torn off from their communities, dispossessed of the means of subsistence, bound by contract to unfree labour regime of the empire, governed by the Master Servants Act (that governed relations between masters and slaves during slavery), they were reduced to mere units of production in the plantation machine of the empire. Studies of indenture informed by, or sympathetic to, subaltern studies have, by and large, focused either on criticizing Gandhi as representative of elite interests, or deconstructing the official documents for not giving voice to subaltern. In that process, the voice of indentured labourers and their descendants, their trials and tribulations, their daily struggles and resistance is all but lost. In a stark contrast, historians of slavery, slave trade and slave resistance foregrounded the voices of slaves, their pains, and their struggles, their materiality and spirituality. The historiography of Indian indenture has a lot to learn from the historiography of slavery and slave resistance.

Diaspora *Sui Generis*

A 'new form of slavery', a label often attached to Indian indenture from its very inception first by the abolitionists in England and later on by the academics, following the publication of Hugh Tinker's book

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bearing that title (Tinker 1974), is a misnomer. Indian indenture was distinct from both slavery and the white indentured servitude. What made it distinct was its historically specific context. Indian indenture originated in the process of colonization of India, and it ended in the process of the struggle for India's decolonization. It is the dialectics of the colonial rule and resistance that constitutes the specific historical context of Indian indenture. The historical specificity of that context is missing in studies of indenture focusing on migration, settlement and citizenship.

Irony of the Civilizing Mission

Abolitionists in England characterized slavery as savagery. Indenture enabled Britain to dispense with savagery of slavery, while allowing the British planters access to unlimited pool of unfree labour (disguised as 'contract', a colonial legal fiction), indispensable to the survival and expansion of the sugar plantation economy in far flung corners of the empire. In return, the British planters and white settlers in the colonies dubbed indentured Indians and their descendants as savages. And the colonial office in London, such as the colonial bureaucracy in India and its counterparts in the colonies, turned deaf ears to unfair treatment of indentured Indians in colonies. The irony was not lost on Mahatma Gandhi in his struggle over the 'Indian Question in South Africa' from the 1890s to the 1910s. It led him to realize that in the last analysis, the predicament of the Indians in South Africa had its roots in British colonial rule in India. It was no mere coincidence that Gandhi wrote *Swaraj* (Self-Rule) in the midst of his involvement with the Indian Question in South Africa, with the issue of Indian indentured labour at the very centre.

It is generally believed that the abolition of slavery resulting in emancipation created acute labour shortage threatening the ruin of plantations. That was the position taken by the planters and their advocates in colonies and in London. The focus of the planters in the post-emancipation period was to persuade the legislators and administrators in Britain that the colonies were faced with acute labour shortage with probable dire consequences for the well being of not only the colony but of the empire—a severe blow to the civilizing mission as a whole (Kale 1998: 7).

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Even before the abolition of slavery, planters and their advocates were preoccupied with search for new sources of labour in order to continue the operation of plantations as profitable enterprises. This search acquired a new urgency in the aftermath of emancipation of former slaves, more so after the end of apprenticeship (ibid.: 19). Post-emancipation labour shortage is, however, only part of the story. The main reason behind importing indentured labour from India was not that there was labour shortage per se. Indian labour was cheaper and also more dependable (Laurence 1994: 4). What made Indian labour cheaper and more reliable was the British colonial rule in India.

Emancipated slaves were not available to carry on the work, as they were forced to, during slavery. Planters attributed emancipated slaves' unwillingness to continue to work on the plantations to a 'disposition of idleness', 'limited wants' and a lack of 'money consciousness'. Some of them went even further to doubt if the freed slaves possessed 'the common attributes of a civilized man' (North-Coombes 1984: 83). Whatever its factual status, it was surely a sign of desperation on the part of slave masters and their protagonists to represent emancipated slaves' withdrawal from labour practices that were outrightly brutal and savage, as a lack of the 'attributes of civilization', if we are reminded that the treatment of slaves was anything but civilized. Nevertheless, their resistance to revert back to the conditions of slavery after the formal abolition of slavery was construed by the slave holders as a sign of a lack of civilization. Attributes of civilization had different meanings for the oppressor and the oppressed in the age of empire.

Contrary to colonial construction of emancipated slaves as lazy, the real reason for the latter's resistance was the association of slavery with horror 'engraved upon their memories with a pen of iron [which] no lapse of time will ever erase' (Rev Patrick Beaton, a resident of Mauritius from 1851 to 1856, cited in ibid.: 82). Plantation labour was ever degrading and painful. As argued by Edward Baker, 'a Quaker missionary, the emancipated slaves deserted the plantations, not because they were irrational or innately lazy rather, because of the unattractiveness of estate labour on planters' terms….' (ibid.: 83). Planters' terms were very specific; they needed uninterrupted supply of labour that was not only cheap but also unfree, a particular labour strategy that was historically and psychologically rooted in slavery.

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It has been reported that any attempt to ameliorate the conditions of labourers during slavery, let alone the idea of freedom, provoked a 'near hysterical' reaction on the part of the planters, who were used to treating labour as a tool of production, a form of property—not as free workers to bargain with. There was no room for the 'coaxing' of labour in planters' psychology. Thanks to British colonial rule in India, the planters acquired access to Indian indentured labour that met the basic tenets of the planters' terms, that is, labour that was regular, cheap and unfree. The specific significance of Indian indentured labour was that it eliminated the pressure for psychological reorientation from unfree to free labour (ibid.: 85–86). Indeed, it did much more.

Indian Indentured Labour and Imperialist Rivalry

It has been suggested that the idea of importing Indian labour was to put pressure on emancipated slaves who were refusing to work under previous conditions of slavery (Kale 1998: 159–160). Any such idea is, however, of a purely academic interest. Access to Indian labour with all the attributes of slave labour, without the label of slavery, rendered the need to employ emancipated slaves rather superfluous. It was not only that freed slaves were not willing to work on planters' terms. Rather, planters were not willing to employ them so long as they were assured of alternative source of supply of labour that had all the attributes of slave labour, with no stigma of slavery.

Much more, mid-19th century was the age of colonial–imperial rivalry. Access to Indian indentured labour gave Great Britain a unique advantage that no other European colonial–imperial rival could match. No other single colony or combination of colonies controlled by other European rivals, or even by England for that matter, was ever available to be exploited as a reserve pool of unlimited supply of bonded, but formally free, labour to meet the needs not only of the existing plantations but also of their further expansion (on the expansion of plantation economy employing Indian indentured labour, see North-Coombs mentioned earlier). That, more than anything else, was the true significance of Indian indentured labour. It was a historically unique asset at the disposal of the Raj.

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Labour and Colour

Indian indenture was particularly suited to replace the slave labour for yet another reason. Centuries of employment of African slave labour had created a vision of the plantation labour as non-white construed as intrinsically inferior in intellect and ill-equipped to be anything worthwhile other than a unit of production on land. This commodified view of labour, with colour, had become part of the social, psychological and sexual imagery of the planters and managers. Indian indentured labour, in addition to being cheap, bonded and abundantly available, was also in tune with the social psychology of the planters' and managers' racialized view of labour as non-white.

The New Triangle

Historians of the slave trade have highlighted the triangular connection between Africa, the central Americas and Europe (cf. Williams 1966). Replacement of slavery by Indian indenture replaced the old triangle with a new triangle of India, the British colonies outside India and the Great Britain. As most studies of Indian indenture tend to focus on what happened in the colonies that imported Indian labour, or on London, the epicentre of colonial regulation, the Indian angle of the triangular theatre (the principal site of the recruitment of labour) is relatively less visible. In order to round out the history of indenture and empire, it is important to bring in the Indian angle, the point of the origin and termination of the entire process of origin, renewal and reproduction of formally free but unfree plantation labour in aftermath of the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

Free Market in Labour

In their attempt to justify indentured emigration from India, it was argued by the planters in the colonies, the colonial office in London and the colonial regime in India that the [British] Government of

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India had no business to prevent or impede the free movement of labour (Kale 1998: 25). The system of colonial rule that had robbed the peoples of India of their freedom at home was at the same time seeking to justify the export of Indian labour, albeit unfree labour, in the name of freedom of movement of labour—all for the benefit of the white planters. Free movement of labour in this context was a colonial ploy.

It was further argued that indentured emigration provided Indians access to foreign markets for their labour where, in addition to improving their material conditions, they will have an opportunity to expand their minds beyond the narrow circle of their native land (Kale 1998: 32). Apart from the obvious (though seldom asked) question as to why no such opportunities for material and mental development could be provided to same Indians by the colonial regime in India, the promise of mental expansion was farcical, particularly if one looks at it in the light of the historical experience of slavery. Comparison to slavery is particularly relevant here since indentured labour was a replacement of slave labour. In reality, contrary to the claim made by the colonial regime in India and the planters in the colonies, what slavery and indenture had in common were the obstacles, not the stimulus, to the mental development of labourers in both situations. What else they had in common was that they (slaves and indentured labourers) were both construed as having lower IQ and hence, naturally indisposed to expanding their mental horizon. They were after all 'imperial monkeys' (Bremann 1989).

In the mid-19th century, colonizers had the power to present history one-sidedly. It was not until the resistance to the colonial rule in India grew stronger that the Indian side of the story of indenture began to be heard. Above all, it unravelled the idyllic view of indenture enshrined in the official colonial historiography. It must be noted that studies of indenture have made a significant contribution to dispelling the idyllic view of indenture in colonies. These studies are, however, of a much later origin. Moreover, they are confined to the particular host colonies, sites of particular studies, ignoring the Indian side of the story. Bringing in the Indian side of the story covering the entire process from inception to dissolution will enrich the area of indenture studies comprising of the new triangle created in the process of renewal and reproduction of bonded labour in the empire.

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Community–Commodity–Community Circuit

Indenture, like slavery, tore emigrants off their traditional community ties in homeland and turned them into commodity—mere tools of production on the plantations. Irrespective of their social rank in homeland, indentured Indian emigrants were all reduced to a single rank—coolies—a derogatory term connoting the lowest rank of social order in host colonies, with no exception. However, at the end of indenture lasting from 5 to 10 years, Indians reconstructed their community. This is what I call here the community–commodity–community circuit of indenture.

The account of the community–commodity–community circuit of indenture (focused on religion, family and caste) during and after indenture presented here is related mainly to South Africa, one of the destinations of indentured emigration from India. South Africa acquires a particular significance on account of Mahatma Gandhi's involvement with the Indian Question in South Africa, the treatment of indentured Indian labourers and their descendants being an important component of it. By sheer coincidence I visited South Africa in 1993, the centenary of Gandhi's arrival there.

The material I collected in South Africa was a combination of archival data and ethnographic fieldwork. The archival material was collected primarily from the Documentation Centre, University of Durban, Westville, the Natal State Archives, Pietermaritzburg, and the library at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted among the descendants of indentured Indians in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and some of the hinterland communities in Natal, the province where most indentured Indians were taken to work on the plantations, and where they settled after the end of their indenture. Information from secondary sources pertaining to Indian indenture in the Caribbean islands and Fiji is used as and when relevant. Ongoing conversation with students of indenture ancestry in the Caribbean at York University and occasional visits to their temples and participation in their social functions like weddings and birthday celebrations in Toronto has been of great help in getting a sense of religion (Hinduism), family and caste, albeit castelessness, among these populations.

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An interesting component of the narrative of the community–commodity–community circuit of indenture is what elements or institutions of the community from homeland did the emigrant Indians retain or revive in the colony and what they did not or could not, and why? Our particular interest here is whatever happened to the caste during and after the indenture, and what does that say about the caste system in India? It is interesting to note that religion and family—the two basic elements of community from back home—were revived, retained and strengthened in the community–commodity–community circuit of indenture in the colony, while the caste and the caste system dissolved. Since the sociological studies of caste and the caste system emphasize an intrinsic connection between kin, caste, and religion, particularly between religion and caste, the significance of contradictory consequences of indenture—the revival and strengthening of religion and family and the dissolution of caste and the caste system—cannot be overemphasized.

Indenture and the Family

Before I deal with the issue of religion and caste, I want to briefly discuss the reconstruction of the (monogamous) family among Indian indentured diaspora. Indenture was not idyllic and rosy. A scheme devised for the benefit of the white English planters, made possible by British colonial rule in India, was a prime example of the other (non-idyllic) side of the 'primitive accumulation'—force, fraud, violence and community disintegration—noted by Marx (1975). One aspect of indenture involving class, race, gender and caste was the treatment of women. It was a problem that was seized upon by the leaders of the Indian freedom movement in the 1910s to make a case for the abolition of indenture, among other concerns.

The question of women in indenture has many sides to it, and it is not my intention to deal with them here (some aspects of this question we have dealt with in another context, Pool and Singh 1999). The question of women I am interested in here is important and relevant to the present context for one reason, that is, the destruction of the institution of (monogamous) family in indenture and how Indians after the end of the contract period of their indenture (5–10 years) reconstructed

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the family from the ruins on the pattern of the monogamous family prevalent in India, with its common strengths and weaknesses. Women's question was at the centre in indenture just as it was at the centre in the reconstruction of the family after indenture.

The (Mysterious) Rule of 33 Per Cent

The question of women and the revival of the monogamous family acquire particular sociological significance in the light of the peculiar context of indenture and the recruitment of women. According to a rule governing the recruitment of indentured emigrants from India, 33 per cent (one-third) of the recruits for each ship had to be women. The origin of this rule and its real intention are still shrouded in mystery. It has been argued that the abolitionists in England (whose movement, we are told, led to the abolition of slavery, the system of labour supply for colonial plantations prior to the introduction of Indian indenture) wanted to restore the institution of the family and family values among the labouring populations on the plantations. Destruction of the family and family values in slavery was a powerful argument used by the abolitionists in support of their cause. The objective to bring Indian women to the plantations was arguably a response to the abolitionist campaign highlighting the sanctity of the family values (cf. Kale 1998: 158–160).

It may be noted that the mandatory provision of one-third women recruits for each shipload was not aimed at encouraging the family to assist the natural growth of labour in the colony. The main interest of the employers, it has been pointed out, was to continue to import indentured labour from India rather than encouraging the institution of family and natural growth of labour in the colony: 'we want to see quickly a race of strong lads for our cane fields', was the planters' motto. They were looking for a regular and quick supply of the 'race of cultivators' from outside (John Scoble, *Reporter*, a Mauritius journal, 11 March 1840, cited in Kale 1998: 163). The idea of importing rather than encouraging the family settlement and reproduction of labour on the plantations was continuation of the practice of renewal and reproduction labour from the days of slavery: importing slaves was cheaper than encouraging the natural growth of slave labour through the restoration of the family.

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If not natural growth of labour through the family, what else was then the reason behind mandatory requirement of recruiting 33 per cent women? Another reason for the one-third women recruits was intended to ensure greater 'comfort' and 'correct conduct' among the indentured labourers in the colonies (Kale 1958: 59). How could 33 women provide 'comfort' to 77 men and also ensure 'correct conduct' might be anyone's guess. Nevertheless, the rule prevailed. The logic of one-third women for the comfort of two-third indentured Indian men was, however, not the whole story. To this must be added the numbers of white men—planters, supervisors, managers—on the plantations, who were mostly single sojourners on the lookout for women—women of colour—for their own 'comfort' and 'correct conduct', a legacy of the slave era. White men were mostly single sojourners mainly because the colonies were not yet safe for white women. It was, however, under the very same unsafe conditions that one-third of indentured passengers on each ship sailing from India were mandated to be women; one of the contradictions of the civilizing mission of colonial rule.

The moral claim to encourage the family values and healthy community growth of labourers in the empire for indentured Indians as well as the lament of the abolitionists about the destruction of the slave families during slavery (as a factor in the abolition) should be seen in the light of the above. Slavery and indenture were not moral undertakings beyond the accumulation of the surplus in primitive accumulation and extended reproduction. Notwithstanding the mandate of 33 per cent women, however, it was always a problem to find 33 per cent women for each voyage (cf. Pool and Singh 1999). The ratio of women to men varied from one year to another and from one ship to another in the same year. According to Bhana (1991: 19–20), the ratio of women to men varied from 28 per cent females to 65 per cent males to 24 per cent females to 72 per cent males averaging out at 64 per cent males to 28 per cent females. The contradictions of morality, family values, renewal and reproduction of labour through natural growth are amply underlined in sheer disproportionate number of women to men. The very idea of women as a means to (men's) comfort should have been morally troubling, excepting that in the age of colonialism and imperialism women of colour occupied the space of the other.

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Construction of Indian Women as Debased

A number of studies have dealt with the various problems relating to women in indenture (cf. Pool and Singh 1999; Kale 1998; Kelly 1992; Laurence 1994; Lal 1985a, 1985b). As mentioned earlier, long before the historians of Indian indenture began to write on these problems, issues relating to Indian indentured women in the colonies were taken up by the leaders of anti-colonial movements in their counter discourse on indenture as moral threat to Indian culture. What is, however, common, rather ironically, to the official discourse and its adversaries is that it is the indentured women who were ultimately held as responsible for the problems of which they were indeed the main victims. Both the official discourse and the counter discourse constructed Indian women as debased attributing it to their lowly origin (by caste and class) and immoral upbringing invariably associated with the former. The official line was that 'the only women who would consider emigration were the already degraded, already commodified women of the 'bazaars', urban free zones, alien to respectable rural Indians and suburban–cantonments–dwelling Europeans alike' (dispatch of Secretary of State for India, 24 March 1875, cited in Kale 1998: 165).

Passing on the blame to recruiters in India, planters and managers in the colonies maintained that they were recruiting the 'wrong kinds of women—namely prostitutes' (ibid.: 164). The recruiters in turn blamed the native magistrates for impeding the recruitment of 'respectable' women, while the magistrates blamed the Indian culture and society that did not allow 'respectable' single women to emigrate to destinations unknown and rather unknowable to them. If respectable women from Europe were not allowed to emigrate or immigrate that was normal and respectable, a sign of civilization. It was, however, a different story with regard to the Indian women. If women from India were not allowed to emigrate, it was symptomatic of India's cultural backwardness. The gap between colonizer and colonized set different standards of normality and respectability for the two. The standard refrain of the time was that given all the 'impediments' to recruitment, the statutory proportion of one-third women to two-third men could hardly be ever made up 'without enlisting large numbers of prostitutes, or women of the lowest classes in whom "habits of honesty and decency" are non-existent'. It was, however, according to the official discourse, relatively easy to recruit larger proportion of women from

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the 'coolie classes' (!)—'the very classes and castes of women which are most lax in their morals' (ibid.: 165). Indian freedom fighters given their caste-class background echoed the same narrative in so far as it spared the upper caste-class women.

Interestingly, there were no 'coolies', let alone 'coolie classes' or 'coolie castes' in India until, of course, the inception of recruitment of Indians as indentured labourers for colonial plantations in India and abroad all wrapped up in the blanket term 'coolie'. However, the colonial discourse not only indigenized the term coolie but also invented the 'coolie classes' and 'coolie castes' in India. The real intent behind this invention was to blame the victim to shield the planters and colonial–imperial system, which created the need for 'coolie' labour in the first place, and used India as the hunting ground for coolies allegedly from the 'coolie castes and classes' for over a century. If one is reminded that indentured Indians came from all castes—from top to bottom (see Appendix 1; see also Bhana 1991)—it can be inferred that indenture turned the entire Indian society into a society of 'coolie castes and classes'—as Gandhi was at pains to discover in South Africa.

The real victims of the blame game in the last analysis were the Indian indentured women. As mentioned earlier, what was rather ironical was that the planters and their advocates in the colonies, magistrates and recruiting agents in India, freedom fighters in India and their supporters abroad alike targeted the indentured women as mainly responsible for ethical and moral breakdown in the colonies. Both colonizers and their opponents were unable and unwilling to transcend their own consciousness of class, race, caste and patriarchy, which shaped their views of women. Commenting on the state of Indian indentured women in Fiji, C. F. Andrews, an associate of Mahatma Gandhi and a sympathizer to the cause of indentured Indians, wrote:

> The Hindu woman in this country is like a rudderless vessel with its mask broken onto the rocks; or like a canoe being whirled down the rapids of a great river without a controlling hand. She passes on from one man to another, and has lost even the sense of shame in doing so. (*Indian Indentured Labor in Fiji*, Perth: Colortype Press, 1918, cited in Kale 1998: 166)

As mentioned earlier, my intention here is not to deal with the question of indentured women or with the morality of indenture as such. Rather, my aim is to argue that it was under these adverse conditions that Indians in the colonies revived the institution of the monogamous

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family on the pattern of traditional family structure in India, overcoming the odds of moral confusion and ethical quandary, in addition to many other hurdles created by the planters, overseers, white settlers, local populations and the bureaucracy in the colonies. These hurdles were comparatively more formidable in South Africa. And they did that precisely in partnership with the same very women—'rudderless vessels' of indenture. Not only that Indian indentured women were equal partners in the reconstruction of the family, they were also at the forefront in the struggle over 'the Indian Question' in South Africa—a problem I cannot deal with here.

Indenture and Religion

What struck me most while visiting Indians of indenture background in South Africa is the ubiquitous presence of religion and its hold on people of all ranks—high and low, rich and poor. Almost every household I visited had a spot in the house set apart as a shrine, and very often, I was invited to participate in the ritual of family prayer or *puja* (worship) before being invited to the table for a meal. If one drives or walks through an Indian neighbourhood in Durban or the hinterlands, one cannot miss the common sight of white or red flags, symbolizing the family deity, on the top of the house or the front lawn. The road to the main entrance to the University of Durban, Westville, is flanked by hills on each side, with a temple at the top of the hill on one side and a mosque on that of the other. In the course of my fieldwork, I spoke to many young girls about their dating preferences, among other things. One of the considerations to be taken into account, they told me, was if the person they date goes to the same temple? During the four months of my stay in South Africa, I visited more temples than at any other place or time since I left the village I was born in and grew up in India.

Interviewing the descendants of indentured Indians I learned that long before the first generation emigrants were able to build homes for themselves and their families, they built the temples. It makes sense if we remember that during indenture lasting in most cases up to 10 years, they were housed in barracks. Only after the end of indenture they could build homes for themselves provided that they had the

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resource, and invariably the acquisition of resource to build home after the end of indenture took time. The story of building temples was, however, different. I was told that labour on the plantations was demanding, with long hours continuing without break for six, or in some cases, six and a half days a week. One or half a day of the break each week was their time to rest, recoup and socialize. And the most important form of socialization during indenture, I was told, was religious congregation. They got together, played their *dholak* (Bhojpuri term for drums popular in North Indian villages) and *manjira* (metal instruments as accompaniments of *dholak*) that they either brought with them or improvised locally, and sang *bhajans* (religious songs) or listened to the Ramayana (a popular Hindu religious scripture) recited by someone who could read and recite.

These weekly congregations were physically as well as spiritually healing, an escape from the backbreaking and humiliating routine of work in the field exacerbated by the separation from home and the disconnection from the kin, kith and community. These congregations gave them a sense of community they were torn off. Much later when ex-indentured Indians were able to build home and community in the colony, they did not forsake religion that had healed many injuries during indenture and afterwards when they had to struggle on their own. Religious consciousness and rituals, if anything, became more entrenched in post-indenture period. Deep religiosity of Indians in South Africa was the product of a specific socio-historical context. It gave them a sense of belongingness and hope during indenture. It provided them strength for struggle in post-indenture period. Temple was the meeting point of the personal, political, social and spiritual. It continues to be the core institution of the community of Indians in South Africa today.

I do not mean to romanticize the ubiquitous presence of religion among Indians in South Africa. While it is important to recognize its role in retaining and reconstructing the community during and after indenture, one must also remain alert to the potential risk of a fundamentalist shift. Some of the people I met in South Africa were very rigid and rather intolerant when it came to religious beliefs and inclinations. I distinctly remember one particular occasion when I was invited to visit a family that is a success story of post-indenture Indian diaspora in South Africa. We were getting ready for dinner

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when the conversation turned to what do Indians of my background eat in a country like Canada where the consumption of beef is rather common. It was a dilemma for me to tell or not to tell the truth. At the end, I was able to avoid embarrassment to me, to my host, and to the contact person between me and my host by saying that it is very difficult to develop a taste for beef—something that I was socialized to intensely detest right from my very early childhood growing up in a very religious Hindu family in a remote village in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, India.

Religious conservatism of Indians in South Africa has more serious social, cultural and political aspects to it. It is, however, a problem I do not intend to pursue here. The main purpose of discussing religion here is to examine the commonplace notion that caste is a creation of Hinduism and that caste is essential to Hinduism. To the contrary, what I discovered in South Africa was that while religion was retained, revived and strengthened, caste was not. Indians of indenture ancestry in South Africa are Hindus without caste.

Indenture and Caste

My Encounter with Caste in South Africa

On my arrival in South Africa, I spent a fortnight in Johannesburg exploring documentary material and talking to people of Indian background, mostly teachers and students at the University of Witwatersrand. After that I moved to Durban, the main urban centre of Natal (the province where indentured Indians were taken to). When I arrived in Durban, I did not know any single Indian or non-Indian there. Finding out Indian South Africans and making contacts with them was, however, a priority for me, above all, for conducting the ethnographic fieldwork among the descendants of indentured Indians.

While going though the Ships' Lists at the Documentation Centre, University of Durban, Westville, I found a wide range of caste names of the original indentured emigrants particularly from North India arriving in Natal. Then, I looked at the Durban telephone directory with a view to selecting Indians of different caste backgrounds to make contacts for ethnographic investigation. To my bewilderment, almost

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all the caste names mentioned in the Ships' Lists had vanished from the telephone directory, excepting occasional mention of a Singh or a Maharaj here and there. It was later on that I found out the secret of the disappearance of the caste names from the telephone directory of Durban. The caste names had disappeared from the telephone directory of Durban, like the telephone directories of many other locations of Indian settlements in Natal, because the castes and the caste system of which these names were symbols had long disappeared in reality in the process of indenture.

I tell the story of indenture and caste in two parts. Part one is the story of whatever happened to caste among indentured Indians during indenture and afterwards in the process of settling down in the colony. Part two is the story of caste and the repatriates, that is, Indians who returned 'home' after the end of the term of their contract of 5–10 years. Part one is the story of the dissolution of caste and the caste system which among other things, provided Indians unity and strength in alien land to resist racial exclusion and civil discrimination. Part two is the story of caste and the caste system haunting the repatriated Indians and turning them into pariah in their homeland. My main purpose is to use the two sides of the story to reflect on the foundation of caste and the caste system in India, particularly the relationship between economic–political relations, religion (Hinduism) and the caste system.

Caste and Occupation

It may be mentioned that there is a serious shortage of material on Indian indenture and caste in the colonies. A research conducted by Govind Ram Pillay in Caneville in Natal North Coast in 1991 provides valuable empirical evidence relating to the various aspects of caste and the caste system that is relevant to the question I am interested in.

An interesting story of the tension between original caste status in India and occupation in indenture is found in a complaint lodged with the Protector of Immigrants by an emigrant claiming to be a Brahman:

> I am a Brahman of Sannath Sect. I have been in the colony for about one year and four months. I have never worked in India. Being a Brahman, I used to go around with my brass pot visiting my disciples and they would provide me flour, lentils, rice, ghee, curry condiments, vegetables, and also

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> cash, while I used to put sacred sandalwood paste on their foreheads to bless them. When I was being recruited, I was told by the agent that being a Brahman, I would be employed as a cook in Natal, and if I did not like it, I'll be sent back to India. I cannot work in the field and wish to be sent back. (cited in Sanyasi 1931: 169)

The research by Pillay shows that occupation has no correlation to caste. That is understandable in the context of indenture. In the first place, indenture, as mentioned above, was a leveller in terms of occupation: everyone irrespective of his/her original caste occupation and status back home became a 'coolie'—a blanket category covering all indentured labourers on the plantations. After completing their indenture, the individuals and families made random choices of occupations, resulting in a breakdown of any correlation between caste and occupation. Brahmans became shoe makers and shoe merchants, Rajputs turned spice vendors, *Ahir*s and *Kurmis* engaged in trade, Banias' children acquired education and became teachers. Some Brahmans became priests, but so did many non-Brahmans. People in one occupation took on the name of another caste remotely associated with their occupation, or in most cases, dropped the caste name altogether. The butchers called themselves Singhs (surname used by the Kshatriyas/Rajputs), orderlies and waiters called themselves Maharaj (a blanket term for the Brahmans) and so forth and so on. Indenture was a living museum of churning, changing and chucking out the family surnames after every generation and sometimes within the same generation. Most importantly, family or surnames did not have any connotation of caste hierarchy as they did back home in India.

Erosion of Caste Consciousness and Hierarchy

The research shows that the hierarchical order of caste vanished in the colony long time ago. The majority of Hindus had no idea of the four Varnas nor did they have any caste consciousness as such. What has, however, survived is a vague sense of dichotomy between the high (twice-born) castes and the rest, the low-born castes. Even this simple dichotomy exists mostly among the older generation and among

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the Gujarati Indians who did not go to South Africa as indentured labourers. It may be added that the distinction between indentured and non-indentured—passenger Indians as they were called—was almost as exclusive as between the twice born and the Shudras in the classical Varna system or between white and black in racial system.

Pillay does not provide any details regarding social consequences of the dichotomy between the twice born and the rest even in respect to the endogamy and commensality—allegedly the very essence of the caste system. The question of power and control of the upper caste over the daily lives of the lower castes ranging from subsistence to other areas, central to the caste hierarchy in India, is not even raised. In other words, the consciousness of the upper and the lower castes, even if it continues to exist at some level among stray individuals or in some segments of the Indian population, it was not socially consequential for the individuals or the groups as the caste and the caste system were back home (an important point discussed below). Mere consciousness of high and low castes among stray individuals does not constitute caste even less the caste system.

Abandoning Caste Surnames

As mentioned earlier, caste surnames of indentured emigrants, particularly those from north India, registered in ships lists have almost completely disappeared. The research by Pillay confirms that caste identification by surname (family name) in the majority of cases is lost. It is reported that among the Tamil-speaking people, surnames like Munasamy and Govindsamy, identified with lower castes, have disappeared, while Naidoos and Pillays identified with the upper echelons of caste hierarchy have a relatively higher rate of survival. Surnames continued to play a role when it came to make a choice for marriage partner, mostly by making it possible to determine by surname if a person belonged to a 'pariah' caste (lower in caste hierarchy back home in South India), writes Pillay. How effective was this consideration in a situation of severe sex disproportion of the indenture days (mentioned earlier) is not discussed.

As I found out from the documentary and ethnographic information, many families took the surname after the first name of the head of

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the household, for example, Boda Singh, Balganesh, Dookharan, Sitaram, Mahadev, Samroo, to mention a few. These surnames kept on changing further down the line from one generation to another. The case of Boda Singh is interesting for citation. Boda Singh was the name of the original emigrant from Bihar in India. After completing the term of his contract, he became a successful farmer. The present Boda Singh (whom I interviewed, along with his wife, at his farmhouse) was then the owner of the largest family farm in South Africa. He was also known as 'Mr. Green' after he received an award from the World Bank in recognition of clean farming and fair labour practices on his farm. Boda Singh, the original emigrant, I was told, was a Rajput from Bihar. The present Boda Singh and his wife (descendant of an emigrant who, she told me, was originally a Brahman) do not believe in caste or the caste system in any form or shape even though they were both particular about referring to their high caste ancestry (Kshatriya and Brahman).

Surnames were markers of caste status (cf. Pandey 2010: 25). In the past, the lower and higher castes could easily be distinguished on the basis of surnames (also first names). In the film *Lagan*, the name of the lowest caste player in the Indian team is Kachda (literally mud). A lower caste woman could seldom be named Ganga, Jamuna, Janki, Saraswati, or Laxmi. Similarly, low caste men could not be named Ram Chandra, Indradatta, or Digvijay. In the ships lists one finds surnames like Dom, Chamar, Pasi (see Appendices I and II) which had negative connotations in terms of caste ranks. These names disappeared. The descendants of indentured Indians did both. Irrespective of their parent's caste, they took (sanskritic) first names usually taken by the upper castes back home. The change in taking surname, that is, abandoning original caste surnames (family names) and taking the first name of the head of the household (usually male),was even more radical. It was a move towards doing away with an important signifier of caste rank. Pandey (ibid.: 25) writes that the question of surnames has been a matter of greatest contention for dalit middle class in India for some time now. Almost a century and a half earlier, descendants of indentured Indians radicalized their surnames (and first names) with no contention whatsoever. There is, however, a fundamental difference between what is going on in India today and what happened with indentured Indians in the colonies more than a century ago. In the former, the contention

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over surnames is about 'passing' for a higher caste, while in the latter the intention was to bypass the caste altogether.

Commensality

Rules of commensality have eroded, according to the research by Pillay. The erosion of the rules of commensality started at the very initial stage of the inception of the arduous journey to indenture even before boarding the ship. After leaving the village on way to recruitment, people of different castes were made to travel together in a gang on way to the depot (a journey that could last for weeks depending on the point of departure). In the depot, they had to wait for weeks for medical examination and other formalities before being certified to embark. Finally, the voyage lasting for weeks and months, depending on the point of disembarkation, allowed them no control over who cooked the food, who served it, and who sat next to whom to eat with. The ritual distinctions in terms of who can touch whom and who can eat the food touched by whom considered as the very foundation of the caste and the caste system collapsed at the very initial stage of the voyage, reminding us that to be operational these distinctions and rules require more than the rotation of ideas in our heads.

Life on the plantation and in the barracks was not designed to respect the rules of commensality. Five-ten years of labour on the plantation and life in the barracks were giant mixers dissolving the rules of touchability and untouchability associated with food and people in caste hierarchy. The main preoccupation of Indians after the end of indenture was survival, with no community or institutional support or even sympathy for the complex set of prescriptions and proscriptions regarding commensality of the caste system, for example, *kaccha* and *pakka* food, food cooked with *ghee* (clarified butter) or food cooked with water. Even though I strongly disagree with the view that rituals of commensality are the basis of caste hierarchy (see the aforementioned text), I do not mean to minimize the symbolic significance of commensality in the caste system. By the same token we should not minimize the significance of the breakdown of commensality in the process of eventual dissolution of the caste system itself.

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Endogamy

What about the rule of caste endogamy (considered as central to the caste system)? Indenture dissolved caste endogamy. A powerful dissolvent of the caste endogamy in indenture was the perennial problem of gender imbalance—disproportionate number of women compared to that of men (noted earlier)—at times less than one woman to two men, made worse by the presence of single European men, with their eyes cast on Indian woman as a fair bait (a problem that needs separate treatment and has been documented by many studies, cf. Pool and Singh 1999). Apart from numerical scarcity of women, given the randomness and vagaries of recruitment, recruitment of women in particular, it was near to impossible to determine the caste of a woman recruit. It is interesting to note that while in the case of male recruits, there is invariably a record of the caste name in the Ships Lists, very seldom there are caste names of women recruits.

Secondly, given the disproportionate number of men to women, a woman in relationship with one or more men at the same time was 'normal'. Based on the archival records and ethnographic accounts I collected through field research, it was abundantly clear that tension over more than one man desiring the same woman was a constant factor the emigrants had to deal with. The resulting complications, including acts of criminality as serious as murder and suicide, are a commonplace story recorded in the files of the Protector of Immigrants. Given that precarious situation—one of the many anomalies of indenture—not only endogamy but the very notion of monogamous marriage collapsed under undue duress of scarcity of women to men. What is, however, important to note is that in post-indenture phase of community reconstruction mentioned above, the monogamous marriage was retrieved, but not caste endogamy. Caste endogamy was cast aside, along with the caste. According to Pillay, religion, race and language emerged as more important considerations than caste in marital choice. Western education, occupation and wealth became other determining factors. In my interviews with about 20 families of Indian indenture background in South Africa, I did not find one single instance of a family where marriage partners for the males or the females over generations were sought and found within the same caste.

According to Pillay, there was some evidence that among a segment of indentured Indians caste endogamy persisted, to an extent, for

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instance, among the Telugu speaking emigrants. It was because a large number of the Telugu speaking people from the same region of the Andhra 'country' (now Andhra Pradesh) emigrated as indentured labourers. After the completion of their indenture, they were able to set up small colonies together and maintain the social cultural practices of the caste. It may, however, be noted that partial adherence to endogamy by a caste or sub-caste is not to be confused with the survival or the revival of the caste system per se. It may not be out of place to point out that even in modern West, by and large, Catholics marry Catholics, Protestant marry Protestants, Copts marry Copts, Orthodox Jews marry Orthodox Jews, and so do the Mormons. But that does not make caste, let alone the caste system. Endogamy is no doubt an important (and relatively resilient) feature of caste. But that is not sufficient and enough to make caste not to say the caste system.

There is, however, a group of Indian diaspora in South Africa, that is, the Gujarati Indians, who followed indentured emigrants as 'passenger Indians'. Passenger Indians, unlike indentured, were free people, mostly engaged in trade. Their general economic conditions and occupation allowed them greater autonomy to organize their family and community. Most importantly, it allowed them to maintain contacts with their community back in homeland, enabling them to continue to practise caste endogamy, along with commensality. Their voyage and working conditions did not force them to mix with other castes in daily chorus of eating and drinking. They were not forced to work together in the fields that eroded all internal distinctions of caste, class and occupation. They were, as a result, able to continue to choose their marriage partners from back home according to the customary norms of their caste, sub-caste and class. Consequently, caste and caste consciousness among the Gujarati traders did not vanish, as it happened in the case of indentured Indians and their descendants. Being free and part of a different political economy, the former did not experience the rupture of economic, political and cultural ties with homeland that set them apart from their indentured counterparts whose ties (economic, political and cultural) with homeland were violently and instantly disrupted. The relationship between material conditions, caste consciousness, and caste rituals is amply demonstrated in the basic difference between the two categories of Indian diaspora in the context of indenture.

There was little social intercourse (commensality, marriage) between Indians of indenture background and passenger Indians in

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South Africa. The question is whether it was the stigma of indenture (a condition of labour) or the violation of caste rules (endogamy and commensality) that was the reason for social distance between the two segments of Indian diaspora? It was a combination of both. The stigma of indenture was a powerful marker of distinction overriding commonality of being Indians or even belonging to the same religion as and when that was the case. The loss of caste in indenture created further distance between them and passenger Indians.

Coming back to caste consciousness and caste rituals among the Gujarati Indians in South Africa, what is important to emphasize is that the evidence of caste consciousness and the practice of caste endogamy in a segment of Indian diaspora is not a case of the survival of the caste system. In the first place, the survival of caste or caste consciousness in this case is dependent on the life support it draws from the caste system in India. Secondly, what we find here is the existence of a caste, not the caste system. It is an important point that has wider implications for Indian diaspora and caste in the past and the present. It is often claimed, as evidence of caste resilience, that Indians living far away from homeland, engaged in trade or working in diverse conditions ranging from the lower to the higher levels of employment requiring less or no education to most advanced form of education and training retain their caste and caste consciousness. True. The more important question, however, is what aspects of caste consciousness and caste conduct are retained and what are lost and what implications do they have for the caste system, particularly for caste hierarchy? Castes in these situations, like the Gujaratis, may survive as discrete units, but not as the caste system, mainly because the economic, political, social relations and cultural norms that bind different castes in a hierarchical system characterized by interdependence, inequality, exploitation and coercion are conspicuously missing.

Story of Beharee Singh (Trinidad)

On 7 August 1869, Beharee Singh, a 20-year-old man, resident of the village Garkhara, District Benares (now Varanasi) boarded the S. S. Varuna and arrived at Nelson Island, Trinidad, West Indies on 8 November 1869 to resume his work as indentured labourer. It had

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taken roughly two months between the day he left his village and the day he boarded the ship. A brief description of what happened during this period is very instructive about the process of recruitment for indenture formally a contract freely consented to.

As per the story provided in the family tree, the area Beharee Singh came from was marked for its active role in the Revolt of 1857. It was subsequently 'targeted' as an area to 'capture' potential recruits for indenture and the recruiters (locally known as *arkatyas*) were licensed to engage in fair and at times not so fair means to meet their quota. They were further assisted in their scheme by the Workers Compensation Act, a legal device to trap the unsuspecting village youth to eventually lead them to indenture. How did it work in the case of Beharee Singh is briefly described further.

In June 1869, Beharee Singh left his village for Varanasi (about 28 kilometres away) to participate in the celebration of the Ganga Dussehra festival converging on the banks of the river Ganga (sacred for the upper caste Hindus). By the end of the celebration, it was too late in the night for Singh to walk back to his village. He, therefore, accepted a villager's offer to provide him food and bed for the night. In the morning, when Singh wanted to leave to go back to his village, the host (who was indeed a recruiter) demanded the cost of boarding and lodging for the night to be paid (under the Workers Compensation Act) before he could leave which he could not. Subsequently, he, along with several other persons, was subsequently taken by boat, under security guard, to Calcutta, one of the two ports used for shipping indentured Indians to the far-flung colonies of the empire. On 1 August 1869, Singh received his documents of indentureship, unknown to his family and folks back in his village. The package of indenture presented to him, the story goes, was rather cozy (I heard many similar stories of recruitment from the descendants of indentured Indians in South Africa). He landed in Trinidad after close to three months of arduous journey taking him across the *Kala pani* (black waters, also a metaphor for the harshest form of incarceration. As a child growing up in the village, part of the cultural region Beharee Singh came from, I heard stories that those who opposed British colonial rule were incarcerated to *Kala pani*, a remote island, to perish, cut off any contact with kith and kin. Popular perception of *Kala pani* in the village was harsher than that of capital punishment).

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Varuna, the ship Singh boarded for Trinidad, had a total of 237 (82 females and the rest males) passengers. On voyage (lasting 93 days), the space was short and activities they could engage in limited. But they had plenty of time to talk, and they talked a lot about the family and the village they were leaving behind. Significantly, they also forged ties cutting across caste and communal lines, the most important being *jahajee bhai* (literally brothers of/on the ship) and *jahajee bahen* (sisters of/on the ship), a bond that outlasted the individuals binding their families sometimes for generations to come. *Jahajee bhai* and *jahajee bahen* were historically specific social relations, product of specific conditions of indenture, marked by equality in which boundaries of caste and class melted away. It was so since all of them were placed on an equal footing on account of their status as indentured labourers reminding us that social relations of inequality (including those of caste) are rooted in unequal access to material conditions. Equality of material conditions in indenture made all indentured Indians equal. Inequality among Indians did re-emerge in post-indenture phase, but not the inequality of caste, as illustrated below by the family history of Beharee Singh.

Once in Trinidad, the fellow passengers were scattered over to different plantations, Singh being allotted to the Macoya estate (at the river Macoya). In his '*jahajee* bundle' (carry-on baggage), Singh had packed an icon of Shiva Lingam and a *lota* (a multipurpose small round metal vessel with a narrow mouth). On arriving at the estate of Macoya, Singh placed the icon of Shiva Lingam under a tree beside the barrack allotted to him. Daily, before sunrise, he would offer the Lingam fresh flowers and water from the *lota* he had brought with him (a common practice among the devotees of the higher castes in the region of Singh's native village). At weekends, he and other *jahajees* would congregate around the Lingam under the tree, talk, sing *bhajans* (religious songs), recite Ramcharitmanas (most popular Hindu epic in North India), and exchange stories. Besides, they will occasionally come together to perform *puja* and celebrate Hindu religious festivals like Holi, Dussehra, Diwali and Shiva *Ratri*. In 1878, Singh and his fellow Indians laid the foundation stone to build the first mandir (temple) in Trinidad and Tobago.

The aforementioned narrative seems to have been common among indentured Indians of Hindu background in colonies scattered over

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different parts of the globe. I heard similar stories about many Indian neighbourhoods during indenture in South Africa that mandirs were the first structures indentured Indians in the colonies built. Building shelters for their gods and goddesses before they did or could build shelters for themselves and their families was testimony to the significance religion held for them in alien (economically, politically, socially and culturally) lands.

At the end of his indenture (1874), Singh bought a piece of land at Macoya and started a vegetable garden. He went on later to open a shop while maintaining the garden, build a house, have a wife and raise the family. The Lingam he brought with him in his accompanied bundle had been his constant companion and a perennial source of inspiration throughout his journey. It was now placed under a Peepal tree (considered sacred, especially for the devotees of Shiva) at the back of the house he built with his wife. The Lingam, apart from being a religious symbol, also symbolized land (*dharti mata*—motherland), the land he had been exiled from. Yearning for the land they were separated from seems to have been a constant theme among indentured Indians in all colonies where they were taken as labourers. The Lingam under the Peepal tree behind Singh's house continued to be the centre of congregation for the fellow Indians.

Beharee Singh got married. On the Certificate of Emigration, his caste is mentioned as Cheettree (Kshatriya). The caste of his spouse is, however, not mentioned. The couple had seven children, one of whom (a daughter) was named Jankie. She was married to Jagmohan Singh. She grew up in and followed the Hindu tradition of beliefs and rituals. Prayers, pujas, fasting, feasting and celebrating religious festivals were regularly observed in her household. It is the descendants Jankie and Jagmohan who compiled the family tree. Aroon and Vijay Narayan Singh (great, great grandsons of Beharee Singh) visited their ancestral village and made *pitri* (ancestral) offering at Dasaswamedh *ghat* (bank) of Ganga in Varanasi—the *ghat* where Beharee Singh sailed from to go the Depot in Calcutta to resume his final journey to Trinidad.

In brief, what we find in the family tree is the story of continuity of the family and religion. The caste is seldom mentioned, excepting on the certificate of emigration issued to Beharee Singh at the time of boarding the ship in Calcutta. Looking at the expansive family chart covering five generations, there is occasional mention of Singh and

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once or twice a Maharaj as a spouse. Singh, the family name of the original emigrant is retained by some in Jankie's line of descent until today, while others have adopted various other family names mostly after the first name of the head of the household. Significantly, there is no trace of adherence to caste endogamy or commensality. Some family members have spouses who are not even Hindus. It is, however, different with religion. As mentioned above, Beharee Singh and his children (e.g. Jankie) were devout Hindus. As mentioned above, great great grandsons of Beharee Singh went on to look for their ancestral village and offered *pitri* at the *ghat* of Ganga (showing continuity of religious beliefs and rituals), but at no point were they ever interested in discovering their caste roots. To sum up, the significance of the story of Beharee Singh and his family tree lies in demonstrating the continuity of religious beliefs and rituals until today. Secondly, there is a strong awareness of the family bond and its significance for memorizing the past and the desire to keep it alive in the present. In contrast, there is no awareness of caste, no urge to trace its past and no desire to memorize it. Religion and the family live on, the caste is dead.

Repatriated Indians: Haunted by Caste

Indentured Indians were haunted by caste and the caste system as and when they returned 'home' (voluntarily or otherwise) at the end of their contract. Stories of the harrowing experiences of repatriated Indians were widely covered by the media. We may reproduce some of these stories selectively to show how pervasive was the hold of caste preventing the 'assimilation' of Indians who had emigrated as indentured labourers back into the Indian society. In villages they cannot live, reported one newspaper. They are treated as outcastes by their own kinsmen. As Mahatma Ji has said, they are looked upon as 'social lepers'. India to them is like foreign land. A great proportions return after so many years abroad that their Indian roots have perished and they are almost equally strangers (*Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 15 May, cited in Sanyasi 1931: 12, 14).

They have no Indian culture, or that they have lost Indian culture in the colony, excepting what they have picked from their half-dis-indianized parents, was the charge. The colonial born Indians are often

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born of inter-caste marriage, and on account of the prevalence of the caste system in India, they have no equivalent social status. Coming out of the colony back to India is like falling out of the frying pan into the fire, wrote the Maharatta (Pune, 24 May 1931, ibid.: 19).

The frying pan in the colony was the race, the fire back home was the caste. Both were excruciatingly discriminatory and exclusionary. Victimized by race, Indians abroad were liberated from caste. While coming back home, they escaped race but were victimized by caste and the caste system. Exclusion by race did not make them pariah in the colony as Indians resisted and fought back racial discrimination. They had no ground to stand on and fight back the caste and the caste system back home. Between race and caste, the barriers of caste proved formidable to cross.

The returnees are caught between the two death traps, wrote *The Liberty*. The two death traps were the native villages from where they had emigrated and where they returned to. Littered with caste as the living landmine exploding into their face, the villages were no more a place they could call home. Rejected by their caste and community in their native villages, many repatriated Indians returned to the slums of Matiabruz in Calcutta (many of them hoping and trying, in vain, to return to South Africa) where they had no material support, no individual identity, no present, no future (*The Liberty*, Calcutta, 18 May 1931, Sanyasi 1931: 19–20).

One newspaper wrote that it had been the boast of Hindu publicists that of all countries India's social system is such that it had always assimilated foreign cultures. But when indentured emigrants came home, they were not assimilated. Bound by the shackles of the caste system, their communities refused to take them back into their fold. 'Caste system all over', declared the newspaper (*The Patna Times*, Patna, 14 June 1931, Sanyasi 1931: 26).

C. F. Andrews, who, as mentioned earlier, was actively involved in the affairs of indentured Indians in South Africa, the Caribbean islands and Fiji, wrote of the state of Indians returning from the colonies:

> According to the conservative traditions prevalent in India, which may be better described as perverse brutality—their village *biradari* would not admit them into their circle. They would refuge their sons or daughters in marriage…Lo! His own brother comes back from Africa and he is treated as an untouchable. 'We were treated like dogs', as one returnee put it. (Sanyasi 1931: 27)

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After realizing how the iron jacket of the caste system in India grinds individuals and collectivities within its fold, Andrews declared: 'No further emigration and no further repatriation'. In particular, 'Indians married in the colony should not return' home, was his advice (Sanyasi 1931: 28, 30). 'Anywhere out of India' was the cry of returned emigrants themselves (*Modern Review*, Calcutta, August 1931).

A story carried out by a newspaper in South Africa reiterates the narrative of caste in India. An old Indian and his three Natal—born children, including a daughter, wrote the newspaper, tramped 2,500 miles from Dar-e-Salaam to Zululand in a vain endeavour to re-establish domicile in Natal after they had returned to India under the voluntary repatriation scheme. What were the reasons for repatriates desiring to return to colony? One reason, above all, was that with the exception of those who belonged to very low castes, the repatriates—of whom 33% are colonial born—could not be assimilated by respective communities primarily because of the sway of the caste system on the community. The question of 'marriage of the colonial-born children, who were often born of inter-caste marriages (which, as mentioned above, contributed to the dissolution of caste in the colony), raised insoluble difficulties', wrote the newspaper (*The Star*, Johannesburg, 13 June 1931).

In a speech by Pt Bhavani Dayal Sanyasi (a South African born Indian of indentured parentage who dedicated himself to the struggle for the cause of Indians in South Africa) delivered in Patna on 11 August 1931, it is pointed out that repatriated Indians on their return to India found themselves as if they were in a strange land. They had developed habits and manners which had nothing in common with the habits of Indians in India. In South Africa, the Indians did not recognize any caste. Inter-dining and inter-caste marriages were a common practice there. On their return to India, however, they found themselves like square peg in a round hole. The society would not accept them. If it would agree to accept them, the conditions attached to acceptance would be such as they were unable to fulfil. The Hindu rites of *prayashchita* (penance) the village Brahmans asked them to perform were beyond their means (the Brahmans in India were anything but cheap when it came to performing caste rituals for the outcastes to readmit the latter to the caste system). The only alternative for them was to leave, said Sanyasi. The caste purity was on sale, with a price tag that was too heavy for the outcasts if they were poor. Repatriated Indians were outcaste and poor.

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One newspaper carried the story of indenture and rupture of family and community ties and the desperate attempt by the emigrants' kith and kin left behind to unite with their family members. Over the past 20 years, wrote the newspaper, there is an ongoing struggle in India over the fate of the indentured Indian emigrants in British colonies in the Caribbean, Fiji and South Africa. There is, however, no end in sight to their troubles. They are no more welcome in the colony after the completion of their labour contract lasting for 5–10 years, nor do they have home in their motherland. Their families left behind in India are desperate.

Once, on the occasion of *Bhai Duj*, the story continues, the women of a village invited Sardar Patel (a prominent Congress leader who later on became the first Home Minister of independent India) and tied *rakhi* on his hand demanding in return that he should intervene to make changes in the conditions of return emigration making it possible for the families to unite. With tears in his eyes, Sardar Patel replied:

> I understand their plight in the colony as much as yours at home. But I feel totally helpless. I understand that they cannot protect your honour there. If, however, they return 'home', they have to face all kinds of hurdles, caste prejudice being a major one, in being accepted back in the community. (*Sudha* [in Hindi], Lucknow, July 1931, Sanyasi 1931: 68–69)

Ironically, the paper comments that in South Africa, the white people treated Indians as untouchables. At the same time, emigrants who returned from South Africa and other colonies were treated as untouchables (or worse) by their own people in India. And the Indians, including the freedom fighters, were not agitated with the treatment of Indians repatriated from the colonies even though they were agitated with the way Indians were being treated in the colonies. The paper does, however, comment that emigrants should not be encouraged to return to India if Indians do not have the courage to fight for them to be admitted to their caste and community (ibid.: 74).

A story published in another newspaper provides a glimpse of the arduous course of emigration–repatriation–assimilation (or ostracization). The story goes that 40 years ago, Gopal *Chamar* of village Dharuhari, District Basti, along with his wife and six-month-old baby son emigrated to Natal, South Africa. Those days, the white planters in South Africa were desperately looking for labour from India, and

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the government of India had employed contractors to recruit labourers in India. Gopal's baby son, Gulzar grew up in Natal and worked on the plantation as indentured labourer for a term of five years. After completing his indenture, Gopal leased 14 acres of land to grow corn and tobacco. He got married and had children. His children grew up, got married and had their own children. In 40 years, his extended family had 18 members.

In 1928, Gopal returned to India—looking for home in his motherland he had always yearned for in 40 years of his exiled existence. The South African government, in its anxiety to repatriate any Indian emigrant willing to return, spent an amount of 457 pounds on transporting Gopal and his family back to India. Gopal left his family in Kanpur and went to visit his native village in Basti and was terribly disheartened with what he encountered there. No one in the village was willing to receive him and his family back. Disheartened and desperate Gopal returned to Kanpur to be with his family. He fell ill and passed away within two weeks after his return. Within a period of three years, half a dozen of the family members passed away. The remaining ones, who were all born in South Africa and were thus entitled to be domiciled there wanted to return back. But that would cost them 350 pounds and there was no way the family could raise that amount in India. Their fate was sealed.

The story of Gopal and his family is typical of the thousands of repatriated ex-indentured Indians from South Africa and other colonies in the Caribbean islands and Fiji, wrote the newspaper (*Vishal Bharat*, Calcutta, July 1931).

Mahatma Gandhi, Indentured Indians and the Caste Question

Mahatma Gandhi, who had lived among indentured and ex-indentured Indians in South Africa and participated in their struggles and led them, admitted that the returnees found the rigor and restrictions of the caste system very annoying and irritating. At the same time, he maintained that they could not be assimilated back into their communities for the reason of having polluted their caste status (*Hindu* 19 May 1931, cited in Sanyasi 1931: 6–7). Commenting on the status

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of children born of indentured Indians in South Africa, Gandhi wrote that as the colonial born Indians,

> they are neither Indian nor colonial. They have no Indian culture in the foreign lands they go to, save what they pick from their uncultured, half-disindianized parents. They are not colonial in that they are debarred from access to the colonial…culture…Here they are social lepers. (cited in ibid.: 21)

The aforementioned observations on the status of colonial born Indians made by Gandhi were reproduced in *The Fiji Times & Herald*, Suva, 7 July 1931 (ibid.: 22).

Ironically, Gandhi fought for the Indians in South Africa holding them as bearers of the Indian culture and civilization of 2,000 years and worthy, on that account, of equal respect on par with the Europeans who were discriminating against them precisely on the ground that Indians were not cultured or civilized deserving of equal treatment (cf. Singh 2007a). Back home, he declared the same very Indians as having lost Indian culture. His solution was that since repatriated Indians and their children could not be assimilated into their community in India, they should go back to the colony where they came from, and he wanted the colonial state to assist them to go back. Colonial state turned deaf ears to the stories of repatriated Indians as well as to Gandhi's demand.

It may not be out of place to mention that even when Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of the lower castes including untouchability, he never ever referred to the predicament of the repatriated Indians from South Africa and other colonies subjected to the sanctions of caste and the caste system. Why did he not use the case of repatriated indentured Indians to agitate against the caste system in India to facilitate their assimilation into Indian society even though he had fought vigorously for their assimilation in South African society denied on the basis of race is an interesting question?

The clue to an answer to the above question may be found in Gandhi's views of the Varna and the caste in the early years after he returned from South Africa and got involved in the struggle against colonial rule in India. He writes:

> Everyone will admit that Hinduism is nothing without the law of *varna* and *Ashrama*. It would be impossible to find any *smriti* work of which a large part was not devoted to *Varnashrama Dharma*. This law of *Varna* and

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> *Ashrama* is to be traced to our most ancient scriptures—the Vedas, and so no one who calls himself a Hindu may ignore it. (Gandhi 1968: 473–474)

Indentured Indians in South Africa were Hindus ignoring the law of Varna and Ashrama.

In a letter to C. F. Andrews, dated 20 June 1920, Gandhi wrote:

> I need not worry you about my views on caste. There, too, my moral position need not cause you anxiety. You have mistaken my standpoint. Not to dine with a fellow-being out of repugnance is a sin. Not to dine with him out of self-restraint is a virtue. Do you know that Indian mothers impose the restraint upon themselves of not sharing even the family meals…I hold it to be a virtue to restrict the area of my choice of a wife…the sin comes in when I limit the area of service, the area of sacrifice. I have often thought that you have not yet realized the full grandeur of the perfect theory of Hinduism, however debased it may be today in practice. (Gandhi 1965: 498–501)

In an earlier letter to C. F. Andrews, dated 25 May 1920, he writes:

> You have asked me [a] very searching question. I have always recognized that there are fundamental differences between you and me on the marriage and the caste question…I would put disciplinary restraints upon the choice of man and woman and just as it would be considered improper for a brother to marry his sister I would make it improper for a person to marry outside his or her group which may be called a caste...I do not believe in unbridled license…So you see that I would be averse to a Brahman going outside his circle for the choice of a wife…Similarly for the institution of caste... I would not like a Brahman to go beyond his pale, and indulge in dining here, there and everywhere…Rob the caste of its impurities, and you will find it a bulwark of Hinduism and an institution whose roots are embedded deep down in human nature. (Gandhi 1965: 534–535)

The roots of the caste system are not embedded in human nature. Caste is not a natural but a social–historical phenomenon. The 'impurities' of caste are systemic (economic, political, ideological). They cannot be done away with without doing away with the caste system itself—its material basis and the ideologies—that produced and reproduced it. By the same token, reforming or renouncing Hinduism will not cure the impurities of caste or the caste system. Impurities of caste are not religious, but secular masked by religion. Conversely, caste is not a bulwark of Hinduism. In the absence of economic–political conditions necessary for creating and sustaining the caste system, caste

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and Hinduism follow different trajectories: one to its demise, the other to renewal and growth. That is the lesson of indenture and caste.

Gandhi's ideas on the *varnashrama* and caste changed later on going as far as recommending the abolition of caste. In the process, he modified his position on endogamy, commensality and the Varna as one's natural calling. The main question is whether he ever revised his view of the caste (and Varna) as essentially religious? This question is important both for a theory of caste as well as for political and policy matters. In order to abolish caste, it is necessary to understand the basic conditions of the genesis and reproduction of caste. The absence of those conditions in indenture resulted in the dissolution of caste without any effort by outside agency to abolish it. Rather than understanding those conditions and consequent abolition of caste, Gandhi and other political leaders were counselling and campaigning for returning indentured Indians back to the colonies. Gandhi may have lost faith in the legitimacy of Varna and Ashrama 'towards the end of his life' (Deshpande 2013: 5–6) and Ambedkar may have never ever had any faith in them to begin with, but neither of them made systemic connection between caste and its economic–political roots legitimized by religious and secular ideologies. To them, caste remained essentially religious. Holding the caste as essentially religious and trying to abolish or annihilate it was like pouring water in bottomless pits.

Indentured Indians and their descendants were caught between the triangular colonial–imperial establishment (London, Delhi, and the colonies in South Africa, the Caribbean Islands, and Fiji) and the freedom fighters in India. They were discriminated in the colonies on account of class, race and nationality, which was objected to and protested by the freedom fighters in India. But the same very freedom fighters did not protest when repatriated Indians were discriminated in India on account of caste. The freedom fighters shed tears for the women in indenture, but were unwilling to fight for their rehabilitation back home in India. Instead, they wanted them to be returned back to the colonies, the same very colonies they were critical of for debasing the same very Indian women.

Emigration to the colonies meant the death of caste and the caste system. At the same time, the death of the caste system in the colony amounted to the social death of emigrants if they returned or were repatriated to India. Colonies were the 'frying pans' for Indian

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emigrants, as Gandhi described it, but they were freed from the caste. Repatriated to India, they were fried by caste and the caste system (as Sanyasi put it) with no one to call on—not even Mahatma Gandhi. Abandonment and ostracization of returning and repatriated indentured Indians and their offspring on account of caste even though they were Hindus raises interesting questions about the caste and Hinduism.

Caste and Hinduism: Twin Myths

Two most persistent myths about caste and the caste system are: one, that Hinduism is the basis of the caste system; two, that the caste system is a bulwark Hinduism. I have presented above two different trajectories of the caste and religion (Hinduism) among indentured Indians and their descendants in the colonies: survival of Hinduism and the demise of the caste system. What does that have to say about the relationship between Hinduism and caste emphasized in the mainstream sociological theory, existing in popular consciousness, and echoed in the views of many of the eminent political leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Babsaheb Ambedkar? If religious ideas and rituals of Hinduism were sufficient to create and sustain the caste system, it would have been revived and retained in the colonies. It was not. Indenture was a levelling device reducing all Indians to a single category of the lowliest form of labour. At the end of indenture, they reconstructed their community retaining religion and reconstituting the family but not caste and the caste system. The economic–political conditions—monopoly of economic–political power by one group and dependence of the rest for their subsistence on the former—which produced the caste system in the first place and reproduced it generation after generation could not be reproduced in the colonies. And the caste died. This is not to deny the role of religion or religious ideas in caste, rather to argue that religious ideas played (and continue to play) the role they did in the context of a particular economic–political structure. Disconnecting religious ideas from economic–political structure and history obscures our understanding of caste and the caste system.

Secondly, if the caste system were a bulwark of Hinduism, the demise of the former would have led to the latter's demise. That did not happen.

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In South Africa, the Caribbean Islands and Fiji, indentured Indians and their descendants abandoned caste and retained Hinduism. They are replicating it today in Canada, the United States of America and England. I have visited their temples, attended their weddings and funerals. They believe in Hindu ideas, practice Hindu rituals, but no caste. They are Hindus without caste. Weber wrote that caste, the ritual rights and duties it imposes, and the position of the Brahman, is the fundamental institution of Hinduism. Going further, he remarked that 'without caste there is no Hindu' (Weber 1958b: 29). Contrary to the mythology, the roots of caste and the caste system do not lie in Hinduism and the end of caste is not the end of Hinduism. Hinduism without caste is not utopia.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Caste Names Taken from the Ships Lists

Caste Names

Ahir [Goala]
Bagadi
Bahalia
Bangadi
Bania
Barhee
Bauri
Beldar
Bhar
Bahroop

Bhat
Bhoi
Bhoojee
Bhujiar
Bhoomij
Bhooyea [Bhoyar]
Bhisti
Bind
Brahman
Caunno

Chhatri [Kshatriya; Rajput]
Chamar
Chandal
Dasadu [Dusadh?]
Dhanuk

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Dharkar
Dhaundo
Dhobi
Dholi
Dom
Duibuth

Fauthey
Gasain
Ghanchi
Ghatwal
Gowari
Gunnoo
Gurraree
Hajam
Haulloye
Jalia

Jat
Kachhi
Kahar
Kaith
Kalar
Kando
Kannoo
Kanwar
Kewat
Khatik [Khatuk]

Koli [Kol]
Kori
Koybutto
Kumhar
Kurmi
Lavanta [Santal]
Lodh
Luhar

Majhi [Machi]
Mehtar

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Moochi
Mooshar [Bhil]
Murao
Muslim
Nuniya
Pausi
Pohur
Rajur
Regar
Sadgope
Shaumanto
Sonar
Tanti
Teli
Vizooruee

Source: Documentation Centre, University of Durban, Westville, South Africa

Appendix II: Sample of a Ship List: Number of Passengers by Caste

Ship Label AD
Port of Departure: Calcutta
Date of Departure: 03/12/1860
Date of Arrival: 04/02/1861
Date of Disembarkation: 05/02/1861

Table

Passengers by Caste

SN	*Caste Name*	*Number*
1.	Nunia	7
2.	Luhar	11
3.	Teli	1
4.	Beldar	4
5.	Bhooyea	1
6.	Bagdi	8
7.	Ghanchi	10
8.	Bhumij	5
9.	Kahar	7
10.	Gurraree	1

(Appendix II Continued)

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(Appendix II Continued)

SN	*Caste Name*	*Number*
11.	Murao	1
12.	Koybuth	3
13.	Sonar	1
14.	Dome:	1
15.	Maujhee	1
16.	Bhangee	2
17.	Bind	1
18.	Dhanuk	11
19.	Haulloye	1
20.	Dhaundo	1
21.	Chassa	1
22.	Ruzowar	1
23.	Soondy	1
24.	Dusadh	10
25.	Kurmi	10
26.	Kori	8
27.	Hajam	1
28.	Brahman	6
29.	Rajput/Chhatri	7
30.	Goala/Ahir	8
31.	Muslim	28
32.	Tanti	2
33.	Chamar	2
34.	Kaieth	2
35.	Fauthy	1
36.	Dhobi	3
37.	Bhoi	5
38.	Koli	2
39.	Bania	2
40.	Santal	5
41.	Kandu	1
42.	Pohur	1
43.	Bhar	1
44.	Ghatwal	4
45.	Duibuth	2
46.	Kumhar	8
47.	Gunjhoo	1
48.	Chunnoo	1
49.	Bauri	3

Source: Documentation Centre, University of Durban, Westville, South Africa

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Appendix III: Emigration Certificate of Beharee Singh (Trinidad Emigration Agency, Calcutta)

Ship's Name, Varuna

Ship's No., 145

Trinidad Emigration Agency

Calcutta, *the* 1st August 1869

36,607
36,607

Depot No., ... 153
Name, ... Beharee
Caste, ... Cheettree
Father's Name, ... Bison
Sex, ... Male
Age, ... 20
Zillah, ... Benares
Pergunnah, ... Hool
Village, ... Gurkhota
Occupation, ... Laborer
Name of next of Kin, ... Drigaul Sing
If married to whom, ...
Marks, ... 57

Certified that I have examined and passed the above named as a fit Subject for Emigration, and that he is free from all bodily and mental disease. – Having been Vaccinated.

Surgeon Superintendent *Depot Surgeon*

I hereby certify that the man above described (whom I have engaged as a laboror on the part of the part of the Government of Trinidad where he has expressed a willingness to proceed to work of hire) has appeared before me and that I have explained to him all matters concerning his duties as an Emigrant, according to Clause 42 of Act XII of 1864.

Protector of Emigrants of Calcutta *Emigration Agent for Trinidad.*

Source: Family Tree of Beharee Singh (complied by Vijay Narayansingh et al., 2009)

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Glossary

bapoti	Occupancy holding
begar	Forced labour
bhomia	Holder of patrimonial land
bhomichara	A special land tenure held by the landlord of Malani (Marwar)
bigori	Rent in cash
bhajan	Religious songs
bhom bab	Levies realized from *bhomias*
chowdhary	A village official from among the peasants
chhtbhais	Younger brothers of the landlords
durbar	Ruler
Ghair-Bapoti	Non-occupancy holding
hasil	Rent in kind
jajmani	Patron–client relationship within the caste system
jati panchayat	Caste council
kathi	A wooden structure devised to torture the defaulting tenants by making them stand in it with little possibility of moving their limbs.
Kashtkaran riyayati	Tenants with concessions
khalsa	Crown land
kisan	Peasant/tenant
kot	Fortress
lag-bag	Cess
lathi	Bamboo stick
patawi	Eldest son
pancheera	A folk song that was popular among the peasants of Rajputana in the 1920s and the 1930s when the peasant movements swept across the entire state
sahukari	Usury
sarkari	Pertaining to the government/state
shikar	hunt

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taluqdar	Landlords of Oudh
taluqdari	System of landlordism in Oudh/landlord's estate
thikana	Land grant in return for military service
thikanedar	Landlord holding military grant
vakil	Lawyer
yajna	Vedic fire sacrifice
zamindari	Landlordism
zulum	Tyranny, atrocities

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