

CASTE: IDEOLOGY AND CONTEXT

Current definitions of caste place its essence in endogamy<sup>1</sup>, which is regarded as a residue from the past existing more or less in a "passive way". Its role in the occupational system and social placement is not denied, in fact its past links with the form of the "labour process" are duly underlined in Marxist historiography<sup>2</sup>, but since it is seen as arising out of the incomplete fusion of tribal elements in the general "Aryan", "Vedic" or "Sanskritic" society<sup>3</sup>, the religious or ritual aspect of caste, the custom of endogamy does acquire the primarily role in its foundation making the play of political and economic factors in its origin as secondary. Such a perception makes caste a transhistoric institution, a continuation of old clan and tribal units predating the state<sup>4</sup>. It is generally held that its influence on political and economic behaviour has declined with

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<sup>1</sup> A. BETEILLE, "The Reproduction of Inequality; Occupation, Caste and Family", in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (N.S.), 25 (1991), pp. 3-28.

<sup>2</sup> IRFAN HABIB, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 161-179.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> M. KLASS, *Caste: The Emergence of South Asian Social System*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1980.

the development of capitalism and industrialization in India and now caste operates largely in personal or religious matters only. Hence, it is being defined as a form of differentiation wherein constituent units form not a continuous hierarchy but "discrete categories" observing ritualized social practices and endogamy, justified "on the basis of putative biological differences"<sup>5</sup>.

However, locating the basic, fundamental principle of the institution of caste in endogamy not only gives it a static character but also provides grist to the mill of those who trace its origin to the desire of the conquering Aryans to keep the subjugated communities at a distance. Thus despite the severe criticism<sup>6</sup> of Herbert Risley's methodology of making caste hierarchy related to the proportional mixture of Aryan and non-Aryan blood, racial theory of caste continues to exercise a good deal of influence<sup>7</sup> in the academic as well as non-academic popular circles. D.D. Kosambi wrote that the *brāhmaṇa* caste emerged as a result of "interaction between the Aryan priesthood, and the ritually superior priesthood, of the Indus culture"<sup>8</sup> and the assimilation of the Aryan and non-Aryan priesthood must have accelerated the formation of an internal, Aryan caste system, essentially the separation of the *Brahmin* in function and discipline from the *Kṣatriya* and setting of both above the householder *Vaiśya*, after *dāsas* had been conquered... for otherwise

<sup>5</sup> D. GUPTA, "Continuous Hierarchies and Discrete Castes", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19/46 (1984). Reprinted in *Social Stratification* ed. by D. Gupta, 1991. pp. 110-141. OUP. Delhi.

<sup>6</sup> See L. DUMONT, *Homo Hierarchicus*, Paladin, London, 1972, p. 64f; S. JAISWAL, "Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities", in *Indian Historical Review* (henceforth IHR), 6/1-2 (1979-80), pp 2; 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Thus Dipankar Gupta traces the rigid rules of endogamy and the rationale of "natural superiority", which govern the *jātis* to the Aryan conquest and subjugation of local indigenous communities, which provided the metaphor of colour; D. GUPTA, "From Varṇa to Jāti: The Indian Caste System, from the Asiatic to the Feudal Mode of Production", in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 10 (1980), pp. 249-271.

<sup>8</sup> D. D. KOSAMBI, *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1956, p. 96.

there is no reason for demarcating into endogamous caste"<sup>9</sup>. We have criticized this hypothesis of Kosambi in greater detail elsewhere<sup>10</sup>. For our present purposes it is sufficient to point out that although the assimilation of non-Aryan, aboriginal priests and ruling lineages as well as commoners into various *varṇa* categories is a process which has taken place throughout the ancient and medieval periods of Indian history, there is nothing to show that such assimilation had given rise to separate endogamous units or *jātis* within the various *varṇa* categories in the Vedic period. On the other hand, Kosambi rightly holds that the subjugation of the *dāśas* and changes in the means and relations of production provided the material background for the emergence of the "four castes fully developed within the tribe: *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, *Śūdra*, in Yajurvedic times and this was "a new class division within each Aryan tribe"<sup>11</sup>. The description of *varṇas* as "castes" here is significant and shall have to be discussed later.

Nevertheless, Kosambi's remarks on caste are not without ambiguity, which leads Irfan Habib to state that according to Kosambi "castes did not arise out of any internal division of the *varṇas* in the original Vedic society, but from an external process altogether, through the fusion of tribal elements into a general society". This assumes that in Kosambi's perception *varṇas* were "estates", "order" or "class" and not "castes", a view contradicted by the passages quoted above. Habib adds<sup>12</sup> that tribes "are often rigorously endogamous" and may have practiced endogamy when they entered into the general society.

But the question whether caste endogamy should be viewed as a continuation of tribal endogamous customs is far from settled.

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<sup>9</sup> D.D. KOSAMBI, "On the Origin of Brahmin Gotras", in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 26 (1950), p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> S. JAISWAL, "Stratification in *Ṛgvedic* Society: Evidence and Paradigms", *IHR* 16/1-2 (1989-90), pp. 1-34. A reader interested in this theme may also refer to S. JAISWAL, "Mystifying the Aryans", *IHR* 20/1-2 (1993-94), pp. 219-228.

<sup>11</sup> D.D. KOSAMBI, *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*,... p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> IRFAN HABIB, *op. cit.*

Scholars such as Max Weber<sup>13</sup> and Louis Dumont<sup>14</sup> have contrasted tribe and caste on the ground that the internal structure of the tribal world is exogamous and of caste society endogamous. In our opinion, Dumont's assertion that "endogamy is a corollary of hierarchy, rather than a primary principle"<sup>15</sup> of caste deserves serious consideration, of course, with the caveat that for us caste hierarchy is not just a religious principle but a system of exploitation of gender and weaker communities<sup>16</sup>.

Kosambi held that caste is "class at the primitive level of production"<sup>17</sup> and originated in later Vedic times as *varṇa* divisions. However, sociologists generally make a clear distinction between the *varṇa* and *jāti* regarding only the latter as castes and the former as "estates", "order" or "status system". This is done on the ground, that (a) *varṇa* are broad categories and the real effective social units today are castes; (b) *varṇas* are only four but castes are numerous, (c) and whereas *varṇa* hierarchy is clear, there is a lack of clarity in the hierarchy of castes, particularly in the middle regions. However, this view of caste organization may be a more or less accurate description of its morphology in modern times, but this does not mean that such a complex organization could not have its beginnings in the simpler *varṇa* organization. This is not to argue in favour of a linear development nor to account for the proliferation of *jātis* within the *varṇa* structure in terms of fission of primary categories through the mixed (*varṇa saṃkara*) marriages in the manner visualized by the *Dharmaśāstra* writers; but to assert that whereas *varṇas* emerged in small-scale later Vedic societies as tribes

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<sup>13</sup> M. WEBER, *The Religion of India*, Translated and edited by Hans H. GERTH and Don MARTINDALE, The Free Press, New York, 1968, pp. 30-33.

<sup>14</sup> L. DUMONT, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>16</sup> S. JAISWAL, "Caste in the socio-Economic Framework of Early India", in *Presidential Address, Section I, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 38th session, Bhubaneswar, 1977; S. JAISWAL, "Semitizing Hinduism: Changing Paradigms of Brahmanical Integration", *Social Scientist* 19/12 (Dec. 1991), pp. 20-32; S. JAISWAL (in Press), *Caste in India*, Manohar, Delhi.

<sup>17</sup> D.D. KOSAMBI, *Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965, p. 50.



disintegrated with the growth of economic disparities, the *jātis* emerged in post-Vedic times when the *varṇa*-based society began to expand spacially and demographically. Both the processes of internal fragmentation and incorporation of tribal communities produced the complex structure of *jātis* within the *varṇa* framework. The pattern of the structuring of the wider society was provided by the principles of the *varṇa* ideology, which was concerned not only with the grading of statuses but with the perpetuation of hierarchy through insistence on the hereditary nature of occupations and rankings and devaluation of the status of women in-built in the notions of hypergamy and endogamy, the two being two sides of the same coin<sup>18</sup>.

However, interpreting *varṇa* as “category” or “estate” and *jāti* as caste, Dumont distinguishes the two on the ground that although there is “homology” and a certain degree of osmosis between the two systems, their principles are different, as in the former stress is laid on function rather than birth but heredity is more important in the caste system<sup>19</sup>. We may point out that the importance of the factor of heredity in the *varṇa* scheme is obvious from its linkage with theory of *guṇas* the three basic qualities namely *satya* (goodness or purity), *rajas* (passion or glory?)<sup>20</sup> and *tamas* (darkness, ignorance). The *Bhagavadgītā* clearly says that owing to their natural, *inborn* qualities (*guṇas*) the four *varṇas* have been assigned different functions<sup>21</sup>. Dumont argues that the fact that ruling dynasties of different origin could acquire *kṣatriya* status in

<sup>18</sup> The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* clearly states that a *kṣatriya* is born of a *kṣatriya*, a *vaiśya* from a *vaiśya* and a *śūdra* from a *śūdra* (XIV. 4.2.27; II. 1.4.4.) However, initially the second *Varṇa* was designated as *rājanya*, meaning kinsmen of the *rājā* indicating crystallization of the ruling lineages.

<sup>19</sup> L. DUMONT, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-114.

<sup>20</sup> *rajas* is generally translated as the “quality of passion”. However, according to MONIER-WILLIAM’S *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, *rajas* is at places equated with *tejas* meaning “glory” or “authority” (S.V. *rajas*). According to V.S. Apte the quality of *rajas* is “the cause of great activity seen in creatures” (V.S. APTE, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Vol. III, S.V., *rajas*). Perhaps in the context of the *guṇas* the term should be translated as “glory” or “energy”.

<sup>21</sup> *karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāvaprabhairguṇaiḥ*, (*Bhagavadgītā*, XVIII. 41).

later times shows that function rather than heredity was important for the *varṇa* categorization. But he does not take into account the fact that the ascription of *kṣatriya* status to people of different origins was itself dependent on their achieving putative hereditary links with the ancient *kṣatriya* lineages or heroes through invented genealogies and those rulers who did not seek such validation continued to be regarded as members of lower *varṇas*, for example, Harṣavardhana of Kanauj and Redḍi kings of Andhra. The hereditary nature of *varṇa* identification is indicated by references to *kṣatriya* merchants (*vaṇis*) in the records of the early centuries of the Christian Era in the Andhra country<sup>22</sup> and in a Gurjara-Pratihāra inscription<sup>23</sup> of the tenth century from the Doab region of U.P.

The main plank of the entire edifice of *Homo Hierarchicus* as constructed by Louis Dumont rests on the assumption that the separation of the "hierarchical status", and the "secular power", that is, the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* elements in the *varṇa* scheme and the subordination of the latter to the former is unique to the way Hindus perceive things; and this is what makes caste a "state of mind", or "system of ideas and values" based on a religious principle. For, although Dumont insists on distinguishing between *varṇa* hierarchy and caste hierarchy, he regards this feature of the *varṇa* system as crucial for the shaping of the relationship between (religious) "hierarchy" and (secular) "power" in the caste system<sup>24</sup>. However, rather than attributing it to the idiosyncratic psychological disposition of the *Homo Hierarchicus* imagined as the "other", the perfect counterfoil of *Homo Economicus*, or *Homo Aequalis*, as Dumont describes the western individual, one should examine the material context in which this ideology evolved. In his study<sup>25</sup> of the East African Nilotes and the Proto-Indo-Iranians, Bruce Lincoln has

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<sup>22</sup> K. GOPALACHARI, *Early History of the Andhra Country*, Madras, 1941, p. 91; S. JAISWAL, "Caste in the Socio-Economic Framework of Early India", ... pp. 15-16.

<sup>23</sup> *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 19, no.6, pp.52-4.

<sup>24</sup> L. DUMONT, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>25</sup> B. LINCOLN, *Priests, Warriors and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981.

drawn our attention to the remarkable similarities between the two cultures which were far apart in time and space with no obvious links. The most important of these is the dichotomization of the priest and warrior categories; and he traces this trait to the ecology of the cattle-keepers. Earlier, contesting the theory of Dumezil regarding the typicality of tripartite division among the Indo-Europeans John Brough had shown<sup>26</sup> that the three-fold occupational division consisting of priests, warriors and commoners existing among the pastoral Semitic societies depicted in the Old Testament too. We have argued<sup>27</sup> that the cattle-keepers tended to develop two kinds of specialists, the priests, who claimed to provide protection and increase in cattle wealth of the tribe by developing rituals of offerings to gods of the most valued items of their society, particularly animals, and in this way secured divine blessings, and warriors, who defended their tribe and its cattle-wealth and supplemented it through cattle-raids. It is not surprising that those who were regarded as capable of mediating with the gods and had control over rituals were considered superior and "purer" than the latter category. It is this context which explains the separation of the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* from the *viś* in the Vedic society. In the process of class formation in the disintegrating Vedic tribes, both *brahma* and *kṣatra* are seen as competing as well as cooperating with each other against the *vaiśya* commoner and defeated *śūdra*, and gradually hardening into castes<sup>28</sup>. Multiple factors, which include the processes of fission as well as fusion, lead to the emergence of the *jātis* and widening of the *varṇa* categories. India being a country with a long and continuous history for more than

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<sup>26</sup> J. BROUGH; "The Tripartite Ideology of the Indo-Europeans: an Experiment in Method", in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22 (1959), pp. 69-85.

<sup>27</sup> S. JAISWAL, "Stratification in Ṛgvedic Society: Evidence and Paradigms", in *IHR* 16/1-2 (1989-90), p 15f; S. JAISWAL, "Varṇa Ideology and Social Change", in *Social Scientist*, 19/3-4 (1989-90), pp. 41-2.

<sup>28</sup> For changes in the concept of *vaiśya* and *śūdra* and shift of emphasis from function to the purity of the *brahmana* *varṇa* see S. JAISWAL, "Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities"... and "Stratification in Ṛgvedic Society: Evidence and Paradigms"...

two thousand years has also carried the burden of its tradition, which nevertheless has been continuously modified and reshaped in the changed circumstances, without making a complete break from the past. It requires a thorough study of the history of various regions of India to grasp the factors which contributed to the specificities of regional social formations under the overall umbrella of the *varṇa* ideology<sup>29</sup>. The expansion of the *varṇa* system to different regions of the subcontinent did not mean replication the *varṇa* categories everywhere in a uniform manner but securing the subordination of the deprived classes in favour of dominant groups at the ideological level following the basic principles of the *varṇa* system. Thus in the south where specific historical conditions did not favour crystallization of the *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya* categories, the land owning agriculturist community of the Veḷḷālas was ranked as *sūdra*. Nevertheless, it functioned as a status category at the regional and subregional levels. It is pointed out that communities quite distinct from the Veḷḷālas have attempted and succeeded in gaining the Veḷḷāla status; and there is a Tamil saying that a low-caste person, when he becomes prosperous, tries to pass off as a Veḷḷāla<sup>30</sup>. We have suggested elsewhere that the perception of agriculture as the function primarily of the *sūdras* (and not the *vaiśyas*) and categorization of the dominant agriculturist communities of the south as “*sūdra*” led to drastic modifications in the concept of the *sūdra* and the *varṇa* theory. These changes ultimately culminated in the shift to the claims for superior status being made on the basis of the purity of birth and not function. It is significant that the *brahmanical* law-books impute the “impurity” of social groups to a hereditary factor, their descent from parents or ancestors who had committed *varṇa-saṃkara*, that is, had married or had sexual union in the *pratiloma*, disapproved order. They were condemned for their *impure birth to carry out impure tasks, their impurity did not arise*

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<sup>29</sup> S. JAISWAL, *Caste in India* (in press), Introduction.

<sup>30</sup> S. ARASARATNAM, “Social History of a Dominant Caste Society: The Veḷḷālar of North Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the Eighteenth Century”, in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 18/3-4 (1981), pp. 377-91.

from their impure occupations at least theoretically. Thus in contradiction to what Dumont asserts: «it is specialization in impure tasks, in practice and theory, which leads to the attribution of a massive and permanent impurity to some categories of people» (p.85), brahmanical ideologues imagined the origin of impurity quite differently. The reality of exploitative relations, regional variations and sharp differences of status had to be encompassed within the divinely ordained *varṇa* divisions.

More recently, George L. Hart (III)<sup>31</sup> has argued that the notion of impurity of certain social groups is to be traced to ancient Tamils, who conceived the divine in terms of dangerous, malevolent spirits manifesting themselves in death and anarchy. These qualities were extended to those social groups whose function was to mediate with and control the sacred, and contact with such persons came to be looked upon as dangerous and polluting. This, in his view, accounts for the low, untouchable status of the Paraiyans and the Velans (officiating priests for the worship of the god Murugan). We have criticized these views elsewhere<sup>32</sup>. The point which deserves explanation is that why those who had the “power” to harm others fell in social status and those who were vulnerable came to be regarded as “superior” and high caste? Dumont is right in stating that the notion of impurity in the caste system is different from the notion of the sacred being dangerous, which concept prevails in some tribal societies. He draws attention to the reversal of the roles, “the tribal chief is taboo, i.e. dangerous for the common people, whereas the *Brahman* is vulnerable to pollution by an inferior”<sup>33</sup>. And if it was merely a question of avoiding contamination from those who were close to the “dangerous sacred”, it is strange that the ancient Tamil king who according to Hart was the central embodiment of “sacred powers” did not suffer any taboo or inhere the quality of pollution.

<sup>31</sup> G.L. HART, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts*, Berkley, California, 1975.

<sup>32</sup> S. JAISWAL, “Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities”, Section V.

<sup>33</sup> L. DUMONT, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

In fact the very idea of what is polluting seems to have evolved over a long span of time in which material factors such as depression of a community engaged in a particular type of manual labour played a crucial role. The case of leather and leatherworkers (the *carmakāras*, modern *chamar* caste) provides a classic example. The later Vedic texts<sup>34</sup> describe, milk, honey, clarified butter (*ghee*), etc., filled in leather bags for sacrificial use without any trace of the notion that leather was a polluting substance. Enough evidence has been produced to show that the profession of leather work was not considered low in later Vedic times<sup>35</sup>. The traditional Hindu's aversion to leather and leather worker need not be traced to earlier than the early medieval period when *smṛtis* such as those of Aṅgiras and Atri begin to mention him among the *antyajas* (lowest castes)<sup>36</sup>. Our argument receives further support from two records of the thirteenth century included in the *Lekhapaddhati*<sup>37</sup>, a collection of model documents compiled in the sixteenth or seventeenth century in western India for the use of the scribe. These speak of the same female slaves being obliged to do both "clean" as well as "unclean" work, such as, cooking food, fetching drinking water as well as cleaning the drains and throwing away human excreta, etc., a situation which would be unthinkable in modern Hindu homes.

In our opinion, the concept of innate and relative purity of social groups emerged as the ostensible explanation for the excessive differentiations in a hierarchical society because of the crystallization of a large *brāhmaṇa* caste at the apex, which feature, as we have seen, was embedded in the ecology of the Vedic cattle-keepers. It continued to derive sustenance from the significant role of the *brāhmaṇas* in the later power structure both as ideologues and active participants, and it is not surprising that the world-view of the

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<sup>34</sup> *Pañcaviṃśa brāhmaṇa*, XVI, 13.13., *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, XV. 16.

<sup>35</sup> R. S. SHARMA, *Śūdras in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasisdass, Delhi, 2nd ed., 1980, p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> P.V. KANE, *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol II part I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1941, p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> P. PRASAD, "Female Slavery in Thirteenth Century Gujarat: Documents in the *Lekhpaddhati*", in *IHR* 15/1-2 (1988-89), pp. 270-75.

priestly caste should show a pre-occupation with the notions of the pure and the impure in personal as well as social spheres tracing them to Vedic roots. This is not a "voluntarist" or "deterministic" thesis but an assertion of the point that social environment, which includes material as well as ideological factors, plays a crucial role in shaping the way one comprehends and tries to mould the world. Thus, when killing of cattle for sacrifice or food became unpopular in the material milieu of the sixth century B.C. and non-killing was raised to the level of a sacred principle, the priestly caste could not remain unaffected by it<sup>38</sup>. Vegetarianism became the norm for the *brāhmaṇa* to be emulated by others who wished to upgrade their status through a process of sanskritization. Nevertheless, it was not merely ideological propaganda which led to the wide acceptance of the *varṇa* system. It is contended that the caste system worked in the favour of the dominant communities by securing the *structured dependence*<sup>39</sup> of menial and "untouchable" castes. This provided cheap labour to the land-based communities in the countryside, reducing the cost of generating surplus and made more revenue available to the state. The congruence between caste and class was well marked in pre-colonial times, but ranking was largely in terms of the relative "purity" of social groups with each region having its own specific hierarchy based on the same general principles.

Thus the functioning of the principle of "purity" in the *varṇa* structure was aimed at justifying and strengthening the dominance of those who occupied the top rung of the ladder. Once the rules of the game changed and numbers rather than the purity of birth become critical for securing political space in the contemporary democratic set-up, the caste system began to adjust itself suitably undergoing yet another metamorphosis. Dumont describes it as "substantialization" of castes in which the spirit of competition replaces the relationship of interdependence and there is "a

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<sup>38</sup> S. JAISWAL, "Origin and Development of *Vaiṣṇavism*, 2nd enlarged edition, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1981, pp. 123-129.

<sup>39</sup> S. JAISWAL, "Origin and Development of *Vaiṣṇavism*, 2nd enlarged edition, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1981, pp. 123-129.

transition from a structure to the juxtaposition of substances”<sup>40</sup>. It is interesting that Dumont does not deny that there has been a weakening of the concept of hierarchy based on the opposition between pure and impure which in his view had constituted the “ideological core of the system”, but he argues that these changes remain incomplete as they affect only “the politico-economic domain which is encompassed in an overall religious setting”<sup>41</sup>. In his view recent modifications only show the plasticity of the system, which continues to exist as the overall framework remains unchanged. However, in spite of Dumont’s assertion that “castes are still present and untouchability still effective”<sup>42</sup>, it will be difficult for anyone to maintain that the present day caste system is based on the concept of untouchability or the opposition of the pure and impure. Dumont himself admits that the rigidity of the caste system operates now largely at the level of *connubium*<sup>43</sup>. In other words, the “religious setting” of the system is now provided not by any notion of hierarchy of purity but by the practice of endogamy. This is a curious conclusion to arrive at particularly in view of Dumont’s earlier assertion that endogamy is a “corollary of hierarchy” and not the general principle.

The difficulty with Dumont’s view on caste is that not only it is “a *brahmanical* view of caste” as Berreman remarked<sup>44</sup>, and overvalorizes the *brahmanical* theory – which in our opinion was an invention to explain and justify the depressed condition of the lower classes and not an adumbration of its causative principles – it completely overlooks the gender issue, the subordination of women, which is the critical constitutive element of this form of social stratification. Caste emerged as a system of exploitation not only of the less privileged and backward communities but also of women.

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<sup>40</sup> L. DUMONT, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-5; 378.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>44</sup> G. D. BERREMAN, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, V (1971), p. 16 f.



Dumont criticizes<sup>45</sup> the oft-quoted remark of Marx that modern industry and the railways will dissolve the Indian caste system, which rests on the hereditary division of labour, by pointing out that castes still exist. But Marx was referring to the politico-economic aspects of the system, which have been eroded to a large extent even according to Dumont. Dumont, however, regards these developments as belonging to the secondary aspect of caste, its primary aspect is located in the continuation of fragmented identities through endogamous boundaries. However, as we have argued elsewhere<sup>46</sup>, the evolution of the caste system is to be linked not only with the building of class society but also with stabilization of patriarchy and gender exploitation. Only those aspects of caste which are in conflict with the capitalist mode of production have weakened and are in the process of disappearing with the impact of industrialization. But endogamy which involves the "gifting" (*kanyādāna*) of the bride in a manner which reinforces caste relationships is quite in harmony with capitalist notions of private property transactions. Only unrestrained participation of women in social production on an equal footing with men could create conditions for a free mixing of sexes and erode the pattern of arranged marriages, which are naturally delimited in the traditional channels. The problem of caste cannot be tackled by divesting it of its social context.

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<sup>45</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 265.

<sup>46</sup> S. JAISWAL, "Caste in the Socio-Economic Framework of Early India"...; S. JAISWAL, "Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities"...