Criteria of Status Evaluation in India

Edited by
S C Malik
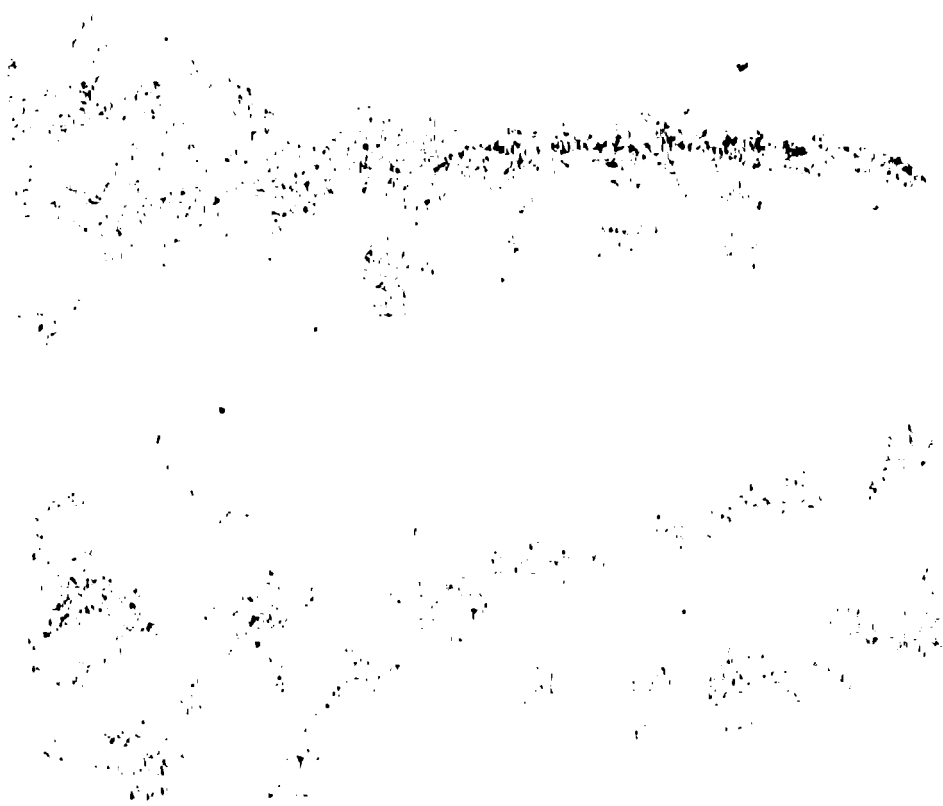
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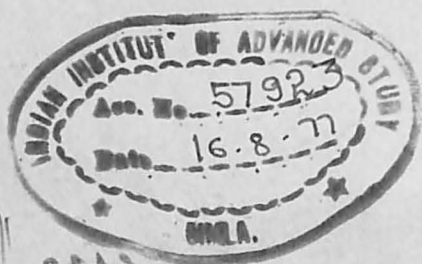
CRITERIA OF STATUS EVALUATION IN INDIA

Criteria of Status Evaluation in India

[Report of a Planning Conference]

Edited by
S C Malik

Indian Institute of Advanced Study
Simla

Preface

The Indian Institute of Advanced Study is engaged on a long-term project of studies on Indian and Asian civilizations. One of the themes chosen for exploration and reflection is focused on the determinants of social status in India. With a view to seeking conceptual clarification and identifying the possible contribution of Indology, history, sociology, and social anthropology, a three-day Planning Conference was held at Simla late in 1976. The Institute sought the assistance of the participants in formulating the problem by taking account of the entire range and diversities of social factors implicit in determination of status in Indian civilization. The invited experts were asked to help also in devising an appropriate strategy of study and investigation. The Conference turned out to be an adventure of ideas and resulted in many perceptive insights. Some of the background papers and a succinct record of discussions is presented in this report.

The Institute is grateful to the participants for their cooperation. A record of discussions was kept by Drs S C Bajpai, B B Goswami, M Horam, Prabhati Mukherjee, B N Saraswati, I J Singh, Robert Varickayil, and O P Verma, Visiting Fellows of the Institute. Drs S C Malik, B N Saraswati, and Robert Varickayil organized the material for publication. The volume was edited by Dr S C Malik. The Institute places on record its appreciation for their initiative and enterprise.

S C DUBE
1 March 1977   Director

Contents

1. Issues and Approaches*

S C DUBE

The problem of status determination in Indian society presents many contradictions and paradoxes. The Hindu ethos is characterized by hierarchy and Hindu society is considered to be a classical example of an ascriptive system in which considerations of ritual purity and pollution take precedence over all other factors contributing to stratification. But a careful examination of the evolution of Hindu social system in an historical perspective unmistakably demonstrates the close linkage between economic and political power on the one hand and social status on the other. The interface between ritual and economic/political determinants of status has remained an uncharted territory.

To comprehend the social reality we need to have a fresh look at the problem in a cross-disciplinary perspective. First, it is essential to understand the ideological premises and fundamental assumptions behind the criteria of status determination. Secondly, a minute examination of the historical evolution of Indian society, with a focus on the changing bases of status evaluation, is necessary. Thirdly, we need to have a close look at the existential reality and see how ascriptive and achievemental as well as ritual and secular principles govern status in contemporary society. Eclectically chosen ideological premises and underlying assumptions can give us models that may be useful heuristic devices, but we should recognize the danger that such models can lead to a distortion of perspective. It is to be regretted that insights from history that have a bearing on this theme have not been explored even modestly. We have, of

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*Condensed from the Director's Opening Address

course, some rich empirical accounts of the structure of socie-
ties and of the operation of status system within them, but
without exploring the ideological underpinnings and historical
contexts of status and rank, the story that they tell is neither
adequate nor convincing. Thus, there is a good case for the
pooling of resources and insights of philosophy, Indology,
history, and empirical social sciences towards the understanding
of status determination in Indian society.

    The prevailing model of Hindu society and also of Indian so-
ciety generally, gives one an impression of uncommon rigidity.
But there is also sufficient evidence of its flexibility and adaptabi-
lity. These characteristics somehow have been played in a low
key. It would be interesting to investigate where, why, and how
Hindu society chose to discard its rigidity and proved to be flexi-
ble and adaptable. It cannot be denied that there has been, in
the past as well as in the present, a definite trend towards status
mobility in Indian society, but its directions and the causes under-
lying it have not been examined in depth. Even in regard to the
unit of mobility we do not have any definitive formulations. We
do not know much about the relative roles of the individual, the
family, the group, and the community in the process of upward
or downward mobility in the status scale.

    The interplay between ritual, economic, and political
determinants of status has also remained an area of darkness.
Which of these criteria predominates over the others and which
ones yield are questions to which we do not have precise
answers. The why and how questions related to the problem,
far from being answered, have not even been properly posed.

    India has a composite culture. It is a multi-ethnic and multi-
religious society with diverse groups having different cultural
antecedents. Doubtless the Hindus have influenced the non-
Hindus, but the latter have not always been at the receiving end.
The spread and percolation of ideas of status evaluation between
different cultural entities merits serious scholarly attention. The
exposure of Indian society to powerful currents of the modern
world has undeniably made an impact on its valuations, but we
do not know in what directions and ways they have altered the
criteria of status evaluation. Analytical treatment of this theme
will bring to us an understanding of the unyielding elements of

thought, belief, and practice and will, at the same time, illuminate the course of change.

It should be our quest to find answers to a broad range of questions having a bearing on status. The fit, or absence of it, between the prescriptive/normative on the one hand and the existential on the other will have to be investigated and understood. We shall have to see what difference time makes to underlying principles and basic propositions governing status determination. Of special interest are problems of conflict, accommodation, and synthesis in situations where cultures meet and historical imperatives necessitate their coexistence. In such contexts traditional status patterns undergo a severe strain. The rationale of the new patterns that emerge provides a useful area of investigation. The spatial distribution of norms of status and the differences in the content and direction of change in them also need careful analysis. Finally, the question of status evaluation has to be viewed in the perspective of persistence and change in the culture. It is essential to discover if the basic symbol system undergoes any transformation and in the process the meanings that the people give are changed.

The problem of status determination in India is not as simple as it looks at the first sight. The models and modes of analysis employed so far have been deceptive in many respects; in any case they have not unfolded the many-stranded reality. To understand Indian society new and dynamic initiatives centred on the problem of status are urgently indicated.

2. Determinants of Social Status : A Framework for Reflection*

S C MALIK

Under the multidisciplinary project of *A Sourcebook of Indian and Asian Civilizations* at this Institute, during the first half (1974-76) of the Fifth Plan period the theme of "Dissent, protest and reform movements in Indian Civilization" was examined. These studies indicate clearly that historically social upheavals (expressed usually in religious terms) have been a recurrent phenomenon allowing for readjustments of Indian society to new situations (Malik : 1975, 1977). Beginning June 1976 the theme of "Economic status *vs.* ritual status in Indian Social System" has been taken up for investigation. The objectives of this Planning Conference are to chalk out various problems and topics which may be taken up for further investigation during 1976-79 : in terms of organizing a Seminar in 1977, for a series of commissioned studies and for writing monographs.

The major focus of our discussions in this Planning Conference is to reappraise different aspects of the Indian social system in order that we may be able to locate and systematize determinants of social status and hence seek criteria of status

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*This review note is a revised version of the first draft which was modified as a result of various discussions held with Prof S C Dube, Prof (Mrs) Leela Dube and Dr BN Saraswati. My special thanks are due to them and also to Dr (Mrs) P Mukherjee, Dr (Mrs) Uma Pandey and Dr O P Verma. Some of their ideas have been incorporated in this note. Yet, if the manner of presentation and the material seems inadequate, the responsibility for this is entirely mine. However, this review note is intended primarily to initiate discussions about the future of this group project.

evaluation. By and large, the caste system has been taken as a basic frame of reference for Indian society. But apart from the fact that this framework is mainly applicable to 'Hindu' society, it is also inadequate. For example, the role of economics and politics as determinants of social status has been underplayed because emphasis has been given to ritual status or the value—moral—system. According to Dumont (1970) since the value of inequality and hierarchy is fundamental in India, social ranking is in terms of purity-pollution principles. The system is thus characterized by three basic elements —hierarchy, specialization, and repulsion or separation. It is the value system which provides a base for society whereby a large number of hereditary and endogamous units, associated with one or more occupations, are ranked in terms of the pure-impure dichotomy that is seen clearly at interactional levels. Each *jati*—subcaste—carries on, within limits, its own style of life in matters of distinctive customs, of dress, diet, ritual, etc., each of which indicates social ranking in a region. Legal and ritual sanctions provide stability to the system.

Society as explained above in terms of ritual status presents a somewhat simplified and ideal picture. At the functional level the problem is really complex. *Jati*, for example, is not a small localized homogenous unit, (nor, of course, is *varna*). Within it there are often several sub-units or gradations that are governed by such factors as wealth, power, and prestige like the Jats and the Rajputs. These factors have also been crucial in determining social status. For instance, the life-styles of Brahmans and Harijans—representing the two extreme poles of the system—cannot be explained in ritual terms alone. Their ritual status in fact reflects inequalities which have arisen due to politico-economic domination (Mencher : 1974). Again, Brahmans were not just priests; they have often wielded power equal to kings because of ownership of land and property. Throughout Indian history, wealth, whether in the form of cows, land or gold, has been gifted to the Brahman who has shared power with the Kshatriya and as Dumont suggests these two have not remained distinct categories. It has also been noted that within the Brahmans higher status is accorded to those who own land and wealth than to those who do not, or those who live on *dan* or charity. As in the case of the Nambudri Brahmans a

disproportionately large amount of land is owned by Brahmans
in other areas also. This is also the case with other 'upper'
groups in India. Apparently, then, a close correlation exists
between land distribution and social structure.

Social mobility—both horizontal and vertical—has arisen
due to such new situations as invasions, migrations, (both that
came from outside and inside, e.g., tribal absorption), economic,
and technological factors. For example, the social position of
groups changed with the advent of the Mughals, when such
social categories as *zamindars*, *jagirdars*, and *mansabdars* became
major components of Indian society. Again, with the coming
of the British new social units were created, while some earlier
ones of the Mughals were eliminated. *Zamindars* under the
British during the Permanent Settlement of Bengal developed
a new style of life by their position in the economic order.
These *zamindars* were recruited from different status groups, to
be given land, other property and power that was legitimized,
(Beteille : 1969). Today, of course, market economy forces and
other factors have displaced traditional social relationships.

Several questions may be raised at this point. What were
the processes of social change whereby status was raised ?
What was the position of Kayasthas who provided services but
owned no land and were yet high in status? In the case of
tribal absorption, while ritual sanction or Brahman patronage
has been an important factor, does it not take place only after
a group or groups have over a period of time changed their
style of life, i.e., the kind of food eaten, the clothes worn, and the
worship of certain gods, etc.? Is it not only then that the Brahman
is ready to legitimize this group's position in social hierarchy
and the system in general? Is not social mobility often associat-
ed with geographical mobility, such as when new land or
marginal areas are brought under cultivation? There are
evidently, therefore, many models of changing social positions
which require our attention.

The problems stated above indicate that, perhaps, relatively
speaking the system has been open; that is, it has allowed for
social mobility and change. We also know that trade and agri-
culture became relatively open occupations during historic
times. But the problems is : How are we to evaluate by com-
plex—multidimensional—analysis this openness, whereby social

change and mobility (and hence, status), was possible? What were—and are—the rates of social change, and how may we determine when and why—under what circumstances—mobility became possible? There is complexity because there are a host of factors involved; apart from food, drink, and even economics, groups rank themselves in relation not only to others but also in terms of how the others rank certain groups both horizontally and vertically. Consequently, *varna-jati* categories as generalized groups remain ambiguous definition-ally and functionally, unless they can be viewed within regional and local contexts where both the attributional and inter-actional criteria are generally valid. What parameters do we need to evolve to discuss this problem? Will not these have to be different under traditional or pre-industrial conditions and, under rural and urban settings? If there has been social mobi-lity and change, is it possible from this to evaluate the dyna-mism of Indian society?

The foregoing preliminary raising of issues suggests that there are indeed various ways of viewing the problem. If society has been dynamic, can we not see the social system as a consequence of class conflict and one of exploitation? If we do so, Marxian models assume importance because these permit us to see the system from the viewpoint of the exploited. The posi-tion of the underprivileged groups of all shades, specially the Harijans and the Backward Classes (Mencher : *Ibid*) will no longer be explained away by *dharma* or moral models, i.e., those which suggest a fixed social order that is governed by religious values and provides security in social life. The latter view presumes that the system is free from conflicts of interest or ex-ploitation. But conflict-tension situations have been a recurrent phenomenon in Indian history. Dubois (1906) and others had made it apparent very early that the system was one of exploi-tation. Later investigators tended to ignore this view. Ignoring the question of suppression and exploitation which may or may not be existent, it may be useful to see Indian society as divid-ed in terms of landlords, agricultural workers and landless classes, artisans, merchants, intellectuals, and so on, i.e., with-out making the religion of communities the reference point.

Then, this may be correlated to the location of the organiza-
tional levels of controls, namely, *a.* institutions that control
the content of theology, and *b.* institutions that physically or
otherwise suppress the subversive, rebellious, and revolution-
ary action of the underprivileged or alienated groups. It may
be noted that in conflict situations the dichotomy may not move
along rich *s.* poor cleavage lines; often loyalty may be present
among lower groups to one faction or the other of the domi-
nant upper groups. Again, status evaluation and dominance
should take into account power points of control that may
exist relatively independently from apparent ritual status, viz.,
guilds, tradesmen and commercial groups.

It is clear that the system of stratification is based on values
of inequality not only socially but also in the distribution of
resources and surpluses. Of course, the system has been ration-
alized by an ideology that claims to provide security to lower
classes, while at the same time allows for the dominance of
upper groups. Traditionally, *jajmani* relationships may have
offered security, in terms of the exchange of goods and services,
and at least provided exclusiveness of work if not privileges
at a time when villages were semi-autocratic. But with deve-
loping technological, economic and cultural factors which in-
volved the incorporation of villages and small towns into the
wider economic and political society, social relations must have
changed. What was once an economically viable system on
the basis of occupational differentiation became redundant later.
Indian society may thus be examined as a system of hierarchy
based on exploitation during different periods, for status differ-
entiation was dependent upon the amount of surplus appro-
priation.

Here, one may ask a counter-question : Why despite the
gross unequal distribustion of economic resources was there no
revolt amongst lower groups? One explanation given, apart
from the one on economic and ideological domination, is that
groups could improve their circumstances especially by means
of *jati* mobility and without resorting to violent revolution.
Mobility, of course, implied change within the *varna-jati*
hierarchy, and not outside it. Nevertheless, as to the question
of uprisings, research does indicate that these did take place,
for instance, uprisings among the peasants in the Chola, Vijaya-

nagar, Maratha as well as the Mughal empires—specially after famines or excessive revenue exactions (Habib : 1963). Historically, therefore, not only has economic and political exploitation to be examined, but whether the value system of inequality was in fact accepted. Equality as a value has also existed, as investigations have shown (Parry : 1974).

If the above questions are taken into account we could think of alternative approaches. We may then be able to ignore caste as the only reference point for analyzing the system. If we concentrate on evaluating social relations of different groups we may move beyond 'Hindu' society and examine other religious communities in a broader general setting. Thus if the terms of analysis are social and economic relations, though not excluding ritual and religion, these will be equally applicable to all other Indian socio-cultural communities. It will indicate, for instance, that a few have always owned major shares of land, while the rest have throughout history had to perform menial tasks (always considered low in status) because they had no other means of sustenance, and little chance of mobility. In other words, it may be fruitful to examine Indian society neither as a unique system, nor in terms of Eastern or Western categories. This is why an essential preliminary exercise is to clear conceptual ideas so that social categories are seen as componants or principles of organization of socio-economic relations.

Conceptully a central problem which requires clearing is this : What is the distinction between class and caste? Max Weber defined class as existing in those societies where social inequalities are less rigid, and where individual mobility occurs due to factors of income, occupation, education, property or prestige—all of which are alterable. A Marxian definition suggests constant conflict and tension in a society between classes radically opposed because of the manner in which land and property are distributed. For example, if we view the social system as a class category, the agrarian system may be seen as a system of production which appears with the emergence of differentiated institutional structures, i.e., in the terms of social relations which comprise landowners, tenants, and

agricultural labourers. Because land and property changed
hands with technological and economic changes, there was
occupational mobility and hence status changes in historical
periods. But is the concept of class applicable in the Indian
context?.

Perhaps it is true that that there do not exist in India sharp·
class divisions as they do in an industrial society. Therefore,
instead of raising the question whether class or caste exist (to
the exclusion of the other) both these categories may inter-
penetrate in the social system, i.e., within each social group
all the categories of upper, middle and lower classes could
exist. This classification requires consideration because a
majority of persons—irrespective of their ritual status—live
under abject poverty conditions. But this should not be seen
simply in terms of the dichotomy of the exploiter *vs.* exploited,
of rich *vs.* poor, powerful *vs.* powerless, and so on. The broad
categories will have to be seen in terms of producers and non-
producers in each social group, including the lower castes and
untouchables. One constant factor has been, of course, that
depressed castes and landless labour have always had to do a
very degrading fixed kind of work, and have had to serve as a
reserve force for agricultural production. This is why we may
consider defining social groups in terms of owners of means of
production, and not simply of landlords and landless labourers.
For instance, tenants may be both exploiting and be exploited
at the same time.

But the basic question that may be raised here is : Can we
really see in India the element of class-consciousness which is
an essential characteristic of class society? While this doubt
may be valid, it is also possible that class formation has not been
so apparent because wrong analytical procedures were used—
especially due to the use of equilibrium models. However, one
reason for the lack of class formation amongst the poor and
the depressed may be because these groups are not able to join
hands on the basis of poverty alone. Dominant groups often
divide lower groups by asking for allegiance and loyalty.
Perhaps, because caste or *jati* groupings do provide social
security to lower groups, and because lately caste group solida-
rity has helped in the formation of political factions, class
cleavages have not occured. Since security is essential, the

lack of a clear class formation may also be because there has not been an alternative to the caste system. It may be worth going into socio-economic relations and contradictions between the lower and the upper groups by highlighting the concrete material interests of various strata rather than the mere superstructure of values.

It is worth noting that in other traditional peasant domin-ated societies with similar agricultural, economic, and political features as in India, the function of upper groups has been to underplay the importance of the economic and political factors —by, for instance, invoking pluralism of cultures or creating myths about the contented dream of the untouchables, lower castes or the poor. Researchers have also underestimated the amount of brute force (like slavery) that is often used in order to maintain the supremacy of dominating groups. This is why while inequalities may exist in all traditional societies we must distinguish between people being unequal, and being unequal because of constantly having to struggle against superior powers. Dominant groups have not only managed to control the resourc-es, they have also prevented unified struggles by creating different ially rewarded dependents, or through manipulation of intra-group categories which create a high degree of structural separa tion. In addition, of course, ideological system are used chiefly to soften the feeling of relative deprivation among lower groups. But Indian history tells us clearly that social relations have not been peaceful ; that there has been conflict over value-systems, even at philosophical levels. Tension situations existed because of wars, largescale migrations, changing political set-ups, epidemics, techno-economic changes and other disruptions. Consequently social relations have been asymmetric and not one of symbiotic harmonious coexistence as some researchers believe.

It is interesting to note that in medieval Japan a system of exploitation and social control was consciously devised by the ruling feudal classes whereby the peasants were made primary objects of exploitation. In normal times outcastes served as artisans and craftsmen, but during times of anger and frustra-tion they and others were often made scapegoats. One possibi-lity therefore is of similarly assessing the situation in India, i.e., it may be that with the coming of industrial capitalist economy a kind of socio-economic discrimination may also

have turned against outcastes and other lowly groups. The British and their Indian followers may have maintained the system in order to transform it for the benefit of the capitalist nation, and in doing so may have reconstituted—reorganized— the social system (Mencher : *Ibid*). Therefore, it is possible to think of contemporary Indian society as in fact, a product of British imperialism. But what happened when the British introduced 'secular' educational institutions? Was not ritual status associated with food, drink, sitting arrangements, etc., diluted? But did it really change the hierachical system? Did it not create further segmentation and rigidity ? These problems require further investigation.

One major objective of rethinking about Indian society is to understand social processes so that the changes that we are planning for a new nation may be brought about in depth. Since models have a self-predictive value, perhaps analyzing social system in terms of classes may ¡result in the sharpening of focus on certain contradictions that exist between social groups. Of course, some fundamental values need to change, if radical changes are to be brought about i.e., values have to change in such a manner that the idea of equality becomes an ethically—culturally—desirable social condition. This is because while perceiving one's degraded situation is essential, and not merely its rationalizations (by others), yet perception itself does not lead to change since as long as the ideology of inequality has a cultural basis the organization of social change can be a very difficult task.

Finally, if the problem is viewed within a framework of social mobility we have to know more about the rates of change and social processess. For the rates of change we require para- meters, not only spatio-temporally but also by taking into account ownership of land, trade and commerce, property, pro- duction process, occupational changes and agricultural practices that influence social ranking. All of these factors in turn are as- sociated with political power.

In order to focus our attention on certain key areas some generalized issues may be put forth along with specific problems as follows :

i. While primarily status evaluation has to be with reference to the individual and the group, it has to be discussed further under the subheadings of ideology, structure, culture, and hierarchy of values. This has to be viewed not ideally but in terms of existential reality or at functional levels.

ii. Since perspectives about the nature and explanation of human societies are changing, what definitions, terms, and concepts will suit problems about Indian social system best? For example, is it valid to think of *the* system, or are subsystems a more valid concept?

iii. What choice of social categorization may we use, behavioural, cultural or structuralist? Is it possible to combine structural models with conflict-tension models ? Analytical strategies will depend upon the problem at hand because variations in socio-cultural structures will differ, say in the rural areas from urban settings, along with the direction and rates of change.

iv. In applying theories of caste identity and ranking, is it to be done in terms of interactional theory or attributional theory? How do we define and locate a dominant caste, by numbers, politico-economic factors, or ritual specialization? What is the difference between status and dominance?

v. In speaking of ritual status, what is ritual in the context of status? And, what is status, i.e. its reference points in a system, subsystem or other units ? Does it mean that ritual observances reflect value-systems, and indicate the manifestations of status differences? Is the system to be defined in terms of its symbols or cultural context?

vi. Is caste as a term appropriate, or is *varna-jati* more applicable ? Is the concept of the ordering of social structure adequate if it is explained by caste alone ? How will the caste-concept as an ideological system be applicable to non-Hindus. If caste cannot be the framework in these terms, by emphasizing socio-economic factors can it be entirely replaced by class? i.e. can Indian social life be examined chiefly in terms of the basic structure of productivity relations? Or, do both these categories— class and caste—interpeneterate?

vii. What are *varna* and *jati*? What is the historical develop-
ment of this type of social system in India ? If there is
one, will we not have to look afresh into the ideological/
philosophic base that may have altered or modified
various norms and standards of status evaluation? Are
scriptures and other normative · texts flexible? To what
extent have the rules of heredity and monopoly in occu-
pation been observed?

viii. Is Indian society a tradition-directed society? Is tradition
the paramount driving force? If so, how can we account
for situational adaptations of society to various external
and internal factors whereby it has adjusted itself. Thus,
the problem is : Has Indian society been static or dyna-
mic? Answers will need to make an evaluation of social
mobility and social change, specially at such different
levels as the ritual, the social or the cultural.

ix. How is one to examine the problems of change? These may
be reflected in, levels of mobility and the extent of mobility.
But in social mobility—its spread both horizontally and
vertically—time is an important factor that will tell us
about both change and mobility, viz., when ascriptive
status changes because of interaction. Are changes in India
derived as a result of consensus, tradition, or secular ideas?
What type of changes do we have in mind when we discuss
social status? Is it of the system, or within the system?
The contextual aspect obviously needs to be kept in view.

x. The patterns of absorption and interaction in Indian
society need to be examined, both when groups from out-
side geographical areas came in and were absorbed and
when there was absorption within India—such as of the
tribal groups into 'Hinduism.' In this process of absorp-
tion, what is the role of ritual pollution and purity?

xi. Historically what are the patterns of interaction which
help us to see changes in social status? How do inter-
actions at the political level reflect social status? For
example, when those who have had political power (say,
the Muslims or Christians) at one time were not in poli-
tical power any more, how did their status change under
the new authority?

xii. Does not the problem of discussing social status among
Muslims, Christians or other minority groups also have
to be examined in its regional setting, as it is in the case
of the Hindus? How have these communities been
influenced by the broad—regional and local—socio-
cultural and economic environment?

xiii. What is to be the framework of regional and local sub-
units ; geographical or other territorial units? How are
these units to be defined; linguistically, historically, or
ecologically (Aryan *vs.* non-Aryan or Dravidian ; north
vs. south, tribal *vs.* non-tribal), or any other relevant
categories?

xiv. How have religion and socio-religious movements been
responsible as generative processes for both . economic
and socio-cultural structures? What has been—and is—
the role of political parties, factions, power groups (in
religious terms, traditional social groups or modern
groups) in changing group—*jati*—and other class forma-
tion identities?

xv. What social relationships may we seek between economic
groups or classes, both at the rural and urban levels?
When does economics become a category in historical
times? How have modern economic choices influenced
traditional social structure at various levels, that range
from *jati,* kinship, family, and have influenced mobiliza-
tion of the rural and urban networks? How have these
factors today disrupted traditional patterns (for example,
economic interdependence in terms of division of labour
of the *jajmani* system, marriage, inheritance, etc.) in order
to create a new ideology of class consciousness?

xvi. Even in terms of the value system, has no importance
ever been given to secular values in India, against those
of the sacred or ritual? Has *dharma* been really so
important, or has the *artha* aspect been an equally impor-
tant value? Or, is the opposition between sacred *vs.*
secular, spiritual *vs.* temporal, unreal in the Indian value
system? If we examine classical texts, literature, or other
philosophical traditions, is this dichotomy not more a
framework of Western or Semetic ideas than that of

India, especially as far as traditional—pre-industrial—
societies are concerned?

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3. Determinants of Status : Definitions and Problems

BAIDYANATH SARASWATI

Meaning and Scope

"Status" means the position held by or belonging to a person, a group, a social segment, or a community in relation to others. The sociological connotation of "status" includes *a.* structure of social position, i.e., arrangement of persons or communities into grades of dignity, and *b.* social and cultural processes involved in the legitimization and perpetuation of this arrangement. In common parlance, status is used in varieties of contexts—social status, moral status, ritual status, secular status, economic status, political status, or temporal status. Related to this concept, although indirectly, are notions of authority, power, privileges, dominance, and also stigma which refers to discrediting attributes involving loss of status.

In order to describe the structural preconditions of status or even to clarify its conceptual frame, it is necessary to raise at the beginning some basic questions pertaining to the patterns and processes involved in the structuring of social positions.

Structural Components and Measurement

By whom is social position determined? By the group of sacerdotalists or by the temporal authority?

What are the individual/category/group dimensions of ascribed and achieved status? How is imbalance or absence of it between the achieved status of an individual and the ascribed status of his group reconciled?

How is social consciousness of status generated? Is it through genetic and socio-economic institutional arrangements

(e.g., heredity, endogamy, and occupation) or through ideological symbols (purity/pollution), values (rebirth/*karma*), world-views and scriptures?

How is the status of an individual or group identified? Does it carry any overt symbols? Can status be measured? If so, how? Is it on the basis of the principle of purity/pollution opposition alone? What about the middle range castes whose position in the hierarchy shows great variability? Why are a majority of castes engaged in agricultural labour labelled as Shudra or even untouchable? What about the coexistence in the *jajmani* system of religious functions with functions in which the religious aspect is either absent or minimal? Are *all* Brahmans accorded respect to the same degree in all situations? What is the basis of the respect for the Brahman? Is it purity? If yes, why is their purity so important? Some other castes also are perhaps no less scrupulous in their observance of rules of purity, but why does precedence continue to be given to the Brahman?

What is the reality of the normative model embodied in the scriptures? How does time influence social structures? Does it yield to the imperative of history? How? To what extent? And in what direction?

What is the reality of the normative model embodied in the scriptures? Whether out-groups are also included in the social identification of status? If so, how is it translated into action or social behaviour? In what respect is the social identification of out-groups different from that of the in-group? How do regional variations in the status of a group distributed in contiguous but culturally different regions get settled?

Is the status of a group marked differently in different contexts such as ritual, political power, economy, education and skill and excellence? If so, how is the difference resolved to a consensus?

Ideological roots, Determinants and Dimensions

In terms of historical experience and contemporary social reality, how does ritual status relate to the relationships of production and control over decision-making mechanisms? Are there multiple determinants of social status?

Which has a higher position, *artha* (wealth and power) or

dharma (moral. spiritual and intellectual)? Or is it the interplay of the two? If it is the latter, how do varying proportions and combinations of the two determine the status variously? How does contemporary society (both urban and rural) look at the *dharma* determinant of status? To what extent is the primacy of secular considerations acting as determinants of status acceptable to contemporary Indian society? What social purpose does this new ideology serve?

What is stigma? How does one lose status? Is it low economy or the notion of impurity that lowers status? Is a person or a group by taking up an 'impure' occupation in a crisis or at will condemned to the same status as that of the caste which follows it traditionally? If not, how does society rationalize such inner contradictions in its laws? What are the criteria employed for classifying occupations into 'pure' and 'impure'? How does technological change in an occupation (as in leatherwork, weaving, and pottery) bring about a status change in those traditionally associated with it as an impure occupation? What are its considerations? Are those who hold on to their traditional occupation, however low and impure, appreciated for their fidelity to tradition? If not, why do they continue to do so?

Fixity and Fluidity of Status

Whether the structuring of social position in Indian society is rigidly fixed or fluid? What historical circumstances gave rise to social acceptability of ascriptive birth-status? What are its philosophical and ideological foundations? Has it been unquestioningly accepted? If not how, when, by whom, and with what effect was it questioned?

How has social mobility been actualized? Has it been through the methods of peaceful absorption or by resorting to violent and non-violent modes of dissent and protest? How far have the processes of modernization been able to bring about a change in the criteria of social ranking? Does a modernized group seek traditional sanction (such as declaring a Shudra, a Kshatriya) for raising status? In contemporary Hindu society, are there instances of lower castes raising themselves to the status of a Brahman (taking on the nomenclature of a Brahman). What has been the frequency and direction of occupational

mobility in different periods of history? Does occupational mobility necessarily lead to status mobility? What is the time scale for stabilizing the achieved status?

Variations in Time and Space

Can we identify static and dynamic aspects of the criteria of status in Indian society? What have Indology, history, and sociology to say on the matter? What modes do we get? How are they and their transformations explained? Are there regional variations in history and in contemporary reality? How are they explained?

4. Discussions

1. The framework—Preliminary Discussions

Victor S D'Souza

In formulating any framework definitions need rigorous treatment. For instance, the term status is very often interchangeably used with the term position, so that no distinction is made between status, position and role. Partly no clear-cut distinction is possible because the concepts denoted by these terms are interrelated. If one were to describe a static situation, the failure to distinguish between these terms would not be of much consequence. But in dealing with a changing situation and seeking explanations for it rather than describing it, terms assume importance. For example, while the status of a person may change his position may remain the same, or vice-versa ; similarly role changes may not involve a change in status. Therefore, paying serious attention to definitions and concepts is fundamental for the framework.

In social science literature the importance given to ritual status and its concept seems to be out of proportion to its significance. But by moving beyond descriptive studies, not only do we need to distinguish between social status, ritual status, economic status and so on, but also to indicate the causal interrelationship of these variables. Thus, if social status is taken to be a major variable it becomes necessary to know those variables which are its determinants or its cause, and also those that are as a consequence of it. If then variables are arranged in this framework, ritual status becomes little more than a mode of expression of status differences, i.e., it is dependent upon social status and is not its determinant.

Social status differerences also tend to express themselves
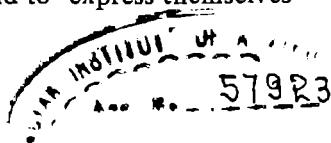
differently in various cultural idioms, as happens in India. That is why the so-called ritual status, based on typically Hindu religious notions of purity and pollution, is applicable mainly to one community. On the other hand, if determinants of social status (social stratification and status dimensions) are related to such attributes as wealth, occupation, political power and so on, these criteria may become applicable to all sections of India's population.

Another conceptualization which causes confusion is the fundamental distinction that is often made between caste status and individual status. Whereas individual status is conceived as a determinant of the attributes of the individual, caste status is 'metaphysically' construed as a quality of the group *per se*. But this is a popular concept of caste status. Strictly speaking, caste status is made up of various statuses of individual members. Therefore, it is only when members of a group are homogeneous with regard to their statuses that the group as a whole acquires a status connotation. But when they are heterogenous the group ceases to have the status dimension. This idea is also important for the measurement of change in the caste system.

Finally, while making a distinction between achieved and ascribed status it is generally assumed that the caste system depends upon ascribed status whereas in a class (in the Weberian sense) system status is an achieved one. But in both the systems in fact an individual initially starts with ascribed status. For instance, in a class society a person's wife and children are accorded status as is appropriate to the husband. But when the son starts his own economic career he has the freedom to achieve a status independent of his father's albeit the degree of such freedom has often been exaggerated. Admittedly in a caste society individual freedom to carve out an occupational career different to the one ascribed is very much restricted. But in a caste group gains and losses made by a person are to some extent shared by other members of the group. This is what maintains the homogeneity of the group and gives one the illusion that the status of the individual is ascribed. But over a period of time the group as a whole may move up in caste hierarchy. When conditions so change that each member is free to enjoy the fruit of his labour, the caste system as a principle of social stratification begins to alter.

Generally, then, the freedom of the individual depends not only upon the attitude of his own group but also on that of the larger community. In short, the concept of achieved and ascribed status holds good in the case of both caste and class systems, but with a difference which is one of degree and not of kind.

Veena Das

The search for a paradgim should be our primary concern before we concentrate on problems of social stratification and so on. Marxian models are relevant to a class society in a capitalist industrial context. They are not always applicable to the Indian situation because throughout most of our history society has been of peasant-feudal nature. In such a situation we have to understand basic contradictions, conditions of social formation and relations and forces of production. Marx has traced dialectics in a capitalist society and not in peasant or feudal societies where intra-systematic contradictions and how changes are brought about require intensive studies.

S P Nagendra

The problem should be discussed primarily in a civilizational context, and our search should be for seeking ideal types. Since Indian civilization is a synthesis of Hindu, Muslim and Christians (Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs being considered as variables of the Hindus) its composite nature should be noted. Both in Hindu and Muslim society their typical traditions are often transcended. For instance, while some caste ideas have penetrated Muslim society (which is basically non-hierarchical) so have non-Hindu and Islamic ideas entered Hindu groups.

With reference to Hindu groups the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular does not hold good because the secular is legitimized by atemporal dimensions or sacerdotal rituals. Of course, economics, power, and authority are important criteria for status. But the rigidity, or openness, of Hindu society in the context of authority and power may be seen only over a period of time, i.e., the Brahman's authority today is not what it was ascribed to it yesterday because power and authority have different connotations today.

K N Sharma

The validity of the framework will lie in its cross-cultural nature, because it has to be applicable to the diverse communities of India especially the scheduled castes who today have more status anxieties and consciousness than any other group. Despite raising their economic status (and in respect of *jati* also), they have not risen above *varna* status. Apparently then while socio-economic relations and interactions often change, *varna* status remains the same. It may be noted that the Brahman acts in a certain manner because it is his *dharma*. So do the other social groups. If this is so then three important variables ought to be taken into account—*dharma*, interaction and hierarchy—in constructing a framework.

B K Roy Burman

The starting point of any framework can only be evaluated in terms of present society and the macro-level. From this perspective we may move on to the past and the micro-level respectively. This is operationally a more feasible proposition than any other.

K S Mathur

Research analysis should start with the contemporary period, and then go back into time. There are two reasons for this. First, it is in conformity with the principle that we should move from the known and to the unknown and this is both convenient as well as authentic to a high degree. Second, recent developments in India are certainly more different than developments have been at any other time, e.g., the trend towards secularization of a uniform kind and of planned and other developments because of industrialization and urbanization. Consequently, the study of the present—and the immediate past— assumes considerable importance in understanding structure and change.

Dhirendra Narain

Basically the reference point for status determination may be got by evaluating the social position of Brahmans in different eras. It is in this context that the status of untouchables and other groups may also be determined.

Leela Dube

The reference point should be the differential status of Brahmans in various regions. Interactional behavioural patterns are determinants of ritual and economic status and are historically linked. Even among Muslims and Christians there is some consciousness of purity-pollution, if not in terms of organic food, at least in terms of blood-purity. Again, status evaluation may also be seen at the level of kinship organization for this is what is a unit of mobility at least among the Christians of Kerala.

P H Prabhu

Many of our confusions arise because terms are loosely ·defined, as when caste, *jati*, *dharma* and *varna* are interchangeably used. The descriptive-narrative method should be underplayed, and we may try to define *jati-varna* in terms of their hard and soft points. But most important concepts arising out of Indian society should be formulated.

Suvira Jaiswal

Examining basic contradictions is a must for our investigations. Social stratification implies a study of contradictions even though these may be clothed in the garb of ritual, which is a variable that indeed complicates the Indian situation. Until recently, since the superstructure has continued to effect the base, various approximations of ritual and economic status need to be considered. The terms *jati-varna* should be retained—discarding caste—at the micro-level before extensive model building is planned. But all these range of studies have to take into account such various factors as dominance and non-dominance, and in historic terms the growth of caste and class.

Ghanshyam Shah

Since the relation of production is to be our broad framework we may note that not only ritual and economic statuses are interlinked but political aspects are equally important. Status may also be seen in the context of the nature of transactions, which are the cause of status changes, i.e., if they stay the same status levels remain the same and vice-versa.

P V Ranade

The mention in Malik's review note of wealth—economic power—is important because it has always been a crucial component in evaluating social status, and hence political power. This is why the system ought to be seen from the viewpoint of the underprivileged groups. Stratification in Indian society has always been based on values of inequality, not only socially but also in the distribution of resources and surpluses. This is why ritual status on its own appears today a dead social force or as an ideological hangover of a defeated conquering class. Ideas of ritual status owe their origin to ideological hangovers of primitive tribal life, as contained in the concept of pollution. Invariably ritual status represents an ideological manifestation of the wishful pretentions of aspiring dominant social groups. Ritual status, therefore, could not have had a decisive role in the articulation of actual status of dominant groups, though it might have affected processes of social mobility at peripheral levels.

As a historical category ritual status is related to the super-structure which reveals as well as conceals the economic basis. But the values determining social status have historically varied from phase to phase. Consequently, a study in depth of the sequence of socio-economic formations, and historical processes underlying them is likely to reveal the nature of determinants. in each phase of social development. Researches carried out by D D Kosambi, R S Sharma and Romila Thapar have established a good sequence of socio-economic formations in early India. For instance, while early Vedic literature reflects a background of pastoralism that later gradually gave way to agricultural settlements, early Buddhist literature suggests a more settled agrarian economy and an emergent commercial urban economy. The Mauryan period saw the development of an imperial system based on an agrarian economy, and in the subsequent five centuries we see a series of small kingdoms accompanied by a tremendous expansion in both internal and foreign trade. The Gupta period marked the beginning of a major change in the agrarian system with the assignment of land grants and revenue grants to both religious and secular

assignees. This resulted in a new politico-economic structure in many parts of the subcontinent.

These remarks are illustrative of the changing pattern of economic relationships, that precludes any attempt at uniform generalizations about Indian society. These changes in socio-economic patterns also imply alterations in status, power and prestige, of dominant social groups. Ritual status therefore depended upon actual status at the functional level at each stage, and on the action and interaction of various factors. The two levels of status—ritual status and actual status—if these are not clear, frequently confuse the picture of social differen-tiation even if the distinction between the two is not always clearly demarcated.

Sudhir Chandra

If the idea is to understand social change in historical times then these processes may be seen only by examining what we know of the past, and not from our knowledge of the present. For example, in the nineteenth century the factors responsible for stratification were economy, power and ideology. But ritual and economic status went hand in hand. Therefore, during different periods the question is one of emphasis, that depen-ded on the issues at stake, i.e., shifting patterns of social dynamics—of intra and intercaste dynamics—is important from the viewpoint of both economic and ritual differentiation.

M G S Narayanan

While the formulation of concepts is undoubtedly important, we should start primarily by viewing the data. This is how we may be able to discuss matters related to effective functional groups, like the Brahmans, the Lingayats, etc. in South India whose decline and rise may be examined.

We may note that this emphasis on ritual status derives from Indological studies, and the emphasis on economic status from Marxian models. If we examine the indicators of status it may seem that prescriptive status groups are also functional categories, i.e., these are occupational groups. Therefore, there is neither a dichotomy here nor should it exist between historical data and the present.

Vidya Niwas Misra

Economic factors have always been important, along with ritual status in India, and we know that economic and political power was closely correlated with the Brahman's power, whose status was high not merely because he was religious. Again, while the *jati-varna* framework does determine status, *jati* cannot be a criterion because by itself it becomes an ambiguous category. As is well known social groups rank themselves within the *varna* model.

Developments during the last two to three hundred years in India are of great significance, because economic and political factors have dominated religious ones. Hence, changes in social organization have been crucial. Of course, attempts at removing inequalities have been of special significance even earlier on in Indian civilization. We do know this from the influence of various egalitarian movements during the medieval period.

A R Khan

Taking examples from the medieval period, especially in the context of Indian Muslim polity, we note that neither political power and economic position nor ritual status were necessarily exclusive of each other. It was generally a combination which gave status to individuals or groups. But, of course, the *zamindars* constituted an important element in medieval Indian polity, i.e., they wielded political power in their respective territories as well as enjoyed an advantageous economic position. But the *Ulema* (the Muslim clerical classes) by virtue of their learning—with no economic power—often enjoyed a status higher than that of the *zamindars*.

2. Concept and Approaches

M S A Rao

The broader concept which may encompass many problems of the themes is better subsumed under social stratification, instead of social status.

B K Roy Burman

Stratification or status need not necessarily imply a system of hierarchy. Stratification differences may exist without a stable structure of ranking, such as in private societies, or tribal societies (like the Konyaks, Nagas, and Anal tribes of Manipur) which often have social differentiation but no stratification.

Victor S D'Souza

The reason why social stratification may not be applicable to some tribal communities is true in terms of three different ideas that are implicit in the concept of social stratification ; namely, *a.* social differentitaion, *b.* social hierarchy based on differentiation, and *c.* the perpetuation of differentiation and hierarchy. Because most scholars consider only the first two ideas in discussing social stratification, they find it difficult to subscribe to Roy Burman's stand. Confusion is caused by ignoring the third idea even though it is a very essential element. In fact, since the first two ideas are also found in the concept of social structure, there is no justification in using another term. Therefore, the principle of perpetuation of differentiation and hierarchy has to be regarded as the distinguishing element for evaluating social stratification. It is only in this sense that some tribal societies may be regarded as non-stratified.

A first necessary step in discussing concepts and approaches should be to specify the major focus of our concern. It should be a discussion of the concept of social status and not any particular theory of social stratification. If this be so then the classification of a number of issues becomes imperative for undertaking empirical investigations. Theories will emerge in the process of understanding problems relating to social status, such as the invidious distinctions in status, the perpetuation of status differences and so on.

We should be quite clear about the nature of this variable, i.e., social status. For instance, social status may be considered a concept of relationships and not an objectively existing entity. This means that a person has status only in relation to others, and because status is dependent upon the attributes of the individual these have to be evaluated, thereby making status a psychological or subjective variable. And, because social status is a concept of relationships, logically it may be viewed in the form of a continuum rather than as dichotomous categories.

Social status as a relationship manifests itself in all interactional settings; be it a family, a friendship circle, or a bureaucratic organization. However, individual status in these different settings may assume different forms. This is why the social status of a person is determined by his attributes and activities whereby he relates himself to the larger society, say, by means of his education and occupation. If so, the question arises: Which one of these statuses of a person are we concerned with? In other words, what is the universe of social status? Obviously the universe in our case is Indian society as a whole—past and present.

However, the attribute and activity of a person whereby he relates himself to society is but one aspect of the determinants of social status. Social status is also a matter of evaluation. Therefore, another important determinant of it is the worldview since it is essentially based upon the value-system. Herein lies the importance of historical, cultural, and regional perspectives. Values and world-view of societies in fact vary and change along these dimensions.

Finally although as a concept of relationship social status is a structural variable, yet its determinants as well as modes of expression have cultural dimensions. Of course that what we

are referring to is the ideal type must be remembered here and also the fact that stratification is not only a Marxian concept; it arises in different contexts also.

Yogendra Singh

Is it really possible to differentiate between stratification and social structure? If this be so, the distinction between power and privilege must be first made clear. In a system of stratification, the basic distinction between power and authority has to be made clear.

Veena Das

A systsm of inequality arises because of the system of production which gives rise to exploitation and contradictions. This is due to the surplus that is generated and its distribution, which may, in fact be governed by the superstructure. But, if differences between contradiction and conflict are also borne in mind, all stratification systems are hierarchical in nature. Nevertheless, when we talk of the class society of a capitalist country, it is certainly different from the contradictions which exist in a peasant-feudal society.

Yogendra Singh

Power comes with exploitation, and this is when classes are created. But can we really speak of contradictions in a society without class ? Contradiction may be considered only as a mechanism of stratification.

Veena Das

Because the basic model of contradiction has not been worked out in peasant-feudal societies like India, there is confusion, and this, therefore, is what requires our close attention.

B K Roy Burman

Social stratification may exist in a classless society, but not in the sense we are talking about it. This is not a phenomenon of class society in industrial societies only. For example, there may exist non-antagonistic strata, i.e. prestigious and non-prestigious groups.

Victor S D'Souza

Conflict situations may be seen only when class conscious-ness is evident, while contradictions may exist without this consciousness.

Veena Das

While it is true that concepts of contradiction and conflict are applicable to different areas, stratification need not belong to a class society alone.

Suvira Jaiswal

It seems very evident that stratification implies contradic-tion, hierarchy, and conflict in a society. Therefore, presum-ably , ritual status is associated with economic and political power. Concepts and models are heuristic devices that may be modified at any time and are not rigid ideas. For example, when we apply the concept of feudal societies to India even though it did not originate here, it does help us to understand however imperfectly, something of Indian history.

M S A Rao

Status may be examined fruitfully perhaps with reference to, *a.* conflict, *b.* inequality, *c.* class conflict, and *d.* contradiction. The confusion about status differences may be cleared if we think of such processes as role formation in terms of structure and role, and determinants.

T K Oommen

Operational concepts for status should be evolved. There are two kinds of concepts which we may employ: *a.* categorical, and *b.* dimensional ones. If dichotomous categories are employ-ed these simply help us to classify, not to measure. Therefore, in order to seek various dimensions of status, we should seek out various parameters. For this purpose clear indicators are required whereby we may be able to encapsulate the problem through objective and operational concepts.

P V Ranade

The functional model should be discarded, and social dicho-tomies considered as important, rather than social function-alism.

Sudhir Chandra

From the viewpoint of Indian history, of significance is Indian social reality which comprises a variety of social units. Whatever concept we have it is clear that there are two sets of statuses that are interlinked, i.e., ritual and economic status. Their analysis requires a multifactor approach. While we may talk about pre-industrial and industrial societies and keep in mind the realities of time, we may note that both these may exist simultaneously. The dynamic interaction of social and economic status then is what we have to understand.

A A Suroor

The evidence of literature is very important. It is worth remembering this distinction between normative or prescriptive literature which speaks about the ideal society, and plays, dramas and other literature of an existential level which take us away from the ideal.

The fact is that religious sects also have brought about equality. E.g., the Sufis, mystics, Bhakti movements, etc. It is good, therefore, to remember that non-economic forces have been important and need to be taken into account, as we learn from literature.

J C Jain

Buddhist and Jain conceptions have not been emphasized. For example, *jati-varna* categories arise in these ideologies due to *karma* or action, and not by birth only. This is why there was conflict between these heretical sects and the Brahmans.

3. Contribution of Indology and History

Vidya Niwas Misra

The dichotomy between secular and non-secular values has been overplayed in Indological studies. While one extreme view of ancient Indian society is that it was obsessed with the idea of other-worldliness, the other overplays the role of *Lokayats* and other materialist thinkers. But, in fact, at no point of time was the interdependence of *dharma, artha* and *kama* lost sight of in ancient India. Again, in early Vedic society the three main facets of the value system corresponded to three *ashramas*, three *varnas* and three obligations (*Rna*). Thus, if *dharma*, served as a safety value against the excesses of *artha* and *kama, artha* and *kama* were also the driving force behind *dharma*. The institution of sacrifice is not simply an act of communion between the whole group comprising the priest, the *yajamana* and the supporter-producer, it represents the interaction of all the three. At a later stage a second group of aryans (*vrata*) were aggressively anti-ritual. They laid emphasis on internalization rather on externalization of religious activity. Along with this came the idea of yoga and the interaction between yoga and *yajna*, that resulted in the rise of a transcendental value—*moksha*. This is what gave meaning to the otherwise futile activities of *dharma, artha,* and *kama*.

At a much later stage the Shudra *varna* comes into existence, especially with settled life associated with trade and urban centres. The common people are split in two *varnas* and simultaneously the fourth *ashrama, sanyasa,* and the fourth obligation for the Universal Being are incorporated into the system. As such if there was any conflict or tension it was between asceticism and non-asceticism—a conflict which was

resolved through the transformation of the ascetic ideal into the ideal of a depersonated man living for the sake of all-life.

Thus, the role of conflict between different classes or castes was less important than that between different ideologies. For example, it was not so much a clash between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas, as between the conservatist and the more 'progressive' Brahmans who may be seen on both sides. The Buddha and Mahavira did not reject *varna*, they gave additional criteria for determining status and these were ethical as well as social. (The Buddha introduced social service through making the mendicants as mobile units of medical care).

Anyway, still later, *moksha* gave way to another higher ideal ; that of the liberation for all, i.e., a self-chosen bondage in the cause of liberating other persons in bondage. This gave a new social dimension to the *summum bonum*. It is paralleled in Buddhism by the importance of the *Bodhisattva* over the *Arhat*. Of course, it is during the period of *Bhakti* (which could be translated as repersonalization of the depersonated ascetic) movements during the early centuries of Christ that Indian society achieved its greatest amount of 'openness'. (It is during this period that there was maximum freedom of intermarriage, and there was the maximum interplay of the scholastic and the folk traditions). It could absorb Graeco-Scythians, *Kushanas*, *Kiratas* (Indo-Tibetans), *Pulindas* and *Shabara* in its fold and give them proper rank and status. Mass movements of socio-religious reform carried through mass media sought systematized stability through Sanskrit while the Brahminic conservatism sought popular media of communication in the *Puranas*.

Another factor which became a determinant of social status in this period was India's growing contact with other countries through trade, for intellectual and religious purposes, and so on. This mobility gave rise to rapid changes in status. It resulted in the fact that illustrious warrior tribes of the earlier ages either took to farming or to hunting. The protestants of the earlier period were forced to step down the status ladder, and because of their inability to accept the new hierarchy of values they were relegated to the position of the Shudras (*Sansthagarikas* becoming Sainthwar, *Bharatas* becoming Bharas).

In addition, while *varna*, wealth and political power, all together determine social status, intellectual achievement and/or living for the good of others by itself has also been a determinant. It is true that financial support to intellectual or monastic organizations was required, and this is where through patronage they obtained status in proportion to the quantum of support. Nevertheless, their status was always subservient to the status of the preacher or the mendicant, at least between the second to the eighth centuries after Christ.

The situation during the ninth to thirteenth centuries is rather confusing. Flexibility gives way to rigid compartmentalization of *jatis* and of religious groups. Pan-Indian patterns are now replaced by regional patterns giving rise to social, political, and religious fragmentation in which political power gained importance. But out of this confusion was born, however, a new urge. This was to voice the aspirations of the down-trodden in society, i.e., it was the beginning of the medieval *Bhakti* movements. Thus, in order to invoke the universal spirit for the emancipation of the individual, the vertical hierarchy of status is cut across by a horizontal hierarchy determined by Man's capacity to share the misery of others. As such the role of *Arhats* or saints assumes importance, for they became a cohesive force in reuniting India. The rigidity and regional diversification of *jatis* were to some extent also overcome by pan-India *Bhakti* movements. Here the role of the sects and the *mathas* in determining community status assumes new importance, as they cut across the caste status structure.

To conclude, if Indology is studied with an open mind in its totality (taking into its compass Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, old Tamil literature, as well as medieval vernacular literature and folk literature) it will shed new light on the changing patterns of social status and social change. There is no denying the fact that different world-views coexisted along with the Brahminical world-view, and that this was transcended by the new ideology of *Bhakti*. Furthermore, economic and political factors were no less relevant. However, a new dimension of value-criteria in determining social status was added. This was more than an ethical other-worldly ideology. It is unique in the Indian context and as such any model proposed for analyzing various

factors leading to change in socia l status patterns should take into consideration these unique factors.

K S Mathur

Several points which emerge from the presentation of Vidya Niwas Misra may be pointed here.

1. If in Indology determining chronological sequence is important, determining place sequence is of equal importance with time sequence. In ancient India, as in later times, the country was divided into small regions. For example, each of the *Janapadas* had developed its own style of society, culture, economy, values, and political system. Thus, when Indologists speak of certain developments in the central theme of Indian tradition (which later developed into the Hindu tradition), an anthropologist would like to know which part of the country and which community this was true of, and not only which time. These autonomous units must have reacted differently to certain common systems, and evolved their own diverse patterns.

2. If there is a lack of appropriate terminology in Sanskrit or Indian languages for the analytical study of a social system and tradition, a fruitful way may be to use indigenous terminology in Sanskrit or other regional languages. The effort to fit facts in straitjackets of Western models and terms might well prove to be an exercise in futility.

3. Misra speaks of the social system in ancient times as developing from a three-fold organization and going on to a four-fold organization in the later Vedic period, i.e., the emergence of the fourth *varna*, the fourth *Rna*, the fourth *ashrama* and the fourth *purushartha*. He has, however, given only a single reason for such a development, namely, the migration of different peoples later called Aryans in historical literature. This might have been the principal reason, but other social factors for the emergence of the fourth sector requires elucidation.

4. The plurality of world-views is very important not only to know the overview but also the regional situations. Even though rituals might well have been the central point, the role of such factors as wealth, land, political power, and such other non-ritual phenomena are important for an under-

standing of the total picture which probably was never homo-
geneous.

P V Ranade

The model suggested by Misra may have nothing to do
with the Hindus. In fact, it was William Jones's—Orientalists—
model which was given and transplanted as our view. An
Indian model may be more appropriately looked for in the
Mahabharata, the *Smritis*, etc. Similarly, the Indian world-view
has never been one of peace or harmony. The word 'Brahman'
is typically Indian, and is not to be found in the ancient
Avestan literature. However, while our material has to be
Indian we must see that it is in conformity with modern socio-
logy and accepted principles of world histriography.

Veena Das

While models of social sciences will help in formulating
some questions, documentary sources have to come from histori-
ans. Texts should be regarded as cognitive models, viz., the
jatipurana and *vamsavalis* may be used fruitfully for this purpose.

Suvira Jaiswal

Saraswati's definition of status as the position of a person or
of a group in relation to others, means that status is an evalua-
tion in relation to the other segments of society. But this is a
relative definition that suits the concept of *varna* more than that
of *jati*, the latter being far from clear. Evidently *varna* was the
measuring rod for determining the status of a person or a group.
But the question arises : Did *varna* measure status in terms of
social and ritual ranking only, or did it imply economic predo-
minance or subjugation and such other factors ? After all, *varna*
may also correspond to class since it was a process of social
ordering which used ritual sanction to maitain status quo in
favour of a definite class, i.e., the Brahman-Kshatriya combine.
This was not only economically predominant but it prescribed,
interpreted, and enforced rights and duties for various segments
of society.

If this broad view is taken, it means that the *varna* ideal was
static, although adjustments were made in practice and are
known historically. This again raises a question : Was *varna*

merely a theoretical model ? There was an attempt by lawgivers
to systematize existing social reality which may be described as
a federation of *jatis*. But if this is so, how real was *varna* iden-
tity ? and how was the system operated ? Or, functionally when
was it that *jati* identification became crucial ? Thus, a study
of the interconnection of *varna* and *jati* is very important.

There are some scholars who think that *jati* is of pre-Aryan
origin and would like to connect it with the Harappans. They
feel that the *varna* system was a superimposition of a social
structure which was a federation of *jatis*, and even look upon
it as a socially artificial device. But there are others who feel
that the *varna* structure developed out of the social realities of
later Vedic times when Vedic tribal society was transforming
itself into a peasant one.

The evolution of *jati* subdivisions was thus primarily the
result of two processes : *a*. the absorptian of isolated tribes
into a more advanced society structured along *varna* lines, and
b. the rise of a closed economy in medieval times that restruc-
tured mobility both horizontally as well as vertically. It led to
the fission of the large groups into a number of subgroups that
ultimately acquired all the characteristics of separate *jatis*.

The question of mobility in ancient India and of social
structure has hardly been settled. We have yet to examine
causal factors for mobility as well as for the quantum of mobi-
lity. Some of these were : *a*. hypergamy, *b*. breaking away of
a segment from the wider kin-group by obtaining property and
influential posts and avoiding social contact with the parent
group, *c*. sanskritization or the imitation of habits of socially
superior classes ; (this was probably a slow process and quite
often religious movements were made use of to obtain a new
identity and higher social status), and, *d*. status achievement
through performance of penance and observance of ascetic
practices such as offering one's flesh to a deity. (This method
would not normally mean admittance to a higher *varna* but it
was certainly used to enhance the status of a family or clan).

Perhaps, similarly, one could list factors leading to down-
ward mobility, and the *Dharmashastras* do contain material on
the issue, of the laws of caste or status. However, we may also
note that group mobility generally meant mobility to the next
step only in caste hierarchy.

In early medieval times there is evidence that socio-economic factors caused important modification in social ranking. We find that people belonging to lower groups also enjoyed prestige and power, say, by using such titles as of *rank* and *thakur*. The texts of the period lay down privileges and duties of not only the four *varnas* but also of those who constituted a feudal hierarchy that was not confined to the two upper *varnas*. Economic determinants thus did cut across ritual determinants.

On the question of the use of models by historians it needs to be pointed out that it is a fallacy to think that history can be written without models. Even *Rajtarangini* and *Ain-i-Akbari* have a model, and one may repeat what has been stated by E H Carr that facts do not speak for themselves. For example, when stating that ancient texts present a variety of world-views, this will depend upon the historian's understanding of the situation—whether he regards one particular world-view as approximating to the real situation or the other.

Leela Dube

Ritual status has to be understood essentially in relation to behaviour, which has mainly to be understood in the context of orthodoxy. Despite historians not giving up-to-date data with regard to problems, sociologists have to depend upon historians for data. Of course, economic and ritual status should not be separated from each other; the same unit may have both economic and ritual status. But *varna* and *jati* do not exhaust the account of Indian society.

M G S Narayanan

The Brahminical view of India's social condition is very deceptive. These prescriptive texts (with the crude caste ideology called *varnasramadharma* enshrined in them) were the products of rationalization and wishful thinking on the part of priestly classes. Though they performed a vital role in helping the priest to control life and thought of the people, they do not contain historical truth. Their specific object was to create the illusion of harmony and changelessness. If we look at the past through their glasses we shall miss all traces of tension, conflict, and change. Consequently, we have to plan ahead by rejecting the nineteenth century idealistic view about the 'other worldli-

ness' of Indian society, and try to understand the past through contemporary records, and secular literature. There is an abudance of this kind of data in thousands of inscriptions and copper-plates as well as in Prakrit and Tamil literature.

Victor S D'Souza

It is erroneous to think of only one world-view prevailing during a particular period of history, say the Brahminical world-view to the exclusion of all others. But it cannot also be denied that one view may have been the dominant one, and was emphasized. The reason for such a state of affairs are twofold. One is the fragmentary character of historical evidence because of which a systematic presentation of a historical picture is difficult, if not impossible. That being the case, there are greater chances of survival of the dominant world-view for a particular historical period. But the second reason is even more important; this is the assumption that for social evaluation it is the world-view of dominant sections that has considerable importance.

This may be elucidated by making a distinction between society and culture, as is done by MG Smith (which has become popular in some recent writings of social anthropologists and sociologists). Culture may be defined as a system of shared symbolic meanings, values and ideas of a category of people, while society refers mainly to a political unit such as a national community in which individuals and groups are linked together by political ties. Thus societal unity implies some kind of a politcal force. The distinction between culture and society makes it clear that different cultural groupings can form parts of the same society or the parts of the same cultural grouping may be distributed in different societies, and that social status is a societal dimension and values and world-views are cultural dimensions.

Indian society has always been a multi-ethnic unity, and it has been brought together by the domination of the world-view of the most powerful category of people. For a long time it was the Brahminical world-view, and then the Buddhist one which overpowered the former for a period. But time and again the Brahminical world-view reasserts itself. The famous dictum of Karl Marx that the history of the world is nothing else but the history of class struggle, prompts me to make another blanket

statement that the history of Indian civilization is nothing else but the history of the triumph of Brahminical culture. It is, therefore, worth our while to unravel the reasons for the dominance of the Brahminical world-view, for this would add to our understanding of the determinants of social status in Indian civilization.

J C Jain

Prakrit Jain narrative literature is full of realistic portrayals of life and needs to be fully explored, in order to have an authentic picture of Indian life. It is true that there existed conflicts with Brahminical values both on ideological and political levels. But Buddhist and Jain literature also depicts the life of the common man, and there are several stories about merchants, centres of trade, traders' association, etc. This is where Jain and Buddhist concepts of status should be taken note of, e.g. Jains gave importance to secularism, opposing the hierarchy of *jati* or *varna*. As Jains wanted to spread their ideas everywhere, they could not afford to restrict it to a certain class. (In early Jain literature we come across a number of instances where a Shudra is respected and considered more virtuous than a person who is simply born a Brahman).

This is why the stress is on *karma* or action rather than on *jati* or birth—"by one's own action can one be called a Brahman, a Kshatriya, a Vaishya or a Shudra." As a result Jainism could attract a number of workers and artisans, including potters, gardeners, smiths, fishermen and even prostitutes. This tradition of the equality of human beings continued into the middle ages, as is well known from the religion of devotion (*Bhakti*) and oneness of God. However, at a later petiod Jains were influenced by Brahminism and their community was divided once again into *varnas*.

It is in this context that Prakrit Jain narrative literature, which is so full of realism, needs to be fully explored. In order to have a complete picture of Indian life a critical study is needed. For instance, in order to preach their sermons Jain monks had to undertake *janapadavihara* which makes it essential for them to be well acquainted with local customs and regional dialects. In order to make their sermons absorbing, they employed popular sayings, parables, illustrations, similies,

examples, and anecdotes. They searched for popular tales and legends and incorporated them in their compositions. The adaptation of *Brihatkatha* of *Gunadhya* by Jain writers with alterations here and there, is one such example. Here we come across adventure stories of trading merchants who at a great risk to life travelled to far-off countries in order to attain worldly prosperity ; *sarthavaha* led the party of the merchants. Without having *artha* one cannot give away in charity and consequently our desires are not fulfilled. Therefore the attainment of wealth is considered even more important than *dharma* and *kama*. This is why we come across realistic descriptions of sea-faring merchants, trade centres, routes of trade, traders' associations, provincial dialects, characterization of people from different regions, manners and customs, transport, various types of ships and boats, workers on the ship, and other nautical material.

Uma Pande

The study of philosophy is important for understanding social status, because Indian philosophy is very different from Western. Sociologists have taken *varna* in a rigid sense. But the concept of *Viratapurusha* and the origin of four *varnas* is an allegorical concept, not a real phenomenon.

Sujata Miri

There appears to be a mental block among academicians regarding ancient philosophical ideology. May be philosophers and Indologists have consciously or unconsciously nurtured this misinterpretation by using, for instance, outdated terminology. Take for example the distinction between *Arhat* and *Bodhisattva* which is interpreted in terms of 'liberation for one' and 'liberation for all.' Instead, could it not be that these are more descriptive of the intellectual, his role and commitment to society ? The important point is : Were the reasons, which demanded the rejection of ideal of the knowledge for the sake of the religious, only economical and sociological ? Or, had the intellectuals lost sight of their true perspective—the understanding and interpreting of total reality ?

The view of the 'Brahminic scriptures' is biased due to a lack of apersonal cquaintance with ancient Indian texts. This accounts for the misunderstanding of Misra's exposition of the

ancient *varna* system. What one may ask him, however, is, how and why *moksha*, which meant self-knowledge, came to be regarded as other-wordly ? Again, does the growth of religious sects mark to some extent a decadent society or a degradation of the concept of man in Indian history?

Ravinder Kumar

Status has to be studied in the totality of the situation, and not in isolation. Models are inadequate unless historical approaches are also linked up with philosophical approaches to reality. One may recall that Marx also wrote on French history, while correlating it with his 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. Similarly, we may be able to formulate different stages of Indian history with specific emphasis. Some relevant points may be mentioned here.

If ritual status is linked with the world view of the dominant community, this may not be an accurate statement because twenty-five per cent of the Indian population (at least in recent centuries) are non-Hindus. Hence that there exists also a plurality of world views should be remembered. In fact, Indian socity is characterized by its plurality and multiplicity even at the level of ritual status. This is why if ideological views alone are taken into account innumerable difficulties face us. Consequently, the starting point of our studies should be the distribution and generation of material wealth, goods, and services. These indeed are factors of importance in the maintenance of life, that rationalize all existence and govern the social reality that creates conflict even at philosophical levels.

A problem, in the context, worth examining is the horizontal expansion of guilds and the mercantile trade of the coastal regions, who had to accommodate incoming groups.

O P Verma

During the early historical period, Brahmans were recipients of land-grants which conferred upon the grantees all rights of ownership. Even the right to govern the gifted village was transferred by the ruler along with all sources of revenue. Thus, Brahmans assumed a new status symbol in which rituals played a secondary part. The priest had now turned into a feudal lord with a number of serfs under him. Another sociolo-

gical factor which determined the status was the rise of guild-organizations. Being autonomous in character, guilds performed various functions : economic, judicial and executive besides maintaining a powerful militia.

S R Mehrotra

Historians are generally concerned with the study of political power. If at all they have studied the problem of status, they have done it very marginally. During the nineteenth century we find repeated references which say that English-knowing people held higher social status. Similarly, throughout Indian history the advocates of knowledge were socially respectable without holding economic power.

Inder Jit Singh

The Marxian view should not be confined to the study of the surplus value and to the mode of production. Instead, we should take a broader perspective of Hegelian Marxism, structural Marxism, and superstructural Marxism. Examples of micro-societies have been given, i.e., tribal societies. But these are self-sufficient, and hence cannot fit into our broader perspective of Indian civilization. A historical reference to the past is very impressive but at the same time it is redundant. It is more relevant to discuss determinants of status in the context of our constitutional preamble, i.e., secular socialist democratic society which has especial emphasis on economic elements.

A R Khan

In the sixteenth century Abul Fazl, the official historian of Akbar's reign, divided society into four groups : warriors, traders, learned men, and husbandmen. He placed warriors at the top and ranked the traders thereafter, followed by the learned men, and the husbandmen and the *zamindars* at the bottom. The *Ulemas* who were learned and pious held no economic or political position whereas the *mansabdars* enjoyed the possession of sixty per cent of the wealth. Consequently, a number of *zamindars* were attracted to the institution of *mansabdari*.

The *Umara* (nobility), i.e., the *mansabdars* enjoyed the

highest status in Mughal polity. They enjoyed political, econo-
mic as well as social status. But the *zamindars* who often enjoyed
political autonomy and economic position were not treated as
equals by the nobility except those *zamindars* who had been
absorbed into the Mughal nobility. The *zamindars* were always
identified with such characteristics as recalcitrance, spirit of
rebellion, and rustic behaviour. The chroniclers while referring
to the induction of individual *zamindars* into the Mughal
nobility/ governing class say, 'so and so was elevated from the
ranks of zamindars to the ranks of the nobility' (*as zamindar
ba umarai rasanid*). This clearly shows that the status of an
amir/noble was superior. On the other hand, the *Ulemas*, even
if they did not enjoy political power and economic status were
always respected by the nobles as well as the emperors who
often humoured them. Jahangir regarded the *Ulemas* (as he
writes in his *Memoirs*) as 'an army of prayers' (*lashkar-i-dua*)
and treated them with respect.

A A Suroor

During the medieval period of Indian history, the ruling
classes needed support which came from the *Ulemas*. There
were then the mystics who came to India earlier, while the
rulers came later. These mystics changed the attitude of the
rulers. Such instances and others of similar significance should
be noted. Besides, emphasis should given to Sanskrit and
Persian sources for a search of the determinants of social
status.

4. Contribution of Sociology, Social Anthropology and other Social Sciences

Veena Das

In investigating any problem in the social sciences a multi-plicity of paradigms are often formulated. Therefore, no single paradigm is necessarily applicable. But evolving a paradigm is a fundamental step. This is why Dumont's contribution which is based on one such paradigm is important, and we should discuss the ideas in *Homo Hierarchicus* (about which Malik's working paper has made critical remarks) sympathetically. Briefly, Dumont's work states that the sacred/profane dichotomy is not relevant to Indian society on the whole because it is governed and sustained by cosmological ideas, of the super-structure. However at the societal level the dichotomy of pure/impure becomes significant and relevant because social life is very real and primary. But this should not distract us from the basic values that govern the whole, and make us view caste ranking as a dichotomy of values. *Varna* hierarchy has to be looked at accordingly, e.g., in this structure Brahmans encom-pass all the other *varnas*. Conceptually, therefore, the contrast between priesthood and kingship becomes crucial because in order for the king to have the right moral order the Brahman also has to be given a pivotal role.

Consequently, the paradigm of Dumont in which the unique logic of operation is that of the dichotomies of pure/impure vegetarian/nonvegetarian, priesthood/kingship and so on, should be viewed within the broader framework. Even if one totally disagrees with him, the important point is to see Dumont's work as a good systemized formalization of a problem and the applicability of a paradigm. We should feel free to evolve

another paradigm perhaps more relevant today, such as the one of contradiction and surplus generation. One can also be critical of Dumont and note that his strength is also his weakness. For example, in taking up such a wide range of material, he somehow convinces himself of his own convictions. Apparently, his basic approach arises as a consequence of early Indological studies which viewed Indian civilization almost exclusively from the view of the superstructure.

Imtiaz Ahmed

Dumont's dichotomy of pure/impure or sacred/profane ignores politico-economic factors. The trichotomy of ritual/ economics/politics somehow appears to be a reflection of the Hindu trinity, and this is why caste always becomes the major focus for discussion. But this view ignores social aspects of significantly large non-Hindu communities especially those where the impact of Christianity and Islam has been dominant. For example, during the medieval period, economic and political factors became dominant; perhaps, the impact of Islam was to weaken caste-rigidity though the contrary view may also be presented. The interaction of religion and politics is therefore important, so that the pure/impure dichtomy may be seen as a reflection of politics.

Victor S D'Souza

Unfortunately too much attention is being focused upon the contribution of Louis Dumont, as if his study marks some major breakthrough in our understanding of social status in India. (It is true not all the participants have endorsed this point of view.) Where Dumont has seriously erred—and this point has not been mentioned—is the one of reiterating that social systems in the West and in India are qualitatively different, i.e., whereas the Western value system is egalitarian the Indian one is inegalitarian. But it is worth noting that the egalitarian value system of the West has not resulted in an egalitarian society, at least in terms of equality of conditions and opportunity. This is why in its essentials Dumont's contribution does not differ much from conventional thinking about social status in India, i.e., those views which regard ritual status as the deter-

minant of caste status. But this is putting the cart before the horse.

Ritual status is a mode of expression of social status that is dependent upon the latter rather than being its determinant. For this very reason Dumont has not been able to explain satisfactorily the changing patterns of social stratification. His view that one can observe changes only when a social order has completely crumbled and a new one has fully emerged provides little satisfaction especially to those who have to undertake empirical investigations.

Satisfactory explanations may be provided by those models which take into account changing patterns in social systems. This is why the Marxian model has some validity since it postulates changes in the forces of production that bring about changes in the stratification system. What however the Marxian model does not account for is that today with the growing complexity of society the stratification system is taking the form of a continuum to an accentuated degree. In such a situation the middle portion of society is bulging more and more. Of course, Marx had visualized just the opposite trend; that with the greater maturing of the forces of production there would be greater polarization in the class system.

S P Nagendra

Since ritual and sacrifice is at the centre of caste organization, Dumont does offer a consistent model which has sustained Indian society over a long period of time. At an unknown point of time in the past, a separation of power and ritual may have taken place to cause conflict among castes. But it has certainly little to do with occupational mobility which appears to be a recent phenomenon. One does come across the process of hypergamy and hypogamy or *anuloma* and *pratiloma*, and sanskritization processes as media of mobility, though the latter never took place in traditional Indian society as one now finds it. For example, a lower caste person could be coronated as a king, i.e., his status could be changed but by the Brahman only.

K S Mathur

The validity and importance of Dumont's contribution to

Indian society cannot be argued, nor the fact that no civiliza-
tion has grown without exploitation of some kind or the other.
But it should be noted that the development of the ethical
system in India was to curb these materialistic tendencies.
Fieldwork (such as mine in Central India, on the basis of
published anthropological data) indicates that society in village
India has been more or less conventional; that status situations
have not undergone drastic changes. There are a few excep-
tional situations which are the result of the abolition of land-
lords (*jagirdari*, *zamindari*, etc.). While in villages many types
of *jatis* dwell they all recognize the *varna* framework albeit the
position of artisans is somewhat puzzling because they have no
fixed status. In addition, there are two other groups, viz., *Antaj*
and *Avarna* (harijan) groups that are important. These are
groups which occupy parallel positions in the caste/*varna* system
but are outside the *jati* system.

By and large, status evaluation and allotment holds true
for groups, and not individuals. Ritual status does give the
basic frame of reference, and this situation may be cited by
examples from north India (Rajasthan and Kashmir). Today
'tangential movements'—not vertical—are being observed
among a few groups in order to improve their positions but
they are not of much significance.

Vidya Niwas Misra

Dumont's view is a lopsided one, and it does not fit in
when applied to modern Indian society. Though India had
never been *one* society, it had at least adhered to one principle—
that of unity. Therefore, the pan-Indian movement had not
been a Gangetic movement alone, but one that belongs to the
entire subcontinent.

T K Oommen

For a clear understanding the problem may be conceptually
reduced to two points: *a.* multiple axis as functional units, in
the context of the social system (and not restricted to such
dichotomies as pure/impure, etc.); and *b.* a process of status
crystallization or status completion. In both cases, the space/
time dimension is crucial as reference points. For the first we
have to identify elements—major and minor—and not list them

in a linear-vertical position. For the second we have to identify core elements and peripheral elements, because from time to time when a movement changes its position, say from A to B, it implies mobility and change. But often such a situation results in status incongruence or disequilibrium, or inadequate crystallization.

The directionality of change is important; if once it was ritual it may not be so now (as when revolts or reform movements took place). Unless these movements were to introduce new core elements, not much change could take place in a social situation. But if basic elements do change, then changes from caste to class do take place in a movement.

Whatever the case, it is important to evolve such means whereby a movement is measurable, i.e., it may begin from one axis and be legitimized at one axis only and it may never be completed. Completion takes place only when a multiplicity of variables are involved. In this context, whether we view the Indian system as a whole or as parts is to be decided by discerning the properties of the system. But which multiplicities are we to view ? World views, values, something else ? And will this give us a whole ? If so, how total is the total ? Is not the totality to be characterized by the dominant view, or is it an aggregation or summation of the parts ? For finding answers it is necessary to formalize various dimensions conceptually because in their absence it is futile to proceed further.

M S A Rao

Status incongruity may be a factor for social status and a good idea to proceed with our formulations. But two other conceptual words, status dichotomization and status manipulation, may also be considered. These have been used in the study by Gould on the 'Rickshawalas of U.P.', which is an example of status dichotomization. For status manipulation the study of Backward Classes is a useful topic.

There has been an overemphasis on the caste view of Indian civilization. But we may also retain the 'sect' perspective of civilization; for sects have cut across caste and acted as channels of mobility from a lower to a higher cadre, such as the *Veerashaiva* movement or other anti-Brahman movements. Many *Bhakti* sects have been egalitarian and have provided. new

norms and values for status formation. But a certain amount
of difficulty arises when Indian society is presented as being
stable and harmonious over a period of centuries.

Therefore, we should give sufficient importance to conflicts
and cleavages as providing levers of change. The anti-Brahman
movements, the Backward Classes movements, and those of
deprivation, had emerged out of conflict situations which did
lead to social transformations. New ethnic identities had emerg-
ed as a result of largescale politicization. With the introduc-
tion of *Pax Britannica* came a new value system and source of
legitimacy. In some cases it led to status-incongruity. For
instance, the ex-untouchables who were occupationally well off
felt deprived in regard to the way they were treated by upper
castes.

Status incongruity may not obtain today, but status-dicho-
tomization is closer to present reality because individuals do
often live in two worlds—caste and class—unconscious of any
contradiction. In the context of a multiplicity of norms and
values there is also status manipulation. For this purpose stiua-
tional analysis is important.

B K Roy Burman

The whole notion of status differentiation will change if we
look at contemporary tribal societies. Status differentiation can
then be separated from stratification. Among some tribal
societies, one's status may derive from role position and vice-
versa, and with a change in power, the secular is often shifted
to the sacred. The pure/impure dichotomy in tribal societies is
often differentiated through nuances, like the genuine and the
non-genuine or original Hinduized tribals and deviants, high
or low, etc. This situation may be seen in the Savara tribe of
Orissa. Among the Toda tribe of the Nilgiris and the Chaura
tribe of the Andaman Islands, social mobiliy dimensions of
ritual power may often slide down to helplessness. Here
sanskritization becomes a social philosophy. Just as earlier on
colonial social science frameworks served the purpose of 'colo-
nialism', today sanskritization serves the role of social mobiliza-
tion. Therefore mobility, as understood through the concept of
sanskritization, is a byproduct of colonization. If the problem is
viewed in this manner a new method of analysis will open up.

The source—or causes—of status in tribal societies is very varied; it may have to do with one's proficiency in head-hunting, lovemaking, and other such factor which gives one an honourable position in society. A chief in a tribal society as a coordinator in production activity may not generate stratification, but as an entrepreneur he often helps in generating stratification. Thus, in most of the tribal societies there are counteracting mechanisms for resolving the congruence of economic and political power, and status. Instead of hierarchy, we thus see the notions of counter-hierarchy in tribal societies.

Regarding peasant society, the modality of the entire occupation of share croppers gives an interesting insight into the problem of status. From first hand experience in West Bengal we may note that share-croppers during summer work as part of the capitalistic system, and during the rainy season as part of the feudal system. As such within a year, the entire working group shows occupational mobility.

Finally, if one looks at Indian civilization from the viewpoint of the Gangetic Valley alone, one may 'miss the bus'.

K N Sharma

To summarize, the participants have offered four different approaches to the study of status, as follows :

1. Status-stratification model;
2. The Marxian model; more specifically the aspect of contradiction resulting from the forces of production and relation of production ;
3. The *varna-jati* model; and
4. A purely empirical approach without any model.

The status-stratification model is too general to comprehend details of the *varna-jati* model, albeit it is the most widespread one that is valid for Indian society. The Marxian model may help us in understanding the forces of production and the relations of production and the resultant contradictions in the system. However, it is not a model which may also easily encompass particular details of the *varna-jati* system. Needless to add, collecting facts without any model is of no help at all.

If all these approaches are taken together it would seem

that the best strategy to be adopted should be based on a combination of the following perspectives :

1. Determining the criteria for individual status, including such a status which has little relationship to either class or caste; say the status of *sanyasis* or other religious leaders.

2. The *varna-jati* model is important because this is a living model for vast sections of the Hindu population, especially for those on the lower rungs of the hierarchy who try to achieve higher status within this model.

3. The Marxian model, especially a historical study of the forces and relations of production and resultant contradictions. It will be useful to find out whether castes are linked up with material conditions Here, it will be worth examining not only how the initiation of the expropriation of surplus takes place but also the mechanisms (institutions) which take care of the distribution process of the surplus there onwards. This means that we have to take into consideration the class model alongside the *varna-jati* model. The coexistence of these two models has created many problems of status including that of status dichotomy and status incongruity. Therefore, it has to be adopted in conjunction with the *jati* model. While it is true that Indian civilization has been materialistic, this materialism was indeed tempered by spiritualism. Of course, it is a truism to state that no great civilization could grow without some form of exploitation either internal or external and India has been no exception to this.

4. The problem of status needs to be examined in the light of models that take into account the growth of great civilizations. For example, all great civilizations have faced the problem of integration of groups. This integration has to be achieved not only politically and linguistically but also culturally in terms of a common system of ideas, values and peoples (in terms of Homens). But both the capitalistic and Marxian models of civilizations are monolithic in nature. Indian civilization is an exception to this, excepting during periods of imperial unity when some form of integration was achieved. But any kind of total integration of all of the groups where they completely loose identities has never been achieved. Nevertheless, sanskrit, the *varna-jati* model and some other

basic values have brought various groups into one single systematic cultural fold.

5. The study of the scheduled castes, and the progeny of intercaste and intercommunal marriages should be undertaken as examples of groups which are facing the problems of status-incongruity in some form or the other.

Dhirendra Narain

The concept of status in social sciences is not so confused as it may appear. If we take the status of women in India the earlier generation of women never felt oppressed. But modern women feel differently because there is an emphasis on a consciousness of being fully exploited. In our eagerness to overthrow the Brahminical view, the Brahman as a focus of inquiry cannot be ignored, and this view is bound to provide useful results.

5. Identification of Areas and Themes

Victor S D'Souza

Our primary concern should be with conceptual clarification of the problem on the basis of a review of studies and original contributions. For example, it is important to formulate theoretical models for the study of changing status in a system because a changing society gives rise to problems of social mobility including those of status discrepancy. From this perspective the study of scheduled castes which are subjected to change may be undertaken. Suggestions for some other studies are given below :

1. Values and world-views in relation to social status. This topic requires an historical study also, in order to indicate the causal time sequence between changing world-views and changes in the status systems, or vice-versa.

2. Political force is an important agent of social change, and hence social status.

3. Planned development and social status.

4. A systematic methodological examination of social grading of occupations because occupational prestige has come to be recognized as one of the most important indices of social status.

Ravinder Kumar

From the viewpoint of history, comparative studies of social status and social mobility in various regions may be of considerable utility. Work of this nature is being done in Punjab such as examining agrarian movements during the medieval period by Grewal and Banga. The study indicates that significant

changes effected social status during the sixteenth century with the introduction of new forms of irrigation when a more or less tribal society was changed into a caste society. We also know how in the nineteenth century social engineering changed the order, and in the twentieth century a similar situation has arisen with the green revolution. Maharashtra (Western India) and UP are other areas where fruitful results along these lines may be possible especially in the urban areas.

Yogendra Singh

Conceptually speaking the problem may be viewed in the following two major ways :

1. by evolving a deductive macro-framework, and
2. by examining smaller entities such as tribes and regions.

It may be preferable to emphasize the first because then we will be able to assess the principle of structuration and status images which were especially maintained during historical times ; this, in order to learn certain principles which have kept up some kind of a unity. Our studies thus have to be heuristic, operational and regional.

To illustrate : structuration principles may be those of, *a.* conflict/integration, *b.* exclusion/inclusion, *c.* pan-Indian/regional, and *d.* class-ethnicity. Further there may be such subprinciples as, *a.* ideology or world-view, *b.* exclusion or inclusion of certain groups in the system, *c.* operationalization of status by the definition of concepts through interdisciplinary methodology, and *d.* examining specific regional areas, agrarian/urban framework, etc.

M G S Narayanan

For historical studies the following themes may be examined :

1. Brahmans in time and space;
2. Kshatriyas in myth and history ; process of recruitment and promotion, power relations and ritual status;
3. Kayasthas as a service class ; their origin and status in bureaucracy, land ownership and military service;

4. Artisans and their changing positions in different periods and areas;

5. West Asian communities and their role in India, such as Jews, Christians, Arab Muslims, Parsis, etc.;

6. Slaves, serfs, and outcastes;

7. Non-Brahminical sects (non-Vedic) as ¦Jainism, Buddhism, *Bhakti* movements and so on;

8. Land ownership, property and social structure;

9. Social stratification in tribal societies ; their encounter with non-tribal societies and process of assimilition, sanskritization, etc.;

10. Specific case studies of such social groups as Nadars, Nayars, Rajputs and so on;

11. The role of creative thinkers, writers and literatures in social pocesses.

B K Roy Burman

The basic assumptions ˹underlying our discussions indicate a legacy which belongs to the colonial phase of social sciences. This is why the studies suggested and the basic principles of structuration given are misguided. Nevertheless, the deductive macro-framework is essential for our approach.

In any case, the focus of the themes should be on a perspective of contemporary society. Developments during the last twenty years when modernization processes have brought about changes in society are especially important. For example, the introduction of tube wells, tractors and so on has changed the land, labour and capital relationships, or the productive system. It has, again, in some areas created share-croppers who tend to work as both attached and unattached labour. Similarly, the impact of commercial or modern markets have had a great impact on status changes. Thus, class-caste movements may be examined as a consequence of the introduction of land reforms, such as the abolition of the *zamindari* system which has changed the power structure.

While these processes of modern changes may be examined in different regions, it is equally important to examine gradings in terms of socio-economic occupational levels. This is because social status may exist without a system of stratification, not only in tribal societies but in other classless societies where

status is accorded on the basis of rewards and prestige or recognition ; that even allows for a shift in power structures. Because India's goal is the creation of a classless society, understanding problems of non-stratified societies assumes importance.

Finally, systems of meanings, world-views and images of man on this subcontinent or in Asia besides those that belong to dominating communities may provide us many insights. These will be of more relevance to us than Western ideas. In this context, investigating the impact on social status during the colonial period on Indian society in terms of the allocation of justice and values, systems of rewards, along with the ethos of national liberation struggles are important themes that require study.

Some other studies that may be undertaken are :

1. Status manipulation is an important process. Therefore, we may examine shifts of foci in the centres of power, and note the role played by the secular and the sacred—the latter is often invoked to maintain power.

2. Dialectics in political cultures of equality. Is politics an instrument of culture or vice-versa ? (For this we must consider principles of stratification *vs.* counter-stratification.)

3. Industrial situations with their problems of ethnic pressure groups, and so on.

Vidya Niwas Misra

1. Role of tension and conflict in Indian history.
2. Value systems as determinants.
3. Migration as a factor in changing status.

M S A Rao

While structuration and mobility are important areas of study we should also be interested in aspects of processes, especially those which involve factors of income, occupation, style of life—all of which are implicitly governed by world-views.

In order to implement approaches from this viewpoint substantive themes may be examined in terms of such categories as,

1. Workers;
2. Ex-*zamindars*;
3. Dispossessed elites;
4. The emergence and growth of middle classes;
5. Special groups such as

   i. minorities,
   ii. women,
   iii. scheduled castes,
   iv. ex-nomads who have become sedentary,
   v. nouveau riche arising out of situations of status forma-
   tion and mobility;

6. Clubs ;
7. Sectarian movements; and
8. Psychological dimensions of the children of intergroup
   marriages.

Ghanshyam Shah

Political status is closely interrelated with ritual status. We may inquire into such aspects as : How far do political and ritual status go together at the ideological level ? When and why did Brahmans lose their political status ? What role did Vaishyas play in the conflict between Brahmans and Kshatriyas ? How and why have ritually low castes attained high political status ? Is or was political status related to an individual, group of individuals belonging to different *jatis,* or to a whole *jati* ? Does political status help in raising ritual status ? How are we to see the interaction of ritual, economic, and political status in tribal society ? How are status changes brought about among tribal groups when these come into conflict with larger societies ?

Shanti Swarup Gupta

It may be a good idea to examine problems and processes in Asian countries which have affinities with India, for this may help us to understand the colonial situation, and its processes.

Imtiaz Ahmed

We should study both general as well as specific regional themes such as :

1. the concept of honour in Rajputana;

2. in situations where status continuities are to be seen, do the principles remain the same ?

3. Integrative impulses of status and mobility at different levels especially if there are a multiplicity of referents; and

4. Social and psychological aspects of deprivation and the dynamics of choice of tradition in social rearing, say, amongst, intergroup marriages or such other cases.

Sudhir Chandra

The notion of structuration implies an understanding of processes, i.e., seeking the dynamic interrelationship between economic and ritual status. Terms should be rigorously defined if we have to understand the dialectics between socio-economic (material) reality and ideology. In the Indian context indigenous —*jati-varna*—categories should be used. For this purpose intra and intercaste status patterns in endogamous groups require especial emphasis.

Sujata Miri

1. The role of religion as a status determinant is important not in terms of the sacred and secular, but in terms of how and why emphasis shifts in the course of time from man to God and vice-versa.

2. Religious identity often determines politico-economic status of the individual; this, at least, is the case in North-Eastern India.

K S Mathur

From the overview two of the problems which may be examined are, *a.* the meaning of Indian civilization in the context of the mainstream and its constituents, *b.* an examination of the space-time dimensions of Indian civilization as processes to be understood not only among the Hindus but other communities that are peripheral or marginal to the mainstream.

K N Sharma

1. Within the principles of structuration, the interplay between the principles of individual prestige/status and status in the *varna-jati* model and class model may be emphasized.

This will have a relevance to contemporary India where it appears that there is a dichotomy of structure, i.e., both *varna-jati* and class structures exist side by side. It is also possible that the principles of individual status/prestige or class structure may be undermining the principles of *varna-jati* structure, and vice-versa.

2. How have the forces and relations of production influenced social formations in Indian history, especially the formation of new *varna-jati* categories?
3. Various movements, sects, or cults which have influenced structuration.
4. In what respect and in accordance with what principles or principle are minority groups being integrated today, if at all, under the same Indian social structure?

P H Prabhu

1. If attention is given to social psychology this may help us to analyze terms of social status historically, and the behaviour of Indians as it has changed within various groups.
2. The impact of invaders on indigenous systems.
3. The impact of modern thought on traditional values, untouchables, or others.
4. What is the Indian personality?
5. Changing values through the ages and attitudes as well as cultural perspectives.

T K Oommen

To understand the principles that determine social status and be able to compare results, the following themes are suggested :

1. Techniques of measuring determinants, for which isomorphic and nominal definitions need to be cleared first in order to operationalize our concepts especially because there are usually several ingredients in a particular situation; and
2. Empirical studies which will take into account the first point so that a strategy of minimizing the principles and maximizing the diversity may be evolved.

A R Khan

Bearing in mind the Central and West Asian background of Islamic society we may note that loyalty was an important factor in medieval society, and this is what gave prestige and status. Therefore, examining ideas of legal status in West Asia that have influenced Islamic society in India, from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, may be one such study. But for this a comparative study of different groups will be necessary.

Dhirendra Narain

1. In sociological literature role is generally derived from status. Therefore, changes in role performance which alter given statuses should be examined.

2. While world-views of Brahminical system do appear to dominate Indian society, in a large and complex civilization one should not ignore alternative and challenging worldviews. The danger of such ignoring is that one may assign objectively world-views to groups that they ought to have but in fact subjectively do not have.

3. Social mobility implies that when the individual improves his position, his family is directly supposed to benefit also. How far does his group, in fact, benefit ? And, to what extent have groups of low status—depressed classes—changed their position ? A study along these lines will be beneficial.

4. Determinants of high status groups is an important aspect. Indian society is doubtless very complex but there is one advantage; there is abundant textual and normative evidence for the high status of Brahmans. Theoretically the high status of the Brahman is very sharply sketched out. One does know in fact that the high status of Brahmans has not been universally true. Why has this been so ? What other factors in addition to prescriptive support does the Brahman need to maintain his high status ? One could mechanically mention secular factors like wealth and (political) power. But what social forces facilitate the convergence of these, or are there other factors that crystallize high status ?

Clearly every group wants high status. Why did—or did not—the Brahman succeed in arrogating to himself secular items like wealth and power in all regions and through all periods of our history? Of course, one cannot study the status

of Brahmans (or any other group) in isolation. High or low status is achieved and maintained in relation to others. So, other caste groups will come in but as background material. With the focus on Brahmans one will get some idea of the particular caste group for whom there is deference next to the Brahman. In all likelihood it will be the next ritually prescribed caste group (Kshatriyas) and not the Shudras. Hence one may further study the Kshatriyas as the main focus.

A A Suroor

The totality of Indian civilization must be kept in mind if we have to study the themes and not be biased by our own favourite topics. Literature and philosophy should be included, as well as various conquests and invasions. We need to see whether medieval times preserved the culture or changed it, and how they influenced tribal movements.

Geeta Kapur

The status of the *shilpin* and the *sanyasi*, vis-a-vis the Shudra status should be examined. While literature has substantial evidence, the plastic arts provide a simultaneity of several elements. One may give the example of the donors who were of lower caste and have been shown in the Karle caves.

S P Nagendra

The micro-sociological approach may be examined in terms of;

1. The conceptualization of traditional India with reference to

 i. the twice-born,
 ii. scheduled castes,
 iii. social mobility;

2. Contemporary India in terms of social mobility in metropolitan areas; and

3. Tribal continuities in Indian civilization.

Robert Varickayil

Status groups amongt he Syrian Christians of Kerala may be examined.

O P Vema

From the viewpoint of ancient history, the following studies may be made:

1. Socio-economic study of land grants vis-a-vis social status;
2. Mercantile organizations and their impact on society;
3. Social mobility among Brahmans; and
4. South Indian guilds.

Leeia Dube

1. Examining the concept of hierarchy is important for it is a universal phenomenon. Hierarchy, for example, in food materials is a reflection of social life and so also in Indian gods.

2. Regional studies are important but in the context of the operationalization of the concept of mobility. For example, how do we identify the unit of mobility? Who moves, is it the caste, the family or some other unit?

3. World-views should be studied in relation to society, and not in isolation. Processes like inclusion and exclusion, generation and distribution of wealth, are important. In other words, we should try to see the dialectical relation between idea and reality.

4. The concept of the purity of blood is very important.

5. Emphasis on behaviour is more important than emphasis on belief.

6. Brahmans have been of pivotal importance in Indian society. The characteristic of a Brahman is not the same everywhere; for there are priestly Brahmans, money-lending Brahmans and landlord Brahmans. But it would be equally interesting to find out the roots of greed and also the dedication to food among them.

7. A study of the units, the mechanisms, and the process of change among the non-Hindus such as the Christians and the Muslims should be undertaken.

S C Malik

A great many ideas both in terms of suggesting a framework and identifying various themes have been presented. A summary of them is not possible here. While all these views are worth

examining, some priorities have to be worked out. This is to be done not only because of the constraints of time and money, but also because we have to take up those studies that are feasible in terms of the availability of persons and material. However, very broadly speaking, certain personal preferences and ideas which are more crucial than others may be indicated here.

A fundamental proposition which requires assertion in all our research endeavours is that contemporary approaches to reality govern our interpretations, whether it is about the past, the present, or the future. It is because contemporary ideas guide us that our—societal or individual—perceptual, conceptual, and metaphysical reproductions of the external world influence research. If this be so, even if we could physically or mentally transport ourselves into the past, we would not be able to view tne past in terms of the people of that time. In fact, if an event was to occur at this moment amidst us there would be as many viewpoints about what really took place, and no single explanation. It is in this sense that the reconstruction of events of either now or the nineteenth century or 2000 B C cannot be truly objective.

But what has been stated does not imply that we have a right to distort historical events. It is essential that our propositions are logically sound, supported by sufficient evidence and also be critically well-formulated in terms of a hypothesis. Today, being scientific does not mean mere empiricism. No longer are historical interpretations (or others) carried out by cataloguing or classification; nor can we any longer use Indian history as a justification to support what one may call largely psychological complexes—of glorifying the past. (It may have been necessary during the national struggle, but this only acts as a drag today). In physical and natural sciences, the logic of the argument has primarily to be sound, which may or may not have an empirical basis—modern mathematics included.

Of course, all of us do have biases and prejudices. But it is essential to be aware of them, and either stay clear of them or indicate the worthiness of our preferences. Consequently, ways and means also have to be evolved whereby unconscious meanings are not brought into our reconstructions. This is possible only if our arguments are rigorously worked out.

Terms and concepts, like models, have to be defined carefully. But definitions need to have reference points, or boundaries and frameworks (an essential aspect being space and time dimensions) that change, as our ideas and evidences change from time to time. But the problem of part and whole is also similarly determined, i.e. by the sets we take into account, or the system-boundaries which we logically formulate. This is what gives us the systemness of the system, i.e., the propeities whereby it is defined.

Deriving from the above proposition, we may ask why we are studying this theme. Simply put, because present day values and approaches to reality govern the theme. This is to say, the dominating ideology today is one of equality and our objectives are those of removing injustice, disparities, and poverty. Never before in the history of mankind have aspirations moved people on such a global scale, including the attempts that are being made to implement them. Today, almost all of the underprivileged groups are aware of their fundamental rights (as groups if not as individuals) and wish to be considered equals, with rights to determine their own destinies. This has been a major factor in bringing about social change. But the problem is of how to bring about not only changes in value systems but also to make them feasible at functional levels, i.e., to actually bring about equality in social, economic and political levels.

A good and valid reason for examining various events, both those of the remote past and of the recent past, is that we may understand ideas about social change, examine disparities in social existence and understand how social mobility has or is taking place, i.e., the amount of dynamism that may exist or may have existed in Indian society. All this is necessary in order that we may understand societal processess so that the changes we intend to bring about are also culturally and ethically accepted—especially the value of equality.

Thinking in this way, research investigations also become socially relevant. Historical material may be considered as modern man's 'myth' for supporting current ideas and values systems about society. Perhaps, these interpretations are as necessary as mythologies have been in earlier times. But this is not to suggest that the direct utility of research is the only valid viewpoint; that one makes use of historical evidence in order

to support one's—individual—preferred arguments, or as a politician does in his speeches. But knowledge which is especially relevant also has to be fundamentally systematic. It has to be so systematized that it helps us to understand general human behaviour, and is also applicable to culture-specific areas. We have therefore primarily to seek knowledge as *qua* knowledge, i.e., processes and patterns of human societies which will provide us with insights that may help us to understand contemporary society.

Here, a reference may be made to some ideas about factors that appear to me to have governed the determinants of social status. Noticeably, when people talk about Brahmans as a reference point for understanding social status, this somehow again emphasizes the view of the privileged. While Harijans are kept in mind, they are given secondary status. A large number of underprivileged groups, of all kinds, who live under conditions of poverty and have done so far quite sometime are thus ignored. Historically, the very broad divisions of Indian society may be seen in terms of the privileged and underprivileged. Groups and individuals in the system derive or secure privileges because they are able to control major points—areas—where decisions are taken about social, economic, and ideological matters. This status is correlated with authority—whether it be of knowledge, wealth, or political power. These people or groups who have both power and prestige, command or hold authority and hence assume higher status. This is the system that is—has been—perpetuated in India, i.e., while the privileged are inherently at an advantage in almost all matters, the disprivileged are inherently at a disadvantage throughout. This is not only in the sense of not having power, prestige, and authority, but also when in every day life their food, land, property and even in matters of sex, they do not have the same rights. They are inherently at a disadvantage because they (lower groups) are governed by decisions of upper groups. In addition, they also have had to do menial work and provide free services and cheap labour. In fact, in early Indian history slavery was quite widely in existence.

One might, of course, say that all traditional societies have been governed by values of hierarchy, inequality, and have been exploitative. But in India this is correlated with birth-

status groups : One is born not only unequal but one has to stay so or is forced to remain so. The basic fact is that it is a system of authority throughout; in the family it is the father or the elder brother who has authority, in education it is the teacher, in public life the king, and the priest in religious life. All of these people have authoritarian power; whether in terms of knowledge, money, or political power they hold the key to the controlling points where important decisions about the individual or the group are taken. The ethical system and the rationalization of this system have also been created by the upper groups. For example, the idea of asceticism (often mentioned here) and of austerity arises among those who have had material wealth and have had the choice of staying poor or austere if they so desire. This is different from being poor out of no choice. This last has been the 'fate' of most people in this country.

Of course, it may also be considered that asceticism and *sanyas* arose out of rigidity, authoritarianism, and tyranny of the system. It is well-known that individual freedom does not really exist in India, for one has to conform to social norms and ascribed status. The only alternative available has been to opt out of the system. It is also worthwhile thinking that the over-emphasis on non-violence may have been as a consequence of a violent—materialistic—society. At any rate, whatever ideology was evolved and legitimized by the Hindus in terms of the *karma* theory, it suggested that the poor had to accept their lot and do their duty towards higher groups for rewards in the next life. Of course, the rich get their rewards in this life!

Basically, therefore, status is determined in terms of those who have the authority and this has to be understood along with factors like distribution of land, modes of production, etc. If this is so, it becomes a good criterion for examining social systems in India, irrespective of the religious categorization which seems to knock us over at every moment in our old categories. This will also highlight the lot of the underprivileged and poor groups, for whom we are so concerned in our own times.

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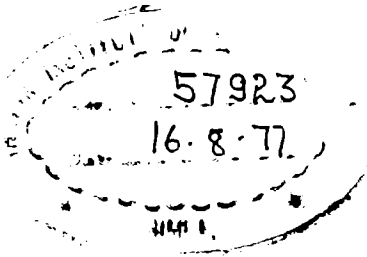Indian Institute of Technology
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