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RACE, CASTE AND GENDER

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The article compares race and caste as two forms of inequality, and argues that inequalities of caste are illuminated in the same way as those of race by a consideration of gender. A comparison of race and caste shows a remarkable similarity in the contrasting attitudes towards women of lower and higher ranks, characteristic of men in privileged positions in both systems. The sexual use and abuse of women appears in the most extreme forms in the treatment of women of the lowest rank by men of the highest; there is moreover an unremitting concern with the purity of women at the top, associated with ideas of bodily substance brought to light in recent studies of kinship. The article argues the case for limited comparisons and questions the utility of drawing radical contrasts between whole civilisations.

Historical overview

Any attempt today to bring together race and caste for comparison and contrast is likely to meet with a cold reception. Such an attempt invites the opprobrium specially reserved for positivism, empiricism and eclecticism by the theoretically well tuned. They will readily acknowledge the similarities between caste and race when they are pointed out; what they will deny is that these similarities can have much significance for the understanding at least of caste. It may be safely said that, although the subject of caste has been discussed threadbare by students of Indian society and culture, the comparison with race has hardly figured, if at all, in the last twenty to twenty-five years.

Yet the fruitfulness of comparing race with caste was taken for granted by American and other sociologists studying the 'Negro problem' in the United States in the thirties, forties and fifties. The pioneer in this regard was Lloyd Warner (1936) who wrote about caste and class in the United States, saying that it was more appropriate to describe blacks and whites as castes than as races or classes. Warner directed and inspired a number of monographic studies of what came to be known among sociologists as the problem of caste in the U.S. South (Davis *et al.* 1941; Cayton & Drake 1945). The psychologist John Dollard (1957) used Warner's conceptual scheme in his outstanding monograph, *Caste and class in a southern town*.

The major work of the forties on the blacks in the United States was Gunnar Myrdal's *An American dilemma*. Myrdal, too, used the same conceptual scheme as Warner, and justified the characterisation of blacks and whites as castes rather than races on the ground that they were socially, and not biologically, defined categories. Monographic studies were accompanied by discussions in general and comparative terms. Kingsley Davis (1941) published a paper in which he contrasted the 'primarily physiognomic, usually chromatic' basis of the caste system of the United States with

the 'purely socio-economic' basis of the caste system prevalent in India. None of these formulations was wholly satisfactory, although several of them illuminated interesting features of both systems. The point I wish to stress is that in all these writings 'caste' was used not merely as a metaphor but as a concept, and attempts were made, though never very successfully, to formulate the concept precisely.

Students of caste in India have drawn on insights from the study of race in two quite different ways. There were the earlier anthropologists, of whom Risley is perhaps the most notable example, who constructed elaborate arguments to prove that the caste system originated from the encounter of races (Risley 1908; also Ghurye 1969). I shall have nothing to say about the part played by racial difference in the origin of the Indian caste system. My concern is with the approach in which insights from the study of race in the United States and from the study of caste in India are used to illuminate each other. A good example of what I have in mind is the work of G.D. Berreman (1966; 1967; 1968). The approach adopted there showed promise when it first appeared, but it went into a decline after the sixties,¹ and has never really recovered its voice. Berreman's essays and other studies which sought to present caste as a form of stratification were dismissed as examples of 'butterfly collection'² in which superficial similarities were allowed to conceal profound differences. It must at once be pointed out that those who introduced the concept of caste into the study of racial stratification in America were acutely aware of the differences between India and the United States, which some of them stressed to a degree that may not have been fully justified. Warner (1936) pointed out that caste in America differed from its Indian prototype because the former, presumably unlike the latter, existed not by itself but in conjunction with a system of classes. Myrdal (1944), in his turn, pointed out that, unlike in India, caste in the United States existed in a moral environment governed by the principle of equality.

Berreman (1960) brought his experience of life in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1953-55 to the study of a village in Dehra Dun district in which he lived in 1957-58, and found that the first experience greatly illuminated the second. He noted in particular the deep resentment of the underprivileged groups in both cases even where they appeared to acquiesce in their social subordination. He went on to construct a formal typology of kin groups, local groups, castes and classes, summarising their similarities and differences in a somewhat mechanical manner (Berreman 1967; 1968). To make matters worse, he appeared to be arguing that the real objective of the comparative method was to reveal similarities between systems.

A change of attitude towards such studies came about in the mid-sixties, reflecting to some extent a change of outlook and orientation among anthropologists in general. Behaviourism and empiricism came under attack, while a case was being made at the same time for redefining the whole field of sociology as the sociology of ideas. In Indian studies this meant a slow, often unperceived and generally unacknowledged shift from the 'fieldview' to the 'bookview' of society, culminating in the assignment of a privileged position to traditional 'structure' over contemporary 'reality'.

What is of specific interest to the present argument is the redefinition of the aim of comparison, viewed now as being directed to 'typification' rather than 'classification' (Dumont 1967). I would say that a fundamental shift of orientation came about in anthropology with the dominance of an intellectual style in which 'difference' became the primary object of attention. The major figure in this shift was, of course, Lévi-

Strauss, and the same shift made its impact on studies of caste through the writings of Louis Dumont. Lévi-Strauss made his point about 'difference' most sharply while contrasting the aims of anthropology and history: 'It is true that a discipline whose main, if not sole, aim is to analyse and interpret differences evades all problems when it takes into account only similarities' (1963: 14). This seems a very arbitrary requirement, that a discipline should either only interpret differences or only take similarities into account.

Dominance and unequal access to women

Like race in the United States, caste in India is perceived by millions of people today as a particularly rigid and oppressive form of inequality. Many practices, described in earlier textbooks as integral to the normal functioning of caste, would now be considered invidious and discriminatory, and might invite legal and political sanctions. Fifty years ago, it might have made sense to say that discrimination based on race was pathological while discrimination based on caste was normal. To insist on the same contrast would be misleading today.

When we consider caste and race together, we are struck at once by the remarkable similarity in the contrasting attitudes towards women of lower and higher ranks characteristic of men in privileged positions in both systems. My argument is that inequalities of caste are illuminated in the same way as those of race by a consideration of gender. There are two aspects of the problem. There is, firstly, the sexual use and abuse of women, which is an aspect of the inequality of power, seen in its most extreme form in the treatment of women of the lowest rank by men of the highest; this is the aspect of the problem that has received most attention. There is, in addition, the unrelenting concern with the purity of women at the top, associated with ideas regarding bodily substance that have been discussed separately in studies of American kinship (Schneider 1968), and of caste and kinship in India (Inden & Nicholas 1977; Marriott & Inden 1980); we can deepen our understanding of both caste and race by exploring these ideas more systematically and in comparative terms.

If we believe that the position assigned in thought and life to women is of crucial significance to the understanding of both caste and race, we are much better placed today than anthropologists were a generation ago to pursue the comparison between the two in greater depth. The position of women in society, particularly in modern or contemporary society, received very little scholarly attention from sociologists and social anthropologists in the decades when comparisons of race and caste were most extensively made. It is true that Dollard (1957) wrote about the 'sexual gain of caste' in the U.S. South and Berreman (1960) later wrote about the sexual exploitation of both black and untouchable women. But these observations were either lost or ignored in the absence of an adequate conceptual framework for the comparative study of gender.

It may well be the case that such a framework does not exist in a fully developed form even now. But there is no doubt that the climate has altered vastly so that the plea for a serious consideration of these issues can no longer be as easily ignored as in the past. The advances achieved in women's studies in the last two decades have implications not only for a fuller understanding of the relations between the sexes, but also for a deeper insight into the general problem of inequality, of which caste and race are two particular forms. I am referring now not only to new facts but also to

new ways of looking at facts that have long been taken for granted.

The sexual use of women of inferior rank by men of superior rank would not acquire its characteristic forms in societies divided by caste or race if the ordinary relations between men and women were not marked by asymmetry. The asymmetry characteristic of such relations in general is merely reinforced when the man belongs to a superior race (or caste) and the woman to an inferior one. The normal requirement of asymmetry would be seriously upset if the woman belonged to a superior and the man to an inferior rank. The stricter the demand for asymmetry in the ordinary relations between men and women, the more severe will be the sanctions against the reversal of roles. I would surmise that the distances required to be maintained between castes or between races are likely to vary directly with the disparities established between men and women in the society as a whole.

We have to be careful, however, to distinguish between relatively stable societies and those undergoing rapid change as a result of changes in the legal and political systems and in the general climate of opinion. Such changes have been marked in the last four or five decades not only in the United States, but also in India. In these changing conditions, small and gradual reductions in disparities are periodically met with sudden and violent reprisals which bring established patterns into sharp relief. It is difficult, when this is happening, to demonstrate or even to discern any clear direction of change.

The asymmetry inherent in the link between race and gender is nicely brought out in Dollard's study of Southerntown.

In simplest terms, we mean by a 'sexual gain' the fact that white men, by virtue of their caste position, have access to two classes of women, those of the white and Negro castes. The same condition is somewhat true of the Negro women, except that they are rather the objects of the gain than the choosers, though it is a fact that they have some degree of access to white men as well as to men of their own caste (Dollard 1957: 135).

This asymmetry sustains and is sustained by contrasting images of the sexuality of black and white women of which exact parallels may be found in the contrasting images of lower and upper caste women in India.

Leaving aside the facts of interaction for the moment, we may turn very briefly to the logic of the asymmetry indicated above. That logic is articulated very nicely in the Hindu Dharmashastras. The traditional Hindu theory of marriage clearly reveals the dual subordination of inferior to superior *varnas* and of women to men in the distinction it maintains between *anuloma* and *pratiloma* unions. An *anuloma* union is one between a man of a superior and a woman of an inferior *varna*, and, subject to certain conditions, it is accepted. The rule in its broadest interpretation allows a Brahman man to take, in addition to a Brahman wife, a Kshatriya, a Vaishya and a Shudra wife; a Kshatriya man is allowed to take, over and above his Kshatriya wife, a Vaishya and a Shudra wife; a Vaishya man may take, in addition to a wife from his own *varna*, one also from the Shudra *varna*; a Shudra man has to be content with only a Shudra wife (Manu 1964: 77). *Pratiloma*, on the other hand, is the union of a woman of a superior *varna* with a man of an inferior one, and it is condemned in the severest possible terms. The lowest of human beings, akin to beasts, are the Chandalas who are described as the offspring of *pratiloma* unions between Brahman women and Shudra men (Manu 1964: 405).

It must be pointed out that scriptural authorities are by and large uneasy about *anuloma* even though they acknowledge its consequences. We may say that there is a

norm of *anuloma* only in the sense that its consequences are acknowledged, but not in the sense that the act itself is commended. Or, we may say that the act itself is viewed very differently from *pratiloma* which is clearly condemned. The contrasts here are strikingly similar to the contrasts encountered in the conventions governing unions between whites and blacks.

By its acceptance of polygyny, Hinduism gave itself room to construct an elaborate formal structure for defining the relations between men and women belonging to superior and inferior *varnas*. Protestantism, with its strict code of monogamy, left itself little room for elaborating a theory of hypergamy, but it gave a kind of piquancy to sexual relations between the races by making them in varying degrees unsanctioned. It must be remembered that in the U.S. South all sexual unions between whites and blacks were extra-legal; but the extra-legal domain itself was not homogeneous, being differentiated according to recognised, if not well-defined, principles.

We must not make the mistake of believing that Indian practice adhered strictly to Hindu theory, and that all inter-caste unions were according to the recommendations of the Dharmashastras. We have seen that the Dharmashastras themselves were uneasy about unions between *varnas*. P.V. Kane (1974: 449-52), our leading authority on the subject, suggests that *anuloma* unions came to be viewed with increasing disfavour by authors of legal digests and commentaries from around A.D. 900, although we know that such unions in various forms were legally recognised as marriages until our own time. What is germane to the issue is that, with or without *anuloma*, a large number of extra-legal unions took place between men and women of different castes everywhere and at all times, and that these unions were governed by the same unwritten rules which, according to Dollard and many others, governed extra-legal unions between the races.

A great deal has changed, in law as well as politics, in the last forty years, not only in the United States but also in India. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 has set itself against the theory of *anuloma* by allowing inter-caste marriage and disallowing plural marriage. But the asymmetry of which *anuloma* was the theoretical expression is still very much in evidence in social practice. Inter-caste marriages are infrequent if not rare, and it is difficult to make any categorical statement on the basis of the limited and rather uneven information available.

A great many sexual unions take place outside marriage, including some between persons of different castes. These range from permanent companionship at one extreme, through semi-permanent and casual liaison, to seduction and rape at the other. In the absence of detailed and systematically collected information, one can go only by general impressions. Such impressions clearly indicate that there is a wide measure of tolerance of extra-marital relations between men of superior and women of inferior rank, particularly between men of landowning castes and women of landless, including untouchable, castes (J.M. Freeman 1979), whereas the reverse relationship generally, though not invariably, meets with reprisal. I should like, in passing, to point to an important change in the attitude of the courts in these matters, as indicated in the judgement of the Calcutta High Court in *Mongal Chandra v. Dharendra Nath* (AIR 1976: 129). *Mongal Chandra*, the illegitimate son of a Shudra named Bhadreshwar by his Brahman concubine, Urmila Bala, claimed succession as a *dasiputra* (son of a female servant or slave) to a part of his father's estate. The arguments against him were twofold. First, it was pointed out that the *dasiputra* had a recognised claim only among Shudras,

i.e. it would hold only if he had been the illegitimate son of a Shudra by his Shudra concubine. Secondly, since the union of which he was the offspring was a *pratiloma* union, no claim could possibly arise. The High Court rejected both the arguments and upheld Mongal Chandra's claim to a share in his father's estate equal to half the share due to his legitimate half-brother.

Although it is difficult to be categorical, it would appear that upper-caste men have less easy access to untouchable and tribal women than they did in the past. From this I am inclined to infer that material sanctions are more decisive than ritual ones in restricting such access. When the balance of political power made the risk of material sanctions relatively small, ritual sanctions were not very effective in preventing the sexual use of untouchable or tribal women by upper-caste men. The balance of power has now changed, though perhaps not very radically, and this has altered not so much the attitudes of upper-caste men as their horizon of possibilities. We have accounts of similar changes taking place in the U.S. South in the thirties.

Relations between castes are changing rapidly and these changes are accompanied by reports of caste violence, including atrocities against untouchables and tribals in many parts of the country. The new legal and political systems have not eliminated the traditional hierarchical order, but they challenge it at many points. Disputes lead to clashes between members of different castes. It is difficult to assess the extent of change, because caste clashes are now reported much more extensively than before although, clearly, not all such clashes are reported even now.

The disputes that lead to atrocities against untouchables and tribals arise from many causes. Some of them clearly are engineered by interested political parties. There are many others that arise from the conditions of land tenure and of agricultural work. But there can be no doubt that there has been an increase in the clashes that arise out of attempts to control and use the sexuality of lower-caste women. It is a sign of the changing times that annual statistics of atrocities against untouchables and tribals, including atrocities against their women, are now officially published in India.³ These statistics are defective on many points, but they are illuminated to some extent by reports of increasing violence against women in general.⁴

Purity of women and ideas of bodily substance

It is clear that there is some pattern in the use and abuse of the sexuality of lower-caste women, even though the pattern is changing. This has to be seen in conjunction with the jealous attitude towards and strict control over the sexual and reproductive capacities of upper-caste women. The jealous concern of white men for the purity of their own women has been noted by most students of race and stratification in the United States (and also South Africa). The purity of women has of course been long recognised as the cornerstone of the Hindu theory of caste and kinship. We are now in a position to compare the two systems at a deeper level as a result of advances recently made by cultural anthropologists, mainly American, in the study of ideas regarding bodily substance in the United States as well as in India.

When we compare caste and race at a deeper level, we find in both systems a prevalence of values and symbols relating to blood and natural substance, and beliefs regarding the strong constraints imposed by them on human character and conduct. These beliefs, values and symbols are deeper in the sense that they remain relatively unaltered even when the asymmetries described earlier change due to changes in law

and politics. Hindus regard differences of caste as being in some sense differences of substance, and believe that these latter impel members of different castes to act differently. There are, as I shall show, parallel beliefs that differences of race express differences of natural substance which constrain character as well as conduct. One might still contrast caste and race by arguing that ideas about natural substance and the constraint imposed by it on social conduct are central to Hindu culture and peripheral to American culture, but I doubt that such an argument can be easily sustained.

I should like to enter here into a brief discussion of Schneider's account of American kinship (Schneider 1968). It has stimulated a body of work on caste and kinship in India, and the authors of an important essay on caste systems have acknowledged its seminal influence on their work (Marriott & Inden 1980). Schneider describes American kinship as a part of American culture, which for him is a system of symbols and their corresponding meanings. There are two symbolic features, described for short as substance and code, which singly or in combination define the domain of kinship in American culture. Americans think of kinship in terms of shared biogenetic substance, typically blood; they think of it also in terms of a distinctive moral code, expressive of diffuse enduring solidarity, or love. Father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, etc. are relatives in the full sense of the term because they share the same blood and also because they love each other or ought to do so. In-laws, stepchildren and foster-parents are also relatives but not in the fullest sense because, although there is love between them, they do not have the same blood; husband and wife constitute a special case because although, like in-laws, they are brought together by marriage rather than blood, there is nevertheless a transmission of substance between them. Natural relatives (e.g. genitor and illegitimate offspring) are the obverse of in-laws because between them there is no recognised code, or so Schneider would have it, although there is shared substance.

According to Schneider, Americans believe that 'relationship as substance' belongs to the natural order whereas 'relationship as code' belongs to the social order. The natural order has its own compulsions as does the social order, although the two compulsions are not of the same kind. The interpenetration of the 'natural' and the 'social' orders within the domain of American kinship is a subject of crucial importance on which, unfortunately, Schneider's account does not throw much light.

The significance of Schneider's work is that it has drawn attention to a fundamental feature of American, indeed western, culture as a whole. It is true that in one sense kinship is to a large extent segregated from other aspects of American culture, but in another sense the dichotomy between substance and code is of general significance. Clearly, the pivot on which the relation between race and stratification turns is the question of rightful kinship, that is, with whom one may rightfully have kinship, with whom one may not, and for what reasons. It goes without saying that 'rightful' is not the same thing as 'legal' or 'by law' or even 'legitimate'; unfortunately, these distinctions are obscured rather than clarified by Schneider's manner of exposition.

The intimate, though negative, relationship between race and kinship is nicely brought out by Everett Hughes. After drawing attention to the highly flexible nature of American marriage and the kin ties arising from it, he goes on to say, 'But on one point of difference the grandly flexible system is hard and unyielding. The essence of the race line in North America is that no person identified as Negro will be admitted as effectively social kin of any person classified as white' (Hughes 1965: 1136). I must,

however, point to the asymmetry which is not brought out with sufficient clarity by Hughes. The risk of being kinless does not weigh equally with all children of racially-mixed unions; it is likely to weigh much more where the genitor is a black than where he is a white.

The ethnography of the U.S. South to which I have already alluded provides fairly detailed information on extra-marital sex, concubinage, and illegitimate offspring which may be used for re-examining the place of substance and code in American culture. The one point that is stressed above all others is the strict governance of the relations between whites and blacks by the rule of endogamy. This is the reason given most frequently for choosing the term 'caste' for the system. The same literature also points out with unfailing regularity that, although marriage was by definition confined within the caste, sexual unions commonly took place across it. This at once raises the question of the social position of the concubine or mistress and of the natural children borne by her.

There is ample evidence of the presence in many cases, though by no means in all, of bonds of affection—perhaps even of love—between a man and his mistress, and between him and his natural children. Davis *et al.* recount the story of a white man who stood by as the house of his black mistress was burning down. Unable to bear the sight any longer, he rushed into the house, calling out, 'Let me in to save my children', and earning permanent ostracism from his own community (Davis *et al.* 1941: 31). Summing up their observations, our authors state:

Furthermore, the white man accepts the children as part of the relationship; he cares for them and exhibits much the same affection as if they were legitimate. Thus there is formed a family group which, at least within the home, ignores caste restrictions (Davis *et al.* 1941: 38).

Here we see the great significance of the distinction between the 'politico-jural' and the 'domestic' domains; what has to be denied in the former may nevertheless be acknowledged in the latter.

Settlements were made of house and other property, and sometimes even of land, for the maintenance of the concubine and, less frequently, for the upkeep and future wellbeing of the natural child (Davis *et al.* 1941; Dollard 1957). The ownership of a black plantation could on occasion be traced to a gift from a white landowner who had fathered a coloured child.⁵ One can see that a black mistress and her children might claim an obligation on the part of the white husband-father to give them protection and patronage. But why should the white man acknowledge a claim that had no basis whatever in the law? The answer seems to me to be obvious. The very fact that American culture places a high value on 'biogenetic substance' means that there is some obligation towards one's own substance, even when that substance is generated clearly outside the law. One is compelled by American culture to acknowledge a part of oneself in one's natural child.

The flaw in Schneider's argument, it seems to me, lies in his belief that code can be completely separated from substance within the framework of American culture. The two may indeed be considered separately for many purposes and in many contexts, but only up to a point and within certain limits. A father cannot disown his son—or a son his father—however much he may be socially embarrassed by him, precisely because son and father are of the same substance. 'Owning' here means owning an obligation which can only be expressed in social terms and which does not cease to be social simply by being outside the law. Other codes may be violated or disowned;

but in American culture, and I suspect in Indo-European culture generally, it is impossible to disown completely the code that is inherent in an immediate relationship by blood.

I have argued that the distinction between 'legal' and 'extra-legal' is by no means simple, at least so far as kinship by blood is concerned. The extra-legal not only has its own code, but is itself internally differentiated. I may illustrate the point by adapting the distinction, formulated by Fortes, between 'illegitimate' and 'illicit' (Fortes 1969: 252). Only the children of legally-wedded spouses of the same colour-caste are 'legitimate' in the restricted sense of having full legal title. The child of a white man and his black common-law wife is illegitimate; but neither the union nor its fruit is illicit; the mother can transmit status to the child. A sexual union between a black man and a white woman would be in a wholly different category; like incest, it would be illicit, and neither parent could transmit status to the offspring.

Schneider's mistake has been magnified by some of those who have carried his conceptual scheme into the study of Hindu caste and kinship. I will take as an example the account of kinship in Bengali culture by Inden and Nicholas which begins with a handsome acknowledgement of indebtedness to Schneider. Substance and code, according to the authors, are fundamental features of Bengali kinship, but their mutual relationship is quite different in Bengali culture from what it is in American culture. This is so because the premiss of Bengali culture is altogether different from that of the American:

As a consequence of this cultural premise, no distinction is made, as in American culture, between an order of 'nature', defined by shared biogenetic substance, and an order of 'law', defined by code for conduct (Inden & Nicholas 1977: xiv).

The authors proceed to underline 'the inseparable relationship of code and substance in Bengali culture' (Inden & Nicholas 1977: xiv), suggesting clearly their contrasting separability in American culture.

I have already indicated, and will try to show by further illustration, that the assumption of the radical separability of substance and code in American culture is open to question. We have seen that in American culture some social obligations are entailed in the natural kinship between father and illegitimate child. We must now ask whether Bengalis—or Hindus in general—are able to distinguish between 'artificial' and 'real' kinship, and the answer to that question will show that there are circumstances under which they are able and willing to treat substance and code as separate.

I shall avoid the obvious trap of adoption, because in Hindu law adoption was governed traditionally by strict conditions, including the condition that adopter and adoptee be of the same caste—a point in favour of the argument by Inden and Nicholas.⁶ The ties of kinship may, however, be extended artificially in other ways than by adoption. There is, first, what is broadly described as ritual kinship. Adrian Mayer tells us: 'There are several ways in which people of different castes can be linked as kin through ritual acts' (1960:139); and, further, 'there is no great feeling that ties should be made inside or outside the caste' (1960: 142). Then there is 'village kinship', through which terms and some forms of courtesy are extended to co-villagers. Obviously, the strength of these ties varies greatly. Mayer himself classifies kin ties into three kinds according to their strength. The strongest are real ties and certain kinds of ritual ties where 'there are definite obligations with a minimal amount to be fulfilled on pain of general public disapproval' (Mayer 1960: 146). Then there are 'minor ritual kin ties

(*rakhi*) and strong friendships which have become expressed in a kinship idiom' (Mayer 1960: 146); these too entail definite obligations, though not of the same kind or the same strength as in the first case. Finally, in 'village kinship', the idiom of kinship is extended mainly as a form of courtesy.

I should like to stress the point, to which Mayer has also alluded, that kin terms and corresponding modes of behaviour are commonly extended, sometimes across caste, in a highly differentiated manner. This means that a certain person may be treated as mother's brother, and another person as father's sister, even though they both belong to castes other than one's own. It is difficult to see how this could happen if code and substance stood in an 'inseparable relationship' in Hindu culture.

Marriott has used Schneider's ideas of substance and code to formulate an elaborate and complex argument about the 'transactional and transformational culture of India' (Marriott 1976: 111). This argument may be viewed as a first step in an ethnosociology of Indian culture which will lead to the construction of a more informed general sociology, free from the distortions inherent in the use of categories derived from one civilisation for the study of all civilisations. This first step, however, entails an accentuation of the contrast between Indian and western thought and culture. It is with this accentuation of the contrast, rather than with other aspects of Marriott's important essay, that I am concerned, since it impinges directly on the comparative study of caste and race.

Turning back for a moment to the example of 'artificial' kinship, it can certainly be argued that a man may well treat a person as 'mother's brother' or 'father's sister', but he will surely not eat food cooked by either if these 'artificial' kin both belong to an inferior caste. Thus, the code of kinship may be extended artificially up to a point, but not beyond that point, for there is also a code of food transactions with which it has to be congruent. Extending the sentiment of kinship may not go very far, it may be argued, if it runs counter to the code of food transactions.

We have to be careful in dealing with such an argument for it does indeed point to a very important part of Hindu culture. There is no doubt about the general importance of food transactions in traditional India and about their specific importance in the operation of kinship and caste. But a number of further points need to be made. The code of food transactions was never observed with the same strictness in all parts of India, and it is now undergoing change to such an extent that ethnographic data become rapidly out of date. Undoubtedly, the traditional code of food transactions was unusually elaborate, but the elaborateness of a code is not the same thing as its social significance. It is not at all clear how far the structure of caste (or of kinship) is dependent for its continued existence on the survival of the traditional code of food transactions. There are now thousands, if not millions, of Indians who ignore or repudiate the traditional code in both principle and practice, but that certainly does not mean that they have given up caste.

Marriott is surely right in asserting that Hindu thinking denies the 'easy separability' of substance and code, and of actor and action. But I am not sure that Hindus are quite unique in that. It is true that the separability of actor and action is much more in tune with modern capitalist than with traditional Hindu culture. But there is at least one significant area of American life, concerned with race, where it is precisely this separability that is widely denied, implicitly if not explicitly.

The doctrine of the separability of substance and code and, more generally, of actor and action is a liberal doctrine whose importance in modern western culture cannot be denied. But this does not mean that the doctrine is never disregarded in either theory or practice. Nor is it the case that the *inseparability* of substance and code, of actor and action, is affirmed only in the context of race. The attitude towards the destitute in early nineteenth-century England was not wholly dissimilar to the attitude towards the blacks in early twentieth-century America. It was a common argument, familiar to every reader of Dickens, that the destitute were unthriftly and improvident *by nature* and not due to circumstance, and that charity, whether private or public, would only harden their nature and not alter their conduct. Echoes of the same kind of argument are heard today in the debate about gender; but that is too large a subject for me to enter into here.

Although attitudes to race in the United States vary greatly among both whites and blacks, the ethnographic literature on the U.S. South reveals the persistent belief that whites and blacks are different *by nature*: there are beliefs of inherent difference in regard to every conceivable attribute, from size of genitals to aptitude for music. Moreover, whatever white men may believe about the separability of substance and code, they do not apply that belief uniformly to themselves and to others.

The explanation of Negro conduct in terms of an unvarying, indeed unalterable, Negro nature is commonly reported in the ethnography of the thirties and forties. It is true that racial stereotypes are now less commonly and less crudely expressed, at least in public, and perhaps also less widely held. To some extent this is paralleled in India by the fact that caste stereotypes are out, at least on the public platform, although they are widely held and frequently expressed in private. There can be little doubt that the upper-caste Hindu typically believes that untouchables perform poorly at school and at work—which in fact they do—because they are made of an inferior substance. This is surely paralleled by the American belief that the poor scholastic achievement of the black is due to his inherently inferior intelligence.⁷

As pervasive as, and perhaps deeper than, ideas about black intelligence are white ideas—and fears—about black sexuality. The idea that black men are governed by untamed and untamable natural sexual urges and that black women are sexually ‘hot’ and white women ‘cold’ is a commonplace of southern literature (Dollard 1957). These ideas, being consistent with the asymmetry of power between the races and between the sexes, no doubt served to maintain that asymmetry. But it would be an oversimplification to treat them merely as rationalisations designed to justify and maintain an unequal structure of power.

The idea of substance manifests itself most insistently in the context of miscegenation. It is true that miscegenation has taken place extensively in the United States, as also in India, but in both cases it has occurred largely outside the law. In each case the fact of miscegenation brings out deep-rooted fears about its effect on the purity of race or caste. Myrdal has discussed in detail the fear of miscegenation or amalgamation, and the arguments against it. ‘The basic role of the fear of amalgamation in white attitudes to the race problem is indicated by the popular magical concept of “blood”’ (Myrdal 1944: 587). He also tells us that the standard response of the man on the street to the plea for racial equality was the presumably unanswerable question: ‘Would you like to have your daughter marry a Negro?’. Myrdal is quick to show us where his own sympathies lie. But in the light of the discussion now available on American kinship,

we cannot as easily dismiss the popular American concept of blood as 'magical'. That concept is of fundamental importance for understanding not only kinship but also race and stratification in the United States.

Myrdal's own liberal presuppositions prevent him from seeing in full the real contradiction between the American Creed and the American attitude to 'blood'. For him, there is a liberal view of race and a conservative, or even a reactionary, view of it. The liberal view, which is also his own view, is the rational one; it has gained ground steadily and is bound to prevail in the end. In the meantime, the conservative view, arising out of the 'popular magical concept of "blood"', is still entrenched in the South which, in any case, is known to be backward, although it is showing definite signs of progress. This view may not be wholly wrong, but it is superficial and can be misleading.

My reading of Schneider, which differs somewhat from that of Parsons (1975), tells me that American attitudes to race are pervasive and enduring because they are tied up with American ideas about blood which are deep and fundamental. This does not of course mean that these ideas are unalterable, but only that their rhythms of change are not the same as the rhythms of change in what is popularly described as political ideology. All aspects of a society do not change at the same rate or even in the same direction. There is abundant evidence of a change in the relationship between race and the occupational structure which is a central part of the American system of stratification (R.B. Freeman 1976; also Pinkney 1985). But it would be a mistake to read that evidence to mean that there has been a corresponding change in the American attitude to miscegenation, which belongs to a different domain of culture.

All the evidence suggests that, by and large, Americans continue to adhere to the belief that race is a biological fact. Why should this be so when every undergraduate student of anthropology knows, or ought to know, that race is a cultural and *not* a biological fact (Montagu 1974)? It is impossible, in the face of this evidence, to agree with Marriott (1976) that 'biological substantialism' is a peculiarity only of the Hindus.

Use and abuse of the comparative method

I am now in a position to return to the original objective of this article. That objective was not to reach any definite conclusion about caste or about race, or about the similarities and differences between them. My purpose was to raise certain questions about attitudes towards the comparative method held by influential students of Indian society and culture; and, at the same time, to enter a claim for the validity of limited comparisons, when made systematically and with an open mind.

Comparisons between caste and race have been all but banished from the field of Indian studies for the last twenty-five years on the ground that, since Indian and western civilisations are so radically different, such comparisons cannot be fruitful and must be either superficial or misleading (Dumont 1964; 1966). It is a part of this argument that caste is 'normal' in India whereas race is 'pathological' in America (Dumont 1961). Such an argument is itself misleading because in a rapidly changing world it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine what is normal and what is pathological; and it introduces evaluations that cannot be defended and are not really necessary.

The marked stress on 'difference' and 'contrast' prominent in anthropological writings on Indian society and culture in the last two decades is associated with a return to the Indological approach, or, as I indicated at the beginning, to the 'book-view' as

against the 'field-view' of Indian society. I do not mean by this that the anthropologists who have contributed most to this return—whether Dumont or Marriott—have ever denied the importance of fieldwork; indeed the fieldwork done in the fifties by each of these anthropologists was outstanding, if not exemplary.⁸ It is nonetheless true that they have increasingly taken their orientation from Hindu thought rather than Indian life, however crude that distinction might sound. Moreover, the increasing preoccupation with thought rather than action has led them, and their followers, to go back to the past and to locate its basic elements in classical Hinduism and its religious and philosophical literature.

The book-view or Indological approach assigns a privileged position to the past as compared to the present. Obviously, a great deal of fieldwork has gone into the anthropological writings to which I have been referring. But we have to consider not merely the *quantum* of fieldwork but also its *orientation*; not just how much fieldwork one does but also where one sets one's sights. It hardly needs to be argued that in anthropological fieldwork what one observes and what one sets out to observe are never wholly unrelated. In particular, there is a marked tendency in the anthropological writing which has emerged from the fieldwork to which I refer to push to the margins whatever is distinctive of modern or contemporary Indian life.

All this has meant that the predominant anthropological representation of Indian society and culture over the last twenty years or so has had a certain timeless character. Attention has shifted away from technology, politics and law and has been focused on ritual, ceremony and religious thought. It is maintained, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, that the changes taking place in India now are confused and confusing, that they affect the surface of Indian life without touching its core. If in my discussion of race in the United States I have used mainly the ethnography of the thirties and forties, this is in part deliberate, since we have to believe that some things in America remain relatively fixed even though many things change, just as some things in India change even though many things remain unchanged.

What emerges from the literature that I have criticised is a 'structural' view of Hindu culture against the backdrop of a 'historical' view of western civilisation. This fits in very well with the emphasis on 'difference' and 'contrast' to which I have drawn attention. My view is that if we are to develop the study of Indian society and culture within the framework of comparative sociology, we must put back the Indological approach where it properly belongs. I mean by this not that we should ignore the past or treat it as unimportant, but simply that the present and not the past should be the point of departure in the sociology of India as it is, or ought to be, in the sociology of any society. A sociology of India that has its orientation to the past and disregards or devalues the present is bound to be unfruitful and in the end self-defeating.

It is of course the most difficult thing, in applying the comparative method, to maintain a proper balance between comparison and contrast. One must try nonetheless to be faithful to the facts and fair to scholars with a different intellectual orientation from one's own. Perhaps there may be genuine differences of orientation between sociologists devoted to the study of their own society and those devoted to the study of other cultures. I would not, however, push that point too far, because implicit in it is the presumption that societies or civilisations—India and the West in the present case—are somehow like substances and, as such, mutually impenetrable; such a presumption itself becomes an obstacle to comparison.

Those who adopt the 'typifying' or the 'distinctive features' approach do not renounce comparison in either principle or practice. It is true all the same that their approach leads to a sharpening of contrasts in the short run if only because they hope thereby to make their comparisons more fruitful in the long run. For what does it mean to typify if not to engage in 'one-sided accentuation' (Shils & Finch 1949: 90) for establishing clear contrasts? We know how effectively that technique was used by Max Weber for constructing ideal types of great analytical value.

It is, however, one thing to engage in 'one-sided accentuation' for constructing ideal types of, say, economic action or legitimate authority, and quite another to accentuate in a one-sided way the peculiarities of a whole nation or a whole civilisation. In the former case it is easy to keep in mind the fact that 'market rationality' or 'charismatic authority', as the case may be, is a construction that we have made for a particular analytical purpose. In the latter, it is easy to lose sight of the distinction between the construct and the reality, for it is useless to pretend that human beings—including anthropologists and philosophers—can be persuaded to regard India, France, Europe, America or the West in the same way, or with the same detachment, as they might regard 'market rationality' or 'charismatic authority'. It is here that the 'typifying' or the 'distinctive features' approach, with its inclination for 'one-sided accentuation', may become a source not only of intellectual error but also of political mischief.

NOTES

I was persuaded to write this article by Chris Fuller for a seminar at the London School of Economics, where it was presented in May 1989. It was also presented at a number of American universities—Duke University, the University of Chicago, and the University of California at Santa Barbara—whose hospitality I enjoyed as a Fulbright Distinguished Lecturer; I would like to thank the U.S. Educational Foundation in India for the opportunity to travel in the United States. The article was revised for publication at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin where I was a Fellow in 1989-90; I would like to thank the Kolleg for its generous hospitality, and in particular Peter Burke, Robert Darnton and Esther Goody for stimulating comments.

¹ If I were to specify a turning point, I would choose the symposium on Caste and Race organised by the CIBA Foundation and held in London on 19, 20 and 21 April 1966. The conference was chaired by Gunnar Myrdal, and papers were presented by G.D. Berreman, Louis Dumont, Edmund Leach and Surajit Sinha, among others. These papers, along with a record of the discussions, were published in a book, *Caste and race* (Reuck & Knight 1967). I had been invited to the conference, but in April-May 1966 I was lecturing at the Centre of Indian Studies in Paris at the invitation of Professor Dumont; I decided to stay behind in Paris, although Professor Dumont himself went to the conference.

² This is Leach's phrase, applied by Dumont to the work of Berreman and others in his contribution to the CIBA volume (Reuck & Knight 1967: 28).

³ Statistics of atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are published annually in the *Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes* (New Delhi: Controller of Publications). Atrocities are grouped under Murder, Violence, Rape, Arson and Others, and figures are arranged state-wise. Atrocities have also been listed in Kamble (1981). For an account by a sociologist of the exploitation of Scheduled Caste women, see Trivedi (1976).

⁴ See, for instance, the March 1987 issue of *The Lawyer's Collective*. The 4th National Conference on Women's Studies held at Andhra University on 28-31 December 1988 discussed several papers on the subject; these are, however, not yet available in published form.

⁵ Davis *et al.* could trace ten of the sixty-five Negro holdings worth \$ 900 or more to gifts by white fathers to their coloured offspring or common-law wife. However, they also note that 'The evidence definitely indicates that in the great majority of cases where real estate has been given to coloured individuals by whites the relation from which the gift resulted was based not upon kinship but upon sexual partnership' (1941: 298). The point simply is that there is a code governing the relationship between father and natural child, not that it is the same code as the one governing the relationship between father

and lawful child.

⁶ Traditionally, only sons could be adopted, and only by men, the choice of the son to be adopted being governed by the idea of *putrachhaya* (*putra* = son, *chhaya* = shadow), i.e. that he must bear the likeness of a real son. All this has changed under the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1955 which, among other things, ignores caste.

⁷ The literature on race and intelligence is voluminous and controversial. Much of the recent controversy has centred on the question whether the belief in the Negro's inherently inferior intelligence has a scientific basis. Some say that it has and others that it does not, but few would contest that the belief itself is widespread. See Kamin (1974).

⁸ I refer in particular to Marriott's various essays on the village Kishan Garhi, published in the fifties and sixties. Dumont's monograph on the Pramalai Kallar, first published in French in 1957, and now available in English (Dumont 1986), is by any account one of the best monographs on any Indian community. It is, however, notable that in his general work on India, *Homo hierarchicus*, he has hardly referred to his own fieldwork, relying on the fieldwork of others with which he could not have been equally familiar and which he must often have judged to be inferior to his own.

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Race, caste et sexe

Résumé

Cet article compare la race et la caste comme deux formes d'inégalité et argumente que des inégalités de caste sont éclairées de la même façon que celles de race par une considération du sexe. Une comparaison de race et de caste montre une similarité remarquable dans les attitudes différentes envers des femmes de classe inférieure ou supérieure—attitudes caractéristiques, dans les deux systèmes, d'hommes occupant des positions privilégiées. Dans les formes les plus extrêmes, l'utilisation et l'abus sexuels des femmes apparaissent dans le traitement des femmes de la classe la plus basse par des hommes de la classe la plus élevée. En outre, il y a une inquiétude constante envers la pureté des femmes au sommet de la société, associée à des idées de substance physique mises en lumière dans de récentes études de parenté. L'article argumente le cas pour des comparaisons limitées et questionne l'utilité de créer des contrastes radicaux entre des civilisations entières.