

Caste and Politics: Identity Over System

Dipankar Gupta

Center for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067 India; email: dipankargupta@hotmail.com

Annu. Rev. Anthropol.
2005. 21:409-27

The *Annual Review of
Anthropology* is online at
anthro.annualreviews.org

doi: 10.1146/
annurev.anthro.34.081804.120649

Copyright © 2005 by
Annual Reviews. All rights
reserved

0084-6570/05/1021-
0409\$20.00

Key Words

difference, hierarchy, stratification, scheduled caste, reservation

Abstract

To integrate conceptually the relationship between caste and politics, one must appreciate that the pure ritual hierarchy operates only when backed by wealth and power. In fact, there are multiple hierarchies in the caste order because each caste overvalues itself in relation to others. This can be gauged from their origin tales, which, without exception, claim an exalted past regardless of the actual status a caste occupies on the ground. With the breakdown of the closed village economy and the rise of democratic politics, the competitive element embedded in caste has come to the fore. This has resulted in the collapse of the caste system but also in the rise of caste identities.

Contents

THE UNIQUENESS OF CASTE . .	410
RECONCEPTUALIZING CASTE	412
THE POLITICAL ASCENDANCE OF THE “PEASANT CASTES” .	415
THE EMERGENCE OF DALIT POLITICS	417
SYMBOLIC DEFIANCE	419
CASTE ARITHMETIC OR CHEMISTRY?	421
THE POLITICS OF RESERVATIONS.....	422

THE UNIQUENESS OF CASTE

India is quite undeniably the most stratified society in the world. Over and above huge income disparities, there are caste, religious, and community differences that are deeply engraved into everyday social relations. No doubt, the nature of caste and community interactions has changed over time, but considerations along ascriptive lines still remain important markers both at the public and private domains.

Although tribes and religious distinctions exist in other societies as well, what sets India apart is the prevalence of the caste order. There are really no phenotypical differences between castes, but it is presumed that Hindus have specific coded substances in them that set them apart from one another. These substances are incommensurable and cannot be compromised; hence the rules relating to purity and pollution were meant to be strictly observed. Commingling of substances led to becoming polluted, and therefore social relations had to be finely calibrated to make sure that people did not compromise their inherent and inalienable substances by being in close physical proximity with members of different castes.

Even this is not that difficult to comprehend. Physical separation is a dominant diacritic of racism: Indeed everyday interactions

at the level of community, religion, and linguistic affiliation often partake of this prejudice. But what makes caste stand apart from other forms of stratification is that in this case there are elaborate and ritualized rules that ordain not just how distinctions should be maintained, but also prescribe sanctions should the norms be violated. It is this obsessive attention to the slightest variation in ritual ranking that marks out caste from other forms of stratification.

This too, one might take as a quantitative exaggeration of a principle that is not unknown in other societies. Perhaps, it is an extreme form of stratification with cognate likenesses in racism, religious separation, and so on. In which case, the problem of comprehending caste is not difficult as all one has to do is to enlarge the scale and deepen the grooves of ascriptive prejudice. And yet this approach does not immediately satisfy either the scholar or the lay person. This is primarily because of the popular belief that castes that are considered impure according to the Brahmannical hierarchy, nevertheless participate willingly in their own degradation (Moffat 1979, p. 303).

The most systematic and influential proponent of this position can be found in Louis Dumont’s *Homo Hierarchicus* (Dumont 1988). It was not as if Dumont was saying anything that has not been said before. But in the course of his exposition on caste as a state of mind, he gave the term “hierarchy” a technical and sophisticated meaning. According to Dumont, a pure hierarchy allows for economics and politics only surreptitiously, but only in the interstitial levels (Dumont 1988, p. 197). Otherwise, the hierarchy stands firm as its two poles stand in opposition to each other. At one extreme of this hierarchy is the Brahman (or the most pure), and at the other stands the untouchables (who are positively polluting). The castes in between are encompassed by this pure hierarchy, which is obsessively ranked on the purity/pollution principle.

There have been others before Dumont, such as Bougle (1958), Ghurye (1950), Leach

(1969), Marriot (1976), and subsequently, Beck (1970), Milner (1994), and Moffat (1979) among others, who would concur with Dumont's general position although they did not quite articulate their views in quite the same way. But the fact that castes were ranked in an undisputed hierarchy was unquestioningly accepted by all. And as castes were often linked to occupations, these too were ranked along the purity/pollution principle (Marriot 1976). If Leach (1969) could argue that competition between castes was unthinkable, then it was primarily because, in his scheme of things, each caste knew its place and abided by the overarching hierarchical order. The difference that Dumont made is that he provided the theoretical underpinning to all this by insisting that a pure hierarchy is a state of mind to which all those in the caste system willingly acquiesce. Whereas in the past this fact may have been taken as read and quietly assumed, Dumont was forthright about it for he thought that his understanding of a pure hierarchy provided the theoretical key that would explain why the Hindu genuflected spontaneously to the caste hierarchy. As all castes are included within this all encompassing pure hierarchy, each caste ideologically participates in upholding the system as a whole (Dumont 1970, p. 24).

As long as caste is seen through this optic, it is not at all surprising that the phenomenon should appear so unique and exotic, almost defying universalistic categorization. It would be difficult to find a parallel in any other society where the subjugated people supposedly endorse the moral order that so thoroughly denigrates them. If traditional scholarship on caste were to be accepted, then even those, who were considered low or impure in the ritual order, would consider their position to be just and befitting their status in terms of the hierarchy of purity and pollution. A single all embracing, all acquiescing, hierarchy was, of course, expressed with the expected hyperboles in Brahmannical texts such as the Yagnavalkyasmṛiti and Manusmṛiti, but it was the nineteenth century Indologists who were the

modern propagators of this point of view and gave it wider respectability. Sadly, social anthropologists, who could have corrected this notion with their field observations, also succumbed to this position (see Dumont 1988, p. 149). So strong was the persuasive power of exotica! As Beteille (1986, p. 123) once rather trenchantly observed, many anthropologists often miss the larger analytical picture as they are constantly searching for differences and unique totalities.

Contemporary evidence indicates that caste identities cannot be straitjacketed within an unrelenting hierarchical grid where the status of the pure and the impure are empirically and unproblematically firm in their interactional nexus (see Gupta 2000a, pp. 54–85). In fact, this feature was noticed long ago by Senart, Bougle, and Blunt. For example, Senart (1930) argued that castes should be seen as units, and one should not rush into arranging them in a hierarchy. Even Bougle, who otherwise believed that hierarchy was an important characteristic of caste, nevertheless forcefully demonstrated that castes also mutually repel one another. That these two formulations were mutually contradictory did not strike Bougle with any degree of analytical force (Bougle 1958). Blunt was perhaps the most incisive of them all when he observed that “if the caste system was devised with the object of preserving ‘the purity of belief and ceremonial usage,’ it has been a singular failure” (Blunt 1960, p. 37). And yet, the dominant Brahmannical view so dominated the intellectuals that it was Dumont's understanding of caste that swept Blunt, Bougle, and Senart under the carpet.

The fact is that the caste order is characterized by contesting notions of hierarchy and that is why we find competitive assertions of caste identity. These assertions draw symbolic energy and sustenance from origin tales that are specific to each caste and often in direct confrontation with the Brahmannical hierarchy. Nor is it that status concerns in these multiple hierarchies are always linked to purity and pollution issues. They may also be

associated with power and wealth, as among the merchant Jain castes, much more directly than what caste purists would have us believe (see Cort 2004). A general insensitivity toward this aspect of caste has led to the overvaluation of the Brahmannical version of hierarchy, both in scholarly works and in popular imaginations. This has also contributed to the general intellectual puzzlement as to how one should conceptualize the relationship between caste and politics because here we have tension and competition in place of ideological acquiescence.

If castes do not contest their positions in the hierarchy, then where does the symbolic energy to compete for power in the political arena come from? Each caste should be content with its lot, and its members should calmly accept the superiority of those who are placed above them in terms of purity rankings. Indeed, Leach once said that when castes begin to compete, then they no longer function as caste (Leach 1969, p. 7). The truth, however, is that the caste system sans competition and conflict never really existed on the ground. There are different rankings in different locales depending upon who has the power and the wherewithal to make a particular ranking system, or hierarchy, work to their advantage. In some cases, the Brahmans were able to realize their favored hierarchy in practice; in other cases, it was the Jats, or the Rajputs, or the Marathas, or the Marawas, or the Lingayats, and so on. In other words, contrary to Dumont's understanding, power and considerations of wealth do not appear surreptitiously or only at the interstitial levels but are manifest across the entire caste order. This is why it is important to factor in the notion of caste identity; otherwise tensions within the caste order will never be fully understood.

Not only are we now confronted by identity assertions of earthy peasant castes, which were earlier ranked as lowly shudras (or menials), but also of those who, until recently, were called untouchables. Now we also know that none of these castes had ever ideologically accepted their degraded status. Yet

they lived out their humble lives quietly for generations for fear of offending the privileged strata. We now know more of their origin tales that boast of the elevated positions they once held before an unsuspected chicanery, a lost war, or a mercurial god, demoted them to lowly rungs in popular perceptions (Gupta 2000a, pp. 69–77; Jaffrelot 2003, pp. 207–8; Sahay 2001, p. 147). Jotiba Phule, the nineteenth century leader of the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra, put forward the claim that the so-called “shudra” lower castes of today were actually Kshatriyas (or warriors) in pre-Aryan times. They were the kind and genial rulers of the land before the Brahmans and then the Muslim “robbers” from across the Himalayas took over by deceit and cruelty (O’Hanlon 1983, pp. 11–14). In this rendition then, the origins of the authentic Kshatriyas predate Vedic Hinduism.

It is true that all these tales of the past are just tales, not unlike myths, but so are Brahmannical justifications of their superiority. As myths, all of these origin tales occupy an identical logical position. It is another thing that intellectuals tend to prefer stories that Brahmans tell us over those that are related by less privileged castes. But today these other assertions are being loudly broadcast, and it would be unwise not to heed them both for empirical and analytical purposes. This is particularly so when we examine the relationship between caste and politics, and the move from caste as a system to caste as identity.

RECONCEPTUALIZING CASTE

The study of caste and politics can be analytically justified only when we accept that castes are, first and foremost, discrete entities with deep pockets of ideological heritage. As they are discrete phenomena, it is both logically and empirically true that there should be multiple hierarchies as each caste always overvalues itself. The element of caste competition is, therefore, a characteristic of the caste order and not a later addition (Gupta 2000a, pp. 55–82). This implies that the caste

system, as a system, worked primarily because it was enforced by power and not by ideological acquiescence. Only when we are armed with this perspective are we conceptually prepared to study the relationship between caste and politics. If in the past it appeared as if there were few obvious disagreements over the hierarchy, then this was primarily due to two reasons. First, the relationships between castes were played out within the confines of the closed natural economy of the village. This left no room for maneuver for the subaltern communities and castes. Second, in precolonial times, caste hierarchies were contested and renegotiated episodically following the philippics of a war or a major social upheaval (see Chattopadhyaya 1976). As such instances were rare, it gave rise to the illusion that castes have never competed and have been politically inactive.

The tranquility that this vision of the pure hierarchy inspired should have been shattered irreparably when certain castes began to clamour for a higher status following the census operations conducted by the colonial regime. According to O'Malley, during the 1911 census enumeration, a number of castes objected to being placed at inferior levels in the hierarchy or wanted to be known differently from the traditional term assigned to them. Such petitions came fast and thick because the impression had gone around at that time that the census was not just about putting down numbers but also about assigning rank and prestige (see Srinivas 1972, p. 101). Around this time caste associations, or *sabhas*, began to proliferate to press for higher status both in census records as well as in everyday interactions (Srinivas 1972, pp. 102–5). Some enlightened Rajas, such as the ruler of Travancore, also helped in this regard by elevating certain castes (Cox 1970, p. 8). The Baroda prince gave scholarships to bright students from “low” caste families. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the legendary leader of the Scheduled Castes and one of the founding figures of independent India's Constitution, was one such beneficiary.

British authorities intervened in the caste order in three significant ways. First, it gave the Brahmans extraordinary precedence by taking their advice on what was the correct custom (Dirks 2001, pp. 10, 170–71). This gave Brahmans in certain regions, particularly in South India and Maharashtra (see also Wagle 1998), a lot of supralocal influence of the kind they did not enjoy hitherto. Resentment against this growing Brahman dominance resulted in anti-Brahman movements in South India and Maharashtra from the latter years of the nineteenth century. Although the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra has now become more or less defunct, the mobilization in Tamilnadu has evolved over the years. There are two mainstream political parties in Tamilnadu that can legitimately claim to be descendants of the original anti-Brahman Dravida Kazhagam movement. Also in North India, traditional peasant castes that were classified as lowly *shudras*, according to Brahmannical ranking, were forming their own associations to press for their rightful status under British rule. The Kurmi Caste Association, for example, was set up as early as 1890 in Lucknow, and the Ahir-Yadava Mahasabha began in 1919.

Second, the Moreley-Minto reforms of 1909 introduced separate electorates that gave a fillip to non-Brahman castes in their quest for self-respect. They now began to organize themselves as “Depressed Classes.” This gained momentum from 1917 onward, and various Depressed Caste Associations began in different parts of India. In fact, the concern for the lower castes and untouchables was evident in the colonial administration from the 1880s onward. This was initially with special reference to education, so that the poor would find a ladder to climb from “the gutter to the university” (Radhakrishnan 1990, p. 515). Nevertheless, such a policy also demanded the enumeration of backward classes. This process began from 1883 onward, and the list of castes included in it began to grow rapidly. As the backward class rubric also included the untouchables, there was a move

initiated in Madras in 1917 to separate them for the rest for special treatment.

Third, British presence also made a difference as a number of laws were enacted to lessen the weight of untouchability that the so-called polluting castes had to bear. For example, the Madras Government passed the Removal of Disabilities Act in 1938; this was soon followed by Mysore in 1943. Thereafter, between 1943 and 1947 a number of states enacted similar laws to free those traditionally deemed as low castes from the incubus of traditional disabilities. After India became independent, Article 17 of the Constitution of India outlawed untouchability. The Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koeris of North India formed the Triveni Sangh to contest the 1935 elections. Though they lost that round to the Congress, the Triveni Sangh held and gradually increased its size. It incorporated other castes from similar backgrounds into its fold to form the Backward Class Federation. The members of the Backward Caste Federation were generally tenants and small cultivators, and they used their organization to fight for their economic interests against the landlord classes, many of whom were close to the Congress (Jaffrelot 2003, p. 198).

Recent studies, therefore, clearly demonstrate that it is not as if castes are warming up to power considerations only after India became independent. The process of questioning established hierarchies through means other than war began with the establishment of British suzerainty in India. Caste and politics were always related, but the relationship was manifested differently at different periods of time. The establishment of democracy in independent India has introduced one major change in the way caste and politics interact, and that is by making all castes legally equal. It took some time for this legal equality to gain empirical momentum, but with the gradual dissolution of the closed village economy, the tempo has certainly become easily visible to the naked eye. This combination between law and economic change has allowed castes that were hitherto considered low to take the fight

to the traditional superior communities and even to thumb their noses at established symbolic and ritual systems. As Beteille rightly remarks, outside the domain of the family, caste is most active at the level of politics in contemporary Indian society (Beteille 1996, p. 167). If this aspect of caste was not noticed in the past, then it was primarily because political upheavals of the medieval age were few and far between. In premodern times, each attempt at caste identity assertion required the philippics of war and could not be carried out, as it is today, in a routine form within a democratic political format.

Quite clearly, castes were never outside politics; only the connection is much more transparent today. Whereas in the past ambitious castes had to "wade through slaughter to a throne," caste tensions today are a daily grind. Further, unlike colonial times, castes in contemporary India are not concerned about official rankings. Caste identities have evolved to a much higher level, and it is now a question of self over others and not self in relation to others. Thus, no matter which caste is in question, its involvement in politics is primarily to stake a claim to jobs, educational opportunities, as well as to positions of power in government bodies in direct competition against other castes. Unlike the agitations regarding the census operations in 1911 and later, caste assertions today are not just to feel good in an attributional way (see Marriot 1959) but to make it good in a highly competitive environment that disregards the interactional setting that the pure caste hierarchy recommends.

The breakdown of the traditional caste system and the emergence of caste identities that energize contemporary caste politics can be explained in a variety of ways. Weiner believed that the repeated ideological exhortations of the Congress party brought an end to "the self-imposed barrier to protests by caste, that is, the acceptance of their place in the hierarchy" (Weiner 2002, p. 199). It may be recalled that India's struggle against British colonialism was led by the Congress, and quite naturally this party also controlled the government

uninterruptedly for 20 years after independence. According to Weiner, the charisma of Congress leaders, combined with the success of the freedom movement, led to the downgrading of the moral basis of castes. According to Kaviraj this resulted in a “democracy of castes in place of a ‘hierarchy’” (Kaviraj 2000, p. 104). Although it is certainly true that the political representation and the impact of the Congress have played a significant role, they need to be placed in the context of the significant shifts in the structural plates of agrarian India. These changes were so fundamental that they cut the ground from under the traditional elite castes and gradually brought about their political decline. As the power of the erstwhile big landlords waned, the middle farmers and the former untouchables grew in stature and became politically more assertive.

THE POLITICAL ASCENDANCE OF THE “PEASANT CASTES”

In the years following independence, the traditional upper castes continued to rule in most parts of India. For example, until 1977, upper castes continued to hold prominent elected positions in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in the Indian union (Hasan 2000, p. 149; Jaffrelot 2003, pp. 67, 129). Until 1962, as many as 63% of ruling Congress members of the Legislative Assembly came from elite castes (Jain 1996, p. 137). Soon, however, traditional peasant castes such as Ahirs, Kurmis, Koeri, Lodh Rajputs, and Jats began to dominate the political scape of northern India. In the southern state of Tamilnadu, the Vanniyars and Thevars have become assertive, and in Karnataka, control was wrested in the mid-1950s from the traditional rural elite within the Congress party by the Vokkaligas and Linagayats (see Brass 1997, p. 205; Manor 1997, pp. 267–70). In the North Indian Hindi-speaking belt, upper caste members of parliament fell below 50% for the first time in 1977. The challenge to the established Congress was mounted in Uttar Pradesh rather effectively in the late 1960s by a coalition of peasant

castes led by Charan Singh. In Bihar, also, there was a significant decline of upper caste members of the legislative assembly after 1977 (Blair 1980, p. 67).

In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the Yadav caste has gained a great degree of political salience. In Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi party is headed by Maulayam Singh Yadav, and in Bihar, the Rashtriya Janata Dal has Laloo Prasad Yadav at its helm. It may also be noted that Maulayam Yadav is today the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), and Laloo Prasad Yadav’s wife, Rabri Devi, is chief minister of Bihar. It is not always the case, however, that other peasant castes such as the Kurmis and Koeris always rally behind either the Janata Dal or the Samajwadi party. According to Jaffrelot, Kurmis are not as widely represented in these parties as the Yadavs are. In 1996, only three percent of Samajwadi party members of the legislative assembly (MLA) were Kurmis (Jaffrelot 2003, p. 376). In Bihar, the numbers were higher but still not more than around eight percent of MLAs were from the Rashtriya Janata Dal (Jaffrelot 2003, p. 381).

The decline of the traditional elite castes in Indian politics has been discussed quite frequently in academic literature (Rudolph & Hoeber 1987, Washbrook 1989, Sheth 2002, Weiner 2002). Rudolph & Hoeber characterized the newly ascendant peasant castes as “bullock capitalists” who challenged the hegemony of the traditional Kshatriya castes, such as the Rajputs and Bhumiyaars (Rudolph & Hoeber 1987, p. 52). These peasant castes constitute 34% of the population but control about 51% of land, more than any other agrarian class (Rudolph & Hoeber 1987). As a category they are closer to “yeoman farmers” than to kulaks. Hence, the appellation “bullock capitalists” is an apposite term for their economic operation is a mix of “capitalist, preindustrial, and noncapitalist features” (pp. 52–53).

The political emergence of these bullock capitalists coincides with the emergence of the backward class movement in large parts of India. To put the matter in perspective, it

UP: Uttar Pradesh

MLA: members of the legislative assembly

needs to be recalled that feudal landlordism, or zamindari, as the Indian variant was known, was abolished after independence in India. This seriously undercut the economic and power base of the traditional rural elite, many of whose members also had an established urban foothold. Although there were attempts by this class to conceal the extent of their holdings by registering their possessions in the name of fictitious owners, the writing was on the wall. Gradually, they lost their preeminence in rural India, and this was signaled by the social ascendance of the middle peasants, or bullock capitalists, many of whom were tenants under zamindars, large and small (see also Brass 1997, p. 205).

In 1963, Srinivas wrote that landownership was "a crucial factor in establishing dominance. Generally, the pattern of landownership in rural India is such that the bulk of the arable land is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of big owners as against a large number who either own very little land or no land at all" (Srinivas 1972, p. 11). The picture has obviously changed a great deal since the 1960s. The bullock capitalists of Rudolph & Hoeber are small owners of land, and yet they exercise considerable political power in contemporary India as can be gauged from the successes of Samajwadi party and Rashtriya Janata Dal in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, respectively (see also Bose 1991, Frankel 1988, Frankel 1989).

It is not as if these peasant castes have suddenly become much richer. The more crucial fact is that the patrons of the past have become poorer. They can no longer wield the kind of power or influence they used to take for granted. Naturally, the idea of vote banks in the control of dominant factions does not quite apply today (Sharma 1997, p. 216). According to Sharma, the new dominants of rural India are not necessarily those who are economically at the top. They must, of course, have a viable economic standing, but they should also have sufficient numbers as well as political connections (Sharma 1997, p. 217). Karanth puts this idea across rather nicely

when he says that "it is not always necessary for a caste to have all the attributes of dominance. . .but one or two are enough to ensure a modicum of dominance" (Karanth 1996, p. 105). Indeed, a modicum of dominance is more prevalent today than decisive dominance because very few castes can simultaneously claim unchallenged superiority at the economic, political, and cultural levels (see Beteille 1965).

The morphological features of contemporary agrarian structure inhibit cumulative inequalities and decisive dominance. It needs to be remembered that 85% of landholdings in India are below five acres and 63% below three acres. Given this ground level situation, owner cultivators can hardly be expected to behave like the power wielders of yore. In addition, a large number of rural people are seeking rural nonfarm employment. Today, 44.5% of rural net domestic product is nonagricultural (Chaddha 2003, pp. 55). The 50th round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) held during 1993–1994 shows that 32.9% of rural households were outside agriculture. By the 57th round of the NSS during 2002–2003, the percentage increased to 35.2%. In states such as Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, and Haryana, the number of nonagricultural households in rural India is above 50%. Even in the backward state of Bihar, 40% of rural households are nonagricultural. This has not only led to rural exodus, but even for those who stay back in the village, it is not agriculture that solely contributes to their earnings. The poorer villagers participate in a host of occupations that require a narrow band width of skills, ranging from construction labor, to coolie, to rickshaw puller, to vegetable seller. The better-off owner cultivator is also looking for nonagricultural outlets and tends to invest outside land, such as in transportation, shops, and various forms of mercantile activity. Of course, for all of them getting a regular urban job has the highest value (see Gupta 2005).

All of this suggests a picture of rural stratification that cannot uphold the earlier prestige that was accorded to the landed elite in a

noncompetitive caste hierarchy. It is obvious that if the earlier hierarchy held, with all its idiosyncratic nuances, it was primarily because it was buttressed by the economic power of the agrarian rich. As that is no longer the dominant feature in rural India, castes compete out in the open. The fact of caste competition in politics should not lead us to believe that this is a restatement of the caste system. If castes are more overtly in conflict today, then it is largely because the caste system, as we knew it, has by and large collapsed in most parts of India. The obverse side of this collapse is the assertion of caste identities. Castes that could not project what they had always believed for fear of reprisal can now boldly assert their pride and status claims.

Numerous field studies also demonstrate that conflicts between castes are rarely resolved at the village level. In the past, the village panchayat used to mediate tensions of various kinds, but, as Karanth demonstrates, the caste panchayat, or council, has lost its importance (Karanth 1996, p. 89). Sahay finds that in Bihar tensions between castes are not adjudicated at the local level. In some cases, the tensions remain unresolved; in other instances, the matter is taken to court where the decision it is not always satisfactory. In one instance, Sahay recalls from his field notes, "members of the Chamar caste [leather workers] were beaten up by the Brahmins. The case was not settled at the village level. The chamars went to the police and to the court for justice. When they realized that the court was not going to punish the Brahmins immediately, they beat some of the Brahmins up and withdrew the case from the court" (Sahay 2001, p. 117; see also Sahay 2004, pp. 125–26; Kumar 2003, p. 3870).

It has been frequently pointed out that caste politics is not to end caste but to "use caste as an instrument for social change" (Weiner 2002, p. 196). Democratic politics has brought about aggressive caste assertion, but this has not resulted in contesting the category of caste as such (Jayaram 1996, p. 73). As Sheth points out, the vertical consolidation

of caste along the purity hierarchy has been replaced by a "horizontalization" (Sheth 2002, p. 212). Political alliances in this horizontal scheme of caste relations are not enduring, and they are "open-ended entities" (Sheth 2002, p. 223). They are made keeping in mind the coalescence of secular interests, and they fade away when a better and more appropriate bargain is struck with other castes and caste clusters (Mitra 1980, pp. 53–54). For example, alliances such as KHAM (comprising Ksahtriyas, Harijan, and Muslims) and AJGAR (made up of Ahirs, Jats and Gujars) had their best days in the 1980s and are now defunct (see also Brass 1990, pp. 217–22).

KHAM: Ksahtriyas, Harijan, and Muslims

AJGAR: Ahirs, Jats and Gujars

THE EMERGENCE OF DALIT POLITICS

As is well known, the Constitution of independent India not only abolished untouchability but also made provisions to reserve jobs and seats in government undertakings and educational institutions, respectively, for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. With independence, and the abolition of untouchability, the untouchables became known as Scheduled Castes because they were listed for special privileges in the Schedule of the Constitution. Untouchability had diverse manifestations in different parts of India, so it was far from obvious as to which castes should be included in the Schedule of the Constitution (Galanter 1984). In any event, roughly 17% of seats in government educational institutions and jobs in the public sector were reserved for the Scheduled Castes and, similarly, about 7% for the Scheduled Tribes.

It is not just the owner cultivators or bullock capitalists, who are aggressively using caste as a vehicle of self-assertion, but so also are those who were earlier considered to be untouchables in the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy. This phenomenon too has an India-wide character from Tamilnadu in the south, to northern states such as Uttar Pradesh. The Republican party in Maharashtra and the Bahujan Samaj party in Uttar Pradesh are the

RPI: Republican
party of India

BSP: Bahujan Samaj
party

STs: Scheduled
Tribes

two most widely acknowledged political organizations forwarding the aspirations of the former untouchables.

The Republican party was founded by the legendary Babasaheb Ambedkar in 1957. He later led his people to renounce Hinduism and embrace Buddhism instead (see Zelliott 1970). It is true that most of the votaries of the Republican party of India (RPI) belong to the Mahar caste because other formerly untouchable castes of the region, such as the Mangs, Matangs, and Chambars, have stayed away from it. In fact, they often veer toward supporting the Bharaiya Janata party (Omvedt 2001, p. 156), which is, ironically, a right-wing Hindu organization. This is because many members of these other castes believe that the RPI is a vehicle of upward mobility for the Mahars alone. They have also desisted from becoming Buddhists.

Nevertheless, Babasaheb Ambedkar's shadow looms large even today in the politics of the former untouchables. They resent the term "Harijan" (children of God) that Gandhi used for them as they consider it too patronizing. They would rather be known as "Dalits," or the oppressed. Ambedkar was the first to use this term to denote the Scheduled Castes for its obvious combative edge (see also Guru 2001, pp. 98–99). Ambedkar, today, has been deified among the Buddhist Mahars of Maharashtra and has a similar iconic status to Buddha in many Mahar families (Burra 1996, p. 164). Ambedkar's death anniversary in 1981 provided the occasion for Kanshi Ram to inaugurate the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samit (or DS-4). In its attempt to attract as wide a range as possible, the DS-4 also called out to Muslims to help fight the privileges of the traditional elite castes.

In 1984, this time in celebration of Ambedkar's birthday, the DS-4 transformed itself into the Bahujan Samaj party (BSP). Since then, it has been a vital force in North India. It may not have won the elections outright in the several polls that it has faced, but by clever political maneuvering, it has managed to propel Mayawati as the Chief Minister in U.P. on

two occasions with the most unlikely political allies. The first time Mayawati's ascendance was supported by the Congress and then later by the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata party (BJP). Just as was noted in the alliances arrived at by the rising peasant castes in the section above, we found no stable compacts in Dalit politics either.

Neither do the Dalits constitute a homogenous group. They contest for superiority among themselves (Desai 1976; Rao 2001, p. 82). Middle class Dalits are more concerned about identity and often project themselves as indigenous people, Buddhists, and or another group (see Burra 1996). But the poor Dalit marginal farmer and landless laborers are more concerned about questions of economic exploitation, but these issues are not adequately attended to by their middle class leaders (Shah 2001b, p. 212). For instance, Burra found that Buddhism had not made a significant impact upon rural Mahar Dalits. Strict observance of Buddhist norms and a singular identification with Buddhism were more common among urban Mahars (Burra 1996, pp. 166–67). According to Vora, no Dalit leader after Ambedkar paid any consistent attention to economic issues (Vora 2004, p. 283). Dalits are, however, very active when it comes to voting in elections. As Yadav notes, the turn out of Scheduled Caste (or Dalit) voters was as high as 62.2% in the 1998 elections (Yadav 2001, pp. 129, 139).

Although the Constitution also provides for reservations for Scheduled Tribes (STs), their situation is in many ways quite different from that of the Scheduled Castes. It is difficult to arrive at a formal definition of tribes in India; many of them are in transition, and many more are already peasants and far removed from a life in the forests. In addition, there are the tribes of Northeast India, such as the Nagas and Mizos, who are not backward because they were the ruling communities in their respective regions and not under the hegemony of the Hindus in the rest of the country. Some of them, such as the Ao and Angami, even had slaves until very recently

(Karyokinesis 1982, pp. 53–54). But as with other tribes in India, they too worshipped gods that were not part of the Hindu pantheon (with a few exceptions). However, stratification between classes was quite marked in many of these northeastern peoples, and that is why they do not fit our usual understanding of “tribes” though they are categorized as such in the Indian Constitution. True, the term “tribe” has been a contentious one in anthropology, and instances from India only confirm its somewhat dubious status. Incidentally, as Xaxa points out, those designated as tribes would rather be called “adivasis” (or original inhabitants) instead (Xaxa 1999, p. 3591). In addition, the tendency to romanticize tribes can also be highly misleading. The belief that tribes spontaneously sacralize nature and that they are primarily hunters and gatherers certainly do not hold true for the majority of STs in India (see Singh, 1982; Jackson & Chattopadhyay 1998, p. 153).

In general, tribes are considered to be deprived communities because of their geographic isolation. In the northeast, they are in a majority, but in certain belts in east and central India, they are in substantial numbers, although never over 50% of the population of those regions. This is why tribal mobilizations, such as the Jharkhand movement, as well as those in the northeast are regional in character (see Sharma 2001). Scheduled Caste (SC) organizations do not have regional autonomy or control on their agenda because their members are embedded in Hindu society and dispersed all over the country.

In recent years, two states have been formed in recognition of the numerical strength of the tribal population in those regions. This does not mean that the leadership in these states is exclusively in tribal hands. This is not possible because the tribes are not in a majority in either of these two states. Yet, by carving these separate states—Jharkhand in east India and Chattisgarh in central India—it is hoped that greater attention will be paid to the specific claims of the tribes that live there. The most important demand that tribes

make is that nontribes should not take away their lands and the forests from which they made a living in the past. In addition, they have also stepped up their claims for more jobs in factories and other state enterprises, with particular emphasis on those organizations that have been established on what was once tribal land. This is why tribal development plans tend to be regional—as tribes, in the main, live in compact zones.

Thus, although it might seem at first sight that the politics of tribes and castes are cognate phenomenon, the two are really quite different. In fact, as Xaxa argues, SCs have been more successful in getting their claims recognized in practice than have STs. This is because of the latter’s geographical isolation from the larger Hindu society. As SCs were always within the interactive nexus of the caste system, they were more adept at using the levers of power than the STs. Be that as it may, the logic of caste politics is certainly very different from that of tribal politics and therefore deserves to be understood separately.

SYMBOLIC DEFIANCE

As we mentioned above, no caste really thinks of itself to be inherently inferior to any other caste. It is another matter that they were never really able to espouse this point of view with the facility with which they do so now primarily because the subaltern communities were locked within a closed village economy. Because agrarian economic relations and land ownership patterns have undergone major transformations in recent times, earlier dominant castes are not as powerful as they once were.

This change in agrarian class relations, coupled with the provisions in the Constitution, has allowed for the proliferation of caste associations all over the country (Kolenda 1978, p. 121). It is true that this process began in the early decades of the twentieth century when caste competition at the political level first began to manifest itself. Today, there are literally hundreds of associations of this sort,

SC: Scheduled Caste

each putting forward its special claims (see for example, Narayan 2004). Through *gaurav gathas* (tales of pride) and *jati puranas* (origin tales of jatis or castes), these associations seek to instill a sense of pride in their primordial identities without which it would be difficult to use caste identities for political aims. This is as true of the Brahman and Baniya castes (see Gupta 2000a, pp. 117–23; Babb 1998; Cort 2004) as it is of peasant castes, such as the Ahirs (Michelutti 2004), or the SCs (Narayan 2004, Jodhka 2004, Deliege 1993).

It is interesting to note in this connection that the origin tales of the nonscheduled castes rarely question established norms and customs other than staking their claim as to an exalted past. There are some exceptions such as in the case of the Khandelwal Jains of Rajasthan, who pointedly distance themselves from Kshatriya practices and consider them to be abhorrent (Babb 1998, pp. 394–401). Otherwise, non-SCs do not, as a rule, contest Hinduism or the various practices associated with it. The Yadav association exemplifies this rather nicely and, at the same time, demonstrates how caste loyalty can be used to forward sectional interests in the name of democracy.

Yadav associations were established as early as in the opening decades of the twentieth century. In 1933, the formation of the All India Yadav Mahasabha (AIYM) brought together various disparate Yadava associations under one roof. The AIYM traces the history of the Yadavs to Lord Krishna, whose earthly incarnations are many but who is most widely cast in several popular lores as a romantic cowherd. He also plays the role of a sagacious warrior priest in the Bhagvat Gita (a chapter of the Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*), as a supreme exegete of Advaita and the laws of karma.

By relating the Yadavs to Krishna, the cowherd, the AIYM is able to portray its followers as descendants of a mighty progenitor with Kshatriya status. This allows them to make the further claim that they are natural politicians as power wielding and herding people come naturally to them. As Michelutti

records, the AIYM believes that the Yadavs are not just “natural politicians” (Michelutti 2004), but they are also the best custodians of democracy. Therefore, if one is to keep democracy alive and well, then it is the Yadavs for whom one should vote. The contradiction between caste loyalty and the democratic principle of individualism is calmly glossed over in such assertions.

We related above that SCs too have their own organizations, which speak of their proud pasts. Although many SC associations are content in claiming Brahman or Kshatriya status, those that are politically active are keen to point out their alienation from established Hindu myths, beliefs, and rituals. When Ambedkar converted to Buddhism, he made it clear in his vows that he did not consider Buddha to be an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu as many Hindus claim. Nor did he follow any of the rituals of Hinduism and abided strictly by the Buddhist code.

Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism was a highly symbolic political act that helped fuse Dalit antipathy toward Hinduism and, at the same time, that enabled them to leverage their new identity to great political advantage (Zelliot 1970). In recent years, the All India Confederation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has held many conversion ceremonies that have attracted a lot of public attention. In these ceremonies, there has always been a pointed attack on Hindu symbolic systems. This was clearly in evidence when a mass conversion was held of SCs who, in hundreds, embraced Buddhism in New Delhi as recently as November 3, 2001. The point of debate is the extent to which these overt demonstrations of identity in urban India are actually carried over to the Dalits of the rural hinterlands (for example, see Burra 1996).

Dalit politics today symbolically defy Hinduism by either promoting conversions to Buddhism or by claiming that Dalits belong to the original Kshatriya orders before Vedic Hindus entered the geographical

space of India. As mentioned above, Phule of the Satyashodhak Samaj in Maharashtra argued that the so-called low castes of Maharashtra were the original and real Kshatriyas before the Brahmans and then the Muslims overwhelmed them (see O'Hanlon 1983; Gore 1993, p. 180). Many SC organizations now project their culture as the origin of all cultures in Indic civilization. These Dalit communities believe that they are the *adi* (literally the origin, or the founders) of all other cultures in the Indian subcontinent, although the Aryans, who came later, did their best to undermine this fact. This *adi* theme helps further the Dalit claim that social and political supremacy should rightfully belong to them and not to the Brahmans who, by deceit and treachery, have worked their way to the top. By legitimizing their cultural supremacy in terms of historic priority, Dalits gain the necessary symbolic confidence in their quest for political power in contemporary politics. This is again quite in keeping with our conceptualization of castes as being principally discrete in character.

Such instances of symbolic defiance are not limited to Hindus alone. Jodhka incisively highlights how the Sikh leather workers (pejoratively known as *chamars*) have also challenged the established norms of the mainstream Gurudwaras (Sikh temples) and their styles of worship (Jodhka 2004). These Sikh leather workers now call themselves Ad-Dharmis (etymologically linked to Phule's concept of *adi*) and refuse to bow down to the dictates of the dominant Jat Sikh community. The Ad-Dharmis have set up their own Gurudwaras and refuse to go to those run by Jat Sikhs. It is true that SC Sikhs have often felt alienated and unwanted in local Sikh Gurudwaras, although Sikhism is officially against casteism. Ad Dharmi Gurudwaras also give the Sikh holy book the pride of place but have a bust or engraving of Ravidas, the devotional medieval low caste saint who challenged Brahman orthodoxy. Although Ravidas' contribution is acknowledged fulsomely in the Sikh holy book, his image is not to be found in

any mainstream Jat Sikh Gurudwara. Ravidas is an important figurehead among former untouchables, especially in North India, and by installing his image in the Gurudwara, the Ad Dharmis were reaching out to other SCs elsewhere, even those outside Sikhism.

CASTE ARITHMETIC OR CHEMISTRY?

The fact that castes are politically active should not give the impression that the equation between caste and political allegiance is unequivocal and unproblematic. It is not as if all members of a certain caste vote unanimously with utmost primordial loyalty. Unfortunately, this view has not been challenged as strongly as it should be. In many scholarly works it is uncritically assumed that the political fortunes of parties depend primarily upon the caste composition of constituencies (Frankel 1989, pp. 823–101). When castes align politically, it is not as if the bond is informed by considerations of hierarchy or tradition. We have found that formations like the Bharatiya Lok Dal (which was a conglomerate of various peasant castes of Uttar Pradesh) or the KHAM and AJGAR alliances were not very stable fixtures in the political firmament. When castes come together, they do so because they believe that their secular interests coincide, which is why it makes good political sense to cement an alliance. Otherwise, members of such alliances do not always think well of their political partners, and in many cases, they have developed oppositional folklores (such as between the Jats and Gujars of Uttar Pradesh). The KHAM alliance, to take another example, comprises Kshatriyas, Harijans, and Muslims. One would be hard put to find a more unlikely combination if one were to calculate strictly along lines of caste ideologies.

Further, the predominance of a certain caste in a defined region is not because it has superior numbers that can carry it through elections but rather because it is better organized. This is the case with Jats of West

OBC: Other
Backward Castes

Uttar Pradesh (Gupta 1997) as well as the Ahirs (Michelutti 2004) and the Marathas (Lele 1981), to give but a few examples. In the case of the Marathas, it is true that they constitute about 30% of the population of Maharashtra, but this caste is politically divided into numerous political affiliations. There are Marathas in the Congress, in the Communist parties, in the Bharatiya Janata party, in the Shiv Sena, and so forth. This negates the possibility of Marathas acting as a united political lobby. Conversely, the Yadavs are not nearly as dominant in terms of population in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, but they make up for it by the intensity of their political activism. As Michelutti points out, the number of Yadavs in politics is proportionately much higher than among any other community in the Sadar Bazaar area of Uttar Pradesh where she conducted her study (Michelutti 2004). Likewise, Jats used to dominate west Uttar Pradesh, although they never constituted more than 8% of the population anywhere in that region. In spite of this, the Jats were so powerful because they were the best organized and were economically the strongest peasant caste of the region. In the case of SC politics, the Mahars in Maharashtra are most prominent because they are the most literate among all the other SCs of the region, and consequently, they have better connections with local and national administrative officials.

We have already noted that SCs do not always vote for parties, such as the RPI or the BSP, that are slated as Dalit organizations. In fact, Congress party still polls the largest share of SC votes across the country (Pushpendra 2002, p. 364). Although the BSP secures mostly Dalit votes, it is not as if the percentage of votes from this community is assured (Pushpendra 2002, p. 365). Occasionally, it has also been noticed that non-SCs also vote for parties such as the BSP. Jaffrelot brings to our attention the fact that in the 1996 elections about 25% of Koeris (a peasant caste of Uttar Pradesh) voted for BSP, and not, as one might expect, for the Samajwadi party of the middle peasants. However, it must

also be said that the BSP has striven to attract Muslims and other peasant castes to its cause (Jaffrelot 2003, pp. 401–2). Even though it may have won over a section of Koeris, there is no marked Yadav preference for BSP over the last few elections.

If one were to study the relationship between caste and elections then there would indeed be many instances of mismatch and of marked fluctuations in political loyalties (Gupta 2000a, pp. 150–76). This is true not just of peasant castes or the SCs but holds for the traditional upper castes as well. Incidentally, there is no constituency in Bihar where the Yadavs are over 20% of the population. Yet, if the Yadav-controlled Janta Dal continues to rule in Bihar, it must be something more than just caste loyalty that one needs to consider. Among the Yadavs too, there are serious factions, and it is an established fact that they do not vote en bloc. Therefore, the popular assumption that caste arithmetic is all that matters in determining political behavior is clearly in need of revision. Empirical data do not substantiate this argument beyond a point.

THE POLITICS OF RESERVATIONS

When the Indian Constitution provided reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, it also added that in due course of time similar legislations ought to be devised for the Other Backward Castes as well. The population of these so-called Backward Castes is difficult to estimate, and the figures range from 25% to 52% of the total population of the country. In terms of their social and economic standing, they are placed between the traditional elite castes such as Brahmans, Baniyas, Kayasthas, Rajputs, other lower castes, and the SC and STs. The upper castes are about 15% of the population, the SC roughly 17% and the STs make up 7% or so. The Backward Castes make up the rest.

These Backwards are now known as Other Backward Castes (OBC) and, in general,

comprise largely peasant and other agrarian communities. These castes are not untouchables but are considered backward as they lack a culture of learning on account of their lowly peasant status. Thus though they did not have to bear the burden of untouchability, their depressed economic position contributed to their general cultural backwardness. In recognition of this fact, the Constitution of India recommended that the state intervene and help these communities by legislating some measures that would break this cycle of poverty and backwardness. Although the Constitution provided clear policies of positive discrimination and reservation for the SCs, it did not do so in the case of the backward castes. It only expressed an intention of intervening in some form and left it at that.

In pursuance of Article 340 of the Constitution, the Kalelkar Commission was set in 1955, but it could not come to any satisfactory conclusion about who should be legitimately considered as OBCs. The Mandal Commission came into existence in 1980, and it promptly came up with a long list of 3743 backward castes on the basis of social, economic, and educational backwardness. The Mandal Commission's recommendations were implemented in 1990 by the then Prime Minister V.P.Singh. This meant that a further 29% of seats in educational institutions and government jobs would now be reserved for OBCs.

The implementation of reservations for OBCs set off a furor of protests, including a few suicides, all over the country by those who are considered to be members of forward castes. Many felt that reservations for OBCs were not warranted for two reasons. First, this would make India a caste society by law, and second, many of those who are considered as OBCs are really quite powerful and dominant in rural India, both economically and politically. The obvious reference was to Jats and Yadavs. A number of social anthropologists wrote against reservations for OBCs primarily on these grounds (see Srinivas 1996, Beteille 2000).

Beteille's criticism of the Mandal Commission recommendations was widely commented upon. He distinguishes between reservations for OBCs following Mandal recommendations and the reservations that were already granted in the Constitution for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Although provisions for Scheduled Castes and Tribes were with the intention of reaching toward greater equality, reservations for OBCs were really to bring about a balance of power on the calculus of caste. The kind of deprivations that former untouchables (SCs) and *adivasis* (STs) encountered for centuries can in no way be compared to the traditional condition of the OBCs. In fact, the Mandal Commission recommendations were actually giving in to a powerful rural lobby that did not really care for equality of opportunities as much as it did for equality of results (Beteille 2000, pp. 211–26). It can also be said that Mandal recommendations are not out to extirpate caste as was the aim of instituting reservations for SCs and STs, but to represent castes, and thus make this ascriptive marker a perennial political resource to be flogged in perpetuity (Gupta 2000b, pp. 212–25).

Another major justification for upholding reservations for SCs and STs came from the acknowledgment that these communities lacked viable marketable assets that would allow them to pursue a life of dignity in a democratic society (Gupta 2000b). The SCs were kept away from education, could only perform menial and polluting jobs, and suffered from a variety of other deprivations. In the case of the STs, it was their physical isolation that put them at a disadvantage with respect to others in society. Reservations for these communities were therefore meant to raise their marketable skills and educational standards to compensate for their historic lack of privileges and to facilitate their participation as equal citizens (Gupta 2000b). The OBCs, however, are politically powerful because they many of them are self-sustaining farmers and owner cultivators. Reservations, Mandal style, only helps them to convert their political and

economic assets, which are currently rural, to urban jobs and related skill assets. These they could develop on their own without the necessary intervention of national level reservation policies (Gupta 2000b).

If one were to look closely at the criteria for social backwardness, then it would become quite apparent that the considerations that went into the reckoning of who were the OBCs were politically weighted. As we mentioned earlier, the Mandal Commission listed three categories of backwardness, e.g., social, economic, and educational. In all a caste can score a maximum of 22 points but needs only 11 to qualify as backward. Each of the four indicators of social backwardness carries three points, the three indicators of educational backwardness just two points each, and each of the criteria for economic backwardness, which should have been the most important, are given only one point.

As social backwardness is given the greatest weight, we examine that more closely. The four indicators of social backwardness are performing manual labor, what other castes think of a particular caste, do the women in that caste work outside the home, and if 25% of females and 10% of males get married above the state average before the age of 17. In this case, it must be noted, that points are being given for actually breaking the law regarding the legal age of marriage.

Each of these indicators carries three points, and it is not at all difficult for a well-to-do rural caste to score on each of them, earn 12 points, and thus qualify as an OBC. Educational and economic backwardness need not come into the picture at all (see Beteille 2000, pp. 216–21; Larson 1995, pp. 264–65). All landowning peasant castes are proud to

call themselves farmers who perform manual work, whether or not they actually do so. The criterion of women working outside their homes is not a good indicator either as they need not necessarily be toiling on others' fields or as coolie labor. We have already commented upon the age of marriage, and moreover given the conditions of recording marriages in India, information on this indicator is very unreliable. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to argue, as critics of Mandal have (and many of them were anthropologists), that the provisions for OBC reservations were devised keeping political considerations in mind. Indeed, this also demonstrates the salience of peasant castes, or the bullock capitalists, in contemporary Indian politics.

It is interesting how the Mandal recommendations provoked anthropologists to debate issues such as citizenship and equity in the context of Indian society, perhaps for the first time (for example, Beteille 1991, 1996; Shah 1996; Gupta 2000b). Policy concerns, at the all-India level, received a kind of urgency in several anthropological writings in, and on India, on a scale that was never witnessed before. The governing assumption in all such works is that caste identity, and not the system, underpins and informs caste politics. This point of view is gradually gaining ground among anthropologists who are now explicitly beginning to acknowledge the discrete nature of caste identities and the consequent clash of multiple hierarchies. Dumont's prestigious *Homo Hierarchicus* for long stood in the way of realizing this phenomenon, but the pressure of social facts has forced anthropologists to look for a different analytical perspective (see Gupta 2004).

LITERATURE CITED

- Babb LA. 1998. Rejecting violence: sacrifice and the social identity of trading communities. *Contrib. Indian Sociol.* 32:387–407
- Beck B. 1970. The right-left division of south Indian society. *J. Asian Stud.* 29:779–98
- Beteille A. 1965. *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*. Berkeley, CA: Univ. Calif. Press

- Beteille A. 1986. Individualism and equality. *Curr. Anthropol.* 27:121-34
- Beteille A. 1991. *The Backward Classes in Contemporary India*. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press
- Beteille A. 1996. Caste in Contemporary India. In *Caste Today*, ed. CJ Fuller. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press
- Beteille A. 2000. *Chronicles of Our Time*. New Delhi: Penguin
- Blair H. 1980. Rising kulaks and backward classes in Bihar: social change in the late 1970s. *Econ. Pol. Wkly.* 15:64-74
- Blunt EAH. 1960. *The Caste System of Northern India with Special Reference to the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*. Delhi: S. Chand
- Bose PK. 1991. Mobility and conflict: social roots of caste violence in Bihar. In *Social Stratification*, ed. D Gupta. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press
- Bougle C. 1958. The essence and reality of the caste system. *Contrib. Indian Sociol.* 2:7-30
- Brass P. 1990. *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press
- Brass P. 1997. The politicization of the peasantry in a north Indian state. See Kaviraj 1997
- Burra N. 1996. Buddhism conversion and identity: a case study of village Mahars. See Srinivas 1996
- Chaddha GK. 2003. *Rural non-farm sector in the Indian economy: growth, challenges and future direction*. Presented at jt. Jawaharlal Nehru Univ./IFPRI workshop, Dragon and the Elephant: A Comparative Study of Economic Reforms in China and India, Mar. 25-26, New Delhi, India Habitat Cent.
- Chattopadhyaya BD. 1976. Origin of the Rajputs: the political, economic and social processes in early medieval India. *Indian Hist. Rev.* 3:59-82
- Cox OC. 1970. *Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics*. New York: Monthly Rev. Press
- Cort J. 2004. Jains, caste and hierarchy in northern Gujarat. See D Gupta 2004
- Deliege R. 1993. The myths of origin of the Indian untouchables. *Man* 28:533-49
- Desai IP. 1976. *Untouchability in Rural Gujarat*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan
- Dirks NB. 2001. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press
- Dumont L. 1988. *Hom. Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson
- Frankel F. 1988. Middle classes and castes in India politics: prospects for political accommodation. In *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State Society Relations*, ed. K Atul. Delhi: Orient Longman
- Frankel F. 1989. Caste, land and dominance in Bihar: breakdown of the Brahmannical order. In *Dominance and State Power in India: Decline of a Social Order*, ed. F Frankel, MSA Rao. Vol. 1. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press
- Frankel F, Hasan Z, Bhargava R, Arora B, eds. 2000. *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press
- Galanter M. 1984. *Competing Equalities*. Berkeley, CA: Univ. Calif. Press
- Ghurye GS. 1950. *Caste and Class in India*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan
- Gore MS. 1993. Social movement and the paradigm of functional analysis: with reference to the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. In *Understanding Indian Society: Festschrift in Honour of Professor S.C. Dube*, ed. Y Atal. Delhi: Har Anand
- Gupta D. 1997. *Rivalry and Brotherhood: Politics in the Life of the Farmers of North India*. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press
- Gupta D. 2000a. *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Penguin

- Gupta D. 2000b. *Culture, Space and the Nation-State: From Sentiment to Structure*. New Delhi: Sage
- Gupta D. 2004. *Caste in Question: Identity or Hierarchy?* New Delhi: Sage
- Gupta D. 2005. Whither the Indian village: culture and agriculture in rural India. *Econ. Pol. Wkly.* 40:751–58
- Guru G. 2001. The language of Dalit-Bahujan political discourse. See Shah 2001a
- Hasan Z. 2000. Representation and redistribution: the new lower caste politics of north India. See Frankel et al. 2001
- Jackson C, Chattopadhyay M. 1998. Identities and livelihoods: gender, ethnicity and nature in a south Bihar village. In *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representation and Rule in India*, ed. A Agrawal, K Sivaramakrishnan. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press
- Jaffrelot C. 2003. *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics*. Delhi: Permanent Black
- Jain M. 1996. Backward caste and social change in UP and Bihar. See Srinivas 1996
- Jayaram N. 1996. Caste and Hinduism: changing protean relationship. See Srinivas 1996
- Jodhka SS. 2004. Sikhism and the caste question: politics in Punjab. See Gupta 2004
- Karanth G. 1996. Caste in contemporary rural India. See Srinivas 1996
- Karyokinesis K. 1982. An introduction to the political economy of tribal societies in North East India. See Singh 1982
- Kaviraj S, ed. 1997. *Politics in India*. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press
- Kaviraj S. 2000. Democracy and social inequality. See Frankel et al. 2001
- Kolenda P. 1978. *Caste in Contemporary India*. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings
- Kumar V. 2003. Uttar Pradesh: politics of change. *Econ. Pol. Wkly.* 38:3869–71
- Larson GJ. 1995. *India's Agony Over Religion*. Albany: State Univ. NY Press
- Leach ER. 1969. Introduction. In *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan*, ed. ER Leach. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press
- Lele J. 1981. *Elite Pluralism and Class Rule: Political Development in Maharashtra-India*. Toronto: Univ. Toronto Press
- Manor J. 1997. Caste and class in a cohesive society. See Kaviraj 1997
- Marriot M. 1959. Interactional and attributional theory of caste ranking. *Man India* 39:92–107
- Marriot M. 1976. Hindu transactions: diversities without dualism. In *Transactional Meaning*, ed. B Kapferer. Philadelphia, PA: Phila. Inst. Stud. Hum. Issues
- Michelutti L. 2004. We (Yadavs) are a caste of politicians: caste and modern politics in a north Indian town. See Gupta 2004
- Milner H. 1994. *Status and Sacredness: A General Theory of Status Relations and Analysis of Indian Culture*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press
- Mitra S. 1980. Norms and modalities of political choice. In *Contrib. Indian Sociol.* (NS) 14:51–75
- Moffat M. 1979. *A Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press
- Narayan B. 2004. Inventing caste history: Dalit mobilisation and nationalist past. See Gupta 2004
- O'Hanlon R. 1983. Maratha history as polemic: low caste ideology and political debate in late nineteenth century. *Modern Asian Stud.* 17:1–33
- Omvedt G. 2001. Ambedka and after: Dalit movement in India. See Shah 2001a
- Pushpendra. 2002. Dalit assertion through electoral politics. See Shah 2002
- Radhakrishnan P. 1990. Backward classes in Tamilnadu: 1872–1988. *Econ. Polit. Wkly.* 25:509–19

- Rao NS. 2001. Th. structure of south Indian untouchable castes: a view. See Shah 2001a
- Rudolph LI, Hoeber S. 1987. *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State*. Delhi: Orient Longman
- Sahay GR. 2001. *Village Studies in India: A Case of Bihar*. Jaipur: Rawat
- Sahay GR. 2004. Hierarchy difference and the caste system: a study of rural Bihar. See Gupta 2004
- Senart E. 1930. *Caste in India*. London: Methuen
- Shah AM. 1996. Job reservation and efficiency. See Srinivas 1996
- Shah G, ed. 2001a. *Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Sage
- Shah G. 2001b. Dalit movements and the search for identity. See Shah 2001a
- Shah G, ed. 2002. *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*. Delhi: Permanent Black
- Sharma KL. 1997. *Rural Society in India*. Jaipur: Rawat
- Sharma KL. 2001. *Reconceptualising Caste, Class and Tribe*. Jaipur: Rawat
- Sheth DL. 2002. Caste and class: social reality and political perceptions. See Shah 2002
- Singh KS, ed. 1982. *Economies of the Tribes and their Transformation*. New Delhi: Concept
- Srinivas MN. 1972. *Social Change in Modern India*. New Delhi: Orient Longman
- Srinivas MN. 1996. Introduction. In *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, ed. MN Srinivas. New Delhi: Penguin
- Vora R. 2004. Decline of caste majoritarianism in Indian politics. In *Indian Democracy: Meanings and Practices*, ed. R Vora, S Palshikar. New Delhi: Sage
- Wagle NK. 1998. *Customary Law Among Non-Brahman Jatis of Pune*. (Mimeogr.) Toronto Univ. Cent. South Asian Stud.
- Washbrook D. 1989. Caste, class and dominance in modern Tamilnadu. In *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, ed. F Frankel, MSA Rao. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press
- Weiner M. 2002. The struggle for equality: caste in Indian politics. In *The Success of India's Democracy*, ed. A Kohli. Delhi: Foundation Books
- Yadav Y. 2001. Understanding the second democratic upsurge: trends of Bajhujan participation in electoral politics in the 1990s. See Frankel et al. 2000
- Xaxa V. 1999. Tribes as indigenous people of India. *Econ. Pol. Wkly.* 34:3589-95
- Xaxa V. 2001. Protective discrimination: Why scheduled tribes lag behind scheduled castes. *Econ. Pol. Wkly.* 36:2765-72
- Zelliot E. 1970. Learning the use of political means: the Mahars of Maharashtra. In *Caste in Indian Politics*, ed. R Kothari. Delhi: Orient Longman

Contents

Frontispiece	
<i>Sally Falk Moore</i>	xvi

Prefatory Chapter

Comparisons: Possible and Impossible	
<i>Sally Falk Moore</i>	1

Archaeology

Archaeology, Ecological History, and Conservation	
<i>Frances M. Hayashida</i>	43

Archaeology of the Body	
<i>Rosemary A. Joyce</i>	139

Looting and the World's Archaeological Heritage: The Inadequate Response	
<i>Neil Brodie and Colin Renfrew</i>	343

Through Wary Eyes: Indigenous Perspectives on Archaeology	
<i>Joe Watkins</i>	429

The Archaeology of Black Americans in Recent Times	
<i>Mark P. Leone, Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, and Jennifer J. Babiarz</i>	575

Biological Anthropology

Early Modern Humans	
<i>Erik Trinkaus</i>	207

Metabolic Adaptation in Indigenous Siberian Populations	
<i>William R. Leonard, J. Josh Snodgrass, and Mark V. Sorensen</i>	451

The Ecologies of Human Immune Function	
<i>Thomas W. McDade</i>	495

Linguistics and Communicative Practices

New Directions in Pidgin and Creole Studies <i>Marlyse Baptista</i>	33
Pierre Bourdieu and the Practices of Language <i>William F. Hanks</i>	67
Areal Linguistics and Mainland Southeast Asia <i>N. J. Enfield</i>	181
Communicability, Racial Discourse, and Disease <i>Charles L. Briggs</i>	269
Will Indigenous Languages Survive? <i>Michael Walsh</i>	293
Linguistic, Cultural, and Biological Diversity <i>Luisa Maffi</i>	599

International Anthropology and Regional Studies

Caste and Politics: Identity Over System <i>Dipankar Gupta</i>	409
Indigenous Movements in Australia <i>Francesca Merlan</i>	473
Indigenous Movements in Latin America, 1992–2004: Controversies, Ironies, New Directions <i>Jean E. Jackson and Kay B. Warren</i>	549

Sociocultural Anthropology

The Cultural Politics of Body Size <i>Helen Gremillion</i>	13
Too Much for Too Few: Problems of Indigenous Land Rights in Latin America <i>Anthony Stocks</i>	85
Intellectuals and Nationalism: Anthropological Engagements <i>Dominic Boyer and Claudio Lomnitz</i>	105
The Effect of Market Economies on the Well-Being of Indigenous Peoples and on Their Use of Renewable Natural Resources <i>Ricardo Godoy, Victoria Reyes-García, Elizabeth Byron, William R. Leonard, and Vincent Vadez</i>	121

An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies <i>Deborah Poole</i>	159
Race and Ethnicity in Public Health Research: Models to Explain Health Disparities <i>William W. Dressler, Kathryn S. Oths, and Clarence C. Gravlee</i>	231
Recent Ethnographic Research on North American Indigenous Peoples <i>Pauline Turner Strong</i>	253
The Anthropology of the Beginnings and Ends of Life <i>Sharon R. Kaufman and Lynn M. Morgan</i>	317
Immigrant Racialization and the New Savage Slot: Race, Migration, and Immigration in the New Europe <i>Paul A. Silverstein</i>	363
Autochthony: Local or Global? New Modes in the Struggle over Citizenship and Belonging in Africa and Europe <i>Bambi Ceuppens and Peter Geschiere</i>	385
Caste and Politics: Identity Over System <i>Dipankar Gupta</i>	409
The Evolution of Human Physical Attractiveness <i>Steven W. Gangestad and Glenn J. Scheyd</i>	523
Mapping Indigenous Lands <i>Mac Chapin, Zachary Lamb, and Bill Threlkeld</i>	619
Human Rights, Biomedical Science, and Infectious Diseases Among South American Indigenous Groups <i>A. Magdalena Hurtado, Carol A. Lambourne, Paul James, Kim Hill, Karen Cheman, and Keely Baca</i>	639
Interrogating Racism: Toward an Antiracist Anthropology <i>Leith Mullings</i>	667
Enhancement Technologies and the Body <i>Linda F. Hogle</i>	695
Social and Cultural Policies Toward Indigenous Peoples: Perspectives from Latin America <i>Guillermo de la Peña</i>	717
Surfacing the Body Interior <i>Janelle S. Taylor</i>	741

Theme 1: Race and Racism

Race and Ethnicity in Public Health Research: Models to Explain Health Disparities <i>William W. Dressler, Kathryn S. Oths, and Clarence C. Gravlee</i>	231
Communicability, Racial Discourse, and Disease <i>Charles L. Briggs</i>	269
Immigrant Racialization and the New Savage Slot: Race, Migration, and Immigration in the New Europe <i>Paul A. Silverstein</i>	363
The Archaeology of Black Americans in Recent Times <i>Mark P. Leone, Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, and Jennifer J. Babiarz</i>	575
Interrogating Racism: Toward an Antiracist Anthropology <i>Leith Mullings</i>	667

Theme 2: Indigenous Peoples

The Effect of Market Economies on the Well-Being of Indigenous Peoples and on Their Use of Renewable Natural Resources <i>Ricardo Godoy, Victoria Reyes-García, Elizabeth Byron, William R. Leonard, and Vincent Vadez</i>	121
Recent Ethnographic Research on North American Indigenous Peoples <i>Pauline Turner Strong</i>	253
Will Indigenous Languages Survive? <i>Michael Walsh</i>	293
Autochthony: Local or Global? New Modes in the Struggle over Citizenship and Belonging in Africa and Europe <i>Bambi Ceuppens and Peter Geschiere</i>	385
Through Wary Eyes: Indigenous Perspectives on Archaeology <i>Joe Watkins</i>	429
Metabolic Adaptation in Indigenous Siberian Populations <i>William R. Leonard, J. Josh Snodgrass, and Mark V. Sorensen</i>	451
Indigenous Movements in Australia <i>Francesca Merlan</i>	473
Indigenous Movements in Latin America, 1992–2004: Controversies, Ironies, New Directions <i>Jean E. Jackson and Kay B. Warren</i>	549

Linguistic, Cultural, and Biological Diversity	
<i>Luisa Maffi</i>	599
Human Rights, Biomedical Science, and Infectious Diseases Among South American Indigenous Groups	
<i>A. Magdalena Hurtado, Carol A. Lambourne, Paul James, Kim Hill,</i> <i>Karen Cheman, and Keely Baca</i>	639
Social and Cultural Policies Toward Indigenous Peoples: Perspectives from Latin America	
<i>Guillermo de la Peña</i>	717

Indexes

Subject Index	757
Cumulative Index of Contributing Authors, Volumes 26–34	771
Cumulative Index of Chapter Titles, Volumes 26–34	774

Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Anthropology* chapters
may be found at <http://anthro.annualreviews.org/errata.shtml>