importance of looking between the structures and highlights the worth of looking beyond the kinship rules and into the 'exceptions' to the rules, which are, as I suggest, as frequent as the rules themselves. As I have shown, although the exceptions are hard to pin down, they are of great consequence: ignoring them may in fact distort kinship theory. Moreover, this study demonstrates that examining something truly significant in Indian society such as personhood, gender or law, or the interplay between an agent and the structure, leads us to study kinship. This keeps the study of kinship at the heart of anthropology in India and makes the renewal of it an anthropological mission.

REFERENCES

Dumont, Louis 1980. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications.* Chicago: The University of Chicago.

Marriott, McKim 1976. Hindu Transactions: Diversity Without Dualism. In Bruce Kapferer (ed.), *Transaction and Meaning. Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior.* Philadelphia: ISHI.

Trawick, Margaret 1990. *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

SIRU AURA
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
siruaura@netsonic.fi

TRACES OF DUMONT FROM INDIA

· SIRPA TENHUNEN ·

Siru Aura's fascinating doctoral dissertation (2008) on divorce, gender and kinship in Indian society exemplifies Dumont's living heritage for the scholarship of South Asia. Dumont's ideas are topical—not because they are accepted as such but because of the new ideas generated by the critical debate on Dumont's Homo Hierarchicus (HH). Inspired by Siru's theses, I will discuss the main points of this debate, which has the potential to help assess and develop Dumont's ideas outside the Indian context.

For Dumont, India presented a lesson on hierarchy which does not originate from political and economic power. Dumont saw Indian hierarchy as built on caste and purity concerns. Castes maintain distance because those lower in caste hierarchy are impure and can transmit impurity to those higher in hierarchy. The essence of Hindu ideology is, according to Dumont, hierarchy in contrast to the individualism of western societies.

However, even early critics of Dumont such as Das and Uberoi (1971) pointed out that hierarchy does not exclude equality concerns. Janta, a village in West Bengal where I have been carrying out fieldwork since 1999, is in many ways an exemplar of caste hierarchy as described by Dumont: divided into caste neighbourhoods with the higher castes maintaining distance from the lower castes which are considered impure. Yet one of the most common

comments made in Janta about recent changes is about the increasing equality, for which the Bengali word *saman* (same) is used. People can perceive equality and be motivated by the quest for equality in hierarchical contexts because in hierarchy people are not only placed above or below each other, but they can also be located at the same level. On the one hand, hierarchies do not exclude ideas of equality and, on the other, despite their ideals of equality, Western people too can be aware of hierarchies.

Dumont traced the origin of modernity to enlightenment thinkers whom newer scholarship of medieval thought has shown to have exaggerated the divide between modern and medieval thinking. Nor do the empirical studies of modern Indian and Western societies give grounds for perceiving Indian society and Western societies as ideological opposites. Empirical studies on concepts of person (Fruzzetti and Östör 1982; Marriott 1976) have provided a more nuanced picture of how the constructions of persons relate to the symbolic whole. Marriott differs from Fruzzetti and Östör in that he controversially uses his concept of the South Asian personality as 'dividual' as his starting point. Marriot's formulations therefore raise the same reservations as raised by Dumont's theory of South Asian personhood. Like Siru Aura, Marriott's students have put less emphasis on Marriott's preconceived notions and drawn more from empirical data in order to grasp the fluidity inherent in kinship systems. What remains Dumontian in spirit in these studies is that they examine how personhood is classified and how hierarchy and equality concerns relate to each other and the ensemble of society.

While Dumont was busy writing HH and arguing that all castes have internalized the caste system, the untouchable castes were engaged in one of the most massive political movement of modern India, the Dalit movement, which has sought to remove their stigma of impurity. Today the Bahujan Samaj Party, representing the Dalits, comprises the fourth largest and the fastest growing political party in India. Dumont, however, did not neglect equality concerns and critical movements because he was unaware of them. In a footnote in HH, Dumont acknowledged the presence of equality in hierarchy but argued that it represents a secondary phenomenon and is therefore irrelevant for the understanding of the dominant ideology; Dumont explicitly and consciously focused on dominant ideologies.

Critics have argued that the dominant ideology Dumont emphasized and found was in fact the Brahmin, high caste version of Indian society (Appadurai 1986; Srinivas 1989; Chatterjee 1993; Gupta 2000; Mencher 1975). Dumont had a formidable command of Sanskrit texts written by Brahmins—scholarship in this field commenced his academic career—and in addition to using primary data from his fieldwork and other ethnographies, Dumont also drew on these Vedic texts. For instance, he bases his argument that politics in India are subordinated to religion on statements from the Vedic texts; no empirical study on politics in India can offer support for his conclusion that rulers are dominated by priests in Indian society.

Few scholars today try to dispute that caste is not about purity but the emerging consensus is that it is not *solely* about purity. The resilience of caste in modern India has to do with the multiple meanings of caste. Low castes build their positive self image on their shared myths about royal origins (Gupta 2000). Dalits studied by Säävälä (2001) choose to emphasize auspiciousness in their ritual life instead of purity concerns.

Equally difficult to maintain is Dumont's view about caste as the basis of Indian culture when empirical studies have repeatedly illustrated that there is more to Indian culture and

society than caste. Caste relates to gender, kinship and politics but it does not explain them totally. My research on rural politics in India has been Dumontian in the sense that I have sought to understand politics by examining how it relates to other social and cultural spheres such as gender, kinship and caste (Tenhunen 2003, forthcoming 2009) but, contrary to Dumont's findings, caste did not emerge as the founding principle of the ensemble of society.

What is then left standing of Dumont's Homo Hierarchicus after Indian critics have had their say? In Dumont's defence, it must be said that he based his arguments carefully on empirical studies which were available at the time. He could not, of course, take into account the changes that would take place in Indian society nor new empirical data that the growing number of recent ethnographies could offer. Dumont's holism lives in studies where symbolic meanings are interpreted by relating them to each other. Purity concerns cannot be overlooked when examining caste but analyses have become more open to the multiple meanings of caste.

India teaches today's scholars about alternatives and critical discourses. Siru Aura's study fascinates because she does not judge the exploration of alternatives and critical discourses to be secondary to understanding of 'the whole', though she does not neglect their relationship to the larger entity. Indeed, this is precisely the post-Dumontian challenge: to examine how alternatives and critical discourses relate to the symbolic whole and how ideology and practice are intertwined. In the course of this project, rather than revealing the West as a symmetrical binary opposite, study of Indian society actually helps to challenge the foundations of long-standing ideas about the incongruity and polarity of West and East.

REFERENCES

....

Aura, Siru 2008. *Women and Marital Breakdown in South India: Reconstructing Homes, Bonds and Persons.* University of Helsinki: Research Series in Anthropology.

Appadurai, Arjun 1986. Is Homo Hierarchicus? *American Ethnologist* 13 (4): 745–761.

Chatterjee, Partha 1993. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Das, Veena and J.P.S. Uberoi 1971. The Elementary Structure of Caste. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 5 (1): 33–43.

Dumont, Louis 1970 [1966]. *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Fruzzetti, Lina and Akos Östör 1992 [1982]. Bad Blood in Bengal. In Akos Östör and Lina Fruzzetti (eds), *Concepts of Person: Kinship, Caste, and Marriage in India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Gupta, Dipankar 2000. *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society.* New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Marriott, McKim 1976. Hindu Transactions: Diversity Without Dualism. In Kapferer, B. (ed.), *Transaction and Meaning.* Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.

Mencher, Joan 1975. The Caste system Upside Down. *Current Anthropology* 15 (4): 469–493.

Srinivas, M.N. 1989. Some Reflections on the Nature of Caste Hierarchy. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 18 (2): 51–67.

Säävälä, Minna 2001. Low Caste but Middle Class: Some Religious strategies for middle-class identification in Hyderabad. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 35 (3): 293–318.

Tenhunen, Sirpa 2003. Culture and Political Agency: Gender, Kinship and Village Politics in West Bengal. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 37 (3): 495–518.

SIRPA TENHUNEN
ACADEMY RESEARCHER
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
Sirpa.tenhunen@helsinki.fi

THE EASTERN AND THE IMAGINED: DEFENDING THE REALM OF THE CULTURAL IN THE GLOBAL

· MINNA SÄÄVÄLÄ ·

South Asia has had a particular role in the disciplinary history of social anthropology largely due to the works of Louis Dumont. For a long time the existence of an ideal typically and radically different social existence as a counterpoint to the individualistic ideology of the European cultural sphere locked the research of the area into an inevitable commentary on the hierarchical principle, either reinforcing Dumont's ideas, rejecting them or transforming his structuralist model.

The changing economic policy of the Indian federal state has nevertheless had inevitable influence on the ways social sciences and anthropology approach life in the subcontinent. The liberalization of the economy that started in the early 1990s has created a situation in which global influences and networks have profoundly transformed social reality in India: possibilities of migrating from India have expanded, foreign investors have created sites for global corporate activity and media expansion and commercialization has been abrupt and pervasive. The emergence of the new middle classes as well as new types of international migration and media has attracted the attention of anthropologists. India does not appear to be what it used to be: the 'different' *par excellence.* Those studying new social and cultural forms of life in the subcontinent are asking: Are we seeing the emergence of radically new cultural forms in South Asia? How is cultural integrity surviving the onslaught of global capitalism? Is the Dumontian holistically hierarchical—or McKim Marriott's 'dividual', characterisation of the South Asian person—readjusting and transforming or disappearing and individualizing? In other words, is the evident change skin deep or fundamental? Or is the question erroneous?

The last fifteen years have witnessed a new vocabulary of the imagination (Appadurai 1996), fantasy, phantasm (Ivy 1995), simulacra (Baudrillard 1994) and other related concepts in anthropology and cultural studies. This interest has been growing from ideas of the intensifying interconnectedness in the transterritorialized or transnational world and it can be seen as a challenge to conventional anthropological wisdom. However, the notion of 'the imagination', just like 'hybridization', and 'negotiation of identities' and