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Louis Dumont



Louis Dumont (1911-1998), an eminent sociologist and Indologist, was a towering figure in the fields of sociology and anthropology in the world. His focus of debate has been India and the West: his exemplary studies are best on methodologies that he constructed for the study of particular societies and for inter-civilizational comparison, and these are of universal combined. The present chapter, which deals with the main contributions of Dumont, focuses on the following:

1. Methodological perspective
2. *Homo Hierarchicus*: The Caste System and Its Implications
3. Concept of pure and impure
4. Theory of *varnas*
5. Religion, Politics and History in India
6. *Homo aequalis*
7. Criticism of Dumont

Background

Louis Dumont, the French sociologist, is regarded as an Indologist. Grandson of a painter and son of an engineer, Dumont combined his way of looking at the world with the qualities of both vocations, namely, creative imagination and an abiding interest in the concrete. Dumont began his academic career in the mid-1930s under the guidance of Marcel Mauss, leading sociologist and Sanskritist. World War II interrupted his studies, but not entirely. He was taken as prisoner of war and was detained in a factory on the outskirts of Hamburg. There, he studied German.

In 1945, at the end of the war, he came back to home. He returned to the *Musees Arts et. tradition populaires* (ATP), where he worked earlier in a non-academic position. Here, he remained engaged in a research project on French furniture and undertook the study of a folk festival, the *Tarascon*, about which he later wrote a monograph, *La Tarasque* (1951). Dumont used ethnographic details in this study and applied holistic approach. He also learnt Sanskrit. He had a chance of meeting with Professor Schubring, a specialist on Jain studies. Around this time, he also carried forward his interest in India, generated by Mauss' teaching, and took lessons in Hindi and Tamil at the *Ecole des Langues Orientales* and studied ethnography of south India. Among his patrons were the comparativist Georges Dumézil and the Indologist Louis Renou.

Dumont spent the years 1949 and 1950 in Tamil Nadu studying the *Pramalai Kallar* who stands somewhere in the middle in the regional caste system. It is interesting to note that he chose to focus on south India because he believed that it was the encounter of the Aryan-speaking people from the north with the southern Dravidians that had been responsible for the genesis of post-Vedic Hinduism and the socio-cultural configuration of classical India.

The 1950 viewpoint of course for the usefulness of village as a unit of study persisted and, as late as in 1974, Dumont was looked down and criticized for "underrating the significance of the village as a principle of social organization by asserting factors of social organization in India, so is village" (Das, 1974). However, this kind

of 'village' partnership was itself combined with taking note of alternatives in order to understand religion, politics and history in India (ibid.: 1974: 119-24).

From 1951 onward, Dumont had lectured and written about caste. The presence of castes everywhere, he had said in 1955, was a token of the cultural unity and distinctiveness of India. The fruit of this pedagogic-cum-research endeavour was his magnum opus, *Homo Hierarchicus* (in French, 1966; in English, 1970), which is the most widely discussed work on the subject, translated into many languages but not yet into any Indian language. However, its English translation offered an excellent opportunity for further discussion of Dumont's approach and its substantial analytical and interpretative results.

Dumont returned home from India in 1951 and came back at the ATP centre. A year later, in 1952, he succeeded M.N. Srinivas as Lecturer in Indian Sociology at Oxford University. There, he developed a close relationship with Evans-Pritchard. The years at Oxford were of critical importance in the formulation of Dumont's methodology for the study of Indian civilization.

In 1955, Dumont returned to Paris to take up a research professorship at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (rechristened as Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in 1975). In his inaugural lecture, he declared that the sociology of India must lie at the 'confluence of sociology and Indology'. The method was dialectical in the sense that although Indology may provide points of departure, the principles derived from it were to be confronted by what the people actually did (their observable behaviour). An English version of this programmatic text was published jointly with David Pocock in 1957 in the first issue of *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, of which they were the founding editors. In this journal, Dumont published a number of studies on the themes like village community, caste, marriage, kinship, renunciation and nationalism.

Dumont spent fifteen months in 1957-58 in a village of Gorakhpur district in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Although, the duration of fieldwork was not much shorter than that in Tamil Nadu, north India did not attract him as the south had. The

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fieldwork, however, contributed to his interest in inter-regional comparison and he published searching analyses of marriage and kinship terminology. His main areas of interest in sociology are Hinduism, caste, kinship in ancient India, and social-political movements in modern India.

Methodology

As a study of the caste system in India, Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* offers several new perspectives of social structure. The notions of ideology and tradition are intrinsic parts of his paradigm. He has brought the method of structuralism to bear upon his study of the caste system. The chief elements of his methodology are:

1. ideology and structure
2. dialectic transformational relationship and comparison
3. Indological and structuralist approach
4. cognitive historical approach

Dumont seeks the ideology of caste in Indology, and in the assumption of the unity of Indian civilization. Defining ideology, he writes: "it designates a more or less unified set of ideas and values". Indian civilization, to him, is a specific ideology whose components are in a binary opposition to that of West: modern against traditional, holism against individualism, hierarchy against equality, purity against pollution, status against power etc.... This opposition (dialectic) is basis for comparison at the level of global ideology within the specific ideology of the caste system. The opposite is between the principles of purity and pollution.

Apart from ideology and structure, the notion of hierarchy has a pivotal place in Dumont's study of caste system. Hierarchy implies opposition between pure and impure, which also determines its dialectics. Hierarchy also suggests the relationship of 'encompassing' and being encompassed'. In the caste system, the principle of purity encompasses the impure. Thus, Dumont's approach to the study of caste system in India provoked very substantial debate.

② philosophy that the parts of a whole are in 'intimacy' interconnection such that they cannot be ever regarded as a whole as they are the sub-sum: its parts holism is often applied to moral

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Based on intensive fieldwork and methodical study of literary sources, two important monographs, *one sous-caste de l'Inde du sud: Organization sociale et religion des Pramalai Kallar* and *Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South India* were published in 1957. The first is one of the richest ethnographic accounts of India ever published, while the latter one was written in English and dedicated to Claude Levi-Strauss.

Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970), to some extent, revived the interest in caste studies in the 1970s. He focused on the need to understand the ideology of caste as reflected in the classical texts. Dumont advocated the use of an Indological and structuralist approach to the study of caste system and village social structure in India. Thus, Dumont (1970: 1-30) views 'Indian sociology' as that specialized branch, which stands at the confluence of Indology and sociology and which he advocates as the right type of 'mix' prerequisite to the understanding of Indian society.

The French sociological tradition leads Dumont to stress the role of ideology in moulding human behaviour and, therefore, to bring together sociology and Indology. When a sociologist is engaged in the analysis of the evolution and growth of social institutions in India, he has to draw heavily Indological materials considering this close relation between sociology and Indology. Dumont and Pocock observed: "In our opinion, the first condition for a sound development of sociology in India is found in the establishment of the proper relation between it and classical Indology."

Analysis of social change from a cognitive historical viewpoint has been postulated by Dumont. He conceives of Indian society not in terms of systems of relationship but as systems of ideational or value patterns or cognitive structures. The focus in social change study, according to Dumont, should be on "the reaction of Indian minds to the revelation of Western culture", and on how under the impact of the cognitive elements of western culture such as individualism, freedom, democracy etc., the cognitive system of Indian tradition is reacting with rejection or acceptance. The contrast in the Indian and western cognitive systems lies in the holistic character of the former and the individualistic attribute of the

latter; this contrast also poses the nature of tension between tradition versus modernity in India (Singh, 1973: 20-22).

Writings of Dumont

As stated at the outset, Dumont's main areas of interest are social anthropology and Indology. He has written on wide range of subjects such as Hinduism, caste, kinship, and social and political movements in India. His major works are as follows:

1. *La Tarasque* (1951)
2. *One sous-caste de l'Inde du sud: Organization sociale et religion des pramalai Kallar* (1957)
3. *Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South India* (1957)
4. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (1966, 1970)
5. *Religion, Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology* (1970)
6. *Homo aequalis* (1977)

Our main focus here is to discuss the important work of Dumont, viz., *Homo Hierarchicus*, which highlights the caste and varna systems in India.

Homo Hierarchicus

The *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (1966) is an unusual work of Dumont in its conception, design and execution. This is a complete, theoretical work that helps us to access the vast body of available ethnographic data on caste. This work is different from others as it begins with a cardinal explanatory principle - hierarchy - and wholly sets out to build a model.

Hierarchy is said to distinguish Indian society from 'modern' societies whose fundamental social principle is equality. The major theme of this review can be anticipated thus: any hierarchy, like any equalitarian system, is opposed by those who see its effect upon themselves as disadvantageous, no matter how loudly or piously it is advocated by those who benefit from it. Those low in a hierarchical system universally see it as disadvantageous to themselves and object either to the system or to the manner in which it is

applied to themselves. Any social hierarchy, then, is perpetrated and perpetuated by elites and is struggled against as circumstances permit, by those they oppress. This is true in India and anywhere else. There are four specific facets of Dumont's argument, which Berreman (2001) takes in a specific way:

- (1) *The assumption that there is a clear and consistent, universal and fundamental disparity between what the author terms 'traditional' or 'simpler' societies (e.g., Indian), and 'modern' ones (e.g., French, British).* Dumont finds 'traditional' societies to be characterized by conception of the collective nature of man, by the primacy of social rather than individual goals, and thus by 'hierarchy' (by which he means ritual hierarchy, based on the purity/pollution opposition). 'Modern' societies are characterized contrastively by individualism and hence by egalitarianism (the antithesis of hierarchy).
- (2) *The notion that power and economic and political factors are distinct from and epiphenomenal to caste and that ritual hierarchy is the central fact of caste, independent of power.* Berreman asserts that the power status opposition is a false dichotomy in the context of caste. The two are inseparable.
- (3) *The notion that caste occurs only in India and is not subject to cross-cultural comparison.* The theoretically weakest part of the book is where Dumont discusses and dismisses the notion of cross-cultural comparisons of caste organization.
- (4) *The limited biased, albeit scholarly, sources of evidence upon which the arguments are based.* Dumont relies heavily on some classical Sanskrit texts while ignoring others.

We will now give a chapter-wise synopsis of the contents of the book to show how Dumont constructs his arguments as described by Madan (2001).

The introductory chapter explains the concept of hierarchy, which is contrasted with opposite values of egalitarianism and individualism. "The caste teaches us a fundamental social principle, hierarchy". Hierarchy is an indispensable element of social life.

After reading this chapter, we can fully understand the concept of equality with the opposite notion of 'hierarchy' and not inequality.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 deal with the concepts employed in the work and the ideology of caste. Dumont introduced the notions of 'system' and 'structure'.

The caste system is above all a system of ideas and values, a formal comprehensible, rational system, a system in the intellectual sense of the term ... (Dumont: 35).

Chapter 3 deals with hierarchy and the theory of varna. It is a most crucial discussion and focuses on the differentiation (disjunction) of status and power and the subordination of the king to the priest in Hindu society. Hierarchy is said to involve gradation, but is asserted to be distinct from both power and authority. It is "religious ranking and classifies things and beings" according to their 'dignity' (ibid.: 65). It is an all-embracing, comprehensive concept. Hierarchy and the scheme of varnas are found to be in consonance with each other, as are varna and jati. In fact, hierarchy encompasses both the varna divisions and the caste system. What remains problematic, however, is the connection of hierarchy with power, for hierarchy cannot give a place to power as such, without contradicting its own principle. Therefore, it must give a place to power without saying so, and it is obliged to close its eyes to this point on pain of destroying itself (ibid.: 77).

At this point, Dumont undertakes a somewhat detailed examination of ethnographical evidence to examine the interaction between purity and power in 'actual situations'.

Having introduced the ideology, Dumont proceeds to consider aspects of behaviour within and between castes in terms of it. Chapter 4 shows the traditional division of labour (the jajmani system) is based on religious values rather than on economic logic. It does not, however, account for all economic transactions, and Dumont admits this. Chapter 5 considers the regulation of marriage (endogamy, isogamy, hypergamy) in terms of the key concept of hierarchy. Chapter 6 carries the argument further to cover rules connecting contact, untouchability, food and vegetarianism. The opposition between the pure and impure emerges clearly and convincingly in these three chapters.

Chapter 7 deals in power and territory and chapter 8 with justice and authority. It is here that the confrontation of ideology with observed social reality is most prominent. We are now brought face to face with territory, power, village dominance, and ownership of wealth, and their mutual relationship. These are said to be questions of fact and not at all of theory. Dominant castes, factions, and economics also are discussed in this very framework.

Chapter 9 deals in renunciation and sects – the opposites of the notions of 'collective man' and caste. An examination of these is a methodological necessity (device) for Dumont, for he seeks understanding of India (and of western society) through a dialectical process, through the juxtaposition of logically opposite cultural types.

Chapter 10 takes the problem of comparison: are there castes among non-Hindus and outside India (ibid.: 201)? Enlarging the scope of comparison, Dumont suggests that caste should be deemed to be present only where the disjunction between status and power is present and where castes exhaust the entire society (ibid.: 214-15).

In Chapter 11 (the last) comparison is continued, but in temporal, rather than spatial, terms. In other words, Dumont takes up the problem of change: "What is the caste system becoming nowadays" (ibid.: 217)? "One thing is certain: the society as an overall framework has not changed, there has been change *in* the society and *not* of the society" (ibid.: 218). And, again, in Dumont's view, the only significant change that does seem to have taken place is the traditional interdependence of castes has been replaced by a "universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another" (ibid.: 222). Dumont calls this 'the substantialization of caste'. An inventory of sources of change in the caste system lists judicial and political changes, socio-religious reform, Westernization, growth of modern professions, urbanization, spatial mobility, and growth of market economy. But, despite all these factors making for change, the most ubiquitous and general form that change has taken in contemporary times is one of a 'mixture', or 'combination', of traditional and modern features (ibid.: 228-31).

Dumont concludes by asserting that hierarchy is 'a universal necessity' and that, if it is not formally recognized in a society, it may assert itself in a pathological form (e.g., racism). It is, therefore, of greatest importance for the western man to endeavour to study and understand a social system in which hierarchy is recognized, and, in fact, accorded the status of a first principle. That is why, the book is offered to the French public.

The appendix contains Dumont's well-known essay, "Caste, Racism, 'Stratification'", first published in 1960. It contains all the principle ideas elaborated in *Homo Hierarchicus* and should help the reader to recapitulate the argument.

The following discussion of Dumont is an extract from his book *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. Dumont, an Indologist, feels that the study of the caste system is useful for the knowledge of India, and it is an important task of general sociology. His study of caste is based on the classical literature, historical examples etc. He expressed his views on caste system, *varnas*, purity and impurity, hierarchy, power and territory, caste council, etc.

Caste System

Louis Dumont was primarily concerned with the ideology of the caste system. His understanding of caste lays emphasis on attributes of caste, that is why, he is put in the category of those following the attributional approach to the caste system. For him, caste is a set of relationships of economic, political and kinship systems, sustained by certain 'values', which are mostly religious in nature. Dumont says that caste is not a form of stratification but a special form of inequality, whose essence has to be deciphered by the sociologists. Here, Dumont identifies 'hierarchy' as the essential value underlying the caste system, supported by Hinduism.

Dumont starts with Bougle's definition of caste and says that it divides the whole Indian society into a larger number of hereditary groups, distinguished from one another and connected together by three characteristics:

- (a) Separation on the basis of rules of the caste in matters of marriage and contact, whether direct or indirect (food);

- (b) Interdependent of work or division of labour, each group having, in theory or by tradition, a profession from which their members can depart only within certain limits; and
- (c) Finally, gradation of status or hierarchy, which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to one another.

Dumont views that this definition indicates the main apparent characteristics of the caste system. He describes mainly three things:

1. India is composed of many small territories and castes;
2. Every caste is limited to particular and definite geographic area; and
3. Marrying outside one's own caste is not possible in the caste system.

In fact, Dumont highlights the 'state of mind', which is expressed by the emergence in various situations of castes. He calls caste system as a system of 'ideas and values', which is a 'formal comprehensible rational system'. His analysis is based on a single principle, i.e., the opposition of pure and impure. This opposition underlies 'hierarchy', which means superiority of the pure and inferiority of impure. This principle also underlies 'separation', which means pure and the impure must be kept separate.

Dumont felt that the study of the caste system is useful for the knowledge of India, and it is an important task of general sociology. He focused on the need to understand the ideology of caste as reflected in the classical texts, historical examples etc. He advocated the use of an Indological and structuralist approach to the study of caste system and village social structure in India. He viewed that 'Indian sociology' is that specialized branch which stands at the confluence of Indology and sociology and which he advocates as the right type of 'mix' prerequisite to the understanding of Indian sociology. From this perspective, Dumont himself, in his *Homo Hierarchicus*, has built up a model of Indian civilization, which is based on a non-competitive ritual hierarchical system. Dumont's analysis of caste system is based on the classical literature, historical examples etc.

Concept of Pure and Impure

While considering the concept of pure and impure, Dumont had two questions in mind: Why is this distinction applied to hereditary groups? And, if it accounts for the contrast between Brahmins and untouchables, can it account equally for the division of society into a large number of groups, themselves sometime extremely sub-divided? He did not answer these questions directly. But, the opposite has always been two extreme categories, i.e., Brahmins and untouchables. The Brahmins, assigned with the priestly functions, occupied the top rank in the social hierarchy and were considered 'pure' as compared to other castes, whereas the untouchables, being 'impure', and segregated outside the village, were not allowed to draw water from the same wells from which the Brahmins did so. Besides this, they did not have any access to Hindu temples, and suffered from various other disabilities. Dumont said that this situation was somewhat changed since the Gandhian agitation and when India attained independence. Untouchability was considered illegal. Gandhi renamed untouchables as 'Harijans' or 'Sons of Hari', that is, creatures of God (Vishnu).

Untouchables are specialized in 'impure' tasks, which lead to the attribution of a massive and permanent impurity to some categories of people. Dumont highlights temporary and permanent impurity. In larger areas of the world, death, birth and other such seclusion of the affected persons, for instance, the newly delivered mother was actually excluded from the church for forty days at the end of which she would present herself carrying a lighted candle and would be met at the church porch by the priest. In India, persons affected by this kind of event are treated as impure for a prescribed period, and Indians themselves identify this impurity with that of the untouchables. In his work, *The History of Dharmashastra*, P.V. Kane writes that a man's nearest relatives and his best friends become untouchable for him for a certain time as a result of these events. According to Harita, there are three kinds of purity: (a) bearing of the family (Kula), (b) objects of everyday use (Artha), and (c) the body (Sarira). For the body, the main thing is

the morning attention to personal hygiene, culminating in the daily bath. Even, the objects are considered as pure and impure: silk is purer than cotton, gold than silver, than bronze, than copper. These objects are not simply polluted by the contact but by the use to which they are put and used by the person. Now-a-days, a new garment or vessel can be received from anybody. It is believed that a person's own bed, garments, wife, child and water pot are pure for his own self and family and for others they are impure.

Theory of Varnas

Dumont feels one cannot speak of the castes without mentioning the *varnas*, to which Hindus frequently attribute the castes themselves. India has the traditional hierarchy of *varnas*, 'colours' or estates whereby four categories are distinguished: the highest is that of the *Brahmins* or priest, below them are the *Ksatriyas* or warriors, then the *Vaishyas*, in modern usage merchants, and finally the *Shudras*, the servants or have-nots. There is one more category, the *untouchables*, who are outside the classification system. Dumont maintains that many of the Indologists confuse the *varna* with caste, mainly because the classical literature is concerned almost entirely with the *varnas*. Caste and *varnas* are to be understood with relationship of hierarchy and power.

By his interpretation, caste was different from other forms of social stratification through the 'disjunction' of ritual status and secular (political and economic) power within the same social system. The subordination of the political and economic criteria of social stratification to that of ritual status in Dumont's model, however, plays down the significance of social change in colonial and contemporary times. Did not caste lose its political significance as late in the 18th and 19th centuries? As for what has happened in the 20th century, although Dumont explicitly recognized the emergence of inter-caste competitiveness in place of a structure of independence as a departure from tradition. He regarded this as behavioural change, rather than a radical transformation of the system as a whole, at the level of values or principles. Madan (1999) presumed that Dumont's analysis is an exercise in deductive logic.

In the last, Dumont discusses the significant changes in the castes. He views that traditional interdependence of castes has been replaced by "a universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essential, identical and in competition in one another". Dumont calls this the 'substantialization of castes'. An inventory of sources of change in the caste system lists judicial and political changes, social-religious reforms, westernization, and growth of modern professions, urbanization, spatial mobility and the growth of market economy. But, despite all these factors making for change, the most ubiquitous and the general form the change has taken in contemporary times is one of a 'mixture', or 'combination', of traditional and modern features (Dumont, 1966: 228-31).

Religion, Politics and History in India

All the essays in this collection, except one (No. 7), have been published in the different issues of *Contribution to Indian Sociology*. According to Dumont, it is intended as a complement to *Homo Hierarchicus* and, together with it, makes available in almost everything that he has written on India (excluding special studies of kinship). Besides the introduction and conclusion, the book has six chapters, two each on the three broad topics set out in the title of the book, viz., religion, politics and history.

As in other works of Dumont, the aim here is also to explain the underlying unity of Hindu thought and practice in terms of a few structural principles. His attempt is to unite a single framework to all Hindu norms and ideas in all their diversity. This concern for unity, which runs through the entire length of the book, thus, brings into focus Dumont's basic approach to the study of Indian society. In Dumont's own words: "Here then is the complete precipitate, on the general level, of an approach intended as structural which was carried out from 1952 to 1966 from earlier monographic starting point to *Homo Hierarchicus*" (p. vi). The main points made in the book in which Dumont's position can be briefly summed up are as follows (Das, 1974: 119):

1. India is one;
2. this unity is found above all in ideas and values;

3. caste is the fundamental institution of Hinduism;
4. the opposition of the pure and impure is central to the caste system;
5. hierarchy and separation are two basic aspects of opposition between purity and impurity, and hence of the caste system;
6. the caste ideology is an all-embracing ideology and power is subordinate to status;
7. hierarchy distinguishes Indian society from 'modern' societies whose fundamental social principle is equality;
8. there cannot be any revolutionary sociology; and
9. the change in contemporary India is 'organizational', rather than 'structural'.

Homo aequalis

To what extent Dumont is successful in his latter enterprise – i.e., in the effort to understand *Homo aequalis* in terms of the opposite of the *Homo Hierarchicus* – remains to be seen. Therefore, after the publication of *Homo Hierarchicus*, it was (in his own words) *Homo aequalis* – Europe and the West generally – that beckoned to him. It was India that helped him problematise the West. The individualism of the West and its sub-theme of egalitarianism are best understood, Dumont maintained, in the light of holism and hierarchy. Not only was the 'individualist configuration' of the West to be compared with the Indian configuration (not at too low a level of ethnographic description but in terms of the underlying principles), particular expression of individualism within the western setting were also to be compared to deepen understanding. The intellectual tools shaped in the Indian forge were now to be applied to the understanding of another civilization.

The results of the studies of the ideological propositions of western civilization or, more precisely, of ideology of individualism, were published in the form of book followed by a number of essays that were later collected in two volumes. The following three works came out in English and French versions.

From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology (1977) – the French title was *Homo aequalis* – argued that, speaking the language of relations (which a structuralist must), the transition from tradition to modernity in Europe occurred when, among other change, the primacy of the relationship of person to one another (holism) was displaced by the primacy of the relationship of persons to things, conceived as property (individualism). This development ultimately freed economics from the constraints of both morality and politics. The second book, *Essays in Individualism* (1986) contained the examination of the modern ideology. Individualism was presented as the global ideology of modern society. The third and the most recent book in the series, *German Ideology: From France to Germany and Back* (1994) develops this theme. The focus is on the German variant. He explains that the beginning of the divergence are traceable to the distinctiveness of the German version of the enlightenment compared to the western (French), for it was religious rather than secularist. The situation is complex, and the German-French contrast has the ontological and epistemological significance; indeed, its ethical dimension may not be denied.

Criticism of Dumont

Dumont wrote many articles and books on sociology in India. He has joint venture with Pocock in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. He is criticized on various grounds:

1. Gupta (2001) demonstrates that Dumont's understanding of hierarchy is critically faulted in his application of the term to the caste system.
2. Dumont's work is based on traditional Indian texts. Consequently, the features of the caste system, as projected by Dumont, seem to be unchanging. In reality, the caste system has changed in various ways during a period of time. Dumont also seems to characterize Indian society as almost stagnant, since he emphasizes the integrative function of caste system. Yogendra Singh agrees with Bailey, who considers Dumont's

approach to sociology rules out a study of a host of crucial social facts of Indian life, such as, formal organizations, the industrial system, labour and agrarian social movements etc. It also rules out many key variables from being introduced into a 'Sociology of Development'. Dumont is more concerned with system integration and system maintenance than with change or conflict. Yogendra Singh views that Dumont postulates some 'functionally equivalent' concepts but his paradigm remains hidden from public view. He also points out that Dumont's emphasis on Indology has inadvertently led to a displacement of focus, as if there is no scope for comparison or abstract generalizations in his sociology.

3. The purity and impurity opposition highlighted by Dumont is also not universal. In certain tribal societies 'status' is not anchored in purity but in 'sacredness'.
4. Dumont's view of caste, as rationally ordered system of values (ideology), has also been questioned. Dumont seems to have ignored the number of protest movements, which emerged in Indian history questioning the ideology of the caste division itself, through his emphasis on values. He could not see the relationship between castes as conflict ridden. For him, the relations between *varnas*, especially the Brahmin and Ksatriya, is almost complementary.
5. McKim Marriott criticizes *Homo Hierarchicus* as containing a speculative sketch of a pair of models, strongly shaped and documented mainly with textual ideology of social science and philosophical allusions.
6. Berreman (2001) adds that 'hierarchy' is simply a lure: the superior castes conception of social system. Further, on the issue of Dumont's separation between power and status, Berreman argues that power and status could be two sides of the same coin as well.

Despite these criticisms, Dumont holds an important position in Indian sociology. Amidst the debates about appraising Indian social reality on the basis of caste, Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*

represented an outstanding contribution, whether or not one agrees with his viewpoint.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed broadly Dumont's contribution to the study of caste system in India. To Dumont, hierarchy is the essential value undertaking the caste system. His approach to caste is basically Indological and structuralist. To him, the hierarchy of caste is religious in nature and is marked by the disjunction between status and power. Dumont's understanding has been traced mainly from ancient texts. Therefore, we consider him in the category of cognitive-historical and Indological.

Dumont's Framework Summarized

Background

1. French sociologist and Indologist.
2. Studied German and also learnt Sanskrit.

Aims

1. Primarily concerned with the ideology of the caste system.
2. Focus on India and the West

Assumptions

1. Hierarchy is the essential value underlying the caste system. Hierarchy of caste is religious in nature and is marked by the disjunction between status and power.
2. Unity in the Indian civilization

Methodology

1. Indological and structural
2. Cognitive and historical approach
3. Dialectic transformational relationship
4. Ethnographical evidence

Theoretical Perspectives

1. Structuralism
2. Attributional approach of caste

Typology

1. Indology: Sources of material: Ancient texts
2. Ideology and tradition
3. Holism against individualism, hierarchy against equality

Issues

Different aspects of Indian society, namely

1. 'System' of caste
2. Concept of pure and impure
3. The theory of *varnas*

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