

"Caste and Tribe": Some Further Comments

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Dr. Bouwer's valuable review (Vol. 1/ 1998:85) has raised several questions which may be discussed in a few additional comments: Perhaps I have understood and admired Bailey's politological approach, but I do not favour it. One reason for this distance is my introduction to the rich and intricate religious world of the Kondh and Pano, ignored by Bailey and other authors who deny the existence of holistic societies. Thus historians have studied the British accounts of the Kondh "human sacrifice" repeatedly but ignored the fact that the grand ritual – apart from the human gift to the Earth Goddess – is practiced everywhere in contemporary Kondh society.

Dumont's analyses of ideologies have influenced me more than any other school of thought. By lecturing and writing, I have defended Dumont's theory on kinship and caste in India, on modern individualism, and on the German heritage. But the subject of the reviewed article was tribal middle India, a feared deliberately ignored by Dumont, apart from the scant remarks quoted.

Dumont may have omitted tribal value-ideas because they differ fundamentally from those attributed to *Homo hierarchicus*. At the same time, the most common mistake is the thesis of an egalitarian tribal order. Following Dumont's method, the structure of tribal thought should be studied through the categories and not as a reflections of

caste of Western values. Unfortunately, however, Dumontians do not study the tribal world view and ethnographers of tribal India ignore the Dumontian theory.

The numerically insignificant Nilgiri tribe of the Toda, anthropologised in every conceivable detail, has value system diametrically opposed to those of many million middle Indian tribes men, ignored by students of ideologies. Thus, the dairy complex is of central relevance for the Toda world view, whereas milk and dairy products are avoided by the Scheduled Tribes of middle India. Elwin's account of a Sora Shaman's marriage to a Hindu in the world of spirits has been corrected and placed into proper context by Vitebsky's brilliant "Dialogues with the Dead" (1993). This modern monograph is the only qualified work on tribal ideology in Orissa. It shows that the world of the dead offers avenues closed in the world of the living, i.e. the marriage with a Khandait wife and husband.

The middle Indian tribes have interacted with the civilization of the plains since thousands of years. Today it is established that they have never lived in isolation. But such long term contacts do not however imply a common ideology. In contrast to Western inquisitiveness and missionary zeal, Hindus live alone other traditions. To use Professor Bailey's phrase they show civility by being indifferent.