



অগ্রমতেন বেদেভ্যম

Department of Anthropology, Cotton University, Guwahati Organizes an online lecture on

Inter-*jāti* Exchange Relations in India: A Theoretical Revisit



Patron
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ABSTRACT: Anthropology of India witnessed transformation of the sort in the 1950s when its dominant focus on “tribes” gradually shifted to the understanding of other social categories like “*jātis*”. Many scholarly researches of that time interrogated the status of Indian traditional social institutions under the influence of the forces of modernization. Great thinkers like Weber insisted that Hinduism in India was a deterrent in the path of modernization as it promoted “otherworldly asceticism”. Marx described the ancient Indian society as a “sack of potatoes” without segmental integration and hence, a hinderance in modernization. Even Dumont’s emphasis on “hierarchy” of the Indian society was portrayed as an obstacle to modernization. But scholars like Gusfield (1967), Eisenstadt (1964), Huntington (1965), Rudolph (1965) and others demonstrated that traditional social institutions had their own dynamics and were the products of centuries of transformation.

Keeping this scholarly debate in mind, I shall be deliberating here on one of the traditional institutions viz. *Jajmāni*, which has been a forceful and accepted medium of inter-*jāti* exchange relations in rural India. Literature reveals that the anthropological analysis of *jajmāni* usually hovers round either a unitary and immutable pan-Indian model proposed by Wiser (1936) or Dumont (1966), or a multiple system model proposed by Parry (1979), Raheja (1988), Lerche (1993) and others. In this presentation I suggest that neither of these models satisfactorily explains the real nature of the inter-*jāti* exchange relations in rural India. Therefore, it is imperative to simultaneously examine the basic ideology behind these relations and the impacts of many socio-political and historical forces that help devising a locally adaptive form of such relations, without necessarily obliterating the basic ideology that shapes the *jāti* organization in rural India. While critically examining Lerche’s views on coastal Odisha as an example, the presentation explicates that the *jāti* dynamics in its locally adaptive form does not necessarily contradict the basic principles of *jāti* organization. Moreover, the inter-*jāti* exchange relations are flexible enough that might take different forms for meeting the common goal of the survival needs of the village community at large. It is only wrapped with a ritual fervor to legitimize the occupational monopoly of different *jātis* and to ensure their sustainability.

Saturday, the 21st August, 2021 at 12 noon

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