

CASTE, CLASS, AND COMMUNITY IN INDIA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH



Balmurli Natrajan
William Paterson University

The anthropology of India has been dominated by an emphasis on caste that has inhibited an integrated approach to understanding class in India. Using an ethnographic approach that takes into account the symbolic and material aspects of caste and class, this article focuses on the attempts to form a “community” of potters among a large group of potter-artisans in central India. It is problematic, however, to view this community as a federation of potter castes or as simply a bloc of classes. Katznelson’s (1986) insights into different aspects of class formation help to understand how caste and class get constructed in the formation of a community. Here the apparently caste-based dispositions of potters reveals a class consciousness that is culturally organized by a custom that men work the potter’s wheel and women do the marketing. (Caste, class community, India)

In the 1980s and 1990s, the anthropology of caste in India underwent a radical revision in reaction to the revolution in caste studies that Louis Dumont’s structuralist approach heralded in the 1960s and 1970s (Dumont 1970). The critiques highlighted three debilitating effects of Dumont’s approach: 1) that it thwarts the comparative aim of sociology and anthropology, since Indians are represented as being so different as to preclude comparison, 2) that it makes the reality of caste stand for India, which is far more complex, and 3) that it explains caste in idealist ways as a cultural construct devoid of material content, resulting in the mythology of a single hierarchy based on purity and pollution, along which all castes in India can purportedly be arranged. The last critique has also been extended to show how Dumont mistakenly makes secular power appear as subordinate to ritual status (Béteille 1979; Berreman 1979; Appadurai 1992; Dirks 1987; Gupta 2000; Quigley 1993, 1994; Raheja 1988). But, despite the critical import of these critiques, they do not bring class into the study of caste in any systematic manner. Anthropological studies of India seem to remain removed from developing an integrated approach to caste and class.

Fuller and Spencer (1990) note that the decline in the 1970s of the “village studies model” of Indian anthropology enabled a shift of focus from caste and the caste system towards other and larger structures such as class, religion, and violence. But it is noteworthy that debates on class formation in India have long been dominated by economists, historians, Marxists, development sociologists, and some political scientists. There is, however, a small body of classic anthropological works that have dealt with caste and class (Béteille 1966; Ghurye 1950; Gough 1955; Gupta 1980; Meillassoux 1973; Mencher 1974) and

some more recent works (Dickey 1993; Kapadia 1995). The anthropology of India arguably is still weak on discussing political and economic issues, especially those that integrate the traditional strengths of studying caste with attention to issues of class. This article attempts to develop an ethnographic approach to class using the traditional anthropological emphasis on caste in India. Attention to the different aspects of class analysis is perhaps the best way for a focus on caste to enter the debate around class formation in India, for anthropologists can ask questions about culture and capital, community and class, and about class-consciousness and caste-consciousness in ways that elude researchers who neglect the material reality of caste. The materiality of caste needs some emphasizing due to the tendency to treat it as either ideological (as a mask for class or economic exploitation) or as an idealized social structure without any material basis (i.e., as kinship or religious system).

THE MATERIAL BASIS OF CASTE

Conventional anthropological understandings of caste are not totally devoid of material content. For example, Srinivas (1962) advanced the concept of "dominant caste" as the most useful way to understand caste on the ground. A dominant caste has six attributes; namely, a sizeable amount of the arable land locally available, strength of numbers, a high place in the local hierarchy, Western education, jobs in government administration, and urban sources of income (Srinivas 1966:10-11). But the historian and sociologist, Mukherjee (2000:337), points out that

[a]ll these attributes are secondary or tertiary expressions of the formation of the top stratum of the *class* structure in rural society. But the proclamation of class relations was an anathema to these conservative scholars. So, class was forcibly funneled into an amorphous identity of the "Dominant Caste" because, as later admitted by its progenitor, all its six attributes need not be present in one caste entity. In other words, the "Dominant Caste" could be identified in $(2^6-1=)$ 63 ways!

Mukherjee (2000) argues that the concept of dominant caste is actually an attempt at speaking of the ways in which the caste structure has increasingly articulated itself within a class structure, and that social reality today is neither caste in itself nor caste and class, but actually caste in class where the "class structure has cut across the caste hierarchy, forming new alliances and antagonisms" (Mukherjee 2000:338).

Indeed it is in the process of withering away with the march of history or otherwise remains atavistic, such as the distinction between the Jews and Gentiles, the Hindus and the Muslims. Yet, it is propped up, for their own sake, by the politicians and a brand of social scientists (Mukherjee 2000:338-9).

Mukherjee is too quick to announce the death of caste in India. Moreover, it does injustice to the large body of critical work on the social production of identities, forms of social distinction, and formation of group interests other than class that exist in ideological space and competition with class, all of which show that phenomena such as caste are not simply imagined and propped up by scholars and politicians. Finally, one wonders how atavistic institutions such as caste or religious identities continue to exist if they are but conjured up by scholars and politicians.

An earlier attempt to integrate an analysis of caste, class, and capitalism in today's India used statistical evidence of occupational categories and caste identities to show that whereas Indian feudalism was shaped closely by caste, colonial transformations, especially in land, gave a severe blow to the association of caste and class (Omvedt 1992). It was only with the development of capitalist agricultural relations in India after independence that this correlation was broken. Thus Omvedt (1992:131) writes, "class and caste are no longer absolutely correlated: economic differentiation has affected almost every caste." This internal differentiation of castes has meant that virtually all castes, regardless of their rank in the ritual hierarchy, have members in different class positions (agricultural labor, small and middle peasantry, capitalist farmers). It has also meant that whereas capitalist farmers are the least differentiated in terms of caste (being mostly from the upper castes), it is the rural proletarians who are the most differentiated in terms of caste (Omvedt 131). In other words, upper castes are diverse in class terms and lower classes are diverse in caste terms.

The above works locate caste within larger processes of capitalism and class, but do not explore the notions of dominance and differentiation in any significant manner. These remain abstract theoretical constructs (rather than concrete historical social processes) that allude to the existence of structures within which people make their histories, but stop short of showing how histories are made. Despite these shortcomings, the insistence on caste as having a material basis shaped by capitalism can be extended to include the work of symbols in its concrete existence, since dominance and authority are legitimized through symbols. Ethnographic approaches, as exemplified by the works of Meillassoux (1973), Gupta (1980), and Mencher (1974), are needed to take analysis of caste in this direction.

Reacting against Dumont's idealist theories of caste and also seeking to make a case for the existence of caste outside India (in parts of Africa), Meillassoux (1973) drew attention to relations of production within what appear to be caste relations or relations of kinship, reproduction, and status. He tried to show how the relations of *jajmani* were actually relations of clientship that depended on exploitation of the laboring classes, and argued that a strong case exists to view caste in the form of *varna* as class, at least in its genesis in ancient India. The

subsequent development of classes accompanied by frequent conquests paved the way for increased fragmentation of society and the rise of endogamous communities or castes in their new form of *jati* (Meillassoux 99-103). The move from varna to jati corresponded with a change from the generalized exploitation of the Asiatic mode of production to the localized exploitation of the feudal mode of production (Gupta 1980; see also Jaiswal 2000). Since jati is a precapitalist mode of production (i.e., Indian feudal effect), "... it would be too much to ask for a casteless system in modern India where the introduction of capitalism was not accompanied by an industrial revolution ... and where, as a result, pre-capitalist remnants are still prevalent" (Gupta 1980:266). In sum, a key reason advanced by these scholars for why caste (as clientship and relations of kinship within exploitative relations of production) exists in contemporary India, is that capitalist relations require caste relations to reproduce itself in a postcolonial setting. Yet another reason is that caste processes disorganized class formation (Mencher 1975). Social reproduction of capitalism and disorganization of class formation are why caste is not simply an atavism in today's India.

There remains the need to demonstrate the processes whereby capitalism in India gives rise to the peculiar configuration of class-caste relations. Such a task requires a focus on relations between castes that simultaneously comprehends the dynamics within a caste, as attempted in this article, since it is at this level of group formation that the following questions can be posed: How do castes originate as groups that represent themselves to others and to their own membership? How do class and other differences (such as gender and regional identities) emerge within a caste? Most important, how does the claim of a community become the key mode of accommodation and contradictions within today's caste groups in India? These questions have not been commonly posed since most studies assume existing caste-groups and tend to focus on inter-caste dynamics. As a result, they do not address processes of class formation that take place only within the space of caste and community in India.

CLASS ANALYSIS

A useful heuristic device for studying class is Katznelson's (1986) view to analyze it at four "levels" (which are perhaps better understood as aspects), each of which takes a different perspective: first, class as part of the structure of capitalist economic development; second, class as life patterns within particular social formations (class as an experience dealing with patterns of life and social relations with respect to work and residence); third, class as shared dispositions resulting from subjectively lived experiences of "objective" positions and limits to action; and fourth, class as conscious collective action to affect society and the position of the class within it (Katznelson 1986:14-22). With their customary

focus on human interaction, culture, power, and community, anthropologists could contribute to the latter two aspects, while historians, sociologists, and economists usually center analyses at the first two levels. Interestingly many of the latter specialists have turned to anthropological insights in their efforts to understand class and capitalism. The question of class formation is best understood as “concerned with the conditional (but not random) process of connection between the four levels of class” (Katznelson 1986:23).

One anthropologist’s approach to social reproduction and economic anthropology could be read as emphasizing exactly such a connection between these aspects of class analysis. “Cultural particularities are part of the class structure because they are crucial to the structure of exploitation and they might or might not be pertinent to class consciousness and the meaningful organization of class identity” (Narotzky 1997:217). Culture is not merely part of a superstructure that is independent of or determined by the infrastructure. Rather, culture is part of the structure of society since it structures the crucial social process of exploitation. Most interesting here is that culture as structure goes into the making of class in the sense that Marxists have repeatedly emphasized, that “classes should be defined in terms of what people (in some sense) have to do, not by what they actually do” (Elster 1986:1414).

Finally, it is possible that these aspects of class could be viewed as mutually dependent or even as constituting each other. Not all forms of class action are possible, given the class structure of a society, and not all class dispositions can be compatible with particular forms of class action. Such considerations are appropriate for studying a place like India, a country that has much in common with less advanced capitalist countries, but which is also unmatched for its class formations and the role of the still relatively autonomous state, even in the age of privatization and liberalization (Vanaik 1997). One would thus not assume *a priori* that the trajectory of class formation in India would follow a model based on England, or that class-consciousness of Indian workers would be signaled in ways similar to English workers (see, e.g., Chakrabarty 1989). Smith (1984:467) observes that

... if anthropology has contributed anything to the discussion of class, it is a recognition that societies are differentially “inserted” into the world system, that the cultural or ideological dimension of class relations (if that is what they are) is more important than is often assumed, less easy to understand, and has a transformative capacity that complements and often exceeds that of technological change.

The Chhattisgarh Potter Caste Community

The late 1960s saw the birth of an organization called the Chhattisgarh Potter Caste Community (referred henceforth as CPCC)¹ in three districts of the central

Indian state of Chhattisgarh.² This organization claims to represent about 40,000 people, all of whom belong to the *Jhariya* Potters caste and the overwhelming majority of whom are traditional potters.³ Almost all potters produce utilitarian items such as pots and pans, roof tiles made on the potter's wheel, and ritual items linked to the local agricultural and Hindu festival cycle. In this region, men work the potter's wheel while women gather firewood and do the marketing. Children may help with preparing the clay and firing items in the kiln.

The leaders who formed the CPCC are not potters, although all of them come from families who were potters a generation or more ago. Numbering no more than 100, these Potters are employed as (or retired) factory or clerical workers in industry or government, teachers, lawyers, or are small businessmen in retailing or restaurants. There also are other, smaller Potter castes in this region that have either migrated from other states such as Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh or reside in those districts within Chhattisgarh and are not represented by the CPCC. While a few of these Potter castes are potters, most of them are entirely divorced from pottery and engage in petty trade and businesses like those from Rajasthan, while others are brick-makers.

In 1971, the leaders of the CPCC tried to unite all castes of Potters as the Chhattisgarh Potter Organization (CPO) to represent all Potters in the region. But only the leaders of the various caste organizations currently belong to the CPO. The CPO in turn operates as a branch of the All India Potters Organization (AIPO), a national organization headquartered in Delhi that is the ideological inspiration for Potter organizations in various states. The conventional characterization of groups that attempt to form collectives of endogamous caste-groups by establishing horizontal and vertical links in modern India is that they are a federation of castes (Fox 1967; Rudolph and Rudolph 1960; Srinivas 1962).

But why should artisans like potters in today's India choose to politically represent themselves in the form of a Potter Organization rather than a potter trade union? Related to the question of the form of collective action of group workers is that of the class character of the CPCC, the CPO, and the AIPO. The easy answer to both questions would take the form of arguing that the CPO and AIPO are examples of class alliances or blocs, since one class (potters, who are petty commodity producers in household economies) is part of a coalition with other classes (a mix of factory workers and petty bourgeoisie, such as clerical workers, teachers, and petty merchants, with the caveat that they all claim to be Potters) in which the latter classes take the lead for the Potter organization on the basis of caste unity. Yet, such a conclusion does not illuminate the process of class formation in India. It cannot shed light on how, for example, class takes root as a lived category of experience, if it does so at all in India. For it cannot be simply assumed that potters consider themselves as a different class than their leaders who are Potters but not potters. Pursuing this line of thinking will

eventually lead to what Mitra (1994:52) has called the “sterile debate” of studying class and caste “as if caste had no economy, and class no culture.”

ANALYZING THE PROBLEM

The various classes within the caste of Potters identify only what Wright (1990) calls the class locations of individuals, but fail to determine whether the leaders and the potters in the Potter organizations are linked to each other as two classes in a class relation; i.e., a social relation of production in which there is an unequal distribution of rights and powers over productive resources, control over the labor process, and the products of labor. It is only when such locations are placed within class relations that it is possible to view a class structure of society as the sum total of class relations (Wright 1990:25).

This requires taking into account the fact that potter-artisans have a diversity of work experiences and relations with capital. While all potters subsist on making utilitarian and ritual pottery for the market, many potter households depend on one or more members working in agriculture during the agricultural season,⁴ as wage labor making bricks, in construction, or as contract workers making roof tiles. Some have their most direct contact with capital working part of the year for a government financed co-operative while others, having joined the chronically unemployed, have lost faith in their traditional occupation. More important, they have been deprived of access to clay or firewood due to the usurping of their land by brickmakers or through discriminatory policies of the Forest Department that favor paper manufacturers over the traditional rights of potters. Finally, almost every potter’s residence in a village or town has some of its members owning or working in teashops, cigarette stalls, or small groceries.

Both class and caste in India articulate with a process that has increasingly become a key form of collective action for groups seeking to shape relations with the state and the market in their own perceived interests. This is the process of forming communities, and it provides an important lesson: that politics can produce a particular consciousness, rather than the other way around. Questioning the basis of community is critical because it challenges prevalent assumptions of culture as shared, rather than as used by and on behalf of capital to disorganize classes. As Narotzky (1997) emphasizes, the task is to use the terms “culture” and “community” seriously and go past the fragmentation that pervades new narratives of capitalist society. What follows here is an ethnographic example that brings out the connections between aspects of class: structure, conditions, dispositions (Bourdieu 1977), and action in the context of community-making.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND CLASS ANALYSIS

This case study, as it is about artisans, is focused on how capitalism has affected artisanal formations. In precolonial India, artisans were intimately connected to the peasantry through the village economy and the demiurgical and jajmani relations of production. In the urban settings they were the industrial class of the future, but very dependent upon royal patronage. British colonialism shattered these relations. The artisans created by colonialism remained independent petty commodity producers but without the status of village employees that was ensured by the caste system through closed labor markets. They were hence deprived of land guarantees and denied protected markets for their goods. Thus, an important axis of change for artisans in India was in the realm of social relations of production. In comparison, changes in the forces of production or technology have been far less important for the history of modern Indian artisans even after independence.⁵ As mentioned earlier, the CPCC was formed by those Potters who no longer were potters. Its genesis was explained by a high-ranking official of the CPCC:

Before the Chhattisgarh Kumbhkar Samaj [CPCC] became an official organization, the elder potters of every village in the region used to meet and make someone unofficially the *Raja* (King), the *Divan* (Chief Court Minister) and the *Mantri* (Court Minister). The object of such an arrangement was to exclusively resolve the problems within the particular samaj of potters such as someone's wife running away with someone else, a married woman going back to her mother's place and staying there, any man taking on more than one wife, etc. That time there was no problem of clay and firewood and hence it was never talked about in the meetings. Then slowly some educated and younger members of the samaj were invited to take part in the meetings. They were of the view that discussions restricted to resolving marital conflicts alone would not be useful to the samaj. It was then that the Chhattisgarh Kumbhkar Samaj [CPCC] became more organized leading to its official status.

The rise of the CPCC was aided by some recent developments in capitalism in India and state policies towards small-scale industry and artisans, including the rapidly shrinking market for clay products due to the increasing popularity of plastic and aluminum substitutes, the competing powerful interests of brick makers and paper industries for clay and wood respectively, the political changes that required traditional industries such as potters to dialogue more closely with the local state representatives rather than village councils for ensuring "protection" and "development," and the higher educational status of the CPCC leaders which made them more suitable representatives than practicing potters. Significantly, to underscore their modernity, the leaders changed their official titles, substituting President for King, Vice-President for Court Minister, and Prime Minister for Chief Court Minister.

Social reproduction is attempted through control over what Potters call *roti-beti-len-den* (lit., exchange of bread and daughters, but referring to endogamy and patrimony). This case of a caste-based disposition conceals a more complex class consciousness that is historically contingent on a particular condition of production relations that is culturally organized; i.e., male potters at the wheel and female potters doing the marketing.

Endogamy and Patrimony

The CPCC leaders took advantage of the changed historical circumstances in their regular speeches at CPCC conventions of Jhariya Potters, where they drew stark contrasts between their capabilities to lead Jhariya Potters and those of the traditional elders, the male potters who are heads of prominent lineages in this region. The CPCC leaders called them conservative, backward, and mired in solving family disputes concerning *roti-beti-len-den* rather than focusing on demanding better access to clay and firewood. The elders, however, have the backing of most potters, and contest the leaders, especially on the issue of interpreting the customary rules of endogamy and patrimony.

The leaders of the CPCC explain their attempt to build a coalition with the larger organizations, the CPO and the AIPO as stemming from the growing necessity for a Potter community to move beyond the Jhariya caste to establish links with other Potter castes in the region and nation. But in a context where the exchange of bread and daughters is strongly proscribed between various Potter castes, the CPCC leaders quickly run into problems with the elder Jhariya potters who oppose their move to extend the boundaries of endogamy. This raises the issue of who are Potters, since that is tied to whom one can marry.

For the elders and a majority of potters, it is anathema to marry non-Jhariya Potters. They even deny Potter status to those who are not working the potter wheel, restricting Potter identity only to those who make clay products on the wheel. Thus, many Jhariya potters and elders taunt the CPCC leaders who, in addition to not working the wheel, have even stopped keeping a wheel in their homes. Thus the main challenge to the leaders concerns reproduction, not production. One story repeatedly told to me by potters is that, at a particular Jhariya Potter convention, two Jhariya potters openly challenged the claim of the CPCC leaders to being Potters by referring to their lifestyles, pointing out that the CPCC leaders prefer to live in the middle-class neighborhoods of the towns instead of with potters, that the leaders prefer Sanskritised surnames such as Kumbhkar, Chakradhari, or Prajapati, instead of the local Pade or humble Kumhar. Most important, they do not want Jhariya potters as mates for their daughters or sons. One of the two potters challenged the Prime Minister of the CPCC to marry his daughter to one of the potters' sons present in the huge

assembly, to which the CPCC leader did not reply. His silence was taken as proof of being guilty of the accusations. It is important to note that gender and caste boundaries articulate in this process, as the Jhariya female potter is associated with the community boundary through marriage and is an index of a contested potter community.

A second point of contestation between leaders of the CPCC and the potters is over the rule of patrimony (printed in the community rule book⁶) which states that a Potter man's son or daughter who has married outside the caste is accepted into the community after an annulment and doing repentance. The rule of patrimony favoring the male Potter was put in place by the elders in the 1970s as affirming Jhariya Potter tradition. As modernizers, the CPCC leaders say that such a view is conservative and desire to remove this gender asymmetry. Gender equality, it would seem, is a "modern" value that has been lost on the traditional elders.

While these examples suggest that potters put caste consciousness before "progress" and "modernization," a case could be made to view things from a different perspective, one that considers the potters' class conditions as different from those of the CPCC leaders. First, even while facilitating an expansion of the Potter community, the CPCC leaders need to simultaneously reproduce their legitimacy as Jhariya Potters in the eyes of the majority of potters within the CPCC, and one way of doing this is to marry their daughters to Jhariya Potters, and not simply to any Potter. The dispositions of the leaders to try to get suitable grooms for their daughters from outside the Jhariya caste derives partly from the fact that the number of non-practicing Jhariya Potters is low. But a class disposition is also at work. The wives of almost all the leaders of the CPCC are either homemakers or work part-time at "white collar" jobs such as clerical or teaching. Marrying into a potter's family would be hard to imagine for the leaders and their daughters, who have not been brought up to do the kind of physical work of women in potter households. This makes it imperative for them to seek to expand the Potter caste boundaries. Their middle-class orientation is also visible in their having set up a Women's Wing (*mahila mandal*) within the CPCC, which consists of the wives of Potters who have very little in common with potter women. In fact, potter women are seldom seen in the group's meetings for lack of time away from work.

Second, the realm of social relations among potters as issues of *roti-beti-lenden* is critical to the reproduction of potter relations of production. In keeping with the centrality to caste of finding wives in patrilineal and patrilocal household commodity-producing groups, the elders and potters know the importance of control over the exchange of women. That the relations of reproduction are capable of being determined by the relations of production has been recognized by scholars and produced some forceful theories concerning the

role of gender (see, e.g., Sacks 1979; Leacock 1986; Harris and Young 1981; Meillassoux 1981). Jhariya potter women do have control over their labor (which includes their technical skill and knowledge of marketing) but have been customarily divorced from working the potter's wheel.⁷ This culturally determined sexual division of labor is maintained as the primary means of production through the use of symbols. One such practice is by the leaders of the CPCC who in their discourses and imagery publicly index a male potter at the wheel on their banners and pamphlets. This cultural division of labor also works through devaluing women's labor in marketing pottery, which is critical to a petty commodity producer. Unlike wage laborers whose subjectivities are primarily fashioned in the realm of production, potters, as petty commodity producers, are both producers and marketers of their products. So, the indexing of pottery-making through the potter's wheel, operated and controlled by the male potter, ensures a sense of productive activities among potters and their leaders that devalue women's work present in all other phases of the labor process and the all-important marketing. That the CPCC leaders bring their class dispositions of gender into their relations with the potters is evident also in the fact that as spokespersons of potters to the Indian state, they focus only on male potters as development targets for any aid to artisans, thus erasing attention to women's roles in production. This enables an asymmetrically gendered power relation in production through control of the meaning of production.

A control of meanings of work and labor in the realm of production facilitates a control over relations of reproduction, which in turn enables reproducing power relations as production relations of inequality. The apparently traditional view of the male elders and potters that the caste transgression of Jhariya males mattered less than that of Jhariya females may be understood as a class compulsion in the sense referred to by Elster (1986). For the particular organization of potter labor, with men at the wheel and women in the market, makes the view of male elders a lived experience not shared by the CPCC leaders divorced from a wheel economy. For example, a Jhariya male potter who marries outside of his caste is not allowed to bring in his outsider wife, but other female members of his household (such as his mother or sisters-in-law) can take up the work of Jhariya women (chores, firewood collection, clay preparation, painting items, aiding firing, and marketing) and the household could continue to reproduce itself as potters. This possibility is borne out when a male potter decides not to remarry after his wife's death or his divorce. He still continues to be a potter and his products are taken to the market by women in his household. But, when a Jhariya female potter marries out of the caste, the only way for her to still be part of a potter household is if her husband is a non-Jhariya potter, since only then will she still be part of a wheel-based economy. However, it is mostly Jhariya potters who work the wheel in this region. The gender

asymmetrical treatment on the part of the elders may then be said to derive from their prior insistence on defining the *kumharman* (essence) of the Potter community by a male working the wheel: a cultural rule that produces class-specific behavior.

The different dispositions of potters and CPCC leaders signify different conditions of class existence. But they also signify a class-consciousness on the part of the elders representing the potters, as their concern is not caste expansion along the lines of the leaders but one of the reproduction of their means of existence. By opposing their leaders on the apparently "superstructural" issue of endogamy and patrimony, the elders and the potters as a class signaled their class distinctions.

Class would thus be defined by the *articulation between reproduction and production locations*. It is not so much the *property* of the means of production which sets apart and creates conflicts between groups of people in structural terms, but the possibilities of owning one's future (Narotzky 1997:218, emphasis in original).

CONCLUSION

It is possible to view potters as displaying a class consciousness that, while surely different from an industrial worker's consciousness, nonetheless is based upon an understanding of potters' social conditions of existence. This consciousness of their material conditions of existence is however limited by their dependent status in the Indian capitalist economy. The fact that the proportionally small sector in India in which trade unions operate show no interest in viewing artisans in the informal sector as workers is also a factor that explains why the CPCC seeks to represent all potter-artisans. It may even be argued that it is a community-for-itself, not merely a class-for-itself.

It is necessary for anthropologists to continue to consider how class operates within culture, rather than assume that it simply exists within an objective material reality capable of somehow being immediately experienced (non-discursively and non-linguistically). This builds upon a strength that allows showing that the distinction between the material and symbolic as being separate from each other is false. Instead, a focus on how class and capital are experienced differently by workers in different cultural contexts is essential for understanding the uneven proletarianization characteristic of much of the post-Fordist world.

[L]abor power only seldom appears in the classical commodity form ascribed to industrial labor. More frequently labor enters social relations with capital through the form we have loosely termed "independent producer figures": family farm owners, local subcontracting middlewomen managing small workshops, self-employed workers,

homeworkers in informal putting-out networks, members of worker co-operatives (Narotzky 1997:204).

Potters as potters in India are surely independent producer figures who perhaps will not become fully proletarianized. It makes no sense to view potters as simply a working-class or petty commodity producing group. They are also a caste, albeit existing without the presence of a caste-system. For if they were treated as a class, it would appear that entities such as the CPCC or the Kumbhkar Samaj are a coalition of classes without a way to show why they come together as a caste-community. Simultaneously, an attention to how class relations and consciousness get signified within caste-communities is also crucial. So, the practice of endogamy that seems to be divisive of workers by separating them as castes could actually be signifying a class consciousness clothed in cultural ways as caste consciousness. Finally, one cannot study economy and society without posing the question of social reproduction. This means that any social structure (whether the community is a structure of kinship, or politics, or economy, or religion) needs to reproduce the conditions of its existence, and it will have to do this by engaging with identity, interests, consciousness, and reproduction of means of production and reproduction.

NOTES

1. The name derives from the central Indian region of Chhattisgarh. Kumbhkar means potter, and Samaj means community, association, or society, depending upon context. I have chosen to translate this term as caste-community since it is used in this region for caste groups that come together to form larger political groups.
2. This region became India's 27th state on November 1, 2000. The three districts from where data for this article were collected are Durg, Raipur and Rajnandgaon. Fieldwork was conducted in the summers of 1994, 2001, 2002, and ten months in 1995-96.
3. The convention in caste studies is for the upper case to designate a caste group, and the lower case to designate occupation. Thus the Potter community in this region can have many members who are not potters, but all potters are necessarily Potters.
4. Almost no potter owns land. Artisans who do are recent and rare in this region.
5. Roy (2000) for example shows how despite technological obsolescence, artisans in some crafts proved to be more efficient.
6. *Chhattisgarh Kumbhkar Samaj: Legislation Regarding Community Organization and Reform 2002*.
7. Two or three women are known to have worked at the wheel. I was told that there are no injunctions against women doing so, and there are no ritual taboos and no ostracism results from a woman working the wheel. Neither has the CPCC introduced any rule to this effect or challenged the sexual division of labor.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Appadurai, A. 1992. Putting Hierarchy in Its Place. *Rereading Cultural Anthropology*, ed. G. Marcus, pp. 34-47. Durham.
- Berreman, G. 1979. Caste and Other Inequities: Essays on Inequality. Meerut.
- Béteille, A. 1979. Homo Hierarchicus, Homo Equalis. *Modern Asian Studies* 13(4):529-38.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge.
- Chakrabarty, D. 1989. *Rethinking Indian Working-Class Histories, 1890-1945*. Princeton.
- Dickey, S. 1993. *Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India*. Cambridge.
- Dirks, N. 1987. *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*. Cambridge.
- Dumont, L. 1970. *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System*, trans. M. Sainsbury. Chicago.
- Elster, J. 1986. Three Challenges to Class. *Analytical Marxism*, ed. J. Roemer, pp. 141-61. Cambridge.
- Fox, R. 1967. Resiliency and Change in the Indian Caste System: The Umar of U. P. *Journal of Asian Studies* 26(4):575-87.
- Fuller, C., and J. Spencer. 1990. South Asian Anthropology in the 1980s. *South Asia Research* 10:85-105.
- Ghurye, G. S. 1950. *Caste and Class in India*. Bombay.
- Gough, E. K. 1960. Caste in a Tanjore Village. *Aspects of Caste in Southern India, Ceylon, and North-west Pakistan*, ed. E. R. Leach, pp. 11-60. Cambridge.
- Gupta, D. 1980. From Varna to Jati: The Indian Caste System, from the Asiatic to the Feudal Mode of Production. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 10(3):249-71.
- . 2000. *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*. New Delhi.
- Harris, O., and K. Young. 1981. Engendered Structures: Some Problems in the Analysis of Reproduction. *The Anthropology of Pre-capitalist Societies*, eds. J. S. Kahn and J. R. Lobern, pp. 109-47. London.
- Jaiswal, S. 2000. *Caste: Origin, Function, and Dimensions of Change*. Delhi.
- Kapadia, K. 1995. *Siva and Her Sisters: Gender, Caste, and Class in Rural South India*. Boulder.
- Katznelson, I. 1986. *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*. London.
- Leacock, E. 1986. Women, Power, and Authority. *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development*, eds. L. Dube, E. Leacock, and S. Ardener, pp. 107-35. Delhi.
- Meillassoux, C. 1973. Are There Castes in India? *Economy and Society* 2(1):85-111.
- . 1981. *Maidens, Meal, and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community*. Cambridge.
- Mencher, J. P. 1974. The Caste System Upside Down, or The Not-So-Mysterious East. *Current Anthropology* 15(4):469-93.
- Mitra, S. 1994. Caste, Democracy, and the Politics of Community Formation in India. *Contextualizing Caste: Post-Dumontian Approaches*, eds. M. Searle-Chatterjee and U. Shara, pp. 49-71. Blackwell.
- Mukherjee, R. 2000. Caste in Itself, Caste and Class, or Caste in Class. *Journal of World Systems Research* 6(2):332-39.
- Narotzky, S. 1997. *New Directions in Economic Anthropology*. London.
- Omvedt, G. 1992. Capitalist Agriculture and Rural Classes in India. *Class, State, and Development in India*, ed. B. Berberoglu, pp. 82-138. New Delhi.
- Quigley, D. 1993. *The Interpretation of Caste*. Oxford.

- . 1995. Is a Theory of Caste Still Possible? Contextualising Caste: Post-Dumontian Approaches, eds. M. Searle-Chatterjee and U. Sharma, pp. 25-48. Oxford.
- Raheja, G. 1988. India: Caste, Kingship, and Dominance Reconsidered. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 17:497-522.
- Roy, T. 2000. *The Economic History of India, 1857-1947*. Delhi.
- Rudolph, L., and S. Rudolph. 1960. The Political Role of India's Cast Associations. *Pacific Affairs* 33(1):5-22.
- Sacks, K. 1979. *Sisters and Wives: The Past and Future of Sexual Equality*. Westport.
- Smith, R. 1984. Anthropology and the Concept of Social Class. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13:467-94.
- Srinivas, M. N. 1962. *Caste in Modern India, and Other Essays*. Bombay.
- Vanaik, A. 1997. *The Painful Transition*. London.
- Wright, E. O. 1990. *The Debate on Classes*. London.

Copyright of Ethnology is the property of University of Pittsburgh and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.