

Hinduism, Structuralism and Dumézil

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This essay tries to indicate the potential of Dumézilian comparativism for studying the underlying structures of Hinduism. In doing so, it takes for granted (what some doubt) that it is meaningful to use the label Hinduism in a broad sense to refer to the traditional mainstream culture of the Indian subcontinent, of which religion is only one aspect. Such a usage does not deny differences over time and space (let alone internal conflicts and external influences), but it abstracts from them. At this level of analysis the interest is in the fundamentals of the world-view characterising a civilisation. Work at such a level risks appearing presumptuous and over-ambitious, but anthropologists ought to be able to move to and fro between different levels of abstraction, between micro and macro. Moreover, however suspicious they are of formulations that may seem to imply underlying essences, they ought to be able to offer some account of how the Hindu world has differed and still differs from, say, the Chinese.

But how is one to set about characterising a civilisation? Discussions of social anthropological theory (e.g. Ardener 1989:195) sometimes take for granted that structuralism is now *passé*, but such formulations leave me uneasy. Having operated myself in (among others) both 'diffusionist' and

'evolutionist' modes (Allen 1987a, 1989), I prefer to think of each major newism as contributing something of value, but as only gradually revealing in what form, to what questions, and (sometimes) in what parts of the world it can most profitably be applied—and how it can be misapplied. If structuralism is presented as the answer to all important anthropological questions, certainly it ought to be dead, if it ever was alive. However, contemporary attempts to come to grips with Hinduism in a global sense continue to build on it, and in particular on the best-known instance of the approach in the work of Dumont.

Although Dumont's particular formulations are constantly being subjected both to frontal attacks and to piecemeal proposals for reformulation or elaboration, it seems that some sort of structuralism still offers the best approach to the issue I am addressing. This view is based on an observation. In one undertaking after another—whether the aim is to fill out Dumont's emphasis on sociostructural ideology with a cosmological and mythic dimension (as in the work of Biardeau), to supplement the pure-impure opposition with auspicious-inauspicious (e.g. Madan 1987 Ch. 2), to set up an 'ethnosociology' (Marriott 1989), to compare the 'mediaevalism' of Hinduism with that of Indian Islam (Uberoi 1994), or to resuscitate and explore a Hocartian view of the relation between kingship and caste (a widespread and desirable trend)—the elements of the analyst's discourse only vary within fairly narrow limits. There does exist a degree of consensus as to which concepts are indispensable in any general account of Hindu civilisation. Nor is this surprising, since Hinduism derives most of what unity it has from its Sanskritic heritage, and most of the concepts in question occur in Sanskrit texts. But if so, the anthropological problem is to

work out how far the concepts are interrelated—in other words, how far they can be construed as an intelligible structure.¹

Dumézil's Indo-European comparativism offers a fresh approach to this challenge. By the time of our earliest written evidence the speakers of the various branches of the language family were so different in culture that, *a priori*, comparison between them might show up no similarities specific enough to demand explanation in terms of a common proto-culture; but Dumézil's achievement has been to demonstrate the opposite. As it turns out, in all the main branches, the influence of the proto-Indo-European (P-IE) heritage is demonstrable—largely, but not exclusively, in the form of manifestations of the trifunctional ideology. Moreover, in most cases, and certainly in the Sanskritic one, this heritage is to be found in a very wide range of cultural contexts—in the schematic or real social structure, in law and ritual, in theology, myth and epic; so the ideological patterning must have been culturally pervasive, as well as enduring. That being so, might it provide insights into core aspects of Hinduism?

At this point, one way of proceeding would be to collect and summarise everything that Dumézil had to say about the P-IE (or proto-Indo-Iranian) heritage in India, mentioning also the rather few Indologists who have followed Dumézil's lead. One might start from Dubuisson (1993:115-6, cf. *ibid.* 32-3), and Hiltebeitel (1982:86). However, this would partly duplicate the work of Sergent (1997), and I shall proceed differently. For some years I have been working on the hypothesis that Dumézil's

¹ Since this essay focuses on Dumézil and Hinduism, I do not attempt a general survey of the copious literature bearing on structuralism and Hinduism (see e.g. Inden 1990:77-8, 201-3; Quigley 1993, 1994; Madan 1994:52-84).

conception of the P-IE ideology needs to be expanded: we need to add a fourth function—moreover, a fourth function that is so often bifurcated that one must think seriously about a fifth. By applying the hypothesis to the Indian material I hope here to give it further substance.

But what exactly **is** a ‘function’, in the Dumézilian sense? I shall answer abstractly and dogmatically, in my own terminology and without explicit reference to the intellectual history—partly for brevity, partly to minimise repetition of previous papers.

Structuralists have typically analysed ideologies in terms of binary opposites (see Needham 1973 for some non-Indian examples), but according to Dumézil the P-IE ideology was dominated by **three** coordinate clusters of ideas. The clusters are ranked in value, and are given numerical labels accordingly. Thus the first and highest-ranked function, F1, pertains to the sacred and to sovereignty; F2 to physical force and war; F3 to abundance and related ideas. My proposal is that F4 pertains to what, from the point of view of F1-3, is other, outside or beyond. Though linked to the others, F4 is heterogeneous, and stands outside the system of ranking.

How does one arrive at such an idea? Suppose a comparativist is dealing with three societies A, B and C, whose languages descend from a common proto-language. He notes that, in cultural context i, society A presents a ranked grouping of elements *b,c,d*, while in a comparable context society B has the grouping *p,q,r*; and moreover that the two sets resemble each other not only in the number and ranking of their elements, but also in that *b* and *p* have a specific quality in common, as do *c* and *q*, and *d* and *r*. Labelling the common factors 1, 2 and 3 respectively, he can express the comparison thus:

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Society A | context i | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> |
| Society B | context i | <i>p</i> | <i>q</i> | <i>r</i> |

So far, the similarity between the two societies might be a coincidence, but when the analyst turns to society C he finds, again in context i, the ranked triad w,x,y , in which w possesses quality 1, x 2, and y 3. Having filled in a third row in the table, he can turn to context ii and try to continue the exercise, before moving to iii.

As the columns grow longer, procedures are refined. The distinctions between contexts i, ii, iii... may prove relatively unimportant; the definitions of 1, 2 and 3 can be polished; cases occur where within a single row two or more elements have to be entered in a single column, or (less often) where one column has to be left blank. The analyst may find multiple levels of structure, such that one element, say d , contains involuted within itself the structure $d1, d2, d3$, which can be written as a separate row analogous to the others. Some cultures will accumulate more rows than others. Experience with difficult cases helps towards formulating explicit rules for establishing that a context really does possess a structured set of elements, and sharpens judgements on whether an element can or cannot properly be entered in a column.

Dumézilian method is usually presented by citing particular comparisons, and it would be easy to replace the quasi-algebraic symbols used above with the elements of attested structures: thus Hindu society, in the context of schematic social structure, presents not b,c,d , but the three twice-born varṇas, while the early Celts present not p,q,r , but Druids, military aristocracy, and cattle-owning freemen. The numerals 1, 2, 3 stand of course for the functions, which are more abstract than the elements in the columns beneath them. The elements are properly said to ‘represent’ or

‘manifest’ the functions, and if one says that *b* or *p* ‘is’ F1 or first-functional, it is only for brevity.

The distinction between levels of abstraction is important when F4 is incorporated in the approach. In itself F4 is neither inferior to F3 nor superior to F1, but its **representatives** may be inferior to those of F3 or superior to those of F1; and a single cultural context may present two F4 representatives, one for each possibility. Thus we may find structures *a,b,c,d,e* and *o,p,q,r,s*, where *a*, *e*, *o* and *s* all manifest F4, but *a* and *o* are other, outside or beyond by virtue of being transcendent (and hence positively valued or F4+), whereas *e* and *s* are equally heterogeneous relative to the F1-3 representatives, but this time by virtue of being in some sense excluded (and hence negatively valued or F4-). The diagram now needs two extra columns: one for F4+ entries on the left, and one for F4- entries on the right.² It may seem odd that a single function should be split in this fashion, but if so, it is due largely to the linear and two-dimensional modelling; by rolling the page vertically into a cylinder one can approximate the two F4 columns, so that in each row the extremes meet. In fact it is often helpful to think of the four functions as if they formed a circle.

Can an approach of this sort be taken seriously? I think there are general theoretical arguments for expecting to find in the world-historical record a certain number of societies with ‘partitional’ ideologies or ‘forms of primitive classification’, as Durkheim and Mauss called them, and furthermore, for expecting to find quadripartition more often than

² I regret the clumsiness of the terminology but cannot think of a better one. Those who dislike the ‘algebraic’ abbreviation can read F4- as ‘devalued fourth-function(al)’.

tripartition (Allen 1987, 1994). However, the idea of F4 is parasitic on the meaningfulness and reality of F1-3, and Dumézil's arguments for the latter are not general or theoretical ones. They consist in the detailed analyses of many well-defined contexts drawn from numerous primary sources and presented in the fifteen or more definitive volumes that he published from 1966 onwards.

If this massive body of scholarship is still often ignored or regarded as too controversial to use, that seems to me (Allen 1993) more a function of disciplinary boundaries and the sociology of knowledge than of the quality or cogency of the criticism it has encountered—and continues to encounter (Schlerath 1995-6). To be sure, some published trifunctional analyses leave one uncertain, while some are so obviously tendentious as to risk bringing the whole approach into disrepute. Moreover, the recognition of F4+ necessitates a slight revision in the definition of F1, namely the deletion of sovereignty as such (Allen 1996b). However, a four-functional approach to Hinduism can build on foundations that are essentially sound, as well as massive.

The question of the specificity of the three or four functions to the IE world needs more attention than I can give it here. The main point is perhaps that a typical analysis by Dumézil consists of so much more than identifying representatives of functions in some context: it is the richness of analysis and the interlinking of contexts that guarantees the explanation by common origin (I shall try and illustrate this interlinking below). In any case, there is no necessity to fetishise the boundedness of the category Indo-European. The 'period of P-IE unity' is merely the furthest most linguists are willing to go when working backwards, but some now think in terms of Nostratic or even larger linguistic groupings. If it turns out that ideological

structures are more durable than lexical and grammatical ones, then the sporadic instances of functional patterns outside the IE world (or some of them) may one day be explicable by common origin predating the P-IE period.

Since structures consist of relationships which remain constant when something else varies (e.g. place, time, personnel or context), and history connotes change, structuralism and history are often felt to stand in an uneasy relationship. In Dumézil's case there is no necessary incompatibility. He himself wished to be classified as a historian (1973:10), and his whole approach is calqued on historical linguistics. Moreover, much of its fascination lies, insofar as the data permit, in watching how the underlying structure manifests itself in different forms in different historical contexts, and how indeed, over centuries and millennia, it becomes fragmented and barely recognisable.

However, it is worth noting a potentially misleading ambiguity in Dumézilian analytical language, one that tends to blur the line between synchrony and diachrony. If it is claimed that a structure p, q, r manifests the trifunctional ideology, this might refer to the ideology of society B at the date when p, q, r is first attested. In particular cases such a claim may be made, and it may or may not be justified. But it would usually be safer to express the claim in explicitly diachronic language: the structure p, q, r manifests the **proto-IE** ideology in that, were it possible to trace the precursors of p, q, r back into prehistory, one would eventually reach a period when they manifested the dominant ideology. I think that contemporary India, in its Sanskritic heritage, still shows traces of the underlying P-IE ideology, but no one would deny that it also participates in modern global culture.

One must also distinguish between the proto-ideology, understood as having dominated the thinking of a certain prehistoric non-literate community, and the model of that ideology, used by the analyst. The two have different relationships to time. The former must have been subject to millennia-long processes of dilution, fragmentation and blurring, if only because the ideology or ideologies of the contemporary world are not partitional in any global sense. The analyst's model on the other hand was created by Dumézil in 1938, and has since then remained largely static. However, it too can be allowed to develop as the discipline moves on, for instance by the addition of a fourth function (which may turn out to need further elaboration); and one can introduce dynamic features of a less radical kind. Thus I have elsewhere envisaged a process whereby F1 is weakened or deleted so as to give rise to the juxtaposition of F4+ and F2, that is, to manifestations which could be written *a, c, d, e* (Allen 1996b); and we shall shortly be envisaging a process whereby F4+ is (as it were) superimposed on F2, giving *b, [c, a], d, e*. If I am right, these developments in the model reflect real historical processes.

* * *

The following discussions of particular contexts (social structure, myth/epic, pantheon, law) from within the Hindu world are necessarily very brief, and attempt little more than to indicate directions for further work. I hope to show that the theoretical approach sketched above is worth pursuing. The order in which contexts are discussed is not crucial. The results are summarised in Table I.

1. Varṇas

As was implied above, the three twice-born varṇas of Hindu social theory provide a stock example of the manifestation of the three functions. However, the myth of origin of the triad aligns it with the fourth social category: when Puruṣa, the Primal Man, was dismembered, the triad originated from his mouth, arms and thighs respectively, while the śūdra were born from his feet (*Rig Veda* 10.90.11 f.). Moreover, the myth evidently contains a fifth element, namely Puruṣa himself.

When the myth is retold at the start of the Code of Manu (1.11, 31), Puruṣa is replaced by Brahmā, but the five-fold structure is no less apparent. Whatever his name, the cosmogonic being embodies totality, preceding and transcending the varṇas that derive from his body parts. From the viewpoint of the triad, he stands outside and beyond; and since in a logical sense the whole possesses a higher value than its parts (Dumont 1982, Allen 1985:25-7), he qualifies as F4+. Even more obviously, from the viewpoint of the Twice-born the śūdra are ritually excluded and devalued outsiders, and qualify as F4-.³

2-3. Lokapālas and King

The Lokapālas ('World-guardians') are the deities associated with cardinal points. In the simplest case (in the *Mahābhārata*) they are four,

³ Smith 1994, who (like myself) also cites Dumézil and starts his substantive analysis with a section on 'classifying society', is right in seeking a partitional or classificatory ideology underlying the large amount of Vedic material that he so usefully assembles. However, his triadic framework is insufficiently complex, and he gives to the varṇas the foundational position in the analysis that properly belongs to the functions.

allocated as follows: Varuṇa west, Indra north, Kubera east, Yama south.⁴ According to Dumézil (1971:253-5), the first three represent F1, 2 and 3 respectively, while Yama is not associated with a function.

Four-functional theory suggests two further steps. Firstly, Yama, the inauspicious god of death, ruler of the Other World and by origin standing on the borderline between man and god, qualifies as F4- (Allen 1991, n.d. a). Secondly, in Hinduism as in most cultures, the cardinal points imply a centre. The very notion of guardians suggests something round which guards are ranged, and the Lokapālas are often subsumed in a larger structure made up of five elements. For instance, when the sage Nārada describes the halls of the Lokapālas (*Mbh.* 2.7-11), his description climaxes with the hall of a fifth god, the Creator Brahmā, whom we have already encountered as representing a transcendent totality (F4+). Nārada himself does not refer to the spatial relations of the halls, but generally of course the five elements are conceived as a quicunx. The unitary centre is logically heterogeneous relative to a plural periphery and, being situated at the axis of radial symmetry, is more closely related to the totality than is any single peripheral element. In fact, any element surrounded by representatives of F1 to F4- is a good candidate for construal as F4+.

One of the most obvious instances of a central entity is a king. For instance, Hopkins (1974:150) cites the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.16.24 = Crit. Ed. 2.321*5-6) where Sītā hopes that Rāma as King will be protected by the Lokapālas

⁴ I follow Hopkins (1974:152), though the allocations of Indra and Kubera are more typically the reverse. Although texts usually present representatives of the functions in the order indicated by their numerical labels, this is not invariable. For instance, Buddhists list the varṇas with Kūatriyas preceding Brahmans.

on all four quarters. Manu too associates the king with the Lokapālas, using the list of eight, i.e. including the guardians of the intercardinal points. Conflating Manu's two main texts (7.3-7, 5.96-7, cf. also 9.303-11), one can extract the following propositions:

At one time the world lacked kings and lived in fear. For the benefit of everyone the Lord created a king. He did this by taking particles from the eight principal deities. The body of a king is therefore composed of the Lokapālas. It is because of this that, among other things, the king cannot be polluted.

It is obvious here that the king is unitary and transcends the multiplicity of the Lokapālas. In this particular context there is no overt reference to the king's spatial centrality, but such references are easily found, and I give only two examples.

(i) At one point in the 'coronation' or inauguration ritual, the king in the centre is surrounded by representatives of the four varṇas located at cardinal points (Witzel 1987:7, cf. 40; also Heesterman 1957 Ch. 17). (ii) According to the *Arthaśāstra* (ca. 300 BC, by tradition), a fortified city should be laid out with the king's palace a little to the north of the temples in the centre, and with the dwellings of each varṇa located at one cardinal point (Kangle 1972: 68 f.). In this text (2.4.6-14, 17) the Brahmins are in the north, the Kṣatriyas in the east, and so on proceeding clockwise, so that the linkage of functions with cardinal points differs from the Lokapāla schema.⁵ However, that does not matter for my argument, which is independent of

⁵ The passage is cited by the original proposers of a fourth function (Rees and Rees 1961:131), who very possibly took the reference from Hocart (1970:353).

any particular linkage of functions and cardinal points (hence the absence of the latter from Table I).

Relative to the ordinary membership of varṇas, the king is heterogeneous not only by virtue of his centrality, with its logical implications, but also by virtue of his immunity to impurity, and because of the ritual sprinkling which he receives at his inauguration from representatives of each varṇa. This heterogeneity raises a fundamental problem in the sociology of Hinduism, namely the interpretation of kingship. It is normally taken for granted by analysts that the king is a Kṣatriya, and the texts repeatedly confirm the point; nevertheless in certain contexts he is set apart from the Kṣatriyas, as from the rest of society. How is the contradiction to be conceptualised?

In four-functional terms, the situation is as follows. The king, set apart from his society, transcending it, and in principle highly valued, certainly qualifies as F4+; but the Kṣatriyas are F2, if anything is. Thus an element which in some contexts is unmistakably F4+ is explicitly classified by the society as F2. In terms of rows, it is as if an element *a* has shifted into or onto *c*.

One might see this simply as an isolated anomaly calling for ad hoc explanation: for instance, could it be that status-seeking Brahmans succeeded in demoting the king to a rank nominally lower than their own? However, as we shall see, the phenomenon is not isolated, and one can even propose an underlying rationale for the shift. Early in the course of the very large-scale and long-term processes by which the original partitional ideology was transformed and displaced, representatives of the classical three functions tended (I suggested) to survive as a block, while the fourth function tended to drift away (Allen 1987:35). However, if an F4+ element,

rather than drifting away, is incorporated within the block, then there are two places where it can plausibly go. It can either (as in Allen 1996b) infiltrate the space of F1, the highest-ranking function in the triad; or it can infiltrate the space of F2, which stands at the centre of the triad. We can diagram the second solution ('centripetal simplification') as follows:



In Table I this hypothetical shift of the king from F4+ to F2 is shown by means of an arrow. Such an arrow, while leaving unanswered many concrete historical questions, provides a way of thinking about what Dumont called the ‘secularisation’ of Indian kingship (1980 Appx. C). It symbolises the tension, present both in the literature and in the evidence from the Hindu world, between the king as transcending the rest of society and the king as subordinate to Brahmins.

4. Vedic Theology

In his work on the Vedic deities Dumézil concentrated primarily (e.g. 1977) on the ‘canonical’ representatives of the classical functions: Mitra and Varuṇa as F1, Indra as F2, the Ásvin twins as F3. This triadic grouping (already attested in Asia Minor in the fourteenth century BC) serves as a sort of epitome of the pantheon. But should it too be subsumed, like the three twice-born varnas, within a four-functional structure?

A pervasive theme in Vedic and later literature is that the gods or Devas under Indra are at war. The enemy varies. In the hymns, although Indra's personal enemy *par excellence* is Vṛtra, collectively the most salient foes are the Dāsa or Dasyu, who are fiends as well as human enemies.

Later, from the Brāhmanas onwards, the major foes are the Asuras, the demons. In any case, gods and demons form a single conceptual structure within which demons are devalued, so we can readily construe the Asuras as F4-.

The F4+ slot is more problematic, but I suggest inserting Dyaus (cf. *ibid.*:116 f.). Dyaus is 'The Father' (i.e. of gods) and, as the Victorian comparativists emphasised, he is cognate etymologically with Jupiter and Zeus. Methodologically, it is a difficulty that whereas the texts themselves (occasionally) present Dumézil's trifunctional set of gods as a complete set, this does not apply to the supernaturals juxtaposed in row 4 of the Table. They come from the same context, namely the Vedic pantheon, but to treat them as a single structure needs justification. To attempt this would lead us too far afield, and I make only one further observation.

Indra, despite being king of the gods, finds himself within row 4 in a slot subordinate to that of Mitra and Varuṇa. But this is just the same paradox as we encountered in the case of the human king, and Table I suggests the same solution, namely a historical shift from F4+ to F2.

5a/b. Mahābhārata Heroes and their Gods

One way to explore this further is to turn to the epic. As Biardeau has shown (e.g. 1989), this vast work will surely make a major contribution to any general theory of Hindu culture. One might expect the mythic structures of Hinduism to be better expressed in the Vedas, which of course reached their current form much earlier and theoretically enjoy greater authority. However, in a culture with strong oral traditions, one needs to make a clear distinction. The date at which a tradition becomes fixed, whether by oral training (as in the Vedic schools), or by writing (as with the epic), is a quite separate issue from the date when its narrative or

ideological content originated. Thus I follow Dumézil in holding that in some respects the epic is more archaic and conservative than the Vedas, as well as being far more coherent and explicit.

Dumézil's analysis of the epic (1968 pt 1) takes off from the five Pāṇḍava brothers. The trifunctional interpretation of the brothers, originally proposed by Wikander, rests in part on the brothers' divine genitors. Yudhisthira is son of Dharma, (socio-cosmic-religious Order—F1); Bhīma and Arjuna are sons of Vāyu and Indra respectively—both F2; the twins Nakula and Sahadeva are sons of the Aśvins—F3. But the epic as a whole centres on the battle between Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, who are linked respectively with Devas and Asuras. The Kauravas, who can be thought of as the Baddies, are led by the Pāṇḍavas' paternal parallel cousin, Duryodhana. This arch-villain is initially presented as a portion of Kali, the demon of strife and eponym of the Kaliyuga (fourth, last and worst of the cyclical eras). However, when he visits the underworld, he is told that the top and bottom halves of his body were made respectively by Śiva and Devī (3.240.6 ff.). His heterogeneity relative to his cousins is confirmed by his monstrous birth as a single mass of flesh, fused with his 99 brothers and one sister, who are also demons. Thus the Kauravas in general, and Duryodhana in particular, qualify well as F4-.

In this context it is probably Krishna, incarnation of Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa, and maternal cross-cousin of the elder Pāṇḍavas, who represents F4+. Krishna transcends the battle, in which he refuses to fight: if he helps and accompanies the Pāṇḍavas, he also gives ten million troops to Duryodhana. Moreover in the Gītā (Ch. 11), he reveals himself to Arjuna as containing within himself, not only the two opposing forces, but all the gods

and all creation. In view of this transcendence, it is no surprise that he is often identified with Puruṣa (cf. row 1).

This leads us to the problem of Arjuna. Dumézil's construal of him as F2 makes sense within a trifunctional framework, but it is not entirely satisfying. The Bhīma-Arjuna duality within F2 is awkward, for although it has been looked for in other IE materials, the parallels that have been proposed are not particularly cogent; and of the two brothers, the huge, violent Bhīma is altogether the more typical of the function. On the other hand, there are many senses in which Arjuna can be characterised as the **central** representative of the brothers (cf. Allen 1978:22 n.10), the one who stands for the group as a whole. For instance, it is he who continues the dynasty by his marriage to Krishna's sister, and although it is his eldest brother who eventually becomes king, one often feels that it 'ought' to be Arjuna—incarnation of the king of the gods.

Let us therefore insert in row 5a an arrow similar to those inserted (for independent reasons) in two previous rows. Probably this helps to explain why Arjuna is so often and so emphatically paired with Krishna (in former lives they were Nara and Nārāyaṇa). We can now without problems enter in row 5b the supernaturals incarnated in the various heroes.

6. Kaurava Generals

The Kauravas have five supreme generals in succession. Although Hiltebeitel (1976 Ch. 10) examines them as 'a cohesively structured group', they do not seem to have been construed trifunctionally. However, the middle triad are distinctly suggestive. The first of them, Droṇa, a Brahman, incarnates Bṛhaspati, chaplain of the gods, and is plausibly seen as F1; Śalya, the third, has strong F3 characteristics (Dumézil 1968:74-6); and between them comes the extremely warlike Karṇa, archenemy of Arjuna.

Like Arjuna, he may merit an arrow from F4, but I leave that point unexplored.

All these three die in the course of the battle, but the remaining pair, Bhīṣma and Aśvatthāman, are heterogeneous in that they survive it. The latter incarnates Śiva, but also Antaka (identified with Yama) and other entities, and as a general he contrasts with the others in that the 'army' he commands is reduced to two humans and a demonic horde, while the daytime battlefield gives way to a phantasmagoric nocturnal massacre. Aśvatthāman is easily seen as F4-. As for Bhīṣma, although no doubt he should also be seen as a member of his generation (Dubuisson 1985), he is relevant here only as general. Compared to Aśvatthāman (who is eventually condemned to 3000 years of miserable wandering), Bhīṣma is highly respected (in spite of his renunciation of kingship). Moreover, one might perhaps argue that his position as classificatory grandfather of both the warring sets of brothers tends to work against his position as Kaurava general and makes him transcend the conflict, somewhat as Krishna transcends it on the Pāṇḍava side. In any case he transcends the battle in the sense of outliving it.

If Aśvatthāman incarnates Yama and Śiva, Bhīṣma incarnates Dyaus. All three gods have appeared earlier in their respective columns, and provided one does not use the Bhīṣma-Dyaus link to justify entering the deity in row 4 (which would be circular), the recurrences help to support the validity of the analysis. They also exemplify the 'interlinking' which I referred to earlier as an important feature of Dumézilian method.

7. Modes of Marriage

To turn from epic to law is again to shift domains, though less than the English terms imply. Manus (3.20-34) presents (with slight incoherences)

an account of the eight modes of marriage recognised in the Dharmaśāstras. This doctrine was analysed trifunctionally by Dumézil 1979, as follows. The first four types in Manu's list (*brāhma*, *daiva*, *arṣa*, *prājāpatya*) involve the bride's father gifting his daughter to the groom; they are all closely linked with dharma, and represent F1. The fifth mode, *āsurā*, which is much less prestigious, involves payment of a bride-price, typically after negotiation, and is F3. The *gāndharva* mode derives from the mutual desires of the bride and groom, the father not being involved, while the *rākṣasa* mode consists in forcible abduction of the bride by the groom. Both of these are analysed as F2. The final mode, the lowest and most sinful, is the *paiśāca*, in which a man unites secretly with a woman who is asleep, drunk or mad.

The *paiśāca* mode, obviously devalued, and so heterogeneous that Dumézil almost ignores it, is surely F4-. But what about F4+? There exists one further mode, ignored by Manu but well attested in epic (see Schmidt 1987 Ch. 3). The *svayamvara* mode, like the *gāndharva*, is based on the mutual choice of the partners: princes assemble as suitors, and the bride, a princess, makes her choice, often following tests of skill and strength. While recognising the link between *gāndharva* and *svayamvara*, Dumézil treats the former as the basic mode and the latter as its specially regulated derivative, appropriate to the world of chivalry. But the association of *svayamvara* with royalty suggests the reverse formulation: *svayamvara* is the basic F4+ mode, and *gāndharva* is its democratised F2 derivative. This would explain the curious duality in F2 modes, which recalls the Bhīma-Arjuna duality: only the intrinsically violent *rākṣasa* mode, like the 'tough-guy' Bhīma, would be originally and unproblematically F2.

On the basis of comparison between Indian and Greek epic, I have argued (Allen 1996a) that the fivefold classification of modes of union goes

back to P-IE times. Though obviously much has changed, I take it that the influence of the ancient classification is detectable even today in the prestige that attaches to dowry as against bride-price.

8. Caste Society

If the four functions underlie the clear-cut and explicit partitional structure of the varṇas in row 1, how if at all do they relate to the variable and ramshackle institutions of caste, on which the Sanskrit texts have so little to say? Let us see how far the argument can be pressed.

In this context it is the Scheduled Castes or Harijans, not the śūdra, who are beyond the pale and qualify as F4-. At the top end of the hierarchy, whatever individual Brahmins do in practice (and most of them do not officiate as priests), the Brahman castes still tend to enjoy the connotations associated with the Brahman varṇa. Thus, in so far as, by tradition and stereotype, Brahman castes continue to be linked with the sacred, they qualify as F1. Closely associated with them, in many areas of India, one finds a local dominant caste, usually with martial traditions or pretensions, which qualifies as F2.⁶ Between the dominant castes and the Scheduled Castes come the mass of mid-ranking castes, whose internal variety might deter one from treating them as a single category. However, given the level of abstraction and generalisation at which we are operating, it seems fair to construe them as oriented towards the economic domain, be it as merchants, money-lenders, farmers or whatever. For instance, in east Nepal, this category would include all the castes ranked between the Brahmins and Chetris at the top and the Untouchables at the bottom (cf. Allen 1997).

⁶ In spite of attacks, the notion of dominant caste seems defensible (Srinivas 1988:4-13).

If so, we have four elements, but there is more to society than that. Beyond and above the local hierarchy, but by no means irrelevant (consider the reservations it lays down for Scheduled Castes), there lies the state. The state exists on a number of levels, from the Central Government downwards, but there is a sense in which, at any particular level, it represents a totality and continues to occupy the F4+ position of the king. Central Government is of course not even potentially demarcated by rules of endogamy or commensality: it is not obviously on the same footing as the other elements of the structure. But that is not a fatal objection, for it applies equally in row 3: the king is not on the same footing as the rest of society, he is not a varṇa, and is symbolically set apart from them. Thus I enter the Government of India in Table I. An arrow connecting the F4+ and F2 representatives might be inserted here too to hint at linkages between the state and local dominant castes.

Such an abstract and general formulation will naturally encounter problems when applied to particular cases. For instance, the gap between dominant and mid-ranking categories may be bridged by numerous subtle gradations of status, as among Newar Shresthas in Nepal or North Indian Rajputs. The local nomenclature may be confusing: in South India the term śūdra, which applies to the F4- varṇa, applies to the conflated F2-3 category of castes. Clearly the analysis abstracts caste from class, and in that sense deliberately simplifies. Nevertheless, the degree to which the old four-functional structure has survived is perhaps more striking than the blurring and changes it has undergone.

I now bring together this quasi-Dumézilian approach to caste and that of Dumont, treating him as the representative par excellence of classical structuralism. It makes sense to connect the two French scholars since

Dumont cites mid-period Dumézil, and both belong in the intellectual milieu indebted to the *Année sociologique*. However, although they share a broadly mentalist and structuralist attitude, Dumézil operates within a larger spatio-temporal framework, subsuming Europe and India within the IE-speaking world rather than polarising them. In addition he tackles a broader range of topics—not only social structure and religion, but also myth and epic, which Dumont hardly touches.

For Dumont, the hierarchical opposition of purity and impurity, which underlies Bouglé's three principles, is the foundation of the caste system in the intellectual sense (1980:43-4). 'The notion of purity is rather like an immense umbrella' (ibid.:60); but I suppose that near the core of the notion lie the exigencies of dharma as practised by a strict Brahman. As for impurity, it arises from the irruption of the organic or biological or natural into the social: one lives 'in' society, and something alien intrudes, as it were from outside. The prototypical polluting event is death, which is particularly associated with the permanently impure Untouchables. One can now connect the two poles of the Dumontian opposition to the four-functional ideology: purity, pertaining to the priestly, falls under F1, and impurity, pertaining to death and the outside, under F4-. Using the binary spectacles so characteristic of the structuralism of the 1960s, Dumont has focused on two elements from the larger five-element whole.

What are the advantages of conceptualising caste in this way? Dumont emphasises that the pure-impure opposition by itself has nothing to say about the place of power. To make sense of power the analyst is forced to refer to the varṇas, and thus to recognise two separate hierarchies based on different principles (ibid.:66-7), even if the sharpness of the distinction is an artifact of analysis (ibid.:78). The advantage of the four-

functional analysis is that it embraces varṇa and caste within a single framework: rows 3 and 8 refer to distinguishable discourses, but historically speaking, both express the same ideology. This formulation is more unitary than Dumont's; it is more economical in the number of hierarchical principles that it postulates; it is more powerful, in that it connects caste ideology, not only with kingship, but also with theology, epic and other domains; and it is more clearly rooted in history.⁷

More abstractly and generally, four-functional theory may help to clarify the much-discussed notion of hierarchy. For Dumont, hierarchy is about the ranking of elements in relation to a whole—a whole that in most cases will be religious (ibid.:66). Three concepts call for brief comment. (i) As regards ranking, the superiority of whole over part (e.g. of Puruṣa, the whole body, over Brahmans, derived from the mouth) can be distinguished from the superiority of part over part (e.g. of Kṣatriyas over Vaiśyas). (ii) As regards the whole, a row or context (a whole consisting of five entries or elements) can be distinguished from the F4+ representative of a whole (one entry among the five). (iii) As regards religion, some contexts might be thought intrinsically secular (modes of marriage, epic heroes, categories of society), but links of some sort can in each case be found with myth and with the gods. Furthermore, if this is true of individual contexts, one can reasonably regard the ideology *in toto* as religious. But a distinction is then

⁷ That the history in question is primarily that of the IE-speaking peoples does not of course imply that non-IE-speakers of the subcontinent contributed nothing. In cultural, as in linguistic studies, genetic comparativism must initially focus on common heritage rather than loan phenomena.

needed between religion as diffusely pervading the whole ideology, and religion as concentrated in F1.

My hope is that, employing distinctions of this sort, four-functional theory can subsume the insights of classical binary structuralism within a picture that is more precise, as well as more historical and more embracing.

* * *

Evidently, much work will be needed to give substance and persuasiveness to a four-functional approach. Each context needs fuller exploration. More rows should be sought from within the Hindu world, as well as from without (forays into Roman, Greek and Nuristani materials appear in my other papers).⁸ The interlinking of rows, i.e. the paradigmatic relations between entities entered within a single column, need to be examined for what they may tell us about affinities between different Hindu concepts, and between Hindu and other IE concepts. But no theory explains everything, and the limits of the approach need to be clarified.⁹

⁸ Since this paper was drafted, I have proposed a further row for Table I, relating to Sâukhya philosophy (Allen 1998), and explored at greater length the relation between Arjuna and kingship (Allen n.d. b).

⁹ Versions of this paper have been tried out in a number of forums since 1989. I recall some particularly helpful criticism from Tom Trautmann.

| Context | F4+ | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4- |
|-----------------------|------------|----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| 1. sociogony | Pu.,Brahmā | Brahman | Kṣatriya | Vaiśya | śūdra |
| 2. Lokapālas (Centre) | | Varuṇa | Indra | Kubera | Yama |
| 3. 'society' | king | Brahman | Kṣatriya | Vaiśya | śūdra |
| 4. Vd. Gods | Dyaus | Mi.-Var. | Indra | Aśvins | dāsa/asura |
| 5a.MBh. men | Kr.,() | Yudhi. | Bhī.,Arj. | Nak.,Sah. | Duryodhana |
| 5b.their gods | Vi.,() | Dharma | Vāyu,In. | Aśvins | Kali/ Śiva |
| 6. Kauravas | Bhīṣma | Droṇa | Karṇa | Śalya | Aśvatthāman |
| 7. unions | Svayaṁv. | br. + 3 | gā.,rākṣ. | āsurā | paiśāca |
| 8. society | G.O.I. | Brahman | dom. c. | mid c. | Scheduled c. |

TABLE I. Attempt at a structural analysis of certain aspects of Hindu culture and society, based on the notion of four functions. For abbreviations, and for the significance of the rows and columns, see text. Arrows indicate instances where an F4 element has in some sense shifted to F2; they could probably be added in rows 2 and 6.

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Abstract

How much can a Dumézilian approach help us in understanding enduring features of Hinduism? Building on previous work, the paper argues that, with certain additions and modifications, the approach has immense potential. If the three functions are set within a basically pentadic framework, but if at the same time allowance is made for a process of 'centripetal simplification', the range of Dumézil's analyses can be considerably extended. A number of examples are briefly presented relating to social structure, pantheon, epic and marital law. Dumont's structuralist analysis of caste (as based on a binary opposition) can also be subsumed and simplified.