

# Imagining the Other: Presentations of India through Social Science Textbooks

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*Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said's classic critique of European Imperialism, discusses the concepts of knowledge and power as they relate to the Imperial enterprise in the Orient. According to Said Orientalism is based on the "ontological and epistemological distinction made between the "Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (Said 1978:2). These distinctions are based on the politics of difference and hierarchy between the Occident and the Orient, promoting a "relationship of power and domination" which "puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand." (Said 1978:7). Thus the idea of Western racial and cultural superiority over "oriental backwardness," promoted through Western academic, philosophical, and other cultural expressions, is seen as central to the promotion and protection of the European Imperialist ventures. Orientalism, then, is a systematic discourse, "a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient-dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism (can be seen) as Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1978:3).

Although Said's book focuses mostly on what is currently called the Middle East or the Near East, it has inspired considerable scholarship on Orientalism and India (see for example Ahmed 1991; Breckenridge and van der Veer ed. 1993; Dirks 2001; Dodson 2007; Ganguly 2005; Halbfass 1988; Inden 1990; King 1999; Ludden 1993). Ronald Inden's *Imagining India* traces the "Orientalist" portrayals of India by "Indologists" and other non-experts coming from disciplines such as "the history of religions, anthropology, economics, and political philosophy" (Inden 1990:1). In his analysis, Inden argues that two Indian institutions, the caste system and Hinduism are seen as transcendent static institutions used to explain Indian society. So dominant and unchanging are these institutions according to many Western scholars, that India is seen as incapable of development in the Western sense. From this perspective, India is essentialized as a backward, irrational, traditional society, which lacks the capacity to embrace individualism, political rights, rational science, etc.

For many scholars, the portrayal of India as locked into the stagnation of Hinduism and caste is more than just a stereotype of "an oriental other". Caste and Hinduism served the function of establishing the superiority of Western society over India (Ganguly 2005; Dirks 2001; King 1999). While India had religion and caste, the West had science and the modern state; indeed Western discourses on caste represented caste as "the antithesis" to modernity and a relic of pre-modernity (Ganguly 2005). In addition, under colonization caste was constructed as the omnipotent and omnipresent axes of identity rather than as one of many such axes (Dirks 2001). In these orientalist narratives India was constructed as despotic, mystical, religious, traditional, backward, wild and female and Europe as constitutional, scientific, secular, modern, civilized, ordered and male (see for example Ganguly 2005; King 1999; Inden 1990). Such dichotomous constructions not only provided a "way of controlling, manipulating and managing the orient" but also legitimized colonial intervention in South Asia (King 1999:6). These discourses also provided western scholars with the "scientific" justification to become "authorities" on India in ways they believed Indian scholars were incapable of. Further, "Euro-American selves and Indian

Others have not simply interacted as entities that remain fundamentally the same. They have dialectically constituted one another” (Inden 1990:3). Thus the presence of “traditional” India with its mystical religion and its ascriptive and hierarchical caste system restricting social mobility has been instrumental in the construction of a self-congratulatory treatise on the “modern” West where achievement, and social mobility provide a basis for a more egalitarian society.

While the scholarship of Inden (1990), Ganguly (2005), Dirks (2001), King (1999), and Ludden (1993) amongst others, has challenged the hegemonic academic texts that shaped Western Indology, our work analyzes sociology texts that sociologists commonly use in teaching introduction to sociology. We used introductory texts to examine the images of India presented to non-Indian specialists of sociology. For many students in the United States, the text assigned in their introductory courses are the only academic resources that they will be required to read about India. Thus, rather than focusing on the images that inform Indologists, we are concerned with images of India that inform the general student population. In this paper we examine introductory textbooks in sociology to analyze the extent to which Indian society and the U.S. are presented in terms of caste and class.

### **INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES: CASTE/CLASS MIXTURES**

In terms of stratification, Indian society parallels the United States in several ways.

1) Both India and the United States have a long history of caste systems. Caste is an ascriptive system of social stratification in which social mobility is restricted and strict rules are prescribed about group interaction with other groups, often including some level of prohibition of intercaste marriages (for a discussions of caste from various theoretical positions see, for example, Appadurai 1986; Das 1977; Dirks 2001; Dumont 1980; Ganguly 2005; Inden 1990; Ilaiah 1996; Srinivas 1997). Typically, caste in India is viewed as an extension of Hinduism. There are four heirachically arranged varnas: the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (traders), Shudras (performing menial tasks). They are followed by the casteless, the Achut (the untouchables) who have systematically organized resistance to the caste system and to the term Achut (Bob 2007; D’Souza and Ilaiah 2005; Joshi 1986). Activists have preferred to use the term Dalits (the oppressed) to show a more realistic portrayal of their historical legacy. The depiction of caste based on the four varnas, however, is an idealized and somewhat misleading version. According to Marriott and Inden (1974), caste in India encompasses thousands of jatis with varying degrees of restrictions, sometimes unclear hierarchial status and includes both secular and non-secular domains (for critiques of Marriott and Inden see Moffatt 1990).

The term caste in the United States context typically focused on the systems of slavery and Jim Crow, and their legacies. U.S. racial caste categories, like Indian jati caste categories, are social constructions. Racial caste became a forceful political, social, and economic weapon for the marginalization of the people of color by the dominant white community. While the use of the term caste has been used in relatively limited contexts, particularly slavery and Jim Crow, caste analysis in the U.S. might be extended to historically analyze other ethnic groups such as Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos.

2) Both India and the United States have made legal attempts at abolishing certain types of discrimination based on the caste system. India declared discrimination on the basis of caste illegal in the 1949 Constitution of India. The United States abolished slavery in 1865. Most of the Jim Crow system and much of the legal discrimination against minority groups were made illegal with Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and anti-miscegenation laws were ruled unconstitutional in 1967.

3) Through democratic governments, both the United States and India have implemented affirmative action programs in an effort to address past and current discrimination; or put another way, they have attempted to deal with caste discrimination coexisting with class stratification. In the U.S., affirmative action was largely designed to increase the representation of women and people of color in higher education and in the workplace. Although the affirmative action program of the United States has been under scrutiny and has even suffered considerable erosion, India has, despite some resistance, extended the program to include more groups suffering past and current discrimination. In addition to the more

commonly reported reservations for scheduled castes, India also has developed reservation policies for scheduled tribes, women, and other backward classes.

4) Both India and the United States also have rich scholarly literatures focusing on class analyses of their respective societies. Despite the abundance of scholarship on India in terms of class stratification and other similarities between India and the U.S., literature from Indian scholars notes a tendency of Western scholars to portray India as a rigid caste system of stratification. We will analyze the extent to which Sociology textbooks stereotype India as caste society and the United States as class society in a direct replay of orientalism.

## **ANALYSIS**

In the previous section we presented a brief description of the U.S. and India in terms of caste, class, and affirmative action. We argued that caste, class, and affirmative action apply to both societies in similar ways. In both cases, caste discrimination has been outlawed by their respective governments, and affirmative action (or reservation policy) are attempts by each society to address the institutional discrimination remaining from historically-rooted caste discrimination. In this section we discuss the presentation of caste, class, and affirmative action in contemporary introductory sociology texts.

The sample was designed to include all introductory sociology texts marketed for university students in the United States that were current editions in 2005. The sample was drawn in a three stage process. First, all entries found under "sociology" or "introductory sociology" using Amazon.com were examined to locate current introductory university texts. Second, the publishers of each of the texts found by the above method were contacted to determine if they had additional introductory sociology texts available. Third, we compared this sample with a previously drawn sample of introductory texts from 1998 to check for possible omissions. This process yielded a sample of thirty-three introductory sociology texts (see Appendix A for a list of texts).

## **CASTE**

When sociology texts use the term "caste" they are referring to a type of stratification concept that might be used to analyze any society. In the words of Ferrante:

Most sociologists use the term *caste* not to refer to one specific system, but rather to describe any form of social stratification in which people are ranked on the basis of characteristics over which they have no control and that they usually cannot change.

Whenever people are ranked and rewarded on the basis of such traits, they are part of a caste system of stratification. (2003:245)

In the case of the textbooks reviewed, caste is generally defined as a system whereby a person's social position is assigned at birth, and commonly caste definitions include prohibition of marriage between caste groups. It is important to note in introductory textbooks caste is not defined as a system unique to India, rather India serves as one example of a caste system of stratification.

Because stratification is at the core of sociology as a discipline, it is not surprising that the terms caste and class appear in most of the textbooks reviewed in our sample. Table 1 shows that of the 33 texts in the sample all use the class concept to analyze stratification. Caste is used in 31 of the 33 texts to analyze stratification. Thus the tables in this article related to caste will be based on the 31 texts which actually use caste analytically, whereas the tables related to class or affirmative action will be based on the full sample of 33 texts.

Table 2 presents the number of texts that use the concept caste to describe the stratification systems of the U.S. or India. Of the 31 texts that use caste as an analytical concept, all (100 percent) discuss India as a caste society. Other examples of caste are occasionally presented in addition to the Indian caste system, such as the former system of apartheid in South Africa, and the slavery and Jim Crow systems of the U.S. However, India is in every caste presentation, serving as the universal example for caste in sociology texts.

As one can see from Table 2, the majority (55 percent) of textbooks do not use caste in a systematic fashion to analyze economic discrimination in the U.S., and this includes both contemporary and historical analyses of stratification. Of the 31 texts reviewed only 8 (26%) analyze the U.S. using the

stratification term caste, however 6 texts describe historical race-relations in the U.S. as being either “caste-like” or “resembling” caste. In part, the “caste-like” qualifications when applied to the U.S. seem to create the misconception that caste is an Indian system rather than a general type of stratification that is relevant to industrial societies as well.

Table 3 indicates whether the texts actually informed the reader that caste discrimination has been made illegal in India. The reader will note that untouchability and all discrimination associated with the Indian caste system was made illegal under the constitution of India enacted in 1949, some fifteen years before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination against various caste categories in the United States, including the institutionalized “separate but unequal” caste system of Jim Crow. In 48 percent of the texts no mention was made that discrimination based on caste was constitutionally banned by the Indian government. Fifty-two percent of the texts mentioned India's legal prohibition on caste discrimination. Unfortunately, several of the texts misrepresented the ban on caste discrimination as outlawing caste itself, which is not true. Caste conceptually remains as an important social construct, and, as we shall discuss later, a powerful political force.

The U.S. figures in table 3 include only those texts (a total of 8) that recognized caste as an integral component, either historically or currently, of the U.S. stratification system. Of those, none left the impression that caste is sanctioned by law in contemporary times. Seven of the texts (87.5 percent) were clear that institutions given as examples of caste were abolished, while the remaining text conveyed that the caste system was no longer relevant. Table 3 shows that only two texts use caste as an important analyzing concept for contemporary U.S. society. Contrast the U.S. findings with India. Table 3 shows 90 percent of the texts present caste as an analytical tool to explain the contemporary Indian stratification system, with two texts not clear as to whether the caste system is still important. More importantly, as we will discuss later when reviewing table 5, *none of the texts in our sample portray India as a society that is significantly stratified by any system other than caste*. Hence, India tends to be presented as a society exclusively stratified by caste.

Despite widespread discrimination against ethnic minorities and women, textbook authors refrain from using caste as an analytically relevant concept for analyzing contemporary U.S. society. Given that race discrimination is still viewed as a relevant concept in most texts, one might speculate that since caste discrimination was made illegal by civil rights legislation, caste analysis seems to have become irrelevant to most textbook authors in the context of the U.S. stratification. This interpretation is a dramatic contrast with the depiction of India. For India, the legality issue is basically treated as irrelevant. Stratification by and large is explained only by caste, although caste discrimination was prohibited in India's first post-colonial constitution some fifteen years before the U.S. passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Table 4 shows that over half of all texts fail to indicate caste discrimination in India is no longer legal, while affirming the illegality of caste discrimination in the U.S. (i.e. slavery and Jim Crow). These findings reinforce the notion of caste as a still a significant force in India but not in the U.S. as indicated earlier in Table 3.

Other factors may influence this discrepancy. First, Indian popular and academic discourse has traditionally acknowledged caste divisions. In contrast, the term caste never became important in popular discourse to describe divisions in the U.S., and U.S. academics have generally reserved the use of the term caste for other societies, with notable exceptions in the field of race and ethnic relations (see van den Berghe 1967; Willie 1979; and Farley 2005). Hence, textbook authors are in a sense following popular convention. Second, western academics have traditionally created different terminology that reflected their perception of modern versus traditional societies (see Jenkins 1986). The use of terms such as stratification, discrimination, or institutional discrimination are used for “modern western” societies, while terms such as caste are more readily used in describing nonwestern or nonindustrial systems of stratification.

Let us examine some examples of problematic textbook discussions on caste. Bryjak and Soroka (2001) state “the closed-caste structures of traditional societies such as nineteenth-century India captured individuals and froze them in social space...upward mobility into a higher caste was impossible...Socialization practices operated in such a way as to discourage the very thought of upward

movement” (2001:102). They continue, “Virtually all important social relations were governed by **endogamy**” (2001:1020). Then, the authors imply the closed-caste system of nineteenth century India *seems to be still in full force*. A caption of a picture of contemporary India informs the reader: “In closed-caste stratification systems, virtually all important aspects of people’s lives are shaped by the social positions into which they are born and from which they normally cannot escape” (2001:102).

Likewise, Shepard (2005) writes from the same perspective. “In a **caste system**, there is no social mobility because social status is inherited and cannot be changed. In a caste system, statuses (including occupations) are ascribed or assigned at birth; individuals cannot change their statuses through any efforts of the own” (2005:231). Shepard continues with the Indian example. “Traditional rules in India prevent movement into a higher caste. Not only are members of different castes not permitted to eat together, but higher caste people will hardly accept anything to eat or drink from lower-caste persons. Untouchables, who must live apart from everyone else, cannot even drink water from the wells used by higher castes. Although the long-standing legal prohibition against dating or marrying someone in a higher caste no longer exists, such crossings are still extremely rare” ((2005:231-232).

Finally, consistent with the above are a series of statements about India made by Macionis:

In India, the traditional caste system still guides people's choice of work, especially in rural areas. Below the four basic castes are the harijans, people defined as 'outcasts' or 'untouchables.' These people perform jobs, such as cleaning the streets, defined as unclean for others of higher social position. (2005: 249)

...Indian culture is built on Hindu moral belief in accepting one's life work, . whatever it may be. (2005: 249)

...Endogamous marriage is necessary because " 'mixed' marriages would blur the ranking of children. (2005: 249).

...Caste norms guide people to stay in the company of 'their own kind.' Hindus in India support this segregation, believing that a ritually 'pure' person of a higher caste will be 'polluted' by contact with someone of lower standing. (2005:249).

These examples highlight the stereotypical and orientalist view of the rigid caste society of India. Not only do the authors (as do all the authors of the texts in the sample) ignore class as a dominating feature of contemporary Indian stratification, they also ignore that even historically the claims of rigid caste hierarchy had been stereotypically constructed by Western observers (Dirks 2001; Ganguly 2005; Inden 1990). While endogamy was widespread in pre-independence India, it was never a universal rule. Indeed, scholars have noted that traditionally in India hypergamy (the practice of women marrying men from a higher caste group) was accepted and commonly done among various caste groups (Quigley 1999). It is not clear what Shepard's (2005) evidence is for the "still extremely rare" marriage across caste categories in contemporary India, since he fails to cite any source for this claim. Similarly, Macionis cites no sources either for his contention of the continued rigidity of caste in rural India or his vague claim that "its grip has relaxed in big cities" (2005:249). A perusal of many Indian newspapers demonstrates that marriage advertisements now commonly state “caste no bar.” Also, inconsistent with Macionis's claim of the "necessity" to enforce endogamy in agricultural areas, Fuller finds that while caste endogamy may be common, "it can no longer be enforced by local subcastes which have lost almost all their power of sanction" (1997:16). Corwin (1977) finds in her study that despite the endogamous tradition of rural West Bengal people married across caste lines without difficulty. Driver and Driver (1987) found in their study of Madras that while endogamy in terms of religion and caste is common, so is homogamy along the lines of socio-economic status (SES). This suggests that the cultural tendency toward homogamy, evident in the U.S. as well as India, might be a reasonable explanation for marrying one's "own kind," rather than assuming a rigid caste hierarchy dominates decision-making in Indian society. Again, regardless of the likelihood of endogamous marriage in India, Macionis, Shepard, and Bryjak and Soroka evidently feel little obligation to base their observations on any cited evidence, preferring instead to present a representation consistent with orientalist imagery.

The lack of status mobility claim in the above examples ignores the reality of Indian stratification. While Ilaiah's treatise (1996) provides important arguments about the status of Dalits in India, it is

important to note that the interplay of caste, including the position of Dalits in India is not homogenous. For example, it has long been noted that urbanization presented opportunities beyond "traditional caste" occupations which contributed to the erosion of caste boundaries, possibly even making certain traditional aspects of caste largely "irrelevant" (Srinivas, 1979, 1997; Fuller 1997). It has also been the case that even in rural areas caste members, sometimes the majority of caste members, did not remain in traditional caste occupations (Srinivas, 1997). In some cases, lower caste groups have completely discarded traditional callings viewed as derogatory (Sharma 1974; Jodhka 2002). In other cases, entire caste groups would change their status position through the process of Sanskritization (Sharma 1974). Similarly, claims about unchanging pollution and purity restrictions, such as lower caste members cannot drink water from the same source as higher caste members, makes little sense in urban areas where water is piped from a central source. But even in the case of rural well water, Jodhka's (2002) study of rural Punjab finds that nearly 80% of scheduled castes respondents say they can drink water from the same wells and eat with the higher caste if they so choose. Hence, while the examples from the sociology texts cited above seem to be stuck in a representation of India as a rigid caste system controlling social contact and occupational opportunity, Gupta has observed "Hereditary occupational specialization is not active anymore [and] the principles of purity and pollution do not invariably intervene to hierarchize (2000:140-141).

Lastly, the presentation of the lower castes as trapped in low status and *accepting of their social position* is a classic orientalist position. The reliance on referencing the lower castes as "untouchables" or "outcasts" rather than "dalits" is telling. The dalit movement is about agency and social change (Bob 2007; D'Souza and Ilaiyah 2005; Joshi 1986). Rather than being resigned to a "moral belief in accepting one's life work, whatever it may be" (Macionis 2005:249), the dalit movement embodies "a radical rejection of the religious legitimation of poverty and untouchability (Zelliot 1998:269). The dalit movement is guided by the vision of transforming Indian society (Michael 1999). In addition, other lower caste groups (called Other Backward Classes) have mobilized as well. While the traditional religious restrictions of caste may be fading, caste is being transformed into a political force. If we are confused about the strength of this mobilization, we might consider the evaluation by Jaffrelot. He argues that since the implementation of reservations for the Other Backward Classes the lower castes "are gradually, and more or less surreptitiously, taking over in North India. In that respect, North India is going the way South India -- and, to a lesser extent, West India -- have already gone" (2003:v). In his view the "politicized version of caste-- was responsible for the democratisation of Indian democracy" (Jaffrelot 2003:10).

## **CLASS**

Class has been associated with two important concepts: industrialization and mobility. Interestingly, while class is difficult to define, a convenient definition method is to define class and caste as oppositional ideal types. Bryjak and Soroka (2001) provide an example of this method, hence caste is "closed," "no upward mobility possible," "ascription-based," "clear caste boundaries," "caste awareness level high," "endogamous social relations," and "stay where you were." Hence, class becomes "open," upward mobility encouraged," indistinct class boundaries," "class awareness level low," "exogamous social relations," and "(nearly) all things are possible" (2001:101). Individualism, talent, educational accomplishments, skill, performance, and no "formal organizations, laws, customs, or cultural traditions deliberately bar or significantly restrict the free circulation of people up (or down) the social ladder. Such social movements [sic] are in fact common and widespread" (Bryjak and Soroka 2001:101-102). The United States is used as the example of such a system. Moreover, the authors assert:

Armed with the proper credentials, individuals can acquire good jobs that will give them access to a better life. They can purchase a dream house in the suburbs, join the local country club, and send their children to quality private schools. Perhaps a son or daughter will meet, fall in love with, and marry someone from an affluent family. This pattern obviously is not likely for everyone, but it is at least possible for some,

and that is the whole point of the open-class system: Such things are possible. (Bryjak and Soroka 2001:102).

There are several obvious problems with this caste-class dichotomous approach. First, because the illustrative example of class moves away from what is "common" to what is "possible" the class-caste dichotomy loses its distinctive definitional features, since the example is "possible" in both real class and caste situations. Second, placing marriage to a rich person as a route to social mobility seems somewhat inconsistent with the typical class focus on education, skill, and performance as "achievement" oriented mobility. Third, exogamy means marriage outside one's social group is required. No class system has this requirement to our knowledge, in fact, homogamy is a common pattern in industrialized societies. Generally, consistent with the orientalist thesis, the above depiction of class is not based on empirical evidence, but it is arguably an imagined ideal of what the caste system is not.

Table 5 shows the extent to which texts analyze India and the U.S. in terms of class. None of the texts analyzed India as a class-based system in discussions about stratification. In one case the term class was used in reference to India, but not as part of any analysis of class. The U.S., by contrast, was analyzed in terms of class in every text.

These numbers reflect a conceptual problem in the texts. The U.S. and India, with one exception, are presented as essentially either a caste or a class system. Once again, the orientalist notion of the achievement industrialized West versus an ascriptive traditional India is reinforced. Conceptually, one promising exception is the Ferrante text in which she states "Systems of stratification usually possess elements of both class and caste characteristics" (2003:253). While recognizing "mixed systems" are the norm, Ferrante unfortunately applies the mixture only to the U.S., leaving India to be described only in terms of caste. The neglect of class analysis in the case of India is disappointing, given the scholarship both about the caste/class mixture in Indian society, and the growing significance of class stratification in India ((for example, see Driver and Driver 1987; Morris 1991; Sharma 1994; Singh 1997; Sheth 1999; Varma 1999; Chakrabarti and Cullenberg 2001; Chandavarker 2003; Fernandes 2006).

#### **AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**

Table 5 shows whether the texts in the sample had any reference to affirmative action policies in India and the U.S. As mentioned previously, affirmative action is particularly important in analyzing stratification because by and large it can be viewed as a policy to address caste discrimination within a society promoting class stratification. Affirmative action, like the legal prohibition on caste discrimination, lends credence to the notion that society has been actively involved in attempting to overcome past discrimination.

Eighty-seven percent of the textbooks in our sample included a discussion of affirmative action policy in the United States. In some cases the program was presented as controversial, suggesting that policies may even result in reverse discrimination. One may infer from such cases, that the class system in the U.S. offers ample opportunities for advancement, even for previously discriminated groups based on caste position.

In contrast, only three of the thirty-three texts (9%) mentioned reservation policies (affirmative action) in India, with each focusing on the policy as exclusively for scheduled caste groups. Concerning reservation policy in India discussed in detail below, no presentation of pro versus con arguments exist. One text has a three-sentence description of reservation policy in India. The other two mention the word reservation or affirmative action in reference to India in one sentence only. In general, we can conclude that discussions about India's reservation policy, a direct attempt to address caste discrimination in the country, is either non-existent or barely noticeable in the sociology texts in our sample. By contrast twenty of the texts (61%) had fairly substantial discussions about the U.S. affirmative action system, ranging from five to more than fifteen paragraphs.

India's reservation policy for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was incorporated in its constitution after independence. More recent increases in reservations were based on the recommendation from the Mandal Commission Report, which is properly titled Reservation for Backward Classes: Mandal Commission Report of the Backward Classes Commission. 1980. The report introduced the concept of

reservation for disadvantaged classes as well. While the overlap between caste and backward classes is significant, the backward class list included groups which are not Hindus, such as certain Muslim groups. On a more technical note, for the other backward classes, membership in a caste-based backward class does not in itself qualify one for reservation programs. Individual members within backward class groups are excluded from reservation benefits if they come from families with significant status or resources. Hence, class becomes a qualifying condition for inclusion in the reservation program.

In addition, the seventy-third amendment to the Indian Constitution reserves one-third of elected positions at the local level (panchayat level) for women. Hence, on the basis of gender, women including women not from lower caste backgrounds, are entitled to certain reservations. The Indian reservation system is arguably a more robust and ambitious attempt to remedy discrimination than the affirmative action policy in the United States. As Jaffrelot (2003) points out, the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations has been a catalyst to reinvigorate caste mobilization as a positive democratic force in India. Unfortunately, by neglecting this important aspect of social change in India our sampled sociology texts fail to provide evidence of social change and agency for historically disadvantaged caste and class groups in India. With this significant omission the texts reinforce the stereotypical view of the unchanging rigid Indian caste hierarchy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Several problems with social stratification analyses of India and the United States in sociology texts are apparent from this study. Generally the textbooks present India as a society stratified by caste, and the United States as a society stratified by class. This false dichotomy reinforces the orientalist notion that the United States is modern society based on individual achievement and unlimited mobility, whereas India is a traditional society based on an oppressive unchanging caste system. Both societies end up being misrepresented by ignoring the class/caste complexities integral to both stratification systems. The class-only presentation of the United States glosses over the reality of continued discrimination interfering with the individual achievement theme. The caste-only presentation of India relegates lower caste groups to the status of helpless victim, ignoring their roles as significant agents of social change. By informing the textbook readers that the United States has a "controversial" affirmative action program, and by failing to inform the reader that India has a robust reservation program, the modern/traditional dichotomy is reinforced again. The problematic image that the United States actively (and implications that it over-actively) addresses its history of discrimination, whereas the Indian state passively accepts an outdated and oppressive hierarchical structure is maintained thus reinforcing the modern and just image of the state in the US in contrast to the traditional, unchanging, and unjust Indian state.

So what needs to be done? First, all of the text would benefit by following the lead of Ferrante (2003) and incorporating a more sophisticated mixed class/caste approach to stratification to analyze societies such as the United States and India. Second, realizing that historically oppressed groups also operate as agents for social change helps create a more historically accurate picture of social stratification, both for the United States and India. Third, the image of India needs to be substantially updated by most of the texts. The recognition that India, like most societies, is in the process of continued significant change is grossly neglected by most of the textbooks in our sample. In part, this seems to be a function of the lack of serious scholarship by many of the textbook authors. Table 7 shows that 42 per cent of the textbooks have no sources cited in their analysis of Indian stratification. Fifty-five percent of the texts have cited one source or less. Seventy-one percent of the texts have two or less sources cited in reference to Indian stratification. Not only do we find a tendency to rely on few or no sources, but in some cases the sources are notably out of date for the topic of discussion. Consider the following example from Newman. He begins by making the important case that India is changing, particularly noting the increasing political participation of Dalits. Then he qualifies the change theme by writing "But the caste system still serves as a powerful source of stratification and oppression. Cultural norms still encourage people to take the occupation of their parents and marry within their caste (Weber, 1970)" (Newman 2004: 329).

In countering the changes taking place in the twenty-first century Newman cites a 1970 source as evidence that the oppression of the caste system is *still* powerful. It would be problematic enough that the

sole source to support the "still" oppressive caste system was in itself thirty-four years old, but this is actually a reference to an edited collection first printed in 1948. Now, the source we know must have been written at least fifty-six years before the "still" oppressive citation. The "Weber" cited as the source is actually Max Weber, whose work on caste was originally written in 1916 and 1917, and was translated by Gerth and Mills (1958) in an edited collection on Weber. Hence, we are presented evidence of a changing social system, but we are told the system is "still" oppressive in terms of hereditary occupation and endogamy based on a source written eighty-seven years prior, when India was a British colony.

These types of representations reinforce the orientalist perspective of an unchanging India. It is time for textbooks to give serious attention to the contemporary scholarship on Indian stratification.

## **APPENDIX A: TEXTBOOKS**

- Anderson, Margaret L. and Howard F. Taylor. 2004. *Sociology: A Diverse Society*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Belmont CA: Thompson/Wadsworth.
- Anderson, Margaret L. and Howard F. Taylor. 2005. *Sociology: The Essentials*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Belmont CA: Thompson/Wadsworth.
- Brim, Robert J. and John Lie . 2005. *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Belmont CA: Thompson/Wadsworth.
- Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega & Weitz. 2005. *Essentials of Sociology*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Belmont CA: Thompson/Wadsworth.
- Bryjak, George J. and Michael P. Soroka,. 2001. *Sociology: Changing Societies in a Diverse World*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Curry, Tim, Robert Jiobu and Kent Schwirian. 2005. *Sociology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall Publishing.
- Eitzen, D. Stanley and Maxine Baca Zinn. 2004. *In Conflict and Order: Understanding Society*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Donovan, Marjorie E. and Juan L. Gonzales, 2005. *Sociology: Fundamentals for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Dubuque: Kendall Hunt.
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## TABLES

**Table 1: Caste is presented as a relevant concept for Stratification**

	CASTE ANALYSIS		CLASS ANALYSIS	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
YES	94%	(31)	100%	(33)
NO	6%	(2)	0%	(0)
TOTAL	100%	(33)	100%	(33)

**Table 2: Caste Analysis of Stratification**

	INDIA		U.S.	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
YES	100 %	(31)	26%	(8)
NO	0%	(0)	55%	(17)
CASTE-LIKE	0%	(0)	19%	(6)
TOTAL	100%	(31)	100%	(31)

**Table 3: Caste Remains a Significant Contemporary Force\***

	INDIA		U.S.	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
YES	90%	(28)	6.5%	(2)
NO	10%	(3)	93.5%	(29)
TOTAL	100%	(31)	100%	(31)

\*This table includes texts in which caste was presented in the context of stratification. Two of the thirty-three texts under review had no discussion of caste

**Table 4: Caste Discrimination is Identified as Now Illegal\***

	INDIA		U.S.	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
YES	52%	(16)	87.5%	(7)
NO	48%	(15)	0%	(0)
OTHER	0%	(0)	12.5%	(1)
TOTAL	100%	(31)	100%	(8)

\*Includes only those texts with caste analysis of the listed country

**Table 5: Class Analysis of Stratification**

	INDIA		U.S.	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
YES	0%	(0)*	100%	(33)
NO	100 %	(33)	0%	(0)
TOTAL	100%	(33)	100%	(33)

\*In one text, class was mentioned in reference to India, but there was no analysis.

**Table 6: Affirmative Action (or Reservation) Programs to Address Past Discrimination**

	INDIA		U.S.	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
YES	9%	(3)	82%	(27)
NO	91%	(30)	18 %	(6)
TOTAL	100%	(33)	100%	(33)

**Table 7: Number of sources Cited in Section on Indian Stratification**

# OF SOURCES CITED	% AND (#) OF TEXTS	
0	42%	(13)
1	23%	(7)
2	16%	(5)
3	6.5%	(2)
4	0%	(0)
5	6.5%	(0)
6	3%	(1)
7	0%	(0)
8	3%	(1)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(31)</b>