

Status relations in South Asian marriage alliances: Toward a general theory

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How the caste system emerged and which aspect of it came first is shrouded in uncertainty (see Klass 1980 for a recent attempt to deal with these issues). But there is little doubt that in the modern period the core of the system is some degree of status homogeneity and endogamy in marriage alliances.¹ Nonetheless, there are regular departures from strict status homogeneity and endogamy that are not simply a matter of deviance on the part of particular individuals or families. Rather, the legitimate and institutionalised definitions of appropriate status relations in marriage alliances vary over different regions and castes.

The phenomena to be explained and the explanatory strategy

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to explain both the strong tendencies toward status homogeneity and caste endogamy, and some of the most common and striking of the institutionalised variations. The first major variation requiring explanation is the difference between the Dravidian south and the rest of India. Isogamy—bride and groom of equal status—is the dominant pattern in the south. In north India, both hypergamy—groom of superior status—and isogamy are permitted, with hypergamy often being the ideal. The second variation is less clear-cut, but nonetheless present: upper caste groups are more likely to be hypergamous than lower caste groups. Third, in virtually all castes and areas, hypogamy—bride of superior status—is looked down upon, if not forbidden. Fourth, there are matrilineal and matrilocal groups whose marriage patterns seem quite different. An attempt will be made to show how these patterns can also be understood in terms of our framework.

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¹ I am using marriage alliance to refer to all arranged marriages whether or not they result in multiple generation allied groups of affines. This, of course, varies from Dumont's usage (1983).

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The explanatory strategy will be to sketch out in very summary fashion a general theory of status alliances. Any general theory is necessarily quite abstract and deals with only a few variables. Hence, when such a theory is applied to specific cases it often needs to be supplemented with additional empirical facts. These facts are exogenous variables which qualify and specify the propositions of the general theory so that it more adequately explains the observed pattern. One of the indirect purposes of this paper is to suggest that social science analysis requires both general theories and their careful contextualisation and specification in particular cultural and historical settings. The idea is not new, but it has been largely abandoned in recent South Asian studies.

A general theory of status alliances

In some social systems the possession of wealth or political power is almost the sole source of status: wealth in the serial *Dallas* portrayed on television, political power for members of the Daley machine in Chicago, fighting prowess for certain street gangs and warrior groups. But status based primarily upon some other form of power is precarious; when that form of power is lost so is most of one's social status. Thus, groups frequently develop bases of status which are not simply a function of the possession of other forms of power. Max Weber called these 'status groups' and emphasised that typically, status was based upon conformity to a specified style of life. Such a life-style might require substantial economic and political resources, but these were not the direct source of status. This insulation of status from direct dependence on economic or political power is the rudimentary or first order process of status groups. The theory presented here is intended to explain the types of alliances characteristic of this kind of social system.

A key source of status is the social *associations* one is able to create and maintain. Associating with higher status people tends to increase one's status, while associating with those of lower status tends to reduce one's status. Accordingly, lower status people usually try to increase their association with those of higher status, while higher status people carefully limit and regulate their association with those of lower status. These contradictory interests tend to result in social associations between those who are roughly equal in status, that is, with a strong tendency toward status homogeneity.² This is especially true of intimate expressive relation-

² Of course a lack of opportunity to associate with superiors is not the only reason equals associate with one another. As Shah (1982) and others have pointed out, caste has a horizontal element of separation with roots other than hierarchy. A sense of solidarity based on common experiences and the resulting ease of mutual communication are two obvious non-hierarchical sources of sub-group formation. Space limitations preclude a systematic discussion of these dynamics in this essay.

ships and is the key source of commensalism, endogamy and isogamy. These tendencies toward status homogeneity are what I will refer to as the dominant or second order processes of status relations.

But the insulation of status from wealth and political power and the tendency of higher status persons to reject associations with those of lower status are only *relative* to other forms of stratification. There are constant attempts to translate economic and political resources into status and vice versa. Likewise, lower status actors frequently attempt to increase their associations with those of higher status. Moreover, strict status homogeneity creates its own problems; for example, the direct exchange of praise or blame between equals is often discounted as 'tit for tat' rather than a valid evaluation. But 'tit for tat' honour, or exchanging intimacy for worldly gain (or vice versa) devalues the honour that is given or received. If such exchanges are to be fully successful they must be disguised or rationalised away. Hence I will refer to these third order tendencies as recessive processes—they are usually present, but disguised. One way to partially disguise the quid pro quo features of such relationships is to transform them into formally asymmetrical exchanges: the explicit gifts and praise of inferiors is given for the status that is acquired implicitly when gifts and praise are accepted by superiors. Many forms of worship—as contrasted to magical manipulation—exemplify such an exchange: the worship is in one direction, but the devotee's status is transformed by coming into contact with the sacred, usually through some form of communion.

When such recessive tendencies toward asymmetrical alliances do become prominent in worldly status systems, such as in systems of hypergamy, they may create fourth order countervailing processes. These will be taken up later.

Up to this point we have primarily been tracing the implications of the premises of our general theory of status alliances. It predicts that when bases of status independent of other forms of power become institutionalised, the dominant tendencies will be toward status homogeneity, but that there will be significant recessive tendencies toward exchanging status for other resources and toward status heterogeneity. This helps us explain the strong tendency in status groups in general and castes in particular toward endogamy and isogamy, as well as why there may be significant deviations from this dominant pattern. i.e., either hypergamy or hypogamy. But when applied to Hindu marriage alliances there are two things the theory does not predict: (i) when will the recessive processes increase in prominence and produce a systematic departure from isogamy, and (ii) which party to the alliance—the groom's or the bride's—is likely to be the inferior one, i.e., will the deviance be hypergamy or hypogamy. Hence, at this next step in the argument, an exogenous empirical fact will be introduced in order to allow us to further elaborate the analysis: in much of

South Asia wife-givers are considered inferior to and must act deferentially towards wife-takers.

The inferiority of wife-givers

It is well documented that in many castes throughout much of South Asia, the wife's family usually acts deferentially toward the husband's family (see, Gray 1980; Fruzzetti 1982; Hershman 1981; Madan 1975; Parry 1979:274, 289; Vatuk 1975; van der Veen, 1973). Moreover, in many castes the wife's family is expected to not only provide a substantial dowry, but to continue to make periodic gifts and prestations to the husband's family. In contrast, members of the wife's family will accept virtually nothing from the husband's family, or perhaps only the most minimal hospitality. The sources of this status difference cannot be systematically elaborated here. The difference seems to be rooted in patriarchal patterns, including patrilineal inheritance and patrilocal residence, and in the doctrine of *kanyadan*. Our primary concern here is not the source of the pattern, but its consequences. The inferiority of wife-givers seems to be the extra weight that tips the scale: it initiates social processes which allow the recessive tendencies toward status heterogeneity to become much more prominent and significantly qualify the dominant processes toward status homogeneity.

Alternative responses—hypergamy and exchange marriages

Since ritual status is a crucial resource, public acknowledgment of one's inferiority is no small matter—especially if the role as an inferior is to be a long-term one. There seem to be two primary institutionalised responses. One is to attempt to marry one's daughters to those who are unquestionably of higher status. The psychology and sociology of this strategy are based upon the benefits gained by being intimately associated with those of higher status. If one must be deferential to wife-takers then the cost can be offset by an alliance with a family that one's peers would acknowledge deserve deference, and, who in the very act of accepting your deference help to increase your status. This is, of course, one of the third order processes which creates tendencies toward status heterogeneity. The other response is to reverse roles as quickly as possible in order not to let status differences accumulate. If two families or lineages exchange wives in a time span sufficiently short for these exchanges to be remembered, then the status differences and deference patterns created by a particular marriage are not likely to build up and produce a fundamental status difference between the two lineages. The equalising effects of this turn-about-is-fair-play strategy are even greater if the process is continued over a number of generations.

The first of these strategies takes the form of a clear tendency towards

hypergamy. This may or may not result in explicitly labelled and formally ranked strata within the caste, which I will refer to as *institutionalised hypergamy*. The second of these strategies results in various forms of exchange marriages including the patterns of cross-cousin marriage in south India and Sri Lanka. We will now use the notion of these two ideal-type responses to analyse some of the regional and caste variations in marriage patterns, beginning with hypergamy.

Hypergamy: Initial discussion

Our task here is to explain both the source of hypergamy and the key structural characteristics and dynamics of this system of marriage alliances. But equally important is to provide an explanatory structure that will allow one to see hypergamy in relationship with other patterns of Indian marriage drawing on the general theory of status alliances outlined above. While arguments will be deliberately stated in general terms, they were developed primarily with reference to Jonathan Parry's discussion of hypergamy among the Rajputs of Kangra (1979). The Kangra Rajputs are divided into four named strata called *biradaris* which roughly means brotherhood. In principle, the members of a single *biradari* are equal and intermarry. Wives should come from within the *biradari* or from the *biradari* immediately below. Daughters are to be given to one's own *biradari* or preferably to one of higher status. Now let us consider how such a system might emerge and some of its structural dynamics.

As noted earlier, for many castes throughout much of India wife-givers are seen as inferior to wife-receivers. This in and of itself cannot account for tendencies toward hypergamy. For, the inferiority of wife-givers could just as logically lead to hypogamy as hypergamy. If the status of a family is lowered when it takes on the role of wife-giver, then wife-takers might well seek alliances with those who are in other situations their status superiors. So while the inferiority of wife-givers may be one precondition for the abandonment of isogamy it is not an explanation of hypergamy.

The most obvious source of hypergamy, per se, is the ideology of *kanyadan* or 'the gift of a virgin'. This doctrine specifically calls for the gift of a virgin bride to a superior and forbids the acceptance of anything in return. As Trautmann notes, after the period of the vedas, Brahman thought developed in a direction strongly hostile to reciprocity. Rather, the notion of *kanyadan* requires 'that daughters must be given up (*anuloma*) rather than down (*pratiloma*). It is this rich concept that opposes hypergamy to the [dharmaśāstra] ideal of isogamy' (1981:293). Not only are the wife-givers forbidden to receive either money or other women in return for the women they give, they are also required to provide a substantial dowry and other gifts to their bride-takers. What is the logic of this 'curiously one-sided' form of exchange (ibid: 292)? It is a specific form of one of the third

order recessive tendencies: economic resources of the bride's lower status family are implicitly exchanged for the increase in status that results from being on intimate terms with superiors. The general theory suggests that such exchanges are particularly characteristic of certain forms of worship, and in Hindu culture *kanyadan* is a form of worship in which the groom is specifically conceived of as a deity.

One of the important regional and caste variations is how rigorously and consistently the prohibition against counter prestations is interpreted and followed. The crucial question is whether the ideology is used to preclude the possibility of relatively direct exchanges of women between lineages. If so, the inferiority of giving a wife cannot be erased by becoming a wife-taker to your wife-taker. Families are, therefore, likely to attempt to reduce the negative cost of being a wife-giver by making an alliance with a family of higher status. If this becomes widespread, institutionalised hypergamy may emerge.

In sum, the inferiority of wife-givers significantly qualifies the tendencies toward isogamy, and makes asymmetrical relationships—in which explicit gifts are exchanged for acceptance by superiors—an attractive pattern. The doctrine of *kanyadan* provides a special cultural rationale for such asymmetrical exchanges and forbids that such patterns be limited or qualified by exchange marriages. In addition, the patriarchal components of *kanyadan*, and Hindu society in general, eliminate the legitimacy of hypogamy. Hence, when wife-giving threatens one's status, the most culturally available alternative is hypergamy.

Where institutionalised hypergamy does emerge as a dominant pattern three corollary processes tend to occur. First, the number and geographical distribution of exogamous relationships, i.e., those within one's *jati* who are not eligible as marriage partners, tends to be large relative to non-hypergamous regions. This is usually rationalised in terms of the four *gotra* rule and the prohibitions against marrying *sapinda* (see Trautmann 1981: 239–77; van der Veen, 1973: 86–95; Parry 1979: 221–27). The details of this system are far too complex to be considered here. Perhaps one of the motivations, and certainly one of the consequences for these rules, is to reduce the possibility of exchange marriages and repeated alliances. The circle of those with whom marriage alliances cannot be formed is expanded to include those with whom alliances have been formed in the memorable past. Another possible source of the increased size of the exogamous group is the weaker impact of approval from those already closely associated with you. Affines who are linked by ongoing alliances as those in south India or Bengal are likely to have about the same status rather than a significantly higher status, and, as our general theory suggests, direct exchange of praise between equals tends to be discounted as 'tit for tat'. If they do have a higher status the effect of their acceptance of your daughters is likely to be discounted compared to a family considered to be more remote and hence objective in their evaluation of your status.

The second tendency is an increase in the size of the endogamous group. If daughters cannot be given to lineages with lower status, then the number of eligible grooms is significantly decreased. Moreover, the smaller the stratum immediately above one, the fewer the potential grooms there. But the scarcity of suitable grooms is further exacerbated by the process discussed above: the expansion of the boundaries of the exogamous group. The expansion of the size of the caste group does not, of course, fundamentally solve the problem if the proportion of those who are appropriate partners does not increase. A larger size does mitigate the problem, however, because the chances of finding the precisely appropriate match increase as the size of the 'market' increases—even if the aggregate ratio of supply and demand stays unchanged. Most of these tendencies are rooted in the fourth order countervailing processes and will be discussed in greater detail when we consider the long-term dynamics of systems of hypergamy.

A third process is an increase in the explicitness and formalisation of rankings within the endogamous caste. Families and lineages within the caste begin to be grouped into specific named sub-categories such as the *biradaris* of the Rajputs (Parry 1979), the *kulas* of high caste medieval Bengalis (Inden 1976), and the *anks* of the Kanya-Kubja Brahmans (Khare 1970). This development of explicit sub-categories and ranks is probably a response to the difficulties that guardians have in determining the rank of potential marriage partners in a large, widely dispersed caste. Two additional sources of such segmentation and internal ranking seem probable on theoretical grounds. The more intense the competition for grooms, the more important small differences will be, and hence the more likely they are to be labelled. Second, formal categories and rankings are more likely if there is a formal authority—such as a *biradari* council, the traditional rajas or the colonial census officials—to arbitrate and impose decisions.

The analysis to some degree implies a built-in progression. The problems solved by larger marriage circles create problems of visibility and social control which lead to more formal categories, which in turn lead to formal structures of authority. But two sets of factors limit the tendencies described. First, the cultural factors initiating the process can be limited or contained. For example, the inferiority of wife-givers or the ideology of *kanyadan* may be less intense in some areas or among some castes. We will consider such circumstances later. Second, hypergamy has some long-term internal dynamics limiting or even reversing the processes described.

Most of the dynamics that limit the tendency toward institutionalised hypergamy are rooted in the fourth order countervailing processes having to do with the demographics of hierarchy (see Blau 1977 for a systematic theoretical discussion of these issues). The specific cultural feature which accentuates the demographic problem is the requirement that brides move only in an upward direction (or stay in their own strata). One crucial result is the inevitable tendency to create a surplus of brides at the top and a shortage at the bottom. Moreover, who is to marry the daughters of the

highest strata.³ The problems are mitigated by a sharper pyramid of inequality. For if each higher stratum is much smaller than the stratum below, then only a small proportion of the daughters of the lower stratum are required to satisfy the demand for wives in the higher stratum. But, of course, this lesser demand cuts both ways because fewer of the lower stratum will have an opportunity to increase their status by marrying up. Generally speaking, the strata under the most strain will be those with a relatively larger stratum above and a relatively smaller one below; this will produce a high demand for its daughters, but an inadequate supply of brides from the strata below. As mentioned, the strata at the top face the problem of a surplus of daughters. Among Rajput groups this was frequently reduced by high rates of female infanticide and polygyny (Plunkett 1973), though these remedies produce other problems. At the lower end of the hierarchy the shortage of wives is often solved by taking wives from the caste below. This will, of course, tend to obscure the lowest boundary of the supposedly endogamous group (see Parry 1979: 228–31; Shah 1982: 11–16). This shortage of wives has some benefits for the lower strata; they can surreptitiously charge a brideprice for their daughters (Parry 1979: 228; Shah 1982: 24), though this is clearly contrary to the ideology of *kanyadan*. This, however, creates another structural contradiction in the strata immediately above. These groups must give large dowries in order to get higher groups to accept their daughters as wives, and at the same time they may have to pay a high brideprice to secure brides for their sons. Obviously this puts middle level strata under great economic strain. Sometimes these strains are alleviated by men postponing the age of marriage. Often this is associated with labour away from the village, most typically military service. While these various remedies may reduce the contradictions they cannot eliminate them. According to Parry, systems of hypergamy are inherently unstable or, more accurately, tend to be in what he calls oscillating equilibrium. That is, 'reform movements' develop at regular periods advocating isogamy and equal exchange either for a particular stratum such as a *biradari* or even for the whole caste. Such reforms last for a while but some members are inevitably tempted to gain advantage by marrying their daughters up. Eventually the reforms erode and the features of hypergamy emerge—until the pressures it creates produce another reform movement. (For another example of oscillation see Shah 1982: 16.) In theoretical terms this can be conceived as an oscillation between the third order pressures for status heterogeneity (and the creation of social mechanisms to stabilise and elaborate such tendencies), and the fourth order countervailing pressures. The latter develop to some degree in any hierarchy—that

³ This same problem can also operate geographically if brides tend to move in one direction. In the classical Rajput system, brides ideally moved from east to west and hence, to the degree that the system actually operated this way, should have created a scarcity of brides in the east and a surplus in the west (see Shah 1982: 15, fn 16).

is, in any ranked, skewed distribution—that allows cross-strata associations and mobility. They become even more acute given the specific characteristics of institutionalised hypergamy.

The form of hypergamy discussed in this section is dependent upon the inferiority of wife-givers and the ideology of *kanyadan*. While this is the key source of most hypergamy in South Asia, we will consider additional sources later.

Upper castes in the south

I have argued that two basic factors produce hypergamous marriage patterns in north India. First, the inferiority of wife-givers creates pressures to depart from isogamy. Second, patriarchal institutions and the ideology of *kanyadan* block the possibility of either hypogamy or exchange marriages. This leaves hypergamy as the most attractive alternative.

But the relatively isogamous marriage patterns of the ritually high caste groups in south India are *not* due simply to an absence of the two features which produce hypergamy in the north. For, both these features—the inferiority of wife-givers and the ideology of *kanyadan*—are also characteristic of these castes. Rather, the explanation of upper caste isogamy in the south lies in identifying a third factor that contains and modifies the effects of the first two factors. This third factor is the Dravidian kinship system and more specifically the institution of cross-cousin marriage.

Trautmann's *Dravidian kinship* (1981) is the most complete treatment of this subject and the discussion here is heavily indebted to him. The variety of Dravidian type kinship systems observed in contemporary India derive from a common proto-Dravidian system. The key structural feature is the institution of cross-cousin marriage. As Trautmann says, 'In order to specify the broad features of the Dravidian . . . we begin with a concept basic to the understanding of the Dravidian, that of cross cousins' (1981: 22). Dumont agrees: 'To put it in a nutshell what distinguishes South India from North India is cross-cousin marriage' (1983: 160).⁴ The source of this core feature need not concern us. The consequences are most relevant: cross-cousin marriage results in at least a rough equality between lineages that exchange brides. As Dumont says 'South Indian kinship presents us with a contrast . . . something like an island of equality in an ocean of caste' (1983: 167). Trautmann notes that even where demographic or other local influences in some respects limit or restrict cross-cousin marriages, 'Dravidian marriage always has the character of an exchange' (1981: 24). Over time this results in the perpetuation of alliances between two lineages: 'my sister marries you and I marry your sister; my daughter marries your

⁴ This quote is in the context of commenting on the contribution of Carter's (1974) work, but it seems clear that this represents Dumont's position.

son and your son marries my daughter, etc. This pattern of exchange marriages—switching roles as wife-givers and wife-takers—prevents the inequalities in any one marriage alliance from accumulating and resulting in institutionalised hypergamy; the result is inequality in the context of a specific marriage ceremony, but the macro pattern is one of isogamy.

But how is the practice of cross-cousin marriage, with its implications of equality and quid pro quo exchange, reconciled with the notion of *kanyadan*? The writers of the dharmasastra texts struggled with this contradiction off and on over the centuries. Numerous texts authorise cross-cousin marriage provided the practice is restricted to the south. While more elaborate rationales were developed, all contain contradictions (see Trautmann 1981: 238–315), and the tensions within the tradition are never completely resolved. In the Dravidian south both cross-cousin marriage—and hence exchange marriages—and the ideology of *kanyadan* are widely embraced. We will examine some of the mechanisms that help to alleviate these contradictions later.

Intermediate patterns: Handling contradictions

Fully developed hypergamy and exchange of brides based on cross-cousin marriage are alternative polar responses for dealing with the cost of being a wife-giver. In addition, intermediate patterns exist which embody only some of the elements previously described. We will begin with the Punjabis and the Bengalis. The Punjabis maintain a strong commitment to asymmetrical marriage relationships—that is, no exchange marriages—but this does not result in institutionalised hypergamy. The Bengalis regularly engage in exchange marriages, but this is not based upon cross-cousin marriages. Hence, these two cases represent important variations on the patterns previously discussed. In each case the pattern involves contradictions and in each case these are handled by what I will call encapsulation.

Punjabis and structural encapsulation

The most extended discussion of Punjabi marriage patterns is by Hershman (1981), which focuses primarily upon the Jats. Hershman's own analysis parallels many of the arguments presented here:

To give a woman in marriage is to place oneself in a position of inferiority to the taker; to take a woman is to assume a position of superiority to the giver; and to exchange women is to maintain a position of equality. Punjabis resolve the problem of having to give their sisters in marriage and yet at the same time of preserving their honor, in two quite distinct ways: Punjabi Muslims maintain and exchange their women within closed groups thus preserving their honor within the

group by arranging the marriages of their sisters to one another; while Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs solve the problem by accepting the inferiority of the wife-giver role and by creating from this premise a system of exogamy based upon the principle of non-exchange.

Apparently, the strategy of the Muslims for preserving their status closely approximates one of the two major strategies discussed above—even though the legitimacy of exchange marriages has quite different roots from Dravidian cross-cousin marriage. Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs are of even more interest because they form an important intermediate case: wife-givers are clearly inferior, exchange marriages are unambiguously prohibited, and yet the normative pattern is isogamy rather than hypergamy. If our basic argument is correct, how does this pattern persist? The answer lies in limiting the scope and effect of the inequalities created by marriage alliances.

Hershman identifies five processes that contribute to this outcome. First, the inequalities caused by wife-giving and wife-receiving are largely limited to specific ritual contexts, for example, at weddings and funerals (1981: 199). Second, only the husband himself acquires any real honour from being a wife-taker and only the wife's immediate family shares the dishonour of being a wife-giver. The more remote kindred have their status affected in only the most nominal ways. Third, interaction with affines is largely restricted to the relationship of a man to his wife's family; the marriage alliances of any one family tend to be widely dispersed across different villages and families and hence do not reinforce one another. Finally, the inequalities created by wife-giving are limited because they are not significantly related to control of the means of production, i.e., land. A fifth factor may be the influence of Sikhism, which seems less committed to strictly asymmetrical relationships between affines (*ibid.*: 216).

I will refer to this complex of processes which limits the consequences of being a wife-giver as structural encapsulation.

Bengalis and ideological encapsulation

Scholars have devoted considerable attention to Bengali marriage patterns (e.g., Klass 1966; Inden 1976; Inden and Nicholas 1977; Fruzzetti, Ostor, and Barnett, 1976; Fruzzetti 1982; Fruzzetti and Ostor 1982; Davis, 1983). The ideology of *kanyadan* is well known and deeply rooted in Bengal; Fruzzetti entitles her monograph on Bengali marriage *The gift of a virgin* (1982). Nonetheless, marriages are basically isogamous: 'The status of the contracting lines and houses should be as close as possible. Marriage alliance in Bengal establishes the equivalence of different lines and houses . . . ' (*ibid.*: 34). While the marriage ritual clearly contains hierarchical elements, this does not result in long-term inequalities. This is in part due to structural encapsulation for, as Fruzzetti notes, 'The inferior/superior

relationship is limited to the giving and receiving of the gift of the virgin' (ibid.: 111).

But even more important, among many castes exchange marriages are common. '... the Bengali system does not follow the classical pattern of hypergamy. The reversal of the direction of marriage is quite common in Bengal. Such unions are known as *badal biye* (exchange marriage), and these are as common as marriages in entirely new directions' (Fruzzetti 1982: 34). This not only involves exchanges between different lines (*bangsa*), but also between specific pairs of households (*ghars*): a brother and a sister of one household have spouses that are brother and sister of another household. Such exchanges are not simply tolerated as deviant patterns. Fruzzetti reports, 'Exchange marriages are encouraged, and this reversal in direction works contrary to the notion of hypergamy, where women—as goods—are supposed to flow in only one direction' (ibid.: 112). Fruzzetti's data is based upon upper and lower castes in a subdivisional town and related rural areas.

But this acceptance of exchange marriages cannot be attributed to the latent influences of cross-cousin marriage. The practice is generally proscribed in Bengal, and according to Trautmann, unlikely to have been widely practiced outside of Dravidian areas—the allusion in classical texts notwithstanding (1981: ch. 5). The kinship terminology is certainly not of the Dravidian type. While some preference exists for repeated marriages between two lines (*bangsa*) new alliances are as common as repeated ones. Hence marriages do not necessarily result in any permanent alliances with affines or for that matter in any other 'groups' (Fruzzetti and Ostor 1976: 93). This absence of Dravidian kinship patterns is evidence that the crucial factors in cross-cousin marriages producing isogamy are not necessarily linked to special features of Dravidian culture (e.g., the kinship terminology), but rather, lie in exchange marriages, per se. In sum, Bengalis both affirm the ideology of *kanyadan* and regularly engage in exchange marriages. The latter is a clear contradiction of the former.

How does Bengali culture handle such contradictions? One characteristic of Bengal seems to be its long tradition of heterodoxy and syncretism. The ability to encapsulate contradictory elements of culture seems to be a common phenomenon in Bengal. While Bengal has deep traditions of Brahmanical orthodoxy, the Tantric traditions have long been popular. Somehow the Bengalis have for centuries managed to hold what are in many respects antithetical traditions in a close alliance. This is not just a matter of tolerating unorthodox sects, but rather, of making the heretical a central part of conventional orthodoxy. This provides a broader cultural context for understanding the Bengali's adherence to and deviation from the doctrine of *kanyadan*. I will refer to this process as ideological encapsulation.

Drawing primarily on Fruzzetti and Ostor's data, I have argued that in Bengal exchange marriages are legitimate and a primary source of the basically isogamous pattern. This may require qualification when we consider the highest caste groups. We know, for example, that hypergamy was the ideal among upper caste Bengalis in previous centuries (see Inden 1976). Many of the upper class groups that came to be known as the *bhadralok* probably followed similar patterns. Hence, the analysis used here may not apply to the very highest castes in Bengal. But despite the strong presence of the *kanyadan* ideology, Bengal is much less preoccupied with hypergamous patterns than most of north India. Our general theoretical arguments supplemented by the notions of structural and ideological encapsulation suggest an explanation for this social fact.

Obviously the concept of ideological encapsulation is relevant to the south Indian contradictions between the *kanyadan* ideology and cross-cousin marriages. As noted earlier, the legitimacy of both sets of values and norms are strongly affirmed in the Dravidian south. But the mechanisms of legitimising these contradictions may vary for the two regions. Exchange marriages are much more central and deeply institutionalised in the south than they are in Bengal. As we have seen, the very kinship terminology in Dravidian languages assumes cross-cousin marriage. To change this would require a fundamental reordering of Dravidian cultural categories. In Bengal the cultural roots of exchange marriages seem much shallower. It is when patterns are tenuous that societies most need mechanisms to reduce the contradictions threatening such patterns. Hence, the notion of encapsulation has been our primary focus in the case of Bengal.⁵

Kashmiri Pandits and ranking types of marriages

Madan's work (1965, 1975) on the Brahman Pandits of rural Kashmir provides a third intermediate case. As their name indicates, the Pandits of Kashmir were renowned for their learning. The Pandits are in most respects orthodox Brahmans and hence strongly committed to a patrilineal ideology and the notion of *kanyadan*. Yet there is considerable flexibility with regard to how equal the status of the two families who enter into a marriage alliance must be. Madan reports:

The marriage of one's daughters into households of higher socio-economic standing is coveted as it is one of the ways in which a *chulah* [household, literally those who share the same hearth] may raise its own status. But there is general agreement that too much disparity between the . . . households is not desirable (1965: 107).

⁵ For an alternative attempt to contrast patterns in Bengal and the Dravidian south (more specifically, Tamil Nadu), see Fruzzetti, Ostor, and Barnett (1976).

Great disparity may result in a demand for an exorbitant dowry and in poor treatment of the girl. But note: 'The parents of a son are not so limited in their ambitions. The richer a daughter's parents and the higher their social status, the more her parents-in-law stand to gain by such an alliance' (ibid: 108). What is unambiguously clear is that in the village he studied, 45 per cent of the marriages were reciprocal, i.e., exchange marriages. In contrast, only 38 per cent of the marriages involved a dowry while 17 per cent involved payments to the girl-giving household. That is, 62 per cent of the marriages did not conform to the ideology of *kanyadan*. The way the Pandits apparently handle this contradiction is to tie the amount of honour one gains from a marriage alliance, not only to the status of one's affines, but also to how orthodox the alliance is. According to Madan, the less orthodox patterns seem to have emerged because of a shortage of women and not because of variations in norms or structural principles (1975: 230).

Dumont (1980: 114–16; 1986: 298) has noted that while primary marriages, secondary marriages, and concubinage may all be acceptable, each subsequent type brings significantly less prestige. There is thus considerable flexibility in terms of what is allowed, but nonetheless, little ambiguity about what is the ideal. An analogous process operates among the Pandits. Marriages conforming to the orthodox *kanyadan* model contribute most to the status of the parties involved, holding constant other factors. Hence, in estimating the benefits of a particular alliance, the Pandits must take into account not only the status, wealth and power of their prospective affines, but also the consequence of departing from the orthodox pattern. At least when Madan conducted his study most found that the costs of being unorthodox were less than the benefits, even though the ideal pattern continued to be genuinely affirmed.

This ranking of types of marriages is a third mechanism for handling the contradictions between the ideological pressure for asymmetrical alliances and the practical pressures for exchange marriages—which, in turn, place a check on the tendencies toward hypergamy.

Finally, some comments are required about the limits of the hypotheses suggested here. The concepts of structural and ideological encapsulation and the ranking of different types of marriages identify and label certain key exogenous variables. These labels (structural encapsulation, etc.) are intended to suggest how these exogenous variables condition and interact with the processes described earlier in our general theory, and hence, why the phenomena observed vary from the more abstract theoretical predictions. These labels do not, however, explain the presence or absence of these exogenous factors. Our theory does not explain everything of interest, but it can help to organise our information about many of the things which interest us, *and* is capable of taking into account the influence of factors not included within the theory proper.

'Matriarchal' institutions and marriage patterns

It is necessary to summarise the argument. In status groups the dominant pressures are toward status homogeneity, but there remain important recessive tendencies toward status heterogeneity. In Hindu marriage alliances the cultural definition of wife-givers as inferiors sets in motion the recessive processes toward status heterogeneity and hence away from isogamy. The even more specific Brahmanical ideology of *kanyadan* bars both hypogamy and exchange marriages as acceptable strategies for coping with the cost of being a wife-giver. The strengthened recessive processes are thus channelled into hypergamy. Hypergamy tends to become dominant unless (i) it is contained by structural encapsulation which reduces the inferiority of being a wife-giver to a limited context, or (ii) ideological encapsulation or the ranking of types of marriages make exchange marriages possible. Note that up to this point the inferiority of wife-givers and the significant presence of the ideology of *kanyadan* have been treated as constants. What has varied is the presence or absence of mechanisms to contain their effects. Now, however, we will take up some cases in which the strength of one or both of these factors seems significantly weaker.

This seems to be characteristic of groups that de-emphasise patriarchal institutions. Of course, no known societies are truly matriarchal in the sense that women are unambiguously dominant and men are subordinate. Rather, we will consider groups where descent and residence are either bilateral or tied to the female line and where the rights of women more closely approximate those of men.

Matrilocals of eastern Sri Lanka

In Eastern Sri Lanka, Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus are matrilineal and matrilocal (Yalman 1967; McGilvray 1982). Here we can mention only a few of the most important characteristics of the Tamil Hindus relevant to our particular theoretical concerns. The eight major Hindu castes can be grouped into three strata: (i) high castes—'Tamils', or 'good/high/big people', (ii) artisan and professional castes—goldsmiths, carpenters, blacksmiths, and (iii) service castes—washermen, barbers, drummers (McGilvray 1982). The most distinctive feature of the area is the system of matrilocals (ibid.: 44).

Marriages are isogamous (McGilvray 1982: 47). This is hardly surprising since like much of south India, exchange marriages are allowed and cross-cousin marriages are preferred. (In the matrilocal regions of Sri Lanka, Trautmann's phrase '... the exchange of a daughter for a daughter-in-law' can be transformed into '... the exchange of a son for a son-in-law': McGilvray, personal communication.) As in Bengal, much haggling occurs

over dowry. All of this suggests equality between affines not dissimilar to the patterns found in much of south India or in Bengal. But this equality seems to be more fundamental; even at the marriage ceremony much less emphasis is placed on the inferiority of wife-givers—though bridegrooms and their families are shown deference.

This more fundamental equality between affines is probably rooted in another striking feature of the region, the absence of any direct Brahmanical influence. Brahmans are virtually non-existent in the region. Hindu funeral rites are not traditionally Brahmanical—they use burial and have no *pindas*. *Gotra*-switching and transubstantiation of the bride are unknown and hence wives and husbands are polluted by deaths in their natal families. Finally, and most important for our concerns, no explicit ideology of *kanyadan* exists—people are unfamiliar with the word. As we would expect, the relationship between affines is not primarily that of worshipper and worshipped.

But dowries are a crucial part of marriage arrangements. If affines are relatively equal and notions of *kanyadan* are at best weak and of indirect influence, why does the bride's family pay a large dowry—a feature characteristic of Brahmanical asymmetrical marriage alliances? The answer lies in the interaction between matrilineal and matrilocal patterns, on the one hand, and the organisation of production, on the other. Two key features are relevant: (i) at the time of marriage men move to their wife's home, and (ii) land is transmitted through daughters, primarily as a dowry. Grooms come to work with and under their fathers-in-law and are the key source of agricultural labour for a household. While husbands eventually gain more influence in the household, they continue to be considered outsiders. Families expect to pay a large dowry in order to recruit a good son-in-law. Sons usually stay at home and work until their sisters have been married (and hence the son-in-law has been acquired) before they are free to marry.

While alliances are considered to involve a 'dowry', the nature of the exchange relationship is fundamentally different from the typical patrilineal situation. In the first place, the core of what is being transmitted is immovable property and especially land—comparable to coparcener property rights of sons rather than the movable property of the woman's *stridhan* (see Tambiah 1973). In the second place, the property in many respects constitutes what might be called a 'groom price' (McGilvray suggests the term 'groom bait' [1987]). While the status of the potential son-in-law is by no means irrelevant, a fundamental consideration—at least in agricultural villages—is the recruitment of labour. If there is a divorce the husband should return the dowry. Hence, it is debatable whether such payments should be considered simply as dowries in the usual sense of that word in South Asian ethnography. In the typical patrilineal situation the groom's household gains both a new member and wealth in the form of a

dowry. In the eastern Sri Lanka situation, the matrilineal household pays to recruit a new member. Usually the son-in-law is of equal status and may be of higher status. McGilvray notes, 'The historical significance of dowry is still a bit uncertain; the most detailed source, Brito's account, makes little reference to it . . .' (1982: 69). This raises two interrelated questions. The first is how to best gloss indigenous terms; it is at least debatable whether the pattern described here should be translated with the same term as the typical patrilineal pattern. But an even greater problem is knowing when to take indigenous terms at face value. Apparently Tamils here conceive their 'dowries' as being similar to the more typical patterns. Nonetheless, the analyst should not accept indigenous categories at face value. This can be as misleading as imposing foreign categories on indigenous ones.

One final theoretical point needs to be made. Unilineal descent, per se, does not seem to produce inequality between affines. Clearly these Tamils are strongly matrilineal and matrilocal, but the result is not the superiority of either set of affines. Of course, a rigorous test of the hypothesis would require that we find a strongly matrilineal group that does not have exchange marriages.

The Nayers of Kerala: The Nayers are important for our purposes because they appear to directly contradict our theoretical argument; wife-givers are not inferior in any usual sense, yet hypergamy is the norm for the upper strata and occurs on occasion among the lower strata. The discussion will be limited to the Nayers of central Kerala during the period from the 15th to the 19th century as reported by Gough (1952, 1959), Fuller (1976, 1986) and Moore (1985, 1986) and commented on by Dumont (1980, 1983). This group is the best documented and deviates most from the typical patrilineal, patrilocal pattern.

Since the Nayers are probably the most famous ethnographic group in South Asia, I will summarise only the most basic features of their social structure. They were a group of warrior and related service castes. Matrilineal and matrilocal households called *taravads* were linked in *enangar* relationships in which they provided each other with ritual services. Before or about the time of puberty each woman had a basically orthodox *tali* marriage with a groom from an *enangar* household. After approximately three days the bride and groom separated and may have had no subsequent relationship—except that at the death of this groom the appropriate mourning rituals were observed. After the *tali* marriage women were free to enter into multiple *sambandham* marriages which were easily initiated and terminated. These husbands were not members of the woman's household, but paid her conjugal visits at night.

What accounts for this peculiar pattern of marriage which has ritual and symbolic elements of orthodox Hinduism and is yet so deviant in fundamental respects? The Nayers were in most respects typical non-Brahman

upper caste Hindus steeped in both Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical traditions (Gough 1952: 84). Therefore, the Nayar marriage patterns cannot be explained as an aberration of some tribal enclave. According to Dumont, we must distinguish between the two types of marriage. He sees the *tali* marriage as ritualistically meeting orthodox Hindu pressures for a primary marriage in which the woman is a virgin and patrilineal symbols are used. By this means the Nayars stayed within the letter, if not the spirit, of the orthodox tradition. Moreover, *enangar* relationships sustained over multiple generations is the equivalent of cross-cousin marriage—the classic Dravidian pattern (Trautmann 1981: 212; Fuller 1976: 110–15). Hence, the *tali* marriage enables the Nayars to conform both to Brahmanical orthodoxy as practiced in the south, and to a version of the apparently even more deeply-rooted Dravidian pattern of kinship.

Sambandham marriages, on the other hand, seem to be rooted in two factors more specific to the area. The first and most obvious is matrilineal inheritance and matrilineal residence. The exact source and age of this is unknown (see Fuller 1976: 121–22 for speculations about this). But as Dumont notes,

It is as if the Nayar, recognizing in the primary marriage the 'paternal' value it has for most castes, had recourse to the secondary marriage to escape it . . . in other words the woman being the secondary subject in the primary marriage, can become the main subject in the secondary marriage (or union), and there only (1983: 131).

But perhaps equally important is the elective affinity these traditions have with the Nayars' military profession. During much of the year younger men were away serving in the army. The matrilineal and matrilineal structures combined with *sambandam* marriages were compatible with this. They reduced sexual deprivation and any tendency for a soldier's martial fervour to be dampened by concerns about his wife and children. The arrangements also avoided an authority vacuum when men were away on military service; authority over the *taravad* was exercised by an older brother retired from military service. Not until the Nayars lost most significant military functions did this marriage and family system begin to undergo significant changes. In sum, the ritualistic *tali* marriage meets the letter of the law with respect to the orthodox and patrilineal tradition while *sambandham* marriages are more compatible with both the group's occupation and what may be an older matrilineal tradition.

Moore (1985) points out that matrilineal and matrilineal institutions have been emphasised when *taravads* have been strongest economically and politically. I interpret this to mean that when some form of unilineal descent is traditional, it will receive increased emphasis when there are significant resources to be inherited. There is a corollary: the more unilineal

relationships are stressed the more spouses are outsiders, and hence, the more the marriage relationship is de-emphasised—the characteristics which made the (central Kerala) Nayars famous. These hypotheses do not explain the source of the maternal institutions, but they help explain variations in emphasis.

But how are we to reconcile these matrilineal institutions with the tendency toward hypergamy? For, I have argued that hypergamy is due primarily to the inferiority of wife-givers, usually linked to strong patriarchal traditions, and a relatively orthodox application of the *kanyadan* doctrine—and both are severely limited and encapsulated among the Nayars. Of course, only the highest caste groups had hypergamous *enangar* relationships and *tali* marriages, as well as most of the hypergamous *sambandham* marriages. Nonetheless, even this limited hypergamy would seem to contradict the basic argument. The resolution to the contradiction lies, I believe, in recognising multiple types of hypergamy.

Typical north Indian hypergamy is composed of a complex set of exchanges. The wife's family provides a woman to procreate the lineage, a partner for sexual activity, the labour a wife provides, the deference of affines, and usually financial gain in the form of a dowry. The husband's family offers an association with those of higher status. In addition to status, the husband's family also provides a sexual partner, subsistence for the wife, the social context for a respectable social role, and a means whereby the wife's father acquires significant spiritual merit.

The terms of exchange for the Nayars are in many respects quite different. Neither the *tali* nor the *sambandham* affines take responsibility for the wife's subsistence or for providing the social network of her day-to-day activity. Conversely, she is not critical to reproducing the line of either set of affines. These features, which are core aspects of patrilineal and patrilocal situations, are not present. So what are the terms of exchange? Here a careful distinction must be drawn between the *tali* marriage of the *enangar* relationship and the *sambandham* marriage. In the former, the main things exchanged are ritual services. Providing ritual services is usually degrading to one's purity and status; the lower the status of those served, the more this is the case. Hence, I would hypothesise that *enangar* relationships are typically reciprocal because equals would not provide ritual services if these were not returned—though this may or may not involve direct quid pro quo exchange. But a key means of upward mobility is to entice those of higher status to provide you with ritual services—usually by offering generous tangible rewards. Both Nambudiri Brahmans and deposed aristocratic lineages often demanded political and territorial rights in exchange for the status they confer by entering into *enangar* relations and *sambandham* marriages with their upstart rulers or the nouveaux riches (Trautmann 1981: 424).

Now let us turn to the exchange dynamics of *sambandham* marriages. As

in the matrilineal matrilocal groups in eastern Sri Lanka, it is more objectively accurate to talk about husband-givers and husband-receivers than wife-givers and wife-receivers. Among the Nayars, husbands are not even integrated into the household except in the most nominal ways; the husband is the outsider, not the wife. Moreover, he brings virtually nothing of any material significance with him. Not only do the wife and children have no inheritance rights, but he makes no significant contribution toward their support. In sum, no objective structure of economic interests makes the potential husband attractive to the wife's *taravad*.

What is required for this outsider with no material contribution to make to be 'let in'? He must procreate and legitimise the wife's household's children without lowering the household's status. From the household's point of view the only thing the *sambandham* husband has to offer besides reproductive capacity is a revalidation or improvement of the household's status. The husband's status must then be equal to or higher than the woman's. This revalidation of status may have been particularly important because of the inferior nature of this type of marriage from the orthodox point of view. Hence, the economically irrelevant outsider is admitted primarily because of status considerations. In the vast majority of cases this involved alliances between equals and the revalidation of established statuses. In some cases, however, the men were higher in status than the women (Fuller 1976: 109). I would speculate that especially attractive women were the ones most likely to enter into such alliances. This was probably one means the *taravad* used to improve its status. A Delhi University dissertation by Kala Unni reports that *taravads* kept a careful record of its women's husbands and lovers including the status of each (personal communication). Apparently, women were extremely concerned about the relative status of their *sambandham* husbands/lovers. When *taravads* were wealthy and interested in increasing their status they relied not only on the charms of their women to recruit higher status men for *sambandham* marriages, but, as we have seen, on their economic resources to recruit higher status *enangans* as well.

Other forms of hypergamy

For the Nayars, two separate sources of hypergamy and mobility existed. In *tali* marriages higher status *enangans* were recruited to carry out ritual activities. In *sambandham* marriages women took higher status lovers. In the first, the crucial exchange involved status for wealth and political benefits. In the second, the exchange was status for sexual privileges. Obviously, these two exchanges could become interrelated: one of the things higher status *enangar* could demand for their services was access to the women of the lower status group.

Elements of the more common versions of hypergamy were probably

present. The upper castes had undoubtedly been influenced by the basically orthodox Nambudiri Brahmans. Moreover, the most elite Nayars had taken the title of Kshatriya, indicating that at the very least they conformed to the orthodox tradition when it was convenient to do so. Nonetheless, this is not hypergamy in the usual sense. The inferiority of wife-givers and *kanyadan* ideology are not the primary dynamic here. Rather, the departure from isogamy and the emergence of hypergamy are produced by a different set of exogenous variables: (i) the desire of upwardly mobile households to upgrade the status of those who provided them ritual services, and (ii) the exchange of status for sexual services—made possible by the unusual marriage and household arrangements which have made the Nayars famous.

This is not the only example of hypergamous patterns emerging from other dynamics. Rao (1973), for example, reports on a caste of Telugu fishermen who have permanently ranked lineages with inferiors giving daughters to superiors. The preferred marriage is with the elder sister's daughter, which involves exchange marriages and in most cases leads to isogamy. Rao shows that the inequalities are maintained because the superior lineages are able to manipulate the kinship terminology to their advantage. He provides no information about why they are successful in this. The headman always comes from the superior lineage and my guess is political power enables the lineage to manipulate the terminology, producing an outcome similar to hypergamy but based on quite different dynamics. Rao says nothing about the ideology of *kanyadan*.

According to Dumont, in Kallar secondary marriages the husband is often of higher status than the wife. He concludes, however, this is not 'true hypergamy as it is found in North India' (1986: 299). But he continues with an even more suggestive comment: 'As things actually stand, one may be tempted to consider the Kallar formula as a combination of two ideal models: a Brahmanic model characterized by monogamy and isogamy, and a royal model based upon polygyny and hypergamy' (1986: 299). Shah also suggests that hypergamy emerges primarily from political power (1982: 14–15). Granted that groups with significant economic or political power have often been successful in securing sexual services and brides from lower strata; this certainly plays a role in Indian structures of hypergamy. Similarly, families with new wealth and power have often been successful in marrying their daughters to status superiors. I in no way want to deny the important role of economic and political power in producing hypergamous relationships. But what these factors cannot explain is the absence of hypogamous relationships, for material considerations alone would lead to both hypergamy and hypogamy. The absence of the latter is understandable only in terms of specific cultural factors. Thus, while there may be multiple forms of hypergamy in South Asia, the crucial factor in most Hindu hypergamy is the ideology of *kanyadan*.

Alliances in lower and middle castes

Most of the analysis has been devoted to explaining departures from what I have called the dominant tendencies of status groups. Hence, it is appropriate to conclude by focusing on cases where these tendencies prevail. Almost by definition, lower and middle castes are less influenced by Brahmanical ideology than upper castes. While the *kanyadan* ideology and the inferiority of wife-givers is common throughout most of South Asia, not surprisingly most of the lower caste groups are not strongly influenced by these ideas, and their influence on middle caste groups is at best uneven (see, for example, Dumont 1986). Undoubtedly the greater economic contribution of women's labour in these strata also plays a role, as a result of which marriages among these groups are usually isogamous. Perhaps more accurately, the same systematic tendencies toward hypergamy, common among more orthodox castes, are not present. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that Brahmanical type dowries are much less common among such castes and the use of brideprice, especially among lower caste groups, has been widely documented (Berreman 1972; Beals 1962; Kolenda 1978; Beck 1972; Parry 1979; Ishwaran 1968; Orenstein 1965; van der Veen 1973). Of course, prestation usually flows in both directions (see, for instance, Tambiah 1973; Vatuk 1975; Srinivas 1984; Dumont 1986; Kolenda 1987). Moreover, as we have noted earlier, brideprice may occur toward the bottom of a hypergamous system (see Shah 1982). Nonetheless, classical hypergamy is antithetical to a brideprice (van der Veen 1973). The lack of Brahmanical orthodoxy among these castes can also have a second effect: a relaxation of the rules of endogamy (e.g., Berreman 1972: 232). The result is likely to be more random deviations, even if the norm remains isogamy.

The theoretical interpretation of these patterns among middle and lower castes is quite straightforward. When neither *kanyadan* nor the inferiority of wife-givers are significant, the outcome—both normative and empirical—conforms to the dominant tendencies toward status homogeneity and hence, isogamy.

Conclusions

Many important studies have not been discussed or only alluded to (e.g., Mayer 1960; Pocock 1972; Lewis 1958; Srinivas 1942, 1952, 1976; Khare 1970; van der Veen 1973; Beck 1972; Shah 1982). I have focused on the material that I thought best illustrated the range of empirical variation within South Asia. The purpose of this paper has been to suggest a set of interrelated explanations of status relations in Hindu marriage alliances derived from a general theory of status relationships. The theory purports to explain the strong tendencies toward status homogeneity, and hence isogamy and endogamy, and the counter pressures toward heterogeneity,

and hence hypergamy or hypogamy. In addition to the propositions of the general theory, there have been three important supplementary parts of the analysis. The first was the identification of the particular cultural and historical factors that in some situations tip the balance toward status heterogeneity and more specifically, hypergamy; these were the inferiority of wife-givers and the ideology of *kanyadan*. The second was the identification of social and cultural mechanisms used to contain and limit these pressures toward heterogeneity; these were exchange marriages, structural encapsulation, ideological encapsulation, and the ranking of different types of marriage alliances. The third was the consideration of cases in which either or both the inferiority of wife-givers and the *kanyadan* ideology were significantly weaker; this was characteristic of groups with matrilineal and matrilocal kinship structures. This latter analysis helped to identify alternative sources and forms of hypergamy.

The claim is that a general theory of status relations, supplemented by particular cultural and historical facts, can help us to systematically organise the data concerning status relations in marriage alliances. A variety of seemingly disparate patterns are seen as variations on a few common themes. This is not a claim that explanations in the social sciences are just like those in the physical sciences. Rather, it is to suggest how we might develop social theory that (a) has significant utility across cultures, (b) takes seriously the categories of particular cultures, and (c) takes into account the sub-cultures present in any complex society. Neither general theory, cultural analysis, nor local ethnography will suffice; all three are necessary for adequate sociological analysis.

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