

Abstract

A Tale of Two Temples: An Exploration of Caste addresses the notion of caste in South Africa, specifically among the Gujarati community in Cape Town. Caste within this community has been discussed with regard to the Indian diaspora in general and Natal in South Africa, but there is not a vast amount of literature regarding this phenomenon among Indians in Cape Town. Through the description of a dispute between a caste-based organisation of *mochis* –those of a leatherworking and cobbler caste- and a non-caste-based organisation predominantly of agricultural *patidars* over control of the space of worship, the recreation, dynamics and interplay of the caste system are discussed. Louis Dumont's influential synoptic theory of caste serves as the frame of reference when addressing the system. Dumont focuses on the idea of purity and hierarchy. The system includes four *varnas* or classes, which are positioned along a pure-to-impure hierarchy. In Cape Town, this hierarchy is not entirely recreated; all four *varnas* are not represented. Instead *patidars* or agriculturalists have claimed to be of high status, which is normally attributed to a Brahmin or clerical caste, and have asserted themselves as the reference group for other castes. They perceive the *mochis* to be of low caste. The *mochis* have not accepted this and through the influence of the Arya Samaj, they have recreated a new historical narrative classifying themselves as high caste. This new narrative and the empowerment of the *mochis* created a conflict that escalated as a result of apartheid's Group Areas Act, which legally enforced racially segregated residential areas. This conflict provides insight into the recreation of caste in Cape Town.

Keywords and Terms

Cape Town, Caste, Diaspora, Dumont, Durban, Gujarati, Indenture, Indian Diaspora, Migration, South Africa