

## **The East-West Encounter: Cooperation and communication in an Indo-Dutch research team\***

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Academic colonialism has often been discussed in the pages of the *Sociologische Gids*.<sup>1</sup> It is an important aspect of social research in the third world that is difficult to avoid. Sociologists from the affluent west too easily come to play the role of the 'ugly American' not only because of their wealth, but because of their western ways as well.

In this paper I will examine aspects of the cooperation between Indian and Dutch sociologists in a research project in South Gujarat. Since the scientific aims of the research and its organization have been discussed in other publications<sup>2</sup> I will concentrate primarily on the human side of counterpart-cooperation. As sociologists, the Indian and Dutch team members were interested in processes of social change in a developing town. In the team itself however, we also became participant observers of cultural contact; for personal idiosyncratic differences notwithstanding, both Indian and Dutch scholars were, after all representatives of their respective socio-cultural milieux. Our experiences show the great extent to which culturally-based disparities influence the human relationships of the team members and thus the work of the team as a whole. Communication and lack thereof will be main issues discussed in this paper. Not that the team wasn't successful: this paper and the soon-to-be-published results of our research should prove the contrary. It is sensible, however, to call attention to certain incidents, because as partnership in combined research teams becomes more and more common, so too will discord(s) rooted in culturally-based differences. Too often these 'minor' disturbances are relegated to the background or not even consciously admitted. But they can seriously hamper cooperation, and therefore it is necessary to take them into account.

In general, the Dutch task-orientation and corresponding preference for retreat as a mechanism for controlling human relationships conflicted with the Indian preference for explicitly diffuse and mutually obligating relationships in which reference to status is the major control mechanism.

The cases presented here were discussed intensively with one of the Indian team members, Dr. S. Devadas Pillai; not, as it happened when he and I worked together in Bulsar, but more than a year later when he visited Holland as research fellow at Amsterdam University. It seems that we needed time to cool down our involvement in order to analyse what happened with greater sociological detachment. After, all, even sociologists

\* This paper is a result of in-depth discussions with my colleague Dr. S. Devadas Pillai. All the Dutch members of the first team mentioned in this paper and Mr. Lambat (presently engaged in study and research in Holland) commented on the first draft. The interpretation is of course my own, but all colleagues agreed with the general line of argument. I am further indebted to Lo Brunt and Jojada Verrips for stimulating criticisms.

find it difficult to analyze their own social behaviour.

Though the events discussed involved fewer than ten sociologists working together, I believe them to be representative of the type of occurrences apt to take place when 'east meets west'. In recounting them I carry no illusion that such disturbances can be prevented; I feel certain, however, that knowing about this problem will be of help to people working under similar circumstances.

### **The team and the research**

In order to set the scene, it will be necessary to give some information about the team, the background of its members and the way they were accommodated during the research period (august 1970 to july 1971).<sup>3</sup> In addition to the sociologists, several Indian interpreters, a typist and a driver were engaged in the project.

All expenses for the project were absorbed by WOTRO, the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research. The coordinator of the team was Dr. E. W. Hommes. Like Dr. Baks and myself, he had an earlier, one-year fieldwork experience in villages of the South Gujarat region. We knew each other quite well and, with Dr. J. C. Breman (who took part in the team during the second year of its existence), we decided to apply for a WOTRO grant to study Bulsar, a regional town. We broadly defined the general research theme — aspects of modernization in a medium-size town — over a period of two years before commencing actual fieldwork. The other team members, Indian as well as Dutch, had the opportunity to choose their own subject within the general framework, but the overall thrust of the research was confined within limits set by the 'senior' Dutch. I use the term 'senior' because in India it is customary to make a sharp distinction between the senior and junior members of a team. In India the junior team members are explicitly regarded as assistants to the seniors.

Hommes and I lived with our families in adjoining flats in a comparatively posh, newly-built housing project. Baks lived in a separate flat on the same street. Drs. H. C. Streefkerk and his wife, a psychologist, had just finished their studies in Amsterdam, and this was their first fieldwork experience. They arrived four months later and came to live in a flat adjacent to the housing project where Baks, Hommes and I lived.

Four flats thus formed the base from which the Dutch entered the field. We undoubtedly formed a foreign element in the street not least because we conspicuously showed the western need for privacy. It was a high-caste quarter, and joint living was still a cherished ideal among the Indian residents. Nuclear families without a lineal or affinal relative living in the same house were very few.

Moreover, rent for four separate flats was expensive, and that again is remarkable in India, where scarcity is still pervasive. In one sense the Dutch lived jointly: we shared a common kitchen as well as the services of a cook and his helpers. We dined together but because we were not strictly vegetarian, it was not easy for the Indian team members to join.

Let me introduce the Indian team members. Dr. S. Devades Pillai took his Ph.D. from Bombay University and had several senior fieldwork experiences in Gujarat and the Bombay region. He lived in a lodging house quite near the housing project where the Dutch resided. His wife and children remained in Bombay, where he went on week ends. Being a South Indian he was to a certain extent a stranger in town as well. Since he had worked in the region before, however, he had several friends there.

Mr. G. D. Thakore (M.A. Baroda University) had earlier junior fieldwork experience in Gujarat. He comes from Central Gujarat and for most of the research period he lived with wife and children at the outskirts of town, a fair distance from the Dutch team members. Mr. I. A. Lambat (M.A. Bombay University) had no previous fieldwork experience. He is from the region and lived with his family in a nearby village (one and a half hours away by bus and train, but considerably longer during monsoon). Miss Nivedita Trivedi (M.A. Bombay University) had no previous fieldwork experience, either. Her family originates from North Gujarat, but she herself had lived all her life in Bombay. She rented a room in the house of an Indian doctor's family, located in the same street as the Dutch team members. She knew almost no one in the town and, by Indian standards, was considered to be alone. She was engaged, and her marriage was to take place after a one-year term with the team, but many people in the (small) town thought it remarkable that she took part in the research.

Because of the established close personal contacts between the Dutch team members, as well as the way we were housed, there was a strong in-group feeling among us.

The Indian team members, on the other hand, did not know each other before they joined the team. Mr. Lambat and Mr. Thakore could not maintain very close contact because of spatial distance between their respective houses. The same held true for their relation vis-à-vis the Dutch group.

Dr. Pillai and Miss Trivedi, the only Indian team members living without family, could not keep too close contact because of their respective social statuses (senior versus junior; male versus female). They worked with the Dutch, so ostentatiously present in the housing project. The Indian neighbours clearly acted as a 'public' to everything the Dutch and the Indian team members did.

Moreover, since Dr. Pillai and Miss Trivedi lived so near the Dutch, it was

likely that a closer contact would evolve. From the beginning, Miss Trivedi had good and close contact with the Dutch wives, while she worked together with Hommes.

Relations between Dr. Pillai and the Dutch, however, were somewhat reserved at the beginning for reasons to be explained later.

Apart from Hommes and Miss Trivedi, who worked closely on their joint study of graduates at the beginning of the year, none of the Dutch or the Indians worked exactly on the same subject. Professionally, their contact was restricted to the weekly joint discussions on the project and incidental contacts.

I refer to the Indian and the Dutch groups as if they were closed units. In practice, of course, this was not so. There were differences in position between juniors and seniors which, especially for the three Indian juniors, had consequences for the topics to be discussed in this paper. In addition to these structural variations there were, of course, marked differences in personal behavior and temperament.

Generally speaking, however, there were common traits that distinguished both the Indians and the Dutch as representatives of their respective cultural backgrounds.

In this paper, I will concentrate mainly on differences in the evaluation of personal relationships, since they accounted for most communication gaps that occasionally arose between members of the respective groups.

There is no need to mention here the differences in the structural settings of Indian and Dutch society. Suffice it to specify the relevant ways to interpret and appreciate human relationships that reflect these structural differences.

### **The Indian and the Dutch view of human relationships**

In Indian society, great importance is given to what have been called primordial attachments:<sup>4</sup> that one belongs to a group is the first determinant of individual behavior, and that most actions of an individual are measured as well as determined by his/her (generally ascribed) status in a group usually a kingroup but, in India, certainly also one's community (caste).<sup>5</sup> Reciprocity, a strong sense of mutual obligation and status are key concepts for the maintenance of such primordial relationships. There is a strong appreciation that one depends on and must preserve relations with others, and this realization makes people keenly aware that their actions influence others and vice versa. This leads to an easy acceptance of the idea that one can 'use' a relationship for personal 'gain'. One can put another under obligation and by doing so, establish a claim on him. The 'gain' is limited, however, by the importance of reciprocity and *mutual obligation*. Either

partner, after all, may claim his share at one time or another. Actions will therefore be constrained by the partners possible counterclaims.

The extent to which partners can exert counterclaims depends greatly on their relative status positions, though willingness to exert a counterclaim hinges of course on the individual psychological characteristics of parties to the transaction. An example may illustrate the strong awareness of notions of reciprocity and obligation. Indians have hardly adequate expressions of gratitude expressed for small gifts or favours granted. To them it is self-evident that by accepting a gift or favour one is obliged to return it one time or another. It is impossible to evade future repayment by saying thanks in a dozen different ways.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of status in the effectuation of claims and counterclaims will be obvious. In the Indian setting, status almost always has hierarchical implications. The partner considered to be 'higher' can more easily take the initiative and can also present claims more openly.

In a socially sanctioned relationship the one with the 'lower' social status certainly can put the other under obligation and exert counterclaims. However, the counterclaim must be disguised and has best changes for fulfillment if it is presented as an appeal on the power and influence of the 'high' partner in the relationship.

An example may illustrate this as well. One of my Indian colleagues said: 'I always could drop in at my Professor's room in the University. At any time of the day I could come and ask questions, only I had to make sure to address him as 'Professor-Sahib'. Should I omit the honourific supplement I could be sure that he would not notice my presence in the room'.<sup>7</sup>

This example makes also clear how explicitly differences in status must be demonstrated and acknowledged in public. One has the right to 'manoeuvre' or 'manipulate' partners; but only within the limits of a socially sanctioned relationship can one expect a partner to meet his/her obligations. This means that the relative status positions must be clearly defined.<sup>8</sup> It also implies that the demonstration of the existence of a socially sanctioned relationship is more important than the content of the relationship at any one given moment.

Here, again, an example may be illustrative. The Indians say 'We first marry and then love, while westerners first love and then marry'. This dictum vividly summarizes the differences in appreciation. For Indians, the social formalization of the relationship is essential, while for westerners its content (at least its supposed content) is what counts. For Indians the social formalization of the relationship (being husband and wife, professor and student, or senior and junior team member) is sufficient condition for the growth of that relationship into one in which reciprocity, mutual obliga-



tions and status are neatly intertwined and balanced. For it to become a fullfledged relationship, however, some essential characteristics should be present.

The relationship should be diffuse. This means that no clear differentiation of the several aspects that comprise the relationship should ever be expressed or openly specified. It does not mean that people are not aware of the different aspects that contribute to the relationship as a whole (affection, intellectual fascination and economic interest, to name a few). It means only that the relationship should never be coined in too restricted terms. Diffuseness is closely related to manystrandedness of relationship. This means that a relationship is built up through the interweaving of many ties. The interlocking of all sorts of activities and interests makes the relationship manystranded (Wolf 1966; 81) and contributes to diffuseness by making it very difficult to specify the reason a relationship is maintained. Diffuseness also makes it easier to postpone counterclaims. Like manystrandedness it ensures that both partners will *always* have a claim on each other. An even and explicitly stated balance between the claims and counterclaims would rob the relationship of its 'usefulness'. 'Every act or favour therefore simultaneously repays a past debt, incurs a future obligation and reaffirms the continuing validity of the contract binding the partners' (Forter 1961; 1187).

Understandably the relationship should be enduring, if not everlasting. Only thus can one ultimately expect a repayment of what has been invested in the relation as such.

These aspects are as essential to the Indian interpretation of relationships as a perhaps unconscious, but fully accepted notion that the relationship may be 'used'. In this sense relationships are *goal-oriented*: it is taken for granted that they should offer each partner a chance to exert claims on the other.

I cannot go into further detail here, but it will be clear that this interpretation of human relationships is closely related to a type of society in which face-to-face relationships and strong group membership and group differences still predominate (see van der Veen, 1974 for a detailed discussion). For the Dutch, interpersonal relationships have a different meaning. Ascriptive status and group identification are much less conspicuous in western society and singlestranded relationships are of overwhelming importance (see Wolf 1966; 82-84). A singlestranded relationship is characterized by the predominance of a pertinent single interest that does not commit the participants to involvement with one another in many other life situations. The predominance of a money economy, specialization and an 'individualistic' and capitalistic ideology tends to enhance the singlestrandedness of

relationships. Consequently, in western society a conscious differentiation is made between 'common' singlestranded, and (ideal) manystranded and 'personal' relationships. The latter must be intimate and therefore be manystranded. Ideally they should be devoid of any incentive for personal 'gain'.<sup>9</sup> Thus, on the one hand, singlestranded task-oriented relationships are accepted. It is, after all, clear that the type of service one can get from a greengrocer, dentist or insurance agent may be the only reason for a relationship with him.

On the other hand, manystranded and intimate bonds are idealized, much sought-after and restricted in number. Because of the high, expectations that attend manystranded relationships in the west, it is difficult to realize them. It is hardly possible to maintain a manystranded and intimate relation without it being 'goal-oriented' in the sense mentioned above.

In the Indian interpretation a socially sanctioned relationship always implies manystrandedness, while in the western perspective 'personal' and 'intimate' relationships are distinguished from the total range of singlestranded ties.

Here again the marriage relationship can serve as an example. The romantic love syndrome so typical of the west exemplifies the need for an ideal manystranded relationship that should encompass reciprocity and mutuality and be based on love not gain (see also note 9).

The dual interpretation of human relationships in the west promotes an outspoken *task-orientedness* in both types of relationships, however. For the singlestranded relationships this is clear enough. In manystranded relationships, however, this task-orientedness also holds true. The very fact that a relationship is allowed to develop into manystrandedness signifies its task-orientation. The partners have (ideally) singled each other out, and the intimate content of their relationship is the reason for it. The task-orientation also promotes a tendency towards specificness as opposed to the Indian diffuseness. The legitimation of relationships is not derived from the social sanction of such human bonds but from its content.

Consequently some relationships are considered to be excessively manystranded, intimate and demanding in nature, while the majority of others are deliberately restricted.

*Retreat* is an essential aspect of the western interpretation of human relationships. One may retreat before a connection evolves into manystrandedness.<sup>10</sup> It is also possible to retreat later, when, for instance, expectations about the content of a relationship do not materialize.

The accepted possibility of retreat differs basically from the Indian situation in which retreat from a socially sanctioned relationship (ascribed or achieved) is discouraged.

In order to understand this, it is necessary to point out the importance of

status as a control mechanism in human relationships.

Indian society is hierarchical and status differentiation is constantly stressed. The hierarchical principle works, however, within a context of preference for diffuse, particularistic, manystranded relationships. Hierarchy is of crucial importance because it creates an opportunity to control formalized manystranded relationships. By reference to what may be called the 'hierarchical map', it is possible to shoulder the claims of a partner and keep a relationship in check. When a relationship is socially accepted, claims and counterclaims are likewise accepted. Only by accentuating difference in status is it possible to control (at least to a certain extent) the claims of a partner.<sup>11</sup>

For the Dutch the possibility for control lies in retreat; for the Indians reference to the hierarchical map is essential for 'handling' the relationship or curbing excessive demands. Stress on equality is a logical result of the western interpretation of human interactions. Since one can retreat, status difference is no longer needed as a mechanism to control human relationships. On the other hand equality is a logical prerequisite for the establishment of self-determined 'personal' attachments. Only when one is not restrained by the outward signs of difference in social status is it possible to create the sort of relationships based exclusively on the mutual desire of the partners to cooperate (or retreat), and not on the necessity to 'use' one another.<sup>12</sup>

Thus egalitarian principles are inherent in the western perception of human relationships while hierarchy is essential to the Indian view (see in this respect Dumont, 1966, 1970).

Within the team, these differences in perception had notable consequences. For the Dutch working on a team meant a task-oriented relationship with the other team members, Indians as well as Dutch, with the possibility that it might grow into a manystranded and 'personal' relationship.

For the Indians, being coworkers on a team meant a formal and socially sanctioned relationship (ideally manystranded) in which the hierarchical map was essential.

Here it is necessary to remind the reader that the senior Dutch team members were certainly task-oriented. They had chosen to do the research together; they had earlier fieldwork experiences and knew that this type of research always creates manystranded relationships. Since we had known each other for a long time, we were quite willing to 'take that risk'. This also held true to a certain extent for Streefkerk and his wife. For that reason the Dutch group was in every respect an in-group, and the Indian team members could definitely perceive a difference between our initially egalitarian, singlestranded and task-oriented behaviour towards them and



the close intra-Dutch relations. The Indians felt (at least at the beginning) that their relationships with the Dutch lacked the expected demonstration of manystrandedness all the more because the egalitarian approach of the Dutch made them expect much.<sup>13</sup>

I will now discuss some salient cases to illustrate my points.

### **Egalitarian procedure versus a hierarchical perception of human relationships**

The project was initiated by Dutchmen, and for that reason the total set-up was based on western egalitarian ideals. Though there was one coordinator, all decisions about the research should have been (at least in theory) taken with mutual consent and after discussion among all the sociologists working on the team. One morning a week we all came together and discussed the programme for that week as well as contributions of individual researchers.<sup>14</sup> The Dutch put great stress on the idea that no member of the team should have precedence on the basis of his formal position, academic status, etc.<sup>15</sup> Such non-hierarchical perception of teamwork was totally out of focus for the Indian members. This was due to their training, general life circumstances and way of interpreting human relationships; but it was certainly also due to the organization of the team and the life circumstances of the Dutch team members as compared with those of the Indians. I mention these structural barriers with little comment not because they are irrelevant, but because they so obviously barred a truly egalitarian situation.

The project was financed by a Dutch organization, and so the Indians felt themselves to be employed by the Dutch. Dr. Hommes the coordinator, was chosen by the Dutch (seniors) because he can convincingly act in an absolutely nonparticularistic, task-oriented and somewhat 'impersonal' way. According to Dutch views, these qualities made him most suitable to act as coordinator but to the Indian team members these qualities had strong hierarchical implications.

From the beginning these organizational aspects made it impossible for the Indians to accept the ideal egalitarian pattern of behavior the more so because in actual position there was a marked difference between all the Indian team members and even the junior Dutch. The salaries of the Dutch were set according to the Dutch scales of income, and those of the Indian team members were based on the much lower Indian standards.<sup>16</sup> The (by Indian criteria) luxurious housing arrangements of the Dutch were only one aspect of a gleaming difference in standard of living.

There was also a formal difference in the academic status of the three senior Dutch and the three Indian M.A.'s. In all respects therefore equality did not really exist.

Egalitarian ideals marked the Dutch behaviour however as well as their way of tackling problems.

Thus the Dutch addressed each other by their Christian names. As is nowadays customary in Holland, the juniors also addressed the seniors by their first names, without adding any reference to their academic title.

Here a minor, but nevertheless illuminating, difference between the Indian and the Dutch team members presented itself from the beginning. Though the Dutch introduced themselves with their Christian names, none of the Indians ever used these. Rather they added the somewhat honourific supplement '*bhai*' to the Christian name, whereas for the senior Dutch they generally used their academic title as a term of address. The senior Indian team member, Dr. Pillai, meticulously stuck to this procedure throughout the year, despite the fact that (in an Indian as well as a Dutch sense) a relationship with the Dutchmen evolved that was definitely manystranded and 'personal'. From an Indian point of view, however, the hierarchical map is the only safety valve in a human relationship. For that reason they could never refrain from expressing hierarchical difference. After all from the beginning they felt themselves to be employees of the Dutch. In the Indian setting employment *does not at all* exclude manystranded relationship; but the hierarchical position of the partners is decisive for its content. Being in the 'inferior' position it was only normal for the Indians to keep expressing their adherence to the rules in order to give the relationship a chance to develop into a really manystranded one.

This example shows something of the differences in appreciation. It had no great importance for the essential colour of the Indo-Dutch connections, however, because it was seen as a formality.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the Dutch neglect of the hierarchical map had a much greater impact, both on the relationships between the Indian team members themselves and on the relationships between them and the other Indians engaged in the project (the driver and the interpreters).

The only senior among the Indians was not acknowledged as such by the Dutch. He was treated exactly like the others. This made it difficult for him to refer to the hierarchical map all the more because the 'easy and democratic' behaviour of the Dutch definitely appealed to the Indian team members. Since he could not fall back on the hierarchical safety valve in the Indian way, his only alternative was retreat: exactly the way westerners generally manage to keep a relationship under control. In the initial stages of research, this certainly affected cooperation among the Indian team members and, for that reason, the team as a whole. For the Indian team members, a senior or junior position had marked consequences for their reactions to Dutch initiatives. For the junior Indian team members, neglect

of the hierarchical map had advantages they certainly appreciated. Mr. Lambat and Mr. Thakore, for instance, contributed papers to conferences held in Gujarat. In an Indian team, it is unlikely that a junior will contribute papers under his own name. And, generally, he will not be the one visiting the conference even if he contributed all the data for a paper read there.

For all Indian team members, the Dutch neglect of hierarchy posed a problem when they had to deal with the other Indians in the project. The Indian sociologists felt that their position was not made clear, and the Indian-co-workers referred only to the evident aspect of hierarchy: the Dutch as employers. Therefore, when the Indian sociologists wanted them to do something, the driver and the interpreters were likely to give precedence to work assigned them by the Dutch team members.<sup>19</sup>

This strengthened the Indian sociologist's conviction that they were in the 'inferior' position and sometimes also led to disturbances in their work.

*A car for common use* — The car incident more or less fits the same pattern. A car with driver was available for all the members of the team.<sup>20</sup> During the weekly sessions every team member could specify when and how long he wanted to use the car. From the Dutch point of view, everyone could at that moment 'fight for his right'. To the Indians, however, this was impossible. They referred to the hierarchical map and simply could not ask for the car, because the employers (of the driver as well as themselves) should have precedence. For the juniors this was only normal; but for Dr. Pillai a difficulty arose. He could claim the car but his position was slightly 'inferior'. Only after one of the Dutch specially asked him to come along for a tour of one of the research villages and urged him to use the car for his own research as well, was the right to use the car made sufficiently clear.

Before the arrival of the Dutch juniors, Drs. Streefkerk and his wife, use of the car for research purposes was not even contemplated by the Indian juniors. When the Dutch juniors put forward their claims on use of the car quite openly, it struck the Indian juniors that they could do so as well.

Demonstrative expression of the 'favours' one wants another to enjoy is a prominent aspect of social behaviour in India.

Every Westerner treated as a guest will have ample opportunity to verify this. Such demonstrative and symbolic accentuation of difference in position is essential for it marks the respective positions on the hierarchical map and thus creates opportunities to fall back upon status in case the relationship slips out of control.

So much for the difference in appreciation of hierarchy. I will now recount

a few misunderstandings that arose as a result of differences in appreciation of manystrandedness and task orientation.

### **Manystranded but hierarchical versus task-oriented relationships and retreat**

In this respect the differences of appreciation of relationships were most pressing; it was also in this respect that the Indian team members became disappointed with the real value of the democratic and egalitarian principles of the Dutch.

The nonhierarchical behavior created a certain amount of uncertainty among the Indian team members, but it also aroused expectations about optimal manystranded relationships in an Indian sense.

The task-orientedness and the specificity (lack of diffuseness) of the Dutch behavior was deceiving not only for the Indian sociologists but also for the interpreters.

For the Dutch it was absolutely normal, for instance, to conclude a day's work with an interpreter by making an appointment for the next day and to offer a most cordial, 'Bye, see you tomorrow'. Similarly it was quite normal to fix a specific hour with one of the Indian colleagues who wanted to discuss something in relation to the research.

To the Indians, such task-orientedness deprived the relation of an essential part. To demonstrate that (or to test if) a relationship is really approved of, for Indians it is necessary to make it as manystranded as possible. This implies diffuseness and a deliberate interweaving of many ties. Not only should cooperation in a shared enterprise have part in it, but also 'just sitting and chatting together'. A strong sense of mutual obligation and the feeling that one has a right to the other finds expression in an intentional accentuation of diffuseness. Therefore, to the Indians it was significant that they were 'not allowed' to come at any decent hour. Fixing the time for an appointment is to rob the meeting of its manystranded demonstration-value. One is asked to come and finish a special job. That one has claims on the other as such is thus denied.

It will be clear that this type of occurrence was not uncommon and sometimes caused deep-felt disappointments. On the whole, however, it belongs to the broad category of actions commented upon by Indians when they talk about western ways and vice versa, because the difficulty of making fixed appointments is an ever-recurring nuisance to westerners working in India. The last two cases I will discuss are in a sense more revealing, because in both cases neither the Dutch nor the Indians were fully aware of essential differences in appreciation.

*The Mount Wison trip* — A day-long outing by the Dutch is illuminating

in this respect. At Christmastime 1970, when the Dutch seniors and their families had been in India about four months, we planned a little trip to a nearby mountain. Only Hommes's and my own families took part because Baks was in Bombay at that time and the Streefkerks had not yet arrived.

For us the trip was a sort of holiday and family-occasion that had nothing to do with research or the team. One of the Indian interpreters, a young boy who stayed regularly at our house, was invited to come along. He lived near the housing project and circumstances at his home made it such that he liked to go out. In accord with the Indian traditions he made his relationship with the Dutch as manystranded as possible and, consequently, he was around our house practically the whole day. He was almost part of the family and, being rather tiny a man, he could be easily accommodated in the car. Besides, he knew both the road and the language.

It was the first trip we made since our arrival, and we certainly enjoyed the opportunity to go out together on a sort of 'private tour' after the many social obligations we had encountered in recent months. So there was no doubt that for the Dutch the 'Mount Wilson Trip' was a form of retreat. Though this was definitely not the main motive.

The Indian sociologists, however, interpreted the trip in exactly that way. To them it was a demonstration of great distance in the hierarchical map.

Again, it was the first real trip the Dutch had taken, and circumstances were such that most of the Indian team members could have joined.

The Indians therefore should have used the trip to demonstrate that the socially sanctioned relation between co-workers had grown into truly many-stranded relationships for all team members. Sadly, an occasion had been missed to show this to the public (the Indian neighbours).

The Dutch failed to include the Indians whom they otherwise treated as equals. To the Indians this was all the more striking because one of the interpreters had been invited. With reference to the hierarchical map, this was absurd. It could be explained easily with reference to the employers role of the Dutch: they had taken the young man along as hired help.

The feeling of disappointment was so great among the Indians that they even planned to make a tour on their own. But the Dutch certainly would not have felt it to be a demonstration as such. To them it would have been quite normal that the Indians, who by that time knew each other well, should like to take a trip together. According to their appreciation of the content of their relationships, the Dutch had good contact with the Indians. For them, there was no need for a public demonstration of closeness. For the Indians, such an acknowledgement would have been extremely important. This is why they did not organize their 'own' tour. To the Indian public, such an open demonstration of separation would confirm their unuttered



suspicion that the relations between the Indians and the Dutch were not really 'good'.

This example shows how differently the content of relationships can be evaluated. Because neither the Indians nor the Dutch were aware at that moment of a difference in appreciation, it could have led to a significant communication gap.

The next case is equally important as an example of how sincere involvement can mutually be misunderstood.

*The Devabhai case* — During an introductory tour of the region, Hommes was introduced to Manibhai, an influential man in the district. Devabhai did much to make the research possible and, in accord with Indian traditions he regularly invited the Dutch and their families to his house. Because of personal sympathy, this relationship evolved into a manystranded relationship from both sides.

But contact with Devabhai was related to a project in which the Indians also took part, and they perceived this relationship as so crucial to the team that it should be shared. At least the senior Indian team member should be included in the acquaintance. Because of their conscious reference to the hierarchical map, it was extremely important for the Indians to establish a relation with this leading man. After all, his name could be used as an introduction anywhere. Precisely because this aspect is so wholeheartedly accepted, it is a sign of real trust to let others 'profit' from the social relationships you yourself have formed. The whole system of brokerage, patronage and nepotism ('laghvagh' as it is called in Gujarat) is based on that very principle.<sup>21</sup> The effectiveness of these mechanisms is proof of the way human relationships are interpreted. It is good and beyond reproach to reach one's own goals via people. Only by means of established and socially acknowledged liens others are attainable. Ascribed status and official introduction to the right people therefore have high value.

These considerations apply equally, of course, to interrelationships of westerners, though they consciously distinguish between manipulative (and for that reason singlestranded) relationships and the 'ideal', nonexploitative, manystranded relationships.

To westerners it is not self-evident that every social relationship implies manipulation. On the contrary, it is morally disapproved of in a 'personal' relationship. For the same reason, the idea of sharing relationships is equally alien to western ideals, thought not to western practice.<sup>22</sup>

To Devabhai as well as Dr. Pillai, who contacted him in relation to his research nearly a year after the project had begun, it was awkward to know that Dr. Pillai worked on the same team as the Dutch (for whom Devabhai

had done so much). The Dutch, after all, had never taken the initiative to introduce the Indian team members to the super-patron of the project. The junior Indian team members did not feel this to be obvious neglect. It is an accepted part of the hierarchical intricacies that the 'superior' may or may not let his dependents share in the relationships he has formed. With respect to Dr. Pillai this was not true, for the Dutch constantly stressed equality, and for Indians this implies that you let others profit from the relations you enjoy.

A chance was therefore missed to show that the Indians were really co-workers and not only employees.

As in the Mount Wilson case, the contradiction between verbal and actual expression of partnership was, from an Indian point of view, aggravated because one of the Indian juniors had been introduced to Devabhai and his family.

Devabhai considered Miss Trivedi, an unmarried girl, as being Dr. Hommes' responsibility. Hence it was a matter of course that he ask Miss Trivedi to accompany the Dutch when they visited his house.

It was not Devabhai's duty to invite all the other Indian team members, and he certainly would not have interest in doing so. The Dutch, however, should have let the Indians profit from their good contact. Again the Dutch never felt they had failed to do the right thing at the time.

Since westerners routinely single out specific relationships in order to develop them into manystrandedness and intimacy, it would never occur to them that this could be seen as a kind of retreat. Even less could they see that the Indians would regard it as a deliberate move to reserve for the Dutch something to which the Indian team members should also have right of access. On the contrary, the very nature of the relationship with Devabhai made it difficult for the Dutch to 'share' it. To them, transforming their friendly relationship with the influential big man of the region into a singlestranded and task-oriented connection with a valuable patron would have diminished its value. They therefore refrained *subconsciously* from introducing the Indian team members to Devabhai. After all, they might 'only use' him as a valuable patron.

This difference in appreciation goes to the heart of what is considered good and moral by Indians and Dutch. For both it is extremely difficult to change patterns of behaviour based on internalized values. People tend to react spontaneously on the basis of blueprints for acceptable action that are rooted in the socio-economic structure of their society.

This paper is an effort to smooth the path toward better communication between east and west. Even apart from joint research-projects, the 'twain' meet more and more often these days.

The problems touched upon in this paper need further analytical exposition to unravel the intricate coherence of structural and cultural factors. I agree with Dumont, who states in his penetrating essay on the caste system that westerners can learn much of the 'nature', the limits and the necessary conditions for an effective realization of the moral and political egalitarianism which the westerners stand for, when they study the principles of hierarchy and status. In order to do that, however, it will be necessary to drop the prejudice that 'the real existence of man only started after the Declaration of the Rights of Man' (Dumont 1966; 14).

This means that westerners should not condemn the articulation of status too quickly, since it has the same connotation for the control of human relationships as has retreat in the West. Indians, for their part, may be aware that withdrawal and retreat do not necessarily indicate a lack of compassion with one's fellow men.

## References

- 1 See *Sociologische Gids*, Vol. 16, 1969, blz. 153-154; Vol. 17, 1970 blz. 177-178; Vol. 18, 1971, blz. 317-375.
- 2 See Hommes, E. W. in *Sociologische Gids*, Vol. 19, 1971, blz. 63-66 and the papers presented for the Conference of the N.S.A.V., february 1974.
- 3 In the second team (July 1971 to June 1972) the situation was different. The three Dutch sociologists (and their families) taking part did not know each other before they joined the team. Apart from Miss Trivedi, all the Indian team members took part in the second years as well. The Dutch group was less an in-group the second year. This gave the Indian team members a better chance to grasp the importance of task-oriented relationships in western society than during the first year of the research project.
- 4 For a general discussion of this concept see Geertz (1963; 105 ff.) and van der Veen 1974.
- 5 See especially van der Veen 1974.
- 6 See Foster (1961; 1188), Firth (1967; 11-14) and van der Veen (1972; 211).
- 7 Since many people have a like claim on professors etc., it is not at all uncommon in India to be present with at least three different people at a time. All discussing their specific questions. Such a diffuse situation makes it of course rather easy to 'ignore' people.  
My colleague Chris Baks rightly commented that diffusion also, is a means to control relationships.
- 8 To illustrate this I will quote extensively from Parekh's fascinating study (1974; 64) of the reactions of immigrant intellectuals in Britain. I read his book only after completing this paper, so it was impossible to incorporate his and other immigrant intellectuals' views on English ways. Generally speaking, their comments are in line with the argument presented here. With respect to the importance of status, Parekh's words are illuminating: 'I met a fellow Indian at a party (in England, vdV). Within a few minutes he was asking me all sorts of predictable questions about how long I had been in England, how many children I had, how often I had been in India... My answers did not

help him to 'place' me, so he asked me what my caste was. Annoyed by this silly question I replied that I was an untouchable. He was clearly not convinced and evidently reasoned that I *must* be a high-caste Hindu to have the courage and audacity to pretend to be an untouchable. He did not pursue the discussion further, and we eventually became good friends. A few years later he made the discovery that I was not a high-caste Hindu as he had imagined but a middle-caste Hindu. His behavior soon began to change. He had now been able to 'place' me; and since he thought, mistakenly, that his caste was higher than mine he could no longer accept me as his equal. He unilaterally redefined our pattern of relationship, and thought that I should recognize his social superiority, which I could not, not only because caste was not for me a determinant of human relationship, but also because in my view, which his wife shared, our respective castes were socially equal. Predictably we broke up'.

- 9 See for instance Sorokin's definition of 'pure love' (1967; 78) 'pure love knows no bargain, no reward. It asks nothing in return. All forms of 'bargaining love' including the heterosexual love in which the sex partner is loved
- 10 See for instance Parekh (1974; 54), 'the relationship between two persons only because he or she gives pleasure or utility, are the examples of 'impure love'.  
develops slowly, subtly, tentatively and voluntarily. It is not abrupt and is allowed to ripen at its own pace . . . . The relationship is not developed obtrusively, by bold gestures of love and affection, but through an intricate system of communication and after careful exploration . . .'. 'Lacking the English and for that matter western, ability to sustain different degrees of intimacy in different types of relationship, he (i.e. the Indian, vdV.) swings between the two extremes of deep involvement and total withdrawal'. (Parekh 1974; 60).
- 11 For the 'lower' also, accentuating the *difference* in status is a means of controlling the relationship, even to 'use' it to his/her own advantage. By stressing childishness a child has a claim on its parents; the same holds true for the 'child-woman' and the servant who demonstrates clumsiness and stupidity in order to manipulate his master.
- 12 For a more elaborate discussion of the imperative meaning of the notions of equality and free choice, see van der Veen (1971; 310-312).
- 13 When Dr. Pillai and I myself discussed this subject in a meeting of sociologists, an American who worked for several years at a Dutch University, commented that *to him*, the Dutch behaviour had exactly the same qualities I present here as typically Indian. To him as an American, the behaviour of Dutchmen was extremely status-conscious, diffuse and too little task-oriented for an American taste. It is beyond the scope of this paper, but it would be interesting to see whether the 'feodal' European tradition hampered the outgrowth of the egalitarian though extremely competitive American society. De Tocqueville's nineteenth century remarks on individualism and democratic principles here come to mind.
- 14 That the interpreters were also present at these meetings was not in accordance with the convictions of most Indian team members. It was a procedure with demonstration-value for the Dutch, however.
- 15 For the Dutch juniors, the effectuation of these ideals was also questionable.

- They were very much aware that they had not had an equal say from the the beginning and they did not agree with that, either.
- 16 This was decided in accordance with the advice of several Indian officials. Within the Dutch group it had been a much discussed matter because it was in such flagrant contradiction to the egalitarian ideology.
  - 17 The Dutch certainly feel it as a sharp rebuke when someone declines to reciprocate in this respect. Most of the Dutch however, had earlier experience in India and they were quite accustomed to the symbolic value of this matter.
  - 18 See for a critical comment by an Indian, a letter to the Editor in 'Economic and Political Weekly', Vol. 6, nr. 11, blz. 603.
  - 19 Dr. Pillai the senior Indian sociologist also worked with an interpreter. Like the Dutch he knew the Gujarati language, but not sufficiently for all research purposes.
  - 20 Both car and a driver were available. The Dutch (practically all of whom can drive) never drove the car themselves. This was advised by Indian officials because it could save trouble in case of accidents. It was also part of the Dutch ideology to make the car available to everyone.
  - 21 See for a more detailed discussion van der Veen 1974.
  - 22 In recent studies of patronage and brokerage in western society, the importance of personal claims and counterclaims in the western political and social field is more and more exemplified as well as acknowledged. See Bailey 1969 and Boissevain 1974.

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