FROM CASTE TO CLASS IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Raj S. Gandhi
University of Calgary

ABSTRACT

Though both Marx and Weber boldly conceived of change in Indian social stratification from caste to class, they laid emphasis on different factors of change. But, true to their observations, castes are changing into classes. However, changes in caste came first through its initiation into political processes, almost parallel and closely followed by change in the mode of production of Indian economy. Thus, politicization and industrialization are the most prominent forces of change. Further, in analyzing change from caste to class, the specific attention must be paid to the rural-urban differences in caste system. Similarly, the emergence of elites, the rise of middle classes, and the formation and the role of caste associations need to be more clearly focused upon. The socio-cultural dimension of caste (unlike its politico-economic dimension) has proven to be more resistant to change. It appears to be the last stronghold of change. The dialectics of caste, through contradictions and conflicts, are paving the way for the future class society in India.

Both Marx and Weber made observations on changes in the caste system of India. Marx thought of change in Indian castes as primarily initiated through alterations in the relations of production. Industrialization, he thought, would dissolve the “Asiatic mode of production” based on the hereditary division of labor upon which Indian castes rest (1973:142). Weber located the significant source of change in new values, the bearers of which were the westernized intellectuals of India (1958:30).

But it is important to note that unlike the strict Marxist of Weberian position, the most strategic source of change in the caste system of Indian came to be located in its power structure, through its initiation into the political system of modern India. However, economic, political and socio-cultural factors of change are found to be inter-linked in the Indian situation that over time they have developed a spiral of mutual reinforcement.

From Status to Power

Weber considered caste as a status community having a specific style of life (1958:39-40). This definition has long influenced students of Indian sociology. Ghurye’s earlier description of caste as a segmental division of society (1969:2-6), and more recently, Beteille’s view of caste (1971:46) as a status
Traditionally, class, status, and power were fused together in the village, expressing itself through the caste system. Now, of course, change has become a fundamental feature of the village. Since the independence of India, land has started coming onto the market. This means that the economic relationships which were traditionally based on status are giving way to those based on contract, and the new governmental laws have been passed affecting and, in fact, reorganizing agrarian relations, thus drawing the village into the wider economic system of the nation. Similarly, the political institutions of independent India which emerged under specific historical conditions changed the distribution of power. Power seems to have shifted much more decisively from the traditional elite of the village into the hands of the new popular leaders. Once freed from the clutches of tradition, the status dimension of caste gets separated from that power.

The findings of Beteille seem to be further supported by the research of Bhatt (1975:199). Drawing his data from the rural and urban areas of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, he finds statistically significant differences among higher, middle, and lower castes along the dimensions of education, socio-economic status, political orientation, political interest, knowledge, influence, and political participation. All four regions also show varying degrees of differences in all dimensions, and hence he concludes that the profile of social stratification in modern India is one of increasing status incongruence, relative openness, mobility between and competition among strata and relative equality. The socio-economic and political dimensions of social stratification are becoming increasingly differentiated from the ascriptive caste dimensions. Both studies point out that the age-old stratification of India is now succumbing to the pressures exerted by changes in the sphere of power dimension, almost parallel to and closely followed by changes in the economic dimension of caste system.

For more than a decade, Kothari and his associates in Delhi have engaged in the study of political institutions of India and brought the polity and modern Indian society under careful scrutiny. Many of their studies are directly oriented to the analysis of the processes of change in the system of
stratification. Hence Kothari (1970:4-5) considers the more useful point of
departure for his studies to be: “What form is caste taking under the impact of
modern politics, and what form is politics taking in a caste-oriented society?”
Anchoring his arguments in the power dimension of the status communities of
India, he makes the shrewd observation that the alleged “casteism in politics”
is no more and no less than politicization of caste. It is something in which both
the forms of caste and the forms of politics are brought nearer each other,
changing both in the process.

Not all sociologists subscribe to the optimistic outlook of Kothari. Notable
among those who believe in the stubbornness of the closed status communities,
even in the face of impingement of the forces of change through the politics of
modern India, are Ghurye and Srinivas. Not sharing the exaggeration in the
sanguine optimism about the future of caste expressed by the westernized
intelligentsia, Ghurye’s view is that the problem of caste arises mainly out of
caste-patriotism. He believes (1969:406) that the castes or sub-castes which
group together for political purposes develop a militant attitude against other
castes and the formation of caste association for political or non-political
purposes is nothing but the renewed reassertion of the strength of caste. An
almost similar argument is made by Srinivas (1964:6). Although he concedes
that a number of “non-caste” elements may operate in state politics, he still
asserts that there is indeed a wide gulf between caste as an endogamous
and ritual unit, and the caste-like units which are so active in politics and
administration in modern India. But between these entities there is not only
connection but much communication. The changes in the power dimension of
caste are clearly recognized by Srinivas. But he does not endorse the view that
such “separation” indeed leads a “closed” status community to a more
“open” one. However, a different view is propounded by other sociologists,
and the foremost representatives of this different view are Leach and Bailey.
According to Leach (1960:6-7), “If a whole caste group plays the role of a
political faction by competing with other such factions for some common
economic or political goal, it thereby acts in defiance of caste tradition.”
Similarly, Bailey (1963:107-24) has argued that when castes behave “segmentally”
and according to a system of hierarchy and “closed stratification,” they
belong to the caste system; when they operate as political entities or as parts of
a political entity, they belong to the political system and are not really part of
the caste system. But according to Kothari (1970:4-5), it is futile to argue as to
whether caste uses politics or politics uses caste. Kothari (1970:14) seems to be
convinced that the actual process of interaction between caste and modern in-
stitutions was necessarily selective: it impinges on certain aspects of caste
more than on others. The first to be drawn into the modernization stream was the power dimension of the caste system. The second was the distribution of economic benefits. These two were closely related: the distribution of divisible benefits was interlinked with the nature of the power system that operated. In short, members of India’s caste communities, when confronted with the new political institutions, no longer found the collective solution to the problem of power from within their castes; they found that the caste was impaired in solving the problem of power in modern India and hence the change. As Schermerhorn (1978:317) succinctly puts it:

In pre-independence India it is doubtful whether much more than 10 percent of the population ever voted, for property and communal restrictions were relatively confining. Suddenly with the adoption of the new Constitution, the franchise was thrown open to all without limit, unlocking forces hitherto held in check.

Both Schermerhorn (1978) and Berreman (1967) tend to emphasize change in power relations as crucial.

From Caste to Class

Yet, if one wants to discern the direction of change in the economic dimension of social stratification of India, the most logical step is to think in terms of change from caste to class. If we selectively focus attention on the economic dimension of caste, there is no doubt that the new economic opportunities in India associated with the growth of a market economy has undermined the traditional system of economic interdependence between castes (the jajmani — the patron-client system). Bost (1951) is one of the chief exponents of the position that the economic dimension of caste system is significantly affected and altered under the impact of industrialization in India. In his study he proposes that once the hereditary occupational base of the traditional caste system is sufficiently broken down (note that this notion was originally propounded by Marx) by the processes of industrialization and urban migration, the traditional caste system is bound to lose its vitality. Similarly, employing the method of historical materialism to the analysis of Indian history of the last one hundred and fifty years, A. R. Desai (1966:250) asserts that the economic foundations of caste were shattered by the new economic forces and forms introduced into India as a result of the British conquest. The vocational basis of the castes and exclusive habits of their members have been undermined by the creation of private property in land, the impact of new property relations, modern cities, new legal system, modern education, political movements and above all, the class struggle.
Middle Class and Middle Class Mobility

But, where change from caste to class is viewed in a strictly Marxist framework, the phenomenon of the formation of middle classes in India does not receive enough attention. In industrial cities new occupations have emerged which either do not fit into the traditional caste hierarchy, or the employers set aside caste considerations in hiring people, or the employees set aside caste while taking to different occupations. In describing occupational mobility in connection with the formal system of western education, Rao (1972:134-5) has maintained that the educational opportunities helped one to acquire the necessary skills outside caste. Occupation thus became a relatively independent element of social status. English education qualified people for such professional jobs as law, engineering, medicine and teaching, and these professional groups are differentiated on the basis of income and value attached to each profession. The development of professions along with the salaried occupations led to the growth of middle classes, and the newly educated middle classes in India cut across different castes (Chibbar, 1968:137).

Although the typical correlation between caste and traditional occupation is breaking down, gradually giving way to salaried occupations and new professions, the general correspondence between class and occupation remains, and the specific very low castes such as the Untouchables of India, even today, are mainly drawn from the lower ranks while the middle class occupations and professions mainly seem to be the preserves of upper and upper-middle castes. But the westernized group of Brahmins is in the vanguard of intellectual leadership in India. In this sense, this continuing intellectual leadership of one caste, now submerged by class, could hardly be matched by any other country (Shils, 1961:21).

About the mobility of middle classes, Béville (1969:66) believes that the three Presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras which were the principal centers of higher education produced the western-educated class which was characterized by moderate wealth, high or moderately high ritual status, and a close association with literacy and education in the traditional system. However, the Brahmins and the Banias of Bombay, as well as the intelligentsia and the Shetias, form a heterogenous urban community in which their common political interests cut across caste barriers. It is here that we witness the dialectics between caste and class, as the members of different castes in this metropolis unite to challenge the caste authority and reunite to struggle against the communal tensions with the Muslims (Dobin, 1972). Much like Bombay, Calcutta also experienced movement towards the formation of classes early in the nineteenth century. In Madras, although caste-consciousness is kept alive by anti-Brahmin movement, the caste cleavages between Brahmins

HUMBOLDT JOURNAL OF SOCIAL RELATIONS – 7:2 – SPRING/SUMMER 1980
and non-Brahmins may be displaced by those of income, occupation and education (Béteille, 1969).

Besides politicization, industrialization of India has no doubt resulted in a considerable degree of occupational mobility and change. Here again differences obtain between the rural and the urban areas. While in the rural areas mobility tends to be uni-occupational with a tendency to invest in land, the urban areas have experienced a multi-occupational shift. There is a pronounced trend among rural Untouchable castes to migrate in strength to industrial and maritime centers for urban jobs and settle there permanently, mostly as workers, as the Panchanadikars (1970:53-4) have observed. The available evidence suggests that the Hindus of all castes seek and accept different kinds of jobs in the industrial sector. This seems to be further supported by Lambert's study (1963:34-6) of five factories in Poona city. Neither the Brahmans nor the Backward castes are excluded from or disproportionately attracted to the factories. They attract employees from different castes. In a survey of the Okhla Industrial Estate near Delhi, it was found that out of a sample of 162 workers, 73 came from the high Hindu castes and the rest from artisan castes. Similarly, N.R. Sheth's study of an engineering factory in Baroda which produced switch gears and electric motors revealed that 26 percent of the factory's workers came from the high castes of Brahmin, Bania and Patidar and 25 percent from castes immediately below them (Srinivas, 1969:174). The industrial cities of India, therefore, encourage new economic institutions which are required and sustained by machine-age technology (Schermerhorn, 1978:55).

But when we look at the overall pattern of mobility of the Harijans (the Untouchables) of Poona city we find that the avenues of unrestricted mobility, free of ritual restrictions, are still very limited for them. Taking a sample of one hundred families of three major Harijan castes—Mahars, Mangs and Chambhars—Patwardhan (1973:67-8) has observed that not all castes performing menial jobs discard their traditional occupations in an urban area. The Mahar has given up his hereditary work almost totally in cities and to a large extent in the rural areas of Maharashtra, as well; whereas this is not the case with Mangs, who have taken over the functions discarded by Mahar, both in rural and urban areas. She finds that the Dhors continue to tan cattle hides and the Chambhars (leather workers) are primary producers of footwear.

Thus, while a large majority of scavengers and sweepers who carry away the waste of India's great cities may have continued the same jobs, a great number of what Isaacs (1964:92) would like to call "ex-Untouchables" have moved into industrial occupations. However, though in politics many of the former "low caste" persons occupy important positions, no comparable visibility has
been achieved by them in the academic profession.

In short, though changes in the Indian caste system are greater and faster as a response to changes in its political institutions, the further changes in the processes of production, and increase in the impact of industrialization and urbanization, the hereditary division of labor based on traditional occupations which were closely tied with the castes are gradually giving way to new industrial occupations in contemporary India. The process of change, however, is slow and gradual. Although the new industrial opportunities are available to Indians, creating aspirations for upward socio-economic mobility and opening up avenues for occupational change, there is still a resistance coming through the socio-cultural dimension of caste as it was traditionally fused with life styles of Indian status communities. However, with sufficient incentive to take advantage of the new industrial opportunities, the further initiative for improving economic positions, and the motivation for upward movement, all strata, including the lower, are experiencing occupational mobility in industrial India. In this sense, the direction of change from caste to class is clear.

The Sabha Formation: The Dialectics of Change

The phenomenon of the formation of caste associations is an important dimension of caste in relation to its change. In addition to the formation of caste associations in Indian cities, there are also inter-city caste Sabhas or caste-societies which hold caste conferences, build caste hostels for students, run community-centers, cooperative banks, maternity homes and general hospitals, and publish caste journals. All these activities are regarded by Ghurye as the manifestation of “caste patriotism.” Similarly, cities become the centers of the heightened self-awareness of castes and the formation of caste Sabhas result in increasing the “horizontal stretch” of castes as Srinivas (1969:98) would have it.

But with reference to caste associations, it should be noted that along with their political role they also perform many non-political functions. They act as recreational bodies and reform clubs. Yet they are not similar to voluntary associations of western cities. Describing caste associations as paracommunities, Rudolph and Rudolph (1972:29) maintain that they enable members of castes to pursue social mobility, political power, and economic advantage. In many ways, the characteristics of the paracommunity resemble those of the voluntary association, but the former is distinguishable in a number of respects from the latter. Khare’s (1970) intensive study of the caste associations of the Kanya-Kubja Brahmans of north India clearly points out how many of their functions still pertain to the management of exacting marriage and kinship norms. Yet paradoxically, norms of bureaucratic behavior have become
translated into an indigenous code of morality and virtue within the associations.

However, to think of caste associations as furthering and even strengthening the status dimension of caste, and in fact increasing its social solidarity in modern India is an exaggeration. Certainly the socio-cultural dimension of caste is very resistive to change and one cannot expect it to be readily dissolved even under the effect of the acids of urbanism, and some element of it would perhaps always remain. But one should not conveniently ignore the “dialectics” of caste associations. By bringing together the members of the same caste (and ignoring sub-castes many times), the caste association educates its members, helps them to improve their economic position; those who are wealthy help the poor and the needy; those who obtain higher education help reform the “evils” of their caste. In short, it creates its own “anti-thesis: and in time to come eats away its roots by becoming anti-caste.” Hence, it must be pointed out that the nationalists of independent India have concluded that caste alone is insufficient as a bestower of honor, prestige, and recognition. Class and power have now gained in prominence.

From Status to Elite

The problem of the differences in public vs. private behavior in relation to certain aspects of caste also leads us to examine Sanskritization, westernization and secularization as the main forces of change in modern India in addition to urbanization and industrialization. According to Srinivas (1969:123), Sanskritization is the process by which a “low” Hindu caste changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, “twice-born” caste. When this happens, it results only in positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change. It takes place in an essentially stable hierarchical order. The system itself does not change.

However, I believe that even though Sanskritization by itself may not result in any structural alteration, it does tend to “loosen up” hierarchy by generating competition between different castes for upward mobility. As an endogenous force of change, it provides a mechanism for relative openness of otherwise closed social stratification in caste.

Although both Sanskritization and westernization may be “cultural” forces of change (Schermherhorn, 1978:45; Berreman, 1967:310), it should be noted that they directly impinge upon the socio-cultural dimension of caste. Particularly westernization as an exogenous force of change (Singh, 1973) seems to have a more lasting effect on the latter. But the most westernized groups are generally found in large cities of India, and hence we presume that the impact of westernization is felt more strongly there. For example, the
breach of commensality, the weakening of customary dietary restrictions, and
laxity in the practice of vegetarianism are found among the educated and
westernized groups in Indian cities.

Further, westernization also gave rise to the new elite in India, which,
although initially dominated by the Brahmans, has recently exhibited a
tendency to cut across the boundaries of caste, region and religion (Srinivas,
1969:47-8). Moreover, there is a clear differentiation within the elite structure
in post-independent India. In 1961, Shils (1961:17-8) estimated that there
were roughly at least 160,000 persons who could be termed the “intellectuals”
of India. He maintained that India alone, of all the new states, appears to
possess an intellectual class which is “modern” in the sense of embodying the
wide range of technical and analytical skills and the dispositions and tastes
characteristic of the intellectuals of the western countries. Singh (1973:138)
believes that Shills, as per his strict definition of intellectuals, might have
underestimated the number of intellectuals in India. In any case, there has been
a significant trend towards increase in the number of productive and consuming
intellectual elites.

When we look at the role of intellectual elites in India, we find that they
have been most critical of the socio-cultural dimension of caste. This has been
particularly true of the westernized intellectual elite. Here also one encounters
an interesting dialectics of change. The westernized intellectual elite, initially
anchored in high castes, becomes critical of the caste system itself. Hence, in
one sense it becomes “self-critical;” it creates, in its intellectual production, a
sort of “anti-thesis.” In this sense, the new elite is qualitatively different from
the traditional elites of India.

Changes in Commensalism

When we refer to one of the age-old socio-cultural dimensions of caste
commensalism, i.e., restrictions on feeding and social intercourse as they relate
to hierarchies in food and the ritual notions of pollution and purity, there are
definite rural-urban differences. Here again, the “low castes” are at a
disadvantage. However, in large cities of India, commensal restrictions have
been relaxed to a very large degree. This is attributed by Srinivas (1969:123) to
the effects of secularization. Urban life sets up its own pressures, and a man’s
daily routine, his place of residence, the times of his meals are more influenced
by his job than by caste. The exigencies of office work force city people to put
aside their old ideas of purity (Ghurye, 1969:294-5). However, both Ghurye
and Srinivas note the double standard of life, at least in Indian cities, with
regard to this particular dimension of caste. In public, the commensal
restrictions may be set aside but in the privacy of one’s home they may be
routinely observed.

Probably the most permanent dent on caste commensalism has been made by the process of secularization. However, the latter is definitely related to the other processes of change we have already referred to, viz., westernization, industrialization and urbanization. The ritual notion of pollution and purity, essentially anchored in the religion of India, and thereby an essential ingredient of the value system of India, was traditionally fused with the status communities, creating a kind of ritual hierarchy of castes, the highest caste being the “purest” and the lowest being the most “impure” (Dumont, 1974). In its full development, an elaborate system of “pollution” and traditionally prescribed purification rites came into existence all throughout Hindu society. The process of secularization brought about by new, non-sacred education, secular or contractual law, secular state, and the new economic relations due to changes in the mode and the process of production, generated secular beliefs and ideas replacing the sacred and the traditional.

However, in this dimension of caste, the slow rate of change is manifested in a slow adjustment between the two aspects of behavior of Indians, viz., the public and the private. The former has changed faster than the latter. The lag between the public and the private aspects of behavior is most clearly manifested in the practice of Untouchability. This has been most clearly demonstrated by I.P. Desai in his recent study of the water facilities for the Untouchables in rural Gujarat. He derived his data from the study of the actual situations in 69 villages selected at random from all districts of the Gujarat State. He observes (1973:21) that in spite of the acceptance of the transport system, the school system and the postal system by the rural people, the rest of the rules of behavior connected with these systems go without the benefits of these systems. The spread of these systems itself drives a wedge into the belief of Untouchability. Yet Untouchability exists. It has not disappeared. What is actually happening is that it is being driven back and is taking protection in the private precincts guarded by the older generation and vested interests. He also observes that Untouchability seems to be more widespread in the cultural and domestic spheres rather than in the occupational sphere.

But here again, the urban areas are more conducive to changes in the Harijan-high caste interactions than the rural. Desai’s study was mainly concerned with the rural areas. Anant (1972:67-77) made systematic rural-urban comparisons of attitudes toward Harijans in a number of dimensions such as physical contact of the high castes with the Harijans in a bus, participation with the Harijans in public sports, and acceptance of food from them. On the problem of sitting beside a Harijan in a bus as well as the admission of Harijans into the temple, Anant found statistically significant differences in the attitudes of the urban and the rural populations. Not only
the urban residence but the higher level of education was also found to be positively correlated with the changes in attitudes toward Harijans on the above two aspects. However, when it came to inter-dining the highly educated high-caste urbanites were found to be more reluctant to admit the Harijans. Similar conclusions were reached by Saberwal (1973:251) in a study of 58 socially mobile urban men drawn from three traditionally low castes, viz., scavengers, leatherworkers, carpenters and blacksmiths. Commenting on receding pollution in urban Punjab, he reports that the Harijan is likely to be treated less as a polluting low caste man and more as a shopkeeper, college student, politician, entrepreneur, or bureaucrat in proportion as he succeeds in his new occupation.

Changes in Connubialism

This brings us to the consideration of the strongest wall of the system, the practice of endogamy, with the help of which the members of castes created impenetrable fortresses surrounding the status communities. So strategic is this practice for the survival of caste that many sociologists of India may be willing to entertain the idea of change in caste only if this practice changes.

Unfortunately, we have very few definitive studies in this area directly related to the changes in the connubial context of caste. The available studies are also of two different kinds. One is the studies reporting actual behavior, the other kind is the studies of attitudes. Of these, the former are still fewer. Mukherjee's data (1964:95) report only one case of inter-caste marriage out of 1040 families interviewed in Indian cities, none out of 631 interviewed in towns, and again only one out of 2249 interviewed in villages. He reports that even if there has been relatively a greater incidence of inter-caste marriage in urban areas than in the rural, as is often announced from official and non-official quarters, the figures indicate that their magnitude in society at large is virtually of no consequence. Similarly, in a study of two middle class neighborhoods in the north Indian city of Meerut, Vatuk (1972:92) reported overwhelming evidence in support of "arranged marriages" between the young boys and girls of the Mohallas of city, increase in dowry, and no instance of even "arranged" inter-caste marriage.

If there is still a general preference for "arranged marriages" in India, one may not expect a significant change in caste endogamy, as marriage is traditionally arranged within one's caste. Though 51 percent of 513 university graduates interviewed by Kapadia (1968:119) expressed their willingness to give their children in marriage outside their own caste, one-third were against the departure from custom. However, Rita Wiesinger (1965:143-59) taking samples of high school and college girls from Bombay, Indore and Khandwa
reports that the girls desiring an “arranged marriage” are: Bombay 63 percent, Indore 72.5 percent and Khandwa 73 percent. While the girls in Khandwa were from surrounding village areas, the difference between Indore and Khandwa samples is negligible.

Though the educated urban youth want to see their potential spouse and talk with a prospective marriage partner, the initiative for such freedom comes from males rather than females. Shah (1964:80-104) in a study of 200 Baroda university students indicates that the college educated male students want to play an active role in the choice of their marriage partners, but a higher proportion of unbetrothed students come from urban backgrounds (cities 63 percent, towns 14 percent) than from rural. Similarly, in selection of their bride, the higher proportion from the urban background (cities 61 percent, towns 47 percent) favored at least a matriculate than someone from the rural background (only 13 percent). Thus, the non-traditionality as regards bride-selection is found largely in urban areas, whereas traditionality is found proportionately greater in rural areas.

Here also one must note the difference between the studies of actual inter-caste marriages and the attitudes toward such marriages. The latter seem to be more favorable to inter-caste marriage; but do the attitudes reflect actual practice? One may not find it difficult to preach in favor of inter-caste marriage when it is talked about in relation to one’s friend or one’s kin. But when it comes to putting it into practice in one’s personal or family matters, one seems to shy away from it. This also corresponds with our earlier observations on the differences between the public and the private spheres of behavior concerning matters of “pollution and purity” as related to caste system. But with respect to caste endogamy even public behavior openly betrays likeness for one’s caste as was found by K. Anand (1969:59-71) in a careful analysis of matrimonial advertisements in two Indian newspapers published in the English language. Out of 1000 advertisements (500 for males and 500 for females) he found that 65 percent of the male advertisers and 63 percent of the female advertisers mentioned their caste. This means that the similarity of castes of the potential marriage partners is found to be of significant importance by the advertisers. Paradoxically, one finds it necessary to use the western media of communication to emphasize the traditional criterion for marriage (Kanan, 1963). In essence, what we find today is that the boundaries of separate sub-castes (but still belonging to the same main caste) are being typically enlarged; at times, this deliberate “stretching” or “enlarging” of boundaries may be consciously in favor of hypergamity in which the girl of a lower sub-caste may marry the boy of a higher sub-caste but not vice-versa, and even where the major caste boundaries are transgressed, it may still reflect a hypergamous pattern. A

Humboldt Journal of Social Relations – 7:2 – Spring/Summer 1980
Harijan boy marrying a Brahmin girl is a rare phenomenon even among the westernized, educated urban youth.

CONCLUSION

The caste system of India, which traditionally and ingeniously fused together class, status and power and created an extreme form of “closed” stratification, has slowly but surely succumbed to those inevitable forces of change, viz., industrialization, urbanization, westernization and secularization. Drawing the closed status communities within its ambit, independent India made its members politically aspirant. For the first time the tight structure of caste was cut open by power ambitious people. While participating in a variety of political processes and activities, they made use of caste whenever and wherever possible and turned caste itself into an instrument of upward mobility.

We find that although the changes in caste were initially and strategically initiated through changes in its power dimension, it was almost parallel with and was closely followed by changes in its economic and socio-cultural dimensions. The latter appears to be the last stronghold of resistance to change, more particularly in its practice of endogamy, and this is further manifested in discrepancy between the public and the private spheres of behavior as well as the differences between the attitudes and the actual practices. With the passing of every new day, through contradictions and conflicts, members of India’s unstable caste-groups thrust thousands of swords in the age-worn hide of archaic traditions.

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HUMBOLDT JOURNAL OF SOCIAL RELATIONS – 7:2 – SPRING/SUMMER 1980


**HUMBOLDT JOURNAL OF SOCIAL RELATIONS — 7:2 — SPRING/SUMMER 1980**