

are still operative. Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, despite their dissent, could not shed them in actual practice. The implicit world-view could not be totally discarded even by those who were converted to Islam or Christianity. Deep-seated beliefs cannot be done away with merely through the act of conversion. Initially, both Islam and Christianity had to adapt to the prevailing social order, for the converts needed a source of livelihood and a minimum community support. They had to continue with their Jati occupations and lean to Hindu neighbours for Jajmani relations—a pattern of interdependent relationships involving the exchange of goods and services. The village community provided these when they needed it. Muslims and Christians continued to share many features of the regional culture in which they were located. Selectively, the Hindus also absorbed some of their traits. In art and architecture, dress and food, literature, music and dance, medicine and technology there was a fusion of styles and the emergence of new forms which were the result of their combined efforts.

The opposition of all Indian groups to the prospect of alien domination by the Whites provided a new impetus to unity. Both Hindus and Muslims were threatened, both fought the foreigner, often together. The national movement welded communities and cultures, though towards the end deep distrust and discord developed between Hindus and Muslims, resulting in the partition of the country. Modern education, the development of a network of transport and communications, and industrialization and urbanization provided new bases for unity.

Some problems persist, others have been spawned in the last few decades. Ethnic movements, religious fundamentalism, new twists in the pattern of inter-communal relations, linguistic conflicts, regionalism and sub-regionalism pose a major challenge to contemporary Indian society.

III

VARNA AND JATI

et al jat

The broad divisions and sub-divisions in Indian society are complex and confusing. Any effort to simplify them beyond a point can lead to a distortion of social reality. The scriptures and ancient social codes have provided the outlines of the social system, but mostly they speak of *what it should be* rather than *what it is*. What is found on the ground is different. There are ways to get around the norms and to manipulate the codes. Many writers on India have over-simplified the situation. To speak of "a four-caste system", for example, is extremely misleading; as we have noticed, there are innumerable Jatis, the classification and position of some having been left vaguely defined. Studies that are specific to particular regions, done by anthropologists and sociologists, provide dependable accounts of the working of the system. But they cannot be projected on the national canvas, for the system works differently in different parts of the country. As groups and communities are continuously redefining their identity or restructuring their past, their status undergoes shifts. Their own perceptions regarding their position in the system change more often; general social acceptance of their altered identity is slower.

An Indian carries several identification tags. The context determines how he or she has to identify himself or herself. Religion, place of residence, or family name may be enough in some contexts. But in others one may have to spell out one's Jati, Gotra, and Kula. Jati is commonly

called caste in English, but the latter word is used to convey a bewildering variety of meanings. It may denote an entire Varna, or an in-marrying (endogamous) group with a defined ascribed status, or a sub-division or splinter of such a group. In this work the word Jati will be used throughout to convey the second of these three meanings. Gotra, on the other hand, is an out-marrying sub-division of Jati. One marries in one's Jati, but outside one's Gotra. Gotra denotes descent from a common ancestor in the distant past. The ancestor is usually a mythological figure or a sage; several Jatis—especially those at the lower levels of the ritual hierarchy—retain tribal totemic beliefs and trace back strong associations with an animal or inanimate object. Kula (or Vansha) represents a lineage, with a five or six generation depth. Beyond this the line is blurred. Some Jatis, and also tribes, have professional bards and minstrels attached to them. They generally offer a much longer genealogy, going up to the mythic progenitor of the group. Of course, much of this genealogy is fictitious, as also the accounts of the great deeds, courage, and valour of the ancestors.

We shall first focus our attention on Varna and later on Jati.

Varna

In the Hindu social system, Varna is only a reference category: it is not a functioning unit of social structure, and only refers broadly to the ascribed status of different Jatis. It is also a classificatory device. In it several Jatis with similar ascribed ritual status are clustered together and are hierarchically graded. The three upper levels—the Brahman, the Kshatriya, and the Vaishya—are considered twice-born, as in addition to biological birth they are born a second time after initiation rites. The Shudra, the fourth level, includes a multiplicity of artisans and occupationally-specialized Jatis who pursue clean, i.e.,

non-polluting occupations. The Varna hierarchy ends here, but there is a fifth level which accommodates those following supposedly unclean occupations that are believed to be polluting. They are Antyaja, i.e., outside the Varna system. The Jatis at this level constitute what were known as the untouchables. Untouchability has been abolished by law, but its practice continues in disguised and undisguised forms in almost all parts of the country. The Scheduled Castes—the Antyaja, called Harijan by Gandhiji, and who now describe themselves as Dalit—form roughly 16 per cent of India's population. The Scheduled Tribes—Adivasi, Adimjati, or Girijans forming 7 per cent of the population—are also in this category, although most of them have been spared the stigma of untouchability. Thus, altogether there are five levels into which a large number of Jatis are classified and clustered.

The system is neat and attractive, but it is also highly idealized and oversimplified. It represents a model of broad divisions of society on the basis of quality and functions and their organic linkages. It does not reflect, however, the reality of the social order, which is much more complex. The four-fold order, as mentioned earlier, excludes the former untouchable Jatis which very much belong to the Hindu social system. It has other ambiguities also. In which Varna are the Kayasthas of northern and eastern India to be classified? Are the Nayars of Kerala to be rated as Kshatriyas or Shudras? In fact, there is no uniform all-India hierarchy; some Jatis have one kind of ranked status in one region and another in other regions. Even the distribution of the Varnas is not uniform throughout Hindu society; in the south there are no indigenous and authentic Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. On the ground, the hierarchical gradations are not as clear as they appear in the model. The status of some Jatis is vague and it has been disputed before bodies of learned men, in royal courts, and in recent times in the courts of law. Such disputes have often resulted in conflicts and

the answers found have been contradictory. The immutability of Varna status has been challenged. Sacred texts provide some evidence of the upgradation of ascribed status. Also, there are examples of the lowering of the status of an entire Jati which may not have conformed to the standards of conduct expected of it. The saint-poets of the Bhakti school have questioned the immutability of the pattern and powerful movements have periodically emerged to fight the harshness and inequity of the system.

In the working of the social system the Varna categories have limited uses. They provide rough and ready indicators of ascribed status, specialized functions in some areas of social life, and expectations of standards of behaviour and conduct. In recent decades efforts have been made to mobilize votes on the basis of Varna loyalty and interests, but the real operating units are Jati as well as family, lineage, and the network of kin.

Before moving on to an extended discussion of the phenomenon of Jati, let us have a brief look at the theories of the origin of "castes", which in fact have a direct bearing on Varna. What they explain is the origin of Varnas, not of Jatis.

The theory of divine origin is the best known and most often cited. Its beginnings can be traced to the Purusha Sukta of the Rig-Veda. The four orders of society are believed to have originated from the self-sacrifice of Purusha—the creator, the Primeval Being. Purusha is said to have destroyed himself so that an appropriate social order could emerge. The Brahman is said to have been born from the head or mouth, the Kshatriya from the arms, the Vaishya from the thighs, and the Shudra from the feet. This is, at best, a symbolic representation of the rank and functions of the four Varnas. In the cultural body-image the head, the arms, the thighs, and the feet are ranked in descending order. So are the traditional functions. Acquiring and disseminating knowledge and performing sacrifices—the functions of the Brahman—en-

joyed the highest position. Next in rank were defence and war, administration and government—the functions assigned to the Kshatriya. Third in rank were trade and commerce and agriculture, the work of the Vaishya. Finally, serving others through crafts and labour—the work of the Shudra—ranked the lowest.

Somewhat less known is the Triguna theory of Varna origin. The philosophic speculation of ancient India identified three *gunas*—inherent qualities—in human beings, animate and inanimate objects, and in human actions: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Sattva* consisted of noble thoughts and deeds, goodness and virtue, truth and wisdom. *Rajas*, on the other hand, was characterized by high-living and luxury, passion and some indulgence, pride, and valour. At the bottom was *tamas*, with the attributes of coarseness and dullness, over-indulgence without taste, the capacity to carry out heavy work without much imagination. Those with *sattvic* qualities were classified as Brahman, those with *rajasic* as Kshatriya and Vaishya, and those with *tamasic* qualities as Shudra. One may read these qualities in the four Varnas, but it is difficult to visualize how an entire population could be subjected to the massive operation of such a classification.

The third theory takes account of ethnic admixture, culture contact, and functional specialization. Any of these three components cannot singly explain the origin of the Varnas. In the initial stage of the evolution of Hindu society—the Vedic stage—race and complexion were important factors, but in its fully evolved form it was only a make-believe phenomenon, not a biological reality. Aryанизation was the result of culture contact, but it was not a one-way process involving donor-recipient relations. As mentioned earlier, the Vratya pre-Aryan traditions asserted themselves and in the process modified the Aryan scheme of social organization, rituals, beliefs, world-view, and its ethos. Groups were incorporated *en masse* into the emerging social order, adopting some new

features, retaining some old characteristics, and imparting their imprint on the wider society. Functionally specialized groups were already in existence; they were incorporated into the new society with appropriate social rank and ritual status.

Jati

"Caste" is a confusing word; in different contexts it has been used to convey different meanings and social categories. It is better to use the term Jati to denote an endogamous community with a more or less defined ritual status, and some occupation traditionally linked to it. Two cautions are necessary. First, the three upper Varnas may be referred to by their generic names, although actual Jatis are their sub-division. Secondly, some Jati clusters have a common name and the actual Jatis are identified by the addition of some prefixes and suffixes to this common name. The Brahmans in north India are divided into several endogamous Jatis—Kanyakubja, Saryuparin, Gaur, and so forth. In Maharashtra their divisions are Deshasth, Kokanasth, Karhade, and Saraswat. In Tamil Nadu their principal divisions are Iyengar and Iyer. These Jatis may also have splinter groups with individual identities. Such groups may be of several types. The Kanyakubja, for example, are assigned Biswas according to their ascribed attributes on a twenty-point scale. The higher the number of Biswas, the higher the rank of the segment possessing them. *Biswa* means twenty; the section having all twenty Biswas has the highest rank. Others follow in descending order according to the number of their Biswas. It is amazing that pride in the number of Biswas still persists among those having twenty or eighteen of them. The Saryuparin Brahman have divisions according to their level of ritual purity. The highest are the Pankti Pawan—those forming the line of supposedly highest purity. Such people sit separately

when dining; those with allegedly less purity cannot join them, even though they too are Saryuparin. The younger generation finds it difficult to observe the strict standards of ritual observations enjoined upon it, but a section of it still carries fond memories of its high ritual status. The upper groups can have hypergamous unions with those who are lower; they will not give their daughters to the lower groups, but will accept the latter's daughters if they cannot find a bride from families of equal rank. Even among those who are not twice-born, some Jati clusters have a generic name, although the cluster is formed by several distinct endogamous Jatis. Outsiders tend to view them as one unit with equal status, but internally the boundaries of endogamy are clearly defined and there are subtle status differences among constituents of the Jati cluster. The Badaga of the Nilgiri hills in the south have this generic name, but they are divided into several Jatis—endogamous groups—each with a name and also a separate identity within the Jati cluster. This is true of the Kunbis of Maharashtra and the Patidar and the Baria of Gujarat. In the Chhattisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh, cowherd and water-carrier groups are known as Rawats, but they have several endogamous Jatis—Kanojia, Jheria, Kosaria, Oriya, and possibly others. Similar endogamous groups are also found among several other Jati clusters including barbers, washermen, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and potters.

Even this simplified account looks confusing, but of necessity it has to be so, for the social reality is infinitely complex. The accommodation of diverse groups and systems in varying regional contexts makes it impossible to have a neat structural model in which units and parts fit well to give a consistent and logical system. We have, thus, to conceptualize the system at three levels: at the top there are four recognized (and one unrecognized) Varnas, which are hereditary and have more or less similar ritual status; in the middle there are Jati clusters

with a generic name, but which are further sub-divided into endogamous Jatis; at the bottom there are the endogamous Jatis, which, unlike the top and intermediate levels, are not only classificatory and indicative of ritual status, but effective and functioning units of the social structure.

Now we can proceed to examine some of the main attributes of Jati:

1. Jatis are endogamous units.
2. They are hierarchically graded.
3. They invariably have a Jati-linked occupation.
4. Considerations of purity and pollution determine the interaction between different units.
5. Members of a Jati generally share a common culture—the way of life of a people consisting of conventional patterns of thought and behaviour (including beliefs, values, rules of conduct, economic, political, religious, and social organization, and the like) which are transmitted from one generation to the next by learning and not by biological inheritance.
6. In several parts of India, Jatis have intra-village and inter-village mechanisms of social control and conflict resolution.

These attributes have wide and general acceptance, but each one of them also has some permitted exceptions. A Jati is an endogamous unit, but some of the lower castes absorb a man or woman marrying into them. The children born of such unions are fully accepted in the Jati. Even some of the upper Jatis allow hypergamous unions; a man can marry a girl from an approved range of slightly lower Jatis. The progeny carries no stigma and is given full membership of the Jati. Hierarchy is an important attribute, but the indicators of status and rank are not precise and well defined. Each of the Jatis of the three twice-born levels claims a higher status for itself and

disputes similar claims made for themselves by others at their levels. At the fourth level, i.e., Shudras, the confusion is greater. Several Jatis engage in the reconstruction of their mythic past and make claims to a higher ritual status than the one ascribed to them. Among them there is competition to secure the right to wear the sacred thread, which is granted for a consideration by some religious agency or authority. There is the practice of untouchability within the untouchable level of Jatis. In Andhra Pradesh the Mala consider themselves superior to the Madiga. The Mahar of Maharashtra regard themselves as superior to the Dhed, the Mang, and other Dalit groups. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar the Chamar are the upper Jati of the Scheduled Castes.

The attributes of hierarchy and occupation are inter-linked. There is recognized ritual and social distance between different Varna levels and also between most of the Jatis at the same Varna level or outside it. A basic degree of ritual purity is ascribed: one gets it from the accident of one's birth. As a general rule it can be said that a "clean" and "noble" occupation give a Jati higher ritual and social status, and "unclean" and "polluting" occupation relegate it to a lower status. The acquisition of learning, imparting knowledge, and priestly functions are "pure" and "noble"; they are thus supposed to give the Brahman the highest rank. Working in leather or scavenging (including handling human wastes) are "unclean" and "polluting"; the Jatis practising them thus get the lowest status. The notions of clean and unclean, purity and pollution enter into intra- and inter-caste behaviour and interaction. They form part of the Hindu psyche. But things are changing, contemporary reality is gradually drifting away from tradition.

Another general proposition can also be made in this context: the higher the Jati the more complex and elaborate are the rules regarding the maintenance of "purity" and avoidance of "pollution". In so far as inter-

Jati "pollution" is concerned, it is necessary to take note of "pollution" through food and through personal contact. In respect of food the questions that are asked in this context are: *What food? Cooked by whom?* With what Jati do you eat it? *Sattvic* food—fruit, milk, most roots and tubers, and generally vegetarian food—ranks higher in the scale of "purity." Even a Brahman can eat fruit brought by a very low Jati provided it is washed in water drawn by a relatively clean Jati and dried with a properly washed cloth. Milk and curds pose some problems as they are liquids and have the probability of being mixed with water which is easily polluted. It is for this reason that the wells for the clean Jatis and the Scheduled Castes are separate in most villages. If there is only one well it will be used exclusively by the "clean" castes; the Scheduled Castes are denied access to it. Traditional water-carriers are of the fourth Varna level and water drawn by them will generally be accepted by all, except by those practising the highest level of purity. In their case, water must be drawn by a person of equally "pure" rank and that too in a ritually "pure" personal condition. It is difficult to distinguish between *rajasic* and *tamasic* food; the regional variations in their definition are many and complex. Deer meat was considered to be *rajasic*, so were wines made from grapes and other fruits that are not considered "impure." Pungent and strong-smelling vegetables—onion and garlic—were *tamasic*, as also the meat of the buffalo and pig. Wild boar and chicken were purer than the domestic varieties. The Brahman and the Vaishya Jatis were expected to confine themselves to *sattvic* food, but there were exceptions. Kashmiri Pandits, the Saraswats of the west coast of Maharashtra, and Brahmins of Bengal and Orissa eat fish and meat. Kshatriyas were enjoined to eat *rajasic* food, and Shudras *tamasic* food. Those below them could eat even some taboo foods. *bata*

water is an ingredient; the latter is fried in oil, preferably ghee or clarified butter. Where some liquid is needed (such as for kneading the batter into dough) milk has to be substituted for water. Creamy rice pudding—*kheer* or *payasam*—is ritually pure if the rice is lightly fried in ghee and then cooked in milk. *Kachcha* food, as a rule, can be accepted only from higher Jatis than one's own, and in some cases from castes of more or less equal ritual ranking. In respect of *pakka* food one could go down considerably lower. But clean castes would not accept even *pakka* food from the unclean Shudras such as the barber, washermen, basket workers, and so forth. No Jati of the four Varnas will accept even *pakka* food from communities traditionally classified as untouchables.

The rules of commensality (inter-dining, eating together) are also confusingly complex. In the same Jati there can be gradations prohibiting inter-dining. About the Kanyakubja Brahman it is said "*teen Kanojia, terah chulhe*"—three Kanyakubjas get their food cooked at thirteen separate hearths. There is obvious exaggeration in this saying, but it is nonetheless illustrative of the complexity of the scene. The main question here is: Who causes pollution to whom in sitting together to eat? The prohibited categories are fewer in respect of *pakka* food, larger in respect of *kachcha* food. A good way of observing social distance between castes is to see precedence and order, separation and clustering in wedding feasts, eleventh or thirteenth day purificatory feasts after death, or the cleansing feast after committing what is culturally defined as a sin or serious social offence. They illuminate Jati ranking in a given regional context.

Physical contact between clean and several categories of inferior Jatis are to be avoided. South India provided extreme examples of the practice of untouchability. The very sight of some of the lowest Jatis was believed to be polluting. Then there were Jatis with whose shadow contact was polluting. The practice was prevalent in Tamil

Nadu and Kerala. The Tiyan (toddy-tappers) of Kerala had to keep a distance of thirty-six pace, and the Pulyan (cultivators) ninety-six paces from the Nambudiri Brahman. The most common—and the least severe—form of untouchability only ruled out their physical contact with the clean Jatis and barred entry into the latter's homes. The untouchable Jatis were denied entry into temples and access to common village wells. Their living quarters had to be built outside the village, often at some distance. They had to sit separately in schools; even tea-shops earmarked separate cups for them which they had to wash themselves and keep aside. Law has abolished untouchability and recognized the equality of the Scheduled Castes in theory. Invidious distinctions, however, are still made and subtle forms of discrimination prevail.

In the past it was more likely than today for members of a Jati to share a common culture; even then, however, there were important exceptions. Most Jatis were confined to particular regions; they formed part of the regional culture and, in addition, had some distinctive Jati cultural features. The Rajputs were an exception; they had widespread regional differences which were pronounced, and did not prescribe endogamy. In culture and language, different territorial groups had differences but they did not rule out inter-marriage. Wealth and power gave certain cultural characteristics to a section that were not shared by the less advantaged sections.

Most Jatis have conflict-resolving mechanisms at the village and inter-village levels. Though becoming weaker now, they cannot be written off. In Chapter V we shall revert to them.

The ritual dimension of Jati has suffered substantial erosion in modern times, but Jati has gained some strength from an unexpected source. Democratic elections need bases of mobilization, and Jati solidarity has been found to have strong political appeal. It has been widely used, but in many constituencies the principal contenders are

of the same Jati. This reduces the effectiveness of the "caste card" in politics. Another trend is also visible: rich and powerful Jatis joining together to maintain their hold on the village scene. This alignment uses terror and its economic and political clout to keep the lower groups on leash. The slightest sign of revolt is silenced by physical violence (including rape and murder), damage to standing crops, and setting fire to entire villages. Election results are influenced by coercing the poor to vote for the candidates of influentials or by preventing them from voting altogether. The linking of Jati with power interests, thus, plays havoc with the democratic processes in the country.

India's "caste" system has been much criticized, both at home and abroad. Yet Varna and Jati have had extraordinary durability and resilience; they appear to survive in some form or other all the assaults on them. But with changing times they have had to adapt. For example, there has been considerable relaxation in the practice of untouchability, commensality, and caste-linked occupations, but at the same time, as mentioned earlier, castes assumed new political roles. Thus, even after forty years of freedom Varna-Jati solidarities are being reinforced anew.

In the previous chapters we have seen how the introduced religions—particularly Christianity and Islam—had to come to terms with Varna and Jati and absorb some of their features which were not part of their basic tenets. It is amazing that these persist even to this day.

A clear-cut Varna division is not found among the Christians and Muslims, but a distinction is made between high-caste and low-caste converts. The former identify themselves as Brahman Christians or Nayar Christians, or as Rajput or Tyagi Muslims. The Mandal Commission (1980) observed, ". . . the caste system is a great conditioner of the mind and leaves an indelible mark on a person's social consciousness and cultural mores."

In their annual meeting in January 1988, the Bishops of Tamil Nadu noted that "the Scheduled Caste Christians, even after conversion, continue to suffer from extreme social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of the traditional practice of untouchability." In a pastoral letter issued in February 1988, the Catholic Bishops of Tamil Nadu admitted: "Caste distinctions and their resultant injustice and violence do still continue in Christian social life and practice. We are aware of and accept the situation with deep pain." The Indian Church now realizes that approximately 60 per cent of the 19 million Indian Christians are subjected to discriminatory practices and treated as second-class Christians or worse. In the south Christians from the Scheduled Caste are segregated both in their settlements and in the Church. Their *cheri* or colony is situated at some distance from the main settlement and is devoid of the civic amenities available to others. In church services they are segregated to the right wing and are not allowed to read scriptural pieces during the service or to assist the priest. They are the last to receive the holy sacraments during baptism, confirmation, and marriage. The marriage and funeral processions of Christians from the low castes are not allowed to pass through the streets of the main settlement. Scheduled Castes converted to Christianity have separate cemeteries. The Church bell does not toll for their dead, nor does the priest visit the home of the dead to pray. The dead body cannot be taken into the Church for the funeral service. Of course, there is no inter-marriage and little inter-dining among the "high-caste" and the "low-caste" Christians. Clashes between them are frequent. The low-caste Christians are waging struggles to improve their lot; the Church is responding, but little meaningful change has come about so far. Even among higher caste Christians the *Jati* origins are remembered and at least covertly they colour social relationships.

The situation among Muslims is somewhat different.

The access to the mosque for prayers is not restricted and the practice of untouchability is not blatant. However, Varna- and Jati-like distinctions, indicating social status and governing social interaction, are present. A reference to the Ashraf and Ajlaf categories has been made earlier; it is common also to speak of *Sharif Zat* (well-bred, an upper Jati-like formation) and *Ajlaf Zat* (common, lower Jati-like formation). These distinctions determine inter-group social intercourse like marriage, inter-dining, and participation in ceremonies and other social functions. Origins are remembered and converts to Islam from Hinduism still largely pursue their earlier Jati-linked occupations. In Mughal times the divisions of Syed, Sheikh, Mughal, and Pathan were often equated with the Varna divisions of Hindu society and in some parts of India converts from Hinduism considered it necessary to enroll themselves into one of these divisions. Whether this is true to Islam is another question, but it is nevertheless a fact that it is being done. The Syeds are the descendants of the family of the Prophet through his daughter; they are of Arab origin. But several higher Jatis converted to Islam claimed this status; Brahman converts claimed that their Syed status was confirmed by the Emperor Akbar. The Sheikhs were also of Arab descent, though they are not the descendants of the Prophet. Even first generation converts are known to call themselves Sheikhs. The Mughals, the ruling dynasty of Delhi, ranked next. They were of Turki origin, but adopted this designation to distinguish themselves from the Ottoman rulers of Turkey. The Pathans were of Afghan origin, though many of them not even remotely connected with Afghanistan claimed this status. There was considerable level-jumping and social-climbing. A joke, not in very good taste, illustrates their tendency: "Last year I was a Julaha (weaver); this year a Sheikh; and next year, if the harvest be good, I shall be a Syed." The higher Jatis—Rajput, Jat, and Ahir—retained their identity. Several Jatis like Julaha,

Teli, Bhat, Kalal, and Bhishti were in many respects comparable to Hindu Jatis, having specialized occupations and gradations of status. The persistence of Jati has worried Muslim theologians and social reformers, but even the recent wave of fundamentalism has not been able to do away with it.

In religions of Indian origin—Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism—there is evidence of the continuance of Jati. The neo-Buddhists find it difficult to de-link themselves from their earlier Jati status. The egalitarian ethos of Sikhism is blunted by the presence of Jati, and even the practice of untouchability.

Such is the hold of the notions of Varna and Jati that they transcend Hinduism, and can be seen to operate in nearly all segments of Indian society. Social reformers have not been able to change this orientation, though some of them have tried hard to do so.

Contemporary Indian society is experiencing strong contrary pulls towards modernity and tradition. Their confrontation has produced some bizarre results. On the one hand the country has adopted and promoted the ideology of democracy, egalitarianism, secularism, and social justice; on the other, primordial loyalties continue to prevail, exploitative structures have never been seriously challenged, the nostalgia for tradition is tapped for political gains, and religious revivalism and, later fundamentalism, have not been dealt with sternly. On the level of emotional and intellectual awareness the inequality and inhumanity built into the Varna and Jati framework have been denounced, but no worthwhile attempt has been made to demolish it. Nearly one half of the country's population, consisting mainly of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and other backward communities, share between them only about 10 per cent of all agricultural land. The poor—bonded labour and those in degrading occupations—have few avenues to seek release from their unfortunate predicament. Abolition

of bonded labour has only meant shifting away from one form of bondage to another. India still has 41,00,000 open latrines; the excrements from them have to be carried as headloads in closed containers or even in open baskets by one particular Jati. The politicization of Varna and Jati has led to diverse forms of atrocities on the "lower" Jatis, who are being prevented from using their electoral strength to improve their lot. In some areas the hold of Jati has weakened, but in others it has fortified and strengthened itself. India's society, economy, and polity have paid only lip service to the cause of the "degraded", the weak, and the vulnerable, but they have not been able to find any viable solution to their problems. The clearly discernible results are resentment and resistance, both very understandable. Tradition has its uses, but regard for it cannot be made an alibi for the perpetuation of exploitation, inequality, and injustice. There has been some change in the operation of Varna and Jati, but it has been too slow and too little. What the law has given with one hand—abolition of untouchability and bonded labour, compensatory discrimination in the fields of education and employment, freedom of choice in marriage, and so forth—it has taken away with the other, thanks to lax vigilance and ineffective implementation.