INTRODUCTION
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The problem of inequality is as ancient as Indian society itself, and has attracted the attention of travelers, men of letters from time immemorial. Sociological literature on the problem grew out of the West, and by the early part of the twentieth century, Indian sociologists began a reevaluation of western interpretations in the light of Indian society and its ideology.

Classical thinkers of Europe, like Karl Marx, Max Weber took a keen interest in the pattern of inequality in India with special reference to the caste system and the attending traditional practices, customs and values. The caste system has historically exhibited great resilience and has accommodated itself to the changing conditions - right from the Vedic period to contemporary India.

More than one hundred and fifty years ago, Marx, on the basis of an extensive study of materials on India, had made an analysis of the Indian social system. He observed that with the development of modern industry and the railway system, the hereditary division of labour, which is the very bases of the Indian castes, and which act as definite impediments to Indian progress and Indian power will dissolve... (Marx, 1853) The expectations, so shared subsequently by many thinkers, including Max Weber, showed that modern economic relations stood in direct contradiction with the caste system. If these relations developed, the caste system had to disintegrate.
That the economic relations have altered is no longer a disputable fact. India is no longer an agricultural society of the stagnant Asiatic type. Capitalist relations have developed rapidly within its agricultural sector. Modern industry has advanced far enough to make India the industrial giant of the Third World. Today with the rapid growth of science and technology India is surging ahead. But has the caste system really "dissolved"?

Surprisingly it has survived despite enormous pressures of modern life and still seems to 'rise from the ashes' even at the turn of the century.

What are the implications of the caste system in this era of globalization and all that it connotes? That the caste system has not only survived but has assumed new forms over the centuries is an historical fact. Social process such as Sanskritization and westernization offer notable illustrations of adaptations as well as reassertion of the caste system.

The cultural variations in India, the rich historical backgrounds of different regions and communities responding in a multiplicity of forms to new economic challenges, notably to the process of modernization and globalization, offers fertile ground for the longevity of the caste system and a reexamination of some aspects of the caste system, especially those relating to patterns of social mobility.
Indian and international sociologists like Srinivas (1952), Dumont (1969, 1970), Beteille (1969b), Bailey (1955) and Leach (1960), tried to delineate specific conceptual and methodological areas relating to stratification in India. In this manner they highlighted the relevance of the indigenous categories of caste.

The complex structure and nature of the caste system in India, led sociologists to make cultural and structural analysis. (Leach, 1961; Dumont, 1960; Srinivas, 1952; 1955)

These studies conceived the caste system as a unique mechanism of social inequality, perpetuated through ritual conception of purity and pollution. They observed that caste and class constitute separate hierarchies – caste based on traditional components of status expressed through concepts of purity and pollution and class based on income, occupation and education. Both hierarchies have a tendency to combine in different ways and manifest themselves differently from one context to the other (Mayer, 1960; Bailey, 1963; Beteille, 1965, 1966, 1969a; Dumont, 1970, 1962; Leach, 1961, 1969; Gould, 1960 and Bougle, 1958). Though no typology of such patterns was worked out, examples were cited to illustrate the transformation from closed status groups based on caste to more open ones based on other secular components (Beteille, 1966, 1970, 1979). However, Marxist historian Habib (1985) challenged this view and argued that caste should be viewed primarily as a social formation based on division of labour and that the major elements of the caste system emerged gradually through new economic situations.
Changes in the caste system, like other systems of stratification have been explained in terms of isolated factors like tradition, religion, values and education (Singer, 1956; Kapp, 1963; Tilman, 1963; Dube, 1955, 1958 and Morris, 1967). As opposed to these studies, Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) argued that tradition and values can be adopted and transformed to serve the needs of society and that the caste system can adapt to changes brought about through modernization.

At the turn of the eighties, Beteille (1980 and 1985) argued that despite the fact that the caste system no longer provided the basis for the division of labour, yet the collective identities based on caste were remarkably durable. That the caste system continues to be a fairly rigid system does not hold much water. As far back as 1952, Srinivas examined the element of social mobility within the caste system. In his study of the Coorgs of Mysore, he explained that the processes of Sanskritization and westernization help to facilitate mobility. Subsequent studies showed that the process of Sanskritization affects the culture of castes in the lower and middle regions of the hierarchy, but is not as viable for the lowest caste group of Untouchables. The Untouchables (who in the caste hierarchy were accorded the lowest position), have been trying to achieve a higher status in society by sanskritizing their life style (Cohn, 1955; Patwardhan, 1966; Harper, 1968; Lynch, 1968 and Isaacs, 1967). However, these attempts were often failed by the upper castes (Cohn, 1955). Some of these studies indicated that whereas education, employment and political power act as passports to 'respectability', the weakening of traditions and values could hasten upward mobility of the Untouchables.
The main question is whether such changes in the system of stratification are being brought about through any real weakening of tradition and values or whether material changes have produced new forms of social consciousness involving only changes but no subversion of tradition and values.

The persistence of the caste system under these conditions inspired the present researcher to make a fresh study of one section of the Untouchables, that is, the Chamars of Aligarh City. A large number of Chamars of this city have given up their traditional occupation of leather work and now set themselves apart from those who have continued their association with that occupation. Such persons have disassociated themselves from their hereditary occupation and have acclaimed themselves as Jatavs. Thus, any Chamar, who had hitherto given up his hereditary occupation and has taken up non-traditional occupations feels insulted if accosted as a "Chamar". This fact itself is interestingly challenging as it points to latent desire among the Chamars to feel that they have upgraded themselves by changing their occupation and hence have achieved a higher status in society. This view on their part challenges some of the basic elements of the nature and capacity of the caste system to have undergone a structural change.

This has led the present researcher to examine the nature of social mobility among the Chamars (Jatavs) who fall under the umbrella of Untouchables.
The present study attempts to make reassessments of the past of the caste system with the objective of understanding the role of education and changes in the occupational structure of the Jatavs in bringing about changes in their status in society.

The notable historians Kosambi (1956) and Sharma (1958) have shown how the major elements of the caste system emerged gradually through new economic situations. Kosambi spoke of the formation of the 'Village Society' in India after the Mauryas and of its effect on caste organization; Sharma showed how peasants were gradually pressed down to the status of Shudras, the lowest Varna. The position of the 'Untouchables' vis-à-vis the upper-castes has been a major element in the caste system. Their exploitation, at one level by the entire upper-caste population too, is a process of historical growth. Irfan Habib (1963) has shown how the requirements of peasant agriculture for additional seasonal labour formed the basis for preventing the 'Untouchables' from cultivating the land themselves and so becoming a vast reserve of agricultural labour in pre-colonial times. This situation persists even today. In other words, the caste system has had a complex history and it has changed so much over the past two millennia that it would not be possible to say when, if ever, it was in its 'classic' form.

Recent studies illustrate that modern socio-economic influences of the past one hundred years have undoubtedly brought about many changes in the Indian social fabric. Education ceased to be the monopoly of a handful of castes. The growth of industry provided a
variety of occupational opportunities for those who acquired skills. Briefly then, this new ‘Open’ system of occupation provided opportunities for all (a constitutional right). What we experienced in effect was the transformation from “closed status” groups based on caste to “Open” ones which accommodate other components as well (Beteille, 1965, 1966, 1977, 1979, 1985). The opportunities for education and employment were, however, not equally distributed in society – this was so not only because of planning deficiencies but also because of the disabilities perpetuated by caste traditions. Obviously, the Upper castes were economically more powerful and were able to reap the harvest of educational opportunities. As a result, they were able to obtain much higher ranks in employment (Srinivas, 1952; Beteille, 1965, 1966, 1977; Isaacs, 1967; Morris, 1968). Thus, those who could obtain higher education entered the higher positions and those who could not – like the Untouchables – had to be satisfied with lower cadre jobs of sweepers in the city’s municipalities and hospitals, as garbage collectors or cesspool cleaners. So under the modern industrial set-up, the Untouchable castes continued to perform their traditional caste roles for want of better ones...

It is reported that very few Untouchables have moved into more skilled occupations. On the other hand, despite the many obstacles, there appears to be a steady rise in the number of educated Untouchables. This difference is apparent if we compare the Census Report of India of 1951 with that of 1981 and 1991 (See Census reports). Reservations in government jobs and seats in educational institutions as well as government scholarships have certainly helped,
but only marginally. A newspaper reported that reservations for scheduled castes in the education system have been wasted. On an average, only fifty percent of the reserved seats for scheduled castes have been filled. The percentage is even lower on the Medical and Engineering colleges (Hindustan Times, February 24, 1986). There are many who have now entered the civil services, have become lawyers, doctors, pilots and educationists (Isaacs, 1967). Yet, they constitute a very negligible minority and despite their high positions, face much humiliation from their high caste colleagues and subordinates. Recruitment of Untouchables into the various service cadres is strongly opposed by upper castes and, time and again newspapers report brutal attacks on the Untouchables. Such incidents have awakened all concerned people to the nature of mass exploitation of the Untouchables.

In effect then, caste and class hierarchies continue essentially to coincide as they did in the past – high castes being recruited to higher occupational positions (Morris, 1967; Beteille, 1965; Srinivas, 1970).

The mechanism of stability through change thus continues to reassert itself – with the desire to change on the one hand and the influence of traditions on the other – a working balance of counter-veiling forces have emerged without altering the fundamentals of caste relations. Thus, for example, while the call for abolishing Untouchability was constitutionally enforced, their inherent economic and educational deprivation prevented them from obtaining education and thereby from entering the job market. At the same time modern instruments ranging from rapid communications to fire arms and efficient forms of
organisation (of all those who have resources) have added to the effectiveness of upper caste pressures upon the Untouchables. Often, the successful sanskritized ‘middling’ castes turn out to be the most hostile and powerful opponents of the urges of the Untouchables. In other words, Sanskritization too helps to consolidate the isolation and repression of the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Like Sanskritization, efforts by the government to provide certain privileges for the Untouchables have strengthened rather than weaken caste alignments. For example, the educated Untouchables want to forget their former caste identity but have not yet been able to build up a satisfactory “identity” (Beteille, 1984). They also tend to discriminate against their own original caste group (Isaacs, 1967).

Conversion to Buddhism did not alleviate their situation either, particularly since the new-Buddhists were excluded from reservation (Parvathamma, 1968).

Thus, it seems that the caste system still remains triumphant and

Varnas were purely occupational groups. In the Vedic, Epic or later periods, the caste system witnessed mobility only in the terms of horizontal and within one’s caste. Status and power were based on hereditary caste. The three upper castes of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, & Vaishyas enjoyed eluted social status whereas the Shudras, i.e. the untouchables were at the lowest ebb of social hierarchy in status, ritual purity and socio-political leadership. Brahmins were regarded superior and enjoyed top position in the hierarchical stratification.

With the passage of time, the caste system also underwent changes and the four traditional Varnas were sub-divided into many sub-
castes. These sub-castes emerged on the scene as endogamous sub-groups within the Hindu fold. With the invasion and conquest by Moghuls, the caste-groups became the citadels of social status, political power, economic leadership and various dominant upper castes were recognised by the ruling Moghuls as Zamindars who were not only landowning bosses of the area concerned, but also exercised political power and enjoyed superior status. The social distance between the ruler and the ruled gave further consolidation to the caste, sub-caste groups and kept their separate identities.

The establishment of British rule and the advent of western education gave further impetus to the caste system of India, to especially, the Brahmins to keep the hold on education. The Kshatriyas and the Vaishya also did not lag behind. In the initial stages of British rule, the rulers themselves wanted to maintain the superiority of the higher castes as is evident from the earlier records of the three universities of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay that the bulk of students consisted of the some of the three higher caste persons. The untouchables were kept away from education. Since the turn of the century, education became more open, and secular in character. The dominance of upper castes did not diminish but the untouchables also found access to the educational institutions. The introduction of the means of transportation, communication, technological industry, urbanization, all gave some opportunity to new social values and came a change in the attitude of caste, based on occupation and new dimensions of social relations and social status could be witnessed. Rigidity of caste rituals, social distance and untouchability has further
declined since independence. It has been mainly due to constitutional guarantees to the untouchable (Scheduled Castes), and various social legislations. Social mobility has been changing perpetually, the process of westernisation among the upper castes and that of Sanskritization among the scheduled castes has marked the eruption of new social values, norms, social relations and hierarchical stratification. It is proved through many sociological studies that the caste system of ancient Vedic period does not exist today. Even the traditional theory though providing basis of the caste-stratification cannot sustain the breaking barriers of inter-cast relations in the changing milieu.

V.P. Sharma through his study of the Chhatisgarh region has tried to prove that highly educated persons of lower castes have more chances of social mobility than those of upper castes with similar education. The occupational hierarchy based on hereditary is no longer sustaining force. Freed & Freed in their study of a Delhi village have observed that caste system is observed along traditional lines but there is marked change towards untouchability, especially among the educated urban-oriented persons. The educated scheduled caste-persons are more critical of the caste system. Upper castes maintain the traditional Hindu view of capabilities inherent in castes. High rate of illiteracy among the lower castes works as a hindrance to change. This view has also been supported by H.L. Harit in his study “A sociological classification of scheduled castes and their socio-political trends”.
Subramaniam, Palaniswamy and Desingusethy have shown that the dominance of upper castes still persists in agricultural occupations. In their study of four South Indian village, they observed that the four intermediate castes of farmers dominate scene and even among them, it the caste of Gowders which takes the lead. The Brahmins remain on the top of social hierarchy though not having any sizeable landholdings and the scheduled castes are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The social relations are marked in the traditional Indian society not only by the size of land-holdings but also in the spatial segregation of residence areas in villages as well as urban towns and even metropolitan cities where caste-groups are clustered into various localities. In rural India, scheduled castes can be seen living on the periphery of the village and even they among themselves practice untouchability based on the cleanliness of day to day occupation. But, says Mudhiraj, that, the Bhangis also show some Sanskritization in order to rise in the social status. Study of Shyam Lal has shown that though the Bhangis and other Untouchable castes are changing their ritual performances and casting off their caste names, the overall situation does not show much improvement.

Parvathamma traces the root cause of this stagnation in the scheduled castes themselves. She blames the scheduled caste leaders for not being able to initiate in their own castes. She says that upper caste dominance and constitutional guarantees stand face-to-face. The dominant upper caste leaders do not allow the scheduled caste leaders
to have and exercise much political power. She suggests for more industrialization and urbanization in order to allow more competition along caste-lines.

With regard to the changing scene in the urban areas, the observations of Satish Sabherwal indicate that there is change in the hierarchical placement, stereotypes and socially approved interactions and civil rights. He maintains that the awareness of the scheduled castes to their constitutional rights and the pressure from the higher castes to get their jobs done even though Scheduled Caste officers, have been instrumental in changing the social and cultural values and inter-caste relations. Untouchability is now based more on occupation practiced by the individual than on his hereditary caste. The concept of pollution has also changed. Even the scavenger is not an Untouchable after bath. The conjunction of pressure from above with the pressure from below has produced new cultural patterns.

This change has been admitted by others also. Subramaniam and Francis admit that contact with urbanised areas has changed occupational choice. Quota reservation and higher education give more chances of vertical social mobility to highly educated persons of lower castes than to those of upper castes with similar or even better qualifications.

On the contrary, Greenwood's study of caste system in Kathmandu valley, gives credence to the idea of dominant caste. The caste system, according to the study in the valley, is believed to have originated either on the sanction of the King or through the concept of purity and pollution. The dominant caste of Newars in the valley
regards itself as the highest caste. But this study was more interested in tracing the origin of caste-system than it was in understanding the nature and processes of change.

The idea of dominant caste or even a group of caste dominating the entire caste in a region or area has very ably put forward by Hetukar Jha in his study of the origin, development, etc. of the Shrotriya Brahmins of Mithila. He observed that even among the Brahmins, the Shrotriya Brahmins established themselves on top but they too have various gradations among themselves. These gradations being based on the source of origin (Moola) give top position to those who have maintained their purity by keeping fewer contacts outside their Moola. There are five categories among the shrotriyas. The yogyas lead the list followed by Vanshas, Panjibadhas, jayabars and the Avadatas. His study gives an idea how the caste(s) acquire dominance by maintaining ritual purity and keeping social interaction confined to one’s own caste or sub-caste, but this system not being static keeps on undergoing change.

Sharma, while studying six villages in Rajasthan, observed the variables of caste, class, power, income, education, and rural-urban distinction to study change in rural stratification. He concluded that ritual-complex, migration, occupational mobility, caste-panchayat, jajmani system, all has undergone change. There are horizontal differences within the same caste proving that caste is not a homogeneous group. There are status-differences between the families of the same caste. The inscriptive and achievement factors cut across each other. The cleavages between caste and class, caste and power,
and power and class reveal the complex character of the process and factors of change in the rural stratification system.

Kaufman’s study of six Indian villages has also supported that rural stratification system is being changed due to technological occupations. Even agricultural practice and village services have undergone change. The caste-system is loosening its traditional tinge with the development of the village.

Panchanadikar and Panchanadikar have studied village Mahi in Gujarat. They admit that there are many changes in rural areas, but the concept of dominant caste holds good. In village Mahi, the person of Leuva caste dominates the scene. They own maximum land percentage, money shares in the cooperative societies, the membership of the cooperatives and the village panchayat. Their children are the forerunners of education from village school to college and university level. Despite all this, they say, that the political scene remains uncertain because of intra-group rivalry and inter-caste tensions. The untouchability is seen in its traditional form.

I.P. Desai’s study of untouchability in rural Gujarat shows that the rigors and strictness of the untouchability are not so strict now. The practice exists in two forms: in “private” life and in “public” life. In private life, even there is the practice of social distance among untouchables depending upon cleanliness of work. In public life, untouchability in the form of physical contact has lost its significance.
except in village Panchayat. In the villages which have not been touched by development, the practice of untouchability is present in traditional form but not in traditional strictness. In developed villages, the rigours have declined and social mobility is visible along with change.

The concept of social mobility has been given well thinking by Sanwal in his book “Social stratification in Rural Kumaon”. According to him the economic sphere was seen as an open system based on political and ethnic status of the natives and the Varna of the immigrants. He studied the caste system from Chand rule, to Gurkha rule and the advent of the Britishers. Gurkhas assimilated themselves into the Kshatriya, fold of the Hindus and overthrew many of the Kshatriyas and Brahmans. Though the advent of British rule changed the caste-system, the ritual system did not change. Even the change induced by British rulers could not change the basis of stratification. Inter-caste tensions manifested themselves in the form of acquiring economic and political powers and educational qualifications. The study is an earnest attempt at understanding regional stratification and a clue to future research.

Venugopal has given an account of the earlier uprising against the traditional caste-system. The lingayal Movement of Karnataka was such an attempt in the twelfth century to overthrow the rigid, traditional, Brahmin dominated caste system. The movement was started by Basar, Prime Minister of the King of the Principalities of Karnataka. The movement preached through vernacular the futility of
ritual purity and pollution as being practiced. It pronounced the equality of all those who were the Linga and considered them ritually pure. The movement provided an opportunity to many lower castes to rise in the social status. But after a flourishing period of about three hundred years, the movement weakened and ended as a caste system itself, becoming another sect of Hinduism. This shows that despite facing many ups and downs, the caste-system in India has sustained itself though undergoing changes with requirement of times.

Gaborieu in his paper “Caste, Lineage territory and power in South Asia: Introduction”, shows that caste and lineage still holds significance in exercising power. He studied the institution of India and Nepal between 1948 and 1975.

Sharma, in his paper “Dominant caste: Perspectives and problems” agrees with the concept of dominant caste and elaborated further to show that the village leadership rests in the hands of a select group of different castes. This group is not representative of all castes, but has much influence in village Panchayat and politics. While it is true in respect of some village, the villages with one caste constituting more than 75% of its inhabitants, still have dominant caste as is shown by the study of Panchanadikar and Panchanadikar of Mahi village of Gujarat. Thus the concept of dominant caste, therefore, has a conflicting statement. The role of castes is changing with the increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, yet the scene is not very different in which the upper castes still hold the upper position by virtue of their higher economic, educational and socio-political status.
Various studies of caste system in India have shown that the traditional stratification is undergoing various changes. The hereditary occupation is no more a determinant factor of one’s caste. Yet the top position of hierarchy is occupied by the Brahmins and the lowest rung is manned by the Untouchables. The middle order has many castes, sub-castes of farmers, tenants, labourers and other many castes formed of various Kshatriyas and Vaishya castes. The Untouchables are being induced to rise socially, economically, politically and educationally by the constitutional guarantees and reservation of seats in all governmental institutions and services.

In the political field, the upper-caste leaders monopolise political power. The scheduled caste leaders do not have much freedom in exercising political power or introducing changes yet the rigours of untouchability, strictness of the traditional Varna system. The hereditary occupation are all undergoing changes and do not have same role in determining social status.

In industrialized towns, in Government colonies, in urban areas, there is new type of social mobility based on likeness of occupation emerging like a class organisation. Private and public life preferences mark the interaction determining social distance. There are cases of individual scheduled caste members attaining high social status by virtue of their occupational or political position. Yet the overall condition remains quite complex. The caste system, at some places seems to have finished and at the same time, at other places, it seems so rigid that individual status, occupation, education, social status, are all dependent on one’s caste. It is more so in the rural area not much
touched by development and urbanization. The class-type social structure can be seen in urban areas where occupation and not caste is the determinant of social status.

Sharda, (1991) in his introductory article "Introduction: Structural Inequalities and mobility in India." In the edited volume " Tribes, Castes and Harijans," Ajanta Publications, Delhi reviewed the literature concerning stratification and mobility. He added the findings and/or arguments of the papers included in that volume. It is clear from the discussion that "caste" has received considerable attention in the literature as well as in the papers included in that volume. He showed the influence of ideologists and Social Anthropologists who dominate the field of stratification in India. He emphasized that, studies of occupational mobility that dominated sociological research is rather a rare phenomenon in Indian sociology. In these studies the unit of observation was the individual, and it would be only through observing the life history of individuals that one could learn about the mobility experiences of a sample, both inter and intra-generational.

That the Untouchables remain economically dependent. The Untouchables in their vast majority continue to perform menial tasks for the upper castes and tend continuously to be exploited by them. In spite of all that has happened since India’s Independence, the words of a British administrator about them still ring true: they are the very “dregs of impurity – scavengers and removers of corpses....” (Crooke, 1896, P. 206).

What is your basic finding at the end?