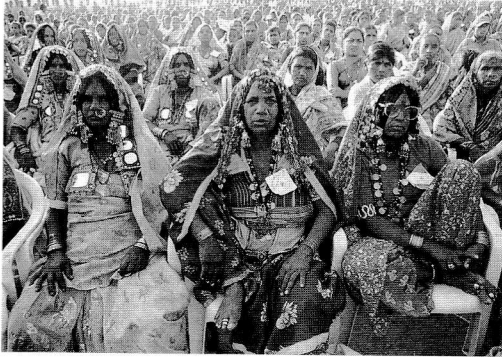


18. The Deeply Rooted Caste System in India



somebody they like belonging to the same class. When Indians first meet each other, they can immediately distinguish which class the person belongs to and which state they are from. In a regular household, there are usually three to four servants working—a driver, a cook, a cleaner, and a gatekeeper—because job assignment is strictly based on which caste

those servants belong to and they are not allowed to do anything else. Their salaries are decided by which caste they belong to, too. The caste system is based on Hinduism and its doctrines of reincarnation and karma, and has been practiced for over 2,000 years.

Nonetheless, the caste system is gradually changing. Today, a person's caste has less effect on school enrollments and job hiring decisions. The government now designates the lower castes as "scheduled castes" (castes which are the subjects of the government's plan). In order to make it easier for children from a lower caste to enter a university, the government is establishing different entrance exam standards for them. In addition, several positions as government officials are reserved for them. Nowadays, there are also people who ignore castes when they get married. Most of them are highly educated people living in big cities, who met as students or co-workers while they were living away from their relatives. After their marriage, some emigrate to another country to avoid problems with their relatives.

The Indian people still talk a lot about the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (1917–1984). She was killed by Sikhs. Sikhism is known as a religion that forbids the worship of idols and the caste system. Sikhs are easily recognizable by their headgear. They let their hair grow, place it on top of their heads and wrap a white turban around it. Only 2% of the Indian population is Sikh, but they make up 60% in Punjab State and are seeking independence. The central government used military force against the Sikhs and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated in retaliation.

I wonder if the problems of India related to the caste system and religious differences can be solved in the 21st century.