

Regional Variations in the Marriage Network and Dowry System : A Study of Unity and Diversity in Indian Civilization

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Regional Variations in the Marriage Network and Dowry System: A Study of Unity and Diversity in Indian Civilization

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The study of social structure is one of the principal interests of anthropologists and geographers. Attempts have been made to elucidate the dimensions of social order, parameters of spatial interaction, and process of change in rural India. The research reported here deals with the distances covered by Indian villagers in completing marriages. The marriage distance, or spatial separation of the husband's and wife's villages, reveals the information field of an individual and the structure of a social network. Such studies augment the meagre store of information concerning the ways in which a village is related to the broader social and cultural environment.

Related research reported on here deals with the pattern and process of social change which is taking place in rural India as measured by the prevalence and frequency of the dowry system. The increasing adoption of the dowry system—a traditional feature of higher castes—by the lower-status castes has been termed the “Sanskritization” of Indian society (Śrinivas 1956: 481–496). We have attempted to study this Sanskritization process along with the marriage network in four selected villages.

The unity of the Indian civilization and the diversity within it can be investigated through the study of the linkages or structures of societal networks (Cohn and Marriott 1958: 1–9). Through these linkages, various communities and subcultures have been integrated into Indian civilization. The networks also function as the significant medium of communication, exchange and diffusion of innovations between villages, villages and urban centres, regions, regions and centres, and various castes, as well as between the educated and uneducated. This research upholds the notion of a long-enduring unity of Indian cultural entity that exhibits very strong regional differentiation with areal variations in social networks and practices.

It is hypothesized that the regional variations in the social network and the process of Sanskritization in rural India are related to cultural attributes and regional levels of development. The social network as measured by marriage distances and the process of Sanskritization expressed through the greater frequency of dowry

among all castes increases with higher levels of regional development.

In recent decades a shift has occurred in the social sciences—from focussing on the village, which had been assumed to be, relatively speaking, a cultural isolate, to the “extensions” of the village, and thence, more recently, to the way in which sets of villages or spatially separate communities are tied together through networks such as marriage and other mechanisms of social interaction. This study concerns the nature and extent of one type of linkage—a linkage arising from the circulation of brides as found in four villages located in four distinct cultural areas of India.

Numerous studies of individual villages in India since 1949 have noted marriage distances (Śrinivas 1975; Sharma 1969; Berreman 1963; Epstein 1960; Mayer 1960; Rowe 1960; Gould 1960; Lewis 1958; Marriott 1955; Gough 1955; Smith 1953). Some of these studies attempt to make generalizations about the structure of rural society based on studies of specific villages located in a distinct cultural region of India. Several studies ignore regional differences. The studies also suffer from profound areal biases in data collection, analysis and interpretation. The location of many of the important village studies reveals clustering in the region around Delhi (Mandelbaum 1970). The density of village study locations diminishes as one moves farther away from North-central India. Even the adjoining Hindi-speaking areas in Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are covered lightly.

There are large geographical areas in South India and the coastal regions which have not attracted the attention of scholars interested in village studies. This suggests a need for comparative studies of the social structure of villages in various cultural regions of India to learn more about the regional patterns of the social network or inter-village relations and the character of and reasons for variations that occur between different regions.

This research tries to answer the following major questions: What is the variation in the size of the marriage fields in various regions of India? How important are caste differences in the size of the marriage fields? What is the role of cultural factors and the regional level of rural development in the size of the marriage field? What is the regional pattern of dowry in India? What is the pattern of regional variations in the process of Sanskritization in rural India as measured by the frequency of dowry practices? We shall also indicate how recent political and social forces in rural Indian society are altering the traditional social structure, which heretofore emphasized the ties of various caste communities to the dominant caste-controlled village.

Replacing this emphasis on village ties, we find a greater interaction with other villages in the marriage network. The network of inter-village relations is increasing in structural importance in the total social organization of society. This study makes a contribution to delimiting the information field and linkages of villagers which can have functional utility in facilitating the diffusion of innovations and change in rural India.

Our study is based on four villages located in Western Uttar Pradesh, North

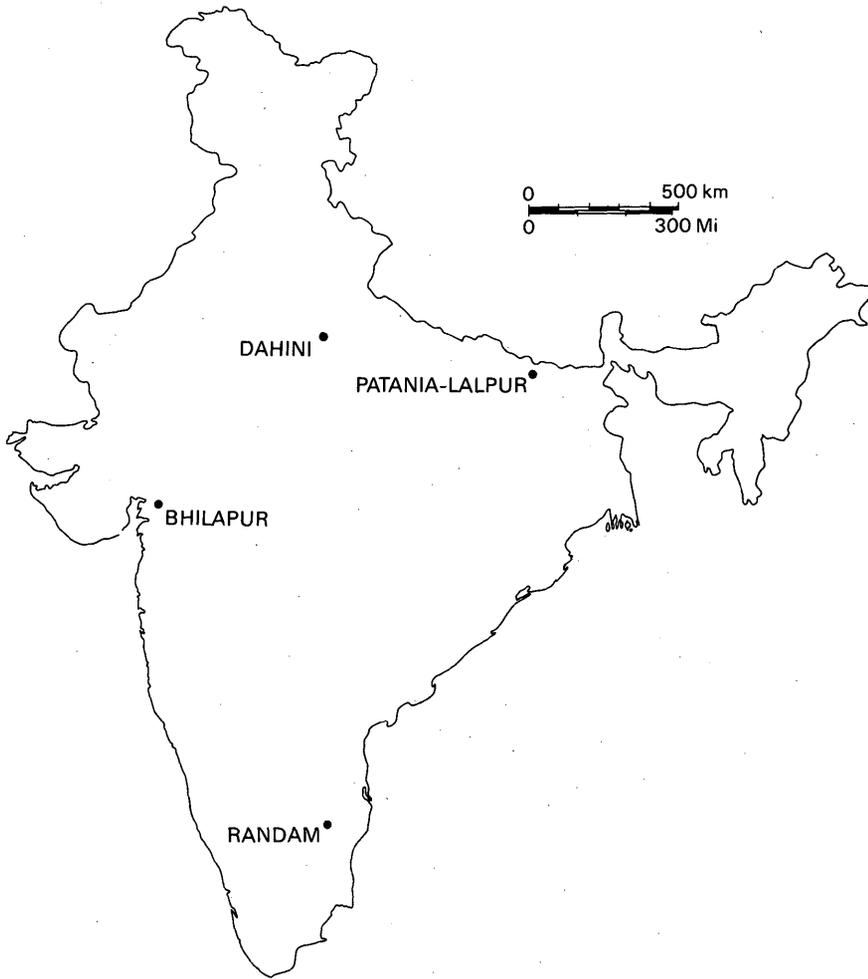


Fig. 1 INDIA: Location of Four Village Sites

Bihar, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu (Fig. 1). This preliminary study will be extended later to include ten other villages located in each of the major cultural regions of India.

STUDIES OF MARRIAGE DISTANCES AND THE DOWRY SYSTEM

Most areas of the world, including rural India, are undergoing rapid social change as the impact of industrialization and urbanization is felt in remote rural areas. In rural India the spread of Western secular education, modern salaried occupations, and the intensification of market cash economies which are replacing agrarian subsistence economies are major factors bringing social change and moder-

nization to villages. The resultant higher incomes have influenced the size of the marriage fields. A number of writers have commented on the development of bridegroom wealth, or dowry, and its great increase in extent and cost during recent decades, partly as a result of the higher demand for well-educated husbands (Gough 1956: 834; Mandelbaum 1957: 252; Karve 1953: 160-161). The increased amount and frequency of dowry would also appear to be a function of the increasing pace of Sanskritization in rural India.

Changes in socio-economic development and levels of living are not taking place at a uniform rate or in a neatly meshed, harmonious functional process in all regions of India. We suggest that a complex of economic and cultural variables influences marriage distances and the frequency of dowry in various regions. We have little quantitative evidence from published literature on marriage fields and dowry from various regions. We have only general statements such as by Karve (1953: 117-118), who suggests that three or four *gotra* rules of exogamy are common in North India.

Under the three or four *gotra* rules, a person cannot marry someone who has the same patri-sib as himself and his father's mother. Patri-sibs are consanguineal kin groups whose members acknowledge a traditional bond of common descent in the paternal line. Based on the study of a village in Jaipur district, Kolenda (1978) suggests that higher caste Brahmans and Khatri give dowries with daughters upon marriage; lower castes give a bride-price. Marriage at considerable distances (40 kilometres or more) is characteristic of the lower castes. Marriage at a nearer village (24 kilometres or less) is characteristic of the Jats and Brahmans.

Lewis (1958: 161), in a study of a village near Delhi, noted that the average marriage distances were between 12 and 24 miles (19 and 38 kilometres). Lewis found that lower castes had a wider marriage field than the upper castes. For example, the marriage distance for upper caste Jats and Brahmans was 12 to 13 miles (19 to 21 kilometres), while for the lower castes it was 24 miles (38 kilometres). Lewis (1958: 182) noted that "the amount of dowry varies in different families, but the sum is usually between 51 and 101 rupees."

Based on a study of Kishan Garhi village in the Aligarh district of North India, Marriott (1955: 173) pointed out that "marriage and kinship generally reach to greater distances" in North India and "the ties of marriage and kinship are traditionally confined to the village and to a small surrounding area" in South India. The average marriage distance in Kishan Garhi was about 12 miles or 19 kilometres (Marriott 1960: 112). Gough (1955: 49), in her study of a village in the Tanjore district in South India, noted 100 miles (160 kilometres) as the farthest marriage distance. Gough did not specify the nearest or average marriage distance.

Mayer (1960: 210), in a study of a village in the Malwa district of Central India, noted that the average marriage distance was 13.5 miles (21.6 kilometres) and the farthest distance was 50 miles (80 kilometres). Based on a study of a village in the Banaras district, Rowe (1960: 301) reported the average marriage distance of 12 miles (19.2 kilometres) and the farthest distance of 55 miles (88 kilometres).

Berremen (1963: 159), in a study of a Himalayan village in the Dehra Dun district, noted that 83 percent of the marriages were within eight trail miles (12.8 kilometres), and the farthest marriage distance was 35 trail miles (56 kilometres). In a study of a village in the Amritsar district of Panjab, Smith (1953: 1297) found that the greatest number of marriages were within eight miles (12.8 kilometres); less than 20 percent married beyond 16 miles (25.6 kilometres).

Cohn (1955: 58), in a study of a village in the Jaunpur district of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, reported that low castes "paid no dowry" but under the influence of upper castes "the practice of dowry has been introduced, although the boy's father still gives a token payment to the girl's father: hence the transition between bride-price and dowry can be seen in progress" (Cohn 1955: 75).

In general, a review of the existing studies reveals that, unlike South India, North Indian villages have greater marriage distances and maintain strict rules of "village exogamy." This condition appears to arise from three highly interrelated factors: (1) caste endogamy, (2) territorial stabilization of kin groups, and (3) *gotra* exogamy. In North India each functionally differentiated caste group must avoid commensal and connubial relations with all other groups for ritual or morally intrinsic reasons. The number of caste groups in a village tends to be quite large in the north. The large number of caste groups imposes a severe limit upon potential objects of matrimony within a village or its immediate surrounding area, which tends to increase the marriage distance.

The elaborate tabus of Hinduism have tended to cement families to their local village communities and region. As a consequence, members of the same caste in a village or in nearby villages are normally confined to a small number of descent groups; sometimes they are all members of a single descent group. Thus, villagers in North India have an implicit notion that all castemen living nearby are "related"; to marry a person who is "related" is to commit incest. As a result, the marriage distance increases over a wider area.

The marriage distance in North India is also influenced by the maintenance of *gotra* exogamy among the higher castes. *Gotras* are agnatic kin groups, and all upper castes are supposed to be ultimately traceable to one of the great Rishis, or founders of schools of ritual (Karandikar 1929). The higher the status of a caste, the more its kinship will correspond to the *gotra* pattern—exogamous clans to maintain ritual purity. The significance of the *gotra* is, then, that "village exogamy" is virtually automatic for the higher castes, because in the average-sized North Indian village all members of the higher castes residing there, and most probably in adjoining communities as well, are of the same *gotra* and, therefore, are "related." The practice of village exogamy by the lower-status castes results from a combination of caste endogamy and the tendency to imitate the higher caste *gotra* system by adhering to its exogamic spatial attributes.

Using place-of-birth data for married females in the 1961 Indian census, Libbee (1980: 65–104) estimated and mapped the marriage distances and territorial endogamy patterns in India (Figs. 2 and 3). Libbee's map reveals that marriage

distances are greatest in Western Uttar Pradesh, Panjab, Rajasthan, Central Gujarat, and in some areas of Madhya Pradesh and Eastern Maharashtra. Marriage distances are shortest—below eight kilometres—in the Western Himalaya, Eastern India, Kerala, and coastal Maharashtra. Libbee's map shows that shorter marriage distances predominate in the Southern Dravidian-speaking zone. The medium-sized marriage field in Karnataka is indicative of the mixed kinship structures of Northern and Southern India. This mixed zone is located south of the conventional Aryan-Dravidian transition zone, which usually is placed in Maharashtra.

It appears that local exogamy is widespread throughout India, but it is relatively higher in Northwestern India as compared with other parts of the country. The mean marriage distance in India is less than that measured by Marriott (1955: 175) in the Aligarh district (19.2 kilometres), but more than the rural European range

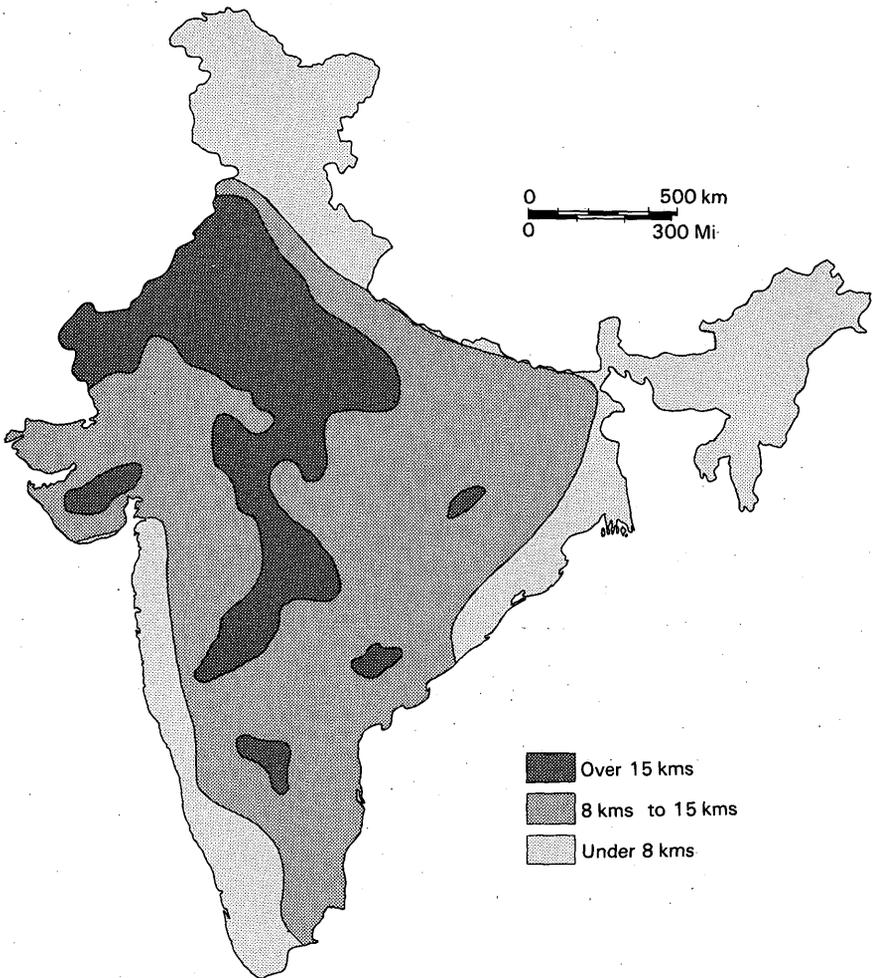


Fig. 2 INDIA: Marriage Distances

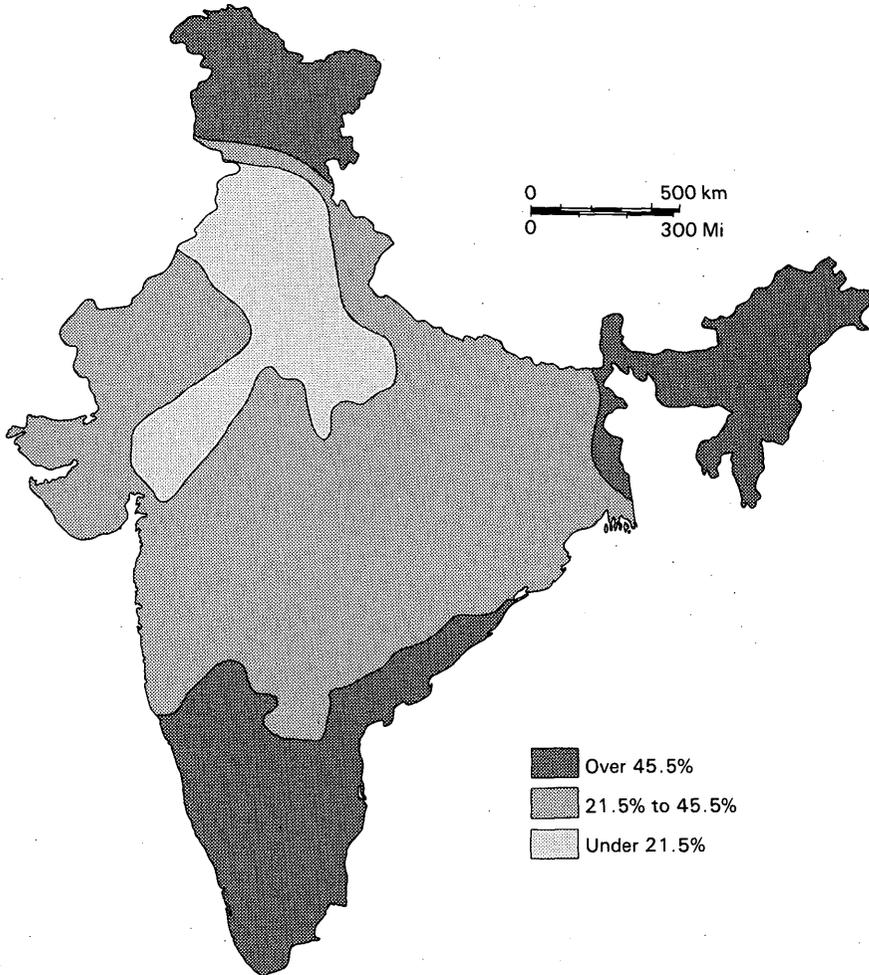


Fig. 3 INDIA: Endogamy Patterns

(9.0 kilometres) indicated by Perry (1969) in his study of rural Dorset.

THE STUDY AREAS AND DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was undertaken in December 1987–January 1988 in four widely dispersed areas in India: Dahini village, Mainpuri district, Western Uttar Pradesh; Patania-Lalpur village, Darbhanga district, North Bihar; Bhilapur village, Baroda district, Gujarat; and Randam-Durairaj Nagar village, North Arcot district, Tamil Nadu. The regional design was an important aspect of this field research. Although several studies of Indian villages have included observations on marriage distances and dowry practices, none has researched the topics systematically for all

of India or has introduced regional comparisons. All the information was obtained through the use of standard uniform questionnaires in all four villages.

One of the objectives of this study was to discover a regional societal structure or spatial patterning of socio-cultural phenomena within the long-sustained unity of India's civilization and to comprehend the relationships among elements of social

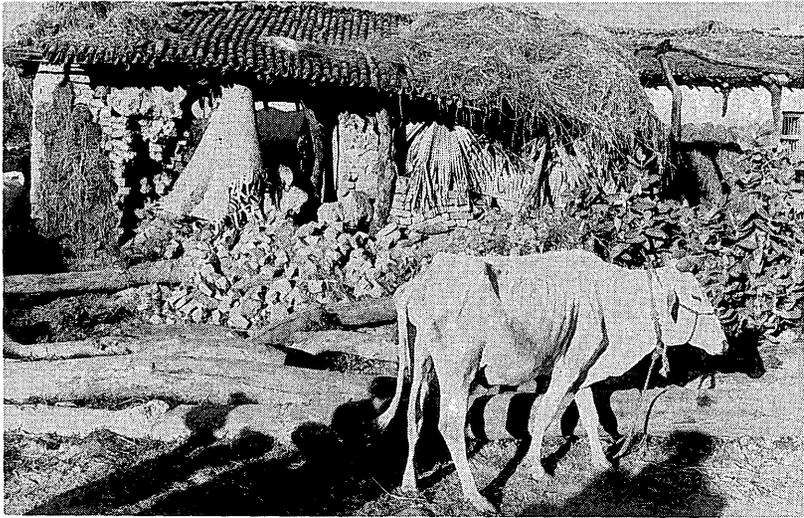


Photo 1 Patania-Lalpur Village, Darbhanga District, Bihar
(Mithila Cultural Region)

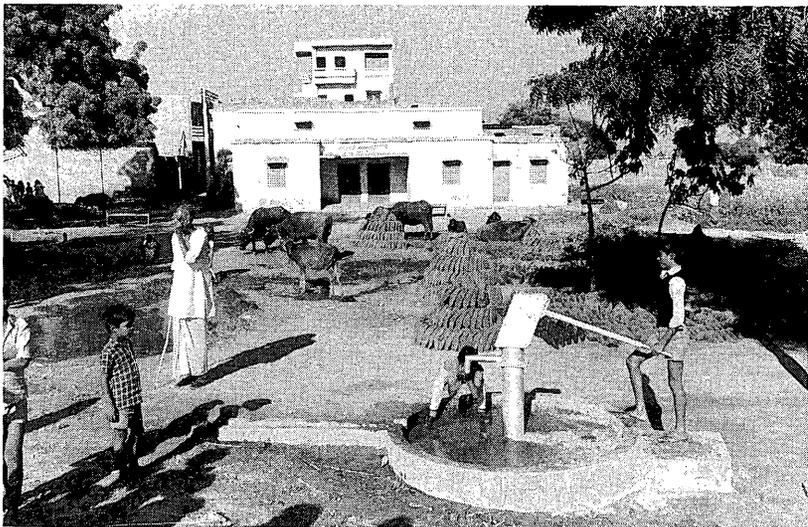


Photo 2 Dahini Village, Mainpuri District, Western Uttar Pradesh
(North India Hindi Cultural Area)

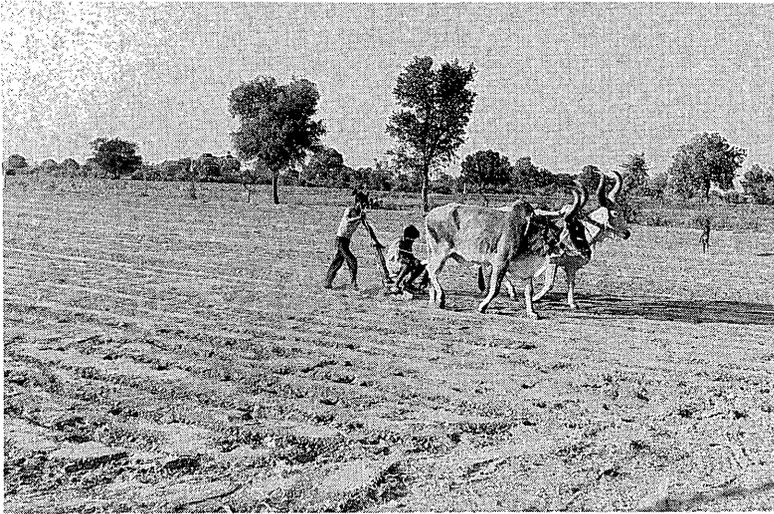


Photo 3 Bhilapur Village, Baroda District, Gujarat, Western India (Gujarat Cultural Area)

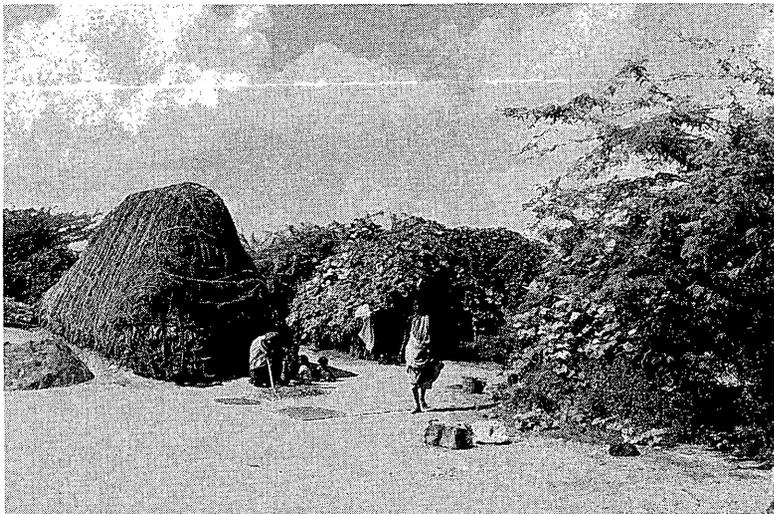


Photo 4 Randam-Durairaj Nagar Village, North Arcot District, Tamil Nadu, South India (Dravidian-Tamil Cultural Area)

structure, political economy, and levels of development at the regional level. The data collected in the four villages provided a preliminary regional comparison of marriage distances and dowry in four widely dispersed areas of India. A brief introduction to these villages may be of interest to the reader.

All villages have certain characteristics in common. Each is connected with a

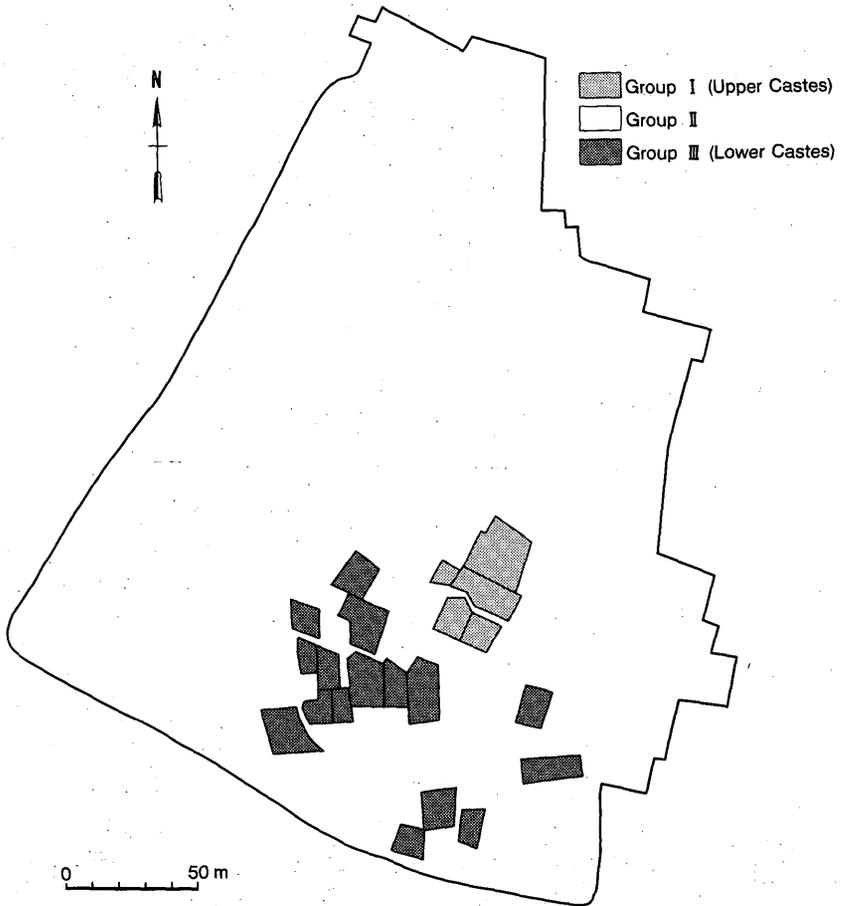


Fig. 4 Dahini: Distribution of three caste groups

road network and has bus service. Although a variety of agricultural products is produced in each, all villages raise primary foodgrains: wheat and rice in Dahini, rice and wheat in Patania-Lalpur, rice in Randam, and wheat and millet in Bhilapur. Each village is predominantly Hindu and represents the regional culture of the area. Each is a *ryotwari* village, in which each landholder's property is assessed separately for taxes with each landholder individually responsible for their payment. A feature common to all the villages is the *panchayat*, or elected council of elders, which decides disputes between villagers and discusses matters of common interest such as the building of roads.

In each village there is a feeling of solidarity. This sense of allegiance is expressed through the feeling that all inhabitants in the village share something of a kinship bond. This is directly reflected in the kin relations and village exogamy that is dominant in North India. In the South Indian village of Randam, a marriage

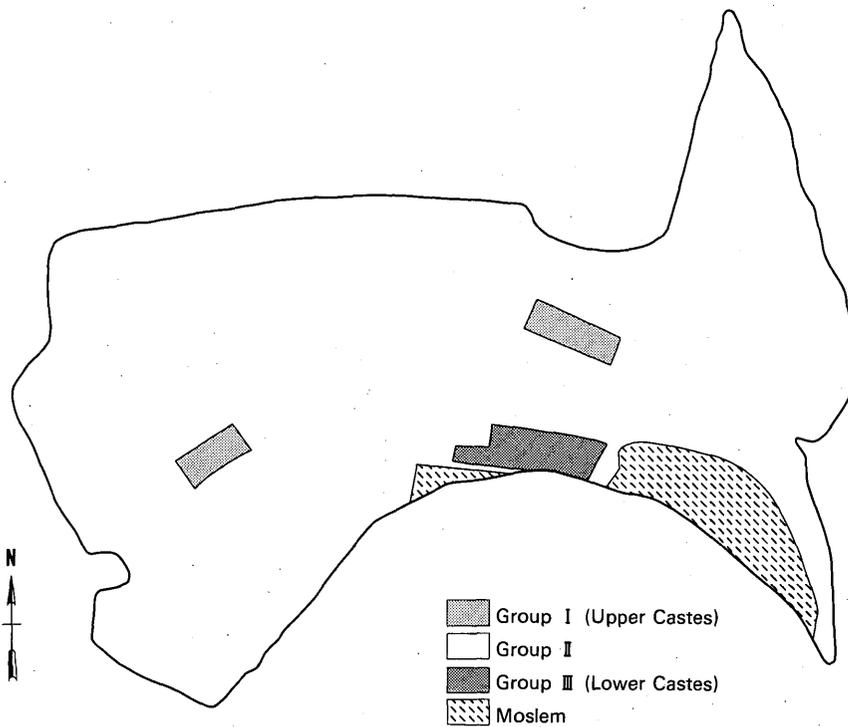


Fig. 5 Bhilapur: Distribution of three caste groups

is also of concern to the entire village. Each marriage of a Random boy or girl activates more kinship ties and facilitates future alliances for the villagers.

The religious ceremonies and festivals held in each village are common expressions of solidarity. In each of the four villages, a local deity—tutelary guardian of the whole village—is worshipped by all villagers. Each village is clearly an important and viable social entity to its people, who also take part in the larger society and share in the pattern of Indian civilization.

All four villages are nucleated, a tight cluster of houses surrounded by adjacent fields. They are old settlements and, until recent land reforms, most of the land was held by the locally dominant Brahmins or Jats. Landownership is now much more evenly distributed. There are artisan castes as well as low-caste Harijans in each village. A small Moslem population is also found in Patania-Lalpur. Each settlement's compact layout promotes greater social interaction among the village population.

Each village is typically divided into several sections or separate neighborhoods. Particular caste groups reside in each section, giving some social distinctiveness to several parts of the village. Harijans live in a separate quarter in Dahini, Bhilapur and Patania-Lalpur (Figs. 4, 5 and 6). In Random the Harijans live in a separate hamlet (Fig. 7). The residential distinctions are very marked in all

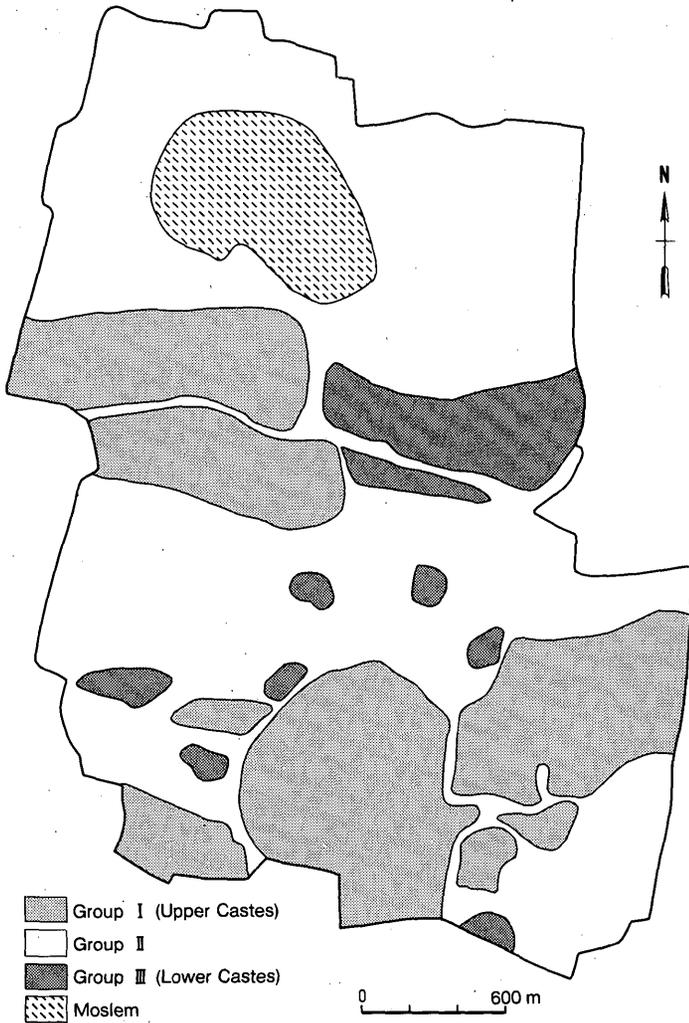


Fig. 6 Patania-Lalpur: Distribution of three caste groups

the villages, where three main social levels are mirrored in the residential pattern. The Brahmans live in one quarter, the Harijans live on the opposite side, and castes of the middle blocs are located between the two. Moslems in Patania-Lalpur are confined to their own locality. Although each group is segregated residentially, there is close economic interchange and a good deal of informal cooperation, shared interests, and loyalties within the bounds of the whole village.

People move constantly from nearby villages and towns to each of the four villages. Within such village clusters, whenever news and influences from a centre reach one village, they quickly spread to the others. Influences from various centres—such as Darbhanga for Patania-Lalpur, Shikohabad for Dahini, Baroda

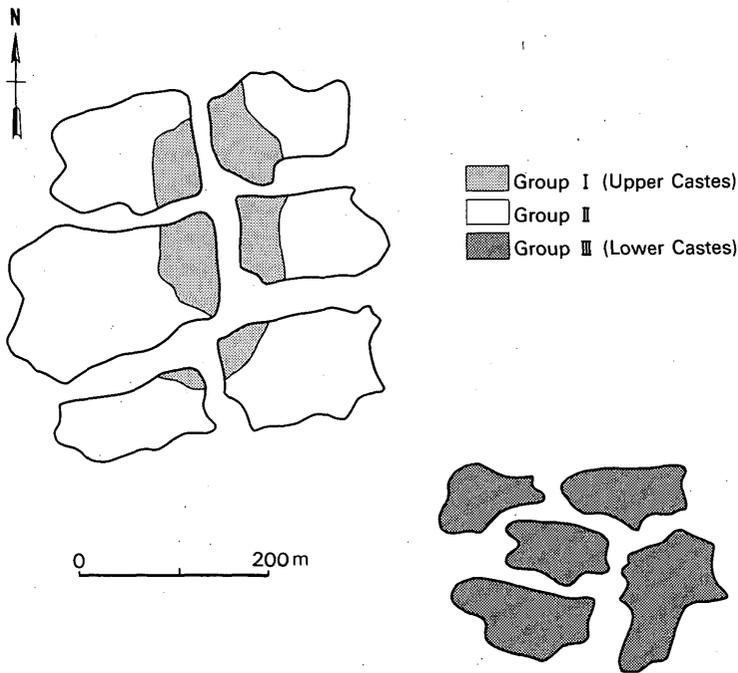


Fig. 7 Random: Distribution of three caste groups

for Bhilapur, and Arcot for Random—are regular and important factors in village life. One effect of these long-established networks and links is that certain concepts and practices have come to be shared in each area, creating cultural similarities within the region. This indicates a closer interaction within borders than across them.

To investigate the spatial pattern of marriage fields and the amount and frequency of dowry, 100 sample heads of households were interviewed in each of the four villages. Information was obtained on the birthplace of the respondent's wife, site of marriage of sons and daughters, dowry received at the time of the respondent's marriage, dowry received at the marriage of sons, dowry given at the time of daughter's marriage, personal attributes, economic status, and activity space.

The sample of 100 in each village was selected as follows. A grid was placed on a map of the village so as to yield a good area sample from each section of the village. Each sample location consisted of several households from which one was selected by the probability method (Survey Research Center, 1976). All respondents were males. The information supplied by them was cross-checked through interviews with their sons.

In Patania-Lalpur 85 percent of the respondents were from 31 to 70 years old; in Bhilapur, 93 percent; in Dahini, 90 percent; and in Random, 91 percent. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents in Random and Dahini had a secondary

education; in Bhilapur, 45 percent; and only six percent in Patania-Lalpur.

Farming was the principal occupation of 46 percent of the respondents in Patania-Lalpur and Randam, 43 percent in Dahini, and 27 percent in Bhilapur. In Bhilapur 43 percent were unskilled laborers, 13 percent were engaged in business, and six percent worked for the government. In Patania-Lalpur 20 percent were unskilled laborers, four percent were engaged in business, and seven percent were school teachers. In Dahini 34 percent of the respondents were employed in government service, and only nine percent were unskilled laborers. In Randam 19 percent of the respondents were employed as unskilled laborers and two percent were in business.

The higher-income group (over 1,000 rupees per month) formed 43 percent of the sample in Dahini, 34 percent in Randam, 30 percent in Patania-Lalpur, and 24 percent in Bhilapur. The middle-income group (400 to 1,000 rupees per month) comprised 26 percent in Randam, 37 percent in Dahini, 22 percent in Bhilapur, and 11 percent in Patania-Lalpur. The low-income group (less than 400 rupees per month) formed 59 percent in Patania-Lalpur, 54 percent in Bhilapur, 35 percent in Randam, and 20 percent in Dahini.

VARIATIONS IN THE SIZE OF MARRIAGE FIELDS

The spatial pattern of marriage for each of the four villages was plotted on the map by locating villages which were the source of the wife of each respondent (Figs. 8, 9, 10 and 11). We also located and mapped the villages where the respondents' sons (Figs. 12, 13, 14 and 15) and daughters (Figs. 16, 17, 18 and 19) were married. The respondents were married between 1947 and 1967; their sons and daughters were married during 1980–1987. A comparison of the data indicate spatial changes in the marriage fields between 1947–1967 and 1980–1987.

Despite "village exogamy" the distribution of marriage ties was local in character in all four villages. The marriage field was extremely localized in Patania-Lalpur, where 80 percent of the marriages were within a distance of 15 kilometres; the greatest marriage distance was only 25 kilometres. Dahini and Bhilapur had wider marriage fields. In Dahini 61 percent of the marriages were within a distance of 35 kilometres; in Bhilapur 96 percent were within 32 kilometres. The longest distance for Dahini was 200 kilometres, and for Bhilapur it was 196 kilometres. In the South Indian village of Randam the marriage field was small—70 percent of the marriages took place within a distance of three kilometres.

Generally, the pattern of marital ties spread much further southwesterly than in other directions. Dense marital distributions often ended at the district or *taluka* boundaries. The administrative units represent more than a mere geographical abstraction in the villager's mind. At the same time, each village's home district shows the greatest concentration of "affinal villages." An explanation of the short

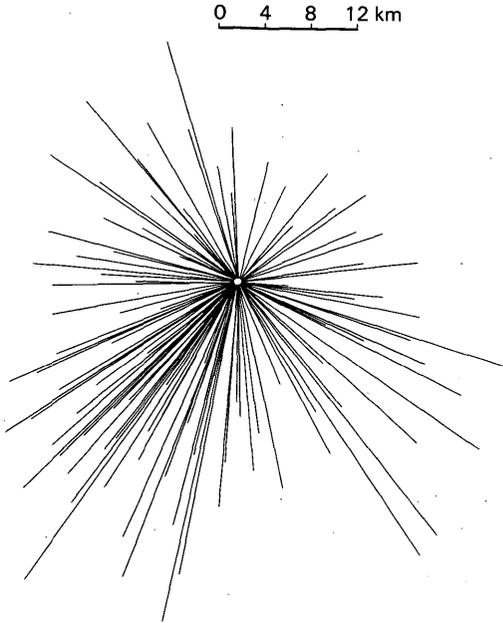


Fig. 8 Patania-Lalpur: Marriage field of respondent

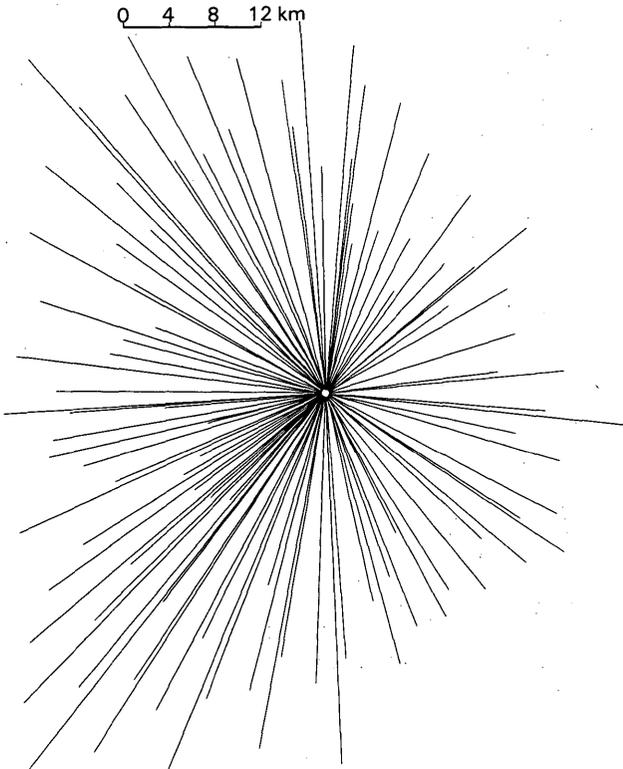


Fig. 9 Dahini: Marriage field of respondent

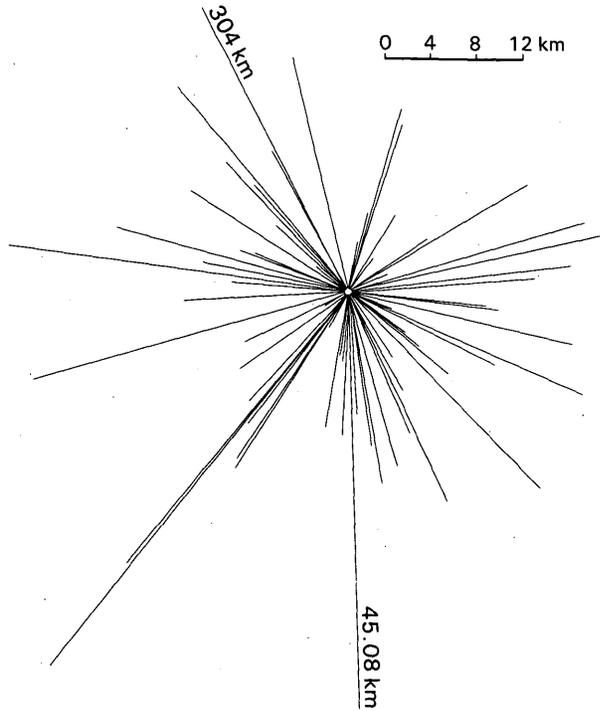


Fig. 10 Bhilapur: Marriage field of respondent

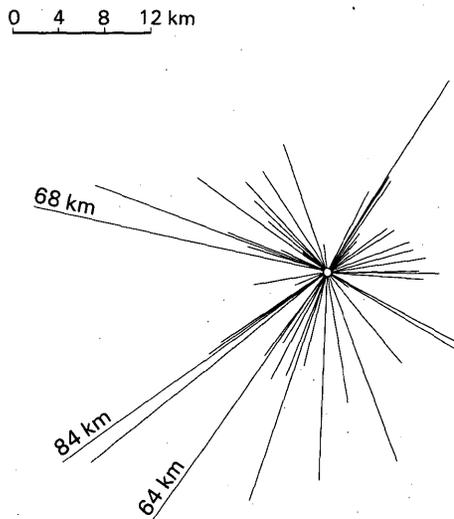


Fig. 11 Random: Marriage field of respondent

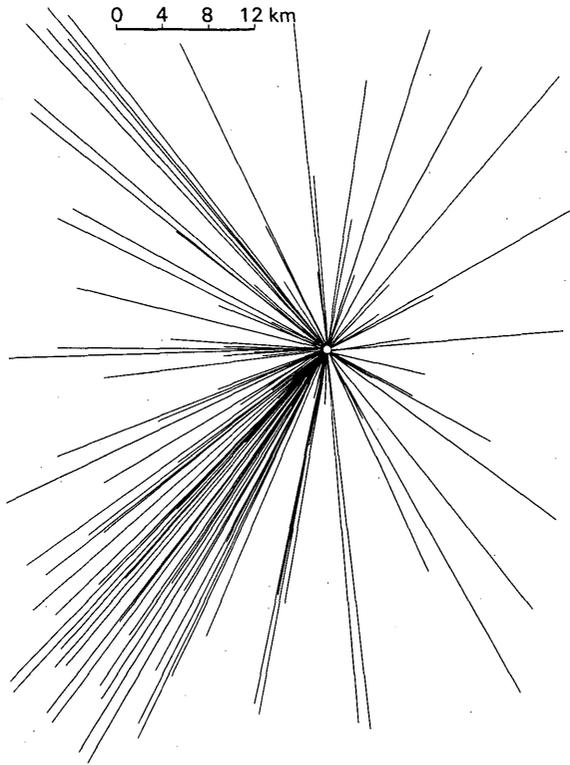


Fig. 12 Patania-Lalpur: Marriage field of respondent's son

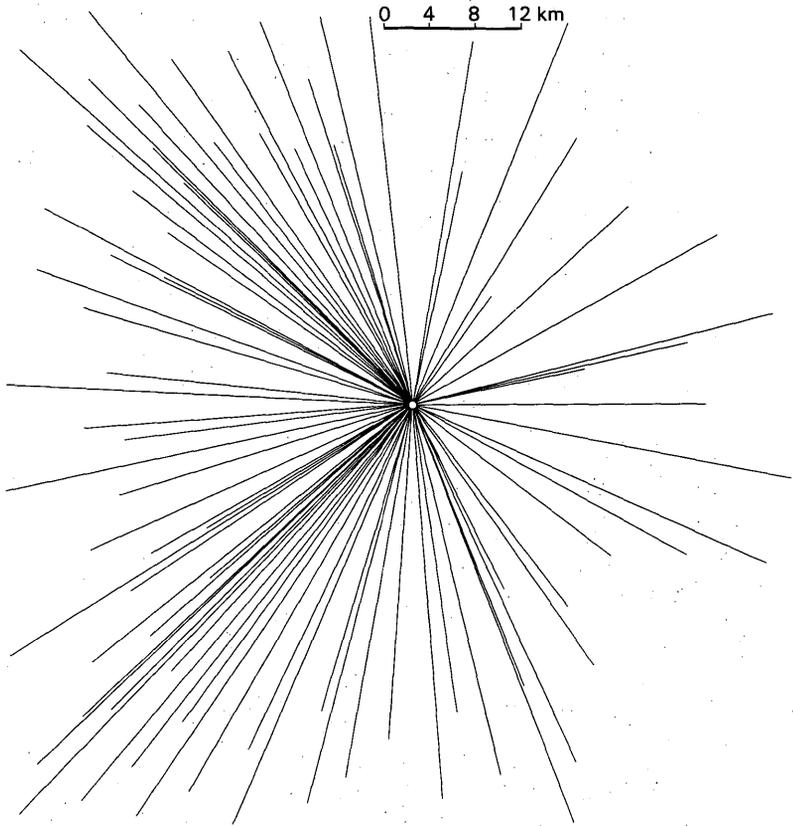


Fig. 13 Dahini: Marriage field of respondent's son

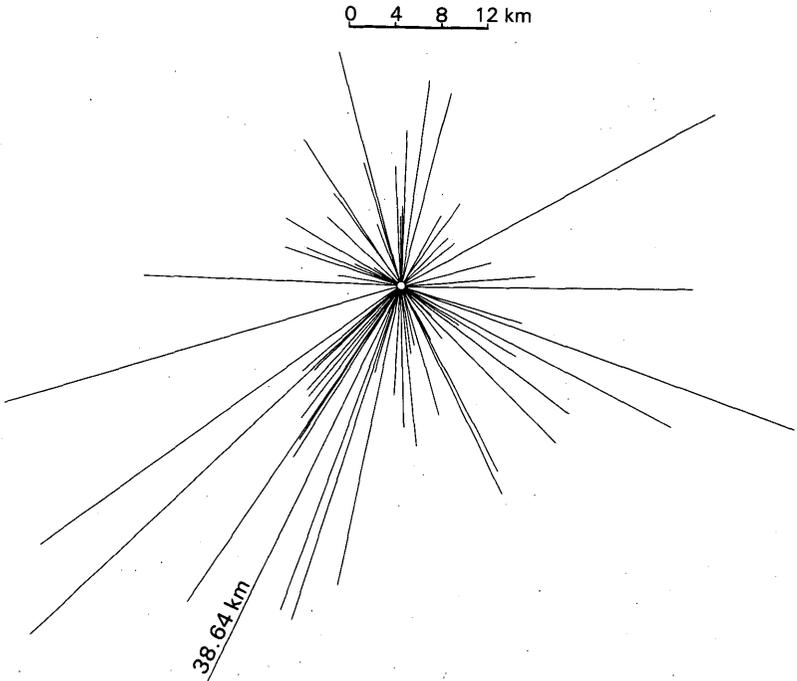


Fig. 14 Bhilapur: Marriage field of respondent's son.

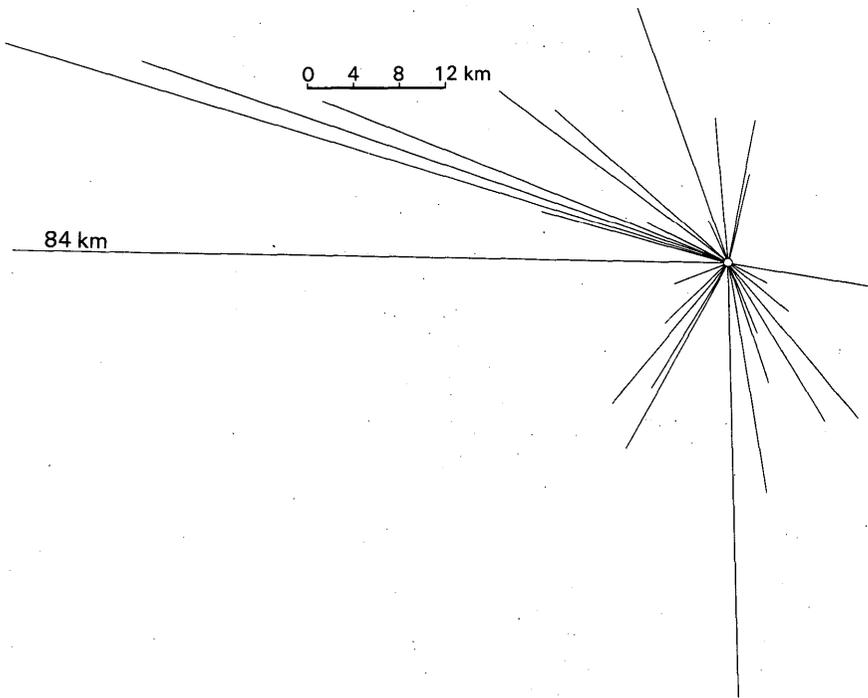


Fig. 15 Random: Marriage field of respondent's son

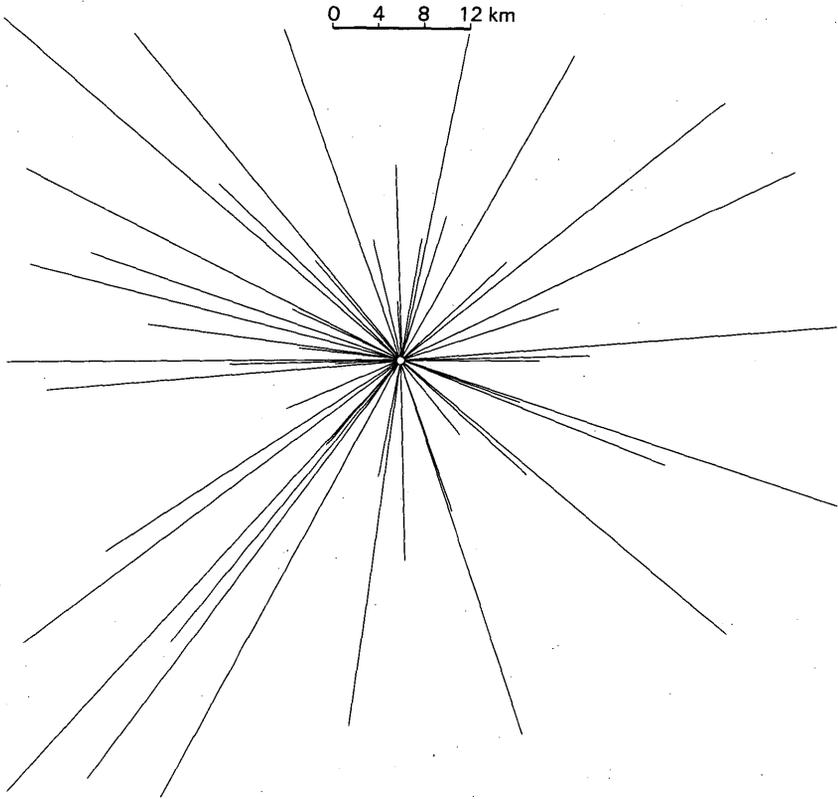


Fig. 16 Patania-Lalpur: Marriage field of respondent's daughter

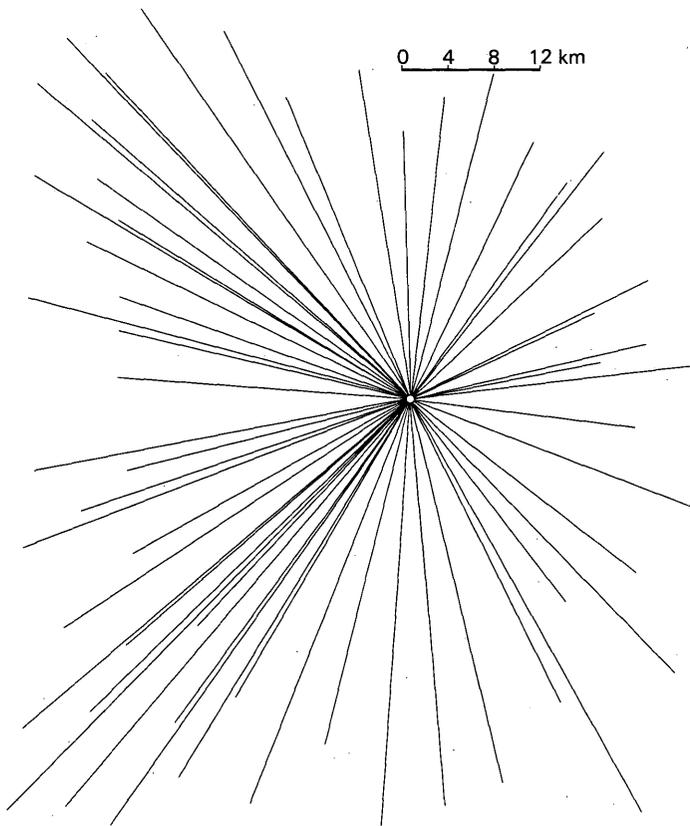


Fig. 17 Dahini: Marriage field of respondent's daughter

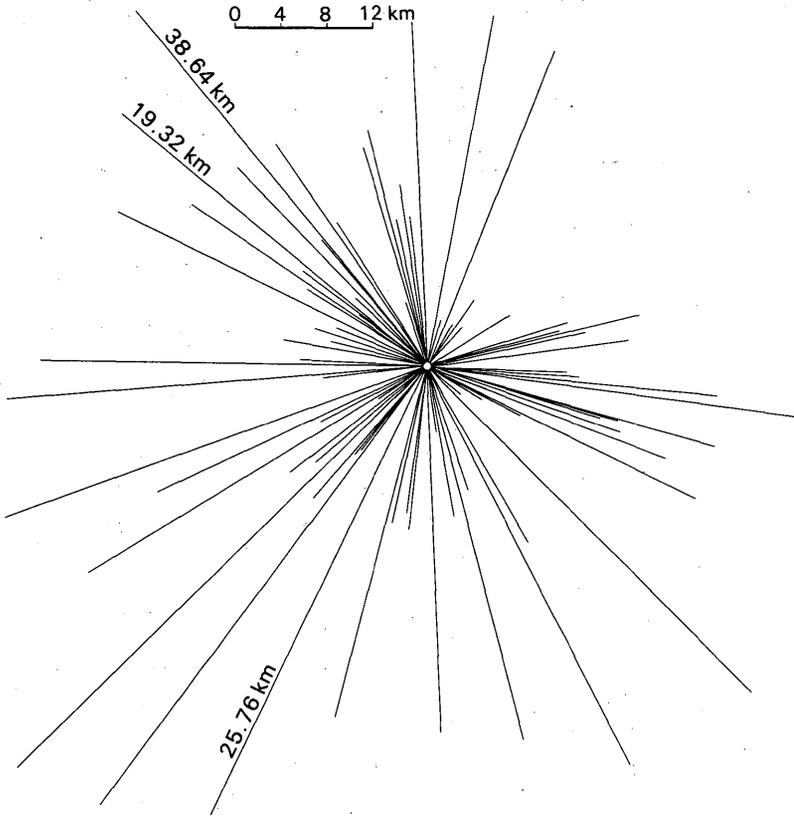


Fig. 18 Bhilapur: Marriage field of respondent's daughter

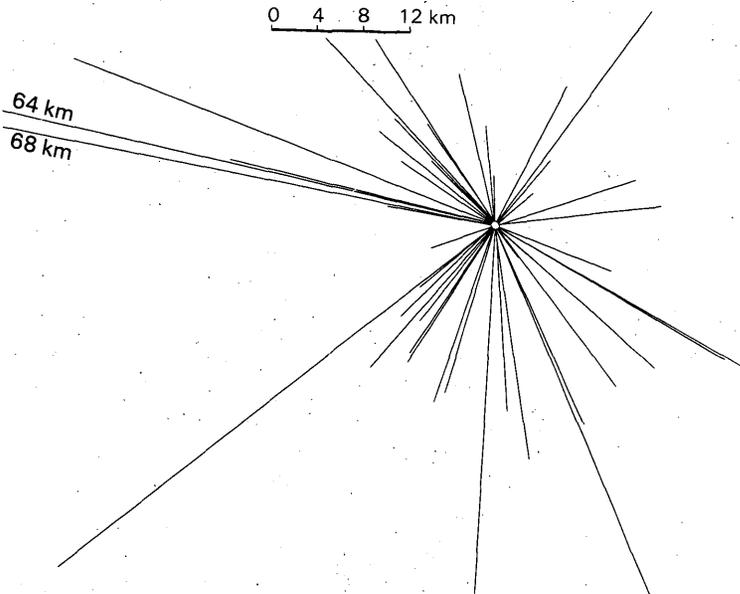


Fig. 19 Random: Marriage field of respondent's daughter

marriage distance towards the east may be that once a village's intermarrying commences in a given direction (for whatever the initial reasons), it tends to maintain that direction because affinal ties that get established become a source of information concerning further marital opportunities.

Marriage fields vary by caste. Higher castes generally have a greater spatial range of marriage than those of lower castes. Eleven castes reside in Patania-Lalpur, 14 in Dahini, 23 each in Bhilapur and Random. These castes can be grouped into three general categories on the basis of their functions and socio-economic condition.

Group I consists of the Brahmans and Rajputs or Thakurs, who are both ritually the "cleanest" castes and the principal proprietors of farmland in each of the four villages.

Group II embraces the five castes (Kurmi, Yadav, Ahir, Chettiar and Reddiar) who practice agriculture on both owned and rented land. Some members of these castes are also merchants. They represent a middle level of economic well-being. These castes are "moderately clean" from a ritual standpoint, the Ahir and Kurmi constituting the lowest stratum.

Group III is made up of the landless artisan and laborer castes (Vanniar, Adi Dravida, Valluvar, Kuyavar, Irular, Oddar, Harijan, Bhangi, Dhobi, Telli, Dusadh, Tanti, Kori, Khamik and Nai). Moslems, although they profess a separate religion, were included by the villagers in Group III. The castes included in Group III are ritually at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and economically depressed as well.

The upper grouping (I) of Brahmans and Thakurs was completely distinct from the others in the matter of marriage distributions. The overwhelming majority (86 percent) of Thakurs in Dahini, Bhilapur and Patania-Lalpur have established marriage ties within the Mainpuri, Baroda and Darbhanga districts respectively. The majority of Brahmans have marriage ties outside their district with the exception of Randam. The average marriage distance of Brahmans in the three villages in Gujarat, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh was 64 kilometres, which was well beyond the local area and usually beyond the district.

Higher status in the local hierarchy of caste is expressed in a distinctively wide range of spatial mobility in marriage. For the higher castes, both the confinements of the local area and district boundaries fail to be significant, as far as marriage fields are concerned. This situation conforms with the functional roles and historical positions attained by the Brahmans and Rajputs respectively. The former have been ritually and the latter secularly dominant in the rural areas.

The wider marriage field of the Group I castes reflects their extended political and cultural integration. The relations of the Brahman and Rajput clans of Dahini, Bhilapur and Patania-Lalpur were interlinked by kinship and political obligations over a greater area, and this is expressed in the wider marriage fields of these castes. In other words, their higher status, based upon an extra-local integration of political and economic power, was, and is, expressed in terms of a wide spatial marriage field.

Cultivator castes in Group III marry closer-in than do the Group III artisan-laborer castes despite the higher status and socio-economic condition of the former. The gradient of decline in the spatial extent of marriage with descent in caste status is not altogether consistent. This may be because the artisan-laborer castes appear to be numerically smaller in the Mainpuri, Baroda and Darbhanga districts than are the Ahir and Kurmi castes. Thus, although lower in status, fewer men and women of marriageable age are available in the surrounding region than there are for Group II castes. A full explanation of the wider marriage field of the Group III artisan-laborer castes must await comprehensive research on the caste geography of these regions. It is possible that the wider marriage field of the Group III castes is a function of their smaller numbers in various regions rather than of their caste status (Mitra 1979).

In order to discover the temporal changes, if any, in the marriage fields, we collected data on the marriage distance of the sons and daughters of the respondents. The data revealed that marriage fields in all four villages expanded between 1947-67 and 1980-87. The greatest increase was recorded in Dahini, where 71 percent of the sons' marriages were completed beyond a distance of 35 kilometres; 60 percent of the daughters' marriages were beyond 54 kilometres. The maximum distance for sons' marriages was 975 kilometres and 954 kilometres for daughters.

In Bhilapur the average marriage distance for sons was 52 kilometres; for daughters it was 43 kilometres. In Patania-Lalpur the increase was very minimal: here, 82 percent of the sons' marriages were within ten kilometres, and 90 percent of

the daughters were married within 15 kilometres. In Randam 86 percent of the sons' marriages were within six kilometres and 70 percent of the daughters were married within twelve kilometres.

An interesting fact revealed by the data is that the sons' "affinal villages" were closer to all the four villages that were studied than were those of the daughters. The daughters-in-law were obtained from villages whose average distance was 19 kilometres, whereas a daughter was sent as a bride to villages where the average distance was 27 kilometres. The differences in the average distance of sons' and daughters' "affinal villages" arose out of the possibility of control exercised in the location of a son's marriage to a much higher degree than the distance of a daughter's marriage. Whenever possible, the son's marriage was arranged with a comparatively nearby family, reflecting certain culturally patterned features such as the son's position in the kin group and the problems of selecting a bride who conformed to the status specifications of the caste. The choosing of spouses for sons was therefore subjected to more "rational" control.

The data collected for this study offers evidence that the marriage distance is increasing in rural India. The increase appears to be greatest in the Northwestern plains—Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab—and in Gujarat. These areas have experienced major increases in development during the last four decades and are economically better off than are the other regions of the country (Karan 1974: 1-6; Karan 1975: 210-220). Large-scale rural development plans have brought about major technological and economic changes in these areas. These developments have influenced the social structure and have increased the villagers' interpersonal contact over a wider space. The increase in marriage distance is a component of the increased interpersonal contact field.

In the relatively less developed regions, such as Darbhanga in North Bihar and the North Arcot district in Tamil Nadu, increased marriage fields have been recorded, but these increases are not as substantial as in Gujarat and the northwestern plains. In the South Indian village of Randam most spouses continue to be chosen from the same village because of the less rigorous practice of village exogamy.

The analysis indicates that there are significant regional differences in the marriage distances in rural India. Also, changes taking place in marriage distances vary between various regions. The changes are associated with regional levels of development along with territorial endogamy-exogamy restraints, caste, and related factors.

REGIONAL PATTERNS OF DOWRY AND THE SANSKRITIZATION PROCESS

In recent years there has been much public concern about large dowry payments in India (Khan and Rao 1984: 303-315). The practice of making dowry payments is not new, especially among the higher castes of North India (Srinivas

1984; Rao and Rao 1980: 99–113). In the feudal society of India land and caste defined the parameters of power. Marriage was central to social strategy and an important instrument of social control. Dowry highlighted and cemented marriage alliances between landed, high-status, and powerful families. Dowry was practiced only by “high” or “middle” ranking castes.

Contemporary dowry practices are different from earlier patterns. Three dimensions of this change may be noted. First, dowry has spread to all caste communities, religions, and regions. It is practiced in all classes to varying degrees.

Second, the “voluntary” character of the dowry “gifts” is disappearing. The amount of dowry is dictated by the demands of the groom’s family as well as by the status symbols of the groups within which the natal and marital family wish to project themselves, rather than by “tradition.” The money value of dowry has increased substantially.

Third, dowry has come to encompass the entire marital relationship and customary gift exchange between affines. Demands begin at the engagement and may continue at frequent intervals and on special occasions throughout the life of the marriage. Truly, there is “extended dowry.”

Dowry varies in form, content and intensity from one region to another within India. Important differences are found to exist in the dowry system of North and South India, in form as well as intensity, because of cultural and historical factors. In North India patriliney and patri-virilocality are dominant and the marriage institution is covered by caste endogamy and village exogamy. The relationship between affines is one of “avoidance,” and there is a marked status differentiation between “bride-takers” and “bride-givers.” In South India, matriliney and matrilocality are found to exist along with patriliney and patrilocality, and the rules of marriage are governed accordingly.

To a very large extent the traditional kinship systems have shaped the dowry practices of various regions. The relationships between kinship, rules of marriage, and dowry have been discussed at length by anthropologists and sociologists such as Lewis (1958) after studying a single village in detail. Cultural anthropologists have sought to establish a link between lineage, locality, inheritance, the division of labor according to sex, and the nature of the dowry system in various regions.

In order to discover the regional variations of dowry and the “Sanskritization process” in rural India, we collected data on dowry in the four villages. During the 1947–67 period 97 percent of the respondents in Patania-Lalpur received 7,000 rupees in dowry; in Dahini and Bhilapur 90 percent received 11,000 and 9,000 rupees respectively. In Randam 98 percent received 6,000 rupees in dowry during the same period. Between 1950 and 1987, 90 percent of the respondents in Patania-Lalpur received 21,000 rupees as dowry at the marriage of their first son, 97 percent in Bhilapur received 20,000 rupees, 97 percent in Dahini received 50,000 rupees, and 96 percent in Randam received 75,000 rupees.¹⁾

The dowry paid by the respondents upon the marriage of their daughters also increased in all four villages. In Patania-Lalpur 90 percent paid 30,000 rupees in

dowry for each daughter between 1950 and 1987. During the same period 97 percent in Bhilapur paid 20,000 rupees, 91 percent in Dahini paid 25,000 rupees, and 97 percent in Randam paid 80,000 rupees. The increase in dowry received and paid was highest in Randam, indicating a rapid diffusion of a dominantly North Indian custom into South India during the last forty years.

The increase in dowry cash payments in Bhilapur was modest, but our interviews revealed that a substantial amount of dowry was paid and received in gold. Most of the respondents were reluctant to reveal the amount of gold paid and received in dowry. If the cash and gold were combined, the dowry in Bhilapur would be among the highest in rural India. In the relatively prosperous areas of the Northwestern plains and Gujarat, the dowry has been consistently high.

The state of Uttar Pradesh, in which Dahini is located, ranks first in India in dowry-related crimes involving the deaths of young married women whose parents are unable to meet excessive dowry demands (Gautam and Trivedi 1981: 1).

Dowry is demanded and paid without any relation to the income and wealth of the bride's father. With the increased desire for quick money, these demands are not confined to the higher castes alone. The lower castes in all four villages studied have tried to adopt the dowry customs of the higher castes. As income levels have risen among the lower castes as a result of development programs, the lower castes have begun to adopt the dowry and marriage codes of the upper castes. The development of communications has facilitated the spread of the dowry system or "Sanskritization" to areas previously inaccessible, and the spread of literacy has carried the system to groups very low in the caste hierarchy in Patania-Lalpur, Dahini, Bhilapur and Randam. Modern economic development in rural areas has facilitated the "Sanskritization" process.

The form and pace of development in rural India varies from one region to another and from one section of the population to another. Among the lower castes the institution of bride-price prevailed among sections of the Group III castes until recently in all four villages studied here. However, with increasing literacy, economic progress, and the demand for educated young men who have good jobs, dowry has replaced the bride-price during the last forty years.

One of the interesting features of social change occurring in modern rural India is that the lower castes are becoming more and more Sanskritized. On the other hand, there has been a general secularization among the upper castes such as the Brahmans and Rajputs, whose lives are traditionally permeated with rituals. The conflicting pressures of Sanskritization among the lower castes and secularization among the upper castes in the four villages studied in this report provide a challenging topic for further research.

In our study of the four villages, we found economic advance to be the principal factor leading to the Sanskritization of customs—such as the adoption of the dowry system among the lower castes. The Harijans of Bhilapur, Dahini, Patania-Lalpur and Randam are becoming increasingly Sanskritized with rising income levels and the collective desire to be held in the high esteem of their friends

and neighbors. Adopting the customs of a higher caste is one means by which the status of a lower caste group is raised.

In each of the four villages the economic advancement of the lower castes, acquisition of political power through the formation of caste voting blocs in general elections, education, leadership, and a desire to move up in the caste hierarchy have expedited the Sanskritization process. A continuance of this process among the lower castes will probably mean the eventual introduction of major cultural and structural changes in India's rural society as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the spatial distribution of marriages undertaken by the residents of four villages located in Bihar, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu has been shown to reveal regional variations in marriage fields based on cultural, social and economic factors. There are also important differences in the dowry system from one region to another and in the diffusion of dowry among the lower castes.

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NOTES

- 1) The inflation of the country is not taken into account in the analysis of dowry.

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