

**Course:** MA (Sociology)

**Paper Code:** SOCY4108

**Paper Title:** Social Stratification and  
Mobility

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Gender and Stratification

*Reading:*

‘Enforcing Cultural Codes’  
by Prem Chowdhry

- Indian social structure is very complex. The present article 'Enforcing Cultural Codes' by Prem Chowdhry, published in 1997 in Economic and Political Weekly offers us a brilliant analysis of the relationship between Caste and Gender and how does this relation invites violence if the cultural norms associated with it are broken.

- Chowdhry explains the crucial interconnections between Caste, Class and Gender through the case study of inter-caste marriages which infringe cultural practices invariably leading to direct violence.
- According to her this is a widespread phenomenon in North India where her ethnography is conducted.

- Chowdhry says that over the years instances of inter-caste marriages have escalated in North India which are not given the same attention as the cases of dowry and rape are given.
- According to her these are not run away marriages or elopements.
- Most of these cases lead to direct violence perpetrated by the family of the male.
- Such marriage alliances are hushed up as family and private affairs

- She discusses many cases of violence from North India to show how ideas of caste purity, status and power stand at the core of the violence perpetrated.
- She also narrates experiences of her field work in Haryana.
- She says that the rural opinion is in favour of violence on those who violate caste norms so that others can learn lesson.

- She demonstrates that there is a complicity of police in punishing those who dare to enter into inter caste marriage.
- The upholding of honour, *izzat*, is very important for them which is under threat if women transgress sexual codes.
- She argues that the marriage alliances which activate the interconnections between honour and violence are not limited to intercaste but intra caste marriages too that breach the customary rules of gotra.

- But it is inter caste marriages which invoke more violent condemnation.
- The idea of izzat, according to Chwodhry, is invoked with regard to women as they are seen as the carrier of izzat of family, community and caste.
- Chowdhry says that it is actually the control of her sexuality which is intrinsically linked up with control of women's productive and reproductive labour.

- Chakravarti, which we have already discussed, also makes a similar argument.
- Chowdhry says that the most virulent objection to the breach of caste taboos comes generally from landowning families due to the intricate connection between control of women's sexuality, her productive and reproductive labour.

- She concludes that until we study this interface of caste, class and gender, we will not be able to understand stratification in India.
- In India Caste, Class and Gender are not independent forms of stratification but inter-connected

Thank You

