3.1.1. Changes in the Caste system

- **Trends for inter-caste marriage:** Purity of blood was one of the main aim of the caste system. As a result, inter-caste marriages were socially forbidden. Due to economic and social necessities, inter-caste marriages on western lines are being performed at increased frequency
- **Challenge to orthodoxy:** Orthodox practices of the caste system such as child marriage, ban on widow re-marriage, ban on conversion, insensitiveness of superior class towards the low caste people are being challenged in the wake of urbanization.
- **New food habits:** Due to frequent mixing of the people at meetings, conferences, seminars etc., food habits have changed. Moreover, people have adapted to new social norms such as eating at the same table, accepting food prepared by low caste people without any reservations etc.
- **Changes in occupation:** Occupational mobility has become the new feature. Leaving behind their traditional roles, Brahmins have become traders whereas Vaishyas have joined teaching and so on.
- **Improvement in the position of lower caste:** Due to steps initiated by the government, position of lower castes have improved economically as well as socially.

3.1.2. Factors Affecting the Changes in Caste System

- **Sanskritisation:** Sanskritisation as a process of change is the mobility concerned with positional change in the caste system. By changing the customs and rituals such as by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, people belonging to the low castes are claiming a 'higher' position in the caste hierarchy.
- **Westernisation:** Due to changes in the spheres of education, food habits, dressing sense, style of eating, manners etc., westernization has brought occupational changes cutting across the caste barriers.
- **Modernisation:** It is a process which primarily relies on scientific outlook, rational attitudes, high social mobility, mass mobilisation and specialisation in work. It has made caste system more flexible. For instances, in the urban areas, castes are gradually becoming classes. The emergence of middle class with a rational outlook and goal orientation is a testimony to the fact.
- **Industrialisation and urbanisation:** With the growth of industrial towns and cities, migration has spiralled up. Unlike the source regions, destination areas witness fewer adherences to caste rules.
- **Democratic decentralisation:** The reservation provided in the Panchayati Raj system has given the opportunity for the lower castes to empower themselves.
- **Caste and politics:** They both are closely linked to each other. In fact, the link has led to an empowerment among the lower castes since they ventilate their feelings through elections and power lobby. Dalit politics is one such example, where Dalits are trying to assert their identities and have become successful in capturing power in various states.
- **Legislative measures:** A variety of social legislations have been introduced in the post-independence era which aim to safeguard the interests of the down-trodden, to eradicate untouchability and to facilitate the social and economic development of the depressed castes. For instance, Untouchability (offences) Act, 1955 provided for punishment against the practice of untouchability.