

There is no evidence on this point at all. Besides the evidence produced by the appellant merely shows some acts by respondent I which no doubt were intended to assert a higher status; but unilateral acts of this character cannot be easily taken to prove that the claim for the higher status which the said acts purport to make is established. That is the view which the High Court has taken and in our opinion the High Court is absolutely right."

In view of the above observations by superior Courts, it can safely be concluded that the crucial test to determine is whether a child born out of such a wedlock has been accepted by the Scheduled Caste community as a member of their community and has been brought up in that surrounding and in that community or not. The nexus between the child and the community or class or caste is a real test irrespective of the fact whether the accommodating class or caste or community is Scheduled Caste community or a caste Hindu community. Even if the mother of the child is a member of the Scheduled Caste community, it is possible that the child is accepted by the community of his father and brought up in the surroundings of his father's relations. In that case, such a child cannot be treated as a member of the Scheduled Caste community and cannot get any benefit as such. Similarly, when the mother belongs to a higher caste and the father is a Scheduled Caste, the father may remain away from the Scheduled Caste Community and the child may be brought up in a different surrounding under the influence of his mother's relations and her community members. In such cases also, the child cannot be said to be a member of the Scheduled Caste community. In the alternative, where the child irrespective of the fact whether the father or the mother is a member of Scheduled Caste community, is brought up on the Scheduled Caste community as a member of such community, then he has to be treated as a member of the Scheduled Caste community and would be entitled to receive benefits as such.

4. As regards the marriages not registered and marriages not legally valid, it may be pointed out that registration is not mandatory for marriages un-

der the Hindu law. Even under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, registration under Section 8 is optional and sub-section (5) provides that the validity of any Hindu marriage shall, in no way, be affected by the omission to make entry in the Marriages Register maintained under this Section. Section 7 provides that Hindu marriage may be solemnised in accordance with the customary rites and the ceremonies of either party thereto and, if such ceremony includes the Saptapadi, the marriage becomes complete and binding when the seventh step is taken. In view thereof, all those marriages though not registered but which have been solemnised in accordance with the procedure mentioned in this Section, are to be treated as valid marriages and our opinion mentioned in para 3 above will apply to the children born out of such valid but undersigned marriages.

5. As regards marriages which are not legally valid, it is clear that such children are illegitimate unless invalidity of marriage is due to grant of a decree of nullity by a Court in which case, provisions of Section 16 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, will apply. Under Section 6(b) of the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956, the natural guardian of a Hindu minor has been stated to be—

"in case of an illegitimate boy or an illegitimate girl—the mother and after her the father"

6. It can be derived from this that the illegitimate children are generally brought up by the mother and in her own surroundings. Therefore, if the mother belongs to the Scheduled Caste and brings up the child within a Scheduled Caste community, the child can be taken as a member of the Scheduled Caste community. But in this case also the major factor for consideration is whether the child has been accepted by the Scheduled Caste community as a member of their community and he has been brought up as such.

7. The above are the general observations, however, each case has to be examined in the light of the circumstances prevalent in that case and final decision has to be taken thereof.