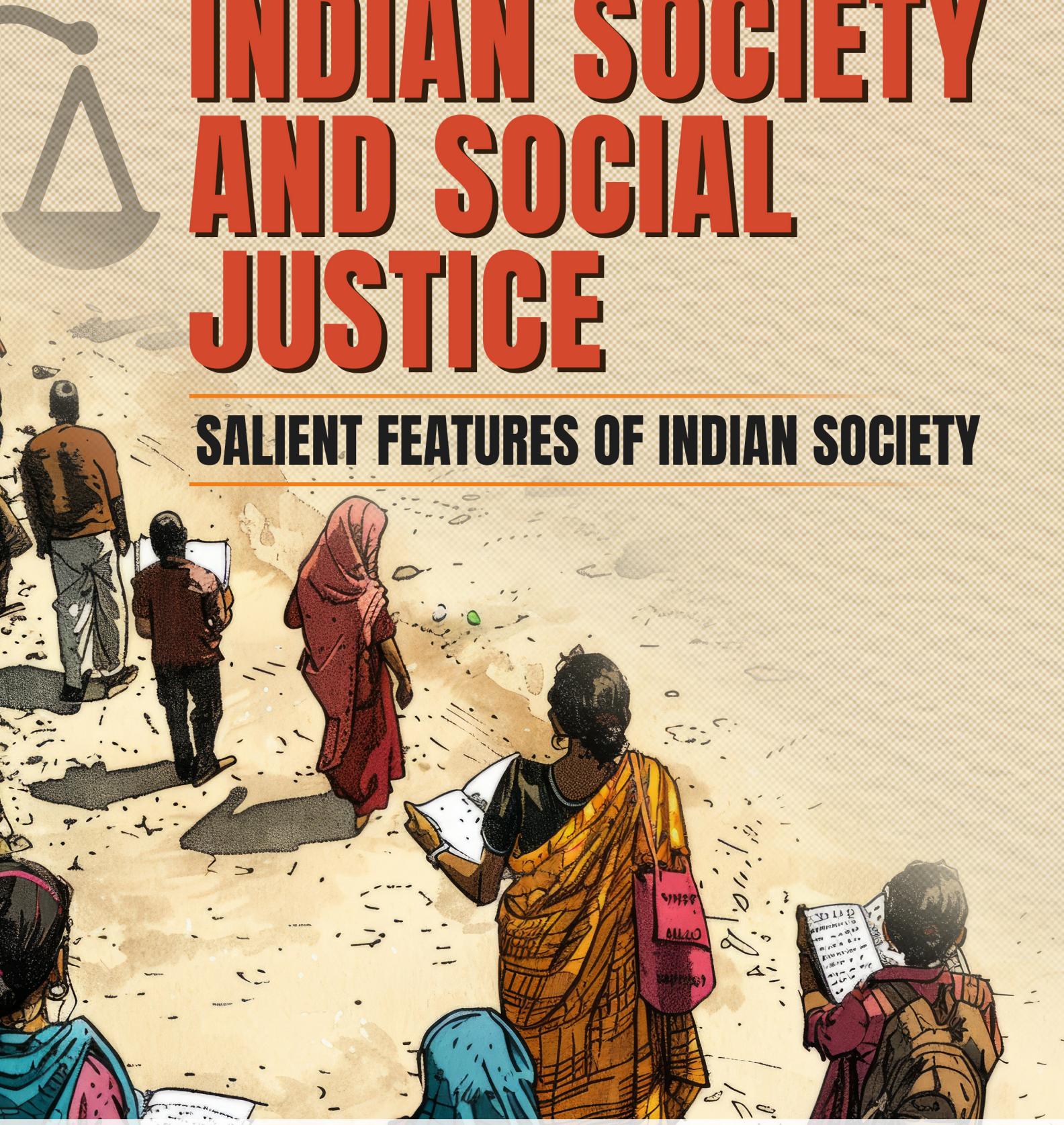


UPDATED VALUE ADDITION MATERIAL 2024

# INDIAN SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

## SALIENT FEATURES OF INDIAN SOCIETY



AHMEDABAD



BENGALURU



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



JAIPUR



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PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI

# SALIENT FEATURES OF INDIAN SOCIETY

Student Notes:

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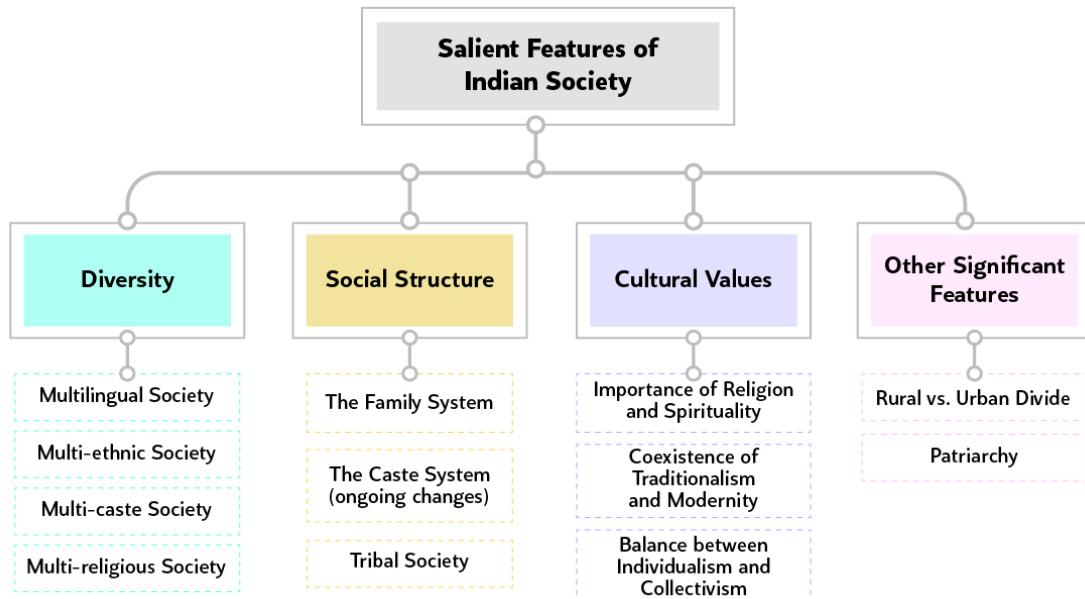
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India is a land of remarkable contrasts. Numerous cultures, religions, and traditions coexist within its borders, creating a society rich in variety. At its core lies a fundamental belief – Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which translates to "the world is one family." This philosophy of unity in diversity has allowed India to absorb and integrate a multitude of influences, shaping a society brimming with unique characteristics.

Student Notes:



## 1. Unity in diversity

The concept of "unity in diversity" lies at the very heart of Indian society. It signifies the nation's remarkable ability to maintain a sense of collective identity and shared purpose despite its inherent heterogeneity.

Here, it's important to understand that diversity doesn't simply mean the existence of differences. Instead, it signifies the coexistence of a multitude of cultures, traditions, and beliefs within a single nation. This is manifested in the following ways:

### 1.1. Religious Harmony

India is a land of remarkable religious diversity. Hinduism is the most prominent faith, practiced by approximately 82.41% of the population. Islam follows with 11.6%, while Christianity (2.32%), Sikhism (1.99%), Buddhism (0.77%), and Jainism (0.41%) make up smaller but significant communities.

This coexistence, enshrined in the Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom, is a testament to India's tolerance and inclusivity.

### 1.2. Racial Tapestry

**India is a fascinating blend of all three major racial groups: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid.** The 1931 census identified various sub-groups, highlighting the country's complex ethnic makeup. This diversity is evident in physical features, customs, and traditions across different regions.

### 1.3. Linguistic Variety

India is one of the unique countries in the world that has the legacy of diversity of languages. The Constitution of India has recognised 22 official languages. Multilingualism is the way of life in India as people in different parts of the country speak more than one language from their birth and learn additional languages during their lifetime. There are over 19,500 languages and dialects spoken as a mother tongue.

This vast linguistic landscape can be broadly categorized into four main families:

Student Notes:

- **Austro-Asian:** This family includes languages like Santhali, Munda, and Ho.
- **Dravidian:** This family encompasses South Indian languages like Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam.
- **Sino-Tibetan:** Languages spoken in the Northeast and Himalayan regions, such as Sikkimese and Bodo, belong to this family.
- **Indo-European:** This is the most widespread family in India, including languages like Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, and Marathi.

**India's linguistic diversity is not just a source of cultural richness, but also a vital element for national integration and social inclusion.** Here's why preserving linguistic diversity is crucial:

- **National Integration:** Providing recognition to various regional languages can help contain linguistic regionalism and promote unity. The formation of linguistic states, far from undermining Indian unity, has helped to prevent separatist movements by acknowledging regional identities.
  - Examples like the dominance of Sinhala over Tamil in Sri Lanka and the Bengali language conflict in Pakistan highlight the dangers of neglecting linguistic identities.

**Rajni Kothari's observation:** Linguistic states, despite challenges, have removed a major source of discord by allowing administration in languages understood by the majority. However, demands for further recognition, like those for Mithila and Gorkhaland, persist.

- **Preservation of Traditional Knowledge:** Endangered languages of ethnic tribes often hold a wealth of knowledge about a region's flora, fauna, and medicinal plants. Preserving these languages helps conserve this rich intangible heritage.

Indigenous languages hold unique knowledge systems and wisdom passed down through generations. For instance, the Asur community of Netarhat, known for their metalworking skills, is believed to have played a role in India's iron production.

- **Social Inclusion:** Linguistic diversity ensures equal opportunities for various language groups in education, social life, and economic development. When administration is conducted in native languages, it promotes greater people participation in governance.
- **Effective Education:** Studies by UNESCO show that primary education in the mother tongue leads to better learning outcomes, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Multilingual abilities have also been linked to cognitive benefits.

### 1.3.1. Linguistic Minorities

These are communities whose native languages are distinct from the dominant language(s) in a particular state or region. Building on the importance of linguistic diversity for national integration and social inclusion, let's delve deeper into the challenges faced by linguistic minorities in India.

#### The Challenges of Linguistic Minorities:

- **Undefined Status:** The Indian Constitution, though recognizing 22 languages in its Eighth Schedule, lacks a clear definition of "linguistic minority." This ambiguity creates uncertainty regarding the specific rights and protections available to these communities.
- **Dominant Languages:** The creation of linguistic states has empowered regional languages, but it can also marginalize smaller communities within those states.
- **Endangered Languages:** Globalization, nuclear family structures, and migration patterns threaten the survival of minority languages. With fewer speakers, these languages risk losing their rich heritage and the knowledge they hold.

With 197 languages teetering on the brink of disappearance, India tops the list of countries with the most endangered languages according to UNESCO.

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### Why are Languages Endangered?

Several factors contribute to this crisis:

- **Dominance and Marginalization:** Efforts by majority communities to impose their language can suppress minority languages. The Tarao tribe in Manipur, with only around 850 speakers left, exemplifies this threat.
- **Colonization's Legacy:** Colonial rule often devalued native languages in favor of the colonizer's tongue, hindering their preservation.
- **Government Apathy:** Limited government support for cultural institutions, education, and media in minority languages can lead to their decline.
- **Globalization's Impact:** The rise of English as the language of business and the homogenizing influence of global culture pose a risk to indigenous languages.
- **Migration and Disintegration:** Economic migration disrupts communities, leading to a decline in native language use. For example, Konkani speakers migrating to Mumbai might adopt Marathi or Hindi as their primary language.

Despite these challenges, India is taking steps to preserve its linguistic diversity:

- **Constitutional Safeguards:** Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution guarantee the right to conserve one's language and script. The Office of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities works to ensure their language rights are protected.
  - Articles 350A and 350B of the Indian Constitution mandate facilities for instruction in mother tongues at the primary level and the appointment of a special officer for linguistic minorities
- **Promoting Multilingualism:** The New Education Policy emphasizes education in mother tongue at the primary level, acknowledging its importance in early learning.
- **Celebrating Diversity:** Initiatives like "Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat" and "Bhasha Sangam" promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of India's many languages.
- **SPPEL Scheme:** The Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages aims to document and create resources for endangered languages, with a long-term goal of covering around 500 languages ,>

### The Road Ahead:

Preserving India's linguistic diversity requires a multifaceted approach:

- **Clear Definition:** A legal definition of "linguistic minority" would ensure their rights and facilitate targeted support.
- **Multilingual Administration:** Increasing the use of regional languages in government administration would empower linguistic minorities and promote their participation.
- **Digital Inclusion:** Encouraging the creation of educational and entertainment content in minority languages would foster their continued use in the digital age.
- **Community Support:** Strengthening community-based initiatives that promote and teach minority languages is crucial for their survival.

## 1.4. Regional Distinctions

India's vast geography fosters a rich variety of **regional identities**. From the snow-capped Himalayas in the north to the sun-drenched beaches of Kerala in the south, each region possesses distinct cultural nuances, cuisines, and traditions. These regional variations are evident in festivals, clothing styles, and architectural styles.

## 1.5. Unity Amidst Difference

Student Notes:

Census Commissioner in 1911, Herbert Risley (1969), was right when he observed: "Beneath the manifold diversity of physical and social type, language, custom and religion which strikes the observer in India there can still be discerned ..... a certain underlying uniformity of life from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin"

Despite its remarkable diversity, India remains a nation bound by a unifying spirit. This "unity in diversity" manifests in various ways across the country's social fabric.

- **Geographical Unity:** The Indian subcontinent is a distinct landmass, separated from the north by the formidable Himalayan barrier and surrounded by seas on other sides. This shared geography fosters a sense of belonging to a unique physical space.
- **Historical Unity:** From ancient times, the concept of "Bharat Varsha" has united the region in cultural memory. Great emperors like Ashoka and Akbar further solidified a sense of territorial integration. The struggle for independence against British rule further strengthened this national consciousness.
- **Cultural Unity:** Underlying the rich tapestry of Indian cultures lies a remarkable thematic unity. Shared philosophies, literary traditions, and festivals like Diwali, Holi, Eid, and Christmas showcase both cultural diversity and a spirit of collective celebration. Customs like respect for elders and the joint family system also transcend regional boundaries.
  - **Tradition of Accommodation:** India has a long history of welcoming and integrating diverse cultures and religions. This tradition allows different communities to coexist peacefully, even as they retain their unique customs and beliefs.

### 1.5.1. Challenges to Unity in Diversity

While India celebrates its diverse identity, maintaining this balance faces challenges:

- **Religious and Ethnic Tensions:** Historical and contemporary conflicts based on religion and ethnicity can threaten national unity.
- **Discrimination and Marginalization:** Marginalized groups like Dalits and some tribes face social and economic disparities due to caste and ethnicity.
- **Cultural Homogenization:** Globalization poses a risk of losing traditional customs and practices, eroding the richness of Indian diversity.
- **Political Polarization:** Political divisions along religious, caste, and linguistic lines can fuel tensions and threaten national unity.
- **Environmental Degradation:** Climate change can displace communities and lead to biodiversity loss, impacting cultural diversity.

### 1.5.2. Maintaining the Balance

India has implemented various mechanisms to promote unity in diversity:

- **Constitutional Provisions:** The Constitution ensures the protection of diverse cultures and traditions, promotes religious freedom, and recognizes multiple languages.
  - **Article 29:** Empowers citizens to preserve their distinct culture and traditions, safeguarding indigenous practices and fostering cultural pride across communities.
  - **Article 15(1):** Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, promoting equal rights and opportunities for all citizens.
  - **Article 25-30:** Guarantee freedom of religion, allowing all faiths to flourish and coexist peacefully.
  - **Schedule 8:** Recognizes 22 official languages, acknowledging and respecting India's linguistic diversity.
- **Policy Initiatives:** Programs like "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" encourage interaction between states, and initiatives like "One Nation-One Ration Card" promote mobility and national integration.

Striking a balance requires acknowledging and appreciating differences while fostering a sense of national identity. Respecting unique cultures is crucial, and citizens should cultivate multiple identities – local, regional, and Indian. Ultimately, embracing diversity while promoting a shared sense of purpose is key to maintaining India's vibrant unity.

Student Notes:

## 2. Social Structure: The Framework of Society

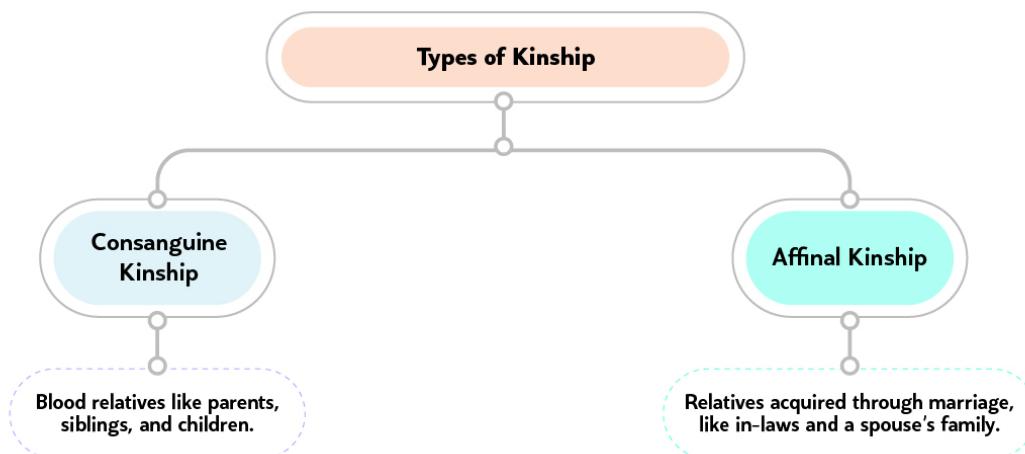
Indian society is characterized by a complex interplay between tradition and change, evident in its social structures. Here, we delve into three key components:

### 2.1. Family, Marriage and Kinship

Kinship, family, and marriage form the bedrock of Indian society, constituting a complex web of social connections that define identity, interaction, and social support. This intricate system, however, is undergoing a fascinating transformation, with tradition encountering the winds of change.

#### 2.1.1. Kinship System

The kinship system is a network of relatives, categorized by blood ties (consanguinity) and marriage ties (affinity). It plays a crucial role in shaping identity, social interaction, and providing a support system throughout life.



#### Regional Variations:

- **North India:** Traditionally patriarchal, with descent traced through the male line (patrilineal).
  - Caste endogamy (marrying within the caste) and village exogamy (marrying outside the village) are prevalent.
- **South India:** While patrilineal descent is prevalent in some regions, matrilineal systems exist in others, particularly in Kerala and parts of Karnataka. Here, inheritance and lineage are traced through the mother's side. Marriage practices also show greater variation.

#### 2.1.2. Marriage: A Social and Religious Union

Marriage is an important social institution. It is a relationship, which is socially approved and sanctioned by custom and law.

Marriage in India transcends a mere legal contract; it is a deeply woven strand in the social fabric, carrying immense significance. Traditionally viewed as a sacred union with social and religious underpinnings, it served the purpose of fulfilling societal obligations, procreation, and the continuation of the family lineage. However, the contemporary understanding of marriage is undergoing a fascinating evolution.

## **Marriage serves a multitude of functions.**

- It legitimizes sexual relations and procreation, ensuring the continuation of the family lineage.
- Furthermore, it fosters emotional companionship and social support between spouses. Traditionally, marriage played a crucial role in the **intergenerational transfer of property and social status**.
- It also served to strengthen social ties between families through carefully selected alliances.

Historically, arranged marriages were the norm in India. Families, particularly elders, played a central role in selecting spouses based on factors like compatibility, social status, and caste. Here's a closer look at this traditional setup:

- **Arranged Marriages**

- Caste Endogamy: Marrying within one's own caste was widely practiced to maintain social order and purity.
- Gotra Exogamy: The practice of avoiding marriage within the same clan (gotra) ensured genetic diversity within the community.
- Polygamy: Forms of polygamy (one man marrying multiple wives) existed in the past.

The 21st century Indian landscape witnesses a gradual transformation of the marriage institution. Several key trends are reshaping this social cornerstone:

- **Rising Age of Marriage:** The average age of marriage is steadily rising, particularly among urban populations. A 2020 National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) survey found the average age of marriage for women in India to be 22.3 years, compared to 20.3 years in 2011.
  - This is linked to factors like increased educational opportunities for women, a growing job market for young adults, and a shift towards nuclear families where financial independence is valued.
- **Live-in Relationships:** Though not yet widespread, live-in relationships are gaining some social acceptance, particularly in urban areas.
  - A 2018 study by localisation platform LocalCircles found that 12% of respondents in major Indian cities knew someone in a live-in relationship, reflecting changing attitudes towards intimacy and commitment.

Its rise can be attributed to several factors that are transforming traditional marriage in India.

- **A Shift in Values:** Modern education exposes young Indians to ideals of freedom, equality, autonomy, and individuality. These values often clash with the patriarchal structure of traditional marriage. Live-in relationships offer an alternative, where couples can share domestic responsibilities more equally and women have more agency over their lives, including reproductive choices.
- **The Burden of Tradition:** Traditional marriage in India often involves patrilocal residence (living with the husband's family) and unequal distribution of domestic labor. This can be a deterrent for modern women seeking a more balanced partnership.
- **Economic Independence:** Increased female workforce participation has led to greater financial security for women. This economic independence empowers them to make choices about marriage and family planning on their own terms.
- **Career Aspirations:** Marriage and child-rearing are often seen as obstacles to career advancement, especially for ambitious young women. Live-in relationships can provide a temporary alternative, allowing them to focus on professional goals.
- **Blurring Social Lines:** The communication revolution has exposed Indian society to new concepts of marriage. This, coupled with the challenges of caste-based societal structures, makes choosing a partner based on compatibility more appealing to urban youth. Inter-caste and inter-religious relationships, discouraged by traditional norms, may find greater acceptance through live-in arrangements.

Student Notes:

Unlike marriage, a well-defined and regulated social institution, **live-in partnerships** lack explicit legal recognition under codified laws or established customs. However, the Indian judicial system, through a series of landmark judgements offers some protection and validation.

Here are some key examples:

- Live-in relationships meeting marriage requirements (age, consent, soundness) can be legal (Badri Prasad, 1978).
- Women in long-term live-in relationships (especially with children) are protected from domestic violence under the Domestic Violence Act (Lalita Toppo, 2018).
- Long-term cohabitation with children can be considered a marriage-like relationship, offering women maintenance and inheritance rights for children (D. Veluswami, 2005).
- Children from live-in relationships can inherit ancestral property (Bharatha Matha, 2010).
- **Increased Divorce Rates:** Legislative reforms such as the Hindu Marriage Act (1955) have made divorce more accessible, leading to a rise in divorce rates. Data from the Government of India shows that the national divorce rate in India increased by over 30% between 2012 and 2018.

This trend can be attributed to several factors that are transforming the social landscape of India.

- **Legislative Reforms:** The Hindu Marriage Act (1955) and subsequent legal reforms have made obtaining a divorce a more accessible and less stigmatized process.
- **Shifting Social Attitudes:** Traditional Indian society emphasized the sanctity of marriage and social pressures often discouraged divorce. However, these attitudes are evolving. There's a growing acceptance of individual happiness and the right to end an unhappy marriage.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Increased educational opportunities and financial independence for women have empowered them to make choices about their lives, including ending marriages that are abusive or unfulfilling.
- **Changing Marital Expectations:** Greater emphasis is placed on emotional compatibility, shared values, and personal growth within the marriage. When these expectations are not met, divorce may be seen as a viable option.
- **Same-sex relationships:** In 2018, a landmark judgement by the Supreme Court decriminalized homosexuality, striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. This decision opened the door for greater acceptance and recognition of LGBTQ+ relationships.
  - However, same-sex marriage remains legally unrecognized in India. This creates a gap between legal rights and the growing social acceptance of same-sex relationships, particularly in urban areas.

#### **Arguments for Same-Sex Marriage:**

- **Equality and Non-Discrimination:** All individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, deserve the right to marry and form a family. Denying same-sex marriage violates their fundamental right to equality enshrined in Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court's interpretation of "sex" to include "sexual orientation" in the Navtej Singh Johar case (2018) strengthens this argument.
- **Right to Privacy:** The right to privacy, recognized in the Puttaswamy verdict (2017), encompasses the ability to make choices regarding intimate relationships. Same-sex couples deserve the same respect for their private lives as heterosexual couples.
- **Strengthening Families and Communities:** Marriage provides social and economic benefits like inheritance rights, joint property ownership, and healthcare access. Same-sex couples deserve these protections to build strong families and contribute meaningfully to society.

- **Global Recognition:** With same-sex marriage legal in 34 countries, denying this right in India goes against the growing global trend of LGBTQ+ rights recognition.

Student Notes:

#### **Arguments Against Same-Sex Marriage:**

- **Religious and Cultural Beliefs:** Many religious laws govern marriage in India. These laws traditionally define marriage as between a man and a woman, posing a challenge for legal recognition of same-sex unions.
- **Traditional Definition of Marriage:** Some argue that changing the definition of marriage could have negative societal consequences. However, the institution of marriage has evolved throughout history, and expanding its definition to be more inclusive strengthens a society built on equality.
- **Children's Rights:** Concerns exist about the impact of same-sex marriage on children. Adoption by same-sex couples is a complex issue, requiring careful consideration of legal frameworks and child well-being. Dialogue and research can address these concerns.
- **Legal Hurdles:** Supreme Court in Supriyo vs Union of India judgment refused to recognize the right of marriage for same-sex couples.

#### **Some key highlights of the judgement:**

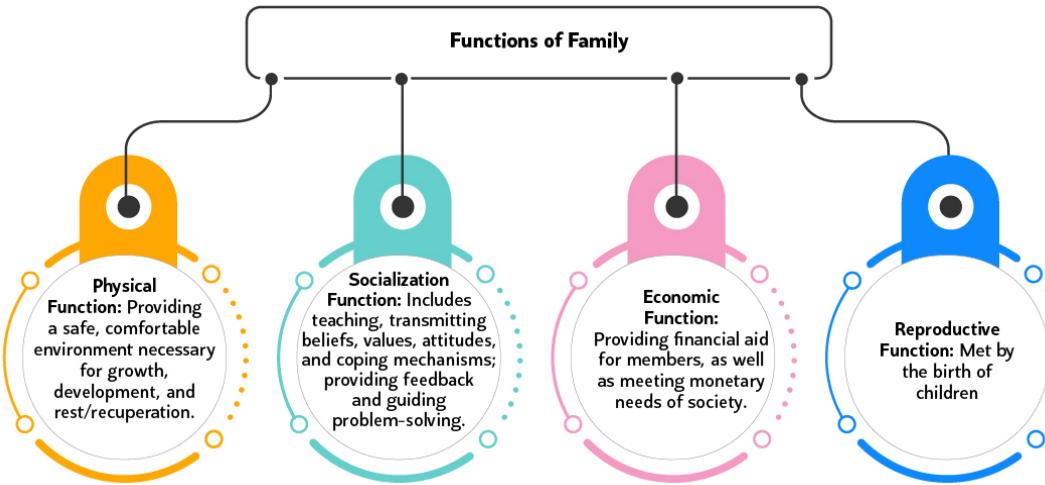
- **Recognition to Right to Marry:** Marriage is a statutory right not a fundamental right guaranteed by Constitution.
- Therefore, its recognition is a subject matter for Parliament and state legislatures and not of Court.
- Thus, court declined to strike down or tweak provisions of Special Marriage Act, 1954 and other allied laws to include same sex members within their ambit.
- **Social Stigma and Public Opinion:** Despite growing acceptance, LGBTQ+ individuals still face discrimination.

#### **Way Forward**

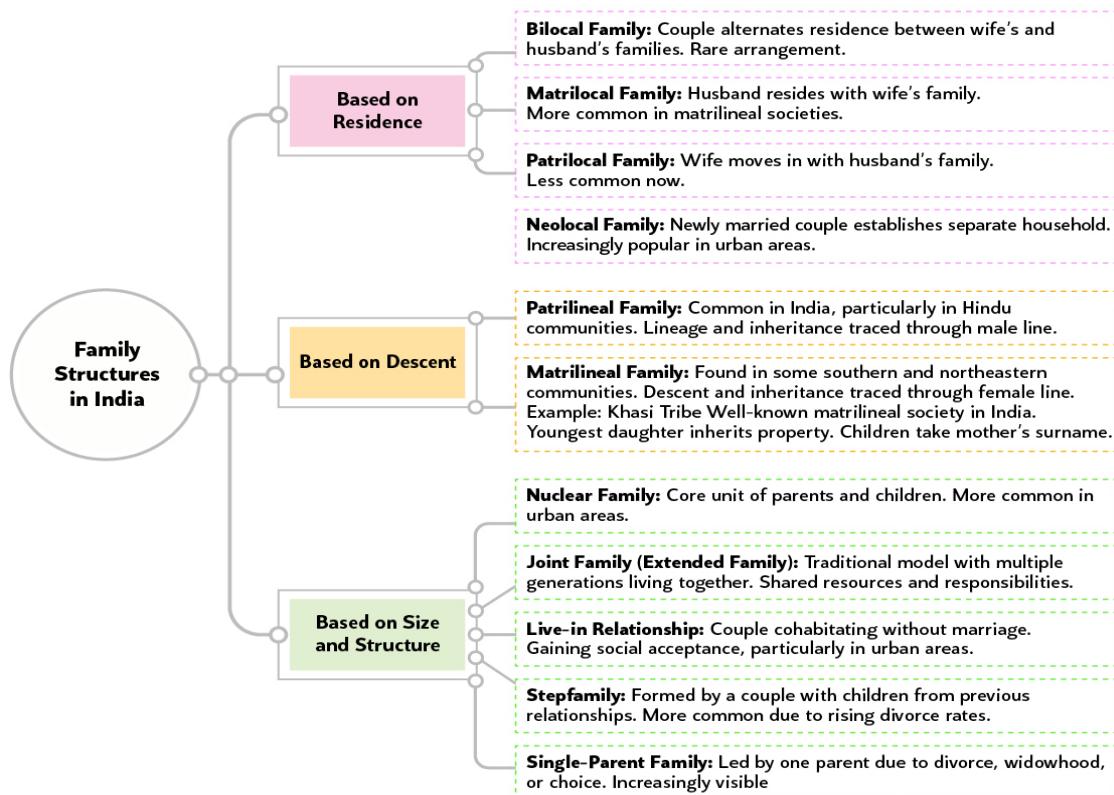
- **Government Recognition:** The government needs to acknowledge the rights of same-sex couples and move towards legal recognition of their unions.
  - US, Sweden, etc. had recognised civil union until same sex marriage was legalised in their country.
  - A “civil union” refers to legal status that allows same-sex couples specific rights and responsibilities normally conferred upon married couples
  - Amending the Special Marriage Act to make it gender-neutral is a crucial step. Additionally, expanding the definition of marriage within the Hindu Marriage Act could promote inclusivity.
- **Addressing Concerns:** Open dialogue can address the concerns of religious groups and others opposed to same-sex marriage.
- **Collaboration:** A concerted effort from the LGBTQ+ community, the government, civil society, and religious leaders is needed for successful reform.

### **2.1.3. Family**

The family is the basic unit of society. It is the first and the most immediate social environment to which a child is exposed. It is in the family a child learns language, the behavioural patterns and social norms in her childhood.



Family structures in India are diverse, reflecting a blend of tradition and contemporary trends. Let's explore them based on residence and size:



### 2.1.3.1. Traditional Family Structure

- Joint families, where parents, siblings, their spouses, and children reside together, were the dominant form.
- The eldest male typically held authority, and family life revolved around shared responsibilities and collective decision-making.



### 2.1.3.2. The Transformation of the Family in Modern India

The traditional Indian family structure, is undergoing a significant transformation. This shift is driven by a multitude of social, economic, and cultural factors, leading to the rise of nuclear families and transformation of the traditional Joint family system.

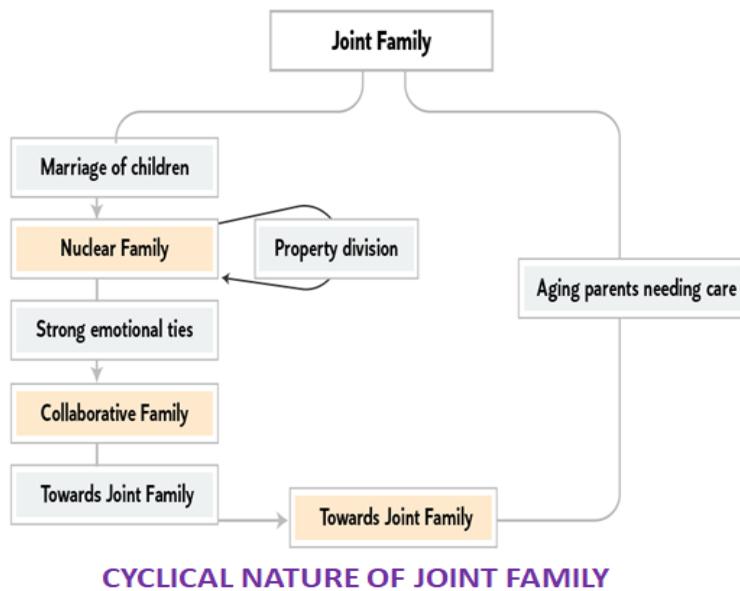
This can be attributed to several key influences:

- Economic Factors:** Job opportunities in cities have led to migration and a break from traditional, family-based occupations. This economic independence allows couples to establish their own households.
- Modern Education:** Educational systems emphasize individual choice and equal rights, challenging the hierarchical structure of joint families. Younger generations, exposed to these ideals, may be less inclined to live in a multi-generational household.
- Legal Factors:** Labor and inheritance laws empower women and reduce economic dependence on the joint family. This financial independence empowers couples to make decisions about their living arrangements without relying on the extended family.
- Urban Migration:** The search for better opportunities often leads to geographical separation from extended families. People moving to cities for work may find it impractical or undesirable to maintain a large, extended household in a new location.
- Globalization:** Exposure to western family models and increased global mobility influence family structures. Ideas of nuclear families prevalent in western cultures become more familiar, potentially influencing choices about living arrangements.

- Demographic Factors:** Smaller families and longer lifespans contribute to a decline in the average size of households. With fewer children per family, the need for a large, extended household diminishes.
- Changing Marriage System:** Less family involvement in mate selection weakens the traditional interdependence within joint families. As couples have more autonomy in choosing their partners, there may be less pressure to live with the husband's extended family.

The rise of nuclear families might not signify a complete shift. **Studies suggest a cyclical nature**, with families evolving from joint to nuclear and back again due to life events.

- A joint family might transform into a nuclear one due to events like marriage of children or property division.
- However, these "nuclear" families often maintain strong emotional ties with extended kin.
- Over time, with events like birth of grandchildren or aging parents needing care, these families might move towards a more collaborative structure, resembling a functional joint family again.



**Functional Joint Families:** This concept highlights the persistence of core joint family values even in nuclear setups. Here's how:

- Strong Emotional Bonds:** Nuclear families continue to prioritize extended family relationships. They visit relatives frequently, celebrate festivals together, and offer support during difficult times.
- Fulfillment of Traditional Obligations:** Rituals, ceremonies, and financial assistance to elders are still observed, even if families reside separately. This sense of responsibility keeps the family unit connected.
- Shared Decision-Making:** Though not physically cohabiting, families may consult each other on major decisions like education, career choices, or marriage for children.

### 2.1.3.3. Impacts of the transformation of the Family in India

India's evolving family structure, with the rise of nuclear families and non-traditional arrangements, has significant consequences. While some aspects empower women, others create challenges for both women and children.

#### Impact on Women:

- Increased Autonomy:** A positive aspect is greater autonomy for women. This is particularly true for those in wealthier families, who may have more decision-making power within the household. However, this benefit is not universal.
- Dual Responsibility:** Nuclear families often rely on dual incomes, placing a heavy burden on women. They must balance professional commitments with traditional household duties and childcare, leading to stress and potential health issues.
- Economic Opportunities:** The changing family dynamic allows some women greater access to education and employment opportunities, fostering financial independence.

- **Redefined Gender Roles:** Women in non-traditional families can challenge traditional expectations by participating in decision-making and sharing household responsibilities more equally with their partners.
- **Socialization and Caregiving:** The decline of the joint family system weakens women's support networks. Single-mother households face even greater challenges in providing social support for their children. Additionally, in nuclear families, the burden of caring for both children and elderly parents often falls primarily on women, creating a significant strain in the face of India's aging population.

Student Notes:

#### **Impact on Children:**

- **Identity Formation:** Children in nuclear families may develop a stronger sense of individual identity, but may also lose connection to their extended family heritage and traditions.
- **Social Support:** Smaller households can limit a child's access to the emotional and social support traditionally provided by extended family, potentially impacting their well-being and social development.
- **Single-parent households:** The rise in single-parent households due to separation and divorce can negatively impact a child's welfare.
- **Cultural Identity:** Children in nuclear families may lose touch with their cultural heritage due to a weakened connection to extended family.

#### **Impact on the Elderly:**

- **Isolation and Loneliness:** With the decline of the joint family system, elderly individuals may face increased social isolation and loneliness. Traditionally, extended families provided companionship and emotional support for their elders. In nuclear families, this responsibility often falls solely on busy adult children, leaving the elderly feeling neglected.
- **Caregiving Challenges:** Nuclear families may struggle to provide adequate care for their elderly members, especially those with chronic health conditions or requiring assistance with daily activities. This can lead to a growing demand for geriatric care services, which may not be readily available or affordable for all.
- **Financial Dependence:** Elderly individuals who are financially dependent on their children may face insecurity if their children struggle financially or are unable to meet their needs.

The transformation of the family structure highlights the growing need for robust geriatric care services in India.

## **2.2. The Caste System**

The caste system, a hierarchical social structure based on birth, has traditionally dictated occupations, social interactions, and even marriage prospects. While its rigidity is diminishing due to affirmative action policies and **upward social mobility** based on education and achievement, remnants of caste continue to influence social interactions, particularly in rural areas. Inter-caste marriages, though becoming more common, can still face societal hurdles in some regions.

*Caste can be defined as hereditary endogamous group, having a common name, common traditional occupation, common culture, relatively rigid in matters of mobility, distinctiveness of status and forming a single homogenous community.*

### **2.2.1. Features of the Caste System**

Some of the features of caste system in India include the following:

- **Segmental Division:** Society is divided into caste groups, with membership determined by birth.
- **Hierarchy:** Castes are ranked based on perceived purity, with Brahmins (priests) at the top and Dalits (formerly "untouchables") at the bottom.

- **Civil and religious disabilities:** These comprise of restrictions based on contact, dress, speech, rituals etc. and are placed on every caste group. It was done in order to maintain purity of specific caste groups.
  - Example, lower caste groups had no access to wells, they were restricted from entering temples etc.
- **Endogamy:** Members of a particular caste have to marry within their caste only. Inter-caste marriages are prohibited. However, in urban areas, the phenomenon of inter-caste marriage is increasing.
- **Untouchability:** It is the practice of ostracizing a group by segregating them from the mainstream by social custom. Untouchability was a corollary of the caste system, wherein the untouchables (those belonging to the lowest caste groups) were deemed impure and polluted.
- **Caste based violence in India:** Increasing trend of caste-based violence are related to instances of inter-caste marriage and assertion of basic rights by Dalits including land rights, freedom of expression, access to justice, access to education etc.
  - e.g. A group of Dalits were attacked in Una, Gujarat when they had participated in the movement for demand of land ownership for the Dalits.

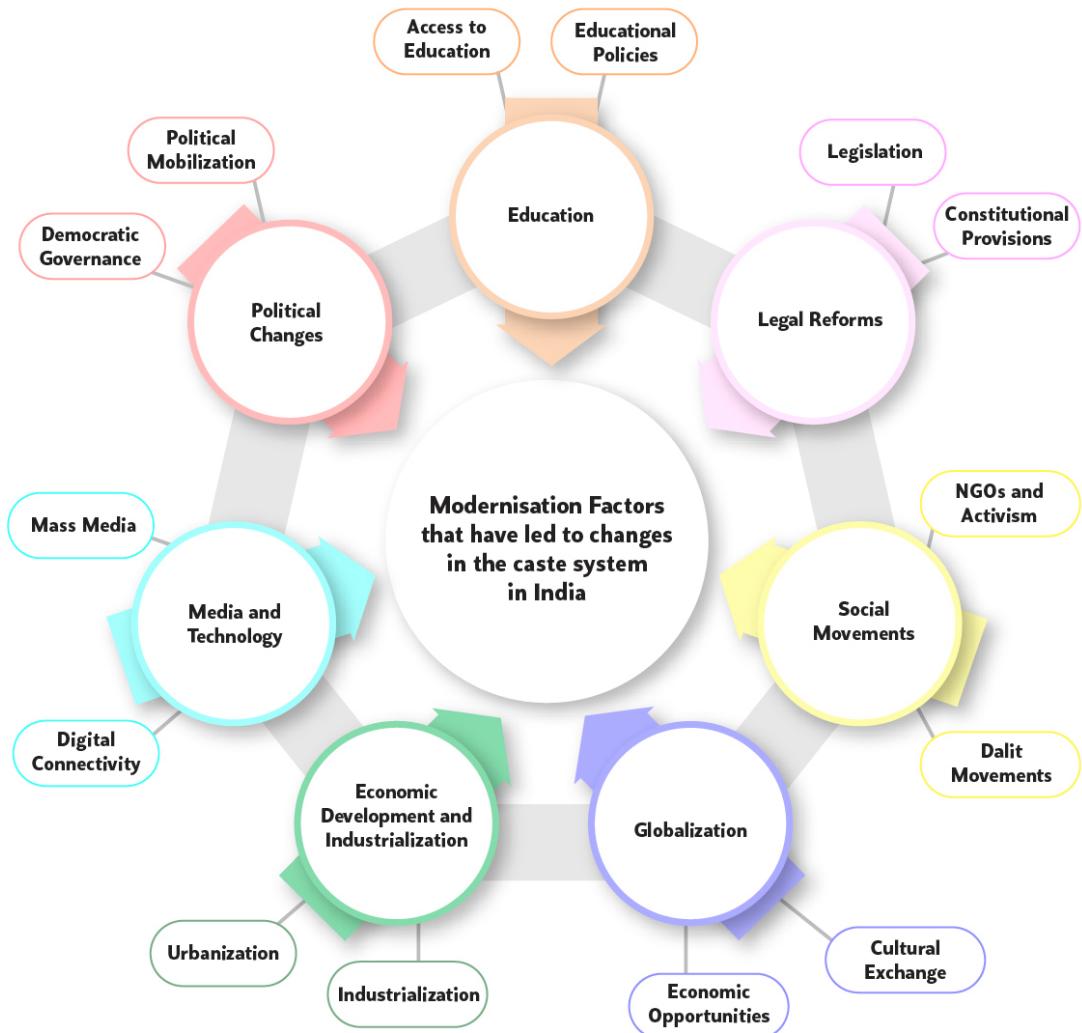
Student Notes:

### ***2.2.2. Transformation of the Caste system: The Paradox of change and Continuity***

The caste system presents a fascinating paradox. While demonstrably weakening in some aspects, it also exhibits surprising signs of persistence and even strengthening in others.

Some of the factors affecting these changes are-

- **Sanskritisation:** Sanskritization is a concept developed by Indian sociologist M. N. Srinivas. It explains the process by which lower castes or tribes attempt to gain social mobility by adopting the customs, rituals, and practices of higher castes, particularly Brahmins.
  - It's essentially a form of cultural emulation aimed at achieving a higher position in the caste hierarchy.
- **Westernisation:** Westernization refers to the process of adopting Western cultural practices, values, institutions, and technologies within Indian society. Individualism, secularism, and exposure to new ideas weaken caste's hold, particularly in urban areas.
- **Modernisation:** The term 'modernization' generally refers to the process of transition between a 'traditional' agrarian society and the kind of 'modern' society that is based on trade and industry. Thus, it should be thought of as a continuous dynamic process, rather than a single 'state'.



- **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.
  - Industrialization creates job opportunities in cities, leading to large-scale migration from rural areas. This physical separation disrupts the traditional social order where caste rules were strictly enforced.
  - Cities offer a degree of anonymity compared to close-knit rural communities. This anonymity makes it harder to monitor and enforce caste-based social interactions. Following complex purity and pollution rules becomes less practical and noticeable.
- **Role of state-** Affirmative action policies like reservations in education and government jobs aim to uplift disadvantaged castes.

The Indian government has undertaken various initiatives to transform the rigidities of the caste system. Here's a detailed analysis of the state's role, incorporating data and examples:

#### Policies and Legislations:

- **Affirmative Action:** The policy of reservation in government jobs and educational institutions aims to provide opportunities for disadvantaged castes (Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)).
- **Anti-discrimination Laws:** Laws like the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, and the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, prohibit caste-based discrimination in public spaces and access to services.

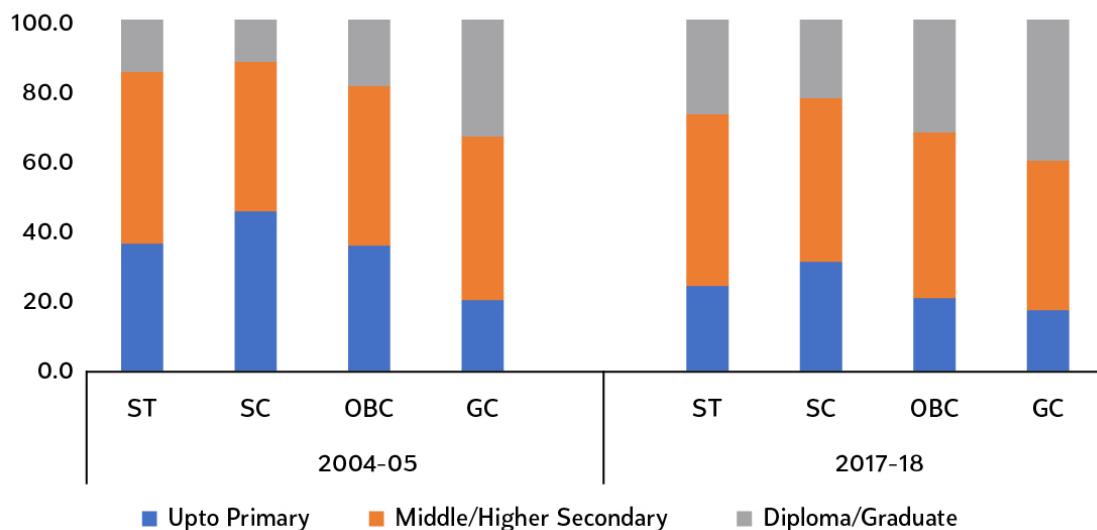
The above factors have led to the changes and transformations in the Indian caste system. The changes have led to weakening as well as strengthening of the caste system.

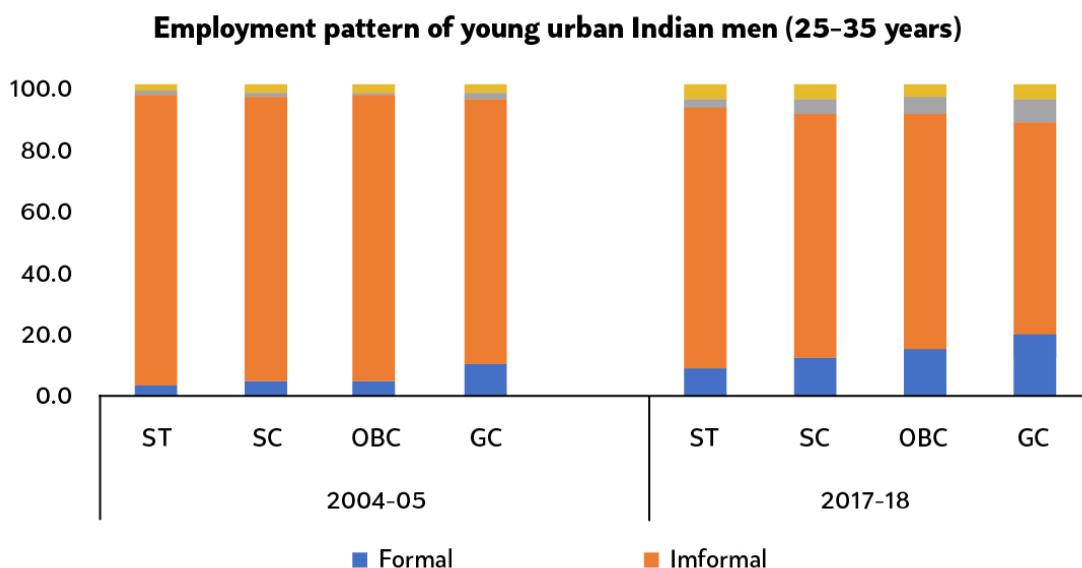
Student Notes:

### 2.2.3. Weakening of Caste System

- Inter-Caste Marriage:** While endogamy (marriage within the caste) remains prevalent, there's a growing trend of inter-caste marriages, particularly among the educated youth. A 2019 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 17% of Indians aged 18-29 have spouses from a different caste, compared to only 5% of those aged 50 and above. This challenges the traditional concept of caste purity and promotes social integration.
- Challenge to orthodoxy:** Orthodox practices of the caste system such as child marriage, ban on widow re-marriage, ban on conversion, insensitivity of 'Upper Castes' towards the 'low castes' are being challenged in the wake of urbanization.
  - Urban living often involves shared public spaces like transportation, workplaces, and educational institutions. These shared spaces bring people from diverse castes together, fostering interaction and challenging the idea of separate spaces based on caste.
- 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.
  - Jobs in factories and urban centers are often based on skills and qualifications needed for the specific role. This creates a shift from caste-based occupations to a meritocratic system, at least ideally. Employers prioritize an individual's ability to do the job over their caste background.
  - Greater access to education empowers individuals, particularly from lower castes, to pursue careers beyond caste-defined roles and compete for jobs based on merit.
- Improvement in the position of the lower castes:** Due to steps initiated by the government, position of lower castes has improved economically as well as socially.
  - As per the data from NSSO 2017, over the last decade, the levels of education and formal employment across all social groups have increased in urban India.
    - ✓ The education pattern of those belonging to OBC is now similar to General caste.
    - ✓ There is also a sharp increase in the proportion of young men who are educated beyond primary schooling among SC and ST.

Progress in education levels, young urban men (25-35 years)





Despite these changes, the caste system retains a significant influence in several areas:

- **Rural Realities:** The caste system remains deeply entrenched in rural areas, where traditional social structures and hierarchies hold sway. Limited access to education and economic opportunities can perpetuate caste-based occupations and social exclusion.
  - A 2016 study by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in India found that social mobility based on caste is significantly lower in rural areas compared to urban areas.
  - However, Caste hierarchies and identities of the marginalised do not disappear in cities; caste manifests in caste-based housing segregation and discrimination in selling a house or renting it out to an SC/ST despite their ability to pay.
    - ✓ The 2011 Census showed that 12.6% of the population in urban India were Dalits. However, Dalits constituted 20.3% of the slum population
- **Political Mobilization:** Caste can be a powerful political tool. Politicians often mobilize voters along caste lines, reinforcing caste consciousness and potentially even strengthening its hold in certain contexts.
  - **Dominant Caste Phenomenon:** Specific castes wield significant power within particular regions. This local power can spark a competition for influence among other castes, leading to an "us vs. them" mentality that strengthens caste boundaries. Political manoeuvring becomes caste-centric, and social comparison fuels solidarity within other castes. This dynamic of competition and differentiation reinforces caste identities as a way to navigate power and claim resources.

The concept of the dominant caste was introduced by sociologist M. N. Srinivas. He observed that within the complex hierarchy of the caste system, specific castes held a disproportionate share of power in their localities.

#### M. N. Srinivas' Dominant Caste:

- **Localized Power:** Dominant castes wield significant power within a particular region, not necessarily across the entire country.
- **Multiple Power Sources:** Their dominance stems from a combination of factors like:
  - **Numerical Strength:** A large population within the area.
  - **Economic Clout:** Control over land, resources, or businesses.
  - **Political Influence:** Ability to sway elections and influence local politics due to their numbers.

- **Impact on Social Dynamics:** This dominance can influence social customs, economic opportunities, and even political representation for other castes within the region.
- **Collective Mobilization:** Lower castes are mobilizing to demand equal rights and challenge discrimination, fostering a sense of collective identity, which can inadvertently strengthen caste consciousness.
- **Private Practices:** While public displays of caste may have lessened, caste rituals and practices persist within the private sphere, particularly in homes and families. This reinforces a sense of separate caste identities passed down through generations.
  - A 2019 report by Human Rights Watch documented instances of upper-caste families refusing to share utensils or meals with lower-caste domestic workers, showcasing the persistence of caste-based customs in private spaces.
- **Economic Inequalities:** Although economic opportunities have expanded, certain occupations remain caste-linked. Manual scavenging, a highly stigmatized task, is often relegated to lower castes. This reinforces economic disparities along caste lines.

#### **Understand by numbers:**

- The intersection between class and caste-based deprivation in Indian society is evident in a gamut of socio-economic statistics. The average monthly per capita consumption expenditures (MPCE) of Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC) and OBC households in rural areas were, respectively 65%, 73% and 84% of the MPCE of the 'Others', i.e. the general category, as per the National Sample Survey (NSS), 2011-12.
- Estimates by scholars from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) show that while almost 28% of all Indians were multidimensionally poor in 2015-16, the poverty headcount ratio among STs was 50.6%, SCs 33.3%, OBCs 27.2% and Others 15.6%.

The Indian caste system is in a state of flux. While significant changes are weakening its rigidity, caste continues to influence social interactions, political participation, and economic opportunities. Combating these inequalities requires a multi-pronged approach:

- **Promoting Inclusive Education:** Fostering education that promotes social equality and dismantles caste prejudices.
- **Creating Economic Opportunities:** Equipping lower castes with relevant skills and ensuring fair access to employment across sectors.
- **Enforcing Anti-Discrimination Laws:** Strict enforcement of laws that prohibit caste-based discrimination in housing, workplaces, and social interactions.
- **Promoting Social Inclusion:** Encouraging inter-caste interaction through cultural events and social initiatives to weaken caste barriers.

There should be efforts to further **promote participation of people in free market**. Increased prosperity would further dilute the caste identities. Also, there is a need to **strengthen Section 123 of RPA 1951**, to prevent parties from invoking votes solely on caste grounds. The **reservation system** should be rationalized to target benefits only to deserving candidates so as to usher in egalitarian society.

## **2.3. Tribal Societies**

India's rich social tapestry also includes vibrant **tribal societies**. India is home to one of the world's largest tribal populations, estimated to be over 100 million people according to various sources.

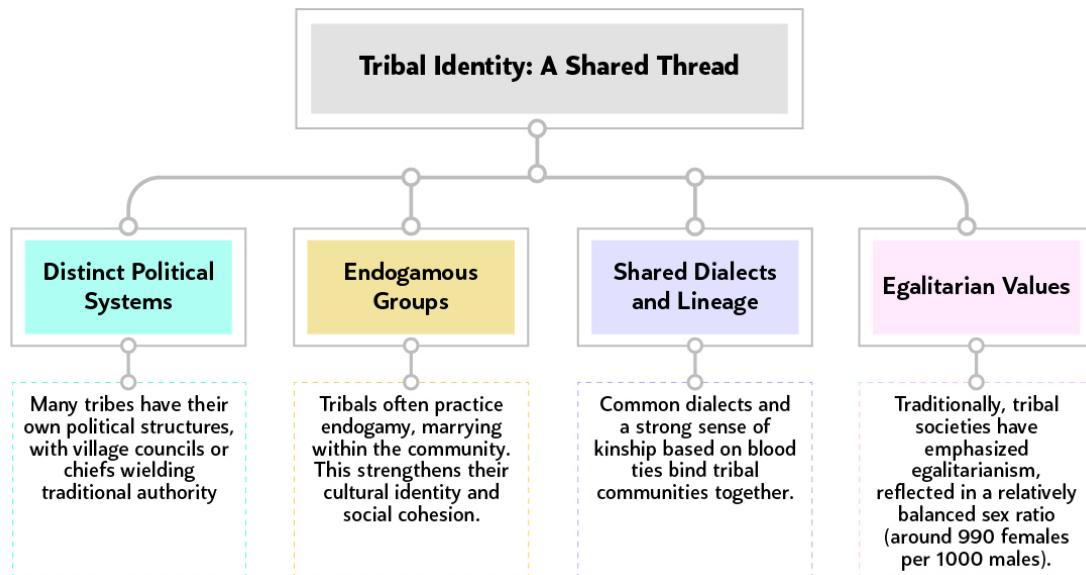
- These communities exhibit remarkable diversity, with over 700 different identified tribes scattered across the country. Some prominent tribal groups include the Gonds, Bhils, Santals, Mundas, and Khasi, each with distinct languages, customs, and social structures.

A tribe is a social group characterized by a shared sense of identity, cultural practices, language, and often, a common territory. Tribal societies are typically smaller, self-contained social units with a strong oral tradition and close ties to their environment. They may have distinct social structures, political systems, and religious beliefs that differ from the dominant culture.

Student Notes:

- Some tribal societies are matrilineal, where women hold significant decision-making power and property is passed down through the female line.
- Tribal knowledge systems encompass a deep understanding of medicinal plants and sustainable resource management, offering valuable insights for conservation efforts.

While geographically dispersed, tribal societies share some commonalities. However, it's important to recognize that they are not a monolithic entity. Each tribe possesses its unique customs, languages, and social structures.



### 3. Cultural Values

Religion and tradition deeply permeate Indian culture, shaping its core values and social interactions. Let's explore three key aspects:

#### 3.1. Importance of Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality are central to Indian life. Ancient philosophies like Yoga and Vedanta emphasize self-realization and inner peace. Diverse religious practices, from the elaborate pujas (worship rituals) in Hinduism to the daily prayers of Muslims, influence the way Indians view the world and their place within it. The concept of **Moksha** (liberation) in Hinduism or **Nirvana** in Buddhism underscores the spiritual quest for liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

#### 3.2. Balancing Individuality and Collectivism

Indian society finds a unique balance between valuing individual aspirations and prioritizing the well-being of the community. This interplay between **individualism** and **collectivism** shapes social interactions and decision-making processes. While a young Indian professional might aspire to a career in technology, they might also be expected to fulfill their obligations towards their family. This collectivist spirit extends to the wider community, evident in the concept of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** (the world as one family), which emphasizes global interconnectedness.

### 3.3. Coexistence of Traditionalism and Modernity

Student Notes:

India is a land in constant flux, where tradition and modernity co-exist and influence each other. Religious festivals and ancient customs are zealously observed, while the country embraces technological advancements and economic growth. This creates a dynamic tension, where Indians navigate between age-old values and contemporary aspirations.

This unique blend of "old" and "new" is evident in the very fabric of Indian society, shaping its institutions and influencing how people interact.

#### Modernization's Impact:

- **Weakening of Caste:** Modernization has challenged the rigidities of the caste system. The traditional belief in purity and pollution associated with caste is diminishing. Modern occupations are increasingly based on qualifications and skills, not birth.
- **Shifting Family Structures:** Industrialization and urbanization have led to a rise in nuclear families, replacing the traditional joint family system.
- **Secularization:** Scientific advancements and a growing emphasis on rationality have reduced the influence of religion on everyday life and individual choices.
- **Intergenerational Conflict:** The clash of traditional and modern values can create tension between generations. The erosion of traditional knowledge due to technological advancements can sometimes lead to a decline in respect for elders and their wisdom.
- **Gender Parity:** Modern feminist movements and growing awareness about gender equality have challenged patriarchal norms and are leading to a dilution of traditional gender roles.

#### Tradition's Enduring Presence:

Despite the forces of modernization, traditional values and institutions continue to hold significant sway in Indian society:

- **Caste System Persists:** While the concept of caste as a determinant of social standing might be weakening, caste identities remain deeply ingrained. Caste-based associations and political mobilizations highlight the enduring influence of this system.
- **Family Ties Endure:** Even in nuclear families, strong connections with extended families persist, especially when it comes to fulfilling religious and social obligations.
- **Vibrant Festivals:** Traditional festivals are celebrated with even greater fervour in some ways, serving as a counterpoint to the perceived cultural dilution brought on by modernization. Modern communication tools like social media have even facilitated the wider celebration of these festivals.
- **Patriarchy's Shadow:** Modernization might have led to changes, but traditional patriarchal mindsets continue to manifest in the form of gender stereotypes that persist in contemporary society.

India's journey of modernization is a process of adaptation, not erasure. Modern influences have undoubtedly reshaped Indian society, but they haven't entirely replaced traditional values.

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