Indian Society

TEXTBOOK IN SOCIOLOGY FOR CLASS XII

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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FOREWORD

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy on Education (1986).

The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participates in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily time-tables is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days are actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this textbook proves for making children's life at school a happy experience, rather than a source of stress or problem. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for child psychology and the time available for teaching. The textbook attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appreciates the hardwork done by the textbook development committee. We wish to thank the Chairperson of the advisory group in Social Sciences, Professor Hari Vasudevan, and the Chief Advisor for this textbook, Professor Yogendra Singh, for guiding the work of this committee. Several teachers also contributed to the development of this textbook; we are grateful to their principals for making this possible. We are indebted to the

institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, material and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development under the chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande, for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinement.

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Director
National Council of Educational
Research and Training

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New Delhi
20 November 2006

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HOW TO USE THIS TEXTBOOK

This is the first of the two textbooks for Class XII in Sociology. It is designed to address the spirit of the new guidelines issued by the National Curriculum Framework 2005, as well as the specific objectives of the Sociology curriculum adopted by the NCERT (Box 1).

Box 1: Objectives of the Sociology Curriculum, NCERT 2005

☐ To enable learners to relate classroom teaching to their outside enviornment.

☐ To introduce them to the basic concepts of Sociology that will enable them to observe and interpret social life.

☐ To be aware of the complexity of social processes.

☐ To appreciate diversity in society in India and the world at large.

☐ To build the capacity of students to understand and analyse the changes in contemporary Indian Society.

Indian Society builds on the two textbooks for Class XI, and complements the second textbook for Class XII — *Social Change and Development in India.* The specific correspondence of chapters and sections to the NCERT syllabus is indicated in Box 2. This is a suggested correspondence; teachers may also find other sections to be relevant or useful for particular segments of the syllabus.

Box 2: Correspondence with the NCERT Sociology Syllabus

(Chapters and sections of this textbook relating to syllabus topics are indicated in brackets after each syllabus section)

Unit I: Structure of Indian Society

1.1 Introducing Indian Society (Ch. 1; 'Colonialism and the Emergence of New Markets' in 4.1; 'Communities, Nations and Nation-States' in 6.1)

1.2 Demographic structure (Ch. 2)

1.3 Rural Urban Linkages and Divisions (Ch. 2.6; section on 'Weekly Tribal Market' in 4.1)

Unit II: Social Institutions: Continuity and Change

2.1 Family and Kinship (Ch. 3.3, Ch. 5.3)

2.2 The Caste System (Ch. 3.1; 'Caste-based markets and trading networks' in 4.1; Ch. 5.2)

Suggestions for Use

As already mentioned, this textbook is intended to reflect the spirit of the new National Curriculum Framework, where the emphasis has been on reducing the curricular burden on the child, specially in the form of information to be reproduced. Moreover, an effort has been made to relate the subject matter to the contemporary social environment and to the everyday life of the child. These features necessarily involve changes in the content and format of the textbook, and, of course, in the way that the classroom use of the textbook is to be structured. While each school, each teacher and each class will doubtless evolve their own ways of using this textbook, it is broadly true that the NCF will shift emphasis towards classroom discussion, activities and projects, and away from information-absorption and reproduction.

In addition to these general features of the NCF which will affect all subjects, there are some features specific to the content of this textbook which may require special handling. The obvious candidates are the chapters on caste and other forms of inequality, and those on minorities and related issues (Chs. 3, 5 and 6). Depending on the composition of the class, teachers will have to devise their own methods of dealing with sensitive material without making any section of students feel embarrassed. However, at the same time students from dominant sections of the society should also be challenged to question their common sense and to rethink many taken-for-granted issues and opinions. It is partly in view of these considerations that Ch. 3 is very light on activities, leaving it to the teacher to devise suitable ones for the specific class and the situation in which she/he is teaching.

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Apart from this exception, however, the text tries to be activity based. Activities are inserted quite deliberately and are intended to be an integral part of the textbook. Teachers and students are welcome to modify them to suit local situations, but please do not skip them! There are different kind of activities. One kind which is new is called an 'Exercise'. It is based on a specific text or table given in the text, and requires students to answer very specific questions. These should be taken as *mandatory*. Information boxes that are meant to provide contextual material that is not part of the evaluative content (i.e., students will not be examined on this material) are coloured (i.e., any colour other than shades of grey, which are the standard shades for boxes).

In order not to overburden the text, we have not inserted too many references or citations. The references given at the end of each chapter are thus intended to be more of a bibliography rather than simply a list of citations. However, citations are given where specific information or quotations are involved. Teachers are of course welcome to use any additional readings or texts they find useful. There is a consolidated glossary at the end of the textbook, and students should be encouraged to refer to it. Terms explained in detail in the text are generally not included in the glossary. Many, but not all, of the words that are included in the glossary appear in bold when they are first used in the textbook. Remember, every word that appears in bold type will be found in the glossary, but the glossary includes many more words as well.

A special word on projects and practical work. This feature is a new one, and involves a significant change in the evaluation procedure. Since at least twenty per cent of the total marks for sociology are to be devoted to this section, close attention should be paid to this. Chapter 7 provides some suggestions, along with a brief recap of the methods discussed in the Class XI textbook (Ch. 5 of *Introducing Sociology*). In view of the scheduling of project work, Chapter 7 is perhaps best discussed relatively early in the course (rather than at the end of all the other chapters), preferably after Chapter 2 and 3 have been discussed. The class can revisit Chapter 7 at the end of the textbook, but selection of projects and work on them should start much earlier. The project suggestions are merely indicative; please feel free to devise your own, keeping in mind the constraints and methodological considerations mentioned in Chapter 7.

This is NCERT's first attempt to take on board the concerns of the new NCF for Class XII. We are already aware of some ways in which this textbook could be further improved, and we are also confident that during the coming year, teachers and students will come up with many more suggestions and comments that will help us revise it. Please do write to us at the following postal address: The Head, Department of Education in the Social Sciences and Humanities, NCERT, Shri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi-110016. Or you can send email to: ncertsociologytexts@gmail.com. We look forward to your responses, and specially your critical comments, including suggestions for improvements in the layout and format. We promise to acknowledge all useful suggestions in the next edition of this textbook.

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THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a [1][**SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**] and to secure to all its citizens :

> **JUSTICE,** social, economic and political;

> **LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

> **EQUALITY** of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

> **FRATERNITY** assuring the dignity of the individual and the [2][unity and integrity of the Nation];

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

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1. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Sovereign Democratic Republic" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)
2. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Unity of the Nation" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)

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CONTENTS

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Part IV A (Article 51 A)

Fundamental Duties

Fundamental Duties – It shall be the duty of every citizen of India —

(a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;

(b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;

(c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;

(d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;

(e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;

(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;

(g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures;

(h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;

(i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;

(j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement;

(k) who is a parent or guardian, to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

Chapter 1

Introducing Indian Society
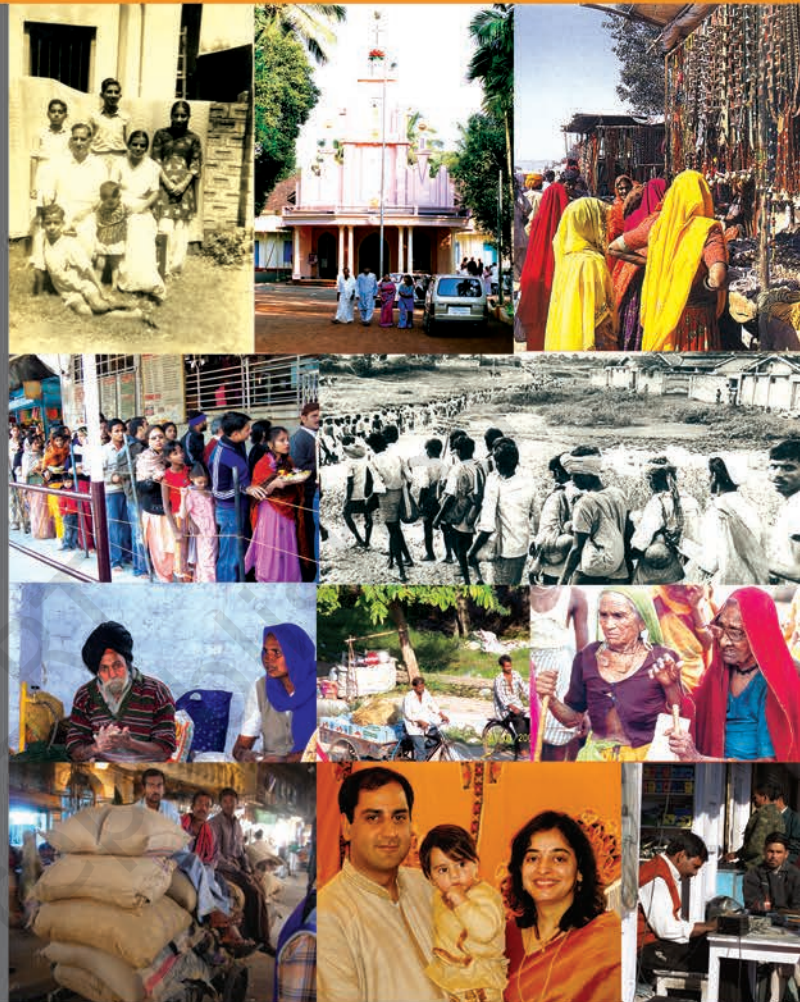
*I*n one important sense, Sociology is unlike any other subject that you may have studied. It is a subject in which no one starts from zero – everyone already knows something about society. Other subjects are learnt because they are taught (at school, at home, or elsewhere); but much of our knowledge about society is acquired without explicit teaching. Because it is such an integral part of the process of growing up, knowledge about society seems to be acquired "naturally" or "automatically". No child is expected to already know something about History, Geography, Psychology or Economics when they come to school. But even a six year old already knows something about society and social relationships. It is all the more true then, that, as young eighteen year old adults, you know a lot about the society you live in without ever having studied it.

This prior knowledge or familiarity with society is both an advantage and a disadvantage for sociology, the discipline that studies society. The advantage is that students are generally not afraid of Sociology – they feel that it can't be a very hard subject to learn. The disadvantage is that this prior knowledge can be a problem – in order to learn Sociology, we need to "unlearn" what we already know about society. In fact, the initial stage of learning Sociology consists mainly of such unlearning. This is necessary because our prior knowledge about society – our common sense – is acquired from a particular viewpoint. This is the viewpoint of the social group and the social environment that we are socialised into. Our social context shapes our opinions, beliefs and expectations about society and social relations. These beliefs are not necessarily wrong, though they can be. The problem is that they are 'partial'. The word partial is being used here in two different senses – incomplete (the opposite of whole), and biased (the opposite of impartial). So our 'unlearnt' knowledge or common sense usually allows us to see only a part of social reality; moreover, it is liable to be tilted towards the viewpoints and interests of our own social group.

Sociology does not offer a solution to this problem in the form of a perspective that can show us the whole of reality in a completely unbiased way. Indeed sociologists believe that such an ideal vantage point does not exist. We can only see by standing *some*where; and every 'somewhere' offers only a partial view of the world. What sociology offers is to teach us how to see the world from many vantage points – not just our own, but also that of others unlike ourselves. Each vantage point provides only a partial view, but by comparing what the world looks like from the eyes of different kinds of people we get some sense of what the whole might look like, and what is hidden from view in each specific standpoint.

What may be of even more interest to you is that sociology can show you what you look like to others; it can teach you how to look at yourself 'from the outside', so to speak. This is called 'self-reflexivity', or sometimes just **reflexivity**. This is the ability to reflect upon yourself, to turn back your gaze (which is usually directed outward) back towards yourself. But this self-inspection must be critical – i.e., it should be quick to criticise and slow to praise oneself.

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At the simplest level, you could say that understanding Indian society and its structure provides a sort of social map on which you could locate yourself. Like with a geographical map, locating oneself on a social map can be useful in the sense that you know where you are in relation to others in society. For example, suppose you live in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. If you look at a geographical map of India, you know that your state is in the North-eastern corner of India. You also know that your state is small compared to many large states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra or Rajasthan, but that it is larger than many others such as Manipur, Goa, Haryana or Punjab. If you look at a physical features map, it could tell you what kind of terrain Arunachal has (hilly, forested) compared to other states and regions of India, and what natural resources it is rich in, and so on.

A comparable social map would tell you where you are located in society. For example, as a seventeen or eighteen year old, you belong to the social group called "young people". People your age or younger account for about forty per cent of India's population. You might belong to a particular regional or linguistic community, such as a Gujarati speaker from Gujarat or a Telugu speaker from Andhra Pradesh. Depending on your parent's occupation and your family income, you would also be a member of an economic class, such as lower middle class or upper class. You could be a member of a particular religious community, a caste or tribe, or other such social group. Each of these identities would locate you on a social map, and among a web of social relationships. Sociology tells you about what kinds of groups or groupings there are in society, what their relationships are to each other, and what this might mean in terms of your own life.

But sociology can do more than simply help to locate you or others in this simple sense of describing the places of different social groups. As C.Wright Mills, a well-known American sociologist has written, sociology can help you to map the links and connections between "personal troubles" and "social issues". By personal troubles Mills means the kinds of individual worries, problems or concerns that everyone has. So, for example, you may be unhappy about the way elders in your family treat you or how your brothers, sisters or friends treat you. You may be worried about your future and what sort of job you might get. Other aspects of your individual identity may be sources of pride, tension, confidence or embarrassment in different ways. But all of these are about one person and derive meaning from this personalised perspective. A social issue, on the other hand, is about large groups and not about the individuals who make them up.

Thus, the "generation gap" or friction between older and younger generations is a social phenomenon, common to many societies and many time periods. Unemployment or the effects of a changing occupational structure is also a societal issue, that concerns millions of different kinds of people. It includes, for example, the sudden increase in job prospects for information technology

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related professions, as well as the declining demand for agricultural labour. Issues of communalism or the animosity of one religious community towards another, or casteism, which is the exclusion or oppression of some castes by others, are again society-wide problems. Different individuals may be implicated in them in different roles, depending on their social location. Thus, a person from a so-called upper caste who believes in the inferiority of the people born into so-called lower castes is involved in casteism as a perpetrator, while a member of a so-called low caste community is also involved, but as a victim. In the same way, both men and women, as distinct social groups, are affected by gender inequalities, but in very different ways.

Age Boundaries (Young and Old)
Regional Boundaries
Economic Boundaries
Religious Boundaries
Caste Boundaries

YOU ARE HERE

One version of such a map is already provided to us in childhood by the process of socialisation, or the ways in which we are taught to make sense of the world around us. This is the common sense map. But as pointed out earlier, this kind of map can be misleading, and it can distort. Once we leave our common sense maps behind, there are no other readymade maps available to us, because we have been socialised into only one, not several or all, social groups. If we want other kinds of maps, we must learn how to draw them. A sociological perspective teaches you how to draw social maps.

1.1 Introducing an Introduction...

This entire book is meant to introduce you to Indian society from a sociological rather than common sense point of view. What can be said by way of an introduction to this introduction? Perhaps it would be appropriate at this point to indicate in advance the larger processes that were at work in shaping Indian society, processes that you will encounter in detail in the pages to follow.

Broadly speaking, it was in the colonial period that a specifically Indian consciousness took shape. Colonial rule unified all of India for the first time, and brought in the forces of modernisation and capitalist economic change. By and large, the changes brought about were irreversible – society could never return to the way things were before. The economic, political and administrative unification of India under colonial rule was achieved at great expense. Colonial exploitation and domination scarred Indian society in many ways. But paradoxically, **colonialism** also gave birth to its own enemy – **nationalism**.

Historically, an Indian nationalism took shape under British colonialism. The shared experience of colonial domination helped unify and energise different sections of the community. The emerging middle classes began, with the aid of western style education, to challenge colonialism on its own ground. Ironically, colonialism and western education also gave the impetus for the rediscovery of tradition. This led to the developments on the cultural and social front which solidified emergent forms of community at the national and regional levels.

Colonialism created new **classes** and **communities** which came to play significant roles in subsequent history. The urban middle classes were the main carriers of nationalism and they led the campaign for freedom. Colonial interventions also crystallised religious and caste based communities. These too became major players. The complex ways in which the subsequent history of contemporary Indian society evolved is something you will encounter in the following chapters.

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1.2 A PREVIEW OF THIS BOOK

In this, the first of two textbooks on sociology, you will be introduced to the basic structure of Indian society. (The second textbook will be focussed on the specifics of social change and development in India.)

We begin with a discussion of the demographic structure of the Indian population (Chapter 2). As you know, India is currently the second most populous country in the world, and in a few decades is projected to overtake China and become the most populous country in the world. What are the ways in which sociologists and demographers study a population? Which aspects of the population are socially significant, and what has been happening on these fronts in the Indian case? Is our population simply an obstacle to development, or can it also be seen as helping development in some ways? These are some of the questions that this chapter tries to tackle.
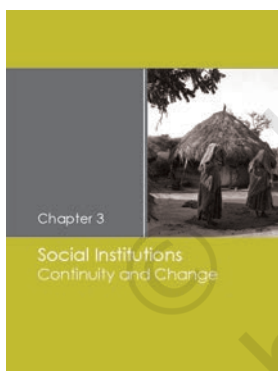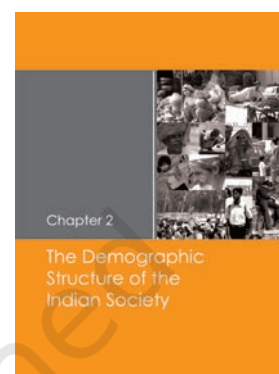
In Chapter 3, we revisit the basic building blocks of Indian society in the form of the institutions of caste, tribe and family. As a unique feature of the Indian subcontinent, caste has always attracted a lot of scholarly attention. How has this institution been changing over the centuries, and what does caste really mean today? What is the context in which the concept of 'tribe' was introduced into India? What sorts of communities are tribes supposed to be, and what is at stake in defining them as such? How do tribal communities define themselves in contemporary India? Finally, the family as an institution has also been subjected to tremendous pressure in these times of rapid and intense social change. What changes do we see in the diverse forms of the family that exist in India? By addressing questions like these, Chapter 3 builds the base for looking at further aspects of Indian society which would pre-suppose caste, tribe and family.

Chapter 4 explores the socio-cultural dimensions of the market as a powerful institution that has been the vehicle of change throughout world history. Given that the most sweeping and rapid economic changes were brought about first by colonialism and then by developmental policies, this chapter looks at how markets of different kinds have evolved in India, and the chain reactions they set in motion.
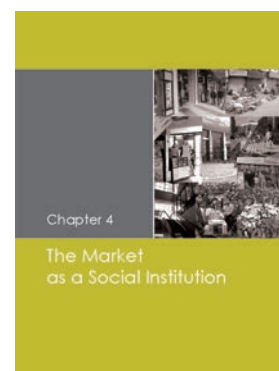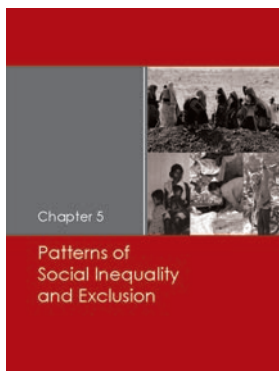
Among the features of our society that have been the cause of greatest concern are its seemingly unlimited capacity for generating inequality and exclusion. Chapter 5 is devoted to this important subject. Chapter 5 looks at inequality and exclusion in the context of caste, tribe, gender and the 'disabled'. Notorious as an instrument of division and injustice, the caste system has been the object of concerted attempts by the state and by the oppressed castes to reform or even abolish it. What are the concrete problems and issues that this attempt faced? How successful have movements to resist caste exclusion been in our recent past? What have been the special problems of tribal movements? In what context are tribal identities reasserting themselves today? Similar questions are dealt with in the context of gender relations, and the 'disabled'. To what extent is our society responsive to the needs of the disabled? How much of an impact has the women's movement had on the social institutions that have oppressed women?

Chapter 6 deals with the difficult challenges posed by the immense diversity of Indian society. This chapter invites us to step outside our normal, comfortable ways of thinking. The familiar cliches and slogans about India being a land of unity in diversity have a hard and complex side to them. Despite all the failures and inadequacies, India has not done too badly on this front. What have been our strengths and our weaknesses? How may young adults face issues like communal conflict, regional or linguistic chauvinism, and casteism without either wishing them away or being overwhelmed by them? Why is it important for our collective future as a nation that every minority in India not feel that it is insecure or at risk?
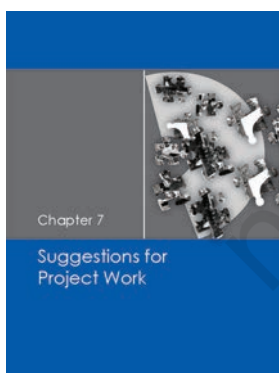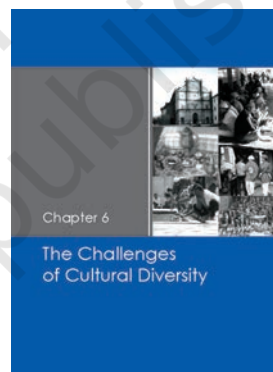
Finally, in Chapter 7, some suggestions are provided for you and your teachers to think about the practical component of your course. This can be quite interesting and enjoyable, as you will discover.

Notes

Chapter 2

The Demographic Structure of the Indian Society

$\mathcal{D}$ emography is the systematic study of population. The term is of Greek origin and is composed of the two words, *demos* (people) and *graphein* (describe), implying the description of people. Demography studies the trends and processes associated with population including – changes in population size; patterns of births, deaths, and migration; and the structure and composition of the population, such as the relative proportions of women, men and different age groups. There are different varieties of demography, including formal demography which is a largely quantitative field, and social demography which focuses on the social, economic or political aspects of populations. All demographic studies are based on processes of counting or enumeration – such as the census or the survey – which involve the systematic collection of data on the people residing within a specified territory.

Demography is a field that is of special importance to sociology – in fact, the emergence of sociology and its successful establishment as an academic discipline owed a lot to demography. Two different processes happened to take place at roughly the same time in Europe during the latter half of the eighteenth century – the formation of nation-states as the principal form of political organisation, and the beginnings of the modern science of statistics. The modern state had begun to expand its role and functions. It had, for instance, begun to take an active interest in the development of early forms of public health management, policing and maintenance of law and order, economic policies relating to agriculture and industry, taxation and revenue generation and the governance of cities.

This new and constantly expanding sphere of state activity required the systematic and regular collection of *social statistics* – or quantitative data on various aspects of the population and economy. The practice of the collection of social statistics by the state is in itself much older, but it acquired its modern form towards the end of the eighteenth century. The American census of 1790 was probably the first modern census, and the practice was soon taken up in Europe as well in the early 1800s. In India, censuses began to be conducted by the British Indian government between 1867-72, and regular ten yearly (or decennial) censuses have been conducted since 1881. Independent India continued the practice, and seven decennial censuses have been conducted since 1951, the most recent being in 2011. The Indian census is the largest such exercise in the world (since China, which has a slightly larger population, does not conduct regular censuses).

Demographic data are important for the planning and implementation of state policies, specially those for economic development and general public welfare. But when they first emerged, social statistics also provided a strong justification for the new discipline of sociology. Aggregate statistics – or the numerical characteristics that refer to a large collectivity consisting of millions of people – offer a concrete and strong argument for the existence of *social* phenomena. Even though country-level or state-level statistics like the number

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of deaths per 1,000 population – or the death rate – are made up by aggregating (or adding up) individual deaths, the death rate itself is a social phenomenon and must be explained at the social level. Emile Durkheim's famous study explaining the variation in suicide rates across different countries was a good example of this. Durkheim argued that the rate of suicide (i.e., number of suicides per 100,000 population) had to be explained by social causes even though each particular instance of suicide may have involved reasons specific to that individual or her/his circumstances.

Sometimes a distinction is made between formal demography and a broader field of population studies. Formal demography is primarily concerned with the measurement and analysis of the components of population change. Its focus is on quantitative analysis for which it has a highly developed mathematical methodology suitable for forecasting population growth and changes in the composition of population. Population studies or social demography, on the other hand, enquires into the wider causes and consequences of population structures and change. Social demographers believe that social processes and structures regulate demographic processes; like sociologists, they seek to trace the social reasons that account for population trends.

2.1 SOME THEORIES AND CONCEPTS IN DEMOGRAPHY

THE MALTHUSIAN THEORY OF POPULATION GROWTH

Among the most famous theories of demography is the one associated with the English political economist Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834). Malthus's theory of population growth – outlined in his *Essay on Population* (1798) – was a rather pessimistic one. He argued that human populations tend to grow at a much faster rate than the rate at which the means of human subsistence (specially food, but also clothing and other agriculture-based products) can grow. Therefore humanity is condemned to live in poverty forever because the growth of agricultural production will always be overtaken by population growth. While population rises in **geometric progression** (i.e., like 2, 4, 8, 16, 32 etc.), agricultural production can only grow in **arithmetic progression** (i.e., like 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 etc.). Because population growth always outstrips growth in production of subsistence resources, the only way to increase prosperity is by controlling the growth of population. Unfortunately, humanity has only a limited ability to voluntarily reduce the growth of its population (through '**preventive checks**' such as postponing marriage or practicing sexual abstinence or celibacy). Malthus believed therefore that '**positive checks**' to population growth – in the form of famines and diseases – were inevitable because they were nature's way of dealing with the imbalance between food supply and increasing population.

Malthus's theory was influential for a long time. But it was also challenged by theorists who claimed that economic growth could outstrip population growth.

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Box 2.1

"The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and tens of thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world."

– Thomas Robert Malthus, *An essay on the principle of population, 1798.*

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834)

Malthus studied at Cambridge and trained to become a Christian priest. Later he was appointed Professor of History and Political Economy at the East India Company College at Haileybury near London, which was a training centre for the officers recruited to the Indian Civil Service.

However, the most effective refutation of his theory was provided by the historical experience of European countries. The pattern of population growth began to change in the latter half of nineteenth century, and by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century these changes were quite dramatic. Birth rates had declined, and outbreaks of epidemic diseases were being controlled. Malthus's predictions were proved false because both food production and standards of living continued to rise despite the rapid growth of population.

Malthus was also criticised by liberal and Marxist scholars for asserting that poverty was caused by population growth. The critics argued that problems like poverty and starvation were caused by the unequal distribution of economic resources rather than by population growth. An unjust social system allowed a wealthy and privileged minority to live in luxury while the vast majority of the people were forced to live in poverty.

THE THEORY OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

Another significant theory in demography is the theory of demographic transition. This suggests that population growth is linked to overall levels of economic development and that every society follows a typical pattern of development-related population growth. There are three basic phases of population growth. The first stage is that of low population growth in a society that is underdeveloped and technologically backward. Growth rates are low because both the death rate and the birth rate are very high, so that the difference between the two (or the net growth rate) is low. The third (and last) stage is also one of low growth in a developed society where both death rate and birth rate have been reduced

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considerably and the difference between them is again small. Between these two stages is a transitional stage of movement from a backward to an advanced stage, and this stage is characterised by very high rates of growth of population.

This 'population explosion' happens because death rates are brought down relatively quickly through advanced methods of disease control, public health, and better nutrition. However, it takes longer for society to adjust to change and alter its reproductive behaviour (which was evolved during the period of poverty and high death rates) to suit the new situation of relative prosperity and longer life spans. This kind of transition was effected in Western Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. More or less similar patterns are followed in the less developed countries that are struggling to reduce the birth rate in keeping with the falling mortality rate. In India too, the demographic transition is not yet complete as the mortality rate has been reduced but the birth rate has not been brought down to the same extent.

COMMON CONCEPTS AND INDICATORS

Most demographic concepts are expressed as rates or ratios – they involve two numbers. One of these numbers is the particular statistic that has been calculated for a specific geographical-administrative unit; the other number provides a standard for comparison. For example, the *birth rate* is the total number of live births in a particular area (an entire country, a state, a district or other territorial unit) during a specified period (usually a year) divided by the total population of that area in thousands. In other words, the birth rate is the number of live births per 1000 population. The *death rate* is a similar statistic, expressed as the number of deaths in a given area during a given time per 1000 population. These statistics depend on the reporting of births and deaths by the families in which they occur. In fact, in most countries including India, people are required by law to report births and deaths to the appropriate authorities – the local police station or primary health centre in the case of villages, and the relevant municipal office in the case of towns and cities.

The *rate of natural increase* or the growth rate of population refers to the difference between the birth rate and the death rate. When this difference is zero (or, in practice, very small) then we say that the population has 'stabilised', or has reached the 'replacement level', which is the rate of growth required for new generations to replace the older ones that are dying out. Sometimes, societies can experience a negative growth rate – that is, their fertility levels are below the replacement rate. This is true of many countries and regions in the world today, such as Japan, Russia, Italy and Eastern Europe. On the other

ACTIVITY 2.1

Read the section on the previous page and the quotation from Malthus in Box 2.1. One reason why Malthus was proved wrong is the substantial increases in the **productivity of agriculture**. Can you find out how these productivity increases occurred – i.e., what were the factors that made agriculture more productive? What could be some of the other reasons why Malthus was wrong? Discuss with your classmates and make a list with the help of your teacher.

hand, some societies experience very high growth rates, particularly when they are going through the demographic transition described on the previous page.

The *fertility rate* refers to the number of live births per 1000 women in the child-bearing age group, usually taken to be 15 to 49 years. But like the other rates discussed on the previous page (the birth and death rates) this is a 'crude' rate – it is a rough average for an entire population and does not take account of the differences across age-groups. Differences across age groups can sometimes be very significant in affecting the meaning of indicators. That is why demographers also calculate age-specific rates. The *total fertility rate* refers to the total number of live births that a hypothetical woman would have if she lived through the reproductive age group and had the average number of babies in each segment of this age group as determined by the age-specific fertility rates for that area. Another way of expressing this is that the total fertility rate is the 'the average number of births to a cohort of women up to the end of the reproductive age period (estimated on the basis of the age-specific rates observed during a given period)' (Visaria and Visaria 2003).

The *infant mortality* rate is the number of deaths of babies before the age of one year per 1000 live births. Likewise, the *maternal mortality* rate is the number of women who die in childbirth per 1000 live births. High rates of infant and maternal mortality are an unambiguous indicator of backwardness and poverty; development is accompanied by sharp falls in these rates as medical facilities and levels of education, awareness and prosperity increase. One concept which is somewhat complicated is that of *life expectancy*. This refers to the estimated number of years that an average person is expected to survive. It is calculated on the basis of data on age-specific death rates in a given area over a period of time.

The *sex ratio* refers to the number of females per 1000 males in a given area at a specified time period. Historically, all over the world it has been found that there are slightly more females than males in most countries. This is despite the fact that slightly more male babies are born than female ones; nature seems to produce roughly 943 to 952 female babies for every 1000 males. If despite this fact the sex ratio is somewhat in favour of females, this seems to be due to two reasons. First, girl babies appear to have an advantage over boy babies in terms of resistance to disease in infancy. At the other end of the life cycle, women have tended to outlive men in most societies, so that there are more older women than men. The combination of these two factors leads to a sex ratio of roughly 1050 females per 1000 males in most contexts. However, it has been found that the sex ratio has been declining in some countries like China, South Korea and specially India. This phenomenon has been linked to prevailing social norms that tend to value males much more than females, which leads to 'son preference' and the relative neglect of girl babies.

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The *age structure of the population* refers to the proportion of persons in different age groups relative to the total population. The age structure changes in response to changes in levels of development and the average life expectancy. Initially, poor medical facilities, prevalence of disease and other factors make for a relatively short life span. Moreover, high infant and maternal mortality rates also have an impact on the age structure. With development, quality of life improves and with it the life expectancy also improves. This changes the age structure: relatively smaller proportions of the population are found in the younger age groups and larger proportions in the older age groups. This is also referred to as the ageing of the population.

The *dependency ratio* is a measure comparing the portion of a population which is composed of dependents (i.e., elderly people who are too old to work, and children who are too young to work) with the portion that is in the working age group, generally defined as 15 to 64 years. The dependency ratio is equal to the population below 15 or above 64, divided by population in the 15-64 age group; the ratio is usually expressed as a percentage. A rising dependency ratio is a cause for worry in countries that are facing an ageing population, since it becomes difficult for a relatively smaller proportion of working-age people to carry the burden of providing for a relatively larger proportion of dependents. On the other hand, a falling dependency ratio can be a source of economic growth and prosperity due to the larger proportion of workers relative to non-workers. This is sometimes refered to as the 'demographic dividend', or benefit flowing from the changing age structure. However, this benefit is temporary because the larger pool of working age people will eventually turn into non-working old people.

2.2 Size and Growth of India's Population

India is the second most populous country in the world after China, with a total population of 121 crores (or 1.21 billion) according to the Census of India 2011 (Provisional). As can be seen from Table 1, the growth rate of India's population has not always been very high. Between 1901–1951 the average annual growth rate did not exceed 1.33%, a modest rate of growth. In fact between 1911 and 1921 there was a negative rate of growth of – 0.03%. This was because of the influenza epidemic during 1918–19 which killed about 12.5 million persons or 5% of the total population of the country (Visaria and Visaria 2003: 191). The growth rate of population substantially increased after independence from British rule going up to 2.2% during 1961-1981. Since then although the annual growth rate has decreased it remains one of the highest in the developing world. Chart 1 shows the comparative movement of the crude birth and death rates. The impact of the demographic transition phase is clearly seen in the graph where they begin to diverge from each other after the decade of 1921 to 1931.

Before 1931, both death rates and birth rates are high, whereas, after this transitional moment the death rates fall sharply but the birth rate only falls slightly.

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TABLE 1: THE POPULATION OF INDIA AND ITS GROWTH DURING THE 20TH CENTURY			
Year	**Total Population (in millions)**	**Average Annual Growth Rate (%)**	**Decadal Growth Rate (%)**
1901	238	–	-
1911	252	0.56	5.8
1921	251	-0.03	-0.3
1931	279	1.04	11.0
1941	319	1.33	14.2
1951	361	1.25	13.3
1961	439	1.96	21.6
1971	548	2.22	24.8
1981	683	2.20	24.7
1991	846	2.14	23.9
2001	1028	1.93	21.5
2011	1210	1.64	17.6

Source: Census of India 2011 (Provisional).
website: http//censusindia.gov.in

CHART 1: BIRTH AND DEATH RATE IN INDIA 1901-2001
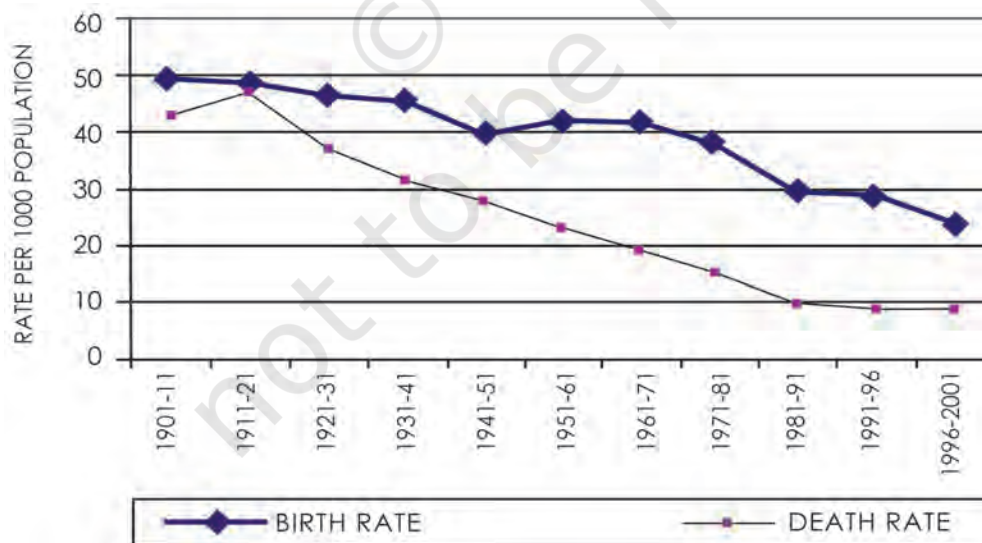
Total birth rate was reported to be 20.8 and death rate as 6.5 in India in 2015.
Source: SRS Bulletin, Registrar General of India, 2016

Source: National Commission on Population, Government of India.
website: http://populationcommission.nic.in/facts1.htm#

The principal reasons for the decline in the death rate after 1921 were increased levels of control over famines and **epidemic** diseases. The latter cause was perhaps the most important. The major epidemic diseases in the past were fevers of various sorts, plague, smallpox and cholera. But the single biggest epidemic was the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, which killed as many as 125 lakh people, or about 5% of the total population of India at that time. (Estimates of deaths vary, and some are much higher. Also known as 'Spanish Flu', the influenza pandemic was a global phenomenon – see the box below. A pandemic is an epidemic that affects a very wide geographical area – see the glossary).

The Global Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19   BOX 2.2

Influenza is caused by a virus that attacks mainly the upper respiratory tract – the nose, throat and bronchi and rarely also the lungs. The genetic makeup of influenza viruses allows for both major and minor genetic changes, making them immune to existing vaccines. Three times in the last century, the influenza viruses have undergone major genetic changes, resulting in global pandemics and large tolls in terms of both disease and deaths. The most infamous pandemic was "Spanish Flu" which affected large parts of the world population and is thought to have killed at least 40 million people in 1918-1919. More recently, two other influenza pandemics occurred in 1957 ("Asian influenza") and 1968 ("Hong Kong influenza") and caused significant morbidity and mortality globally.

The global mortality rate from the 1918/1919 Spanish flu pandemic is not known, but is estimated at 2.5 – 5% of the human population, with 20% of the world population suffering from the disease to some extent. Influenza may have killed as many as 25 million in its first 25 weeks; in contrast, AIDS killed 25 million in its first 25 years. Influenza spread across the world, killing more than 25 million in six months; some estimates put the total killed at over twice that number, possibly even 100 million.

In the United States, about 28% of the population suffered, and 500,000 to 675,000 died. In Britain 200,000 died; in France more than 400,000. Entire villages perished in Alaska and southern Africa. In Australia an estimated 10,000 people died and in the Fiji Islands, 14% of the population died during only two weeks, and in Western Samoa 22%. An estimated 17 million died in India, about 5% of India's population at the time. In the British Indian Army, almost 22% of troops who caught the disease died of it.

While World War I did not cause the flu, the close quarters and mass movement of troops quickened its spread. It has been speculated that the soldiers' immune systems were weakened by the stresses of combat and chemical attacks, increasing their susceptibility to the disease.

Source: Compiled from Wikipedia, and World Health Organisation; Webpages:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_flu
http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs211/en/

Improvements in medical cures for these diseases, programmes for mass vaccination, and efforts to improve sanitation helped to control epidemics. However, diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhoea and dysentery continue to kill people even today, although the numbers are nowhere as high as they used to be in the epidemics of the past. Surat witnessed a small epidemic of plague in September 1994, while dengue and chikungunya epidemics have been reported in various parts of the country in 2006.

Famines were also a major and recurring source of increased mortality. Famines were caused by high levels of continuing poverty and malnutrition in an agroclimatic environment that was very vulnerable to variations in rainfall. Lack of adequate means of transportation and communication as well as inadequate efforts on the part of the state were some of the factors responsible for famines. However, as scholars like Amartya Sen and others have shown, famines were not necessarily due to fall in foodgrains production; they were also caused by a 'failure of entitlements', or the inability of people to buy or otherwise obtain food. Substantial improvements in the productivity of Indian agriculture (specially through the expansion of irrigation); improved means of communication; and more vigorous relief and preventive measures by the state have all helped to drastically reduce deaths from famine. Nevertheless, starvation deaths are still reported from some backward regions of the country. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is the latest state initiative to tackle the problem of hunger and starvation in rural areas.

Unlike the death rate, the birth rate has not registered a sharp fall. This is because the birth rate is a sociocultural phenomenon that is relatively slow to change. By and large, increased levels of prosperity exert a strong downward pull on the birth rate. Once infant mortality rates decline, and there is an overall increase in the levels of education and awareness, family size begins to fall. There are very wide variations in fertility rates across the States of India, as can be seen in Chart 2 (on page no. 20). Some states, like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have managed to bring down their total fertility rates (TFR) to 1.7 each (2009). This means that the average woman in Kerala and Tamil Nadu produces only 1.7 children, which is below the 'replacement level' and Kerala's TFR is also below the replacement level, which means that the population is going to decline in future. Many other states (like, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Karnataka and Maharashtra) have fairly low TFRs. But there are some states, notably Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, which still have very high TFRs. In 2009, the TFRs of these states were 3.9, 3.3, 3.3 and 3.7, respectively. According to the SRS Bulletin in 2015, India's total birth rate is 22.4, among them rural birth rate is 22.4 and urban 17.3. The highest birth rate in India is of Uttar Pradesh (26.7) and Bihar (26.3), and they will also account for about half (50%) of the additions to the Indian population upto the year 2026. Uttar Pradesh alone is expected to account for a little less than one-quarter (22%) of this increase. Chart 3 (on page no.21) shows the relative contribution to population growth from different regional groupings of States.

CHART 2: STATE-WISE BIRTH RATES IN INDIA, 2016

INDIA
BIRTH RATES, 2016

Legend:
- 25.7 and above
- 23.6 (average)
- 20.7 (average)
- 17.1
- below 15.2
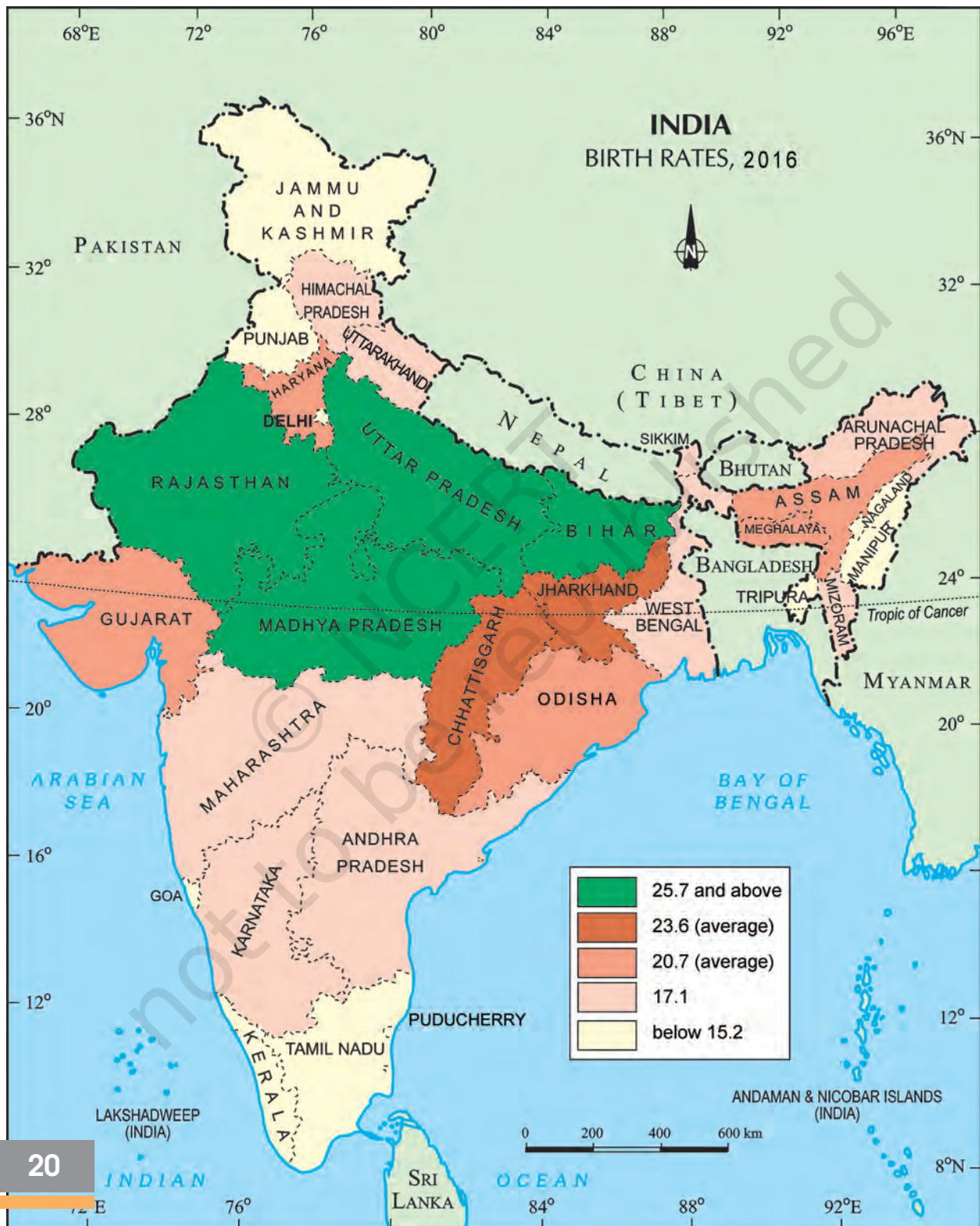
Source: Sample Registration System Bulletin, Government of India, July 2016

CHART 3: REGIONAL SHARES OF PROJECTED POPULATION GROWTH UPTO 2026

Legend:

- Maharashtra, Gujarat (15%)
- Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka (13%)
- West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand (11%)
- Punjab, Haryana, Delhi (9%)
- Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh (16%)
- Uttar Pradesh, Bihar (30%)
- Remaining States (6%)
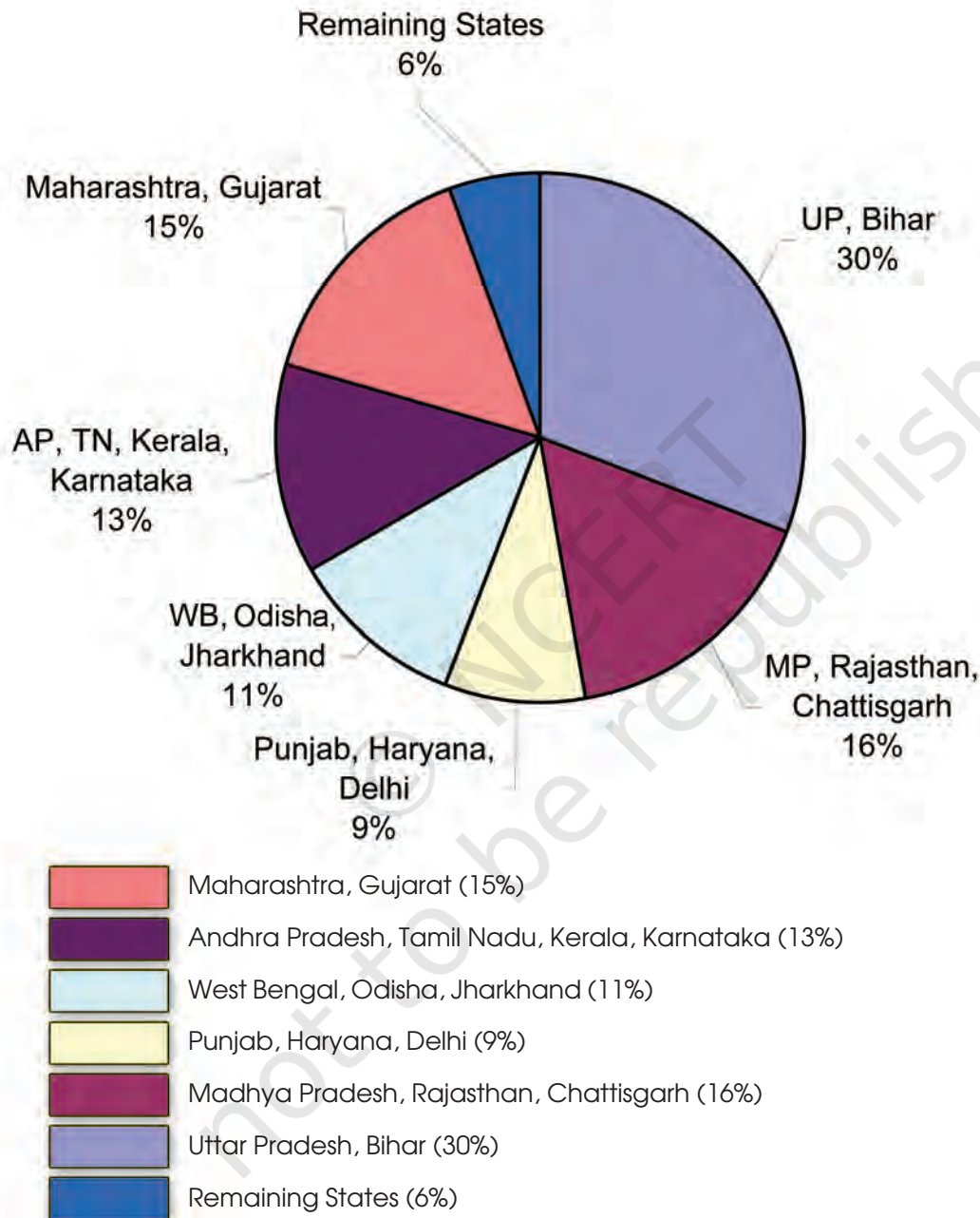
Source: Computed from 2001 Census figures and the Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections of the National Commission on Population, 2006.

2.3 AGE STRUCTURE OF THE INDIAN POPULATION

India has a very young population – that is, the majority of Indians tend to be young, and the average age is also less than that for most other countries. Table 2 shows that the share of the under 15 age group in the total population has come down from its highest level of 42% in 1971 to 35% in 2001. The share of the 15-60 age group has increased slightly from 53% to 59%, while the share of the 60+ age group is very small but it has begun to increase (from 5% to 7%) over the same period. But the age composition of the Indian population is expected to change significantly in the next two decades. Most of this change will be at the two ends of the age spectrum – as Table 2 shows, the 0 -14 age group will reduce its share by about 11% (from 34% in 2001 to 23% in 2026) while the 60 plus age group will increase its share by about 5% (from 7% in 2001 to about 12% in 2026.) Chart 4 shows a graphical picture of the 'population pyramid' from 1961 to its projected shape in 2016.

TABLE 2: AGE COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION OF INDIA, 1961-2026

Year	Age Groups			Total
	0–14 Years	*15–59 Years*	*60+ Years*	
1961	41	53	6	100
1971	42	53	5	100
1981	40	54	6	100
1991	38	56	7	100
2001	34	59	7	100
2011	29	63	8	100
2026	23	64	12	100

Age Group columns show percentage shares; rows may not add up to 100 because of rounding

Source: Based on data from the Technical Group on Population Projections (1996 and 2006) of the National Commission on Population.
Webpage for 1996 Report: http://populationcommission.nic.in/facts1.htm

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CHART 4: AGE GROUP PYRAMIDS, 1961, 1981, 2001 AND 2026

India 1961

80+yrs	
75–79	
70–74	
65–69	
60–64	
55–59	
50–54	
45–49	
40–44	
35–39	
30–34	
25–29	
20–24	
15–19	
10–14	
05–09	
0–4 yrs	

14 12 10 8 6 4 2 0   0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14

Percentage of Population

■ Males   ■ Females

India 1981

80+yrs	
75–79	
70–74	
65–69	
60–64	
55–59	
50–54	
45–49	
40–44	
35–39	
30–34	
25–29	
20–24	
15–19	
10–14	
05–09	
0–4 yrs	

12 10 8 6 4 2 0   0 2 4 6 8 10 12

Percentage of Population

■ Males   ■ Females

23

India 2001

India 2026
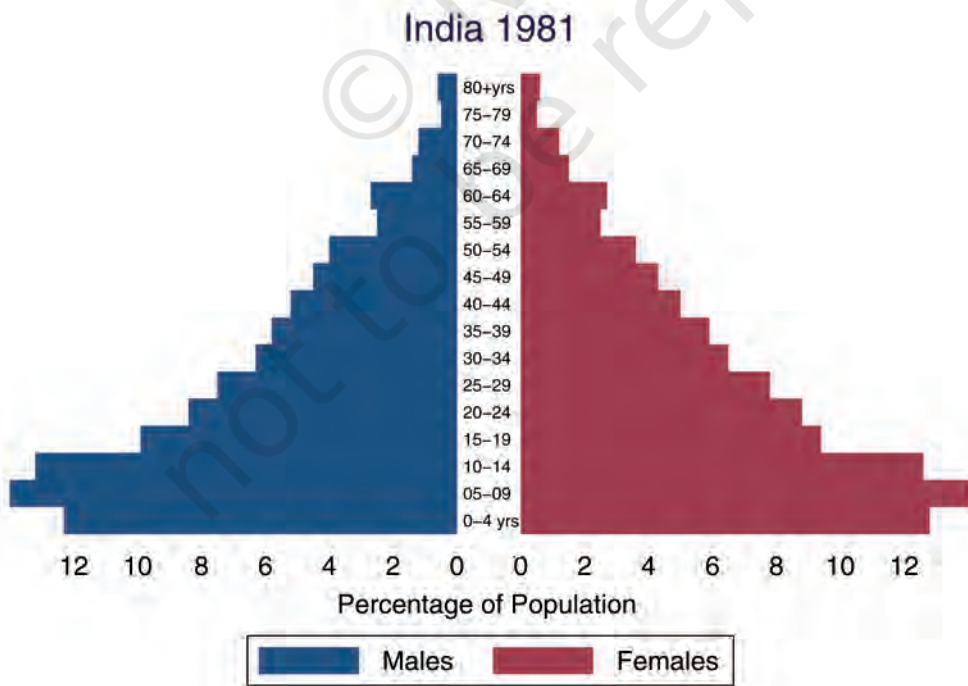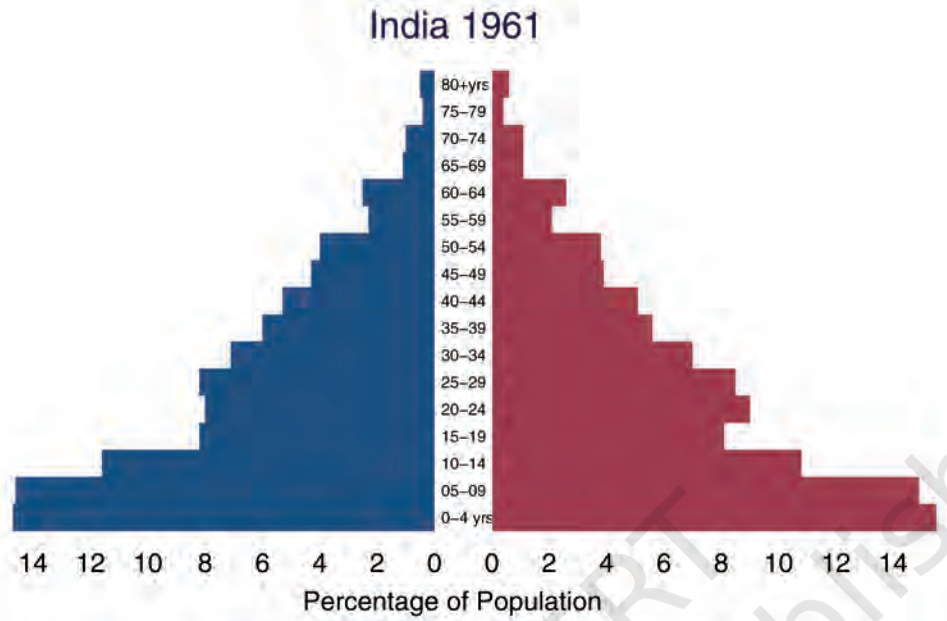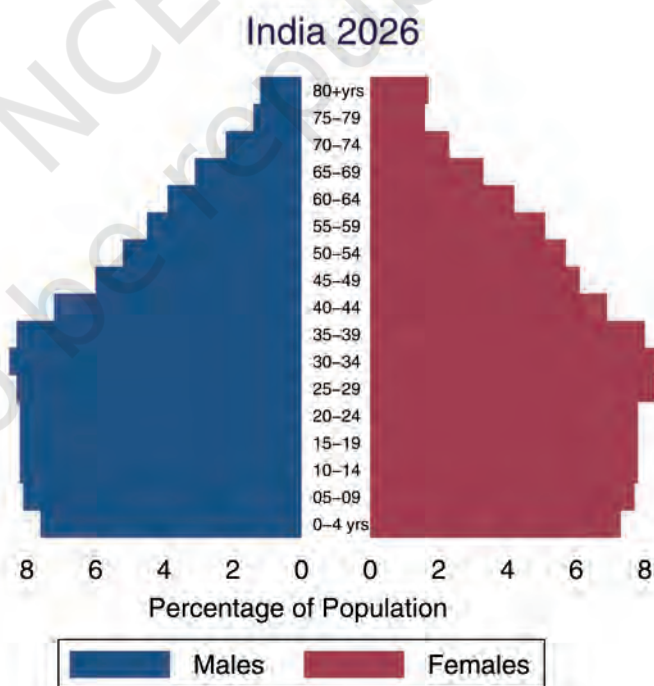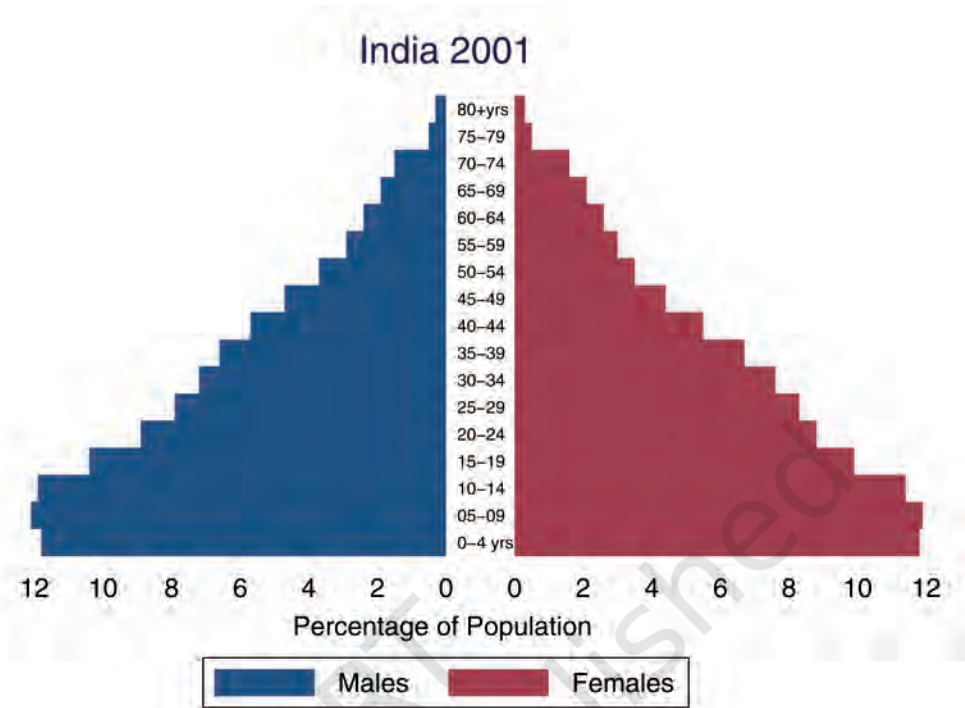
Source: Based on data from relevant volumes of the Census of India (1961, 1981 & 2001) and the Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections (2006) of the National Commission on Population.

EXERCISE FOR CHART 4

The Age Group 'pyramid' shown in Chart 4 provides a much more detailed version of the kind of age grouped data presented in Table 2. Here, data are shown separately for males (on the left side) and females (on the right side) with the relevant five-year age group in the middle. Looking at the horizontal bars (including both males and females in a particular age group) gives you a visual sense of the age structure of the population. The age groups begin from the 0-4 years group at the bottom of the pyramid and go on to the 80 years and above age group at the top. There are four different pyramids for the decennial census years of 1961, 1981, 2001 and the estimates for 2026. The pyramid for 2026 shows the estimated future size of the relevant age groups based on data on the past rates of growth of each age group. Such estimates are also called 'projections'.

These pyramids show you the effect of a gradual fall in the birth rate and rise in the life expectancy. As more and more people begin to live to an older age, the top of the pyramid grows wider. As relatively fewer new births take place, the bottom of the pyramid grows narrower. But the birth rate is slow to fall, so the bottom doesn't change much between 1961 and 1981. The middle of the pyramid grows wider and wider as its share of the total population increases. This creates a 'bulge' in the middle age groups that is clearly visible in the pyramid for 2026. This is what is refered to as the 'demographic dividend' which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Study this chart carefully. With the help of your teacher, try to trace what happens to the new-born generation of 1961 (the 0-4 age group) as it moves up the pyramid in succesive years.

■ Where will the 0-4 age group of 1961 be located in the pyramids for the later years?

■ Where – in which age group – is the widest part of the pyramid as you move from 1961 to 2026?

■ What do you think the shape of the pyramid might be in the year 2051 and 3001?

As with fertility rates, there are wide regional variations in the age structure as well. While a state like Kerala is beginning to acquire an age structure like that of the developed countries, Uttar Pradesh presents a very different picture with high proportions in the younger age groups and relatively low proportions among the aged. India as a whole is somewhere in the middle, because it includes states like Uttar Pradesh as well as states that are more like Kerala. Chart 5 shows the estimated population pyramids for Uttar Pradesh and Kerala in the year 2026. Note the difference in the location of the widest parts of the pyramid for Kerala and Uttar Pradesh.

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CHART 5: AGE STRUCTURE PYRAMIDS, KERALA AND UTTAR PRADESH, 2026
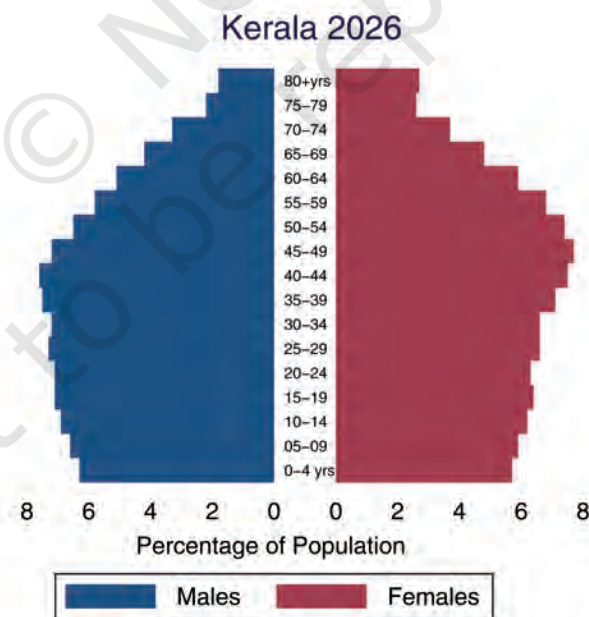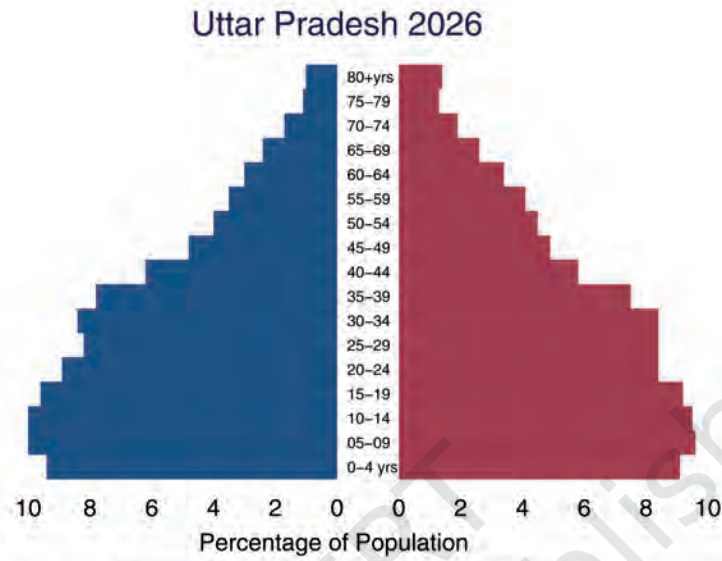
Source: Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections (2006) of the National Commission on Population.

The bias towards younger age groups in the age structure is believed to be an advantage for India. Like the East Asian economies in the past decade and like Ireland today, India is supposed to be benefitting from a 'demographic dividend'. This dividend arises from the fact that the current generation of working-age people is a relatively large one, and it has only a relatively small preceding generation of old people to support. But there is nothing automatic about this advantage – it needs to be consciously exploited through appropriate policies as is explained in Box 2.3 below.

Box 2.3

Does the changing age structure offer a 'demographic dividend' for India?

The demographic advantage or 'dividend' to be derived from the age structure of the population is due to the fact that India is (and will remain for some time) one of the youngest countries in the world. A third of India's population was below 15 years of age in 2000. In 2020, the average Indian will be only 29 years old, compared with an average age of 37 in China and the United States, 45 in Western Europe, and 48 in Japan. This implies a large and growing labour force, which can deliver unexpected benefits in terms of growth and prosperity.

The 'demographic dividend' results from an increase in the proportion of workers relative to non-workers in the population. In terms of age, the working population is roughly that between 15 and 64 years of age. This working age group must support itself as well as those outside this age group (i.e., children and elderly people) who are unable to work and are therefore dependents. Changes in the age structure due to the demographic transition lower the 'dependency ratio', or the ratio of non-working age to working-age population, thus creating the potential for generating growth.

But this potential can be converted into actual growth only if the rise in the working age group is accompanied by increasing levels of education and employment. If the new entrants to the labour force are not educated then their productivity remains low. If they remain unemployed, then they are unable to earn at all and become dependents rather than earners. Thus, changing age structure by itself cannot guarantee any benefits unless it is properly utilised through planned development. The real problem is in defining the dependency ratio as the ratio of the non-working age to working-age population, rather than the ratio of non-workers to workers. The difference between the two is determined by the extent of unemployment and underemployment, which keep a part of the labour force out of productive work. This difference explains why some countries are able to exploit the demographic advantage while others are not.

India is indeed facing a window of opportunity created by the demographic dividend. The effect of demographic trends on the dependency ratio defined in terms of age groups is quite visible. The total dependency ratio fell from 79 in 1970 to 64 in 2005. But the process is likely to extend well into this century with the age-based dependency ratio projected to fall to 48 in 2025 because of continued fall in the proportion of children and then rise to 50 by 2050 because of an increase in the proportion of the aged.

ACTIVITY 2.3

What impact do you think the age structure has on inter - generational relationships? For instance, could a high dependency ratio create conditions for increasing tension between older and younger generations? Or would it make for closer relationships and stronger bonds between young and old? Discuss this in class and try to come up with a list of possible outcomes and the reasons why they happen.

The problem, however, is employment. Data from the National Sample Survey studies of 1999-2000 and from the 2001 Census of India reveal a sharp fall in the rate of employment generation (creation of new jobs) across both rural and urban areas. This is true for the young as well. The rate of growth of employment in the 15-30 age group, which stood at around 2.4 per cent a year between 1987 and 1994 for both rural and urban men, fell to 0.7 for rural men and 0.3 per cent for urban men during 1994 to 2004. This suggests that the advantage offered by a young labour force is not being exploited.

Strategies exist to exploit the demographic window of opportunity that India has today. But India's recent experience suggests that market forces by themselves do not ensure that such strategies would be implemented. Unless a way forward is found, we may miss out on the potential benefits that the country's changing age structure temporarily offers.

[Source: Adapted from an article by C.P. Chandrashekhar in Frontline *Volume 23 - Issue 01, January 14-27, 2006]*

2.4 THE DECLINING SEX-RATIO IN INDIA

The sex ratio is an important indicator of gender balance in the population. As mentioned in the section on concepts earlier, historically, the sex ratio has been slightly in favour of females, that is, the number of females per 1000 males has generally been somewhat higher than 1000. However, India has had a declining sex-ratio for more than a century, as is clear from Table 3. From 972 females per 1000 males at the turn of the twentieth century, the sex ratio has declined to 933 at the turn of the twenty-first century. The trends of the last four decades have been particularly worrying – from 941 in 1961 the sex ratio had fallen to an all-time low of 927 in 1991 before posting a modest increase in 2001. According to the provisional data of Census of India 2011 sex ratio has been increased and now it is 940 females per 1000 males.

But what has really alarmed demographers, policy makers, social activists and concerned citizens is the drastic fall in the child sex ratio. Age specific sex ratios began to be computed in 1961. As is shown in Table 3, the sex ratio for the 0 - 6 years age group (known as the juvenile or child sex ratio) has generally been substantially higher than the overall sex ratio for all age groups, but it has been falling very sharply. In fact the decade 1991-2001 represents an anomaly in that the overall sex ratio has posted its highest ever increase of 6 points from the all time low of 927 to 933, but the child sex ratio has dropped from 945 to 927, a plunge of 18 points taking it below the overall sex ratio for the first time. In 2011 Census (provisional) the child sex ratio again decreased by 13 points and now it is 914.

TABLE 3: THE DECLINING SEX RATIO IN INDIA, 1901–2011				
Year	Sex ratio (all age groups)	Variation over previous decade	Child Sex ratio (0–6 years)	Variation over previous decade
1901	972	–	–	–
1911	964	–8	–	–
1921	955	–9	–	–
1931	950	–5	–	–
1941	945	–5	–	–
1951	946	+1	–	–
1961	941	–5	976	–
1971	930	–11	964	–12
1981	934	+4	962	–2
1991	927	–7	945	–17
2001	933	+6	927	–18
2011*	940	+7	914	–13
2017	945	–	919	–

NOTE: *The sex ratio is defined as the number of females per 1000 males*
Data on age-specific sex ratios is not available before 1961

Source: *Census of India 2011 (Provisional) Government of India*

The state-level child sex ratios offer even greater cause for worry. As many as six States and Union Territories have a child sex ratio of under 900 females per 1000 males. Punjab is the worst with an incredibly low child sex ratio of 793 (the only state below 800), followed by Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. As Chart 6 shows, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra are all under 925, while Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Odisha are above the national average of 927 but below the 950-mark. Even Kerala, the state with the best overall sex ratio does not do too well at 963, while the highest child sex ratio of 986 is found in Sikkim.

Demographers and sociologists have offered several reasons for the decline in the sex ratio in India. The main health factor that affects women differently from men is childbearing. It is relevant to ask if the fall in the sex ratio may be partly due to the increased risk of death in childbirth that only women face. However, maternal mortality is supposed to decline with development, as levels of nutrition, general education and awareness, as well as, the availability of medical and communication facilities improves. Indeed, maternal mortality rates have been coming down in India even though they remain high by international standards. So, it is difficult to see how maternal mortality could have been responsible for the worsening of the sex ratio over time. Combined with the fact that the decline in the child sex ratio has been much steeper than the overall figure, social scientists believe that the cause has to be sought in the differential treatment of girl babies.

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CHART 6: MAP OF CHILD SEX RATIOS ACROSS STATES, 2011

INDIA
CHILD SEX RATIO, 2011
(0-6 YEARS)

Legend:
- 966 and above
- 932-953
- 908-916
- 868-896
- 819-834
- below 846
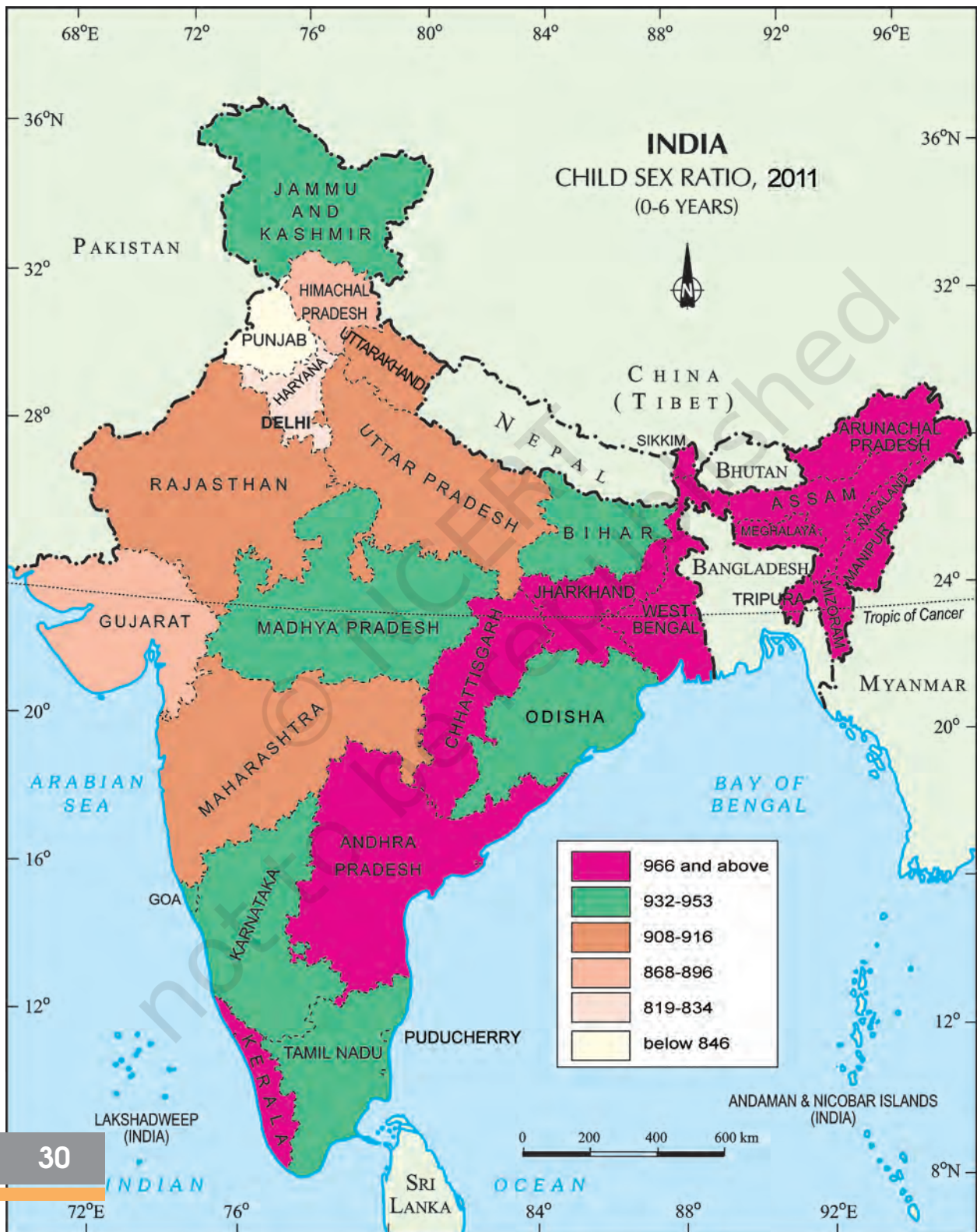
Source: Census Report of 2011

Several factors may be held responsible for the decline in the child sex ratio, including severe neglect of girl babies in infancy, leading to higher death rates; sex-specific abortions that prevent girl babies from being born; and female infanticide (or the killing of girl babies due to religious or cultural beliefs). Each of these reasons point to a serious social problem, and there is some evidence that all of these have been at work in India. Practices of female infanticide have been known to exist in many regions, while increasing importance is being attached to modern medical techniques by which the sex of the baby can be determined in the very early stages of pregnancy. The availability of the sonogram (an x-ray like diagnostic device based on ultra-sound technology), originally developed to identify genetic or other disorders in the foetus, may be used to identify and selectively abort female foetuses.

The regional pattern of low child sex ratios seems to support this argument. It is striking that the lowest child sex ratios are found in the most prosperous regions of India. According to the data of Census 2011, Maharashtra is still number one in case of per capita income. Now, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi are having high per capita income and the child sex ratio of these states is still low. So the problem of selective abortions is not due to poverty or ignorance or lack of resources. For example, if practices like dowry mean that parents have to make large dowry payments to marry off their daughters, then prosperous parents would be the ones most able to afford this. However, we find the sex ratio to be the lowest in the most prosperous regions.

It is also possible (though this issue is still being researched) that as economically prosperous families decide to have fewer children – often only one or two now – they may also wish to choose the sex of their child. This becomes possible with the availablity of ultra-sound technology, although the government has passed strict laws banning this practice and imposing heavy fines and imprisonment as punishment. Known as the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, this law has been in force since 1996, and

Women's Agitation

has been further strengthened in 2003. However, in the long run, the solution to problems, like bias against girl children, depends more on how social attitudes evolve, even though laws and rules can also help. Recently, the Government of India has introduced the programme, *'Beti-Bachao, Beti-Padhao'*. It can prove to be an important policy to increase the child sex ratio in the country.

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2.5 LITERACY

Literacy as a prerequisite to education is an instrument of empowerment. The more literate the population the greater the consciousness of career options, as well as participation in the knowledge economy. Further, literacy can lead to health awareness and fuller participation in the cultural and economic well being of the community. Literacy levels have improved considerably after independence, and almost two-thirds of our population is now literate. But improvements in the literacy rate have to struggle to keep up with the rate of growth of the Indian population, which is still quite high. Enormous effort is needed to ensure the literacy of the new generations – which are only just beginning to be smaller in numbers than in the past (remember the discussion on age structure and the population pyramids earlier in this chapter).

Literacy varies considerably across gender, across regions, and across social groups. As can be seen from Table 4, the literacy rate for women is 16.7% less than the literacy rate for men (Census of India 2011-Provisional). However, female literacy has been rising faster than male literacy, partly because it started from relatively low levels. Female literacy rose by about 11.2 per cent between 2001 and 2011 compared to the rise in male lieracy of 6.2 per cent in the same period (Provisional). Literacy increased approximately 9% in total. Male literacy rose about 6% whereas female literacy rose about 10%. Again female literacy has been rising faster than male literacy. Literacy rates also vary by social group – historically disadvantaged communities like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have lower rates of literacy, and rates of female literacy within these groups are even lower. Regional variations are still very wide, with states like Kerala approaching universal literacy, while states like Bihar are lagging far behind. The inequalities in the literacy rate are specially important because they tend to reproduce inequality across generations. Illiterate parents are at a severe disadvantage in ensuring that their children are well educated, thus perpetuating existing inequalities.

TABLE 4: LITERACY RATE IN INDIA				
(Percentage of population 7 years of age and above)				
Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male-Female gap in literacy rate
1951	18.3	27.2	8.9	18.3
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4	25.1
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0	24.0
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8	26.6
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3	24.8
2001	65.4	75.9	54.2	21.7
2011*	74.0	82.1	65.4	16.7

*Source: Bose (2001:22) *Census of India 2011 (Provisional).*

2.6 RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES

The vast majority of the population of India has always lived in the rural areas, and that continues to be true. According to Census of India 2011 (Provisional) still more people are living in rural areas but the population of urban areas has increased. Now 68.8% population lives in rural areas while 31.2% people live in urban areas. However, as Table 5 shows, the urban population has been increasing its share steadily, from about 11% at the beginning of the twentieth century to about 28% at the beginning of the twenty-first century, an increase of about two-and-a-half times. It is not a question of numbers alone; processes of modern development ensure that the economic and social significance of the agrarian-rural way of life declines relative to the significance of the industrial-urban way of life. This has been broadly true all over the world, and it is true in India as well.

TABLE 5: RURAL AND URBAN POPULATION				
Year	Population (Millions)		Percentage of Total Population	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1901	213	26	89.2	10.8
1911	226	26	89.7	10.3
1921	223	28	88.8	11.2
1931	246	33	88.0	12.0
1941	275	44	86.1	13.9
1951	299	62	82.7	17.3
1961	360	79	82.0	18.0
1971	439	109	80.1	19.9
1981	524	159	76.7	23.3
1991	629	218	74.3	25.7
2001	743	286	72.2	27.8
2011*	833	377	68.8	31.2

*Source: India 2006, A Reference Annual   *Census of India 2011 (Provisional)*

Agriculture used to be by far the largest contributor to the country's total economic production, but today it only contributes about one-fourth of the gross domestic product. While the majority of our people live in the rural areas and make their living out of agriculture, the relative economic value of what they produce has fallen drastically. Moreover, more and more people who live in villages may no longer work in agriculture or even in the village. Rural

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people are increasingly engaged in non-farm rural occupations like transport services, business enterprises or craft manufacturing. If they are close enough, then they may travel daily to the nearest urban centre to work while continuing to live in the village.

Mass media and communication channels are now bringing images of urban life styles and patterns of consumption into the rural areas. Consequently, urban norms and standards are becoming well known even in the remote villages, creating new desires and aspirations for consumption. Mass transit and mass communication are bridging the gap between the rural and urban areas. Even in the past, the rural areas were never really beyond the reach of market forces and today they are being more closely integrated into the consumer market. (The social role of markets will be discussed in Chapter 4).

Considered from an urban point of view, the rapid growth in urbanisation shows that the town or city has been acting as a magnet for the rural population. Those who cannot find work (or sufficient work) in the rural areas go to the city in search of work. This flow of rural-to-urban migration has also been accelerated by the continuous decline of common property resources like ponds, forests and grazing lands. These common resources enabled poor people to survive in the villages although they owned little or no land. Now, these resources have been turned into private property, or they are exhausted. (Ponds may run dry or no longer provide enough fish; forests may have been cut down and have vanished…). If people no longer have access to these resources, but on the other hand have to buy many things in the market that they used to get free (like fuel, fodder or supplementary food items), then their hardship increases. This hardship is worsened by the fact that opportunities for earning cash income are limited in the villages.

Sometimes the city may also be preferred for social reasons, specially the relative anonymity it offers. The fact that urban life involves interaction with strangers can be an advantage for different reasons. For the socially oppressed groups like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, this may offer some partial protection from the daily humiliation they may suffer in the village where everyone knows their caste identity. The anonymity of the city also allows the poorer sections of the socially dominant rural groups to engage in low status work that they would not be able to do in the village. All these reasons make the city an attractive destination for the villagers. The swelling cities bear testimony to this flow of population. This is evident from the rapid rate of urbanisation in the post-Independence period.

While urbanisation has been occurring at a rapid pace, it is the biggest cities – the metropolises – that have been growing the fastest. These metros attract

migrants from the rural areas as well as from small towns. There are now 5,161 towns and cities in India, where 286 million people live. What is striking, however, is that more than two-thirds of the urban population lives in 27 big cities with million-plus populations. Clearly the larger cities in India are growing at such a rapid rate that the urban infrastructure can hardly keep pace. With the mass media's primary focus on these cities, the public face of India is becoming more and more urban rather than rural. Yet in terms of the political power dynamics in the country, the rural areas remain a decisive force.

2.7 POPULATION POLICY IN INDIA

I HAVE NO PROBLEM IN KEEPING THE POPULATION DOWN IN MY SECTOR; I PERSUADE THE PEOPLE HERE TO GO AWAY TO OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY!

It will be clear from the discussion in this chapter that population dynamics is an important matter and that it crucially affects the developmental prospects of a nation as well as the health and well being of its people. This is particularly true of developing countries who have to face special challenges in this regard. It is hardly surprising therefore that India has had an official population policy for more than a half century. In fact, India was perhaps the first country to explicitly announce such a policy in 1952.

The population policy took the concrete form of the National Family Planning Programme. The broad objectives of this programme have remained the same – to try to influence the rate and pattern of population growth in socially desirable directions. In the early days, the most important objective was to slow down the rate of population growth through the promotion of various birth control methods, improve public health standards, and increase public awareness about population and health issues. Over the past half-century or so, India has many significant achievements to her credit in the field of population, as summarised in Box 2.4.

The Family Planning Programme suffered a setback during the years of the National Emergency (1975-76). Normal parliamentary and legal procedures were suspended during this time and special laws and ordinances issued directly by the government (without being passed by Parliament) were in force. During this time the government tried to intensify the effort to bring down the growth

India's Demographic Transition

Box 2.4

Census data from India (i.e., Registrar of India) suggests that population growth is on the decline since 1991. The average number of children a woman expected was 3.8 in 1990, and this has fallen to 2.7 children per woman today (Bloom, 2011). Even though the fertility and population growth rates are declining, India's population is projected to increase from 1.2 billion today to an estimated 1.6 billion by 2050 due to **population momentum.** Population momentum refers to a situation, where a large cohort of women of reproductive age will fuel population growth over the next generation, even if each woman has fewer children than previous generations did. Additionally, the drop in Crude Death (CDR) and Birth Rates (CBR) for the past four decades indicates that India is progressing towards a post-transitional phase. From 1950 to 1990, the drop in CBR was less steep than the drop in the CDR. However, during 1990s, the decline in CBR has been steeper than the decline in CDR, which has resulted in reduced annual population growth rate of 1.4% today.

National Socio-Demographic Goals for 2010

Box 2.5

- Address the unmet needs for basic reproductive and child health services, supplies and infrastructure.
- Make school education up to the age of 14 years free and compulsory, and reduce dropouts at primary and secondary school levels to below 20 per cent for both boys and girls.
- Reduce infant mortality rate to below 30 per 1000 live births.
- Reduce maternal mortality ratio to below 100 per 100,000 live births.
- Achieve universal immunisation of children against all vaccine preventable diseases.
- Promote delayed marriage for girls, not earlier than age 18 and preferably after 20 years of age.
- Achieve 80 per cent institutional deliveries and 100 per cent deliveries by trained persons.
- Achieve universal access to information/counselling, and services for fertility regulation and contraception with a wide basket of choices.
- Achieve 100 per cent registration of births, deaths, marriage and pregnancy.
- Contain the spread of Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and promote greater integration between the management of reproductive tract infections (RTI) and sexually transmitted infections (STI) and the National AIDS Control Organisation.
- Prevent and control communicable diseases.
- Integrate Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM) in the provision of reproductive and child health services, and in reaching out to households.
- Promote vigorously the small family norm to achieve replacement levels of TFR.
- Bring about convergence in the implementation of related social sector programmes so that family welfare becomes a people-centred programme.

Source: National Commission on Population.

Aren't you proud? We are the world's biggest democracy and soon we will be a still bigger democracy!

rate of population by introducing a coercive programme of mass sterilisation. Here sterilisation refers to medical procedures like vasectomy (for men) and tubectomy (for women) which prevent conception and childbirth. Vast numbers of mostly poor and powerless people were forcibly sterilised and there was massive pressure on lower level government officials (like school teachers or office workers) to bring people for sterilisation in the camps that were organised for this purpose. There was widespread popular opposition to this programme, and the new government elected after the Emergency abandoned it.

The National Family Planning Programme was renamed as the National Family Welfare Programme after the Emergency, and coercive methods were no longer used. The programme now has a broad-based set of socio-demographic objectives. A new set of guidelines were formulated as part of the National Population Policy of the year 2000. These are summarised in Box 2.5 in the form of the policy targets set for the year 2010.

The history of India's National Family Welfare Programme teaches us that while the state can do a lot to try and create the conditions for demographic change, most demographic variables (specially those related to human fertility) are ultimately matters of economic, social and cultural change.

The Demographic Structure of the Indian Society

1. Explain the basic argument of the theory of demographic transition. Why is the transition period associated with a 'population explosion'?

2. Why did Malthus believe that catastrophic events like famines and epidemics that cause mass deaths were inevitable?

3. What is meant by 'birth rate' and 'death rate'? Explain why the birth rate is relatively slow to fall while the death rate declines much faster.

4. Which states in India have reached or are very near the 'replacement levels' of population growth? Which ones still have very high rates of population growth? In your opinion, what could be some of the reasons for these regional differences?

5. What is meant by the 'age structure' of the population? Why is it relevant for economic development and growth?

6. What is meant by the 'sex ratio'? What are some of the implications of a declining sex ratio? Do you feel that parents still prefer to have sons rather than daughters? What, in your opinion, could be some of the reasons for this preference?

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Notes

Chapter 3

Social Institutions
Continuity and Change

$\mathcal{H}$aving studied the structure and dynamics of the population of India in Chapter 2, we turn now to the study of social institutions. A population is not just a collection of separate, unrelated individuals, it is a society made up of distinct but interlinked classes and communities of various kinds. These communities are sustained and regulated by social institutions and social relationships. In this chapter we will be looking at three institutions that are central to Indian society, namely caste, tribe and family.

3.1 CASTE AND THE CASTE SYSTEM

Like any Indian, you already know that 'caste' is the name of an ancient social institution that has been part of Indian history and culture for thousands of years. But like any Indian living in the twenty-first century, you also know that something called 'caste' is definitely a part of Indian society today. To what extent are these two 'castes' – the one that is supposed to be part of India's past, and the one that is part of its present – the same thing? This is the question that we will try to answer in this section.

CASTE IN THE PAST

Caste is an institution uniquely associated with the Indian sub-continent. While social arrangements producing similar effects have existed in other parts of the world, the exact form has not been found elsewhere. Although it is an institution characteristic of Hindu society, caste has spread to the major non-Hindu communities of the Indian sub-continent. This is specially true of Muslims, Christians and Sikhs.

As is well-known, the English word 'caste' is actually a borrowing from the Portuguese *casta,* meaning pure breed. The word refers to a broad institutional arrangement that in Indian languages (beginning with the ancient Sanskrit) is referred to by two distinct terms, *varna* and *jati. Varna*, literally 'colour', is the name given to a four-fold division of society into *brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya* and *shudra*, though this excludes a significant section of the population composed of the 'outcastes', foreigners, slaves, conquered peoples and others, sometimes refered to as the *panchamas* or fifth category. *Jati* is a generic term referring to species or kinds of anything, ranging from inanimate objects to plants, animals and human beings. *Jati* is the word most commonly used to refer to the institution of caste in Indian languages, though it is interesting to note that, increasingly, Indian language speakers are beginning to use the English word 'caste'.

The precise relationship between varna and jati has been the subject of much speculation and debate among scholars. The most common interpretation is to treat varna as a broad all-India aggregative classification, while jati is taken to be a regional or local sub-classification involving a much more complex system consisting of hundreds or even thousands of castes and sub-castes.

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This means that while the four varna classification is common to all of India, the jati hierarchy has more local classifications that vary from region to region.

Opinions also differ on the exact age of the caste system. It is generally agreed, though, that the four varna classification is roughly three thousand years old. However, the 'caste system' stood for different things in different time periods, so that it is misleading to think of the same system continuing for three thousand years. In its earliest phase, in the late Vedic period roughly between 900 — 500 BC, the caste system was really a varna system and consisted of only four major divisions. These divisions were not very elaborate or very rigid, and they were not determined by birth. Movement across the categories seems to have been not only possible but quite common. It is only in the post-Vedic period that caste became the rigid institution that is familiar to us from well known definitions.

The most commonly cited defining features of caste are the following:

1. Caste is determined by birth – a child is "born into" the caste of its parents. Caste is never a matter of choice. One can never change one's caste, leave it, or choose not to join it, although there are instances where a person may be expelled from their caste.

2. Membership in a caste involves strict rules about marriage. Caste groups are "endogamous", i.e. marriage is restricted to members of the group.

3. Caste membership also involves rules about food and food-sharing. What kinds of food may or may not be eaten is prescribed and who one may share food with is also specified.

4. Caste involves a system consisting of many castes arranged in a hierarchy of rank and status. In theory, every person has a caste, and every caste has a specified place in the hierarchy of all castes. While the hierarchical position of many castes, particularly in the middle ranks, may vary from region to region, there is always a hierarchy.

5. Castes also involve sub-divisions within themselves, i.e., castes almost always have sub-castes and sometimes sub-castes may also have sub-sub-castes. This is referred to as a segmental organisation.

6. Castes were traditionally linked to occupations. A person born into a caste could only practice the occupation associated with that caste, so that occupations were hereditary, i.e. passed on from generation to

Ayyankali
(1863 - 1914)
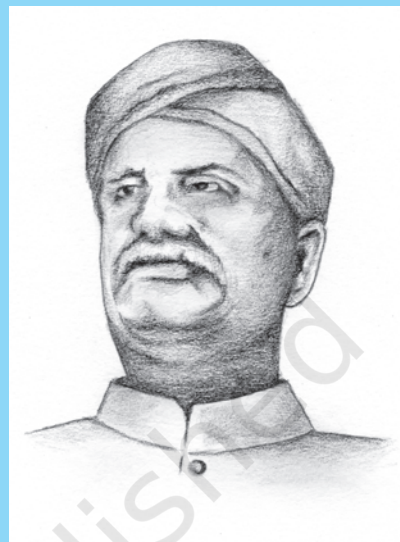
Ayyankali, born in Kerala, was a leader of the lower castes and Dalits. With his efforts, Dalits got the freedom to walk on public roads, and Dalit children were allowed to join schools.

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Jotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890)

Jotirao Govindrao Phule denounced the injustice of the caste system and scorned its rules of purity and pollution. In 1873 he founded the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers Society), which was devoted to securing human rights and social justice for low-caste people.

generation. On the other hand, a particular occupation could only be pursued by the caste associated with it – members of other castes could not enter the occupation.

These features are the prescribed rules found in ancient scriptural texts. Since these prescriptions were not always practiced, we cannot say to what extent these rules actually determined the empirical reality of caste – its concrete meaning for the people living at that time. As you can see, most of the prescriptions involved prohibitions or restrictions of various sorts. It is also clear from the historical evidence that caste was a very unequal institution – some castes benefitted greatly from the system, while others were condemned to a life of endless labour and subordination. Most important, once caste became rigidly determined by birth, it was in principle impossible for a person to ever change their life circumstances. Whether they deserved it or not, an upper caste person would always have high status, while a lower caste person would always be of low status.

Theoretically, the caste system can be understood as the combination of two sets of principles, one based on difference and separation and the other on wholism and hierarchy. Each caste is supposed to be different from – and is therefore strictly separated from – every other caste. Many of the scriptural rules of caste are thus designed to prevent the mixing of castes – rules ranging from marriage, food sharing and social interaction to occupation. On the other hand, these different and separated castes do not have an individual existence – they can only exist in relation to a larger whole, the totality of society consisting of all castes. Further, this societal whole or system is a hierarchical rather than egalitarian system. Each individual caste occupies not just a distinct place, but also an ordered rank – a particular position in a ladder-like arrangement going from highest to lowest.

The hierarchical ordering of castes is based on the distinction between 'purity' and 'pollution'. This is a division between something believed to be closer to the sacred (thus connoting ritual purity), and something believed to be distant from or opposed to the sacred, therefore considered ritually polluting. Castes that are considered ritually pure have high status, while those considered less pure or impure have low status. As in all societies, material power (i.e., economic or military power) is closely associated with social status, so that those in power tend to be of high status, and vice versa. Historians believe that those who were defeated in wars were often assigned low caste status.

Finally, castes are not only unequal to each other in ritual terms, they are also supposed to be complementary and non-competing groups. In other words,

each caste has its own place in the system which cannot be taken by any other caste. Since caste is also linked with occupation, the system functions as the social division of labour, except that, in principle, it allows no mobility.

Not surprisingly, our sources of knowledge about the past and specially the ancient past are inadequate. It is difficult to be very certain about what things were like at that time, or the reasons why some institutions and practices came to be established. But even if we knew all this, it still cannot tell us about what should be done today. Just because something happened in the past or is part of our tradition, it is not necessarily right or wrong forever. Every age has to think afresh about such questions and come to its own collective decision about its social institutions.

COLONIALISM AND CASTE

Compared to the ancient past, we know a lot more about caste in our recent history. If modern history is taken to begin with the nineteenth century, then Indian Independence in 1947 offers a natural dividing line between the colonial period (roughly 150 years from around 1800 to 1947) and the post-Independence or post-colonial period (the six decades from 1947 to the present day). The present form of caste as a social institution has been shaped very strongly by both the colonial period as well as the rapid changes that have come about in independent India.

Scholars have agreed that all major social institutions and specially the institution of caste underwent major

> **Savitri Bai Phule (1831-1897)**
>
> Savitri Bai Phule was the first headmistress of the country's first school for girls in Pune. She devoted her life to educating Shudras and Ati-Shudras. She started a night school for agriculturists and labourers. She died while serving plague patients.
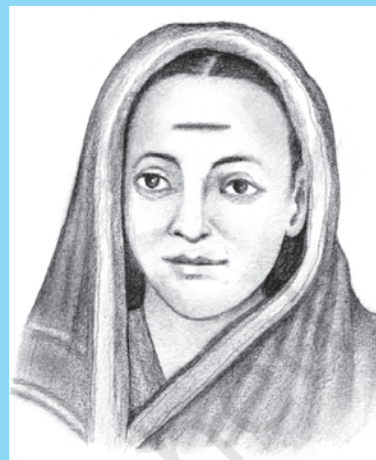
changes during the colonial period. In fact, some scholars argue that what we know today as caste is more a product of colonialism than of ancient Indian tradition. Not all of the changes brought about were intended or deliberate. Initially, the British administrators began by trying to understand the complexities of caste in an effort to learn how to govern the country efficiently. Some of these efforts took the shape of very methodical and intensive surveys and reports on the 'customs and manners' of various tribes and castes all over the country. Many British administrative officials were also amateur ethnologists and took great interest in pursuing such surveys and studies.

But by far the most important official effort to collect information on caste was through the census. First begun in the 1860s, the census became a regular ten-yearly exercise conducted by the British Indian government from 1881 onwards. The 1901 Census under the direction of Herbert Risley was particularly important as it sought to collect information on the social hierarchy of caste – i.e., the social order of precedence in particular regions, as to the position of

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Periyar (E.V. Ramasami Naickar) (1879-1973)
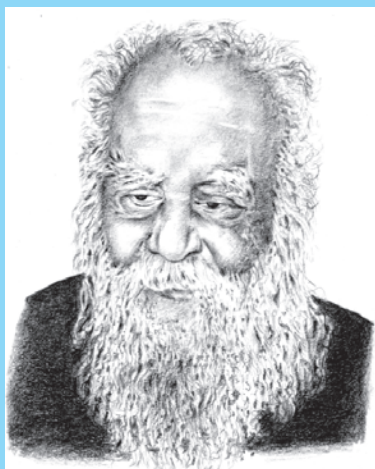
Periyar (E.V. Ramasami Naickar) is known as a rationalist and the leader of the lower caste movement in South India. He aroused people to realise that all men are equal, and that it is the birthright of every individual to enjoy liberty and equality.

each caste in the rank order. This effort had a huge impact on social perceptions of caste and hundreds of petitions were addressed to the Census Commissioner by representatives of different castes claiming a higher position in the social scale and offering historical and scriptural evidence for their claims. Overall, scholars feel that this kind of direct attempt to count caste and to officially record caste status changed the institution itself. Before this kind of intervention, caste identities had been much more fluid and less rigid; once they began to be counted and recorded, caste began to take on a new life.

Other interventions by the colonial state also had an impact on the institution. The land revenue settlements and related arrangements and laws served to give legal recognition to the customary (caste-based) rights of the upper castes. These castes now became land owners in the modern sense rather than feudal classes with claims on the produce of the land, or claims to revenue or tribute of various kinds. Large scale irrigation schemes like the ones in the Punjab were accompanied by efforts to settle populations there, and these also had a caste dimension. At the other end of the scale, towards the end of the colonial period, the administration also took an interest in the welfare of downtrodden castes, referred to as the 'depressed classes' at that time. It was as part of these efforts that the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed which gave legal recognition to the lists or 'schedules' of castes and tribes marked out for special treatment by the state. This is how the terms 'Scheduled Tribes' and the 'Scheduled Castes' came into being. Castes at the bottom of the hierarchy that suffered severe discrimination, including all the so-called 'untouchable' castes, were included among the Scheduled Castes. (You will read more on untouchability and the struggles against it in Chapter 5 on social exclusion.)

Thus colonialism brought about major changes in the institution of caste. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the institution of caste underwent fundamental changes during the colonial period. Not just India, but the whole world was undergoing rapid change during this period due to the spread of capitalism and modernity.

CASTE IN THE PRESENT

Indian Independence in 1947 marked a big, but ultimately only partial break with the colonial past. Caste considerations had inevitably played a role in the mass mobilisations of the nationalist movement. Efforts to organise the

"depressed classes" and particularly the untouchable castes predated the nationalist movement, having begun in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was an initiative taken from both ends of the caste spectrum – by upper caste progressive reformers as well as by members of the lower castes such as Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar in western India, Ayyankali, Sri Narayana Guru, Iyotheedass and Periyar (E.V. Ramaswamy Naickar) in the South. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar began organising protests against untouchability from the 1920s onwards. Anti-untouchability programmes became a significant part of the Congress agenda so that, by the time Independence was on the horizon, there was a broad agreement across the spectrum of the nationalist movement to abolish caste distinctions. The dominant view in the nationalist movement was to treat caste as a social evil and as a colonial ploy to divide Indians. But the nationalist leaders, above all, Mahatma Gandhi, were able to simultaneously work for the upliftment of the lower castes, advocate the abolition of untouchability and other caste restrictions, and, at the same time, reassure the landowning upper castes that their interests, too, would be looked after.

The post-Independence Indian state inherited and reflected these contradictions. On the one hand, the state was committed to the abolition of caste and explicitly wrote this into the Constitution. On the other hand, the state was both unable and unwilling to push through radical reforms which would have undermined the economic basis for caste inequality. At yet another level, the state assumed that if it operated in a caste-blind manner, this would automatically lead to the undermining of caste based privileges and the eventual abolition of the institution. For example, appointments to government jobs took no account of caste, thus leaving the well-educated upper castes and the ill-educated or often illiterate lower castes to compete on "equal" terms. The only exception to this was in the form of reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In other words, in the decades immediately after Independence, the state did not make sufficient effort to deal with the fact that the upper castes and the lower castes were far from equal in economic and educational terms.

The development activity of the state and the growth of private industry also affected caste indirectly through the speeding up and intensification of economic change. Modern industry created all kinds of new jobs for which there were no caste rules. Urbanisation and the conditions of collective living in the cities made it difficult for the caste-segregated patterns of social interaction to survive. At a different level, modern educated Indians attracted to the liberal

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Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928)
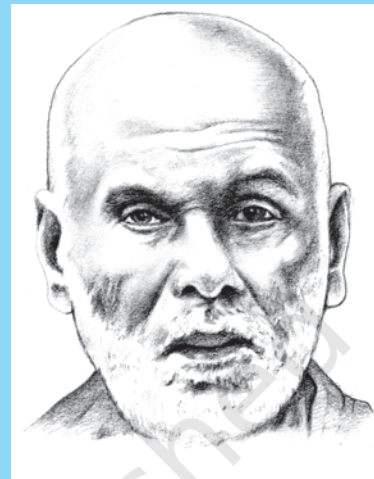
Sri Narayana Guru, born in Kerala, preached brotherhood for all and fought against the ill effects of the caste system. He led a quiet but significant social revolution and gave the watchwords 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for all men'.

ideas of individualism and meritocracy, began to abandon the more extreme caste practices. On the other hand, it was remarkable how resilient caste proved to be. Recruitment to industrial jobs, whether in the textile mills of Mumbai (then Bombay), the jute mills of Kolkata (then Calcutta), or elsewhere, continued to be organised along caste and kinship-based lines. The middle men who recruited labour for factories tended to recruit them from their own caste and region so that particular departments or shop floors were often dominated by specific castes. Prejudice against the untouchables remained quite strong and was not absent from the city, though not as extreme as it could be in the village.

Not surprisingly, it was in the cultural and domestic spheres that caste has proved strongest. Endogamy, or the practice of marrying within the caste, remained largely unaffected by modernisation and change. Even today, most marriages take place within caste boundaries, although there are more intercaste marriages. While some boundaries may have become more flexible or porous, the borders between groups of castes of similar socio-economic status are still heavily patrolled. For example, inter-caste marriages within the upper castes (eg., brahmin, bania, rajput) may be more likely now than before; but marriages between an upper caste and backward or scheduled caste person remain rare even today. Something similar may have occurred with regard to rules of food sharing.

Perhaps, the most eventful and important sphere of change has been that of politics. From its very beginnings in independent India, democratic politics has been deeply conditioned by caste. While its functioning has become more and more complex and hard to predict, it cannot be denied that caste remains central to electoral politics. Since the 1980s we have also seen the emergence of explicitly caste-based political parties. In the early general elections, it seemed as though caste solidarities were decisive in winning elections. But the situation soon got very complicated as parties competed with each other in utilising the same kind of caste calculus.

Sociologists and social anthropologists coined many new concepts to try and understand these processes of change. Perhaps the most common of these are 'sanskritisation' and 'dominant caste', both contributed by M.N. Srinivas, but discussed extensively and criticised by other scholars.

'Sanskritisation' refers to a process whereby members of a (usually middle or lower) caste attempt to raise their own social status by adopting the ritual, domestic and social practices of a caste (or castes) of higher status. Although this phenomenon is an old one and predates Independence and perhaps even the colonial period, it has intensified in recent times. The patterns for emulation chosen most often were the brahmin or kshatriya castes; practices included adopting vegetarianism, wearing of sacred thread, performance of specific prayers and religious ceremonies, and so on. Sanskritisation usually accompanies or follows a rise in the economic status of the caste attempting it, though it may also occur independently. Subsequent research has led to many modifications and revisions being suggested for this concept. These include the argument that sanskritisation may be a defiant claiming of previously

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prohibited ritual/social privileges (such as the wearing of the sacred thread, which used to invite severe punishment) rather than a flattering imitation of the 'upper' castes by the 'lower' castes.

'Dominant caste' is a term used to refer to those castes which had a large population and were granted landrights by the partial land reforms effected after Independence. The land reforms took away rights from the erstwhile claimants, the upper castes who were 'absentee landlords' in the sense that they played no part in the agricultural economy other than claiming their rent. They frequently did not live in the village either, but were based in towns and cities. These land rights now came to be vested in the next layer of claimants, those who were involved in the management of agriculture but were not themselves the cultivators. These intermediate castes in turn depended on the labour of the lower castes including specially the 'untouchable' castes for tilling and tending the land. However, once they got land rights, they acquired considerable economic power. Their large numbers also gave them political power in the era of electoral democracy based on universal adult franchise. Thus, these intermediate castes became the 'dominant' castes in the country side and played a decisive role in regional politics and the agrarian economy. Examples of such dominant castes include the Yadavs of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the Vokkaligas of Karnataka, the Reddys and Khammas of Andhra Pradesh, the Marathas of Maharashtra, the Jats of Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh and the Patidars of Gujarat.

M. N. Srinivas (1916-1999)

Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas was one of India's foremost sociologists and social anthropologists. He was known for his works on the caste system and terms such as 'sanskritisation' and 'dominant caste'. His book *The Remembered Village* is one of the best known village studies in Social Anthropology.

One of the most significant yet paradoxical changes in the caste system in the contemporary period is that it has tended to become 'invisible' for the upper caste, urban middle and upper classes. For these groups, who have benefited the most from the developmental policies of the post-colonial era, caste has appeared to decline in significance precisely because it has done its job so well. Their caste status had been crucial in ensuring that these groups had the necessary economic and educational resources to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by rapid development. In particular, the upper caste elite were able to benefit from subsidised public education, specially professional education in science, technology, medicine and management. At the same time, they were also able to take advantage of the expansion of state sector jobs in the early decades after Independence. In this initial period, their lead over the rest of society (in terms of education) ensured that they did not face any serious competition. As their privileged status got consolidated in the second and third generations, these groups began to believe that their advancement

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had little to do with caste. Certainly for the third generations from these groups their economic and educational capital alone is quite sufficient to ensure that they will continue to get the best in terms of life chances. For this group, it now seems that caste plays no part in their public lives, being limited to the personal sphere of religious practice or marriage and kinship. However, a further complication is introduced by the fact that this is a differentiated group. Although the privileged as a group are overwhelmingly upper caste, not all upper caste people are privileged, some being poor.

For the so called scheduled castes and tribes and the backward castes – the opposite has happened. For them, caste has become all too visible, indeed their caste has tended to eclipse the other dimensions of their identities. Because they have no inherited educational and social capital, and because they must compete with an already entrenched upper caste group, they cannot afford to abandon their caste identity for it is one of the few collective assets they have. Moreover, they continue to suffer from discrimination of various kinds. The policies of reservation and other forms of protective discrimination instituted by the state in response to political pressure serve as their lifelines. But using this lifeline tends to make their caste the all-important and often the only aspect of their identity that the world recognises.

The juxtaposition of these two groups – a seemingly caste-less upper caste group and an apparently caste-defined lower caste group – is one of the central aspects of the institution of caste in the present.

3.2 TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

'Tribe' is a modern term for communities that are very old, being among the oldest inhabitants of the sub-continent. Tribes in India have generally been defined in terms of what they were *not*. Tribes were communities that did not practice a religion with a written text; did not have a state or political form of the normal kind; did not have sharp class divisions; and, most important, they did not have caste and were neither Hindus nor peasants. The term was introduced in the colonial era. The use of a single term for a very disparate set of communities was more a matter of administrative convenience.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF TRIBAL SOCIETIES

In terms of positive characteristics, tribes have been classified according to their 'permanent' and 'acquired' traits. Permanent traits include region, language, physical characteristics and ecological habitat.

PERMANENT TRAITS

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The tribal population of India is widely dispersed, but there are also concentrations in certain regions. About 85% of the tribal population lives in

'middle India', a wide band stretching from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the west to West Bengal and Odisha in the east, with Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and parts of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh forming the heart of this region. Of the remaining 15%, over 11% is in the North Eastern states, leaving only a little over 3% living in the rest of India. If we look at the share of tribals in the state population, then the North Eastern states have the highest concentrations, with all states, except Assam, having concentrations of more than 30%, and some, like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland with more than 60% and upto 95% of tribal population. In the rest of the country, however, the tribal population is very small, being less than 12% in all states except Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. The ecological habitats covered includes hills, forests, rural plains and urban industrial areas.

In terms of language, tribes are categorised into four categories. Two of them, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian, are shared by the rest of the Indian population as well, and tribes account for only about 1% of the former and about 3% of the latter. The other two language groups, the Austric and Tibeto-Burman, are primarily spoken by tribals, who account for all of the first and over 80% of the second group. In physical-racial terms, tribes are classified under the Negrito, Australoid, Mongoloid, Dravidian and Aryan categories. The last two are again shared with the rest of the population of India.

In terms of size, tribes vary a great deal, ranging from about seven million to some Andamanese islanders who may number less than a hundred persons. The biggest tribes are the Gonds, Bhils, Santhals, Oraons, Minas, Bodos and Mundas, all of whom are at least a million strong. The total population of tribes amounts to about 8.2% of the population of India, or about 84 million persons according to the 2001 Census. According to Census Report 2011, it is 8.6% of the population of India, or about 104 million tribal persons in the country.

ACQUIRED TRAITS

Classifications based on acquired traits use two main criteria – mode of livelihood, and extent of incorporation into Hindu society – or a combination of the two.

On the basis of livelihood, tribes can be categorised into fishermen, food gatherers and hunters, shifting cultivators, peasants and plantation and industrial workers. However, the dominant classification both in academic sociology as well as in politics and public affairs is the degree of assimilation into Hindu society. Assimilation can be seen either from the point of view of the tribes, or (as has been most often the case) from the point of view of the dominant Hindu mainstream. From the tribes' point of view, apart from the extent of assimilation, attitude towards Hindu society is also a major criterion, with differentiation between tribes that are positively inclined towards Hinduism and those who resist or oppose it. From the mainstream point of view, tribes may be viewed in terms of the status accorded to them in Hindu society, ranging from the high status given to some, to the generally low status accorded to most.

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TRIBE – THE CAREER OF A CONCEPT

During the 1960s scholars debated whether tribes should be seen as one end of a continuum with caste-based (Hindu) peasant society, or whether they were an altogether different kind of community. Those who argued for the continuum saw tribes as not being fundamentally different from caste-peasant society, but merely less stratified (fewer levels of hierarchy) and with a more community-based rather than individual notion of resource ownership. However, opponents argued that tribes were wholly different from castes because they had no notion of purity and pollution which is central to the caste system.

A tribal village fair

In short, the argument for a tribe-caste distinction was founded on an assumed cultural difference between Hindu castes, with their beliefs in purity and pollution and hierarchical integration, and 'animist' tribals with their more egalitarian and kinship based modes of social organisation.

By the 1970s all the major definitions of tribe were shown to be faulty. It was pointed out that the tribe-peasantry distinction did not hold in terms of any of the commonly advanced criteria: size, isolation, religion, and means of livelihood. Some Indian "tribes" like Santhal, Gonds, and Bhils are very large and spread over extensive territory. Certain tribes like Munda, Hos and others have long since turned to settled agriculture, and even hunting gathering tribes, like the Birhors of Bihar employ specialised households to make baskets, press oil etc. It has also been pointed out in a number of cases, that in the absence of other alternatives, "castes" (or non-tribals) have turned to hunting and gathering.

The discussion on caste-tribe differences was accompanied by a large body of literature on the mechanisms through which tribes were absorbed into Hindu society, throughout the ages – through Sanskritisation, acceptance into the Shudra fold following conquest by caste Hindus, through acculturation and so on. The whole span of Indian history is often seen as an absorption of different tribal groups into caste Hindu society at varying levels of the hierarchy, as their lands were colonised and the forests cut down. This is seen as either natural, parallel to the process by which all groups are assimiliated into Hinduism as sects; or it is seen as exploitative. The early school of anthropologists tended to emphasise the cultural aspects of tribal absorption

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into the mainstream, while the later writers have concentrated on the exploitative and political nature of the incorporation.

Some scholars have also argued that there is no coherent basis for treating tribes as "pristine" – i.e., original or pure – societies uncontaminated by civilisation. They propose instead that tribes should really be seen as "secondary" phenomena arising out of the exploitative and colonialist contact between pre-existing states and non-state groups like the tribals. This contact itself creates an ideology of "tribalism" – the tribal groups begin to define themselves as tribals in order to distinguish themselves from the newly encountered others.

Nevertheless, the idea that tribes are like stone age hunting and gathering societies that have remained untouched by time is still common, even though this has not been true for a long time. To begin with, adivasis were not always the oppressed groups they are now – there were several Gond kingdoms in Central India such as that of Garha Mandla, or Chanda. Many of the so-called Rajput kingdoms of central and western India actually emerged through a process of stratification among adivasi communities themselves. adivasis often exercised dominance over the plains people through their capacity to raid them, and through their services as local militias. They also occupied a special trade niche, trading forest produce, salt and elephants. Moreover, the capitalist economy's drive to exploit forest resources and minerals and to recruit cheap labour has brought tribal societies in contact with mainstream society a long time ago.

MAINSTREAM ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRIBES

Although the early anthropological work of the colonial era had described tribes as isolated cohesive communities, colonialism had already brought irrevocable changes in their world. On the political and economic front, tribal societies were faced with the incursion of money lenders. They were also losing their land to non-tribal immigrant settlers, and their access to forests because of the government policy of reservation of forests and the introduction of mining operations. Unlike other areas, where land rent was the primary source of surplus extraction, in these hilly and forested areas, it was mostly appropriation of natural resources – forests and minerals – which was the main source of income for the colonial government. Following the various rebellions in tribal areas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the colonial government set up 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas, where the entry of non-tribals was prohibited or regulated. In these areas, the British favoured indirect rule through local kings or headmen.

The famous isolation versus integration debate of the 1940s built upon this standard picture of tribal societies as isolated wholes. The isolationist side argued that tribals needed protection from traders, moneylenders and Hindu and Christian missionaries, all of whom were intent on reducing tribals to detribalised landless labour. The integrationists, on the other hand, argued that tribals were merely backward Hindus, and their problems had to be

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addressed within the same framework as that of other backward classes. This opposition dominated the Constituent Assembly debates, which were finally settled along the lines of a compromise which advocated welfare schemes that would enable controlled integration. The subsequent schemes for tribal development – five year plans, tribal sub-plans, tribal welfare blocks, special multipurpose area schemes all continue with this mode of thinking. But the basic issue here is that the integration of tribes has neglected their own needs or desires; integration has been on the terms of the mainstream society and for its own benefit. The tribal societies have had their lands, forests taken away and their communities shattered in the name of development.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT VERSUS TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT

The imperatives of 'development' have governed attitudes towards tribes and shaped the policies of the state. National development, particularly in the Nehruvian era, involved the building of large dams, factories and mines. Because the tribal areas were located in mineral rich and forest covered parts of the country, tribals have paid a disproportionate price for the development of the rest of Indian society. This kind of development has benefited the mainstream at the expense of the tribes. The process of dispossessing tribals of their land has occurred as a necessary byproduct of the exploitation of minerals and the utilisation of favourable sites for setting up hydroelectric power plants, many of which were in tribal areas.

The loss of the forests on which most tribal communities depended has been a major blow. Forests started to be systematically exploited in British times and the trend continued after Independence. The coming of private property in land has also adversely affected tribals, whose community-based forms of collective ownership were placed at a disadvantage in the new system. The most recent such example is the series of dams being built on the Narmada, where most of the costs and benefits seem to flow disproportionately to different communities and regions.

Many tribal concentration regions and states have also been experiencing the problem of heavy in-migration of non-tribals in response to the pressures of development. This threatens to disrupt and overwhelm tribal communities and cultures, besides accelerating the process of exploitation of tribals. The industrial areas of Jharkhand for example have suffered a dilution of the tribal share of population. But the most dramatic cases are probably in the North-East. A state like Tripura had the tribal share of its population halved within a single decade, reducing them to a minority. Similar pressure is being felt by Arunachal Pradesh.

TRIBAL IDENTITY TODAY

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Forced incorporation of tribal communities into mainstream processes has had its impact on tribal culture and society as much as its economy. Tribal identities

today are formed by this interactional process rather than any primordial (orginal, ancient) characteristics peculiar to tribes. Because the interaction with the mainstream has generally been on terms unfavourable to the tribal communities, many tribal identities today are centred on ideas of resistance and opposition to the overwhelming force of the non-tribal world.

The positive impact of successes – such as the

Agitation by tribal women

achievement of statehood for Jharkhand and Chattisgarh after a long struggle – is moderated by continuing problems. Many of the states of the North-East, for example, have been living for decades under special laws that limit the civil liberties of citizens. Thus, citizens of states like Manipur or Nagaland don't have the same rights as other citizens of India because their states have been declared as 'disturbed areas'. The vicious circle of armed rebellions provoking state repression which in turn fuels further rebellions has taken a heavy toll on the economy, culture and society of the North-eastern states. In another part of the country, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh are yet to make full use of their new-found statehood, and the political system there is still not autonomous of larger structures in which tribals are powerless.

Another significant development is the gradual emergence of an educated middle class among tribal communities. Most visible in the North-eastern states, this is now a segment beginning to be seen in the rest of the country as well, particularly among members of the larger tribal communities. In conjunction with policies of reservation (about which you will learn more in Chapter 5), education is creating an urbanised professional class. As tribal societies get more differntiated – i.e., develop class and other divisions within themselves – different bases are growing for the assertion of tribal identity.

Two broad sets of issues have been most important in giving rise to tribal movements. These are issues relating to control over vital economic resources like land and specially forests, and issues relating to matters of ethnic-cultural identity. The two can often go together, but with differentiation of tribal society they may also diverge. The reasons why the middle classes within tribal societies may assert their tribal identity may be different from the reasons why poor and uneducated tribals join tribal movements. As with any other community, it is the relationship between these kinds of internal dynamics and external forces that will shape the future.

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BOX 3.1

Assertions of tribal identity are on the rise. This can be laid at the door of the emergence of a middle class within the tribal society. With the emergence of this class in particular, issues of culture, tradition, livelihood, even control over land and resources, as well as demands for a share in the benefits of the projects of modernity, have become an integral part of the articulation of identity among the tribes. There is, therefore, a new consciousness among tribes now, coming from its middle classes. The middle classes themselves are a consequence of modern education and modern occupations, aided in turn by the reservation policies…

(Source: Virginius Xaxa, 'Culture, Politics and Identity: The Case of the Tribes in India', in John et al 2006)

3.3 FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Each one of us is born into a family, and most of us spend long years within it. Usually we feel very strongly about our family. Sometimes we feel very good about our parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins, whereas at others we don't. On the one hand, we resent their interference, and yet we miss their overbearing ways when we are away from them. The family is a space of great warmth and care. It has also been a site of bitter conflicts, injustice and violence. Female infanticide, violent conflicts between brothers over property and ugly legal disputes are as much part of family and kinship as are stories of compassion, sacrifice and care.

The structure of the family can be studied both as a social institution in itself and also in its relationship to other social institutions of society. In itself a family can be defined as nuclear or extended. It can be male-headed or female-headed. The line of descent can be matrilineal or patrilineal. This internal structure of the family is usually related to other structures of society, namely political, economic, cultural etc. Thus the migration of men from the villages of the Himalayan region can lead to an unusual proportion of women-headed families in the village. Or the work schedules of young parents in the software industry in India may lead to increasing number of grandparents moving in as care-givers to young grandchildren. The composition of the family and its structure thereby changes. And these changes can be understood in relation to other changes in society. The family (the private sphere) is linked to the economic, political, cultural, and educational (the public) spheres.

The family is an integral part of our lives. We take it for granted. We also assume that other people's families must be like our own. (This and other dimensions of the family have been discussed in Chapter 1, of your Class XI textbook, *Introducing Society*) As we saw however, families have different structures and these structures change. Sometimes these changes occur

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accidentally, as when a war takes place or people migrate in search of work. Sometimes these changes are purposely brought about, as when young people decide to choose their spouses instead of letting elders decide. Or when same sex love is expressed openly in society.

The present study…deals with a Muslim *biradri* (community) called the Multani Lohars. … Karkhanedar is a vernacular term used for a person engaged in the business of manufacturing of which he is generally the owner…The karkhanas under study operate in domestic conditions and, therefore, have certain pervasive effects on the life of the karkhanedars who work in them. …The following case illustrates this.

Mahmood, aged forty years, was living with his two younger brothers, one of whom was married. He had three children and was the head of the complex household. …All the three brothers were employed in various karkhanas and factories as skilled workers. Mahmood succesfully fabricated replica of a motor part the import of which had been banned. This greatly encouraged him to start his own karkhana…Later it was decided that two karkhanas should be set up to manufacture the motor part. One was to be owned by the two elder brothers, and the other by the youngest, provided he set up a separate household. Rasheed set up an independent household, consisting of his wife and unmarried children. Therefore, one complex household, comprising three married brothers, gave birth to a simple household as a result of new entrepreneurial opportunities.

Excerpted from S.M. Akram Rizvi, `Kinship and Industry among the Muslim Karkhanedars in Delhi', in Imtiaz Ahmad, ed. *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1976, pp. 27-48.

It is evident from the kind of changes that take place that not only have family structures changed, but cultural ideas, norms and values also change. These changes are however not so easy to bring about. Both history and contemporary times suggest that often change in family and marriage norms are resisted violently. The family has many dimensions to it. In India however discussions on the family have often revolved around the nuclear and extended family.

NUCLEAR AND EXTENDED FAMILY

A nuclear family consists of only one set of parents and their children. An extended family (commonly known as the 'joint family') can take different forms, but has more than one couple, and often more than two generations, living together. This could be a set of brothers with their individual families, or an elderly couple with their sons and grandsons and their respective families. The extended family often is seen as symptomatic of India. Yet this is by no means the dominant form now or earlier. It was confined to certain sections and certain regions of the community. Indeed the term 'joint family' itself is not a native category. As I.P. Desai observes, "The expression 'joint family' is not the translation of any Indian word like that. It is interesting to note that the words used for joint family in most of the Indian languages are the equivalents of translations of the English word 'joint family'." (Desai 1964:40)

THE DIVERSE FORMS OF THE FAMILY

Studies have shown how diverse family forms are found in different societies. With regard to the rule of *residence,* some societies are *matrilocal* in their marriage and family customs while others are *patrilocal.* In the first case, the newly married couple stays with the woman's parents, whereas in the second case the couple lives with the man's parents. With regard to the rules of inheritance, *matrilineal* societies pass on property from mother to daughter while *patrilineal* societies do so from father to son. A *patriarchal* family structure exists where the men exercise authority and dominance, and *matriarchy* where the women play a similarly dominant role. However, matriarchy – unlike patriarchy – has been a theoretical rather than an empirical concept. There is no historical or anthropological evidence of matriarchy – i.e., societies where women exercise dominance. However, there do exist *matrilineal* societies, i.e., societies where women inherit property from their mothers but do not exercise control over it, nor are they the decision makers in public affairs.

The account of Khasi matriliny in Box 3.3 clarifies the distinction between matriliny and matriarchy. It shows the structural tensions created by matrilinear system which affect both men and women in Khasi society today.

Khasi matrilineal family

Box 3.3

The Meghalaya Succession Act (passed by an all-male Meghalaya legislative assembly) received the President's assent in 1986. The Succession Act applies specifically to the Khasi and Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya and confers on `any Khasi and Jaintia of sound mind not being a minor, the right to dispose of his self-acquired property by will'. The practice of making out a **will** does not exist in Khasi custom. Khasi custom prescribes the devolution of ancestral property in the female line.

There is a feeling, specially among the educated Khasi, that their rules of kinship and inheritance are biased in favour of women and are too restrictive. The Succession Act is therefore seen as an attempt at removing such restrictions and at correcting the perceived female bias in the Khasi tradition. To assess whether the popular perception of female bias in the Khasi tradition is indeed valid, it is necessary to view the Khasi matrilineal system in the context of the prevalent gender relations and definitions of gender roles.

Several scholars have highlighted the inherent contradictions in matrilineal systems. One such contradiction arises from the separation of the line of descent and inheritance on the one hand and the structure of authority and control on the other. The former, which links the mother to the daughter, comes in conflict with the latter, which links the mother's brother to the sister's son. (In other words, a woman inherits property from her mother and passes it on to her daughter, while a man controls his sister's property and passes on control to his sister's son. Thus, inheritance passes from mother to daughter whereas control passes from (maternal) uncle to nephew.)

Khasi matriliny generates intense role conflict for men. They are torn between their responsibilities to their natal house on the one hand, and to their wife and children on the other. In a way, the strain generated by such role conflict affects Khasi women more intensely. A woman can never be fully assured that her husband does not find his sister's house a more congenial place than her own. Similarly a sister will be apprehensive about her brother's commitment to her welfare because the wife with whom he lives can always pull him away from his responsibilities to his natal house.

The women are more adversely affected than men by the role conflict generated in the Khasi matrilineal system not only because men wield power and women are deprived of it, but also because the system is more lenient to men when there is a transgression of rules. Women possess only token authority in Khasi society; it is men who are the defacto power holders. The system is indeed weighted in favour of male matri-kin rather than male patri-kin. (In other words, despite matriliny, men are the power holders in Khasi society; the only difference is that a man's relatives on his mother's side matter more than his relatives on his father's side.)

(Source: Adapted from Tiplut Nongbri, 'Gender and the Khasi Family Structure' in Uberoi 1994.)

Questions

1. What is the role of the ideas of separation and hierarchy in the caste system?

2. What are some of the rules that the caste system imposes?

3. What changes did colonialism bring about in the caste system?

4. In what sense has caste become relatively 'invisible' for the urban upper castes?

5. How have tribes been classified in India?

6. What evidence would you offer against the view that 'tribes are primitive communities living isolated lives untouched by civilisation'?

7. What are the factors behind the assertion of tribal identities today?

8. What are some of the different forms that the family can take?

9. In what ways can changes in social structure lead to changes in the family structure?

10. Explain the difference between matriliny and matriarchy.

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Chapter 4

The Market
as a Social Institution

$\mathcal{W}$ e usually think of markets as places where things are bought and sold. In this common everyday usage, the word 'market' may refer to particular markets that we may know of, such as the market next to the railway station, the fruit market, or the wholesale market. Sometimes we refer not to the physical place, but to the gathering of people – buyers and sellers – who constitute the market. Thus, for example, a weekly vegetable market may be found in different places on different days of the week in neighbouring villages or urban neighbourhoods. In yet another sense, 'market' refers to an area or category of trade or business, such as the market for cars or the market for readymade clothes. A related sense refers to the demand for a particular product or service, such as the market for computer professionals.

What all of these meanings have in common is that they refer to a specific market, whose meaning is readily understandable from the context. But what does it mean to speak of 'the market' in a general way without refering to any particular place, gathering of people, or field of commercial activity? This usage includes not only all of the specific senses mentioned above, but also the entire spectrum of economic activities and institutions. In this very broad sense, then, 'the market' is almost equivalent to 'the economy'. We are used to thinking of the market as an economic institution, but this chapter will show you that the market is also a *social* institution. In its own way, the market is comparable to more obviously social institutions like caste, tribe or family discussed in Chapter 3.

4.1 Sociological Perspectives on Markets and the Economy

The discipline of economics is aimed at understanding and explaining how markets work in modern capitalist economies – for instance, how prices are determined, the probable impact of specific kinds of investment, or the factors that influence people to save or spend. So what does sociology have to contribute to the study of markets that goes beyond what economics can tell us?

To answer this question, we need to go back briefly to eighteenth century England and the beginnings of modern economics, which at that time was called 'political economy'. The most famous of the early political economists was Adam Smith, who in his book, *The Wealth of Nations*, attempted to understand the market economy that was just emerging at that time. Smith argued that the market economy is made up of a series of individual exchanges or transactions, which automatically create a functioning and ordered system. This happens even though none of the individuals involved in the millions of transactions had intended to create a system. Each person looks only to their own self-interest, but in the pursuit of this self-interest the interests of all – or of society – also seem to be looked after. In this sense, there seems to be some

sort of an unseen force at work that converts what is good for each individual into what is good for society. This unseen force was called 'the invisible hand' by Adam Smith. Thus, Smith argued that the capitalist economy is driven by individual self-interest, and works best when individual buyers and sellers make rational decisions that serve their own interests. Smith used the idea of the 'invisible hand' to argue that society overall benefits when individuals pursue their own self-interest in the market, because it stimulates the economy and creates more wealth. For this reason, Smith supported the idea of a 'free market', that is, a market free from all kinds of regulation whether by the state or otherwise. This economic philosophy was also given the name **laissez-faire,** a French phrase that means 'leave alone' or 'let it be'.

Modern economics developed from the ideas of early thinkers such as Adam Smith, and is based on the idea that the *economy* can be studied as a separate part of society that operates according to its own laws, leaving out the larger social or political context in which markets operate. In contrast to this approach, sociologists have attempted to develop an alternative way of studying economic institutions and processes within the larger social framework.

Sociologists view markets as social institutions that are constructed in culturally specific ways. For example, markets are often controlled or organised by particular social groups or classes, and have specific connections to other institutions, social processes and structures. Sociologists often express this idea by saying that economies are socially 'embedded'. This is illustrated by two examples, one of a weekly tribal *haat*, and the other of a 'traditional business community' and its trading networks in colonial India.

Adam Smith (1723-90)

Adam Smith is known as the fountainhead of contemporary economic thought. Smith's reputation rests on his five-book series 'The Wealth of Nations' which explained how rational self-interest in a free-market economy leads to economic well being.

A WEEKLY 'TRIBAL MARKET' IN DHORAI VILLAGE, BASTAR, CHATTISGARH

In most agrarian or 'peasant' societies around the world, periodic markets are a central feature of social and economic organisation. Weekly markets bring together people from surrounding villages, who come to sell their agricultural or other produce and to buy manufactured goods and other items that are not available in their villages. They attract traders from outside the local area, as well as moneylenders, entertainers, astrologers, and a host of other specialists offering their services and wares. In rural India there are also specialised markets that take place at less frequent intervals, for instance, cattle markets. These periodic markets link different regional and local economies together, and link them to the wider national economy and to towns and metropolitan centres.

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A weekly market in tribal area

The weekly *haat* is a common sight in rural and even urban India. In hilly and forested areas (especially those inhabited by adivasis), where settlements are far-flung, roads and communications poor, and the economy relatively undeveloped, the weekly market is the major institution for the exchange of goods as well as for social intercourse. Local people come to the market to sell their agricultural or forest produce to traders, who carry it to the towns for resale, and they buy essentials such as salt and agricultural implements, and consumption items such as bangles and jewellery. But for many visitors, the primary reason to come to the market is social – to meet kin, to arrange marriages, exchange gossip, and so on.

While the weekly market in tribal areas may be a very old institution, its character has changed over time. After these remote areas were brought under the control of the colonial state, they were gradually incorporated into the wider regional and national economies. Tribal areas were 'opened up' by building roads and 'pacifying' the local people (many of whom resisted colonial rule through their so-called 'tribal rebellions'), so that the rich forest and mineral resources of these areas could be exploited. This led to the influx of traders, moneylenders, and other non-tribal people from the plains into these areas. The local tribal economy was transformed as forest produce was sold to outsiders, and money and new kinds of goods entered the system. Tribals were also recruited as labourers to work on plantations and mines that were established under colonialism. A 'market' for tribal labour developed during the colonial period. Due to all these changes, local tribal economies became linked into wider markets, usually with very negative consequences for local people. For example, the entry of traders and moneylenders from outside the local area led to the impoverishment of adivasis, many of whom lost their land to outsiders.

The weekly market as a social institution, the links between the local tribal economy and the outside, and the exploitative economic relationships between adivasis and others, are illustrated by a study of a weekly market in Bastar district. This district is populated mainly by Gonds, an adivasi group. At the weekly market, you find local people, including tribals and non-tribals (mostly Hindus), as well as outsiders – mainly Hindu traders of various castes. Forest officials also come to the market to conduct business with adivasis who work for the Forest Department, and the market attracts a variety of specialists selling their goods and services. The major goods that are exchanged in the market are manufactured goods (such as jewellery and trinkets, pots and knives), non-local foods (such as salt and *haldi* (turmeric)), local food and agricultural produce and manufactured items (such as bamboo baskets), and forest produce (such as tamarind and oil-seeds). The forest produce that is brought by the

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adivasis is purchased by traders who carry it to towns. In the market, the buyers are mostly adivasis while the sellers are mainly caste Hindus. Adivasis earn cash from the sale of forest and agricultural produce and from wage labour, which they spend in the market mainly on low-value trinkets and jewellery, and consumption items such as manufactured cloth.

According to Alfred Gell (1982), the anthropologist who studied Dhorai, the market has significance much beyond its economic functions. For example, the layout of the market symbolises the hierarchical inter-group social relations in this region. Different social groups are located according to their position in the caste and social hierarchy as well as in the market system. The wealthy and high-ranking Rajput jeweller and the middle-ranking local Hindu traders sit in the central 'zones', and the tribal sellers of vegetables and local wares in the outer circles. The quality of social relations is expressed in the kinds of goods that are bought and sold, and the way in which transactions are carried out. For instance, interactions between tribals and non-tribal traders are very different than those between Hindus of the same community: they express hierarchy and social distance rather than social equality.

An Adivasi Village Market in Bastar — Box 4.1

Dhorai is the name of a market village located deep in the hinterland of North Bastar district, Chattisgarh … On non-market days Dhorai is a sleepy, tree-shaded hamlet straddling an unscaled road which winds it's way through the forest … Social life in Dhorai revolves around two primitive tea-shops with a clientele of low-ranking employees of the State Forest service, whose misfortune it has been to be stationed in such a distant and insignificant spot … Dhorai on non-market days – every day except Friday, that is – hardly exists at all; but Dhorai on a market day might be a totally different place. Parked trucks jam the road … The lowly Forest Guards bustle about in smart, newly-pressed uniforms, while the more important officials of the Forest service, down for the day, oversee operations from the verandah of the Forest Rest House. They disburse payments to the tribal labourers …

While the officials hold court in the Rest House, files of tribals continue to pour in from all directions, laden with the produce of the forest, of their fields, and of their own manufacture. They are joined by Hindu vegetable sellers, and by specialised craftsmen, potters, weavers and blacksmiths. The general impression is one of richness and confusion, compounded by the fact that a religious ceremony, as well as a market, is in process … The whole world, it seems, is at the market, men and their Divinities alike. The marketplace is a roughly quadrangular patch of ground, about 100 yards square, at the centre of which there grows a magnificent banyan tree. The thatched market stalls are arranged in a concentric pattern, and are divided by narrow streets or defiles, along which customers manoeuvre themselves as best they can in the crush, trying to avoid treading on the goods of less established traders, who make use of every nook and cranny between the permanent stalls to display their wares.

Source: Gell 1982:470-71.

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EXERCISE FOR BOX 4.1

Read the excerpt in the box and answer the questions below.
1. What does this passage tell you about the relationship between the adivasis and the state (represented by the Forest Department officials)? Why are Forest Guards so important in adivasi districts? Why are they making payments to the tribal labourers?
2. What does the layout of the market suggest to you about its organisation and functioning? What kinds of people would have permanent stalls, and who are the "less established traders" sitting on the ground?
3. Who are the main buyers in the market, and who are the sellers? What kinds of goods flow through the market, and who are the buyers and sellers of different kinds of goods? What does this tell you about the nature of the local economy in this area and the relationship of adivasis to the larger society and economy?

CASTE-BASED MARKETS AND TRADING NETWORKS IN PRECOLONIAL AND COLONIAL INDIA

In some traditional accounts of Indian economic history, India's economy and society are seen as unchanging. Economic transformation was thought to have begun only with the advent of colonialism. It was assumed that India consisted of ancient village communities that were relatively self-sufficient, and that their economies were organised primarily on the basis of non-market exchange. Under colonialism and in the early post-independence period, the penetration of the commercial money economy into local agrarian economies, and their incorporation into wider networks of exchange, was thought to have brought about radical social and economic changes in rural and urban society. While colonialism certainly brought about major economic transformations, for example due to the demand that land revenue be paid in cash, recent historical research has shown that much of India's economy was already extensively monetised (trade was carried out using money) in the late pre-colonial period. And while various kinds of non-market exchange systems (such as the '*jajmani* **system**') did exist in many villages and regions, even during the precolonial period villages were incorporated into wider networks of exchange through which agricultural products and other goods circulated (Bayly 1983, Stein and Subrahmanyam 1996). It now seems that the sharp line that was often drawn between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' (or the pre-capitalist and capitalist) economy is actually rather fuzzy. Recent historical research has also highlighted the extensive and sophisticated trading networks that existed in pre-colonial India. Of course, we know that for centuries India was a

major manufacturer and exporter of handloom cloth (both ordinary cotton and luxury silks), as well as the source of many other goods (such as spices) that were in great demand in the global market, especially in Europe. So it is not surprising that pre-colonial India had well-organised manufacturing centres as well as indigenous merchant groups, trading networks, and banking systems that enabled trade to take place within India, and between India and the rest of the world. These traditional trading communities or castes had their own systems of banking and credit. For instance, an important instrument of exchange and credit was the *hundi,* or bill of exchange (like a credit note), which allowed merchants to engage in long-distance trade. Because trade took place primarily within the caste and kinship networks of these communities, a merchant in one part of the country could issue a *hundi* that would be honoured by a merchant in another place.

The Nattukottai Chettiars (or Nakarattars) of Tamil Nadu, provide an interesting illustration of how these indigenous trading networks were organised and worked. A study of this community during the colonial period shows how its banking and trade activities were deeply embedded in the social organisation of the community. The structures of caste, kinship, and family were oriented towards commercial activity, and business activity was carried out within these social structures. As in most 'traditional' merchant communities, Nakarattar banks were basically *joint family* firms, so that the structure of the business firm was the same as that of the family. Similarly, trading and banking activities were organised through caste and kinship relationships. For instance, their extensive caste-based social networks allowed Chettiar merchants to expand their activities into Southeast Asia and Ceylon. In one view, the economic activities of the Nakarattars represented a kind of indigenous capitalism. This interpretation raises the question of whether there are, or were, forms of 'capitalism' apart from those that arose in Europe (Rudner 1994).

Caste-based trade among the Nakarattars of Tamil Nadu   **BOX 4.2**

This is not to say that the Nakarattar banking system resembled an economist's model of Western-style banking systems … the Nakarattars loaned and deposited money with one another in caste-defined social relationships based on business territory, residential location, descent, marriage, and common cult membership. Unlike in modern Western banking systems, it was the reputation, decisions, and reserve deposits shared among exchange spheres defined according to these principles, and not a government-controlled central bank, that … assured public confidence in individual Nakarattars as representatives of the caste as a whole. In other words, the Nakarattar banking system was a caste-based banking system. Individual Nakarattars organised their lives around participation in and management of various communal institutions adapted to the task of accumulating and distributing reserves of capital.

Source: Rudner 1994:234.

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SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF MARKETS – 'TRADITIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNITIES'

Many sociological studies of the Indian economy have focused on 'traditional merchant communities' or castes such as the Nakarattars. As you have already learned, there is a close connection between the caste system and the economy, in terms of landholding, occupational differentiation, and so on. This is also true in the case of trade and markets. In fact, 'Vaisyas' constitute one of the four *varnas* – an indication of the importance of the merchant and of trade or business in Indian society since ancient times. However, like the other *varnas*, 'Vaisya' is often a status that is *claimed* or aspired to rather than a fixed identity or social status. Although there are 'Vaisya' communities (such as *banias* in North India), whose traditional occupation has been trade or commerce for a long time, there are some caste groups that have entered into trade. Such groups tend to acquire or claim 'Vaisya' status in the process of upward mobility. Like the history of all caste communities, in most cases there is a complex relationonship between caste status or identity, and caste practices, including occupation. The 'traditional business communities' in India include not only 'Vaisyas', but also other groups with distinctive religious or other community identities,

Agricultural work in a village

such as the Parsis, Sindhis, Bohras, or Jains. Merchant communities did not always have a high status in society; for instance, during the colonial period the long-distance trade in salt was controlled by a marginalised 'tribal' group, the

Banjaras. In each case, the particular nature of community institutions and ethos gives rise to a different organisation and practice of business.

To understand the operation of markets in India, both in earlier periods and at present, we can examine how specific arenas of business are controlled by particular communities. One of the reasons for this caste-based specialisation is that trade and commerce often operate through caste and kinship networks, as we have seen in the case of the Nakarattars. Because businessmen are more likely to trust others of their own community or kin group, they tend to do business within such networks rather than with others outside – and this tends to create a caste monopoly within certain areas of business.

COLONIALISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW MARKETS

The advent of colonialism in India produced major upheavals in the economy, causing disruptions in production, trade, and agriculture. A well-known example is the demise of the handloom industry due to the flooding of the market with cheap manufactured textiles from England. Although pre-colonial India already had a complex monetised economy, most historians consider the colonial period to be the turning point. In the colonial era India began to be more fully linked to the world capitalist economy. Before being colonised by the British, India was a major supplier of manufactured goods to the world market. After colonisation, she became a source of raw materials and agricultural products and a consumer of manufactured goods, both largely for the benefit of industrialising England. At the same time, new groups (especially the Europeans) entered into trade and business, sometimes in alliance with existing merchant communities and in some cases by forcing them out. But rather than completely overturning existing economic institutions, the expansion of the market economy in India provided new opportunities to some merchant communities, which were able to improve their position by re-orienting themselves to changing economic circumstances. In some cases, new communities emerged to take advantage of the economic opportunities provided by colonialism, and continued to hold economic power even after Independence.

A good example of this process is provided by the Marwaris, probably the most widespread and best-known business community in India. Represented by leading industrial families such as the Birlas, the community also includes shopkeepers and small traders in the bazaars of towns throughout the country. The Marwaris became a successful business community only during the colonial period, when they took advantage of new opportunities in colonial cities such

> ### ACTIVITY 4.1
>
> Visit a market or shopping area in the town or city where you live. Find out who the important traders are. To which community do they belong? Are there particular areas of business that are controlled by particular communities, for instance, jewellery shops, *kirana* (provisions) shops, the hardware trade, furniture making shops, and so on? Visit some of these shops and find out about the traders who run them and their communities. Are they hereditary family businesses?

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New markets

as Calcutta and settled throughout the country to carry out trade and moneylending. Like the Nakarattars, the success of the Marwaris rested on their extensive social networks, which created the relations of trust necessary to operate their banking system. Many Marwari families accumulated enough wealth to become moneylenders, and by acting as bankers also helped the commercial expansion of the British in India (Hardgrove 2004). In the late colonial period and after Independence, some Marwari families transformed themselves into modern industrialists, and even today Marwaris control more of India's industry than any other community. This story of the emergence of a new business community under colonialism, and its transformation from small migrant traders to merchant bankers to industrialists, illustrates the importance of the social context to economic processes.

4.2 UNDERSTANDING CAPITALISM AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM

One of the founders of modern sociology, Karl Marx, was also a critic of modern capitalism. Marx understood capitalism as a system of **commodity** production, or production for the market, through the use of wage labour. As you have already learned, Marx wrote that all economic systems are also social systems. Each **mode of production** consists of particular relations of production, which in turn give rise to a specific class structure. He emphasised that the economy does not consist of *things* (goods circulating in the market), but is made up of *relations* between *people* who are connected to one another through the process of production. Under the capitalist mode of production, labour itself becomes a commodity, because workers must sell their **labour power** in the market to earn a wage. This gives rise to two basic classes – capitalists, who own the means of production (such as the factories), and workers, who sell their labour to the capitalists. The capitalist class is able to profit from this system by paying the workers less than the value of what they actually produce, and so extracting **surplus value** from their labour. Marx's theory of capitalist economy and society provided the inspiration for numerous theories and debates about the nature of capitalism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

COMMODITISATION AND CONSUMPTION

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The growth of capitalism around the world has meant the extension of markets into places and spheres of life that were previously untouched by this system.

Commodification occurs when things that were earlier not traded in the market become commodities. For instance, labour or skills become things that can be bought and sold. According to Marx and other critics of capitalism, the process of commodification has negative social effects. The commodification of labour is one example, but there are many other examples in contemporary society. For instance, there is a controversy about the sale of kidneys by the poor to cater to rich patients who need kidney transplants. According to many people, human organs should not become commodities. In earlier times, human beings themselves were bought and sold as slaves, but today it is considered immoral to treat people as commodities. But in modern society, almost everyone accepts the idea that a person's labour can be bought, or that other services or skills can be provided in exchange for money. This is a situation that is found only in capitalist societies, according to Marx.

In contemporary India, we can observe that things or processes that earlier were not part of market exchange become commodified. For example, traditionally, marriages were arranged by families, but now there are professional marriage bureaus and websites that help people to find brides and grooms for a fee. Another example are the many private institutes that offer courses in 'personality development', spoken English, and so on, that teach students (mostly middle class youth) the cultural and social skills required to succeed in the

ACTIVITY 4.2

Commoditisation or commodification – these are big words that sound very complicated. But the process they refer to is a familiar one and it is present in our everyday life. Here is a common example – bottled water.

In cities and towns and even in most villages now it is possible to buy water packed in sealed plastic bottles of 2 litres, 1 litre or smaller capacity. These bottles are marketed by a wide variety of companies and there are innumerable brand names. But this is a new phenomenon, not more than ten or fifteen years old. It is possible that you yourself may remember a time when bottled water was not around. Ask older people. Your parents' generation will certainly remember the initial feeling of novelty when bottled water became widely available. In your grandparents' generation, it was unthinkable that anyone could *sell* drinking water, charge money for it. But today we take bottled water for granted as a normal, convenient thing, a *commodity* that we can buy (or sell).

This is commoditisation/commodification – the process by which something which was not a commodity is made into a commodity and becomes part of the market economy.

Can you think of other examples of things that have been commodified relatively recently? Remember, a commodity need not only be a thing or object; it can also be a service. Try also to think of things that are not commodities today but could become commodities in the future. What are the reasons why this could happen? Finally, try to think of things that were commodities in the past but have stopped being commodities today (i.e., they used to have market or exchange value before but do not have it now). When and why do commodities stop being commodities?

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contemporary world. In earlier times, social skills such as good manners and etiquette were imparted mainly through the family. Or we could think of the burgeoning of privately owned schools and colleges and coaching classes as a process of commodification of education.

Another important feature of capitalist society is that **consumption** becomes more and more important, not just for economic reasons but because it has symbolic meaning. In modern societies, consumption is an important way in which social distinctions are created and communicated. The consumer conveys a message about his or her socio-economic status or cultural preferences by buying and displaying certain goods, and companies try to sell their goods by appealing to symbols of status or culture. Think of the advertisements that we see every day on television and roadside hoardings, and the meanings that advertisers try to attach to consumer goods in order to sell them.

One of sociology's founders, Max Weber, was among the first to point out that the goods that people buy and use are closely related to their status in society. He coined the term *status symbol* to describe this relationship. For example, among the middle class in India today, the brand of cell phone or the model of car that one owns are important markers of socio-economic status. Weber also wrote about how classes and status groups are differentiated on the basis of their **lifestyles.** Consumption is one aspect of lifestyle, but it also includes the way you decorate your home and the way you dress, your leisure activities, and many other aspects of daily life. Sociologists study consumption patterns and lifestyles because of their cultural and social significance in modern life.

> **ACTIVITY 4.3**
>
> **Interpretation of Advertisements**
>
> Make a collection of advertisements from newspapers and magazines. From the collection, choose two or three that you find interesting. For each of these advts., try to answer the following questions.
> 1. What is the product that is being advertised, and what image has been created of that product?
> 2. How has the advertiser tried to relate this product to a desirable lifestyle or social status?

4.3 GLOBALISATION – INTERLINKING OF LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

Since the late 1980s, India has entered a new era in its economic history, following the change in economic policy from one of state-led development to **liberalisation.** This shift also ushered in the era of **globalisation**, a period in which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected — not only economically but also culturally and politically. The term globalisation includes a number of trends, especially the increase in international movement of commodities, money, information, and people, as well as the development of technology (such as in computers, telecommunications, and transport) and other infrastructure to allow this movement.

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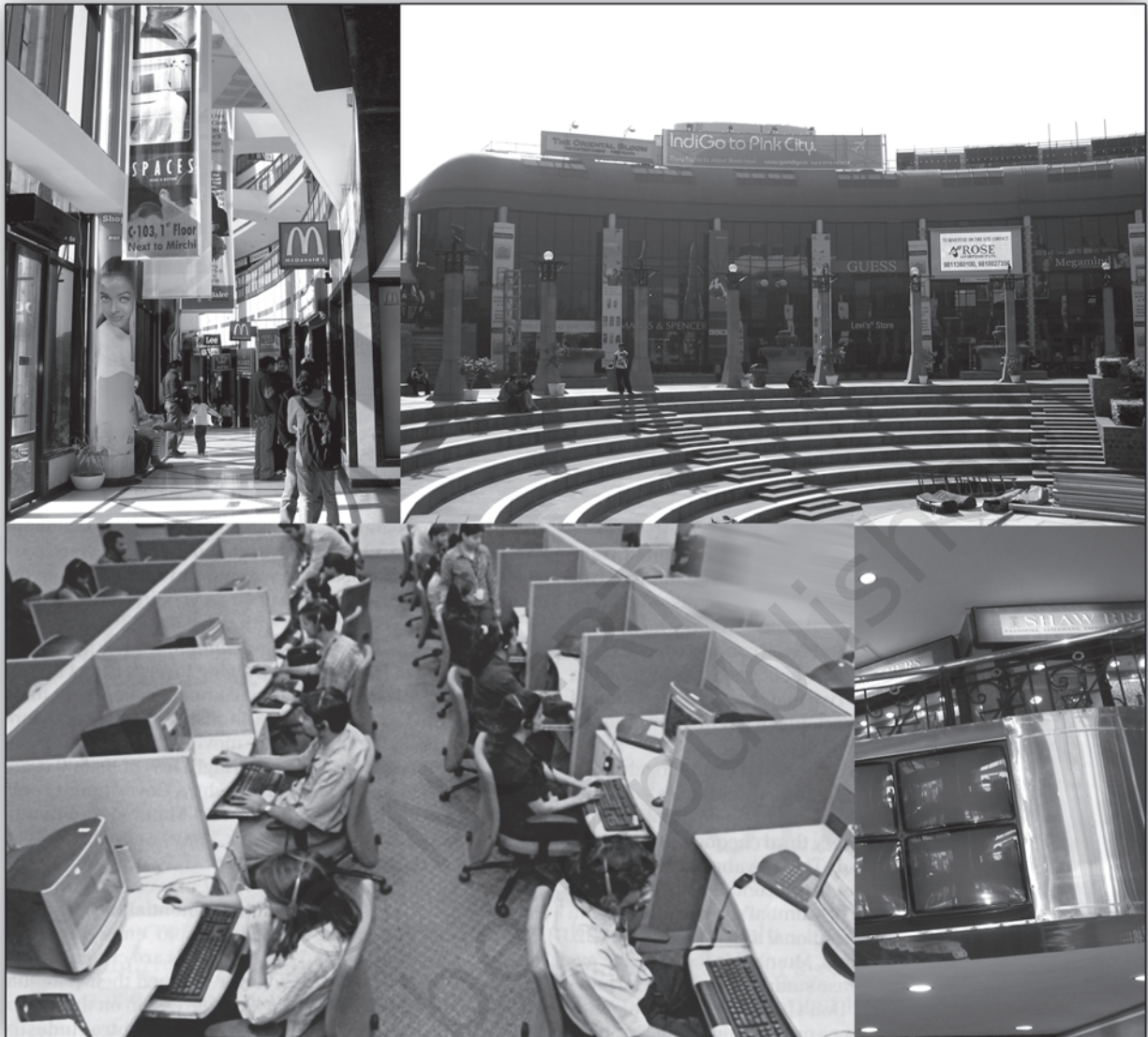
Technological development in different areas

A central feature of globalisation is the increasing extension and integration of markets around the world. This integration means that changes in a market in one part of the globe may have a profound impact somewhere else far away. For instance, India's booming software industry may face a slump if the U.S. economy does badly (as happened after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York), leading to loss of business and jobs here. The software services industries and business process outsourcing (**BPO**) industries (such as call centres) are some of the major avenues through which India is getting connected to the global economy. Companies based in India provide low-cost services and labour to customers located in the developed countries of the West. We can say that there is now a global market for Indian software labour and other services.

THE VIRTUAL MARKET – CONQUERING TIME AND SPACE?

Nasdaq Rings from Mysore –
Infy's Remote Operation Scripts Record, Opens US Market

BOX 4.3

Mysore: If you still don't believe that the world is flat, then consider this: Infosys Technologies rang the Nasdaq opening bell remotely from Mysore. At 7 pm sharp (9.30 am US East Coast time), Infosys chairman and chief mentor N.R. Narayana Murthy pressed a button to mark the opening of Monday's trading session at Nasdaq's MarketSite Tower in Times Square, New York. …. The opening bell is a ceremonial event that represents the essence of Nasdaq's virtual market model. Since Nasdaq's operations are entirely electronic, it can be opened from any location around the world, symbolically bringing together investors and market participants at the beginning of each trading day.

Source: *News item in the* Times of India*, Bangalore, August 1, 2006*

EXERCISE FOR BOX 4.3

NASDAQ is the name of a major electronic stock exchange based in New York. It operates exclusively through computerised electronic communications. It allows stock brokers and investors from around the world to buy and sell shares in the companies it lists. These transactions are conducted 'in real time' – i.e., they take effect within seconds, and they involve no paper – no paper documents or paper currency. Read the news item carefully and answer the questions below.

1. How is trading in a stock market (like NASDAQ or the Bombay Stock Exchange) different from trading in other markets? You can find out more about stock exchanges from newspapers, magazines and the internet.

2. What does this event – the opening of the US-based Nasdaq market located in New York by the Infosys chairman Narayana Murthy located in Mysore – tell you about the nature of markets (especially share and financial markets) in today's world, and about India's connection to the global economy?

3. The article describes the opening event as 'ceremonial'. Can you think of similar ceremonial practices or rituals that are important in other kinds of markets?
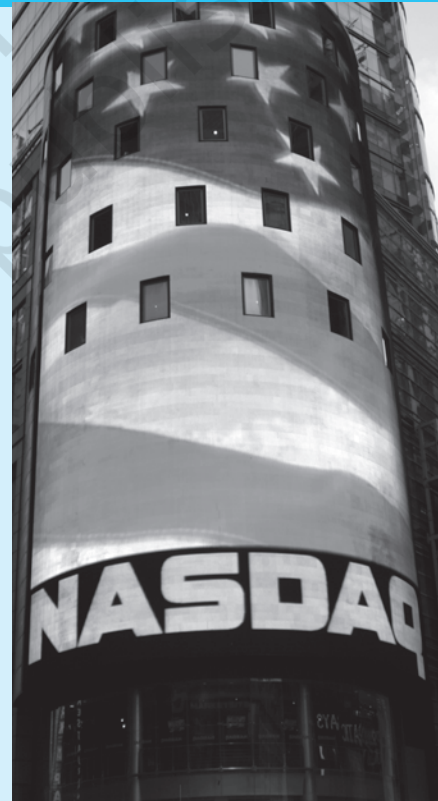
Under globalisation, not only money and goods, but also people, cultural products, and images circulate rapidly around the world, enter new circuits of exchange, and create new markets. Products, services, or elements of culture

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When a market becomes a commodity: The Pushkar camel fair

Box 4.4

"Come the month of Kartika …, Thar camel drivers spruce up their ships of the desert and start the long walk to Pushkar in time for Kartik Purnima … Each year around 200,000 people converge here, bringing with them some 50,000 camels and cattle. The place becomes an extraordinary swirl of colour, sound and movement, thronged with musicians, mystics, tourists, traders, animals and devotees. It's a camel-grooming nirvana, with an incredible array of cornrows, anklets, embroidery and pom poms."

"The religious event builds in tandem with the Camel Fair in a wild, magical crescendo of incense, chanting and processions to dousing day, the last night of the fair, when thousands of devotees wash away their sins and set candles afloat on the holy water."

(From the Lonely Planet *tourist guidebook for* India, *11th edition)*

EXERCISE FOR BOX 4.4

Read the passages in Box 4.4, which are taken from a guide book meant for foreign tourists. The passage illustrates the way in which a market – in this case the traditional annual cattle market and fair at Pushkar – can itself become a kind of product for sale in another market, in this case the market for tourism.
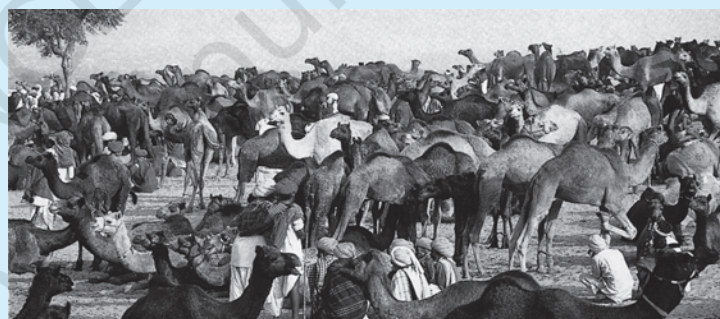
Cattle market in Pushkar fair

(Look up any unfamiliar words in a dictionary. For your information: 'cornrows' is a kind of hairstyle, and in this passage it refers to decorative braiding of camel hair; 'dousing day' means the day (Kartik Poornima) when pilgrims take a holy bath in the Pushkar lake.) Discuss the passages in class before you go on to answer the questions:

1. What are the new circuits of goods, services, money, and people that have been created at Pushkar because it is now a part of the international tourist circuit?
2. How do you think the coming of large numbers of foreign and Indian tourists has changed the way in which this fair operates?
3. How does the religiosity of the place add to its marketability? Can we say that there is a market for spirituality in India?
4. Can you think of other examples of how religions, traditions, knowledge, or even images (for instance, of a Rajasthani woman in traditional dress) become commodities in the global market?

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that were earlier outside of the market system are drawn into it. An example is the marketing of Indian spirituality and knowledge systems (such as yoga and ayurveda) in the West. The growing market for international tourism also suggests how culture itself may become a commodity. An example is the famous annual fair in Pushkar, Rajasthan, to which pastoralists and traders come from distant places to buy and sell camels and other livestock. While the Pushkar fair continues to be a major social and economic event for local people, it is also marketed internationally as a major tourist attraction. The fair is all the more attractive to tourists because it comes just before a major Hindu religious festival of Kartik Poornima, when pilgrims come to bathe in the holy Pushkar lake. Thus, Hindu pilgrims, camel traders, and foreign tourists mingle at this event, exchanging not only livestock and money but also cultural symbols and religious merit.

DEBATE ON LIBERALISATION – MARKET VERSUS STATE

The globalisation of the Indian economy has been due primarily to the policy of liberalisation that was started in the late 1980s. Liberalisation includes a range of policies such as the privatisation of public sector enterprises (selling government-owned companies to private companies); loosening of government regulations on capital, labour, and trade; a reduction in tariffs and import duties so that foreign goods can be imported more easily; and allowing easier access for foreign companies to set up industries in India. Another word for such changes is **marketisation,** or the use of markets or market-based processes (rather than government regulations or policies) to solve social, political, or economic problems. These include relaxation or removal of economic controls (deregulation), privatisation of industries, and removing government controls over wages and prices. Those who advocate marketisation believe that these steps will promote economic growth and prosperity because private industry is more efficient than government-owned industry.

The changes that have been made under the liberalisation programme have stimulated economic growth and opened up Indian markets to foreign companies. For example, many foreign branded goods are now sold, which were not previously available. Increasing foreign investment is supposed to help economic growth and employment. The privatisation of public companies is supposed to increase their efficiency and reduce the government's burden of running these companies. However, the impact of liberalisation has been mixed. Many people argue that liberalisation and globalisation have had, or will have, a negative net impact on India – that is, the costs and disadvantages will be more than the advantages and benefits. Some sectors of Indian industry (like software and information technology) or agriculture (like fish or fruit) may benefit from access to a global market, but other sectors (like automobiles, electronics or oilseeds) will lose because they cannot compete with foreign producers.

For example, Indian farmers are now exposed to competition from farmers in other countries because import of agricultural products is allowed. Earlier,

Indian agriculture was protected from the world market by support prices and subsidies. Support prices help to ensure a minimum income for farmers because they are the prices at which the government agrees to buy agricultural commodities. Subsidies lower the cost of farming because the government pays part of the price charged for inputs (such as fertilisers or diesel oil). Liberalisation is against this kind of government interference in markets, so support prices and subsidies are reduced or withdrawn. This means that many farmers are not able to make a decent living from agriculture. Similarly, small manufacturers have been exposed to global competition as foreign goods and brands have entered the market, and some have not been able to compete. The privatisation or closing of public sector industries has led to loss of employment in some sectors, and to growth of unorganised sector employment at the expense of the organised sector. This is not good for workers because the organised sector generally offers better paid and more regular or permanent jobs. (See the chapters on agrarian change and industry in the other textbook for Class XII, *Social Change and Development in India)*.

In this chapter we have seen that there are many different kinds of markets in contemporary India, from the village haat to the virtual stock exchange. These markets are themselves social institutions, and are connected to other aspects of the social structure, such as caste and class, in various ways. In addition, we have learned that exchange has a social and symbolic significance that goes far beyond its immediate economic purpose. Moreover, the ways in which goods and services are exchanged or circulate is rapidly changing due to the liberalisation of the Indian economy and globalisation. There are many different ways and levels at which goods, services, cultural symbols, money, and so on, circulate — from the local market in a village or town right up to a global trading network such as the Nasdaq. In today's rapidly changing world, it is important to understand how markets are being constantly transformed, and the broader social and economic consequences of these changes.

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The Market as a Social Institution

1. What is meant by the phrase 'invisible hand'?

2. How does a sociological perspective on markets differ from an economic one?

3. In what ways is a market – such as a weekly village market – a social institution?

4. How do caste and kin networks contribute to the success of a business?

5. In what ways did the Indian economy change after the coming of colonialism?

6. Explain the meaning of 'commoditisation' with the help of examples.

7. What is a 'status symbol'?

8. What are some of the processes included under the label 'globalisation'?

9. What is meant by 'liberalisation'?

10. In your opinion, will the long term benefits of liberalisation exceed its costs? Give reasons for your answer.

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Notes

Chapter 5

Patterns of Social Inequality and Exclusion

$\mathcal{T}$he family, caste, tribe and the market – these are the social institutions that have been considered in the last two chapters. In Chapters 3 and 4, these institutions were seen from the point of view of their role in forming communities and sustaining society. In this chapter we consider an equally important aspect of such institutions, namely their role in creating and sustaining patterns of inequality and exclusion.

For most of us who are born and live in India, social inequality and exclusion are facts of life. We see beggars in the streets and on railway platforms. We see young children labouring as domestic workers, construction helpers, cleaners and helpers in streetside restaurants (*dhabas*) and tea-shops. We are not surprised at the sight of small children, who work as domestic workers in middle class urban homes, carrying the school bags of older children to school. It does not immediately strike us as unjust that some children are denied schooling. Some of us read about caste discrimination against children in schools; some of us face it. Likewise, news reports about violence against women and prejudice against minority groups and the differently abled are part of our everyday lives.

This everydayness of social inequality and exclusion often make them appear inevitable, almost natural. If we do sometimes recognise that inequality and exclusion are not inevitable, we often think of them as being 'deserved' or 'justified' in some sense. Perhaps the poor and marginalised are where they are because they are lacking in ability, or haven't tried hard enough to improve their situation? We thus tend to blame them for their own plight – if only they worked harder or were more intelligent, they wouldn't be where they are.

A closer examination will show that few work harder than those who are located at the lower ranks of society. As a South American proverb says – "If hard labour were really such a good thing, the rich would keep it all for themselves!" All over the world, back-breaking work like stone breaking, digging, carrying heavy weights, pulling rickshaws or carts is invariably done by the poor. And yet they rarely improve their life chances. How often do we come across a poor construction worker who rises to become even a petty construction contractor? It is only in films that a street child may become an industrialist, but even in films it is often shown that such a dramatic rise requires illegal or unscrupulous methods.

ACTIVITY 5.1

Identify some of the richest and some of the poorest people in your neigbourhood, people that you or your family are acquainted with. (For instance a rickshawpuller or a porter or a domestic worker and a cinema hall owner or a construction contractor or hotel owner, or doctor... It could be something else in your context). Try to talk to one person from each group

to find out about their daily routines. For each person, organise the information in the form of an imaginary diary detailing the activities of the person from the time they get up to the time they go to sleep on a typical (or average) working day. Based on these diaries, try to answer the following questions and discuss them with your classmates.

➢ How many hours a day do each of these persons spend at work? What kind of work do they do – in what ways is their work tiring, stressful, pleasant or unpleasant? What kinds of relationship does it involve with other people – do they have to take orders, give orders, seek cooperation, enforce discipline….? Are they treated with respect by the people they have to deal with in their work, or do they themselves have to show respect for others?

It may be that the poorest, and in some cases even the richest, person you know actually has no real 'job' or is currently 'not working'. If this is so, do go ahead and find out about their daily routine anyway. But in addition, try to answer the following questions.

➢ Why is the person 'unemployed'? Has he/she been looking for work? How is he/she supporting herself/himself? In what ways are they affected by the fact of not having any work? Is their lifestyle any different from when they were working?

Activity 5.1 invites you to rethink the widely held commonsense view that hard work alone can improve an individual's life chances. It is true that hard work matters, and so does individual ability. If all other things were equal, then personal effort, talent and luck would surely account for all the differences between individuals. But, as is almost always the case, all other things are not equal. It is these non-individual or group differences that explain social inequality and exclusion.

5.1 WHAT IS *SOCIAL* ABOUT SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND EXCLUSION?

The question being asked in this section has three broad answers which may be stated briefly as follows. First, social inequality and exclusion are social because they are not about individuals but about groups. Second, they are social in the sense that they are not economic, although there is usually a strong link between social and economic inequality. Third, they are systematic and structured – there is a definite pattern to social inqualities. These three broad senses of the 'social' will be explored briefly below.

SOCIAL INEQUALITY

In every society, some people have a greater share of valued resources – money, property, education, health, and power – than others. These *social resources*

can be divided into three forms of capital – *economic capital* in the form of material assets and income; *cultural capital* such as educational qualifications and status; and *social capital* in the form of networks of contacts and social associations (Bourdieu 1986). Often, these three forms of capital overlap and one can be converted into the other. For example, a person from a well-off family (economic capital) can afford expensive higher education, and so can acquire cultural or educational capital. Someone with influential relatives and friends (social capital) may – through access to good advice, recommendations or information – manage to get a well-paid job.

Patterns of unequal access to social resources are commonly called *social inequality*. Some social inequality reflects innate differences between individuals for example, their varying abilities and efforts. Someone may be endowed with exceptional intelligence or talent, or may have worked very hard to achieve their wealth and status. However, by and large, social inequality is not the outcome of innate or 'natural' differences between people, but is produced by the society in which they live. Sociologists use the term *social stratification* to refer to a system by which categories of people in a society are ranked in a hierarchy. This hierarchy then shapes people's identity and experiences, their relations with others, as well as their access to resources and opportunities. Three key principles help explain social stratification:

1. *Social stratification is a characteristic of society, not simply a function of individual differences.* Social stratification is a society-wide system that unequally distributes social resources among categories of people. In the most technologically primitive societies – hunting and gathering societies, for instance – little was produced so only rudimentary social stratification could exist. In more technologically advanced societies where people produce a surplus over and above their basic needs, however, social resources are unequally distributed to various social categories regardless of people's innate individual abilities.

2. *Social stratification persists over generations.* It is closely linked to the family and to the inheritance of social resources from one generation to the next. A person's social position is *ascribed*. That is, children assume the social positions of their parents. Within the caste system, birth dictates occupational opportunities. A Dalit is likely to be confined to traditional occupations such as agricultural labour, scavenging, or leather work, with little chance of being able to get high-paying white-collar or professional work. The ascribed aspect of social inequality is reinforced by the practice of *endogamy*. That is, marriage is usually restricted to members of the same caste, ruling out the potential for blurring caste lines through inter-marriage.

3. *Social stratification is supported by patterns of belief, or ideology.* No system of social stratification is likely to persist over generations unless it is widely viewed as being either fair or inevitable. The caste system, for example, is

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justified in terms of the opposition of purity and pollution, with the Brahmins designated as the most superior and Dalits as the most inferior by virtue of their birth and occupation. Not everyone, though, thinks of a system of inequality as legitimate. Typically, people with the greatest social privileges express the strongest support for systems of stratification such as caste and race. Those who have experienced the exploitation and humiliation of being at the bottom of the hierarchy are most likely to challenge it.

Often we discuss social exclusion and discrimination as though they pertain to differential economic resources alone. This however is only partially true. People often face discrimination and exclusion because of their gender, religion, ethnicity, language, caste and disability. Thus women from a privileged background may face sexual harassment in public places. A middle class professional from a minority religious or ethnic group may find it difficult to get accommodation in a middle class colony even in a metropolitan city. People often harbour prejudices about other social groups. Each of us grows up as a member of a community from which we acquire ideas not just about our 'community', our 'caste' or 'class' our 'gender' but also about others. Often these ideas reflect prejudices.

Prejudices refer to pre-conceived opinions or attitudes held by members of one group towards another. The word literally means 'pre-judgement', that is, an opinion formed in advance of any familiarity with the subject, before considering any available evidence. A prejudiced person's preconceived views are often based on hearsay rather than on direct evidence, and are resistant to change even in the face of new information. Prejudice may be either positive or negative. Although the word is generally used for negative pre-judgements, it can also apply to favourable pre-judgement. For example, a person may be prejudiced in favour of members of his/her own caste or group and – without any evidence – believe them to be superior to members of other castes or groups.

Prejudices are often grounded in **stereotypes**, fixed and inflexible characterisations of a group of people. Stereotypes are often applied to ethnic and racial groups and to women. In a country such as India, which was colonised for a long time, many of these stereotypes are partly colonial creations. Some communities were characterised as 'martial races', some others as effeminate or cowardly, yet others as untrustworthy. In both English and Indian fictional writings we often encounter an entire group of people classified as 'lazy' or 'cunning'. It may indeed be true that some individuals are sometimes lazy or cunning, brave or cowardly. But such a general statement is true of individuals in every group. Even for such individuals, it is not true all the time – the same individual may be both lazy and hardworking at different times. Stereotypes fix whole groups into single, homogenous categories; they refuse to recognise the variation across individuals and across contexts or across time. They treat an entire community as though it were a single person with a single all-encompassing trait or characteristic.

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ACTIVITY 5.2

➢ Collect examples of prejudiced behaviour from films or novels.

➢ Discuss the examples you and your classmates have gathered. How are prejudices reflected in the manner a social group is depicted? How do we decide whether a certain kind of portrayal is prejudiced or not?

➢ Can you distinguish between instances of prejudice that were intentional – i.e., the film maker or writer *wanted* to show it as prejudiced – and unintentional or unconscious prejudice?

If prejudice describes attitudes and opinions, **discrimination** refers to actual behaviour towards another group or individual. Discrimination can be seen in practices that disqualify members of one group from opportunities open to others, as when a person is refused a job because of their gender or religion. Discrimination can be very hard to prove because it may not be open or explicitly stated. Discriminatory behaviour or practices may be presented as motivated by other, more justifiable, reasons rather than prejudice. For example, the person who is refused a job because of their caste may be told that they were less qualified than others, and that the selection was done purely on merit.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Social exclusion refers to ways in which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society. It focuses attention on a broad range of factors that prevent individuals or groups from having opportunities open to the majority of the population. In order to live a full and active life, individuals must not only be able to feed, clothe and house themselves, but should also have access to essential goods and services such as education, health, transportation, insurance, social security, banking and even access to the police or judiciary. Social exclusion is not accidental but systematic – it is the result of structural features of society.

It is important to note that social exclusion is involuntary – that is, exclusion is practiced regardless of the wishes of those who are excluded. For example, rich people are never found sleeping on the pavements or under bridges like thousands of homeless poor people in cities and towns. This does not mean that the rich are being 'excluded' from access to pavements and park benches, because they could certainly gain access if they wanted to, but they choose not to. Social exclusion is sometimes wrongly justified by the same logic – it is said that the excluded group itself does not wish to participate. The truth of such an argument is not obvious when exclusion is preventing access to something desirable (as different from something clearly undesirable, like sleeping on the pavement).

Prolonged experience of discriminatory or insulting behaviour often produces a reaction on the part of the excluded who then stop trying for inclusion. For example, 'upper' caste Hindu communities have often denied entry into temples for the 'lower' castes and specially the Dalits. After decades of such treatment, the Dalits may build their own temple, or convert to another religion like

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Buddhism, Christianity or Islam. After they do this, they may no longer desire to be included in the Hindu temple or religious events. But this does not mean that social exclusion is not being practiced. The point is that the exclusion occurs regardless of the wishes of the excluded.

India like most societies has been marked by acute practices of social discrimination and exclusion. At different periods of history protest movements arose against caste, gender and religious discrimination. Yet prejudices remain and often, new ones emerge. Thus legislation alone is unable to transform society or produce lasting social change. A constant social campaign to change awareness and sensitivity is required to break them.

You have already read about the impact of colonialism on Indian society. What discrimination and exclusion mean was brought home to even the most privileged Indians at the hands of the British colonial state. Such experiences were, of course, common to the various socially discriminated groups such as women, *dalits* and other oppressed castes and tribes. Faced with the humiliation of colonial rule and simultaneously exposed to ideas of democracy and justice, many Indians initiated and participated in a large number of social reform movements.

In this chapter we focus on four such groups who have suffered from serious social inequality and exclusion, namely Dalits or the ex-untouchable castes; adivasis or communities refered to as 'tribal'; women, and the differently abled. We attempt to look at each of their stories of struggles and achievements in the following sections.

5.2 Caste and Tribe – Systems Justifying and Perpetuating Inequality

The Caste System as a Discriminatory System

The caste system is a distinct Indian social institution that legitimises and enforces practices of discrimination against people born into particular castes. These practices of discrimination are humiliating, exclusionary and exploitative.

Historically, the caste system classified people by their occupation and status. Every caste was associated with an occupation, which meant that persons born into a particular caste were also 'born into' the occupation associated with their caste – they had no choice. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, each caste also had a specific place in the hierarchy of social status, so that, roughly speaking, not only were occupational categories ranked by social status, but there could be a further ranking within each broad occupational category. In strict scriptural terms, social and economic status were supposed to be sharply separated. For example, the ritually highest caste – the Brahmins – were not supposed to amass wealth, and were subordinated to the secular power of kings and rulers belonging to the Kshatriya castes. On the other

hand, despite having the highest secular status and power, the king was subordinated to the Brahmin in the ritual-religious sphere. (Compare this to the *'apartheid'* system described in Box 5.1)

However, in actual historical practice economic and social status tended to coincide. There was thus a fairly close correlation between social (i.e. caste) status and economic status – the 'high' castes were almost invariably of high economic status, while the 'low' castes were almost always of low economic status. In modern times, and particularly since the nineteenth century, the link between caste and occupation has become much less rigid. Ritual-religious prohibitions on occupational change are not easily imposed today, and it is easier than before to change one's occupation. Moreover, compared to a hundred or fifty years ago, the correlation between caste and economic status is also weaker – rich and poor people are to be found in every caste. But – and this is the key point – the caste-class correlation is still remarkably stable at the macro level. As the system has become less rigid, the distinctions between castes of broadly similar social and economic status have weakened. Yet, between different socio-economic groupings, the distinctions continue to be maintained.

Although things have certainly changed, they have not changed much at the macro level – it is still true that the privileged (and high economic status) sections of society tend to be overwhelmingly 'upper' caste while the disadvantaged (and low economic status) sections are dominated by the so called 'lower' castes. Moreover, the proportion of population that lives in poverty or affluence differs greatly across caste groups. (See Tables 1 and 2) In short, even though there have been major changes brought about by social movements over more than a century, and despite changed modes of production as well as concerted attempts by the state to suppress its public role in independent India, caste continues to affect the life chances of Indians in the twenty-first century.

Race and Caste – A Cross-Cultural Comparison   Box 5.1

Just like caste in India, race in South Africa stratifies society into a hierarchy. About one South African in seven is of European ancestry, yet South Africa's White minority holds the dominant share of power and wealth. Dutch traders settled in South Africa in the mid-seventeenth century; early in the nineteenth century, their descendants were pushed inland by British colonisation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the British gained control of what became the Union and then the Republic of South Africa.

To ensure their political control, the White European minority developed the policy of **apartheid**, or separation of the races. An informal practice for many years, apartheid became law in 1948 and was used to deny the Black majority South African citizenship, ownership of land, and a formal voice in government. Every individual was classified by race and mixed marriages were prohibited. As a racial caste, Blacks held low-paying jobs; on average, they earned only one-fourth what whites did. In the latter half of the twentieth century, millions of Blacks were forcibly relocated to 'Bantustans' or 'homelands' – dirt-poor districts with no infrastructure or industry or jobs. All the

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homelands together constituted only 14 per cent of South Africa's land, while Blacks made up close to 80 per cent of the country's population. The resulting starvation and suffering was intense and widespread. In short, in a land with extensive natural resources, including diamonds and precious minerals, the majority of people lived in abject poverty.

The prosperous White minority defended its privileges by viewing Blacks as social inferiors. However, they also relied on a powerful system of military repression to maintain their power. Black protestors were routinely jailed, tortured and killed. Despite this reign of terror, Blacks collectively struggled for decades under the leadership of the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela, and finally succeeded in coming to power and forming the government in 1994. Although the Constitution of post-apartheid South Africa has banned racial discrimination, economic capital still remains concentrated in White hands. Empowering the Black majority represents a continuing challenge for the new society.

"I have fought against White domination and I have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Nelson Mandela, 20 April 1964, Rivonia Trial.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE, 2011–12

CASTE AND COMMUNITY GROUPS	RURAL INDIA Spending Rs.327 or less per person per month	URBAN INDIA Spending Rs.454 or less per person per month
Scheduled Tribes	45.3	24.1
Scheduled Castes	31.5	21.7
OBCs	22.7	15.4
UC-Muslim	26.9	22.1
UC-Hindu	25.6	12.1
UC-Christian	22.2	05.5
UC-Sikh	06.2	05.0
ALL GROUPS	25.4	13.7

Note: OBC = Other Backward Classes; UC = 'Upper Castes', i.e., not SC/ST/OBC
Source: Report of NITI Aayog, 2014

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TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT IS AFFLUENT, 1999-2000		
CASTE AND COMMUNITY GROUPS	**RURAL INDIA** Spending Rs.1000 or more per person per month	**URBAN INDIA** Spending Rs. 2000 or more per person per month
Scheduled Tribes	1.4	1.8
Scheduled Castes	1.7	0.8
OBCs	3.3	2.0
UC-Muslim	2.0	1.6
UC-Hindu	8.6	8.2
UC-Christian	18.9	17.0
UC-Sikh	31.7	15.1
UC-Others	17.9	14.4
ALL GROUPS	4.3	4.5

Note: OBC = Other Backward Classes; UC = 'Upper Castes', i.e., not SC/ST/OBC
Source: Computed from NSSO 55th Round (1999-2000) unit-level data on CD

EXERCISE FOR TABLES 1 AND 2

Table 1 shows the percentage of the population of each caste/community that lives below the official 'Poverty Line' for 1999-2000. There are separate columns for rural and urban India.

Table 2 is organised in exactly the same way except that it shows the percentage of population living in affluence rather than in poverty. 'Affluence' is here defined as a monthly per person expenditure of Rs.1000 for rural India and Rs.2000 for urban India. This is equivalent to a family of five spending Rs.5000 per month in rural India and Rs.10,000 per month in urban India. Please take some time to study the tables carefully before you answer the questions below.

1. What is the percentage of the Indian population that was living below the poverty line in (a) Rural India and (b) Urban India?

2. Which caste/community group has the highest proportion of its members living in extreme poverty in a) rural and b) urban India? Which caste/community has the lowest percentage of population living in poverty?

3. Approximately how many times higher than the national average is the poverty percentage for each of the lower castes (ST, SC, OBC)? Is there a significant rural-urban difference?
4. Which caste/community has the lowest percentage of population living in affluence in rural and urban India respectively? How does this compare with the national average?
5. The affluent population of 'Upper' caste Hindus is roughly how many times larger than the percentage for the 'lower' castes (ST, SC, OBC)?
6. What do these tables tell you about the relative position of the OBCs? Is there a significant rural-urban difference?

UNTOUCHABILITY

'Untouchability' is an extreme and particularly vicious aspect of the caste system that prescribes stringent social sanctions against members of castes located at the bottom of the purity-pollution scale. Strictly speaking, the 'untouchable' castes are outside the caste hierarchy – they are considered to be so 'impure' that their mere touch severely pollutes members of all other castes, bringing terrible punishment for the former and forcing the latter to perform elaborate purification rituals. In fact, notions of 'distance pollution' existed in many regions of India (particularly in the south) such that even the mere presence or the shadow of an 'untouchable' person is considered polluting. Despite the limited literal meaning of the word, the institution of 'untouchability' refers not just to the avoidance or prohibition of physical contact but to a much broader set of social sanctions.

It is important to emphasise that the three main dimensions of untouchability – namely, exclusion, humiliation-subordination and exploitation – are all equally important in defining the phenomenon. Although other (i.e., 'touchable') low castes are also subjected to subordination and exploitation to some degree, they do not suffer the extreme forms of exclusion reserved for 'untouchables.' Dalits experience forms of exclusion that are unique and not practised against other groups – for instance, being prohibited from sharing drinking water sources or participating in collective religious worship, social ceremonies and festivals. At the same time, untouchability may also involve forced *inclusion* in a subordinated role, such as being compelled to play the drums at a religious event. The performance of publicly visible acts of (self-)humiliation and subordination is an important part of the practice of untouchability. Common instances include the imposition of gestures of deference (such as taking off headgear, carrying footwear in the hand, standing with bowed head, not wearing clean or 'bright' clothes, and so on) as well as routinised abuse and humiliation. Moreover, untouchability is almost always associated with economic exploitation of various kinds, most commonly through the imposition of forced, unpaid (or

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பெண்கள் பொது நவீன கழிப்பிடம்
மூளிக்குளம்
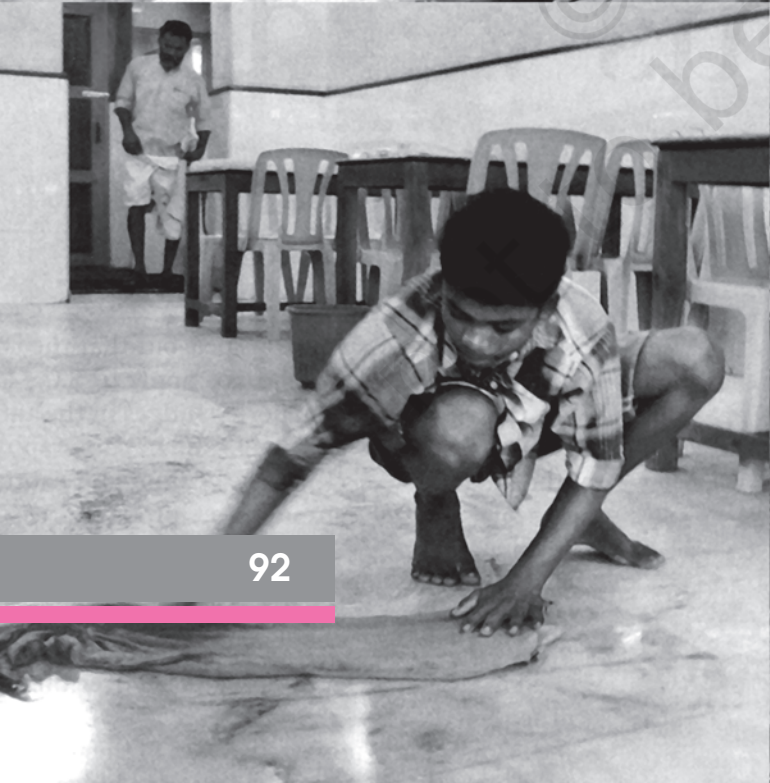
under-paid) labour, or the confiscation of property. Finally, untouchability is a pan-Indian phenomenon, although its specific forms and intensity vary considerably across regions and socio-historical contexts.

The Everyday Ordeal of a Dalit Scavenger   Box 5.2

Among the estimated 8 million manual scavengers in India is Narayanamma, who work in a 400 seat public latrine in Anantpur municipality in Andhra Pradesh. From time to time, after the women using the toilet file out, Narayanamma and her fellow workers are called inside. There is no flush. The excrement only piles up at each seat, or flows into open drains. It is Narayanamma's job to collect it with her broom onto a flat, tin plate, and pile it into her basket. When the basket is filled, she carries it on her head to a waiting tractor-trolley parked at a distance of half a kilometre. And then she is back, waiting for the next call from the toilet. This goes on until about ten in the morning, when at last Narayanamma washes up, and returns home.

"*Ai, municipality* come, clean this", is how most people call out to Narayanamma and her fellow workers when they walk down the road.

It is as though we do not have a name, she says. And often they cover their noses when we walk past, as though we smell. We have to wait until someone turns on a municipal tap, or works a hand-pump, when we fill water, so that these are not polluted by our touch. In the tea-stalls, we do not sit with others on the benches; we squat on the ground separately. Until recently, there were separate broken teacups for us, which we washed ourselves and these were kept apart only for our use. This continues to be the practice in villages even in the periphery of Anantpur, as in many parts of the state.

Source: Adapted from Mander 2001: 38-39.

The so-called 'untouchables' have been referred to collectively by many names over the centuries. Whatever the specific etymology of these names, they are all derogatory and carry a strongly pejorative charge. In fact, many of them continue to be used as forms of abuse even today, although their use is now a criminal offence. Mahatma Gandhi had popularised the term 'Harijan' (literally, children of God) in the 1930s to counter the pejorative charge carried by caste names.

However, the ex-untouchable communities and their leaders have coined another term, 'Dalit', which is now the generally accepted term for referring to these groups. In Indian languages, the term Dalit literally means 'downtrodden' and conveys the sense of an oppressed people. Though it was neither coined by Dr. Ambedkar nor frequently used by him, the term certainly resonates with his philosophy and the movement for empowerment that he led. It received wide currency during the caste riots in Mumbai in the early 1970s. The Dalit Panthers, a radical group that emerged in western India during that time, used the term to assert their identity as part of their struggle for rights and dignity.

STATE AND NON-STATE INITIATIVES ADDRESSING CASTE AND TRIBE DISCRIMINATION

The Indian state has had special programmes for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes since even before Independence. The 'Schedules' listing the castes and tribes recognised as deserving of special treatment because of the massive discrimination practiced against them were drawn up in 1935, by the British Indian government. After Independence, the same policies have been continued and many new ones added. Among the most significant additions is the extension of special programmes to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) since the early 1990s.

The most important state initiative attempting to compensate for past and present caste discrimination is the one popularly known as 'reservations'. This involves the setting aside of some places or 'seats' for members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in different spheres of public life. These include reservation of seats in the State and Central legislatures (i.e., state assemblies, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha); reservation of jobs in government service across all departments and public sector companies; and reservation of seats in educational institutions. The proportion of reserved seats is equal to the percentage share of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the total population. But for the OBCs this proportion is decided differently. The same principle is extended to other developmental programmes of the government, some of which are exclusively for the Scheduled Castes or Tribes, while others give them preference.

In addition to reservations, there have been a number of laws passed to end, prohibit and punish caste discrimination, specially untouchability. One of the earliest such laws was the Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, which disallowed the curtailment of rights of citizens due solely to change of religion or caste. The most recent such law was the Constitution Amendment (Ninety Third Amendment) Act of 2005, which became law on 23rd January 2006. Coincidentally, both the 1850 law and the 2006 amendment related to education. The 93rd Amendment is for introducing reservation for the Other Backward Classes in institutions of higher education, while the 1850 Act was used to allow entry of Dalits to government schools. In between, there have been numerous laws, of which the important ones are, of course, the Constitution of India itself, passed in 1950; and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989. The Constitution abolished untouchability (Article 17) and introduced the reservation provisions mentioned above. The 1989 Prevention of Atrocities Act revised and strenthened the legal provisions punishing acts of violence or humiliation against Dalits and adivasis. The fact that legislation was passed repeatedly on this subject is proof of the fact that the law alone cannot end a social practice. In fact, as you will have seen from newspapers and the media, cases of discrimination including atrocities against Dalits and adivasis, continue to take place all over India today. The particular case mentioned in Box 5.3 is only

one example; you can find numerous others in the newspapers and media.

State action alone cannot ensure social change. In any case, no social group howsoever weak or oppressed is only a victim. Human beings are always capable of organising and acting on their own – often against very heavy odds – to struggle for justice and dignity. Dalits too have been increasingly active on the political, agitational, and cultural fronts. From the pre-Independence struggles and movements launched by people like Jyotiba Phule, Iyotheedas, Periyar, Ambedkar and others (See Chapter 3) to contemporary political organisations like the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh or the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti of Karnataka, Dalit political assertion has come a long way. (For an example of a contemporary struggle, see Box 5.3) Dalits have also made significant contributions to literature in several Indian languages, specially Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. (See Box 5.4 which features a short poem by the well known Marathi Dalit poet, Daya Pawar.)

ACTIVITY 5.3

Obtain a copy of the Constitution of India. You can get it from your school library, from a bookshop, or from the Internet (web address: http://indiacode.nic.in/).
Find and list all the articles and sections (laws) that deal with the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, or with caste-related problems like Untouchability. You can make a chart of the most important laws and put them up in your class.

D for Dalit, D for Defiance

BOX 5.3

Gohana is a small, dusty town on the Sonepat-Rohtak highway of Haryana with billboards promising progress… Past the town square, Gohana's largest dalit neighbourhood, Valmiki Colony, has risen from the ashes. On 31 August 2005, it was looted and burnt by a mob of Jats after a Jat youth was killed in a scuffle with some dalit youngsters. Dalits had fled their homes fearing attacks by Jats after the murder; the patrolling police had chosen not to stop the mobs from torching 54 dalit houses. "The arson was the Jats' way of teaching the dalits a lesson," said Vinod Kumar, whose house was burnt. "The police, administration and the government are dominated by Jats; they simply watched our houses burn."

Five months later, the burnt houses have been rebuilt, their facades painted in bright pink, red and green. Marble tiles with bright pictures of Valmiki adorn the facades of every house, asserting the dalit identity of the residents. "We had to return. It is our home," said Kumar, sitting on a newly acquired sofa in the drawing room of his house painted blue.

Kumar embodies the spirit of the dalits of Gohana. In his early 30s, he is not the scavenger the caste society ordered him to be, but a senior assistant in an insurance company. Most dalits have embraced education and stepped across the line of control of the caste system. "There are many of us who have a masters degree and work in private and government jobs. Most of our boys go to school and so do the girls," he said. (…)

The young men of the Valmiki Colony are not the stereotyped, submissive, suffering dalits that one would traditionally expect to encounter. Dressed in imitation Nike shoes and Wrangler jeans, their body language is defiant. However, the journey of upward social mobility remains tough for the vast majority of

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landless dalits in Haryana. "Most boys drop out after high school because of acute poverty," said Sudesh Kataria, an assistant engineer working for a multinational. He has a diploma in electrical engineering from the Industrial Training Institute, Gurgaon. Kataria's best friend at ITI, a Jat, once invited him to a family wedding but insisted that he shouldn't reveal his identity. "At the wedding a guest asked me about my caste and I lied. Then he asked me about my village and I told him the truth. He knew my village was a dalit village." A fight broke out between the hosts and the guests — how can they let a dalit in? "They washed the chair I sat on and threw me out," Kataria recalls.

Kataria wants a new life for the dalits — he campaigns throughout the villages of Gurgaon with other educated dalits. "Our people will rise, stronger and powerful. We need to unite. And once we unite and fight back, there will be no Gohanas or Jhajjars. Not any more."

(Source: Adapted from an article by Basharat Peer, *in* Tehelka *February 18, 2006)*

The City
by Daya Pawar

Box 5.4

One day someone digs up a twentieth century city
and ends on this observation.
Here's an interesting inscription:
'This water tap is open to all castes and religions'.
What could it have meant:
That this society was divided?
That some were high while others were low?
Well, all right, then this city deserved burying—
Why did they call it the machine age?
Seems like the Stone Age in the twentieth century.

THE OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES

Untouchability was the most visible and comprehensive form of social discrimination. However, there were a large group of castes that were of low status and were also subjected to varying levels of discrimination short of untouchability. These were the service and artisanal castes who occupied the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy. The Constitution of India recognises the possibility that there may be groups other than the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes who suffer from social disadvantages. These groups – which need not be based on caste alone, but generally are identified by caste – were described as the 'socially and educationally backward classes'. This is the constitutional basis of the popular term 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs), which is in common use today.

Like the category of the 'tribe' (see Chapter 3), the OBCs are defined negatively, by what they are not. They are neither part of the 'forward' castes at the upper end of the status spectrum, nor of the Dalits at the lower end. But since caste has entered all the major Indian religions and is not confined to Hinduism alone, there are also members of other religions who belong to the backward castes and share the same traditional occupational identification and similar or worse socio-economic status.

For these reasons, the OBCs are a much more diverse group than the Dalits or adivasis. The first government of independent India under Jawaharlal Nehru appointed a commission to look into measures for the welfare of the OBCs. The First Backward Classes Commission headed by Kaka Kalelkar submitted its report in 1953. But the political climate at the time led to the report being sidelined. From the mid-fifties, the OBC issue became a regional affair pursued at the state rather than the central level.

The southern states had a long history of backward caste political agitation that had started in the early twentieth century. Because of these powerful social movements, policies to address the problems of the OBCs were in place long before they were discussed in most northern states. The OBC issue returned to the central level in the late 1970s after the Emergency when the Janata Party came to power. The Second Backward Classes Commission headed by B.P. Mandal was appointed at this time. However, it was only in 1990, when the central government decided to implement the ten-year old Mandal Commission report, that the OBC issue became a major one in national politics.

Since the 1990s we have seen the resurgence of lower caste movements in north India, among both the OBCs and Dalits. The politicisation of the OBCs allows them to convert their large numbers – recent surveys show that they are about 41% of the national population – into political influence. This was not possible at the national level before, as shown by the sidelining of the Kalelkar Commission report, and the neglect of the Mandal Commission report.

The large disparities between the upper OBCs (who are largely landed castes and enjoy dominance in rural society in many regions of India) and the lower OBCs (who are very poor and disadvantaged, and are often not very different from Dalits in socio-economic terms) make this a difficult political category to work with. However, the OBCs are severely under-represented in all spheres except landholding and political representation (they have a large number of MLAs and MPs). Although the upper OBCs are dominant in the rural sector, the situation of urban OBCs is much worse, being much closer to that of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes than to the upper castes.

ADIVASI STRUGGLES

Like the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are social groups recognised by the Indian Constitution as specially marked by poverty, powerlessness and social stigma. The *jana* or tribes were believed to be 'people of the forest' whose distinctive habitat in the hill and forest areas shaped their economic, social and political attributes. However, ecological isolation was nowhere absolute. Tribal groups have had long and close association with Hindu society and culture, making the boundaries between 'tribe' and 'caste' quite porous. (Recall the discussion of the concept of tribe in Chapter 3).

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A Dalit village
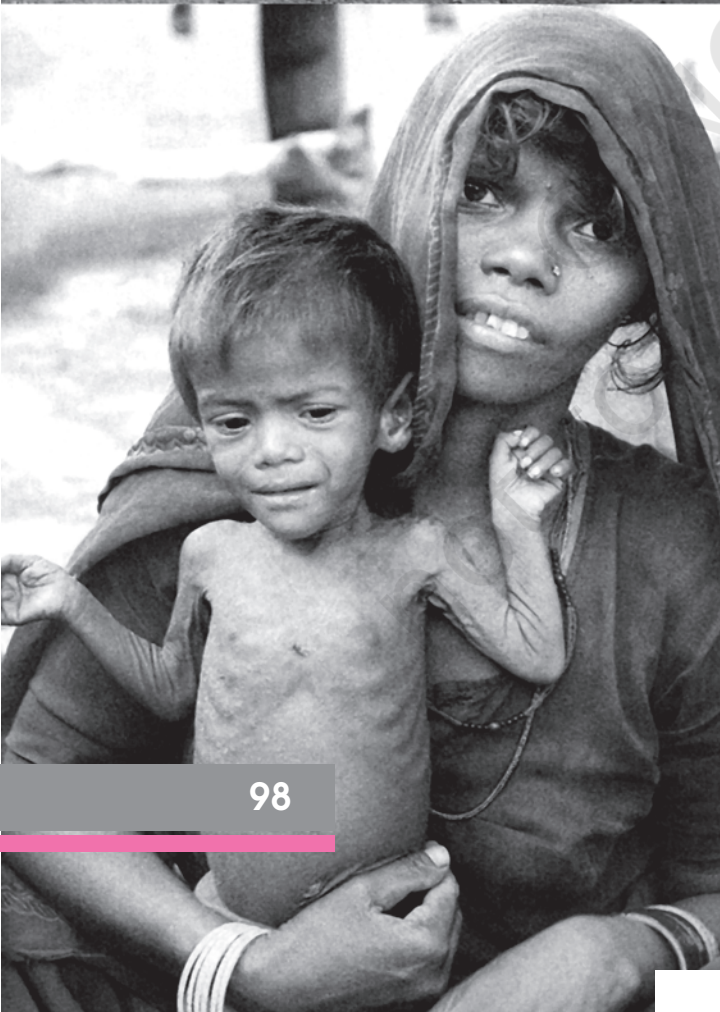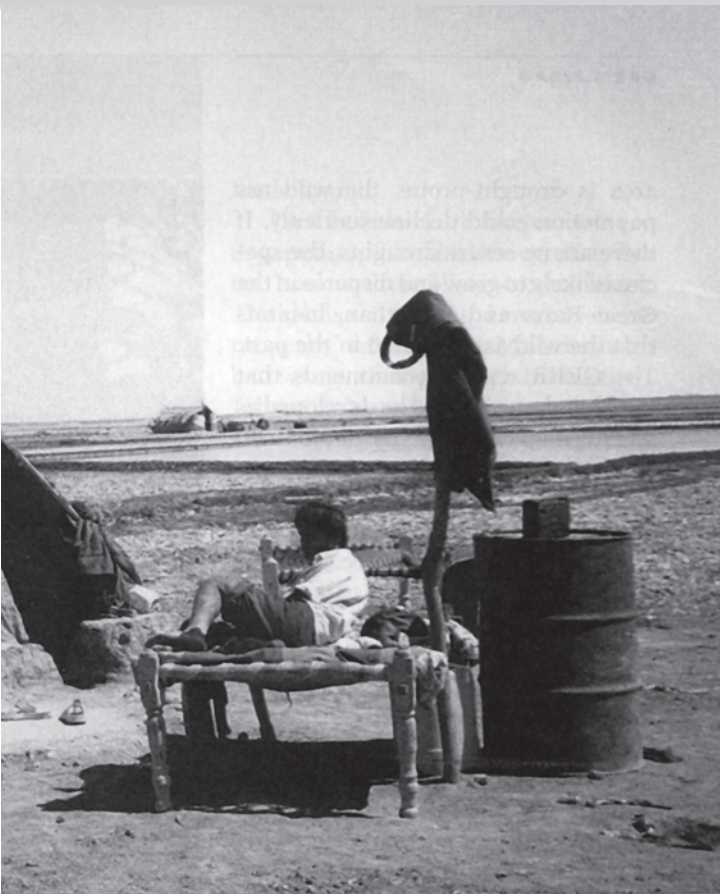
In the case of adivasis, the movement of populations from one area to another further complicates the picture. Today, barring the North-Eastern states, there are no areas of the country that are inhabited exclusively by tribal people; there are only areas of tribal *concentration*. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, non-tribals have moved into the tribal districts of central India, while tribal people from the same districts have migrated to plantations, mines, factories and other places of employment.

In the areas where tribal populations are concentrated, their economic and social conditions are usually much worse than those of non-tribals. The impoverished and exploited circumstances under which adivasis live can be traced historically to the pattern of accelerated resource extraction started by the colonial British government and continued by the government of independent India. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the colonial government reserved most forest tracts for its own use, severing the rights that adivasis had long exercised to use the forest for gathering produce and for shifting cultivation. Forests were now to be protected for maximising timber production. With this policy, the mainstay of their livelihoods was taken away from adivasis, rendering their lives poorer and more insecure. Denied access to forests and land for cultivation, adivasis were forced to either use the forests illegally (and be harassed and prosecuted as 'encroachers' and thieves) or migrate in search of wage labour.

The Independence of India in 1947 should have made life easier for adivasis but this was not the case. Firstly, the government monopoly over forests continued. If anything, the exploitation of forests accelerated. Secondly, the policy of capital-intensive industrialisation adopted by the Indian government required mineral resources and power-generation capacities which were concentrated in Adivasi areas. Adivasi lands were rapidly acquired for new mining and dam projects. In the process, millions of adivasis were displaced without any appropriate compensation or rehabilitation. Justified in the name of 'national development' and 'economic growth', these policies were also a form of internal colonialism, subjugating adivasis and alienating the resources upon which they depended. Projects such as the Sardar Sarovar dam on the river Narmada in western India and the Polavaram dam on the river Godavari in Andhra Pradesh will displace hundreds of thousands of adivasis, driving them to greater destitution. These processes continue to prevail and have become even more powerful since the 1990s when economic liberalisation policies were officially adopted by the Indian government. It is now easier for corporate firms to acquire large areas of land by displacing adivasis.

Like the term Dalit, the term Adivasi connotes political awareness and the assertion of rights. Literally meaning 'original inhabitants', the term was coined in the 1930s as part of the struggle against the intrusion by the colonial government and outside settlers and moneylenders. Being Adivasi is about shared experiences of the loss of forests, the alienation of land, repeated displacements since Independence in the name of 'development projects' and much more.

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In spite of the heavy odds against them and in the face of their marginalisation many tribal groups have been waging struggles against outsiders (called 'dikus') and the state. In post-Independence India, the most significant achievements of Adivasi movements include the attainment of statehood for Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, which were originally part of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh respectively. In this respect adivasis and their struggles are different from the Dalit struggle because, unlike Dalits, adivasis were concentrated in contiguous areas and could demand states of their own.

In the Name of Development — Adivasis in the Line of Fire   Box 5.5

The new year brought death to Orissa. On 2 January 2006, police opened fire on a group of adivasi*s*, killing twelve and injuring many others. For the past 23 days, the Adivasis had blocked the state highway at Kalinganagar, peacefully protesting against the take-over of their farmlands by a steel company. Their refusal to surrender their land was a red rag to an administration under pressure to expedite industrial development in the state. The stakes were high — not only this piece of land but the entire policy of accelerated industrialisation would be jeopardised if the government were to entertain the adivasis' demands. The police were brought in to forcibly clear the highway. In the confrontation that followed, twelve adivasi men and women lost their lives. Many of them were shot in the back as they were trying to run away. When the dead adivasis' bodies were returned to their families, it was found that the police had cut off their hands, the men's genitals and the women's breasts. The corpses' mutilation was a warning — we mean business.

The Kalinganagar incident, like many horrors before it and after, briefly made the headlines and then disappeared from public view. The lives and deaths of poor adivasis slid back into obscurity. Yet their struggle still continues and by revisiting it, we not only remind ourselves of the need to address ongoing injustice, but also appreciate how this conflict encapsulates many of the key issues in the sphere of environment and development in India today. Like many adivasi-dominated parts of the country, Kalinganagar in Jajpur district of central Orissa is a paradox. Its wealth of natural resources contrasts sharply with the poverty of its inhabitants, mainly small farmers and labourers. The rich iron ore deposits in the area are state property and their 'development' means that Adivasi lands are compulsorily acquired by the state for a pittance. While a handful of local residents may get secure jobs on the lower rungs of the industrial sector, most are impoverished even further and survive on the edge of starvation as wage-labourers. It is estimated that 30 million people, more than the entire population of Canada, have been displaced by this land acquisition policy since India became independent in 1947 (Fernandes 1991). Of these, almost 75 per cent are, by the government's own admission, 'still awaiting rehabilitation'. This process of land acquisition is justified as being in the public interest since the state is committed to promoting economic growth by expanding industrial production and infrastructure. It is claimed that such growth is necessary for national development.

To these arguments has been added a new justification. Since 1990, the Indian government has adopted a policy of economic liberalisation — divesting the state of its welfare functions and dismantling the institutional apparatuses regulating private firms. Economic policy has been re-oriented to maximise foreign

exchange earnings, with concessions and subsidies given to Indian and foreign firms to encourage them to invest in production for export. Kalinganagar's iron ore attracted increased interest due to the booming international demand for steel and spurred a steel company, which had bought land from the Orissa state government, to start work on a new steel plant by building a wall enclosing the factory site. It was the construction of this wall that sparked off protests leading to the killing of adivasis. The state government had forcibly acquired this land from them years ago by paying them a few thousand rupees per acre. Since the meagre compensation did not enable adivasis to invest in an alternative livelihood, they had continued to live in the area and cultivate the land that legally no longer belonged to them (after acquiring the land, the administration had not put it to any use). The move in December 2005 to enclose this land directly deprived adivasis of their sole source of livelihood. Their desperation was fuelled by anger when they learnt that the state government had sold the aquired land to the steel firm at a price roughly ten times the compensation amount paid to the original owners. Adivasis took to the streets, refusing to give up the land that they survived on.

The struggle of adivasis in Orissa and its violent reprisal highlight how conflicts over land and related natural resources remain central to the challenge of India's development. Kalinganagar is now marked along with Narmada, Singrauli, Tehri, Hirakud, Koel Karo, Suvarnarekha, Nagarhole, Plachimada and many other sites, on the map of environmental conflicts in India. Like the others, its contours too reflect the deep social and political divides that characterise contemporary India.

To read more about the Kalinganagar issue see: Frontline, v. 23, n.1, Jan 14-27, 2006 or the People's Union for Civil Liberties report at http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Dalit-tribal/2006/kalinganagar.htm

5.3 Struggle for Women's Equality and Rights

Because of the obvious biological and physical differences between men and women, gender inequality is often treated as natural. However, despite appearances, scholars have shown that the inequalities between men and women are social rather than natural. For example, there are no biological reasons that can explain why so few women are found in positions of public power. Nor can nature explain why women generally receive a smaller or no share in family property in most societies. But the strongest argument comes from the societies that were different from the 'normal' or common pattern. If women were biologically unfit to be inheritors and heads of families, how did matrilineal societies (as the Nairs of Kerala used to be, and as the Khasis of Meghalaya still are) work for centuries? How have women managed to be successful farmers and traders in so many African societies? There is, in short, nothing biological about the inequalities that mark the relations between women and men. Gender is thus also a form of social inequality and exclusion like caste and class, but with its own specific features. In this section we will look at how gender inequality came to be recognised as inequality in the Indian context, and the kinds of responses that this recognition produced.

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The women's question arose in modern India as part of the nineteenth century middle class social reform movements. The nature of these movements varied from region to region. They are often termed as middle class reform movements because many of these reformers were from the newly emerging western educated Indian middle class. They were often at once inspired by the democratic ideals of the modern west and by a deep pride in their own democratic traditions of the past. Many used both these resources to fight for women's rights. We can only give illustrative examples here. We draw from the anti-sati campaign led by Raja Rammohun Roy in Bengal, the widow remarriage movement in the Bombay Presidency where Ranade was one of the leading reformers, from Jyotiba Phule's simultaneous attack on caste and gender oppression, and from the social reform movement in Islam led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.

Raja Rammohun Roy's attempts to reform society, religion and the status of women can be taken as the starting point of nineteenth century social reform in Bengal. A decade before establishing the Brahmo Samaj in 1828, Roy undertook the campaign against "sati" which was the first women's issue to receive public attention. Rammohun Roy's ideas represented a curious mixture of Western rationality and an assertion of Indian traditionality. Both trends can be located in the over arching context of a response to colonialism. Rammohun thus attacked the practice of *sati* on the basis of both appeals to humanitarian and natural rights doctrines as well as Hindu *shastras*.

The deplorable and unjust treatment of the Hindu upper caste widows was a major issue taken up by the social reformers. Ranade used the writings of scholars such as Bishop Joseph Butler whose *Analogy of Religion* and *Three Sermons on Human Nature* dominated the moral philosophy syllabus of Bombay University in the 1860s. At the same time, M.G. Ranade's writings entitled the *The Texts of the Hindu Law* on the *Lawfulness of the Remarriage of Widows* and *Vedic Authorities for Widow Marriage* elaborated the *shastric* sanction for remarriage of widows.

While Ranade and Rammohun Roy belonged to one kind of nineteenth century upper caste and middle class social reformers, Jotiba Phule came from a socially excluded caste and his attack was directed against both caste and gender discrimination. He founded the Satyashodak Samaj with its primary emphasis on "truth seeking". Phule's first practical social reform efforts were to aid the two groups considered lowest in traditional Brahmin culture: women and untouchables. (See Chapter 3)

ACTIVITY 5.4

➢ Find out about a social reformer in your part of the country. Collect information about her/him.

➢ Read an autobiography/biography of any social reformer.

➢ Can you see any of the ideas they fought for existing today in our everyday lives or in our constitutional provisions.

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Dalit women and girls
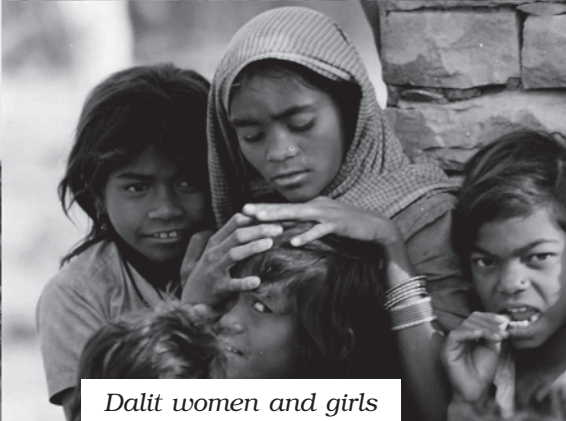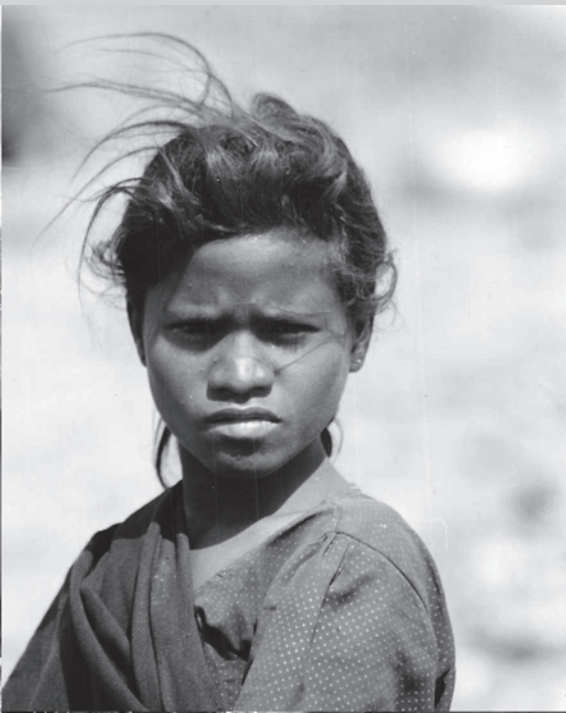
ACTIVITY 5.5

➤ Make a list of professions in which women are involved today.

➤ Can you think of any educational field where women are barred today? Perhaps the recent discussion on women in the Indian armed forces may throw some light on this.

As in the case of other reformers, a similar trend of drawing upon both modern western ideas as well as the sacred texts characterised Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's efforts to reform Muslim society. He wanted girls to be educated, but within the precincts of their homes. Like Dayanand Saraswati of the Arya Samaj, he stood for women's education but sought for a curriculum that included instruction in religious principles, training in the arts of housekeeping and handicrafts and rearing of children. This may appear very stereotypical today. One has to however realise that once rights such as education for women were accepted it started a process that finally made it impossible to confine women to only some kinds of education.

It is often assumed that social reform for women's rights was entirely fought for by male reformers and that ideas of women's equality are alien imports. To learn how wrong both these assumptions are, read the following extracts from two books written by women, *Stree Purush Tulana* written in 1882 and *Sultana's Dream* written in 1905.

Stree Purush Tulana (or Comparison of Men and Women) was written by a Maharashtrian housewife, Tarabai Shinde, as a protest against the double standards of a male dominated society. A young Brahmin widow had been sentenced to death by the courts for killing her newborn baby because it was illegitimate, but no effort had been made to identify or punish the man who had fathered the baby. *Stree Purush Tulana* created quite a stir when it was published. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born in a well-to-do Bengali Muslim family, and was lucky to have a husband who was very liberal in outlook and

From *Stree Purush Tulana* 1882   Box 5.6

…Who are these women you give such names to? Whose womb did you take your birth in? Who carried the killing burden of you for nine months? Who was the saint who made you the light in her eye, …How would you feel if someone said about your mother, "That old chap's mother, you know, she's a gateway to hell'. Or your sister, "That so-and so-s' sister, she's a real storehouse of deceit'. …Would you just sit and listen to their bad words?…

…Then you get blessed with a bit of education and promoted to some important new office- and you start feeling ashamed of your first wife. Money works its influence on you and you begin to say to yourself, what does a wife matter after all? Don't we just give them a few rupees a month and keep them at home like any other servant, to do the cooking and look after the house? You begin to think of her like some female slave you've paid for….If one of your horses died it wouldn't take long to replace it, and there's no great labour needed to get another wife either. ..The problem is Yama hasn't got time to carry off wives fast enough, or you'd probably get through several different ones in one day!

From *Sultana's Dream* (1905)

BOX 5.7

…"What is the matter, dear?" she said affectionately.

" I feel somewhat awkward," I said, in a rather apologising tone, "as being a purdahnishin woman I am not accustomed to walking about unveiled."

"You need not be afraid of coming across a man here. This is Ladyland, free from sin and harm…"

…I became very curious to know where the men were. I met more than a hundred women while walking there, but not a single man.

"Where are the men?" I asked her.

"In their proper places, where they ought to be."

"Pray let me know what you mean by `their proper places.''

"Oh, I see my mistake, you cannot know our customs, as you were never here before. We shut our men indoors."

"Just as we are kept in the zenana?"

"Exactly so."

"How funny." I burst into a laugh. Sister Sara laughed too.

encouraged her education first in Urdu and later in Bengali and English. She was already a successful author in Urdu and Bengali when she wrote *Sultana's Dream* to test her abilities in English. This remarkable short story is probably the earliest example of science fiction writing in India, and among the first by a woman author anywhere in the world. In her dream, Sultana visits a magical country where the gender roles are reversed. Men are confined to the home and observe 'purdah' while women are busy scientists vying with each other at inventing devices that will control the clouds and regulate rain, and machines that fly or 'air-cars'.

Apart from the early feminist visions there were a large number of women's organisations that arose both at the all India and local levels in the early twentieth century. And then began the participation of women in the national movement itself. Not surprisingly women's rights were part and parcel of the nationalist vision.

In 1931, the Karachi Session of the Indian National Congress issued a declaration on the Fundamental Rights of Citizenship in India whereby it committed itself to women's equality. The declaration reads as follows:

1. All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex.

2. No disability attaches to any citizen, by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.

ACTIVITY 5.6

➢ Find out the names of a few women's organisations that emerged both at the national level and in your part of the country.

➢ Find out about any woman who was part of a tribal or peasant movement, a trade union or one of the many strands of the freedom movement.

➢ Identify a novel, a short story or play in your region which depicted the struggle of women against discrimination.

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ACTIVITY 5.7

Possible examples of topics could be :

➢ 33 per cent reservation for women in elected bodies

➢ Domestic violence

➢ Right to employment … there are many other topics of interest, choose the ones which interest you.

3. The franchise shall be on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

4. Woman shall have the right to vote, to represent and the right to hold public offices. (Report of the Sub-Committee, 'Woman's Role in Planned Economy', 1947: 37-38).

Two decades after Independence, women's issues re-emerged in the 1970s. In the nineteenth century reform movements, the emphasis had been on the backward aspects of tradition like sati, child marriage, or the ill treatment of widows. In the 1970s, the emphasis was on 'modern' issues – the rape of women in police custody, dowry murders, the representation of women in popular media, and the gendered consequences of unequal development. The law was a major site for reform in the 1980s and after, specially when it was discovered that many laws of concern to women had not been changed since the 19th century. As we enter the twenty-first century, new sites of gender injustice are emerging. You will recall the discussion of the declining sex ratio in Chapter 2. The sharp fall in the child sex ratio and the implicit social bias against the girl child represents one of the new challenges of gender inequality.

Social change whether on women's rights or any other issue is never a battle won once and for all. As with other social issues the struggle is long, and the women's movement in India will have to fight to defend hard won rights as well as take up new issues as they emerge.

5.4 THE STRUGGLES OF THE DISABLED

The differently abled are not 'disabled' only because they are physically or mentally 'impaired' but also because society is built in a manner that does not cater to their needs. In contrast to the struggles over Dalit, adivasi or women's rights, the rights of the disabled have been recognised only very recently. Yet in all historical periods, in all societies there have been people who are disabled. One of the leading activists and scholars of disability in the Indian context, Anita Ghai, argues that this invisibility of the disabled can be compared to the *Invisible Man* of Ralph Ellison. Ellison's novel of that name is a famous indictment of racism against African Americans in the USA.

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in the circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of

hard distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, figments of their imagination. Indeed everything and anything except me (Ellison, 1952:3).

The very term 'disabled' is significant because it draws attention to the fact that public perception of the 'disabled' needs to be questioned.

Here are some common features central to the public perception of 'diability' all over the world —

➢ Disability is understood as a biological given.

➢ Whenever a disabled person is confronted with problems, it is taken for granted that the problems originate from her/his impairment.

➢ The disabled person is seen as a victim.

➢ Disability is supposed to be linked with the disabled individual's self perception.

➢ The very idea of disability suggests that they are in need of help.

In India labels such as 'disability', 'handicap', 'crippled', 'blind' and 'deaf' are used synonymously. Often these terms are hurled at people as insults. In a culture that looks up to bodily 'perfection', all deviations from the 'perfect body' signify abnormality, defect and distortion. Labels such as *bechara* (poor thing) accentuate the victim status for the disabled person. The roots of such attitudes lie in the cultural conception that views an impaired body as a result of fate. Destiny is seen as the culprit, and disabled people are the victims. The common perception views disability as retribution for past *karma* (actions) from which there can be no reprieve. The dominant cultural construction in India therefore looks at disability as essentially a characteristic of the individual. The popular images in mythology portray the disabled in an extremely negative fashion.

The very term 'disabled' challenges each of these assumptions. Terms such as 'mentally challenged', 'visually impaired' and 'physically impaired' came to replace the more trite negative terms such as 'retarded', 'crippled' or 'lame'. The disabled are rendered disabled not because they are biologically disabled but because society renders them so.

ACTIVITY 5.8

➢ Find out how different traditional or mythical stories depict the disabled. You can draw from any of the innumerable regional sources of folklore, mythology, and traditional storytelling in India, or from any other part of the world.

➢ Make a list of popular sayings or proverbs that show negative attitudes towards the disabled.

We are disabled by buildings that are not designed to admit us, and this in turn leads to a range of further disablements regarding our education, our chances of gaining employment, our social lives and so on. The disablement lies in the construction of society, not in the physical condition of the individual (Brisenden 1986 :176).

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The social construction of disability has yet another dimension. There is a close relationship between disability and poverty. Malnutrition, mothers weakened by frequent childbirth, inadequate immunisation programmes, accidents in overcrowded homes, all contribute to an incidence of disability among poor people that is higher than among people living in easier circumstances. Furthermore, disability creates and exacerbates poverty by increasing isolation and economic strain, not just for the individual but for the family; there is little doubt that disabled people are among the poorest in poor countries.

ACTIVITY 5.9

Have you seen the film, *Iqbal*? If you have not do try and see it. It is an exemplary story of the grit and determination of a young boy who cannot hear and speak but has a passion for cricket, and finally, excels as a bowler. The film brings alive not just Iqbal's struggles but also the many possible concrete meanings of the phrase 'differently abled'.

Approach adopted for the disabled in Census 2011 — BOX 5.8

- Information on disability was collected during the Population Enumeration phase of Census 2011 through 'Household Schedule'.
- Questions on disability were asked about all persons in the household.
- Enumerators were instructed to contact the disabled person in the households, besides the respondent, to collect information.
- All types of household, i.e., 'National', 'Institutional' and 'Household', were covered.
- Questions and instructions on disability were finalised after field trial of selected questions, including disability in selected area, extensive deliberation with civil society organisations and nodal ministry, pre-test of all census questions covering rural/urban sample in all States.
- Aspects considered in finalising questions were simple nomenclature of the types/ categories of disability for easy comprehension by both enumerator and respondent, relevance of data for the planners and policy-makers, feasibility of canvassing the question to cover all types of disabilities as listed in the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, and the National Trust Act, 1999.
- A filter question to ascertain disability status was included.
- Attempt was made to collect information on eight types of disabilities as against five in Census 2001.
- The placement of the question on disability in the census Schedule was changed and the question was brought forward.
- Special efforts were made to improve the coverage, which included extensive training to the enumerators and publicity measures.

Significantly, efforts to redress the situation have come from the disabled themselves. The government has had to respond as the notification in Box 5.8 shows.

It is only recently with the efforts of the disabled themselves that some awareness is building in the society on the need to rethink 'disability'. This is illustrated by the newspaper report on the next page.

Recognition of disability is absent from the wider educational discourse. This is evident from the historical practices within the educational system that continue to marginalise the issue of disability by maintaining two separate streams – one for disabled students and one for everyone else.

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> **'Disabled-unfriendly' Courts**   **Box 5.9**
>
> Describing the non-consideration of handicapped persons for Judge posts as an "exclusive" policy of the higher judiciary, a senior jurist says by continuing to ignore the handicapped, the judiciary is violating a statutory mandate. "The High Court building itself is far from disabled-friendly." All entrances to the actual court complex are preceded by staircases and none of them has a ramp. Even to access the limited elevator facility, one has to climb several steps.
>
> The condition of the City Civil Court, where many handicapped or injured persons come to depose before courts hearing accident claims cases, is worse. One can see disabled, injured or old people being carried up the stairs by their companions, says an advocate.
>
> *The Hindu* Wednesday 2 August 2006.

In this chapter we have looked at caste, tribe, gender and disability as institutions that generate and perpetuate inequalities and exclusion. However, they also provoke struggles against these inequalities. Historically, the understanding of inequality in the social sciences has been dominated by notions of class, race and more recently, gender. It is only later that the complexities of other categories like caste and tribe have received attention. In the Indian context, caste, tribe and gender are now getting the attention they deserve. But there remain categories that are still in need of attention, such as those who are marginalised by religion or by a combination of categories. More complex formations like groups defined by religion and caste, gender and religion, or caste and region are likely to claim our attention in the near future, as shown, for example, by the Sachar Committee Report on the Muslim community.

> In a country where half the children in the age group of 5-14 are out of school how can there be space for children with disabilities, especially if a segregated schooling is being advocated for them? Even if the legislation optimistically tries to make education available to every disabled child, parents in a village do not see this as instrumental in achieving any autonomy for their disabled child. What they would prefer is perhaps a better way of fetching water from the well and improved agricultural facilities. Similarly, parents in an urban slum expect education to be related to a world of work that would enhance their child's basic quality of life.
>
> **Box 5.10**
>
> *Source: Anita Ghai 'Disability in the Indian Context', 2002:93*

ACTIVITY 5.10

Read the quote above and discuss the different ways in which the problems of the disabled are socially constituted.

Questions

1. How is social inequality different from the inequality of individuals?

2. What are some of the features of social stratification?

3. How would you distinguish prejudice from other kinds of opinion or belief?

4. What is social exclusion?

5. What is the relationship between caste and economic inequality today?

6. What is untouchability?

7. Describe some of the policies designed to address caste inequality.

8. How are the Other Backward Castes different from the Dalits (or Scheduled Castes)?

9. What are the major issues of concern to adivasis today?

10. What are the major issues taken up by the women's movement over its history?

11. In what sense can one say that 'disability' is as much a social as a physical thing?

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Chapter 6

The Challenges
of Cultural Diversity
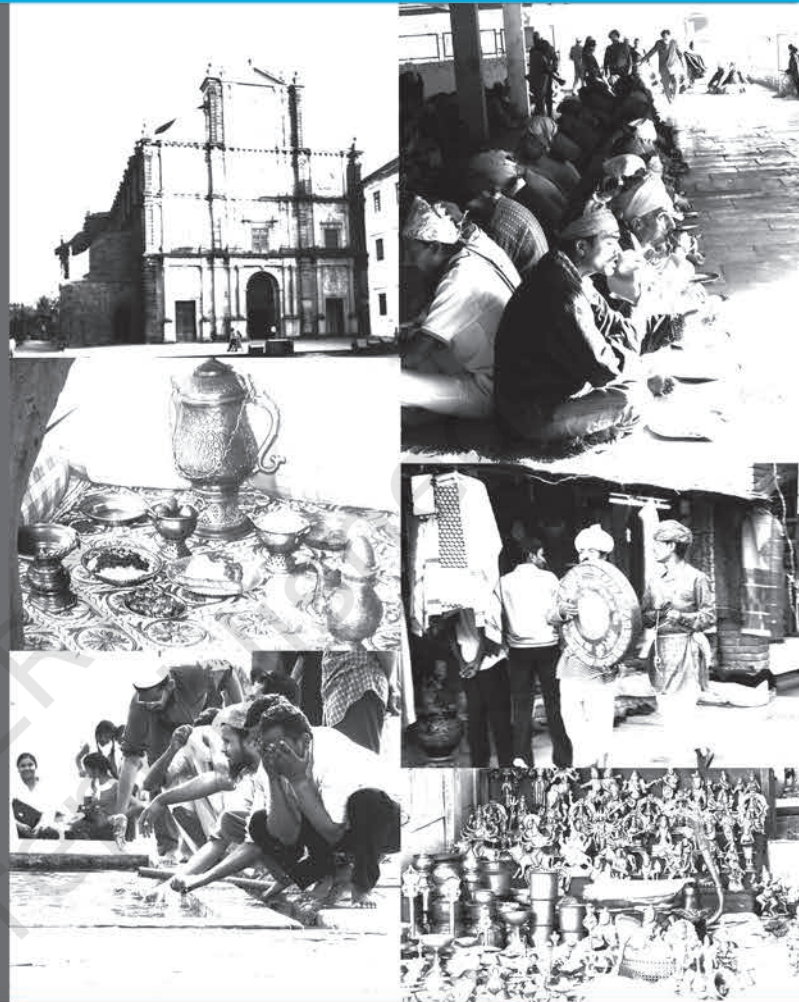
D ifferent kinds of social institutions, ranging from the family to the market, can bring people together, create strong collective identities and strengthen social cohesion, as you learnt in Chapters 3 and 4. But, on the other hand, as Chapters 4 and 5 showed, the very same institutions can also be sources of inequality and exclusion. In this chapter, you will learn about some of the tensions and difficulties associated with cultural diversity. What precisely does 'cultural diversity' mean, and why is it seen as a challenge?

The term 'diversity' emphasises *differences* rather than inequalities. When we say that India is a nation of great cultural diversity, we mean that there are many different types of social groups and communities living here. These are communities defined by cultural markers such as language, religion, sect, race or caste. When these diverse communities are also part of a larger entity like a nation, then difficulties may be created by competition or conflict between them.

This is why cultural diversity can present tough challenges. The difficulties arise from the fact that cultural identities are very powerful – they can arouse intense passions and are often able to moblise large numbers of people. Sometimes cultural differences are accompanied by economic and social inequalities, and this further complicates things. Measures to address the inequalities or injustices suffered by one community can provoke opposition from other communities. The situation is made worse when scarce resources – like river waters, jobs or government funds – have to be shared.

If you read the newspapers regularly, or watch the news on television, you may often have had the depressing feeling that India has no future. There seem to be so many divisive forces hard at work tearing apart the unity and integrity of our country – communal riots, demands for regional autonomy, caste wars… You might have even felt upset that large sections of our population are not being patriotic and don't seem to feel as intensely for India as you and your classmates do. But if you look at any book dealing with the history of modern India, or books dealing specifically with issues like communalism or regionalism (for example, Brass 1974), you will realise that these problems are not new ones. Almost all the major 'divisive' problems of today have been there ever since Independence, or even earlier. But in spite of them India has not only survived as a nation, but is a stronger nation-state today.

As you prepare to read on, remember that this chapter deals with difficult issues for which there are no easy answers. But some answers are better than others, and it is our duty as citizens to try our utmost to produce the best answers that are possible within the limitations of our historical and social context. Remember also that, given the immense challenges presented by a vast and extremely diverse collection of peoples and cultures, India has on the whole done fairly well compared to most other nations. On the other hand, we also have some significant shortcomings. There is a lot of room for improvement and much work needs to be done in order to face the challenges of the future …

6.1 CULTURAL COMMUNITIES AND THE NATION-STATE

Before discussing the major challenges that diversity poses in India – issues such as regionalism, communalism and casteism – we need to understand the relationship between nation-states and cultural communities. Why is it so important for people to belong to communities based on cultural identities like a caste, ethnic group, region, or religion? Why is so much passion aroused when there is a perceived threat, insult, or injustice to one's community? Why do these passions pose problems for the nation-state?

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Every human being needs a sense of stable identity to operate in this world. Questions like — Who am I? How am I different from others? How do others understand and comprehend me? What goals and aspirations should I have? – constantly crop up in our life right from childhood. We are able to answer many of these questions because of the way in which we are socialised, or taught how to live in society by our immediate families and our community in various senses. (Recall the discussion of socialisation in your Class XI textbooks.) The socialisation process involves a continuous dialogue, negotiation and even struggle against significant others (those directly involved in our lives) like our parents, family, kin group and our community. Our community provides us the language (our mother tongue) and the cultural values through which we comprehend the world. It also anchors our self-identity.

Community identity is based on birth and 'belonging' rather than on some form of acquired qualifications or 'accomplishment'. It is what we 'are' rather than what we have 'become'. We don't have to do anything to be born into a community – in fact, no one has any choice about which family or community or country they are born into. These kinds of identities are called 'ascriptive' – that is, they are determined by the accidents of birth and do not involve any choice on the part of the individuals concerned. It is an odd fact of social life that people feel a deep sense of security and satisfaction in belonging to communities in which their membership is entirely accidental. We often identify so strongly with communities we have done nothing to 'deserve' – passed no exam, demonstrated no skill or competence… This is very unlike belonging to, say, a profession or team. Doctors or architects have to pass exams and demonstrate their competence. Even in sports, a certain level of skill and performance are a necessary pre-condition for membership in a team. But our membership in our families or religious or regional communities is without preconditions, and yet it is total. In fact, most ascriptive identities are very hard to shake off; even if we choose to disown them, others may continue to identify us by those very markers of belonging.

Perhaps it is because of this accidental, unconditional and yet almost inescapable belonging that we can often be so emotionally attached to our

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community identity. Expanding and overlapping circles of community ties (family, kinship, caste, ethnicity, language, region or religion) give meaning to our world and give us a sense of identity, of who we are. That is why people often react emotionally or even violently whenever there is a perceived threat to their community identity.

ACTIVITY 6.1

To get a clearer understanding of the expanding circles of community ties which shape our sense of identity, you can do a small survey designed as a game. Interview your school mates or other friends: each interviewee gets four chances to answer each of two questions: 'Who am I?' and 'Who do others think I am?'. But the answers must be in a single word or short phrase; they cannot include any names (your own or your parents'/guardians' names; cannot include your class/school, etc.). Interviews must be done singly and in private, i.e., other potential interviewees should not be able to hear what is said. Each person should only be interviewed once (i.e., different interviewers cannot interview the same person). You can record the answers and analyse them later. Which types of identities predominated? What was the most common first choice? Which was often the last choice? Were there any patterns to the answers? Did the answers for 'who am I' differ greatly, somewhat, or not at all from answers to 'who do others think I am'?

A second feature of ascriptive identities and community feeling is that they are universal. Everyone has a motherland, a mother tongue, a family, a faith… This may not necessarily be strictly true of every individual, but it is true in a general sense. And we are all equally committed and loyal to our respective identities. Once again it is possible to come across people who may not be particularly committed to one or the other aspect of their identity. But the possibility of this commitment is potentially available to most people. Because of this, conflicts that involve our communities (whether of nation, language, religion, caste or region) are very hard to deal with. Each side in the conflict thinks of the other side as a hated enemy, and there is a tendency to exaggerate the virtues of one's own side as well as the vices of the other side. Thus, when two nations are at war, patriots in each nation see the other as the enemy aggressor; each side believes that God and truth are on their side. In the heat of the moment, it is very hard for people on either side to see that they are constructing matching but reversed mirror images of each other.

It is a social fact that no country or group ever mobilises its members to struggle for untruth, injustice or inequality – everyone is always fighting for truth, justice, equality… This does not mean that both sides are right in every conflict, or that there is no right and wrong, no truth. Sometimes both sides are indeed equally wrong or right; at other times history may judge one side to be the aggressor and the other to be the victim. But this can only happen long after the heat of the conflict has cooled down. Some notion of mutually agreed upon truth is very hard to establish in situations of identity conflict; it usually takes decades, sometimes centuries for one side to accept that it was wrong (See Box 6.1).

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When 'Victors' Apologise

Box 6.1

It is not uncommon for the losing side in a war to be forced to apologise for the bad things that it did. It is only rarely that the winners accept that they were guilty of wrong doing. However, in recent times there have been many such examples from around the world. Nations or communities that were on the 'winning' side, or that are still in a dominant position, are beginning to accept that they have been responsible for grave injustices in the past and are seeking to apologise to the affected communities.

In Australia, there has been a long debate on an official apology from the Australian nation (where the majority of the population today is of white-European origin) to the descendants of the native peoples who were the original inhabitants of the forcibly colonised land. Most state governments in Australia have passed some variant of the following apology resolution:

> *We, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation. We value the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of lands and waters.*
>
> *We recognise this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent. (…) Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves. As we walk the journey of healing, one part of the nation apologises and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apologies and forgives. (…) And so, we pledge ourselves to stop injustice, overcome disadvantage, and respect that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to self-determination within the life of the nation.*

In the United States of America there has been a longstanding debate about apologies to the Native American community (the original inhabitants of the land driven out by war) and to the Black community (brought as slaves from Africa). No consensus has been reached yet.

In Japan, official policy has long recognised the need to apologise for the atrocities of war and colonisation during the periods when Japan occupied parts of East Asia including Korea and parts of China. The most recent apology is from a 15th August 2005 speech by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi:

> *In the past, Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. Sincerely facing these facts of history, I once again express my feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology, and also express the feelings of mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, in the war. I am determined not to allow the lessons of that horrible war to erode, and to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world without ever again waging a war.*

Similar debates have gone on in South Africa, where a white minority was in power and brutally oppressed the black majority consisting of the native population. In Britain as well, there has been public discussion on whether the nation should apologise for its role in colonialism, or in promoting slavery. Interestingly, the latter issue has also been taken up by cities – for example, the port city of Bristol debated whether the city council should pass a resolution apologising for the role that Bristol played in the slave trade.

Sources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bringing_Them_Home#Apologies
http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/koizumispeech/2005/08/15danwa_e.html

ACTIVITY 6.2

Read Box 6.1 carefully. What purpose do you think such apologies serve? After all, the actual victims and the actual exploiters or oppressors may be long dead – they cannot be compensated or punished. Then for whom and for what reason are such apologies offered or debated?

Can you think of other examples where anonymous ordinary people (i.e., people who are not famous or powerful) who are no longer living are remembered, celebrated or honoured in a public way? What purpose is served by memorials and monuments like, for example, the India Gate monument in Delhi? (To whom is this monument dedicated? If you don't know, try to find out.)

Think about the kind of apology mentioned in Box 6.1 in the Indian context. If you were asked to propose such a thing, which groups or communities do you think we as a nation should 'apologise' to? Discuss this in class and try to reach a consensus. What are the arguments and counter-arguments given for various candidate groups?

■ Did your opinion on such 'apologies' change after the class discussion?

COMMUNITIES, NATIONS AND NATION-STATES

At the simplest level, a nation is a sort of large-scale community – it is a community of communities. Members of a nation share the desire to be part of the same political collectivity. This desire for political unity usually expresses itself as the aspiration to form a *state*. In its most general sense, the term state refers to an abstract entity consisting of a set of political-legal institutions claiming control over a particular geographical territory and the people living in it. In Max Weber's well-known definition, a state is a "body that successfully claims a monopoly of legitimate force in a particular territory" (Weber 1970:78).

A nation is a peculiar sort of community that is easy to describe but hard to define. We know and can describe many specific nations founded on the basis of common cultural, historical and political institutions like a shared religion, language, ethnicity, history or regional culture. But it is hard to come up with any defining features, any characteristics that a nation must possess. For every possible criterion there are exceptions and counter-examples. For example, there are many nations that do not share a single common language, religion, ethnicity and so on. On the other hand, there are many languages, religions or ethnicities that are shared across nations. But this does not lead to the formation of a single unified nation of, say, all English speakers or of all Buddhists.

How, then, can we distinguish a nation from other kinds of communities, such as an ethnic group (based on common descent in addition to other commonalities of language or culture), a religious community, or a regionally-defined community? Conceptually, there seems to be no hard distinction – any of the other types of community can one day form a nation. Conversely, no particular kind of community can be guaranteed to form a nation.

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ACTIVITY 6.3

Is it really true that there is no characteristic that is common to each and every nation? Discuss this in class. Try to make a list of possible criteria or characteristics that could define a nation. For each such criterion, make a list of examples of nations that meet the criterion, and also a list of nations that violate it.

In case you came up with the criterion that every nation must possess a territory in the form of a continuous geographical area, consider the cases mentioned below. (Locate each country or region on a world map; you will also need to do a little bit of prior research on each case…)

➢ Alaska and the United States of America

➢ Pakistan before 1971 (West Pakistan + East Pakistan)

➢ Malvinas/Falkland Islands and the United Kingdom

➢ Austria and Germany

➢ Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela

➢ Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates

(Hint: The first three cases are examples of geographically distant territories belonging to the same nation; the last three cases are examples of countries with contiguous territory, shared language and culture but separate nation-states.)

■ Can you add to this list of examples?

The criterion that comes closest to distinguishing a nation is the state. Unlike the other kinds of communities mentioned before, nations are communities that have a state of their own. That is why the two are joined with a hyphen to form the term *nation-state*. Generally speaking, in recent times there has been a one-to-one bond between nation and state (one nation, one state; one state, one nation). But this is a new development. It was not true in the past that a single state could represent only one nation, or that every nation must have its own state. For example, when it was in existence, the Soviet Union explicitly recognised that the peoples it governed were of different 'nations' and more than one hundred such internal nationalities were recognised. Similarly, people constituting a nation may actually be citizens or residents of different states. For example, there are more Jamaicans living outside Jamaica than in Jamaica – that is, the population of 'non-resident' Jamaicans exceeds that of 'resident' Jamaicans. A different example is provided by 'dual citizenship' laws. These laws allow citizens of a particular state to also – simultaneously – be citizens of another state. Thus, to cite one instance, Jewish Americans may be citizens of Israel as well as the USA; they can even serve in the armed forces of one country without losing their citizenship in the other country.

In short, today it is hard to define a nation in any way other than to say that it is a community that has succeeded in acquiring a state of its own. Interestingly, the opposite has also become increasingly true. Just as would-be or aspiring

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nationalities are now more and more likely to work towards forming a state, existing states are also finding it more and more necessary to claim that they represent a nation. One of the characteristic features of the modern era (recall the discussion of modernity from Chapter 4 of your Class XI textbook, *Understanding Society)* is the establishment of democracy and nationalism as dominant sources of political legitimacy. This means that, today, 'the nation' is the most accepted or proper justification for a state, while 'the people' are the ultimate source of legitimacy of the nation. In other words, states 'need' the nation as much or even more than nations need states.

But as we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, there is no historically fixed or logically necessary relationship between a nation-state and the varied forms of community that it could be based on. This means that there is no pre-determined answer to the question: How should the 'state' part of the nation-state treat the different kinds of community that make up the 'nation' part? As is shown in Box 6.2 (which is based on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report of 2004 on Culture and Democracy), most states have generally been suspicious of cultural diversity and have tried to reduce or eliminate it. However, there are many successful examples – including India – which show that it is perfectly possible to have a strong nation-state without having to 'homogenise' different types of community identities into one standard type.

Threatened by community identities, states try to eliminate cultural diversity
Box 6.2

Historically, states have tried to establish and enhance their political legitimacy through nation-building strategies. They sought to secure … the loyalty and obedience of their citizens through policies of assimilation or integration. Attaining these objectives was not easy, especially in a context of cultural diversity where citizens, in addition to their identifications with their country, might also feel a strong sense of identity with their community – ethnic, religious, linguistic and so on.

Most states feared that the recognition of such difference would lead to social fragmentation and prevent the creation of a harmonious society. In short, such identity politics was considered a threat to state unity. In addition, accommodating these differences is politically challenging, so many states have resorted to either suppressing these diverse identities or ignoring them on the political domain.

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Policies of assimilation – often involving outright suppression of the identities of ethnic, religious or linguistic groups – try to erode the cultural differences between groups. Policies of integration seek to assert a single national identity by attempting to eliminate ethno-national and cultural differences from the public and political arena, while allowing them in the private domain. Both sets of policies assume a singular national identity.

Assimilationist and integrationist strategies try to establish singular national identities through various interventions like:

➢ Centralising all power to forums where the dominant group constitutes a majority, and eliminating the autonomy of local or minority groups;

➢ Imposing a unified legal and judicial system based on the dominant group's traditions and abolishing alternative systems used by other groups;

➢ Adopting the dominant group's language as the only official 'national' language and making its use mandatory in all public institutions;

➢ Promotion of the dominant group's language and culture through national institutions including state-controlled media and educational institutions;

➢ Adoption of state symbols celebrating the dominant group's history, heroes and culture, reflected in such things as choice of national holidays or naming of streets etc.;

➢ Seizure of lands, forests and fisheries from minority groups and indigenous people and declaring them 'national resources'…

Source: Adapted from UNDP Human Development Report 2004, Ch.3, Feature 3.1

Box 6.2 speaks of 'assimilationist' and 'integrationist' policies. Policies that promote assimilation are aimed at persuading, encouraging or forcing all citizens to adopt a uniform set of cultural values and norms. These values and norms are usually entirely or largely those of the dominant social group. Other, non-dominant or subordinated groups in society are expected or required to give up their own cultural values and adopt the prescribed ones. Policies promoting integration are different in style but not in overall objective: they insist that the public culture be restricted to a common national pattern, while all 'non-national' cultures are to be relegated to the private sphere. In this case too, there is the danger of the dominant group's culture being treated as 'national' culture.

You can probably see what the problem is by now. There is no necessary relationship between any specific form of community and the modern form of the state. Any of the many bases of community identity (like language, religion, ethnicity and so on) may or may not lead to nation formation – there are no guarantees. But because community identities can act as the basis for nation-formation, already existing states see all forms of community identity as dangerous rivals. That is why states generally tend to favour a single, homogenous national identity, in the hope of being able to control and manage it. However, suppressing cultural diversity can be very costly in terms of the

alienation of the minority or subordinated communities whose culture is treated as 'non-national'. Moreover, the very act of suppression can provoke the opposite effect of intensifying community identity. So encouraging, or at least allowing, cultural diversity is good policy from both the practical and the principled point of view.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE INDIA1N NATION-STATE – AN OVERVIEW

The Indian nation-state is socially and culturally one of the most diverse countries of the world. It has a population of about 1.21 billion people, according to Census of India 2011 (Provisional), currently the second largest – and soon to become the largest – national population in the world. These billion-plus people speak about 1,632 different languages and dialects. As many as eighteeen of these languages have been officially recognised and placed under the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, thus guaranteeing their legal status. In terms of religion, about 80.5% of the population are Hindus, who in turn are regionally specific, plural in beliefs and practices, and divided by castes and languages. About 13.4% of the population are Muslims, which makes India the world's third largest Muslim country after Indonesia and Pakistan. The other major religious communities are Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.8%) and Jains (0.4%). Because of India's huge population, these small percentages can also add up to large absolute numbers.

In terms of the nation-state's relationship with community identities, the Indian case fits neither the assimilationist nor the integrationist model described in Box 6.2. From its very beginning the independent Indian state has ruled out an assimilationist model. However, the demand for such a model has been expressed by some sections of the dominant Hindu community. Although 'national integration' is a constant theme in state policy, India has not been 'integrationist' in the way that Box 6.2 describes. The Constitution declares the state to be a secular state, but religion, language and other such factors are not banished from the public sphere. In fact these communities have been explicitly recognised by the state. By international standards, very strong constitutional protection is offered to minority religions. In general, India's problems have been more in the sphere of implementation and practice rather than laws or principles. But on the whole, India can be considered a good example of a 'state-nation' though it is not entirely free from the problems common to nation-states.

National unity with cultural diversity – Building a democratic "state-nation"

BOX 6.3

An alternative to the nation-state, then, is the "state nation", where various "nations"— be they ethnic, religious, linguistic or indigenous identities— can co-exist peacefully and cooperatively in a single state polity.
Case studies and analyses demonstrate that enduring democracies can be established in polities that are multicultural. Explicit efforts are required to end the

cultural exclusion of diverse groups … and to build multiple and complementary identities. Such responsive policies provide incentives to build a feeling of unity in diversity — a "we" feeling. Citizens can find the institutional and political space to identify with both their country and their other cultural identities, to build their trust in common institutions and to participate in and support democratic politics. All of these are key factors in consolidating and deepening democracies and building enduring "state-nations".

India's constitution incorporates this notion. Although India is culturally diverse, comparative surveys of long-standing democracies including India show that it has been very cohesive, despite its diversity. But modern India is facing a grave challenge to its constitutional commitment to multiple and complementary identities with the rise of groups that seek to impose a singular Hindu identity on the country. These threats undermine the sense of inclusion and violate the rights of minorities in India today. Recent communal violence raises serious concerns for the prospects for social harmony and threatens to undermine the country's earlier achievements.

And these achievements have been considerable. Historically, India's constitutional design recognised and responded to distinct group claims and enabled the polity to hold together despite enormous regional, linguistic and cultural diversity. As evident from India's performance on indicators of identification, trust and support (Chart 1), its citizens are deeply committed to the country and to democracy, despite the country's diverse and highly stratified society. This performance is particularly impressive when compared with that of other long-standing—and wealthier—democracies.

The challenge is in reinvigorating India's commitment to practices of pluralism, institutional accommodation and conflict resolution through democratic means. Critical for building a multicultural democracy is a recognition of the shortcomings of historical nation-building exercises and of the benefits of multiple and complementary identities. Also important are efforts to build the loyalties of all groups in society through identification, trust and support. National cohesion does not require the imposition of a single identity and the denunciation of diversity. Successful strategies to build "state-nations" can and do accommodate diversity constructively by crafting responsive policies of cultural recognition. They are effective solutions for ensuring the longer terms objectives of political stability and social harmony.

Source: Adapted from UNDP Human Development Report 2004, Ch.3, Feature 3.1

CHART 1: FOSTERING CULTURAL DIVERSITY STRENGTHENS

FAITH IN THE INDIAN STATE

Trust, support and identification: poor and diverse countries can do well with multicultural policies
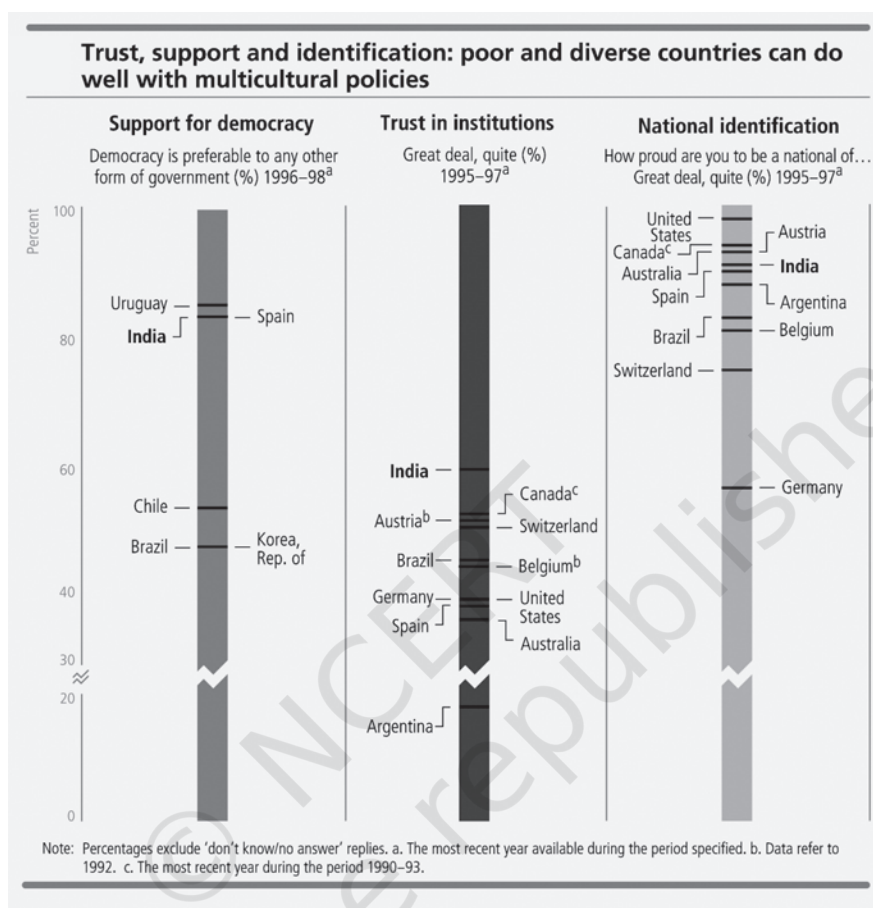
Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2004, Ch.3, Feature 3.1, Figure 2.

6.2 REGIONALISM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Regionalism in India is rooted in India's diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, and religions. It is also encouraged by the geographical concentration of these identity markers in particular regions, and fuelled by a sense of regional deprivation. Indian federalism has been a means of accommodating these regional sentiments. (Bhattacharyya 2005).

After Independence, initially the Indian state continued with the British-Indian arrangement dividing India into large provinces, also called 'presidencies'. (Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta were the three major presidencies; incidentally, all three cities after which the presidencies were named have changed their names recently). These were large multi-ethnic and multilingual provincial states constituting the major political-administrative units of a semi-federal state

called the Union of India. For example, the old Bombay State (continuation of the Bombay Presidency) was a multilingual state of Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada and Konkani speaking people. Similarly, the Madras State was constituted by Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam speaking people. In addition to the presidencies and provinces directly administered by the British Indian government, there were also a large number of princely states and principalities all over India. The larger princely states included Mysore, Kashmir, and Baroda. But soon after the adoption of the Constitution, all these units of the colonial era had to be reorganised into ethno-linguistic States within the Indian union in response to strong popular agitations. (See Box 6.4 on the next page).

Linguistic States Helped Strengthen Indian Unity

The Report of the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) which was implemented on November 1, 1956, has helped transform the political and institutional life of the nation.

The background to the SRC is as follows. In the 1920s, the Indian National Congress was reconstituted on lingusitic lines. Its provincial units now followed the logic of language – one for Marathi speakers, another for Oriya speakers, etc. At the same time, Gandhi and other leaders promised their followers that when freedom came, the new nation would be based on a new set of provinces based on the principle of language.

However, when India was finally freed in 1947, it was also divided. Now, when the proponents of linguistic states asked for this promise to be redeemed, the Congress hesitated. Partition was the consequence of intense attachment to one's faith; how many more partitions would that other intense loyalty, language, lead to? So ran the thinking of the top Congress bosses including Nehru, Patel and Rajaji.

On the other side, the rank and file Congressmen were all for the redrawing of the map of India on the lines of language. Vigorous movements arose among Marathi and Kannada speakers, who were then spread across several different political regimes – the erstwhile Bombay and Madras presidencies, and former princely states such as Mysore and Hyderabad. However, the most militant protests ensued from the very large community of Telugu speakers. In October 1953, Potti Sriramulu, a former Gandhian, died seven weeks after beginning a fast unto death. Potti Sriramulu's martyrdom provoked violent protests and led to the creation of the state of Andhra Pradesh. It also led to the formation of the SRC, which in 1956 put the formal, final seal of approval on the principle of linguistic states.

In the early 1950s, many including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru feared that states based on language might hasten a further subdivision of India. In fact, something like the reverse has happened. Far from undermining Indian unity, linguistic states have helped strengthen it. It has proved to be perfectly consistent to be Kannadiga and Indian, Bengali and Indian, Tamil and Indian, Gujarati and Indian…

To be sure, these states based on language sometimes quarrel with each other. While these disputes are not pretty, they could in fact have been far worse. In the same year, 1956, that the SRC mandated the redrawing of the map of India on linguistic lines, the Parliament of Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known) proclaimed Sinhala the country's sole official language despite protests from the Tamils of the north. One left-wing Sinhala MP issued a prophetic warning to the chauvinists. "One language, two nations", he said, adding: "Two languages, one nation".

The civil war that has raged in Sri Lanka since 1983 is partly based on the denial by the majority linguistic group of the rights of the minority. Another of India's neighbours, Pakistan, was divided in 1971 because the Punjabi and Urdu speakers of its western wing would not respect the sentiments of the Bengalis in the east.

It is the formation of linguistic states that has allowed India to escape an even worse fate. If the aspirations of the Indian language communities had been ignored, what we might have had here was – "One language, fourteen or fifteen nations."

Adapted from an article by Ramachandra Guha *in the Times of India, 1 November 2006.*

Language coupled with regional and tribal identity – and not religion – has therefore provided the most powerful instrument for the formation of ethno-national identity in India. However, this does not mean that all linguistic communities have got statehood. For instance, in the creation of three new states in 2000, namely Chhatisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand, language did not play a prominent role. Rather, a combination of ethnicity based on tribal identity, language, regional deprivation and ecology provided the basis for intense regionalism resulting in statehood. Currently there are 28 States (federal units) and 7 Union territories (centrally administered) within the Indian nation-state.

NOTE: In this chapter, the word "State" has a capital S when it is used to denote the federal units within the Indian nation-state; the lower case 'state' is used for the broader conceptual category described above.

Couples from different regions 1880s to 1930s: Clockwise from top left corner: Gujarat; Tripura; Bombay; Aligarh; Hyderabad; Goa; Calcutta. From Malavika Karlekar, Visualising Indian Women 1875-1947, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

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ACTIVITY 6.4

Find out about the origins of your own State. When was it formed? What were the main criteria used to define it? – Was it language, ethnic/tribal identity, regional deprivation, ecological difference or other criterion? How does this compare with other States within the Indian nation-state?

Try to classify all the States of India in terms of the criteria for their formation.

Are you aware of any current social movements that are demanding the creation of a State? Try to find out the criteria being used by these movements. (Hint: Check the Telengana and Vidarbha movements, and others in your region...)

Respecting regional sentiments is not just a matter of creating States: this has to be backed up with an institutional structure that ensures their viability as relatively autonomous units within a larger federal structure. In India this is done by Constitutional provisions defining the powers of the States and the Centre. There are lists of 'subjects' or areas of governance which are the exclusive responsibility of either State or Centre, along with a 'Concurrent List' of areas where both are allowed to operate. The State legislatures determine the composition of the upper house of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha. In addition there are periodic committees and commissions that decide on Centre-State relations. An example is the Finance Commission which is set up every ten years to decide on sharing of tax revenues between Centre and States. Each Five Year Plan also involves detailed State Plans prepared by the State Planning Commissions of each state.

On the whole the federal system has worked fairly well, though there remain many contentious issues. Since the era of liberalisation (i.e., since the 1990s) there is concern among policy makers, politicians and scholars about increasing inter-regional economic and infrastructural inequalities. As private investment (both foreign and Indian) is given a greater role in economic development, considerations of regional equity get diluted. This happens because private investors generally want to invest in already developed States where the infrastructure and other facilities are better. Unlike private industry, the government can give some consideration to regional equity (and other social goals) rather than just seek to maximise profits. So left to itself, the market economy tends to increase the gap between developed and backward regions. Fresh public initiatives will be needed to reverse current trends.

6.3 THE NATION-STATE AND RELIGION-RELATED ISSUES AND IDENTITIES

Perhaps the most contentious of all aspects of cultural diversity are issues relating to religious communities and religion-based identities. These issues may be broadly divided into two related groups – the secularism–communalism set and the minority–majority set. Questions of secularism and communalism are about the state's relationship to religion and to political groupings that invoke religion as their primary identity. Questions about minorities and majorities involve decisions on how the state is to treat different religious, ethnic

or other communities that are *unequal* in terms of numbers and/or power (including social, economic and political power).

MINORITY RIGHTS AND NATION BUILDING

In Indian nationalism, the dominant trend was marked by an inclusive and democratic vision. Inclusive because it recognised diversity and plurality. Democratic because it sought to do away with discrimination and exclusion and bring forth a just and equitable society. The term 'people' has not been seen in exclusive terms, as referring to any specific group defined by religion, ethnicity, race or caste. Ideas of humanism influenced Indian nationalists and the ugly aspects of exclusive nationalism were extensively commented upon by leading figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

Rabindranath Tagore on the evils of exclusive nationalism   Box 6.5

…where the spirit of the Western nationalism prevails, the whole people is being taught from boyhood to foster hatreds and ambitions by all kinds of means -- by the manufacture of half-truths and untruths in history, by persistent misrepresentation of other races and the culture of unfavourable sentiments towards them…Never think for a moment that the hurt you inflict upon other races will not infect you, or that the enemities you sow around your homes will be a wall of protection to you for all time to come? To imbue the minds of a whole people with an abnormal vanity of its own superiority, to teach it to take pride in its moral callousness and ill-begotten wealth, to perpetuate humiliation of defeated nations by exhibiting trophies won from war, and using these schools in order to breed in children's minds contempt for others, is imitating the West where she has a festering sore…

Source: On Nationalism by Rabindranath Tagore. First published in 1917, Reprint Edition of Macmillan, Madras 1930.

To be effective, the ideas of inclusive nationalism had to be built into the Constitution. For, as already discussed (in section 6.1), there is a very strong tendency for the dominant group to assume that their culture or language or religion is synonymous with the nation state. However, for a strong and democratic nation, special constitutional provisions are required to ensure the rights of all groups and those of minority groups in particular. A brief discussion on the definition of minorities will enable us to appreciate the importance of safeguarding minority rights for a strong, united and democratic nation.

The notion of minority groups is widely used in sociology and is more than a merely numerical distinction – it usually involves some sense of relative disadvantage. Thus, privileged minorities such as extremely wealthy people are not usually referred to as minorities; if they are, the term is qualified in some way, as in the phrase 'privileged minority'. When minority is used without qualification, it generally implies a relatively small but also disadvantaged group.

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The sociological sense of minority also implies that the members of the minority form a collectivity – that is, they have a strong sense of group solidarity, a feeling of togetherness and belonging. This is linked to disadvantage because the experience of being subjected to prejudice and discrimination usually heightens feelings of intra-group loyalty and interests (Giddens 2001:248). Thus, groups that may be minorities in a statistical sense, such as people who are left-handed or people born on 29th February, are not minorities in the sociological sense because they do not form a collectivity.

A Kashmiri girl

However, it is possible to have anomalous instances where a minority group is disadvantaged in one sense but not in another. Thus, for example, religious minorities like the Parsis or Sikhs may be relatively well-off economically. But they may still be disadvantaged in a cultural sense because of their small numbers relative to the overwhelming majority of Hindus. Religious or cultural minorities need special protection because of the demographic dominance of the majority. In democratic politics, it is always possible to convert a numerical majority into political power through elections. This means that religious or cultural minorities – regardless of their economic or social position – are politically vulnerable. They must face the risk that the majority community will capture political power and use the state machinery to suppress their religious or cultural institutions, ultimately forcing them to abandon their distinctive identity.

Left Margin: Food from different parts of India; Right top: Child dressed in Kashmiri Clothes; Bottom: Dolls dressed in costumes of different Indian States.

Relative size and distribution of religious minorities   **Box 6.6**

As is well known, Hindus constitute an overwhelming majority in India: they number about 828 millions and account for 80.5% of the total population according to the 2001 Census. The Hindu population is *four times larger* than the combined population of all other minority religions, and about *six times larger* than the largest minority group, the Muslims.

However, this can also be misleading because Hindus are not a homogenous group and are divided by caste – as indeed are all the other major religions, albeit to different extents. The Muslims are by far the largest religious minority in India – they numbered 138 millions and were 13.4% of the population in 2001. They are scattered all over the country, constitute a majority in Jammu and Kashmir and have sizeable pockets in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan.

Christians constitute around 2.3% of the population (24 million) and are scattered all over, with sizeable pockets in the north eastern and southern states. The three Christian-majority states are all in the North East – Nagaland (90%), Mizoram (87%) and Meghalaya (70%). Sizeable proportions of Christians are also found in Goa (27%) and Kerala (19%).

The Sikhs constitute 1.9% of the population (19 million) and although they are found scattered across the country, they are concentrated in Punjab where they are in a majority (60%).

There are also several other small religious groups – Buddhists (8 million, 0.8%), Jains (4 million, 0.4%), and 'Other Religions and Persuasions' (under 7 million, 0.7%). The highest proportion of Buddhists is found in Sikkim (28%) and Arunachal Pradesh (13%), while among the larger states Maharashtra has the highest share of Buddhists at 6%. The highest concentrations of Jains are found in Maharashtra (1.3%), Rajasthan (1.2%) and Gujarat (1%).

In the long years of struggle against British colonialism, Indian nationalists understood the imperative need to recognise and respect India's diversity. Indeed 'unity in diversity' became a short hand to capture the plural and diverse nature of Indian society. Discussions on minority and cultural rights mark many of the deliberations of the Indian National Congress and find final expression in the Indian Constitution (Zaidi 1984).

Dr. Ambedkar on protection of minorities   **Box 6.7**

To diehards who have developed a kind of fanaticism against minority protection I would like to say two things. One is that *minorities are an explosive force which, if it erupts, can blow up the whole fabric of the state.* The history of Europe bears ample and appalling testimony to this fact. The other is that the minorities in India have agreed to place their existence in the hands of the majority. In the history of negotiations for preventing the partition of Ireland, Redmond said to Carson "Ask for any safeguard you like for the Protestant minority but let us have a United Ireland." Carson's reply was "Damn your safeguards, we don't want to be ruled by you." No minority in India has taken this stand.

[John Redmond, Catholic majority leader; Sir Edward Carson, Protestant minority leader]

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(Source: Constituent Assembly Debates 1950: 310-311, cited in Narang 2002:63)

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956)

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar Buddhist revivalist, jurist, scholar and political leader, is the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Born in a poor untouchable community, he spent his life fighting against untouchability and the caste system.

Parliament building

The makers of the Indian Constitution were aware that a strong and united nation could be built only when all sections of people had the freedom to practice their religion, and to develop their culture and language. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution, made this point clear in the Constituent Assembly, as shown in Box 6.7.

In the last three decades we have witnessed how non-recognition of the rights of different groups of people in a country can have grave implications for national unity. One of key issues that led to the formation of Bangladesh was the unwillingness of the Pakistani state to recognise the cultural and linguistic rights of the people of Bangladesh.

The Indian Constitution on minorities and cultural diversity   Box 6.8

Article 29:

(1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.

(2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or received out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

Article 30:

(1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

(2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

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One of the many contentious issues that formed the backdrop of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was the imposition of Sinhalese as a national language. Likewise any forcible imposition of a language or religion on any group of people in India weakens national unity which is based upon a recognition of differences. Indian nationalism recognises this, and the Indian Constitution affirms this (Box 6.8).

Finally, it is useful to note that minorities exist everywhere, not just in India. In most nation-states, there tend to be a dominant social group whether cultural, ethnic, racial or religious. Nowhere in the world is there a nation-state consisting exclusively of a single homogenous cultural group. Even where this was almost true (as in countries like Iceland, Sweden or South Korea), modern capitalism, colonialism and large scale migration have brought in a plurality of groups. Even the smallest state will have minorities, whether in religious, ethnic, linguistic or racial terms.

## COMMUNALISM, SECULARISM AND THE NATION-STATE

COMMUNALISM

In everyday language, the word '**communalism**' refers to aggressive chauvinism based on religious identity. Chauvinism itself is an attitude that sees one's own group as the only legitimate or worthy group, with other groups being seen – by definition – as inferior, illegitimate and opposed. Thus, to simplify further, communalism is an aggressive political ideology linked to religion. This is a peculiarly Indian, or perhaps South Asian, meaning that is different from the sense of the ordinary English word. In the English language, "communal" means something related to a community or collectivity as different from an individual. The English meaning is neutral, whereas the South Asian meaning is strongly charged. The charge may be seen as positive – if one is sympathetic to communalism – or negative, if one is opposed to it.

> ## ACTIVITY 6.5
>
> There are many instances of a 'majority' in one context being converted into a 'minority' in another context (or the other way around). Find out about concrete examples of this, and discuss the implications.
> Remember that the sociological concept of a minority involves not just relative numbers but also relative power.
> (Suggestions: Whites in South Africa before and after the end of apartheid; Hindus in Kashmir; Muslims in Gujarat; Upper castes among Hindus; Tribals in North Eastern states;)

Different religious worship places
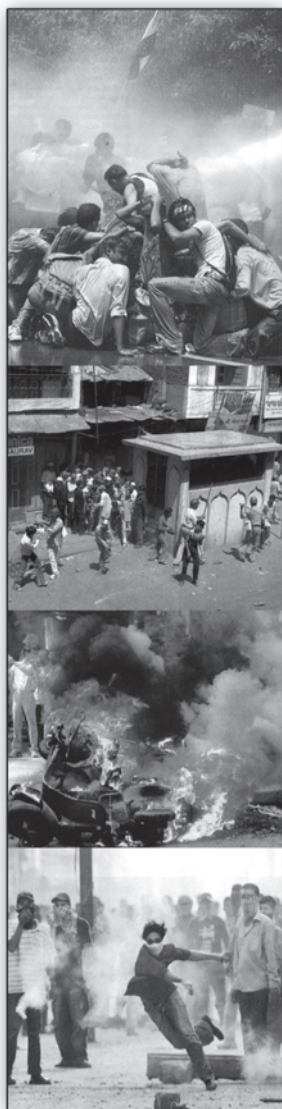
Communal riots

It is important to emphasise that communalism is about politics, not about religion. Although communalists are intensely involved with religion, there is in fact no necessary relationship between personal faith and communalism. A communalist may or may not be a devout person, and devout believers may or may not be communalists. However, all communalists do believe in a *political identity* based on religion. The key factor is the attitude towards those who believe in other kinds of identities, including other religion-based identities. Communalists cultivate an aggressive political identity, and are prepared to condemn or attack everyone who does not share their identity.

One of the characteristic features of communalism is its claim that religious identity overrides everything else. Whether one is poor or rich, whatever one's occupation, caste or political beliefs, it is religion alone that counts. All Hindus are the same as are all Muslims, Sikhs and so on. This has the effect of constructing large and diverse groups as singular and homogenous. It is noteworthy that this is done for one's own group as well as for others. This would obviously rule out the possibility that Hindus, Muslims and Christians who belong to Kerala, for example, may have as much or more in common with each other than with their co-religionists from Kashmir, Gujarat or Nagaland. It also denies the possibility that, for instance, landless agricultural labourers (or industrialists) may have a lot in common even if they belong to different religions and regions.

Communalism is an especially important issue in India because it has been a recurrent source of tension and violence. During communal riots, people become faceless members of their respective communities. They are willing to kill, rape, and loot members of other communities in order to redeem their pride, to protect their home turf. A commonly cited justification is to avenge the deaths or dishonour suffered by their co-religionists elsewhere or even in the distant past. No region has been wholly exempt from communal violence of one kind or another. Every religious community has faced this violence in greater or lesser degree, although the proportionate impact is far more traumatic for minority communities. To the extent that governments can be held responsible for communal riots, no government or ruling party can claim to be blameless in this regard. In fact, the two most traumatic contemporary instances of communal violence occurred under each of the major political parties. The anti-Sikh riots of Delhi in 1984 took place under a Congress regime. The unprecedented scale and spread of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 took place under a BJP government.

India has had a history of communal riots from pre-Independence times, often as a result of the divide-and-rule policy adopted by the colonial rulers. But colonialism did not invent inter-community conflicts – there is also a long history of pre-colonial conflicts – and it certainly cannot be blamed for post-Independence riots and killings. Indeed, if we wish to look for instances of

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> ## Kabir Das – A Lasting Symbol of Syncretic Traditions
> **Box 6.9**
>
> The poems of Kabir, synthesising Hindu and Muslim devotion are cherished symbols of pluralism:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | *Moko Kahan Dhundhe re Bande* | Where do you search for me? |
> | *Mein To Tere Paas Mein* | I am with you |
> | *Na Teerath Mein, Na Moorat Mein* | Not in pilgrimage, nor in icons |
> | *Na Ekant Niwas Mein* | Neither in solitude |
> | *Na Mandir Mein, Na Masjid Mein* | Not in temples, nor in mosques |
> | *Na Kabe Kailas Mein* | Neither in *Kaaba* nor in *Kailash* |
> | *Mein To Tere Paas Mein Bande* | I am with you o man |
> | *Mein To Tere Paas Mein…* | I am with you … |

religious, cultural, regional or ethnic conflict they can be found in almost every phase of our history. But we should not forget that we also have a long tradition of religious pluralism, ranging from peaceful co-existence to actual inter-mixing or syncretism. This syncretic heritage is clearly evident in the devotional songs and poetry of the Bhakti and Sufi movements (Box 6.9). In short, history provides us with both good and bad examples; what we wish to learn from it is up to us.

SECULARISM

As we have seen above, the meanings of the terms communal and communalism are more or less clear, despite the bitter controversies between supporters and opponents. By contrast, the terms 'secular' and 'secularism' are very hard to define clearly, although they are also equally controversial. In fact, **secularism** is among the most complex terms in social and political theory. In the western context the main sense of these terms has to do with the separation of church and state. The separation of religious and political authority marked a major turning point in the social history of the west. This separation was related to the process of "secularisation", or the progressive retreat of religion from public life, as it was converted from a mandatory obligation to a voluntary personal practice. Secularisation in turn was related to the arrival of modernity and the rise of science and rationality as alternatives to religious ways of understanding the world.

The Indian meanings of secular and secularism include the western sense but also involve others. The most common use of secular in everyday language is as the opposite of communal. So, a secular person or state is one that does not favour any particular religion over others. Secularism in this sense is the opposite of religious chauvinism and it need not necessarily imply hostility to religion as such. In terms of the state-religion relationship, this sense of

> ## ACTIVITY 6.6
>
> Talk to your parents and the elders in your family and collect from them poems, songs, short stories which highlight issues such as religious pluralism, syncretism or communal harmony. When you have collected all this material and presented them in class, you may be pleasantly surprised to learn how broad based our traditions of religious pluralism are, and how widely they are shared across different linguistic groups, regions and religions.

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secularism implies equal respect for all religions, rather than separation or distancing. For example, the secular Indian state declares public holidays to mark the festivals of all religions.

One kind of difficulty is created by the tension between the western sense of the state maintaining a distance from all religions and the Indian sense of the state giving equal respect to all religions. Supporters of each sense are upset by whatever the state does to uphold the other sense. Should a secular state provide subsidies for the Haj pilgrimage, or manage the Tirupati-Tirumala temple complex, or support pilgrimages to Himalayan holy places? Should all religious holidays be abolished, leaving only Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti for example? Should a secular state ban cow slaughter because cows are holy for a particular religion? If it does so, should it also ban pig slaughter because another religion prohibits the eating of pork? If Sikh soldiers in the army are allowed to have long hair and wear turbans, should Hindu soldiers also be allowed to shave their heads or Muslim soldiers allowed to have long beards? Questions of this sort lead to passionate disagreements that are hard to settle.

Another set of complications is created by the tension between the Indian state's simultaneous commitment to secularism as well as the protection of minorities. The protection of minorities requires that they be given special consideration in a context where the normal working of the political system places them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the majority community. But providing such protection immediately invites the accusation of favouritism or 'appeasement' of minorities. Opponents argue that secularism of this sort is only an excuse to favour the minorities in return for their votes or other kinds of support. Supporters argue that without such special protection, secularism can turn into an excuse for imposing the majority community's values and norms on the minorities.

These kinds of controversies become harder to solve when political parties and social movements develop a vested interest in keeping them alive. In recent times, communalists of all religions have contributed to the deadlock. The resurgence and newly acquired political power of the Hindu communalists has added a further dimension of complexity. Clearly a lot needs to be done to improve our understanding of secularism as a principle and our practice of it as a policy. But despite everything, it is still true that India's Constitution and legal structure has proved to be reasonably effective in handling the problems created by various kinds of communalism.

The first generation of leaders of independent India (who happened to be overwhelmingly Hindu and upper caste) chose to have a liberal, secular state governed by a democratic constitution. Accordingly, the 'state' was conceived in culturally neutral terms, and the 'nation' was also conceived as an inclusive territorial-political community of all citizens. Nation building was viewed mainly as a state-driven process of economic development and social transformation.

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The expectation was that the universalisation of citizenship rights and the induction of cultural pluralities into the democratic process of open and competitive politics would evolve new, civic equations among ethnic communities, and between them and the state (Sheth:1999). These expectations may not have materialised in the manner expected. But ever since Independence, the people of India, through their direct political participation and election verdicts have repeatedly asserted their support for a secular Constitution and state. Their voices should count.

6.4 STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

You may have noticed that much of this chapter has been concerned with the state. The **state** is indeed a very crucial institution when it comes to the management of cultural diversity in a nation. Although it claims to represent the nation, the state can also become somewhat independent of the nation and its people. To the extent that the state structure – the legislature, bureaucracy, judiciary, armed forces, police and other arms of the state – becomes insulated from the people, it also has the potential of turning authoritarian. An authoritarian state is the opposite of a democratic state. It is a state in which the people have no voice and those in power are not accountable to anyone. Authoritarian states often limit or abolish civil liberties like freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of political activity, right to protection from wrongful use of authority, right to the due processes of the law, and so on. Apart from **authoritarianism**, there is also the possibility that state institutions become unable or unwilling to respond to the needs of the people because of corruption, inefficiency, or lack of resources. In short, there are many reasons why a state may not be all that it should be. Non-state actors and institutions become important in this context, for they can keep a watch on the state, protest against its injustices or supplement its efforts.

Civil society is the name given to the broad arena which lies beyond the private domain of the family, but outside the domain of both state and market. Civil society is the non-state and non-market part of the public domain in which individuals get together voluntarily to create institutions and organisations. It is the sphere of active citizenship: here, individuals take up social issues, try to influence the state or make demands on it, pursue their collective interests or seek support for a variety of causes. It consists of voluntary associations, organisations or institutions formed by groups of citizens. It includes political parties, media institutions, trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious organisations, and other kinds of collective entities. The main criteria for inclusion in civil society are that the organisation should not be state-controlled, and it should not be a purely commercial profit-making entity. Thus, Doordarshan is not part of civil society though private television channels are; a car manufacturing company is not part of civil society but the trade unions to which its workers belong are. Of course these criteria allow for a lot of grey areas. For

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example, a newspaper may be run like a purely commercial enterprise, or an NGO may be supported by government funds.

The Indian people had a brief experience of authoritarian rule during the 'Emergency' enforced between June 1975 and January 1977. Parliament was suspended and new laws were made directly by the government. Civil liberties were revoked and a large number of politically active people were arrested and jailed without trial. Censorship was imposed on the media and government officials could be dismissed without normal procedures. The government coerced lower level officials to implement its programmes and produce instant results. The most notorious was the forced sterilisation campaign in which large numbers died due to surgical complications. When elections were held unexpectedly in early 1977, the people voted overwhelmingly against the ruling Congress Party.

The Emergency shocked people into active participation and helped energise the many civil society initiatives that emerged in the 1970s. This period saw the resurgence of a wide variety of social movements including the women's, environmental, human rights and dalit movements. Today the activities of civil society organisations have an even wider range, including advocacy and lobbying activity with national and international agencies as well as active participation

Forcing the State to Respond to the People: The Right to Information Act

Box 6.10

The Right to Information Act 2005 (Act No. 22/2005) is a law enacted by the Parliament of India giving Indians (except those in the State of Jammu and Kashmir who have their own special law) access to Government records. Under the terms of the Act, any person may request information from a "public authority" (a body of Government or instrumentality of State) which is expected to reply expeditiously or within thirty days. The Act also requires every public authority to computerise their records for wide dissemination and to proactively publish certain categories of information so that the citizens need minimum recourse to request for information formally.

This law was passed by Parliament on 15 June 2005 and came into force on 13 October 2005. Information disclosure in India was hitherto restricted by the Official Secrets Act 1923 and various other special laws, which the new RTI Act now overrides.

The Act specifies that citizens have a right to:
➢ request any information (as defined)
➢ take copies of documents
   ➢ inspect documents, works and records
   ➢ take certified samples of materials of work.
   ➢ obtain information in form of printouts, diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts.

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in various movements. The issues taken up are diverse, ranging from tribal struggles for land rights, devolution in urban governance, campaigns against rape and violence against women, rehabilitation of those displaced by dams and other developmental projects, fishermen's struggles against mechanised fishing, rehabilitation of hawkers and pavement dwellers, campaigns against slum demolitions and for housing rights, primary education reform, distribution of land to dalits, and so on. Civil liberties organisations have been particularly important in keeping a watch on the state and forcing it to obey the law. The media, too, has taken an increasingly active role, specially its emergent visual and electronic segments.

Among the most significant recent initiatives is the campaign for the Right to Information. Beginning with an agitation in rural Rajasthan for the release of information on government funds spent on village development, this effort grew into a nation-wide campaign. Despite the resistance of the bureaucracy, the government was forced to respond to the campaign and pass a new law formally acknowledging the citizens' right to information (Box 6.10). Examples of this sort illustrate the crucial importance of civil society in ensuring that the state is accountable to the nation and its people.

> ## ACTIVITY 6.9
>
> Find out about the civil society organisations or NGOs that are active in your neighbourhood. What sorts of issues do they take up? What sort of people work in them? How and to what extent are these organisations different from
> a) government organisations;
> b) commercial organisations?

Questions

1. What is meant by cultural diversity? Why is India considered to be a very diverse country?

2. What is community identity and how is it formed?

3. Why is it difficult to define the nation? How are nation and state related in modern society?

4. Why are states often suspicious of cultural diversity?

5. What is regionalism? What factors is it usually based on?

6. In your opinion, has the linguistic reorganisation of states helped or harmed India?

7. What is a 'minority'? Why do minorities need protection from the state?

8. What is communalism?

9. What are the different senses in which 'secularism' has been understood in India?

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10. What is the relevance of civil society organisations today?

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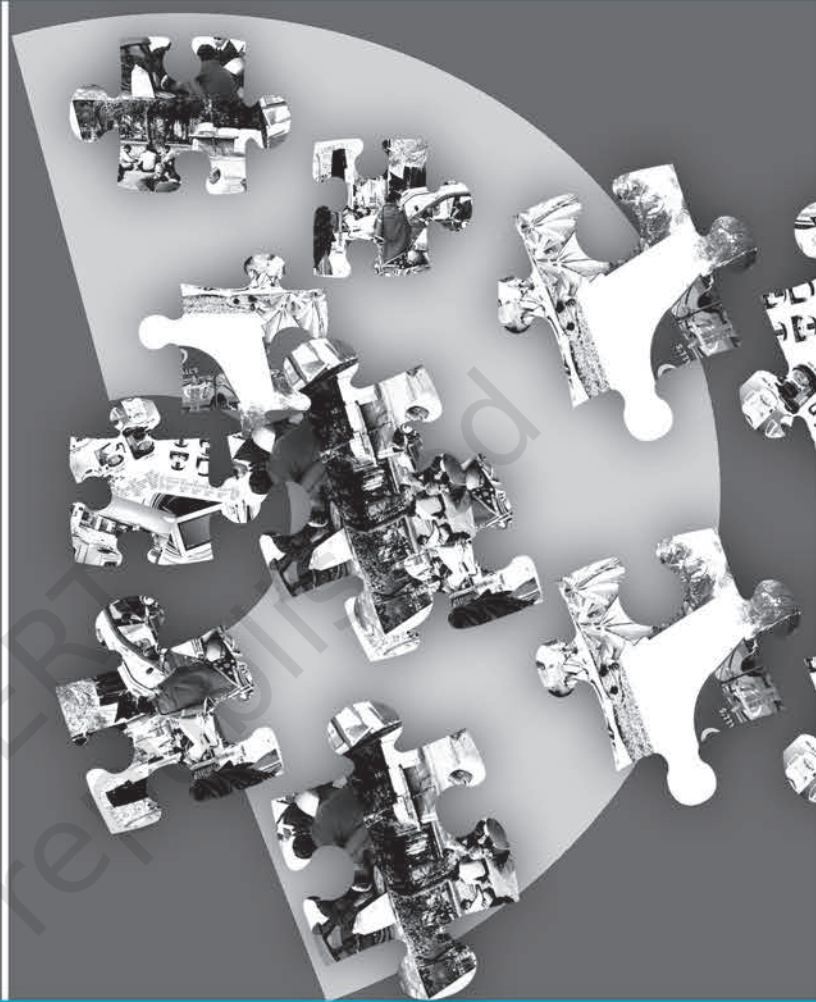Chandra, Bipan. 1987. *Communalism in Modern India.* Vikas Publishing House. New Delhi.

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Chapter 7

Suggestions for Project Work

$\mathcal{T}$ his chapter suggests some small practical research projects that you can try out. There is a big difference between reading about research and actually doing it. Practical experience of trying to answer a question and collecting evidence systematically is a very valuable experience. This experience will hopefully introduce you to the excitement and also some of the difficulties of sociological research. Before you read this chapter, please refer once again to Chapter 5 ("Doing Sociology: Research Methods") in the Class XI textbook, *Introducing Sociology.*

The projects suggested here have tried to anticipate the potential problems of organising this kind of activity for large number of students in different kinds of schools located in different kinds of contexts. These are intended just to give you a feel for research. A "real" research project would obviously be more elaborate and involve much more time and effort than is possible in your setting. These are meant as suggestions; feel free to think up ideas of your own in consultation with your teachers.

Every research question needs an appropriate or suitable research method. A given question may be answered with more than one method, but a given research method is not necessarily appropriate for all questions. In other words, for most research questions one has a choice of possible methods but this choice is usually limited. One of the first tasks of the researcher – after carefully specifying the research question – is to select a suitable method. This selection must be done not only according to technical criteria (i.e., the degree of compatibility between question and method), but also practical considerations. These latter might include the amount of time available to do the research; the resources available in terms of both people and materials; the circumstances or situations in which it has to be done, and so on.

For example, let us suppose you are interested in comparing co-educational schools with 'boys only' or 'girls only' schools. This, of course, is a broad topic. You must first formulate a specific question that you want to answer. Examples could be: Do students in co-educational schools do better in studies than students in boys/girls only schools? Are boys only schools always better than co-educational schools in sports? Are children in single sex schools happier than children in co-educational schools, or some other such question. Having decided on a specific question, the next step is to choose the appropriate method.

For the last question, 'Are school children in single sex schools happier?', for example, you could choose to interview students of different kinds of schools. In the interview you could ask them directly how they felt about their school. You could then analyse the answers you collect to see if there is any difference between those who attend different kinds of schools. As an alternative, you could try to use a different method – say that of direct observation – to answer the research question. This means that you would have to spend time in co-educational and boys/girls schools, observing how students behave. You would have to decide on some criteria by which you could say if students are

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more or less happy with their school. So, after observing different kinds of schools for sufficient time, you could hope to answer your question. A third method you could use is the survey method. This would involve preparing a questionnaire designed to get information on how students felt about their schools. You would then distribute the questionnaire to an equal number of students in each kind of school. You would then collect the filled-in questionnaires and analyse the results.

Here are some examples of some practical difficulties that you might face when doing research of this kind. Suppose you decide to do a survey. You must first make enough copies of the questionnaire. This involves time, effort and money. Next, you may need permission from teachers to distribute the questionnaire to students in their classrooms. You may not get permission the first time, or you may be asked to come back later….. After you have distributed the questionnaire you may find that many people have not bothered to return it to you or have not answered all questions, or other such problems. You then have to decide how to deal with this – go back to your respondents and ask them to complete the questionnaires; or ignore the incomplete questionnaires and consider only the complete ones; consider only the completed answers, and so on. You must be prepared to deal with such problems during research work.

7.1 Variety of Methods

You may remember the discussion of research methods in Chapter 5 of the Class XI textbook, *Introducing Sociology*. This may be a good time to revisit this chapter and refresh your memory.

Survey Method

A survey usually involves asking a relatively large number of people (such as 30, 100, 2000, and so on; what is considered 'large' depends on the context and the kind of topic) the same fixed set of questions. The questions may be asked by an investigator in person where they are read out to the respondent, and his/her answers are noted down by the investigator. Or the questionnaire may be handed over to the respondents who then fill it up themselves and give it back. The main advantage of the survey is that it can cover a lot of people, so that the results are truly representative of the relevant group or population. The disadvantage is that the questions to be asked are already fixed. No on-the-spot adjustments are possible. So, if a question is misunderstood by the respondents, then wrong or misleading results can be produced. If a respondent says something interesting then this cannot be followed up with further questions on the subject because you have to stick to the questionnaire format. Moreover, questionnaires are like a snapshot taken at one particular moment. The situation may change later or may have been different before, but the survey wouldn't capture this.

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INTERVIEWS

An interview is different from a survey in that it is always conducted in person and usually involves much fewer persons (as few as 5, 20, or 40, usually not much more than that). Interviews may be *structured*, that is, follow a pre-determined pattern of questions or *unstructured*, where only a set of topics is pre-decided, and the actual questions emerge as part of a conversation. Interviews may be more or less *intensive*, in the sense that one may interview a person for a long time (2-3 hours) or in repeated visits to get a really detailed version of their story.

Interviews have the advantage of being flexible in that promising topics may be pursued in greater detail, questions may be refined or modified along the way, and clarifications may be sought. The disadvantage of the interview method is that it cannot cover a large number of people and is limited to presenting the views of a select group of individuals.

OBSERVATION

Observation is a method where the researcher must systematically watch and record what is happening in whatever context or situation that has been chosen for the research. This sounds simple but may not always be easy to do in practice. Careful attention has to be paid to what is happening without pre-judging what is relevant to the study and what is not. Sometimes, what is *not* happening is as important or interesting as what does actually happen. For example, if your research question is about how different classes of people use specific open spaces, then it is significant that a given class or group of people (say poor people, or middle class people for example) never enter the space, or are never seen in it.

COMBINATIONS OF MORE THAN ONE METHOD

You can also try to combine methods to approach the same research question from different angles. In fact, this is often highly recommended. For example, if you are researching the changing place of mass media sources like newspapers and television in social life, you could combine a survey with archival methods. The survey will tell you about what is happening today, while the archival methods might tell you about what magazines, newspapers or television programmes were like in the past.

## 7.2 POSSIBLE THEMES AND SUBJECTS FOR SMALL RESEARCH PROJECTS

Here are some suggestions about possible research topics; you can always choose other topics in consultation with your teachers. Remember that these

are only topics – you need to select specific *questions* based on these topics. Remember also that most methods can be used with most of these topics, but that the specific question chosen must be suitable for the method chosen. You can also use combinations of methods. The topics are in no particular order. Topics that are not obviously or directly derived from your textbooks have been emphasised because it will be easier for you and your teachers to think of your own project related to the texts.

1. PUBLIC TRANSPORT

What part does it play in people's lives? Who needs it? Why do they need it? To what degree are different types of people dependent on public transport? What sorts of problems and issues are associated with public transport? How have forms of public transport been changing over time? Does differential access to public transport cause social problems? Are there groups who do not need public transport? What is their attitude towards it? You could also take up the case of a particular form of transport – say the tonga, or the rickshaw, or the train – and write about its history in relation to your town or city. What are the changes this mode of transport has gone through? Who have been its main rivals? Is the competition with rivals being lost or won? For what reasons? What is the likely future of this mode of transport? Will anyone miss it?

If you live in Delhi, try to find out more about the Delhi Metro. Could you write a science-fiction like account of what the Metro would be like fifty years from now, in, say 2050 or 2060? (Remember, it is not easy to write good science fiction! You must give reasons for the things you imagine; these future things must be related in some coherent fashion to things/relations/situations that exist in the present. So you would have to imagine how public transport will evolve given present conditions, and what the role of the Metro would be in future compared to what it is now.)

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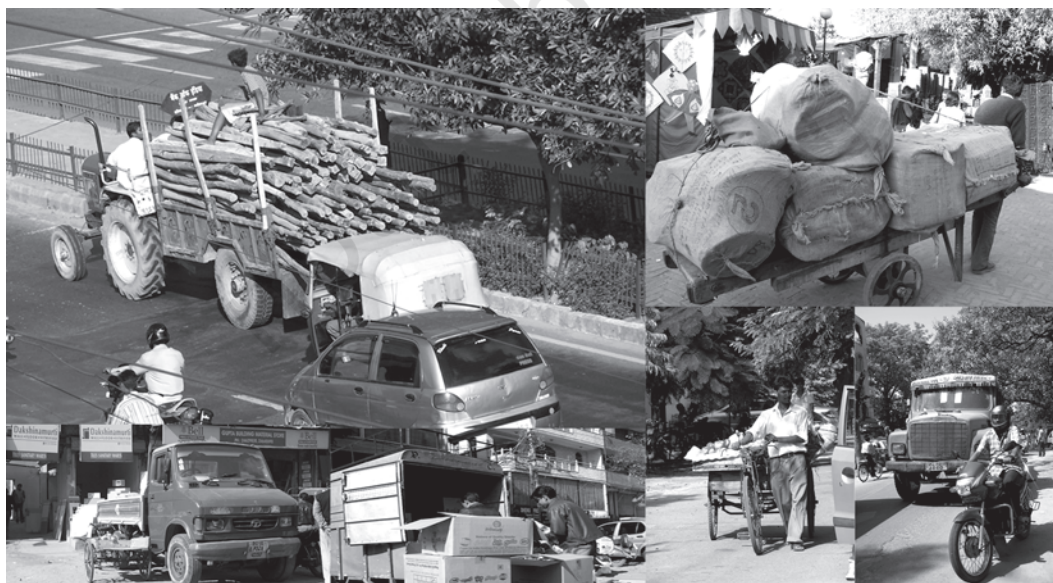
2. ROLE OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN SOCIAL LIFE

Communication media could include the mass media, like newspapers, television, films, internet and so on – i.e., media which convey information and are seen/accessed by large numbers of people. It could also include the media that people use for communicating with each other, such as the telephone, letters, mobile phones, email and internet. In these areas, you could try to investigate, for example, the changing place of mass media in social life and the shifts within major formats like print, radio, television, and so on. At a different level, you could try to ask a different sort of question about the likes and dislikes of particular groups (classes, age groups, genders) regarding films, books etc. How do people perceive the new communication media (like mobile phones, or internet) and their impact? What can we learn through observation and inquiry about their place in people's lives? Observation allows you to capture the divergence (if any) between stated views and actual behaviour. (How many hours do people really watch television, as different from how many hours they feel they watch, or feel is appropriate to watch etc..) What are some of the consequences of shift in format? (For example, has TV really reduced the importance of radio and newspapers, or does each format still have its own special niche?) What are the reasons why people prefer one or the other format?

Alternatively, you could think of doing any number of projects based on a content analysis of the media (newspapers, magazines, television etc.) and how they have treated particular themes or subjects, such as, for example, schools and school education, the environment, caste, religious conflicts, sports events, local versus national or regional news, etc.

3. Household Appliances and Domestic Work

This refers to all the devices used to do work in the household, such as gas, kerosene or other type of stoves; mixies, grinders and food processors of various kinds; the electric or other kind of iron for ironing clothes; washing machines; ovens; toaster; pressure cooker, and so on. How has work within the household changed over time? Has the coming of these devices changed the nature of work and specially the intra-household division of labour? Who are the people who use these devices? Are they mostly men or women, young or old, paid or unpaid workers? How do the users feel about them? Have they really made work easier? Have there been any changes in the age-related jobs done within the household? (i.e., do younger/older people do different kinds of jobs now as compared to earlier?)

Alternatively, you could simply concentrate on how the domestic tasks are distributed within the household – who does what, and whether there have been changes lately.

4. THE USE OF PUBLIC SPACE

This research topic is about the different uses to which public space (such as an open field, the roadside or footpath, empty plots in housing colonies, space outside public offices, and the like) is put. For example, some spaces support a lot of small scale commercial activity like roadside vendors, small temporary shops and parking lots etc. Other spaces seem empty but get used in different ways – to hold marriage or religious functions, for public meetings, as a dumping ground for various kinds of things... Many spaces are occupied by poor homeless people and become in effect their homes. Try to think of research questions in this general area: What do people from different classes (e.g., the poor, middle classes, affluent people etc.) feel about the use of public space? What kind of a resource do they represent for these groups? How has the use of a particular open space in your neighbourhood been changing over time? Has it generated any conflicts or frictions? What are the reasons for this conflict?

5. CHANGING ASPIRATIONS OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

Did you always have the same ambitions throughout your life? Most people change their goals, specially at young ages. This research topic tries to discover what these changes are and whether there are any patterns to the changes across different groups. You could try choosing research groups such as different age groups (eg., classes 5, 8 and 11) in different kinds of schools; different genders; different parental backgrounds etc. and see if any patterns emerge. You could also include adults in your research design and see what they remember about these sorts of changes, and whether there is any pattern to changes after school as compared to changes within the school-going age.

6. THE 'BIOGRAPHY' OF A COMMODITY

Think of a particular consumption item in your own home, such as a television set, a motor cycle, a carpet or a piece of furniture. Try to imagine what the life-history of that commodity would be. Write about it as though you were that commodity and were writing an 'auto-biography'. What are the circuits of exchange through which it has moved to get to where it is now? Can you trace the social relations through which the item was produced, traded, and purchased? What is its symbolic significance, for its owners – i.e. for you, your family, for the community?

If it could think and talk, what would your television set (or sofa set, or motorcyle…) have to say about the people it meets or sees (like your family or other families or households that you can imagine)?

RESEARCH TOPIC / AREA	TYPE OF RESEARCH METHOD / TECHNIQUE		
	OBSERVATION	SURVEY	
Modes of Public Transport; Local Railway or Bus Station	Modes of behaviour, expected etiquette, space sharing	Opinions on changes over time; experiences, difficulties etc.	
Domestic Appliances (Use of cooking fuel/ mode; fan, cooler, ac; iron; fridge; mixie…)	Patterns of use; domestic division of labour; gender aspects	Attitudes/memories relating to different type of appliances	
Use of Public Spaces (roadside, empty land, etc)	Observe how comparable open spaces are used in different localities	Opinions of a cross-section of people on different uses of specific public spaces	
. Changing Aspirations of School Children at different ages (e.g. Classes 5, 8, 11)	Not suitable	Boys and Girls Adults of different generations (from memory)	
Place of the means of communication in social life (from mobile phones to satellite TV)	Watch how people use mobile phones in public – what place do these devices have in their lives?	How much TV do different kind of people watch, and what are their preferred programmes?	

TYPE OF RESEARCH METHOD / TECHNIQUE		
ARCHIVAL	**INTERVIEWS**	**COMMENTS / SUGGESTIONS**
Newspaper and other sources for history of change	Views of regular vs. occasional users; men vs. women etc.	Suitable only for biggish cities?
Advertisement patterns for different kinds of appliances	How do different type of people respond to specific appliances?	Boys to be encouraged to do this; should not become a 'girl's topic'
What were the different uses to which a particular space was put over the years?	Do people of different social classes, groups have different views on use of space?	Best to take familiar, specific places that people know about and relate to
Depends on availability of material from the past (such as school essays on this subject)	Talk to one group about their own evolution; or talk to different age groups	Interviewees should not be from own school
Analysis of . media coverage and content on any current issue of interest	What do people feel about the decline of letter writing after the coming of phones?	Try not to pre-judge the the issue (e.g. it is so sad that letter writing has declined) – ask, don't tell.

Notes