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## UNIT 21 CASTE - CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

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### 21.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you will be able to

- describe the social spheres in which caste continues to exist, such as, the ritual, economic and political sphere of life
- state the changes that have occurred in the functions of caste system
- explain the new functions of caste in the socio-political system
- describe the nature of caste associations.

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### 21.1 INTRODUCTION

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With the help of your study of earlier units in Blocks 1, 2, 3 and 4, and particularly unit 20 of this Block in ESO-12, you are in a position to define caste system, identify its structure and functions. You are familiar with the predominant features of caste system and its regional pattern. So far we have attempted to understand caste with reference to its nature and attributes and how it governs human behaviour in a multitude of situations. In this unit, we shall look into the dynamics of the caste system. We shall seek reasons as to how and why the system has continued to exist and what are the changes that have occurred and are occurring in the system.

In this unit, section 21.2 describes the continuity aspect of caste system in India and section 21.3 describes the aspect of change in caste system in India. Section 21.4 provides the summary of the unit.

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## 21.2 CASTE AND CONTINUITY

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Caste, as you already know, is by definition a closed social system whose membership is acquired by virtue of birth. Rules of endogamy and restrictions on social intercourse between castes help to maintain the insularity of such groups. From a purely *Brahmanic* or Sanskrit view, it appears as if this system is rigid and closed. However, when we examine historical data ranging back to the Vedic period we find that in reality there existed a lot of flexibility. Social mobility with the gain of economic and political power was always present. Historian, K.M. Pannikar (1955) believes that in Indian history, the Nandas were the last true Kshatriyas (around 5th Century B.C.), and since then all the so called Kshatriyas have come into being by usurpation of power by the lower castes who acquired the Kshatriya role and social position.

Caste system is, therefore, a dynamic reality with a great degree of flexibility in terms of internal structure and functions. To examine the continuity of caste system and its reasons, we need to keep in mind this high degree of flexibility of the system. Social mobility has been an important feature of caste system. We will proceed to understand the flexibility aspect in section 21.2.1. Then we will discuss caste and the ritual sphere in section 21.2.2; caste and economic sphere in section 21.2.3; and finally caste and politics in section 21.2.4.

### 21.2.1 Caste and Social Mobility

Before discussing the caste and social mobility, let us understand what is meant by social mobility. Social mobility refers to the process by which individuals or groups move from one social status to another in the social hierarchy. Social mobility can be either upward or downward. Upward social mobility is one where the individual or group moves from a lower status in the hierarchy to the upper. Downward mobility is when a person or group moves from a higher status to a lower one in the hierarchy (for more details see the unit 22 of this Block in ESO-12). Caste has been considered to be a closed system of stratification. However, in reality no system can be absolutely closed. In fact, social mobility has always been present within the caste system.

When we talk about caste and social mobility we are essentially dealing with the processes of social change in Indian society. Sociologists observe that in spite of the closed nature of caste system, there have been changes in caste hierarchy and its norms from time to time. For example, the culturally accepted practices during the Vedic period of Hinduism became a taboo in the periods that followed. Some of these practices were that Vedic Hinduism was magico-animistic, Vedic Brahmins drank soma (liquor), offered animal sacrifice and ate beef. These practices were prohibited later but they continued amongst the lower castes (Singh 1973: 6).

Caste mobility as a process of social and cultural change has been explained by Srinivas in his concept of Sanskritisation. The widespread social and cultural process called Sanskritisation is a process where a low Hindu caste changes

its customs, rites, rituals ideology and way of life in the direction of high and frequently twice-born castes. This has paved the way for mobility to occur within the caste system. With the advent of the British, the opening up of frontiers by means of roads, and railways and economic opportunities cutting across caste barriers increased the process of caste mobility.

Besides Sanskritisation, another major agent of social change was Westernisation. Westernisation includes the influences, which swept over India during the British rule bringing in the ideologies of secularism, egalitarianism and democracy. The new opportunities in education, economy and polity were in theory caste free and open to all. No one could be denied access to them by reason of birth in a particular caste, sect or religion. However, no social change can bring about total change of a society. Therefore, we find that the traditional social organisation exemplified by the caste system has undergone several changes yet continues to exist in Indian society performing some old and some new functions. Now let us examine caste and the ritual sphere.

### **21.2.2 Caste and the Ritual Sphere**

The notions of hierarchical gradation of caste groups drawing legitimacy from religion and the concept of purity and pollution have changed with the passing of time. The structural distance between various castes, as you are already aware of, has been defined in terms of purity and pollution. Corresponding to the caste hierarchy are hierarchies in food, traditional caste occupation, and styles of life. Endogamy and social restraints regarding commensality and free interaction between different castes in the local caste hierarchy were clearly defined and ritualised. As Mckim Marriot (1955) noted in his study of the Kishan Garhi village in U.P., the exchange of food and drink between different castes was patterned within the framework of the *jajmani* system. The pattern related to who will eat with whom, who will give *kaccha* food (i.e. food cooked in water) to whom, and who will receive it, who will give only *pacca* food to whom, and so on. Thus, interaction between castes was highly ritualised prior to the impact of Westernisation.

During the last few decades, as a result of the forces of modernisation, the ideology of caste has become less pervasive in an individual's day to day life. Caste rituals have become increasingly a personal affair, rather than public due to changed circumstances of living, forces of industrialisation, and urbanisation. Place of residence and food habits are influenced more by an individual's workplace and occupation than by his or her caste or religion. In a city a person generally does not ask the caste of a cook who serves in a restaurant. A person who might be a Brahman by caste may work in a shoe factory, and so on. Figure 21.1 shows how the people in a city may respond when they find an upper caste man doing a job which is traditionally considered as done by low caste people.

Harold Gould in his study of the *rickshawallahs* of Lucknow (1974) observed that the rickshawpullers whom he studied belonged to different castes. While working they interacted with each other without observing any caste restrictions. However, when these rickshawpullers went back to their homes in the evening they observed all the ritual practices of their caste. Their kins belonged to their own caste and they married within their own caste. This example illustrates the point that in workplace the caste norm are set aside but

in personal family life the caste norms exerts itself. In this sense, out of the two main features of caste system identified by Max Weber (1948), namely, commensality and **connubium**, the commensality aspect has disappeared but the connubium, i.e. caste and kinship and marriage link, yet survives in spite of all other changes (for a better understanding of the term connubium see section 21.5, Key Words). The ritual aspect of caste is confined to the personal sphere. Now, let us see the nature of caste in the economic sphere.

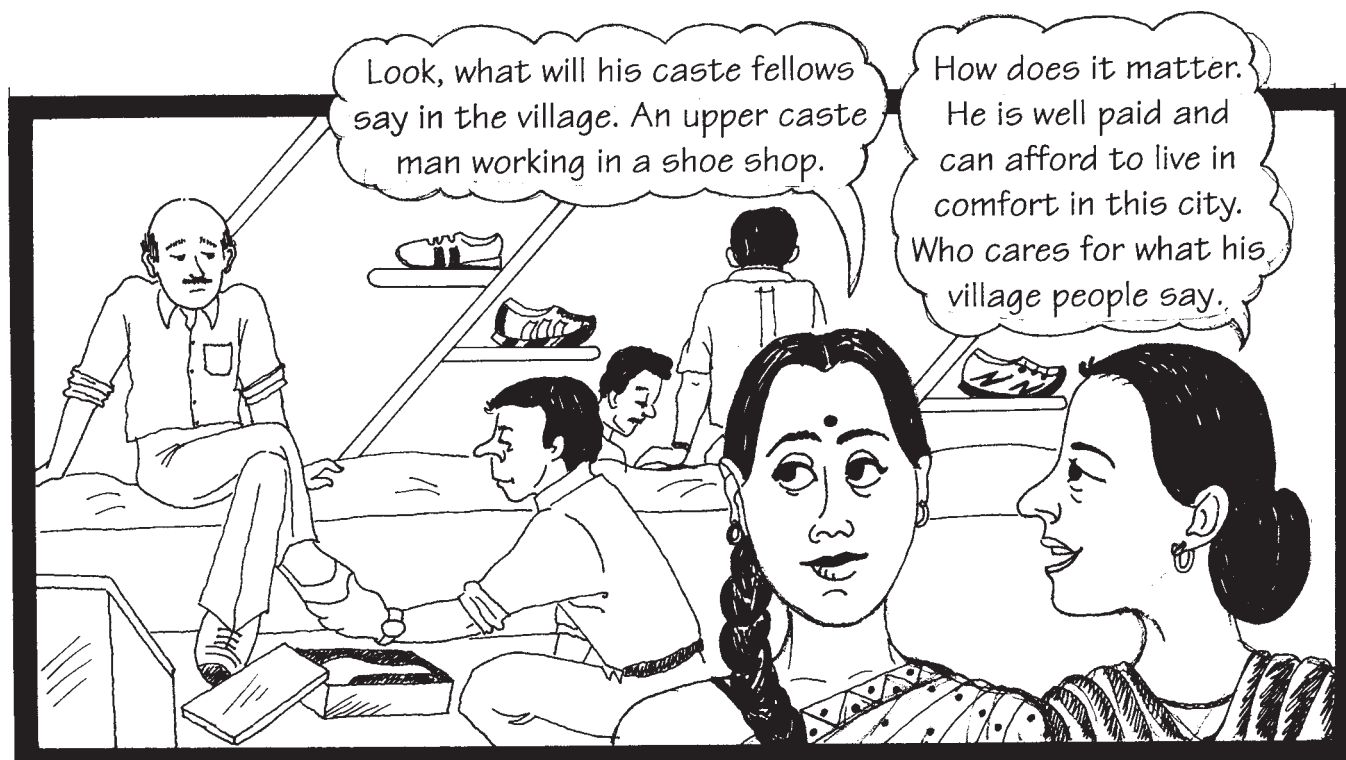


Fig. 21.1: Changes in the traditional caste occupation

### Activity 1

Take the latest issue of the Sunday newspaper, which carries advertisements for brides or bridegrooms. Take the first 100 cases and categorise these into (i) those which ask for spouse of a specific caste, (ii) those which say “caste no bar”; and (iii) those which do not mention caste.

From the statistics i.e. the number of cases in each category you have got, state whether the significance of caste in marriage relations has remained important or declined. Compare your answer, if possible, with the answers of other students at your Study Centre.

### 21.2.3 Caste and the Economic Sphere

In this section we will discuss the continuity in the nature and function of caste in terms of its economic and occupational sphere of influence. The ideology of caste prescribed specific occupations for specific caste groups, which had a specific place in the social hierarchy. The vocations of the upper castes were considered to be the most prestigious while the occupations of the lower castes, especially the untouchables were considered to be polluting and defiling.

The advent of the British saw new economic opportunities flowing out, and reaching the masses. The opening up of plantations, development of towns and cities laid the basis for economic development, which intruded into the functioning of the caste system. The growth of money economy enabled economic relations to be governed by market conditions as opposed to inherited status. Certain caste groups flourishing in the wake of new business opportunities invested their profits in land. Because of land reforms like, Permanent Settlement, introduced during the British rule, land came into the market and thus ceased to be tied to caste.

The stability of caste monopolies over land, which was enforced by family inheritance, came under attack. Ownership of land provided principles governing wealth and a yardstick by which the local prestige system was measured. The low castes were thus able to surmount the obstacles posed by tradition and began to participate in the economic process.

The breakdown of the traditional economic system and the emergence of lower caste groups in economic rivalry rather than cooperation undermined the Brahman dominance found in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu. This has been attributed to the changing village structure from a closed stationary system to that of a relatively open system. The closed system was characteristic of **feudal economy** resulting in cooperation between ranked castes in ways ordained by religious ideas. An open system is one, which is governed by secular law under the influence of **market economy**.

The *Jajmani* system, which was a hereditary patron-client relationship, with the worker traditionally tied to his master, lost most of its insularity. Market economy, daily wages, and hired labour eroded steadily into the functioning of the traditional *jajmani* system.

Let us look at the changes that have occurred in the traditional, subsistence village economy which due to the impact of mercantilism becomes part of the larger national economy with an example from a village study conducted by F.G. Bailey (1955) of an Oriya village called Bisipara. The village Bisipara in Orissa witnessed changes due to the coming of land into the market as a result of certain economic forces set in motion by the British rule. The progressive extension of the economic frontier by which we mean the increasing contact of the villages with the cities due to the introduction of better means of transport and mass media, the impact of outside influences that have reached the villages as a result of market economy, brought migrant labour and factories to bear upon the village economy and sources of income were not confined to land and agriculture alone. A person participated as an individual in commercial economy. The village witnessed a breakdown of the traditional, economic organisation in which there was division of labour and division of wealth according to caste.

Bailey noted that the changed political atmosphere under the British disturbed the traditional caste hierarchy and the power structure of the village. He wrote, “the ultimate seat of political power moved outside the village. At the same time, redistribution of wealth upset the political structure inside the village. Division of wealth no longer followed the same lines as caste division” (Bailey 1955: 146). However, Bailey also maintains that although there was an internal reshuffle of positions, the caste system continued to order political relations



between the groups concerned and to reflect their economic status. Thus, in this sense, in spite of the tremendous changes that caste had undergone, it continued to exist.

Another important way in which we can see the continuity of caste is that when the new forces of socio-economic, political and educational changes came, it was the already powerful, wealthy upper castes, such as the Brahmans, Rajputs and the Vaishyas who benefited initially from these changes. The Brahman sections responded first to English education and therefore, benefited from political and administrative power (Kothari 1970: 9). The same pattern is visible in the commercial sector too. The great business houses like Birlas, Dalmias, etc., belonged to the traditional commercial castes. In banking the castes like the Chettiers of South established themselves in the modern systems of banking and commerce which was an extension of their traditional occupation.

#### 21.2.4 Caste and Politics

A system of **social stratification** such as the caste rests upon the unequal distribution of power between status groups having definite positions in the prestige hierarchy. In any social strata the upper echelons face the problem of how to maintain their positions which they and their ancestors at one time achieved against the more socially disabled segments of the population. To maintain their position of superiority the higher strata must be able to control the mechanism of coercion. How was this possible?

The political system of the pre-British India was characterised by clear territorial changes marking off the territory of one chieftain or *Raja* from the territories of the other. These boundaries constituted effective barriers between people living under different chieftains. At the village level caste panchayats and caste councils functioned as the local governing bodies and provided a self-sufficient image to the Indian village. Such a political system imposed severe limits on extension of caste ties. Here the cultural and political boundaries overlapped with each other.

The British rule set the castes free from the territorial limitations inherent in the pre-British political system. It is widely held that civil and penal codes introduced by the British over the sub-continent of India in 1860 took away the power exercised by caste panchayats. The British had also introduced a new principle of justice wherein all men were equal before law and that the nature of wrong is not affected by the caste of the person who is committing it and by the caste of the person against whom it is committed.

Many sociologists undertook political analysis in terms of caste and traced the political development of caste through time, and the alliances of certain castes against certain others to gain political power. According to them, the advent of democracy and decentralised politics in the form of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system saw politics carried down to the grassroots level. Caste became a prominent variable in electoral politics. The demands of organised party system in politics have brought about a coalition of castes. Sub-castes and sub-divisions in sub-castes can find an active field of engagement in village politics. The introduction of democratic **decentralisation** and universal suffrage protected the interests of the backward classes (which include the scheduled castes,

scheduled tribes and other backward classes) in education, employment and political life, against the dominance of the traditionally powerful castes.

The dominant caste was a factor to reckon with in village India. Not all the dominant castes were ritually superior (for further details refer back to unit 20 of this Block of ESO-12). Dominance in a sense could be combined with land-ownership, political power, numerical strength, and so on. In some regions of Western and Northern India one encounters dominant peasant castes combining land-ownership and political power.

The coming of market economy, the decline of the traditional economic systems (a good example is that of the decline of Brahman hegemony in Tanjore), caste-free occupations and mobilisation of caste groups have all resulted in the decline of the traditional political role of castes. Yet, we find that caste retains its political significance. This is evident, for example, in the case of the **political mobilisation** of caste groups in Madhopur, U.P. In this village, the ranks of Noniyas, the salt-makers and Chamars, the leather-makers joined hands in opposing the locally dominant upper caste Thakurs. Thakurs were the Rajput landlords and the traditional dispensers of justice of erstwhile masters of the lower castes of this village. Thus, caste, which was a dividing factor, reshaped itself in the new circumstances to form a unifying factor. Not only for political gains but for material welfare and social status also, **caste alliances** came to be established.

It is very clear now that caste as a dynamic reality of Indian society has accompanied changes and in the process has continued to survive the onslaught of time. The characteristic of adaptability to forces of change has been a feature of the caste in the past and it continues to remain its main characteristic even today. This pattern of change therefore, constitutes an element of continuity of this system.

The changes introduced during the British period and post-independent India have witnessed the changing functions of caste and how it has continued to exist as a social institution unique to India. In this section we discussed how in spite of accommodating to social change through a long period of Indian history, especially during and after the British rule, caste has continued to exist.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.
  - a) Social mobility is the process by which individuals or groups move from one ..... to another.
  - b) Mobility in the caste system resulted in the process called .....
  - c) According to Max Weber the two main features of caste system are commensality and .....
- ii) Write in about five lines on the opening of the economic frontier in Bisipara, Orissa.  
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## 21.3 CASTE AND CHANGE

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We have already discussed the continuity aspect of caste system in India. We discovered that in spite of the varied forces of change, caste has continued to adapt itself to the new circumstances and remain a significant part of Indian society. Here we are going to examine the changes that have come about in the caste system itself.

In the section on caste and rituals we have mentioned how some major aspects like the notions of purity and pollution, commensality, the *jajmani* system and rituals connected with it have declined. Untouchability has been legally abolished and declared a punishable crime under the Constitution of India. Thus, change has come about in caste system and its practices at the ideological level. But besides the ideological level, it is at the structural i.e. organisational level, as well as at the level of its functions, that major changes have come about. In the following sections we are going to examine some of these changes in caste system.

### 21.3.1 From a Closed System to an Open System

Indian society has undergone tremendous social change, as mentioned earlier, due to the impact of the British rule. Caste being part of the Indian society too has, therefore, experienced change. Society has moved from a relatively closed system to an open system. A closed system has been described as one in which elements like caste, class and power are combined together. In other words, this system is based on “cumulative inequalities” where higher caste implies higher class and consequently higher power.

An open system is one in which inequalities of caste, class and power are dispersed. In this case a person can be of lower caste but belong to upper class. This system has more avenues for social mobility open for the lower castes and classes in terms of employment, education, economic enterprise, politics, etc.

The caste system as a closed system of stratification in pre-British India does not mean that there was no social mobility possible at that time. We have already clarified that change was always an aspect of the continuity of this system. Another point is that no system can be either absolutely closed or absolutely open. So, in what way can we talk about change now? The change in the caste system today is due to the forces of modernisation set free by the British. Another force of change is our adoption of parliamentary democracy and giving ourselves a constitution which seeks to secure to all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity (Preamble of the Constitution of India). One of the major consequences of introducing parliamentary democracy was that every Indian adult above the age of 21 (and since the Elections in 1989 voting age has been reduced to 18 years) has the right to vote his or her leader



to power. Since, every individual vote counts it is imperative for a leader to get the allegiance of the people. In this sense numerical power and caste identity has become very important.

The modern political system, new market forces, development of science and technology has had several repercussions on the traditional caste structure. The association between elements of different kinds of land-ownership, political power and status based on caste is slowly giving way to status achieved through education, new occupations available due to the opening up of new economic opportunities, higher income, and so on. In his study of *Caste, Class and Power Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, Andre Beteille (1966) wrote that earlier (i.e. in pre-British period) education was a virtual monopoly of the Brahmans who dominated this area. But at the time of his study, the educational system had become far more open, both in principle and in practice. Many non-Brahman and even untouchable boys attended the schools at Sripuram (the village studied by Beteille) and the adjacent town of Thiruvaiyur. Because of this education the non-Brahmans and the Adi-Dravidas (the lowest castes) could compete on more equal terms with the Brahmans for white-collar jobs. It helped them to participate in the political affairs more equally with the Brahmans.

According to Beteille in the towns and cities white-collar jobs were relatively caste-free. Non-Brahmans from Sripuram could work as clerks or accountants in offices at Thiruvaiyur and Tanjore along with the Brahmans. Within the village land had come into the market since, due to several factors, some of the Brahmans had to sell their land. This enabled the, non-Brahmans and even a few Adi-Dravidas to buy it. Thus, as land came into the market, the productive organisation of the village tended to become free from the structure of caste (Beteille 1966: 3). Beteille had come to the conclusion that in a way changes in the distribution of power was the most radical change in the traditional social structure. He said that the traditional elites of Sripuram, comprising the Brahman landowners, had lost its grip over the village and the new leaders of the village depend for power on many factors in addition to caste. There had come into being new organisations and institutions, which provided new bases of power. These organisations and institutions were at least formally free of caste. All these changes in effect altered, if not weakened, the role of caste in the political arena (Beteille 1966: 16). Keeping in mind this perspective, let us now examine the relation or link between the institution of caste and modern politics in India at a wider level than the village.

### **21.3.2 Caste in Modern Polity**

Unlike the European experience, political democracy in India did not emerge as a natural development of ideas, values and technologies. In fact, the notion of political democracy was adopted by the national leaders to serve the people of India in the best way possible. Thus, the values and attitudes, which went with this form of polity, had to be inculcated in its people. We see that the new political order is universal in constitution and in principle rejects the demands of caste. However, in practice it has accommodated a variety of interests, in addition to those of caste. Caste has, in fact, come to terms with the democratic political process.

Political conflicts can almost be seen as conflicts between caste groups or caste alliances. The beginning of political consciousness on caste lines is evident

in references made to caste *sabhas* or caste associations. We will discuss this aspect later. The reason for this development can be seen in the fact that politics being a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for realisation of certain goals. This is possible through identifying and manipulating the existing, as well as emerging alliances.

Politics has drawn caste into its web for organising support and in articulating the needs of the masses. The organisation of support is done through the same organisation in which the masses are found, namely the caste groups. In making politics their sphere of activity, caste and kin groups attest their identity to strive for positions of power.

Different parties and movements mobilise different social status groups as resources for their political objectives. Thus, even today we often hear of candidates being selected for political parties on the basis of caste.

The caste provided for organised party politics a ready made system of segments, which could be used to marshall support. Liberal education, government patronage, and an expanding franchise have been major factors that have penetrated the caste system. Discontent and exploitation prevailing within the caste groups provided a basis for organising caste factions and alliances. Thus modern politics found an on going vertical network of caste and made the structure of caste a political vehicle.

According to Rudolph and Rudolph (1967: 11), caste has in its transformed state, helped the Indian masses (of which nearly 70 percent live in the villages) make a success of representative democracy. It has fostered the growth of equality by making Indians less separate and more alike. Indians are becoming less separate in the sense that due to the electoral system numerical strength i.e., the number of votes, as mentioned earlier, makes a lot of difference in power. Thus, it is in the interest of large majority of castes to come together to achieve their political goals. In this process, caste associations and caste federations are formed.

Formation of caste federations refers to a grouping together of members of distinct endogamous groups into a single organisation for common objectives. One of the most active caste federation is the Kshatriya *Sabha* of Gujarat. It dates from 1946 and includes several *jati*-clusters of the region, notably the Rajputs, Bariyas and Bhils. It was not only a caste community but was also a political community. The *Sabha* had made use of new avenues of politics and promoted Rajput leaders. The federation welcomed all *jatis* who followed the Rajput model in their life style. Even the poor landless and Muslim Rajputs (Rajputs who converted to Islam) were taken into their fold.

The founder of the *sabha* believed that Kshatriyas were a 'class' and not just a caste. To prove this point many of the rich, aristocratic Rajputs would even go to the extent of having a common meal with the Bariyas and Bhils. With numerical strength they gained political importance and influence (Kothari 1970: 30-70).

The relationship that caste bears to politics can be best understood in terms of three types of political mobilisation discussed by Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) which exemplify different phases of political development in India. These three types of political mobilisation are i) vertical, ii) horizontal and iii) differential.

- i) **Vertical mobilisation:** This is a process in which political support is acquired by the traditional notables, such as the erstwhile *Rajas*, feudatory landlords, locally dominant caste elites and so on. This is possible in a society organised and integrated along caste lines having mutual dependence and where legitimacy of traditional authority still survives. Due to their traditional authority the notables are able to get the support of their dependents, socially inferior groups in the traditional manner where the local *Raja* or landlord used to protect and promote the interests of his '*praja*' i.e., the subjects and in return gained their loyalty and deference. Rudolph and Rudolph (1967: 24) maintain that vertical mobilisation remains a viable strategy for dominant classes and castes until dependents, tenants, and clients become politicised enough to be mobilised by ideological appeals to class or community interests and sentiments.
- ii) **Horizontal mobilisation:** This is a process in which popular political support is marshalled by class or community leaders and their specialised organisations. As the term horizontal indicates, the solidarity among classes and caste groups such as provided by the caste federations introduces a new pattern of cleavage by challenging the vertical solidarities and structures of traditional societies.

The major difference between this form of mobilisation and vertical mobilisation is that here the agent of mobilisation is the political party rather than the local notable. Here political parties appeal to voters directly as individuals or indirectly through the organised groups to which they belong. Direct appeals to individual voters may emphasise ideology or issues, on the one hand, or community identification through caste, on the other. This mobilisation is possible only as long as internal differentiation has not developed and caste communities are by and large homogeneous, cohesive and their interests are still diffuse and varied.

- iii) **Differential mobilisation:** This process takes place when the changes that caste has and is undergoing carries it beyond the traditional ascriptive definition. These changes include internal differentiation or fission, and integration of several caste groups in caste federations and associations i.e. fusion which express the shared interests, symbols and norms of these castes.

It also brings out the caste from its village home that it does not remain rooted to the village social structure alone.

We can explain the differential mobilisation through the example of the Rajputs of Rajasthan. The Rajputs were the rulers, feudal lords, court retainers of princely states before Independence. At that time they formed an association called the Kshatriya *Mahasabha* which initially represented all ranks within the community.

In 1954 a new caste association was formed called the *Bhooswami Sangh*. This new association brought into open the conflict between the "small" Rajputs whose modest landholdings had to be supplemented by income from service under the princes and *jagirdars*. These princes and *jagirdars*, however, had in most cases dismissed them from service with the advent of the land reforms after Independence. Thus, when the rich and powerful Rajputs refused to protect the interests of the "small" Rajputs, they formed

the *Bhooswami Sangh*. This *sangh* took up the task of protecting the interests of the “small” Rajputs. Political parties, at this time, were quick to capitalise on these class and ideological differences within the Rajput community. This example illustrates the process of differentiation that occurs within the caste community and is used by the political parties.

We have so far understood the role played by caste in modern polity. In this discussion we have also discussed the significance of caste associations and caste federations in the context of politics. Let now us understand the nature of caste associations.

### 21.3.3 Caste Associations

Caste associations are defined as “paracommunities which enable members of castes to pursue social mobility, political power, and economic advantage” (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 29). Caste associations resemble in many ways the voluntary associations or interest groups found in industrially advanced societies. However, caste associations or paracommunities are distinct in many respects from voluntary associations; as well as from natural associations like caste out of which they have developed.

The caste associations are more like the voluntary associations at the organisational level than the traditional caste structures. It has offices, membership, incipient bureaucratisation and legislative process that can be seen through conferences, delegates, and resolutions. But, unlike the voluntary associations, caste associations are characterised by a shared sense of culture, character and status, which gives it solidarity not found in voluntary associations.

The functions of caste associations are diverse. It serves the Indian society by both levelling the sacred and hierarchical caste order and also replacing it. It initiates and manages the efforts of the lower castes to become twice-born, to don the sacred thread which symbolises higher ritual rank and culture. This is clear from the case of the Nadars of Tamil Nadu, a low caste of toddy tappers, who through the efforts of their association, the Nadar *Mahajana Sangam* formed in 1910, acquired not only higher status but a modern organisation to serve their needs.

According to Kothari (1970: 115), some of the objectives of this association are

- i) To promote the social, material and general welfare of the Nadars
- ii) To take practical measures for the social, moral, and intellectual advancement of the Nadars
- iii) To start schools and colleges for imparting western education to Nadar children and to help poor but deserving pupils belonging to the community with scholarships, books, fees, etc.
- iv) To encourage and promote commercial and industrial enterprise among the members of the community

These and several other objectives of this caste association and caste associations in general, reveal the significant contribution that these organisations provided to their communities.

We see that the paracomunities or caste associations contribute to fundamental structural and cultural change in Indian society by providing an adaptive institution in which both the traditional as well as modern features of society can meet and fuse.

In the final analysis we see that caste is loosing the functions, norms, and structures it once had and acquiring new ones to suit the new demands and condition of the people. It is today serving the ritual and occupational goals of traditional society more as well as it is helping Indian society to transform itself from an ascriptive, hierarchical and closed system to one which is achievement oriented, relatively egalitarian and open (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 103). In the next section therefore, we will answer the crucial question - can caste exist in the India of tomorrow?

**Activity 2**

Find out about one of the major caste associations found in your area. If possible, go and meet one of their office bearers. If not meet one of the members of this caste association or write to the caste association. Ask them to give you their written constitution and some information regarding the foundation of this association. From the written constitution, write down a short note of about two pages on the establishment, aims and objectives of this caste association. Compare, if possible, your note with those written by other students at your Study Centre.

**21.3.4 Can Caste Exist in the India of Tomorrow?**

A small section of Indian population, comprising the educated elites, probably powerful but numerically insignificant, desires that caste system ought to go. For a vast majority of the Indian population, especially the Hindus envisaging a social system without caste is impossible. Caste is part of their social identity and existence.

The joint family and caste system provide the individual in our society some of the benefits, which a welfare state provides in the industrially advanced countries. Caste stands for a certain amount of cultural homogeneity. However, it has its evil and exploitative side which has not been perceived by the majority of the people, especially the upper castes.

It is essential to remember that nothing effective can be achieved unless and until the people themselves are made to realise the unjust nature of caste system. The principle of caste is so firmly entrenched in our political and social life that everyone including the political leader appears to have accepted tacitly these very principles.

The coming of modern means of communication has increased the 'horizontal stretch of caste'. Far-flung caste groups are able to interact and communicate with each other and find commonalties and shared interests to form clusters and this has resulted in the increase of caste solidarity within a region. One effect of universal adult franchise is the strengthening of caste consciousness. Political parties are at pains to select candidates who have a social base, usually drawn from the locally dominant caste groups.

It is obvious that the eradication of caste is a distant reality, despite the indications to the contrary.

As long as caste performs the functions of a welfare state in India and provides for the common bonds of kinship ties, political groups and alliances, it can be assured of a continued existence in modern India.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.
  - a) In a closed system different components of caste, class and power are ..... together.
  - b) Caste has become the most important variable in the ..... process.
  - c) In horizontal mobilisation the agent of mobilisation is the ..... rather than the local notable found in the case of vertical mobilisation.
- ii) Define caste association and mention at least two functions of caste associations using about seven lines.

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## 21.4 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have described the social spheres in which caste system continues to exist. We described that social mobility has always been part of caste system. The flexibility and accommodative nature of caste is one of the essential aspects, which has lead to its continuity. We have discussed how the divisive role of caste has declined in the society. Concept of purity and pollution, the *Jajmani* system, and the commensality aspect of caste have declined. However, caste as an endogamous social group and its link with the kinship system still persists.

We explained in this unit how in spite of this continuity of caste system the structure and role of caste have changed. We have discussed the role of caste in modern politics and also the phases of development in political mobilisation of caste groups from vertical, horizontal to differential mobilisations. We have defined caste associations and explained in what ways these are similar or different from both voluntary associations of industrially advanced societies and the traditional caste structure. Finally, we have explained how and under what conditions caste can continue to exist in future India.



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## 21.5 KEYWORDS

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<b>Caste Alliance</b>	People belonging to different groups of castes or sub-castes coming together to achieve certain goals. For example, a caste alliance can decide to support a particular leader in elections.
<b>Connubium</b>	It refers to the right and obligation of members of a category of men to choose their wives from a prescribed category of women. The two groups are said to have or maintain connubium.
<b>Decentralisation</b>	Distribution of power to the grassroots level of the village.
<b>Feudal Economy</b>	Traditional ties of landowner, intermediaries and agricultural labourers. This economy is characterised by ties of patron client relationships, bonded labour and payment of wages in kind rather than cash.
<b>Market Economy</b>	This economy is characterised by forces of supply and demand. Wage labour and money are the principal means of exchange.
<b>Political Mobilisation of Castes</b>	Caste groups are manipulated to meet certain political goals.
<b>Social Stratification</b>	It is the process of differential ranking where a society is divided in segments and these segments are hierarchically ranked.

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## 21.6 FURTHER READING

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- Bailey, F.G. 1957. *Caste and the Economic Frontier*. The University Press: Manchester.
- Beteille, A. 1966. *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*. Oxford University Press: Bombay
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- Srinivas. M.N., (ed.), 1996. *Caste its Twentieth Century Avatar*. Penguin Book: New Delhi

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## 21.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i)
  - a) Social status
  - b) Sanskritisation
  - c) Connubium
- ii) Certain administrative changes introduced by the British saw the low castes of Bisipara, a village in Orissa, making use of the new business opportunities. They broke free from the caste-bound traditions and economic organisations. With money they bought land which came into the market. This disturbed the traditional equation of higher caste, higher land-ownership and higher power.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i)
  - a) Combined
  - b) Political
  - c) Political party
- ii) Caste associations have been defined as paracommunities that help their members to pursue social mobility. It attempts to improve the social, material and political condition of its members. It provides a modern rational organisation to carry out its objectives. Amongst its functions one very important function is that it provides schools and college facilities for the education of the children of its members. It provides a unified strength to fight for political goals.

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## UNIT 22 THE SCHEDULED CASTES

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### Structure

#### 22.0 Objectives

#### 22.1 Introduction

#### 22.2 The Scheduled Castes

##### 22.2.1 Castes Deemed as the Scheduled Castes

##### 22.2.2 Characteristics, Disabilities and Deprivations

#### 22.3 Social Mobility during Pre-Independence Period

##### 22.3.1 Social Mobility

##### 22.3.2 Social Mobility during the Ancient period

##### 22.3.3 Social Mobility during the Medieval Period

#### 22.4 Social Mobility during the British Rule

##### 22.4.1 Differential Impact of the British Rule

##### 22.4.2 Social Mobility through Sanskritisation

##### 22.4.3 Social Mobility through Westernisation

##### 22.4.4 Social Mobility through Conversion

##### 22.4.5 Ambedkar and Gandhi

#### 22.5 Scheduled Castes in Post-Independent India

##### 22.5.1 Policy of Protective Discrimination

##### 22.5.2 Vertical Mobilisation

##### 22.5.3 Horizontal Mobilisation

##### 22.5.4 Sanskritisation

##### 22.5.5 Urbanisation

##### 22.5.6 Present Situation

#### 22.6 Let Us Sum Up

#### 22.7 Key Words

#### 22.8 Further Reading

#### 22.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 22.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- describe the status of the scheduled castes both at scriptural, legal and existential levels in a historical perspective
- discuss their traditional social, ritual disabilities and deprivations
- analyse the various aspects of their social mobility through various processes during ancient, medieval and modern period
- examine the present and developing situation in respect of the scheduled castes.

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## 22.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous two units of this Block you learnt about caste and its regional patterns and its continuity and change in Indian society. In this unit you will learn about the scheduled castes, their social status and condition in Indian society in a historical perspective.

The scheduled castes constitute the most deprived and oppressed section of Indian society. The history of their suffering is very old. Under the traditional set-up, they were placed at the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy. But enactment of the Constitution in 1950 sought to place them at equal footing with other sections of the population. In reality, however, they continue to suffer from various social, economic, political and cultural deprivations.

For understanding the status of the scheduled castes, section 22.2 of this unit deals with the meaning, characteristics and various traditional disabilities and deprivations they have to suffer. But, Indian society has never been static. Individuals and groups belonging to the scheduled castes under certain conditions could achieve some measure of **social mobility** from the very beginning. This process is described in section 22.3, which discusses the concept of social mobility, and the process of social mobility among the scheduled castes during the ancient and medieval period.

During British rule, India experienced important changes in almost all spheres of life. The scheduled castes also were not left untouched. Colonial rule had differential impact on different sections of the scheduled castes which is discussed in section 22.4. Social mobility among them during this period, because of **Sanskritisation**, **Westernisation**, Conversion, and contributions of Ambedkar and Gandhi have been explained in this section. Section 22.5 discusses constitutional-legal provisions pertaining to the scheduled castes, government policy of '**protective discrimination**' in their favour, their mobility through the processes of Sanskritisation and urbanisation, and the phenomena of their vertical and horizontal mobilisation during the post-Independence period. Lastly, section 22.6 presents a summary of this unit.

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## 22.2 THE SCHEDULED CASTES

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The term 'scheduled caste' was coined by the Simon Commission (1927). The expressions, 'Depressed Classes', 'Exterior Castes' and 'Untouchables' were commonly used for the scheduled-castes during the colonial period. Gandhiji called them '*Harijans*' (the people of God). But since the passage of the Government of India Act of 1935, they have been generally referred to as 'Scheduled Castes'. The population of Scheduled Castes in different states of India during 1981 and 1991 is given in figure 22.1.

### 22.2.1 Castes Deemed as the Scheduled Castes

The Constitution of India (1950) made a provision that "the President may, with respect to any State or Union Territory, after consultation with the Governor, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of the Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory" (Article 34).

In pursuance of this provision, the President of India has passed orders from time to time specifying the names of scheduled castes in the country.

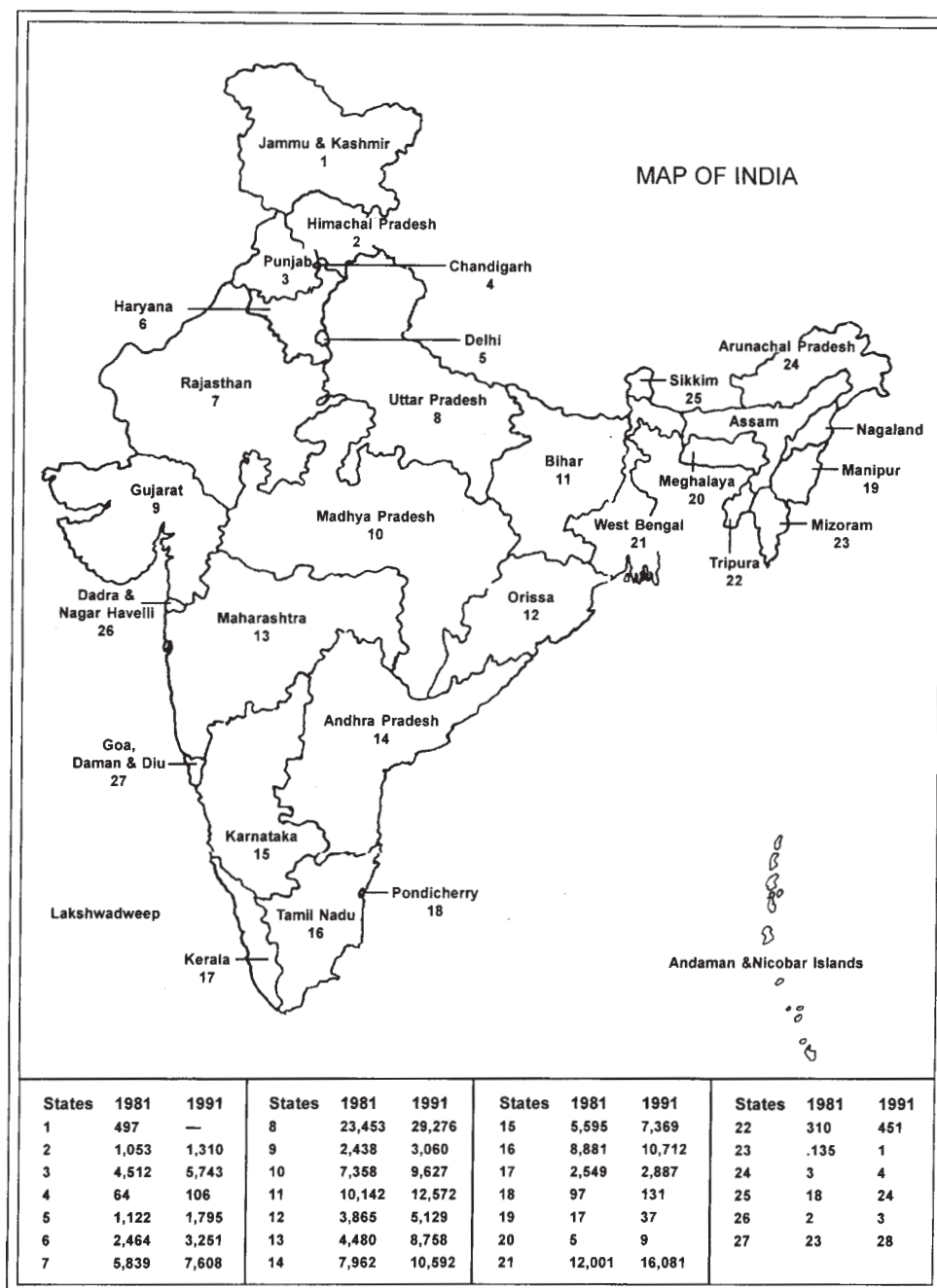


Fig. 22.1: Population of scheduled castes in 1981 and 1991

In the past these groups were classified on ritual criteria: contact with them caused varying degrees of pollution. The criteria adopted for inclusion in the scheduled caste's list are social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of the stigma of untouchability. The better known Scheduled Castes include Chamar and Bhangi (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab), Bagdi and Rajbansi (West Bengal), Mahar (Maharashtra), Mala and Madiga (Andhra Pradesh), Cheruman and Pulayan (Kerala), Palla and Paraiya (Tamil Nadu). There are numerous other groups, large and small.

### 22.2.2 Characteristics, Disabilities and Deprivations

The scheduled castes account for about 15 per cent of the total population of the country (Government of India 1988: 15). In 1991 they accounted for about

16.48 percent of the total population. They are not concentrated in any particular geographical region. They are found in every state and their proportion varies from state to state (for details see figure 22.1).

The scheduled castes constituted the lowest strata of Indian society. They had been subjected to a variety of disabilities, deprivations and oppressions under the traditional system. They were placed outside and down below in social and ritual hierarchy under the '*varna*' model of society. They were engaged in manual tasks, which were considered impure and unclean. They were considered untouchables. Their touch required ritual purification for the upper caste people. They were denied entry into temples and to houses of the upper castes. They were prohibited from drawing water from '*savarna*' wells. Like the Shudras, they had no access to the study of religious texts. They were not permitted to wear clothes or jewellery customarily worn by the higher castes. They had to hold upper caste people in high esteem. Generally, they lived at the outskirts of the village in poor housing condition. In his study of Iravas of Kerala, Jeffrey (1976) observes,

They were forbidden the dignity of an umbrella or a shoulder cloth.... Their women were prohibited from covering their breasts and from wearing certain type of jewellery. They were said to pollute a Nambudiri from 36 paces and a Nayar from 120.

Besides this segregation, the scheduled castes formed an integral part of social life. At the village level, a large proportion of them worked as agricultural labourers for landowners or tenants belonging to high castes. Moreover, they provided a variety of specialised services. They worked as servants, scavengers, sweepers, drummers and so forth. They served all the caste Hindus but were not served by Brahman priest, barber, water carrier, washermen, and some others who served the caste Hindus.

In spite of their common deprivations and disabilities, the scheduled castes did not constitute a ritually homogeneous category nor do they do so now. The various castes belonging to this category form a ritual hierarchy somewhat similar to the *varna* model. They do not practice inter-marriage and sometimes do not interdine. According to Srinivas (1965), the leather-working Chamars in Uttar Pradesh consider themselves superior to the Bhangis, sweepers. The Kannada Holeya place themselves above the Madiga and do not accept even water or betel leaf from the latter.

Thus, we find that the scheduled castes formed a ritual hierarchy of their own. But they suffered from common deprivations and disabilities in social, economic and political domains in the larger society under the traditional system.

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## 22.3 SOCIAL MOBILITY DURING PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

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In spite of the rigid caste structure present in the pre-Independence period, the historical data show that social mobility was present in both ancient and medieval Indian society. But before learning about social mobility during these periods let us understand what the concept of social mobility means.



### 22.3.1 Social Mobility

Human societies are divided into various social strata. These strata are arranged hierarchically and are considered superior or inferior to one another according to the prevalent value system in society. But, any system of social stratification is not absolutely closed. Individuals or groups can move from one social status to another in the social hierarchy. This process of shifting of social status is called social mobility.

Sorokin has identified two types of social mobility on the basis of direction of mobility, i.e., vertical and horizontal. Vertical mobility refers to transition of an individual or group from one social stratum, to another, either upward or downward. A scheduled caste member getting a high post in an organisation, and a Brahman working as a landless agricultural labourer are examples, on an individual level, of upward and downward social mobility respectively.

By horizontal social mobility is meant shifting from one social group to another situated broadly on the same level. The shift from agricultural labour to factory labour is an example.

### 22.3.2 Social Mobility During the Ancient Period

Sacred texts portray the traditional Indian society as characterised by a closed and rigid system of social stratification based on '*varna*'. In reality, a degree of social mobility existed in society. The Rig-Vedic society (c 1500-1000 B.C.) as a whole was tribal, pastoral, semi-nomadic and egalitarian. Untouchability did not exist and hence nor did a class of untouchables. But gradually the Vedic society got transformed into an agricultural and *varna*-caste-class divided social order by the sixth century B.C. The scheduled castes were termed as '*antyaja*' '*panchama*' and '*chandala*' in ancient literature.

But even then the system of social stratification was not entirely 'closed'. In their studies, Romila Thapar (1977) and K.M. Pannikar (1955) have shown that social mobility did exist in ancient India. Individual and group mobility vertical and horizontal did take place during that period. Pannikar has said that the Nandas were the last Kshatriya rulers in India, then people from the lower *varnas* took over. There is also a controversy regarding the Shudra origin of the Mauryas.

The important channels of social mobility during the ancient period were (a) Sanskritisation (b) conversion to Buddhism, Jainism and other heterodox sects, (c) migration and (d) renouncing the world and taking to the life of mendicant and preacher. Srinivas (1966) defines Sanskritisation as "the process by which a low Hindu-caste or tribe or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently twice-born caste". The scheduled castes, along with other lower castes and tribes took advantage of various available avenues of social mobility both on individual and group levels, on a limited scale during this period.

### 22.3.3 Social Mobility During the Medieval Period

Burton Stein (1986) has shown that social mobility prevailed during the medieval period in India. In addition to the ancient channels of social mobility two fresh avenues opened up during this period, conversion to Islam and the Bhakti cult. Islamic emphasis on equality and brotherhood, a sense of affiliation

with the ruling class and material consideration motivated small sections of the Hindus to embrace Islam. They were from both the upper and lower caste Hindus. Some untouchables also got converted to Islam in the hope of raising their social status. But they did not benefit much. Imtiaz Ahmad (1978) observed that status inequalities continued to exist much as before. But it may have brought about a 'psychological revaluation' of themselves. In fact, as Ghaus Ansari (1960) opines, Muslim society in India itself got stratified. The converts from the untouchable castes were placed lowest in Muslim social hierarchy. However, it can be assumed that they suffered less segregation and restrictions in social interaction as Muslims than under the Hindu order.

The Bhakti movement provided another avenue of social mobility for the untouchable castes along with others. Kabir, a weaver, Ravidas, a cobbler and several others belonging to the lower castes became prominent Bhakti saints. The Bhakti saints preached that salvation was possible even for the untouchables, who were sincere devotees of God. Shanker Deva, the great Bhakti saint of Assam sang, "that Chandala at the tip of whose tongue is the message of Hari is to be placed in the highest estimation".

Additionally, social mobility among the scheduled castes continued along the earlier paths, e.g., Sanskritisation and migration.

However, social mobility among the scheduled castes occurred on a limited scale. An overwhelming majority of them continued to suffer from traditional disabilities and deprivations during the medieval period.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) When and by whom was the term 'scheduled caste' coined? Answer in two lines.

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- ii) List at least two social disabilities or deprivations that the scheduled castes were subjected to in the pre-independence period? (Use about two lines).

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- iii) Define social mobility in about three lines.

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- iv) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

Who gave the concept of Sanskritisation?

- a) Triloki Nath Madan
- b) Shyama Charan Dube
- c) Mysore N. Srinivas
- d) Yogendra Singh

## 22.4 SOCIAL MOBILITY DURING THE BRITISH RULE

Social mobility found during the ancient and medieval period was relatively different from the kind found during the colonial rule in India. Now let us examine this social mobility.

### 22.4.1 Differential Impact of the British Rule

The establishment of British rule brought about deep and far reaching changes in the economic, political, educational and cultural spheres in India. It offered some new avenues of social mobility to the scheduled castes, e.g., new economic opportunities, education, westernisation, conversion to Christianity and politicisation. Moreover, the traditional process of mobility through Sanskritisation also gained more momentum during this period.

But all sections of the scheduled castes did not benefit under the colonial rule. The scheduled castes who were engaged in cottage industries or handicrafts, such as, weaving and tanning could not compete with cheap and better quality machine-made goods imported to India by the British. This led to their proletarianisation and pauperisation, forcing them to take to agricultural labour for survival. Some of the scheduled castes people migrated to urban areas and continued with their traditional occupation e.g., sweeping and scavenging. Hence, despite increased earning in urban areas, they experienced status immobility with regard to occupation.

Some of the scheduled castes benefited economically from the exigencies of the British rule and became upwardly mobile. The Nadars of Tamil Nadu were traditionally engaged in toddy tapping which was considered a polluting occupation. In his study, Hardgrave (1984) found that during the British rule, the Nadars turned to trade in toddy tapping and established themselves as middlemen and money-lenders. They earned wealth, purchased their own land and acquired education and thus raised their social status. Similarly, the Mahars of Maharashtra (studied by Patwardhan 1973) and the Jatav Chamars of Agra in Uttar Pradesh (studied by Lynch 1969) improved their social status by taking advantage of the new economic opportunities.

### 22.4.2 Social Mobility through Sanskritisation

The traditional avenue of social mobility of the scheduled castes through Sanskritisation gained added momentum during the British period. The economically and educationally mobile scheduled castes were no longer willing to accept their inferior social position. The policy of recording castes in the census gave a fillip to the process of Sanskritisation. Many Scheduled Castes claimed higher status in the caste hierarchy. The Jatavas and the Nadars started claims to Kshatriya status by Sanskritising their way of life. The Jatavas traced their origin to the *gotra* of Siva and stopped eating beef and buffalo. Similarly, the Nadars began to tie the *dhoti* in the fashion of the Brahmins, to crop their hair in the fashion of the Brahmin tuft, and to abandon the heavy jewellery and ear-pieces which had been common among them. But the scheduled castes had to face the wrath of the upper castes who beat them and even stripped their women to the waist for following the style of upper caste living.

Moreover, Sanskritic beliefs and values were mediated to the scheduled castes through a number of movements of different religious sects, e.g., the Satnami Sect, Gorakh Panth, Ramanand Panth and Kabir Panth. Sri Narayana Guru of Kerala started organising his sect around Izhava priests and *sanyasis* for socio-religious reform.

### Activity 1

Select at least five people who belong to the scheduled caste category in your area and ask them the following questions.

- 1) Occupation of all the members of their family
- 2) Educational qualifications of their parents, brothers and sisters
- 3) Their personal ambitions regarding what they want to become in future

Write a report of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with those of the other students in your Study Centre.

### 22.4.3 Social Mobility through Westernisation

Westernisation, as defined by Srinivas (1980), “characterises the changes brought about in society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, and the term subsumes changes occurring at various levels—technology, institutions, ideology, values”. The upwardly mobile untouchable castes adopted the life-style implied in Westernisation. This was facilitated by the prevalence of various non-Sanskritic traditions among them—such as, eating meat and drinking alcohol. Sunanda Patwardhan (1973) observes: “The Mahar were the first people to serve the British officers and their wives as butlers, butchers and ayah. Being beef-eating themselves, the Mahar did not mind working for the foreign, beef-eating master”.

### 22.4.4 Social Mobility through Conversion

Conversion to Christianity provided an additional avenue of social mobility to the scheduled castes. This was prompted by the hope of improvement in social status through education, health facilities, job opportunities and financial support provided by the Christian missionaries. Large-scale conversion took place during the latter half of the nineteenth century from among the Chamar, the Churra, the Lal Begi and other scheduled castes. Further, it has been observed that though the scheduled castes who became highly educated, got white-collar jobs and earned wealth were integrated into the Christian fold, the backward ones could not remove their stigma of untouchability even after conversion.

### 22.4.5 Ambedkar and Gandhi

Another important effort to raise the status of the scheduled castes was made by the great leader, B.R. Ambedkar who belonged to the untouchable Mahar caste of Maharashtra. He laid emphasis on horizontal mobilisation of the scheduled castes and made them a political force to reckon with. He emphasised secular avenues of politics, education and administration for social mobility of the scheduled castes. He held that political power was the key to all progress and that the scheduled castes could achieve political salvation if they captured power by organising themselves into a separate party.

Ambedkar emphasised the Depressed Classes Mission Society to articulate the demands of the scheduled castes. Recourse was taken to non-violent direct action for removal of the social and civil disabilities of the scheduled castes. Ambedkar led '*satyagraha*' in 1927 to gain *Harijan* entry in the temple at Poona (now Pune). He also burnt the Manusmriti to express his anger.

In 1928, Ambedkar demanded of the Simon Commission adult franchise, separate electorate and full representation for the scheduled castes. His insistence on separate electorate resulted in big increase in the number of reserved seats for the scheduled castes in legislature under the Poona Pact (1932) with Gandhiji. Further, he set up the Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942 for securing political rights and representation for the Scheduled Castes through acquisition of power. But he failed at the elections in 1946. Later, fed up with political manoeuvring, he embraced Buddhism with a large number of scheduled castes after Independence.

In contrast with Ambedkar, Gandhi wanted the *Harijans* to be integrated into the Hindu society. For this, he tried to raise the consciousness of the upper castes through a countrywide campaign against untouchability and other constructive work. He did not believe in the *Dharma Shashtra*, which taught untouchability. He started publishing a newspaper named *Harijan*. His well-known fast in 1932 drew the attention of the people to the problem of the scheduled castes. On his insistence, the British government agreed to increase the representation of the scheduled castes in the legislature under the Poona Pact (1932). Thus, Ambedkar's demand for separate electorate was abandoned and the scheduled castes remained in the Hindu fold. Gandhiji pleaded for compassion and equity to the scheduled castes.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Read each of the following statements and about each statement write Yes, if you agree and No, if you do not agree.
  - a) There was no scope of social mobility for the scheduled castes during ancient and medieval period in India.
  - b) Bhakti Movement during the medieval period provided opportunities to the scheduled castes for social mobility.
  - c) B.R. Ambedkar gave emphasis on horizontal mobilisation of the scheduled castes for raising their status.
  - d) M.K. Gandhi supported the proposal for separate representation in legislature for the scheduled castes.
  - e) State policy of protective discrimination aims at promoting the interests of the scheduled castes.
- ii) In what way did the Nadars of Tamil Nadu benefit socially and economically during the colonial period? Describe in about six lines.

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- iii) Discuss the differences between B.R. Ambedkar and M.K. Gandhi with regard to their approach to raise the status of the scheduled castes. Use about seven lines.

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## 22.5 SCHEDULED CASTES IN POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA

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India gained Independence in 1947. The Constitution of India was enacted in 1950. It aimed at constituting India into a sovereign, democratic republic and securing to all its citizens: justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Later on the words socialist and secular were also added in the Preamble of our Constitution.

### 22.5.1 Policy of Protective Discrimination

It was realised that the scheduled castes constituted some of the most backward sections of the population. Hence, to protect them from the difficulties of open competition and safeguard their interests, the policy of 'protective discrimination' was adopted. The term protective discrimination implies that the Government under the Constitution of India considers them, i.e., the scheduled castes a separate category which has to be helped through welfare measures, reservation of seats in educational institutions, jobs, etc. so that this backward section of Indian population can catch up with the other sections. The Constitution made provision for special safeguards and protection for the scheduled castes with the object of removing their social disabilities and promoting their educational, economic and political interests (Articles 15, 16, 17, 23, 25, 46, 330, 332, 335, 338). Practice of untouchability was abolished. The scheduled castes were granted access to shops, hotels, and the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort. Forced labour was prohibited. Moreover, the State was given the responsibility to promote the educational and economic interests of the scheduled castes and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46). State was also permitted to make reservation for them in public services (Article 16, 335) and in representation in the Lok Sabha and the state Vidhan Sabhas (Article 330, 332), and also appoint a special officer at the Centre to oversee the implementation of the various provisions (Article 338).



In pursuance of the above Constitutional provisions, about 14 per cent of the total seats in the Lok Sabha and State Vidhan Sabhas have been reserved for the scheduled castes. The proportion of reservation in services is 15 per cent of the vacancies. The position of Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been created at the Centre. Five-Year Plans now have a special component earmarked for the welfare and the development of the scheduled castes.

### **22.5.2 Vertical Mobilisation**

Here, vertical mobilisation refers to the process of political mobilisation of the scheduled castes across caste line by the upper caste people. Government's policy of reservation and special welfare schemes for the scheduled castes have facilitated this process in the post-Independence period. Some individuals and families belonging to the scheduled castes have reached the top of the legislative and administrative bodies. They work as catalysts for vertical mobilisation.

The scheduled caste politicians have been largely co-opted into the major political party, which uses them for creating vote banks. The Scheduled Caste leaders may also be co-opted into upper caste factions in local and regional politics. Dushkin (1972) observes, "Under this arrangement locally powerful upper-caste notables mobilise the vote to fill the reserved seats with their own scheduled caste men, whom they manipulate and control. These men are bound to them by traditional ties as well as political debts, and the kind of leadership expected by them is good fellowship".

### **22.5.3 Horizontal Mobilisation**

Here, the term refers to the political process in which emphasis is on increasing the solidarity among the scheduled castes and organising them into a political force so that their interest is safeguarded and promoted. Before independence Ambedkar made ceaseless efforts in this direction. This process continued after Independence. This is reflected in the formation of political parties and pressure groups by the scheduled castes.

The 'Republican Party of India' was formed by the scheduled castes in 1957. The party stood for an alliance of the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and other backward classes. It aimed at fighting for equality of opportunity and for special preference to the 'have-nots'. Its noble ideals included removal of exploitation of man by man and class by class. But the party had limited effectiveness. It formally split in 1970 due to internal differences. Its members were by and large co-opted into the Congress and worked as a pressure group in the party.

A group of young and militant scheduled caste radicals disillusioned with the leadership of the Republican Party formed a new party called the 'Dalit Panthers'. They have a broad orientation and seek to include all depressed people, such as, landless labourers, poor peasants, and factory workers belonging even to non-scheduled caste category in their movement. They aim at revolution. They proclaim: "We want to rule the whole country. Our target is not individuals but a whole system rotten to the core". Their main thrust lies in the sphere of creating a revolutionary consciousness through literature. They have a limited following.

In early 1980s, 'Bahujan Samaj Party' (BSP), under the leadership of Kanshi Ram, championed the cause of the scheduled castes through the strategy of horizontal mobilisation. During its brief career till the year 2003 it has shown itself to be capable of uniting the SCs with OBCs with a view to gain electoral success. Working on the calculation that the SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities constitute about 85 percent of the population BSP has managed to make major inroads to electoral politics (Suresh 1996). In the thirteenth Lok Sabha they have 14 MPs and 5 of their MPs represented the party in Rajya Sabha in 2003. They came to power thrice in the State of Uttar Pradesh, once in the year 1995 and second and third time in 1997 and 2002 respectively.

Further, the power bloc of the scheduled castes in the legislatures at the national and state levels also works on the principle of horizontal mobilisation. Such power blocs aim at securing benefits for the scheduled caste depending on the prevailing political situation. One such effective power bloc existed in the Lok Sabha under the leadership of Jagjivan Ram.

It is observed that vertical mobilisation of the scheduled castes in politics made them an ally in the continuation of an unjust and inequalitarian social order. Their horizontal mobilisation through the Republican Party of India, the Dalit Panthers have had only a limited effect. Bahujan Samaj Party managed to achieve political mileage to a great extent in this regard. Although the BSP is recognised by the Election Commission as a national party and it fields candidates across India, as an official national party must, it effectively functions on a regional basis limited to certain states of north India.

But it is rightly observed by Andre Beteille (1969) that "Since Independence... the emphasis seems to be shifting from Sanskritisation to competition for positions of office and power".

### Activity 2

Meet one of the leaders of your area who belongs to the scheduled caste category. Talk to him/her about

- 1) What measures he has taken to improve the socio-economic status of scheduled caste people of his/her area.
- 2) What he/she thinks about the reservation issue.

Write a note of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with those of the other students of your Study Centre.

### 22.5.4 Sanskritisation

The process of social mobility among the scheduled castes through Sanskritisation has continued during post-Independence period. They have adopted upper caste names, discovered myths regarding their glorious origin, adopted Sanskritic deities, customs and changed their occupations. In Kerala, the scheduled castes have adopted upper caste names, e.g., Uma, Ramani, Sankaran, Pushkaran and so on. The Barwis of West Bengal anoint turmeric on the day of the marriage. The Tiya of West Bengal call themselves Rajbanshi (or royal descent) or Suryabanshi (descendant from the Sun God). Moreover, Mahar of Maharashtra, Pasi of Uttar Pradesh, Baira and Balai of Rajasthan

have given up their traditional polluting occupation and taken up clean occupations in agriculture, industry and services.

### **22.5.5 Urbanisation**

Increased pace of urbanisation and urbanward migration from the rural areas in the post-Independence period has opened up a secular avenue of social mobility. But in case of the scheduled castes urbanward migration per se does not result in upward social mobility. In urban areas, they are generally employed in low status and low income occupations e.g. scavenging, boot polishing, construction work and unskilled factory work. Therefore, in spite of some increased earning they experience status immobility. Srinivas (1980) observed

Rural barbers when they migrate to towns, work in hair cutting saloons, washermen start laundries, smith work in furniture shops, oilmen sell oil, if not press oil, Malis work as gardeners, Chamars work in shoe-shops and Brahmins are cooks, teachers and lawyers.

### **22.5.6 Present Situation**

Some individuals, families and groups from amongst the scheduled castes have achieved social mobility. But the over-whelming majority of the scheduled castes still constitutes the most backward section of society. They suffer from traditional disabilities and deprivations, more in rural than in urban areas. In his study of Gujarat villages, I.P. Desai (1976) found that the practice of untouchability, restriction on entry into temples and upper caste houses, and separate source of water supply prevailed in 47,90 and 64 per cent respectively of the total number of 69 villages.

Occupational mobility of the scheduled castes has been very limited. They are under-represented in Class I and II services but over-represented in Class III and IV services. In politics, they are treated as a 'vote bank'. Educationally, they are still backward. The literacy rate is 21 per cent. Economically, they constitute the bulk of the people living below the poverty line.

Oppression and atrocities against the scheduled castes continue to exist even at the beginning of twenty-first century. On the contrary, we witness sharpening of conflicts between the scheduled castes and dominant section of the population. This is reflected in the emergence of anti-reservation riots in urban areas and increasing atrocities on the scheduled castes in rural areas.

The provisions of reservation for the scheduled castes have given rise to a feeling of resentment among the non-scheduled caste section of the population. Competition over scarce jobs and limited seats in professional colleges has generated tensions and conflicts. Anti-reservation movements have been witnessed in some parts of the country, e.g., Maharashtra and Gujarat. These movements have been directed against the upwardly mobile scheduled castes. In 1981, anti-scheduled caste riots occurred in many urban centres in Gujarat over the issue of reservation of seats in the post-graduate medical courses. The targets of attacks were mainly the upwardly mobile scheduled castes, such as, the Vankar who are generally employed in blue or white-collar jobs. Attacks were not directed at the lowly Bhangi who are generally engaged in the menial jobs as scavengers and where literacy rate is quite low.

Further, we need to understand that the scheduled castes form a part of the large section of backward population of our country, which includes the scheduled tribes and the other backward classes (OBCs). Generally speaking, the whole of the backward classes is backward in social, economic, political and educational domains. Their backwardness is reflected in their under-representation in central government services in which their overall proportion is about thirty per cent though they constitute about seventy-five per cent of the total population. Their representation in Class I services is much smaller (Report of the Backward Classes Commission 1980, First Part, p. 42).

Moreover, we observe that the policy of reservation has led to the growth of a small group of elites from amongst the backward classes. They are well educated, economically prosperous and politically vocal. The benefits of reservation are mainly cornered by them. Regarding the scheduled caste elites, Sachchidananda (1977) states that since they are educated and therefore, comparatively more enlightened than the rest of the community, they are better able to foresee social change. This perception helps them to take advantage of the various concessions and welfare measures adopted by the government for them. The scheduled caste elites, both in the towns and the villages show little concern for their lowly brethren. Instead, they are largely concerned with their own self-interests and those of their family and kin.

Thus, we find that the “trickle down approach” of the planners and “social mobility approach” in academics for raising the status of the scheduled castes have been a failure. An alternative could be a united struggle of all the oppressed sections of the population for transforming the society and building a united struggle of all the oppressed sections of the population for transforming the society and building a secular socialist and democratic India as envisaged in the Constitution.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Tick the correct answer to the following question.

What is the percentage of the scheduled castes in the total population of India, according to the 1991 Census?

- a) 20.49 percent
- b) 10.12 percent
- c) 23.56 percent
- d) 16.48 percent

- ii) In what way has the urbanward migration not helped the scheduled castes? Use about five lines.

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## 22.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have learnt that the term scheduled caste has been defined mainly on ritual basis of untouchability. The criteria of social, economic and educational backwardness have been taken into account for including various castes in the list of the scheduled castes. We have noted that this list is issued by the President of India.

We learnt that the term “scheduled caste” was coined by the Simon Commission in 1927. The concept of social mobility has been defined and its horizontal and vertical dimensions have been described in this unit. We have examined the various aspects of social mobility amongst the scheduled castes during the ancient, medieval and colonial periods. We discussed the different approaches to the problem of scheduled castes taken by B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi.

In this unit, you have learnt about the present situation of the scheduled castes. You have come to know that the policy of ‘protective discrimination’ was adopted by the Indian government in order to protect and promote the socio-economic interests of scheduled castes. The horizontal mobilisation of the scheduled castes can be seen through the formation of political parties, such as, the “Republican Party of India”. You have also learnt about the process of Sanskritisation amongst the scheduled castes and the impact of urbanisation on them. Finally, you have looked at the problems faced by them.

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## 22.7 KEYWORDS

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<b>Protective Discrimination</b>	This refers to the policy of the state to safeguard and promote the interests of the backward classes of population through giving preferential treatment to them. This is reflected in state policy of reservation in education, services and legislature to the scheduled castes. The terms “affirmative action”, “reverse discrimination” and “compensatory discrimination” are also used.
<b>Sanskritisation</b>	According to Srinivas, “Sanskritisation is the process by which a low Hindu caste or tribe or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently twice-born caste”.
<b>Social Mobility</b>	The process of shifting of social position by individual or social group in social hierarchy is called social mobility. It could be of two types viz., horizontal and vertical. Horizontal social mobility refers to the process of transition of individual or group from one social position to another situated on the same level in social hierarchy. Vertical mobility refers to the process of shifting of individual or group from one social stratum to another, which may be either upward or downward in social hierarchy.

## Westernisation

This term is used by Srinivas to “characterise the changes brought about in society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, and the term subsumes changes occurring at various levels-technology, institutions, ideology, values”.

## The Scheduled Castes

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## 22.8 FURTHER READING

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## 22.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The term ‘scheduled caste’ was coined by the Simon Commission in 1927.
- ii) The scheduled castes were prohibited from drawing water from the ‘savarna’ wells. They were not permitted to wear clothes or jewellery worn by the higher castes.
- iii) Social mobility is described as the process of shifting of an individual or social group from one social position to another in the social hierarchy. It is of two kinds, horizontal mobility and vertical mobility.
- iv) (C)

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) No
- b) Yes
- c) Yes



- d) No
- e) Yes
- ii) During the colonial period the Nadars of Tamil Nadu became upwardly mobile. Traditional occupation of toddy tapping which was considered polluting earlier became so profitable in the British period that they earned considerable amount of wealth from it. This wealth they used for purchasing land, for education, and so on. This enabled them to raise their status socially and economically.
- iii) To raise the status of the scheduled castes Ambedkar emphasised horizontal mobilisation of the scheduled castes. He wanted to turn them into a political force. He considered political power and secular means like education, administration, etc. an important tool for social mobility. Mahatma Gandhi on the other hand described their complete integration in the Hindu society. This he thought could be done through raising the consciousness of the upper castes against untouchability and other constructive works.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) (d)
- ii) The urbanward migration has not resulted in raising the social status of the scheduled castes because in urban areas also, they are generally employed in low status and low income occupations, like, scavenging boot polishing, and so on.

### Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Social Classes in India
- 23.3 The Impact of British Rule on Class Formation in India
  - 23.3.1 Change in Agriculture
  - 23.3.2 Trade and Commerce
  - 23.3.3 Development of Railways and Industry
  - 23.3.4 State and Administrative System
- 23.4 Uneven Growth of Social Classes
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- 23.6 Social Classes in Urban India
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  - 23.6.5 Working Classes
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- 23.8 Keywords
- 23.9 Further Reading
- 23.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 23.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you will be able to

- define the concept of social class in India
- discuss the impact of British rule on the class formation in India
- explain the consequent uneven growth of social classes
- describe the rural and urban classes in India.

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### 23.1 INTRODUCTION

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You have studied the caste dimension of social structure in the previous units. You learnt how well rooted and significant caste is in our society. Here, we

will introduce you to another dimension of Indian social structure, namely, its class component. We will discuss the classes in India in the British and post-British periods. We will also describe these classes in the context of rural and urban society in India.

In this unit we have discussed the concept of social class in section 23.2, the impact of the British rule on the class formation in India in section 23.3, and the consequent uneven growth of **social classes** has been explained in section 23.4. We have then listed and discussed some of the major types of classes found in rural and urban India in the two main sections 23.5 and 23.6. Finally, in section 23.7 we have given a summary of the unit.

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## 23.2 SOCIAL CLASSES IN INDIA

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Social class has been defined as a kind of social group, which is neither legally defined nor religiously sanctioned. It is generally defined as a stratum of people occupying similar social positions. Wealth, income, education, occupation are some of the basic determinants of class. It is relatively open, i.e. any one who satisfies the basic criteria can become its member. There are several classes in a society. These classes are hierarchically ranked primarily in terms of wealth and income. The differences of wealth and income are expressed in different life styles and consumption patterns. Social classes are the characteristic features of industrial societies (Bottomore 1962: 188). To give you an example, in a capitalist society we generally find the class of capitalists and the **working classes** besides several others.

Social classes in India, as we see them today, had their genesis during the British rule. This is not to say that the class phenomenon was absent in the pre-British Indian society. The class dimension of Indian society was only less pronounced than it turned out to be during the British period. The so-called self-sufficiency of the village community appears to have been one of the reasons behind it. That is, village community generally produced only what was required for the consumption needs of the village. There was hence little surplus and therefore less marked differentiation among the village population.

Even when there was a marked class dimension; it was overshadowed by the caste component. In fact, the only sphere where class dimension showed itself rather more sharply was in the nature of interaction between the rulers and the ruled. The king and his courtiers represented a class quite different from the subjects over whom they ruled. The courtiers comprised the *Zamindars*, *Jagirdars* and several others. They along with the king lived on the revenue collected from the village community under their jurisdiction.

Besides these classes there were also classes of administrative officers of various ranks, of merchants, artisans and specialists of various kinds.

The colonial rule in India proved to be one of the turning points in Indian history. It introduced new elements, which led to some radical changes in Indian society. Now let us see what the impact of the British rule was on the class formation in India.

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## 23.3 THE IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON CLASS FORMATION IN INDIA

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The impact of British rule in India has brought about far-reaching changes in Indian society. Some of these changes are discussed in the following sections.

### 23.3.1 Change in Agriculture

The emergence of new social classes in India was the consequence of far-reaching changes brought about by the British in the economic structure of India. The British administration revolutionised the existing land system. It did away with the traditional rights of the village community over the village land. Instead it created individual ownership rights in land by introducing several land reforms during the eighteenth century, such as the Permanent Settlement, the *Ryotwari* settlement, and the *Mahalwari* settlement. With this, land became private property, a commodity in the market. It could be mortgaged, purchased or sold.

Till the village ownership of land existed, the village was the unit of assessment. The new land revenue system eliminated the village as the unit. It introduced the system of individual land assessment and revenue payment. Along with it, a new method of fixing land revenue and its payment was introduced. Previously, revenue was fixed at a specified portion of the year's actual produce. This was replaced by a system of fixed money payment irrespective of crops. The landlord or cultivator under the system was hence forced to meet this demand. Further, the payment of revenue in cash gave impetus to production of cash crops in place of food crops. With expanding railway and transport system production for market became fairly well established. This commercialisation of agriculture, in turn, stimulated the growth of trade and commerce in India.

### 23.3.2 Trade and Commerce

Trade and commerce were centred around two things. Supply of raw material for industries in Britain was one. Procuring of the British manufactured goods for consumption in India was another. The latter had a disastrous effect on town and village handicrafts. Village and town handicrafts could not stand the competition brought about by import of goods from Britain and got disintegrated. Meanwhile there was lack of sufficient industrial development. The result was that the emerging industry could not absorb the displaced population, which eventually fell on an already stagnant agriculture.

### 23.3.3 Development of Railways and Industry

Alongside the growth of trade and commerce, there was rapid development of the transport system in India. The railways expanded on an increasing scale from the middle of the nineteenth century. These developments were undertaken with a view to meet the raw material requirements of industries in Britain. The construction of railways and roads also gave scope for investment of British capital in India. It led to better mobility of troops and for establishment of law and order. Investment of British capital found an outlet initially in such spheres as plantations (indigo, tea), cotton, jute and mining industries. This was the beginning of the industrialisation process in

India. By then, there was accumulation of sufficient savings on the part of Indian traders and merchants. This served as capital and made possible the creation of Indian owned industries.

### 23.3.4 State and Administrative System

Even before these developments, the British government had organised a huge and extensive state machinery to administer the conquered territory. A large number of educated individuals were required to staff this machinery. It was not possible to secure the staff of educated people from Britain for running such huge administrative machinery. Therefore the foreign rulers felt that there was a need for the introduction of Western education in India. Thus, schools, colleges and universities were established to impart Western education in India and to cater to the needs of the expanding economy and growing state machinery. As a consequence of the impact of British rule in India, the Indian society experienced an uneven growth of social classes. We are going to examine some aspects of this uneven growth in the next section.

#### Activity 1

Find out at least five people of your father, grand father or great-grand father's generation and request them to tell you about the changes that they had observed in the area where they lived due to the impact of British rule in India.

Write a note of two pages and compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

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## 23.4 UNEVEN GROWTH OF SOCIAL CLASSES

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The process of the rise of new social classes was an uneven one. It did not develop uniformly in different parts of the country and also among various communities. This was due to the fact that the social forces, which developed during the British rule, spread both in time and tempo unevenly. This was, in turn, dependent on the growth of political power in India. For example, it was in Bengal that two of the social classes - *zamindars* and **tenants** - came into existence first. Again it was in Bengal and Bombay that the first industrial enterprises started. This led to the emergence of the class of industrialists and workers in this region. It was for this reason that the British established a complex administrative system and introduced modern education first in Bengal and Bombay.

The process of the rise of new social classes among different communities was also uneven. This was due to the fact that certain communities were already engaged in definite economic, social or educational vocations in pre-British period. For example Baniyas were traders by vocation in our traditional social structure. Hence they were the first to take up modern commerce, banking and industrial enterprises (Misra 1978: 14). Similarly, Brahmans were the first to take up modern education and enter the **professional classes**. These communities took up the new challenges and entered these spheres of activity first because they were already having the basic disposition towards these

occupations. Thus on the eve of Independence we find that Indian social structure was made up of innumerable castes and classes. In some cases, these coincided with each other but in some they did not.

In the next two sections 23.5 and 23.6 we are going to enumerate and discuss the classes in India in the rural context and then in the urban context.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Define the concept of social class. Use about seven lines.

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- ii) List some of the changes that have lead to the emergence of social classes in India. Use about three lines.

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- iii) Spell out two spheres which show uneven growth of social class. Use about two lines.

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## 23.5 SOCIAL CLASSES IN RURAL INDIA

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In rural areas, classes consist principally of i) **landlords**, ii) tenants, iii) **peasant proprietors**, iv) agricultural labourers and v) artisans. Now let us examine each of them one by one.

### 23.5.1 Landlords

The British administration made various types of land settlements such as, the Permanent settlement, *Ryotwari* settlement and *Mahalwari* settlement with the natives (for details see Block 3, unit 10, section 10.4 of this course). Under the Permanent Settlement a new type of landlord was created out of the erstwhile tax collectors viz., the *zamindars*. Under the term of this settlement, the right of ownership was conferred on the *zamindars*. Before this settlement, the land used to be auctioned by the state on *patta* basis on which the *zamindars* only had the right to collect revenue. After this settlement, this land became theirs permanently i.e., they became hereditary owners of this land. *Zamindar's* only



obligation was the payment of fixed land revenue to the British Government. The new type of landholders were for all practical purposes equivalent to those of the landlords. As a result of this arrangement the peasants of this land were transformed into a mass of tenants in a day. This settlement was introduced by Lord Cornwallis in 1793, in the vast region of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and in certain districts of Madras. It was later also introduced in U.P. and parts of Bombay, Punjab, Sind, and so on. The *zamindari* settlement gave rise to a class of landlords, which was hitherto unknown in Indian society. The conferment of the right of ownership gave recognition to the right of mortgage and sale. Failure on the part of some *zamindars* to pay the fixed revenue led to the auction of portions of large estates. This in turn, led to the entry of a new class of landlords who were primarily the merchants and money-lenders.

The right of ownership also recognised the right to lease. This led to large-scale growth of smaller tenures. Legislation made such tenures transferable. In the course of time, tenure passed into the hands of non-cultivators such as money-lenders, traders, and absentee landlords, who had very little interest in agriculture itself. Their main aim was only in extracting money from the land. The passing of land into the hands of non-cultivating classes was not the feature of *zamindari* areas alone. Similar development took place in the *ryotwari* areas too where the right of ownership was vested in the actual cultivators. (For further details refer back to unit 10, section 10.4.2, ESO-12.)

### **Types of Landlords**

Broadly, there were two types of landlords: (i) the *zamindars/taluqdars* (old landlords) and (ii) money-lenders, merchants and others. Those who held such ownership of tenure rights (in *zamindari* areas) were often referred to as **intermediaries**. These intermediaries were of various categories known by different names and found in various regions of U.P., Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. *Taluqdars* were inferior intermediaries whom the large *zamindars* created out of their own *zamindari* rights. *Jotedars* found in some parts of Bengal were substantial landholders who held land direct from the *zamindars*. They got land cultivated by subletting to the tenants on a 50: 50 share. Similarly, *Pattidars* held permanent leases at fixed dues under the *zamindars*. *Ijardars* on the other hand were those to whom the revenue of an area was hired out on a contract basis.

### **Land Reform and its Consequences**

On the eve of Independence, the class of intermediaries owned a large portion of land in their hands while the peasant cultivators had little or no lands. There was also extreme economic inequality leading to socio-political inequality in Indian society. Hence, our national leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Patel placed a lot of emphasis on land reforms after India gained independence.

The first phase of land reform was aimed at abolition of intermediaries such as, the *Zamindars*. The *Zamindari* system was abolished in the 1950s and land reform was first implemented in Uttar Pradesh. The objective was to bring cultivators into direct relationship with the state. Hence, conferment of proprietary or occupancy rights on actual cultivator-tenants was a part of this measure.

The abolition of *Zamindari* system in the 1950s had several consequences. It led to the formation of new classes. For instance, the intermediaries like the *zamindars* declared themselves as the owners of the land. Previously the *zamindar* used to lease out their lands to the tenants. But when *Zamindari* system was abolished, in states like U.P., the Government permitted the erstwhile *zamindars* to declare ownership of those lands which they were cultivating themselves. These lands were called '*Khudkasht*' lands. So, as consequence, the *Zamindars* forced most of the tenants out of these lands and declared the land, which they were holding as '*Khudkasht*'. Thus, after the land reforms they simply came to be renamed as *bhoomidars*, i.e., cultivators of the soil.

The tenants who were actually cultivating the land prior to the land reforms were thrown out of their lands and most of them became landless **agricultural labourers**. It led to the pauperisation of the peasants. But there was a category of better off tenants who were able to buy the surplus land, created due to the land ceilings from the *Zamindars*, at reasonably low rates determined by the Government. Thus, a new class of peasant proprietors or cultivators was formed who took up agriculture as an enterprise (Khusro 1975: 186).

Thus, the land reform measures after Independence failed to create a socially homogeneous class of cultivators. All the same, the top strata of the agrarian hierarchy, the *Zamindars*, lost their right to extract taxes from the peasants. They were left with truncated landholding. Their economic, political and social supremacy was also broken. Hence, they could no longer enjoy the kind of control they used to exercise over peasants. Under the circumstance, they found it difficult to live as rentiers. Indeed only a small proportion of them continue to live as rentiers. The rest have taken to active participation in the management and improvement of their farm.

They have also brought about radical change in the methods of agricultural production. The erstwhile landlords and some of the ex-tenants thus became the forerunners of capitalist trend in the Indian agriculture. In view of such changes, they also took maximum benefits out of the **Green Revolution** programme launched by the government. These changes had led to the development of a class of "gentlemen" or progressive farmers who had some education and often training in agriculture. These farmers had taken up agriculture as a kind of business. They invest money in agricultural crops, which have higher cash value i.e., they go in for cash crops. They read the reports of experts, use best seeds and fertilisers. (For further details refer back to unit 10, Block 3, ESO-12.)

### 23.5.2 Peasant Proprietors

Another settlement made by the British is known by the name of Ryotwari Settlement. This was introduced in Madras, Bombay Presidencies in the nineteenth century. Under this settlement, ownership of land was vested in the peasants. The actual cultivators were subjected to the payment of revenue. However, this settlement was not a permanent settlement and was revised periodically after 20-30 years. It did not bring into existence a system of peasant ownership. Instead the cultivators came into direct contact with the State which replaced the oppressive role of the landlord. The settlement thus gave rise to a class of peasant proprietors. Owing to excessive land revenue, small

landholdings, acute indebtedness, this class underwent impoverishment from the very beginning.

The process of differentiation was at work among the peasant proprietors. In the process, a few climbed up in the socio-economic hierarchy but a large number fell from their previous rank and position. A great majority of them were transformed into tenants and even agricultural labourers. This showed a large-scale passing of land from the actual cultivators to not only those of money-lenders, merchants and others, but also to a certain section of peasant proprietors who had become rich peasants.

In the post-Independence period, there was increase in the number of peasant proprietors as mentioned before in this unit. This was due to measures like *Zamindari* abolition and ceiling on existing landholdings and family labour. By paying compensation to *zamindars*, the erstwhile tenants obtained proprietary rights over the land, which they held as tenants. This option could be availed of by and large only by the rich tenants. Similarly, through ceiling on landholding, many could acquire proprietary rights in land.

The peasant proprietors, in the past as well as in the present, hardly constitute a homogeneous category. They may be broadly divided into three categories, namely, (i) the rich, (ii) the middle, and (iii) the poor peasants.

- i) **Rich peasants:** They are proprietors with considerable holdings. They perform no fieldwork but supervise cultivation and take personal interest in land management and improvement. They are emerging into a strong capitalist farmer group.
- ii) **Middle peasants:** They are landowners of medium size holdings. They are generally self-sufficient. They cultivate land with family labour.
- iii) **Poor peasants:** They are landowners with holdings that are not sufficient to maintain a family. They are forced to rent in other's land or supplement income by working as labourers. They constitute a large segment of the agricultural population.

The peasant proprietors had been instrumental in bringing about great change in Indian agriculture, specially in Punjab, Haryana, western U.P., Karnataka and Bihar. This change is known as the Green Revolution. The role of such peasants was crucial in this change.

**Green Revolution:** After Independence, India was faced with acute food shortage. Green revolution was seen as a way out of the problem. Like all other programmes of planned rural development, India embarked upon the Green Revolution in the 1960s. It began launching programmes like the High Yielding Variety Programme (HYVP), the Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (IADP) and the like. These measures were introduced initially in a few selected areas, which were mostly irrigated. Under the programme, there was considerable use of fertilizers and pesticides. There was also increase in the acreage under irrigation either through canals or installation of water pumps, etc. Correspondingly, there was marked increase in crop yield. The programme, initiated initially on an experimental basis, took off exceedingly well in Punjab, Haryana and western U.P. The improved method of cultivation thus became a general pattern of agricultural practices in these parts of the country. There

was even further trend towards modern method of cultivation viz. mechanisation. The increasing use of tractors, tillers, threshers, reflected this trend.

Such development led to grave social consequences. Socio-economic inequalities inherent in the agrarian structure were further reinforced. It led to further concentration of land into the hands of a few. Side by side, rural poverty had increased. The agricultural labourers, the landless and near landless, form the core of the rural poor.

The present big landowners in various parts of India are formed into organisations to safeguard their interests. Some of these organisations are for example, All India Kisan Sabha, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Kshetkari Sanghatana and so on. Such organisations in some parts of India had begun in the British period. For example, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa Zamindars Association. Under the auspices of such organisations, peasants took part in the National Movement in India (Chandra 1971: 204). All categories of peasants are, in general, members of these organisations. They are, however, mostly dominated by rich peasants and leadership comes from them.

### 23.5.3 Tenants

The creation of *zamindari* settlement transformed the owner cultivators of pre-British India into a class of tenants. The *zamindars* resorted to the practice of extracting an exorbitant rent from the tenants. Those who failed to pay were evicted from land and were replaced by those ready to pay higher rents. Similar practice prevailed in estates, which were leased out by the *zamindars*. Broadly then there were two categories of tenants in *zamindari* areas- tenants under *zamindars* and tenants under lease (tenure) holders during the British period. Tenants under tenure holders were thus sub-tenants. Of course, various categories of tenants under subtenants too had grown up in Bengal. The lowest in the hierarchy were **sharecroppers**. This process of creating tenants and subtenants is called sub-infeudation. (For further understanding of this concept refer back to Block 3, unit 10 of ESO-12).

The growth of tenants was not confined to *zamindari* areas alone. Even in *ryotwari* areas where peasant proprietorship was introduced, a new class of tenants grew. They were composed broadly of the earlier owners whose land passed into the hands of money-lenders and others in the course of time. Legislations were passed from time to time in various parts to protect the interests of tenants. This did give some protection to the affluent category of tenants. The lower impoverished category of tenants remained unprotected.

On the eve of Independence, there were various categories of tenants. Broadly they could be classified as tenants, subtenants, sharecroppers, etc. In *zamindari* areas, of course, there were many sub-categories between the *zamindars* and the actual cultivators who were in general sharecroppers. Tenants on the whole enjoyed occupancy right. They could not be evicted. Sub-tenants in general enjoyed some security of tenure but were liable to eviction. Sharecroppers on the other hand did not have any security of tenure and were at the mercy of their landlords. They cultivated the land and retained only a half share of the produce.

## Tenancy Reforms

Tenancy reforms became an important component of land reform programme. The provisions under the reforms were regulation of rent, security of tenure and ownership of tenant. However, there was not much success due to loopholes in the programme and its implementation. The benefits of the reform, of course, mainly went to the affluent section of the tenant class. They acquired ownership rights in areas not taken by the *zamindars* for their personal cultivation i.e., the land besides their *khudkasht* land. Subtenants too benefited to some extent as they could get the occupancy right and in some situations could even convert it into ownership right.

In short, the affluent section of tenants and subtenants were transformed into peasant proprietors with tenancy reform programme. Sharecroppers on the other hand, gained little from these programmes. With the second phase of land reform viz. ceiling on land holding, there was reduction in the extent of tenancy. Sharecropping however, continues even thereafter. Indeed, sharecroppers constitute the most important, if not the only, segment of tenant class in rural India today. Organisationally and politically, they are weak though they form a very important component of peasant organisation in India.

### 23.5.4 Agricultural Labourers

Non-cultivating landlords, peasant proprietors and tenants are not the only social groups connected with agriculture. Along with the swelling of rent paying tenants there was also a progressive rise in the number of agricultural labourers. The growing indebtedness among peasant population, followed by land alienation and displacement of village artisans was largely responsible for this.

The agricultural labourers were and still are broadly of three types. Some owned or held a small plot of land in addition to drawing their livelihood from sale of their labour. Others were landless and lived exclusively on hiring out of their labour. In return for their labour, the agricultural labourers were paid wages, which were very low. Their condition of living was far from satisfactory. Wages were generally paid in kind i.e. food grains like paddy, wheat and pulses. Sometimes cash was paid in lieu of wages in kind. A certain standard measure was employed to give these wages. In fact, payment in kind continued alongside money payments.

There was another type of labour prevailing in many parts of the country. Their status was almost that of bondage or semi bondage. Dublas and Halis in Gujarat, Padials in Tamil Nadu are a few examples of such bonded labour existing in India. Such labour force exists in some parts even today. The land reform programmes after Independence have done almost nothing to improve the condition of agricultural labourers in India. Of course, the government has proposed to settle them on co-operative basis on surplus or newly reclaimed or wasteland. Bonded labour was legally abolished in India in 1972 and Government, as well as, voluntary agencies are doing serious work in order to locate the bonded labourers and rehabilitate them. There has been considerable swelling in the number of agricultural labourers in the wake of the land reform programmes. Resumption of land by landlords for personal cultivation and eviction of tenants from their tenure have been the factors leading to this trend. The process was further accelerated by the Green Revolution. Large farms, being in conformity with the Green Revolution, has opened the way for greater



concentration of land by purchase, sale or through eviction of tenants. In the process the rank of agricultural labourers has further increased. At the same time, there is very low rate of transfer of the agricultural labour population to industry. Hence, there is little likelihood of radical change in the social and economic situation of the agricultural labourers in most parts of the country. The government has, of course, taken some steps towards protecting their interest. Legislation towards abolition of bonded labour and minimum wage structure on the one hand, and employment generating programmes on the other, reflect this concern. Such measures are, however, far from effective. The agricultural labourers hence constitute the weakest section of the rural society.

### 23.5.5 Artisans

In rural areas the class of artisans form an integral part of the village community. They have existed since the ancient periods contributing to the general self-sufficient image of an Indian village. Some of these are like the carpenter (*Badhai*), the ironsmith (*Lohar*), the potter (*Kumhar*) and so on. Not all villages had families of these artisans but under the *Jajmani* system, sometimes a family of these occupational castes served more than one village.

Some social mobility did exist in the pre-British period but, generally, these artisan castes did not experience much change. Due to the advent of the British in India, this relatively static existence of the artisan castes suffered a radical change. Indian economy became subordinate to the interests of the British trade and industry.

Rural artisans and craftsmen were hard hit under the British rule. They could not compete with the mass manufactured goods produced by the British industries. These goods were machine-made and cheap. For example, textile used to be an area where Indian artisans excelled themselves. Even today we hear the praises of “*Dhaka malmal*” (a fine variety of cloth produced in Dhaka, now in Bangladesh). Due to the British impact and availability of mass manufactured cloth, the Indian textiles suffered a severe set-back. Therefore, the demand for the goods produced by the Indian artisans dropped. The artisans suffered badly and most of them became so pauperised that they had to revert back to agriculture. This in turn flooded the agricultural fields with surplus labour which became counter productive instead of useful.

The destruction of the village arts and crafts led to deindustrialisation of rural economy (for more details refer back to unit 10, Block 3, ESO-12). After Independence, the Indian Government has taken several steps to improve the condition of the artisans. New cottage industries have been established, loan facilities provided and their skills have been recognised in the form of National Awards etc. Transport facilities to bring their products to the urban markets have also been provided. However, the class of artisans and craftsmen in the rural areas is not a homogeneous lot. In their own group there are some who are highly skilled and some semi-skilled or less skilled. Thus, socially all of them cannot be ranked in one class. But in a broad sense we can consider them as a class by virtue of their occupation. Yet, they remain very much unorganised except to some extent in parts of south India. Their chance of developing an effective organisation for collective bargain too appears quite remote. The distinct social classes commonly seen in rural and urban India are picturised in figure numbers 23.1 and 23.2, respectively.



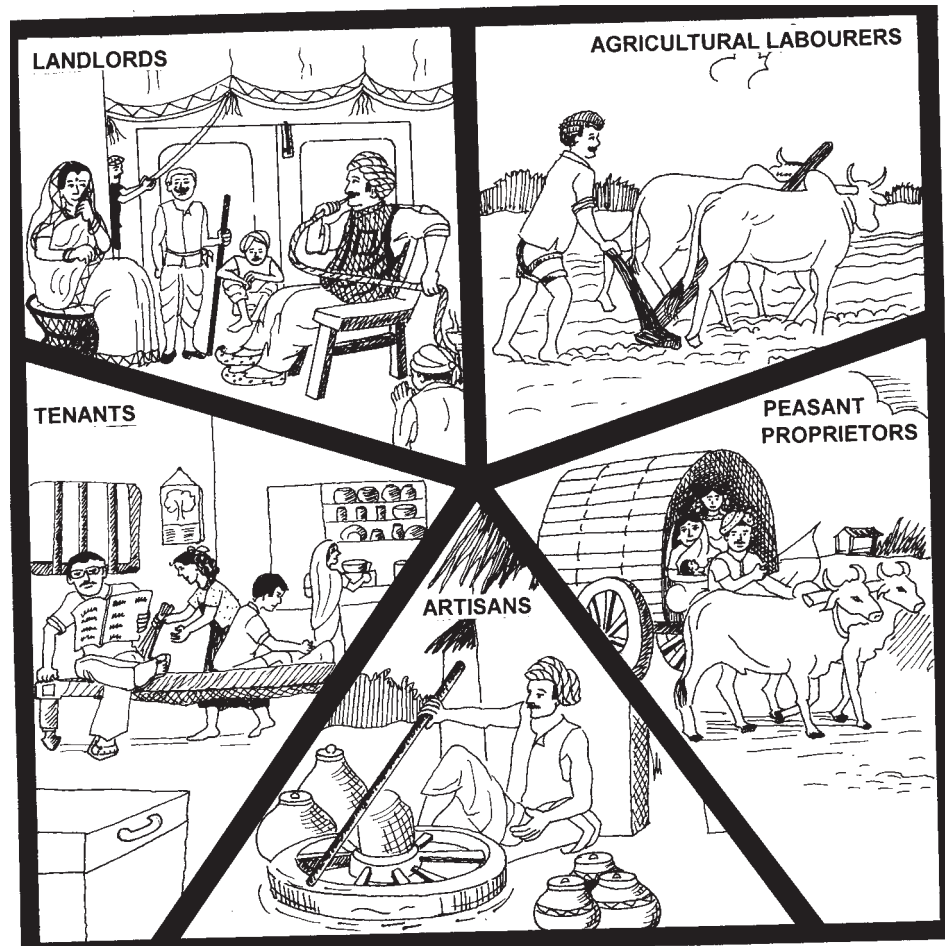


Fig. 23.1 Social classes in rural India

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Describe the *ryotwari* settlement of land during the British rule. Use two lines for your answer.

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- ii) Describe the permanent settlement of land during the British rule. Use three lines for your answer.

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- iii) Distinguish between the rich peasant proprietors and the middle peasant proprietors, in about six lines.

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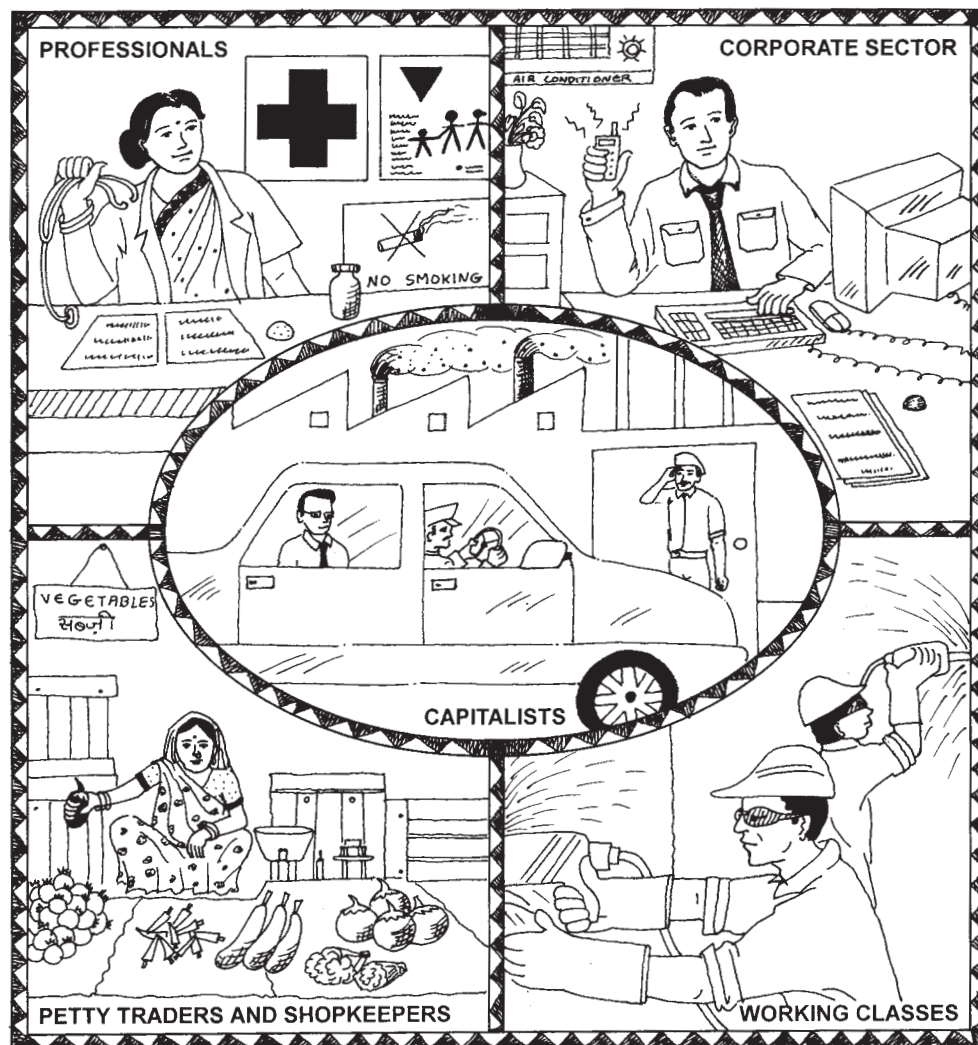


Fig. 23.2: Social classes in urban India

## 23.6 SOCIAL CLASSES IN URBAN INDIA

In the urban areas social classes comprise principally (i) capitalists (commercial and industrial), (ii) corporate sector (iii) professional classes, (iv) **petty traders and shopkeepers** and (v) working classes (see figure 23.3). Now let us examine each of them one by one.

### 23.6.1 Commercial and Industrial Classes

Under the British rule, production in India became production for market. As a result of this, internal market expanded and the class of traders engaged in internal trading grew. Simultaneously, India was also linked up with the world market. This led to the growth of a class of merchants engaged in export-import business. Thus, there came into being a commercial middle class in the country. With the establishment of railways, the accumulation of savings on the part of this rich commercial middle class took the form of capital to be invested in other large-scale manufactured goods and modern industries. Like the British, who pioneered the industrial establishment in India, the Indians, too made investment initially in plantations, cotton, jute, mining and so on. Indian society thus included in its composition such new groups as mill owners,

mine owners, etc. Subsequently, they also diversified the sphere of their industrial activity. Economically and socially this class turned out to be the strongest class in India.

However, Indians lagged far behind in comparison to the British in these activities. Government policy was mainly responsible for their slow development during the colonial period. The conflict of interest with the British led to the formation of independent organisations by the Indian **commercial and industrial classes**. This class participated in the freedom struggle by rallying behind the professional classes who were the backbone of the Indian National Movement. With the attainment of Independence, emphasis was laid on rapid industrialisation of the country. In this process, the state was to play a very active role. It evolved economic and industrial policies, which clearly indicated the role of the commercial and industrial class as the catalyst of industrialisation in India. It also actively assisted such classes towards augmentation of production. The state hence introduced the mixed economy pattern, which implies that there is a public sector and a private sector in the Indian Economy. The major fields like agriculture, industry and trade were left to the private individuals. The creation of infrastructure and establishment of heavy and strategic industries was taken up by the state sector. This type of economy led to a phenomenal rise in the number of industries owned and controlled by the capitalists. It also led to the rise of commercial classes. The commercial and business class has therefore, grown in scale and size in the post-Independence era. These industries were not confined to traditional sectors alone such as textile, jute, mines, and plantation. Rather there was considerable diversification into steel industries, paper mills, and various steel manufactured goods. Industrialisation, as has been going on, however shows a disturbing trend. There is a growing tendency towards inequality amongst industrial classes. There is heavy concentration of assets, resources and income in a few business houses such as the Tatas, Birlas, Dalmias, and a few others.

### **23.6.2 The Corporate Sector**

Any organisation that is under government ownership and control is called as public sector units and any organisation, which does not belong to public sector can be taken to be a part of private sector. The firms and organisation which are owned, controlled and managed exclusively by private individuals and entities are included in private sector. All private sector firms can be classified into two categories, such as individually owned and collectively owned. Collectively owned firms are further classified into i) partnership firms ii) joint Hindu family iii) joint-stock companies and iv) co-operatives. The most important of these is the joint-stock organization, which is otherwise popularly known as corporate sector. Joint-stock companies which do not belong to public sector are collectively known as private corporate sector.

Indian corporate sector is substantially large and highly diversified. The role and significance of private corporate sector can be gauged from the contribution it makes in terms of value added to national economy. The contribution of private corporate sector in terms of net value added, increased from 10 per cent of the total 'net value added' generated in the economy in early 1980s to around 19 per cent of the same in mid 1990s (Shanta 1999). This clearly shows the significance of private corporate sector in the economy is increasing constantly. The private corporate sector has been important in many other

important respects also. According to a study carried out by 'Dalal Street Investment Journal (2000), most companies, which achieved best growth in 1999-2000 in terms of their net profit, belong to private corporate sector.

Greater move towards privatisation after the adoption of new economic policy in 1991 accorded significant importance to private sector in the development process of the economy. Due to the radical change in policy approach from regularisation to liberalisation, private corporate sector has gained centre stage in the economic areas.

### 23.6.3 Professional Classes

The new economic and state systems brought about by the British rule required cadres of educated Indians trained in modern law, technology, medicine, economics, administrative science and other subjects. In fact, it was mainly because of the pressing need of the new commercial and industrial enterprises and the administrative systems that the British government was forced to introduce modern education in India. They established modern educational institutions on an increasing scale. Schools and colleges giving legal, commercial and general education were started to meet the needs of the state and the economy. Thus, there came into being an expanding professional class. Such social categories were linked up with modern industry, agriculture, commerce, finance, administration, press and other fields of social life. The professional classes comprise modern lawyers, doctors, teachers, managers and others working in the modern commercial and other enterprises, officials functioning in state administrative machinery, engineers, technologists; agriculture scientists, journalists and so on. The role of this class in the National Movement was decisive. They were, in fact, pioneers, and pace-setters. They were also the force behind progressive social and religious reform movements in the country.

Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in post-independent India has opened the way for large-scale employment opportunities in industries, trade and commerce, construction, transport, services and other varied economic activities. Simultaneously, the state has created a massive institutional set-up comprising a complex bureaucratic structure throughout the length and breadth of the country. This has provided employment on a sizeable scale. The employment in these sectors, whether private or government requires prerequisite qualifications, such as education, training, skill, and so on. Bureaucrats, management executives, technocrats, doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, are some of the categories who possess such skills.

They have grown considerably in size and scale ever since independence. This class, however, hardly constitutes a homogeneous category. Of course, it enjoys pay and condition of work far more favourable than those engaged in manual work but less than those enjoyed by the upper class. However, even within this non-proprietary class of non-manual workers, a deep hierarchy exists. There are some high paid cadres at the top. A large proportion on the other hand, has earnings of only a little above those of the non-manual workers. There are also considerable differences in the condition of their work and opportunity for promotion. They differ in their styles of life as well. In view of these observations we can say that they are only gradually crystallising into a well-defined middle class.

### 23.6.4 Petty Traders, Shopkeepers and Unorganised Workers

In addition to the new classes discussed above, there has also been in existence in urban areas a class of petty traders and shopkeepers. These classes have developed with the growth of modern cities and towns. They constitute the link between the producers of goods and commodities and the mass of consumers. That is, they buy goods from the producers or wholesalers and sell it among the consumers. Thus, they make their living on the profit margin of the prices on which they buy and sell their goods and commodities.

Like all other classes, this class also has grown in scale in post-independent India. The unprecedented growth of cities in the process of urbanisation, which the post-independent India has been witness to, has stimulated the growth of this class. The pressure of population on land and lack of avenues of employment in rural society has led to a large-scale migration of rural population to towns and cities in search of employment. Such migration is taking place not only in big cities but also in hundreds of medium sized or small sized cities that are springing up in different parts of the country. Urbanisation on the other hand, offers a variety of new activities and employment. The growing urban population creates demands for various kinds of needs and services. Petty shop-keeping and trading caters to these needs of the urban population. A section of the urban population draws its livelihood from these sources. In view of the growing urbanisation their size has considerably increased. Besides these spheres of activities, urbanisation also offers opportunities for employment in the organised and unorganised sector of the economy. The opportunities in the organised sector are small and require educational qualification, and training. The bulk of rural migrants lack this pre-requisite and hence the organised sector is closed to them. Invariably then, they fall back upon the unorganised sector of the economy. They work in small-scale production units or crafts, industry or manual service occupation. They get low wages, and also are deprived of the benefits, the organised labour force are entitled to.

In the wake of economic liberalisation since 1991, there is now a trend towards deregulation of labour market, which may make the labour relations in the unorganised sector more exploitative. Although economic liberalisation is affecting the organised workers directly, there may be considerable impact on unorganised workers. For instance, the growing unemployment in the organised sector tends to decrease the wages and the working days of the workers in the unorganised sector. Besides many petty trade and business activities engaging unorganised workers will be affected because of the entry of the private corporate sector and multinational corporations. A recent study (Haque and Naidu 1999) shows that the impact of economic liberalisation has been disastrous for those employed in petty trade, artisans, fisherman, etc. thus illiteracy coupled with lack of organisational strength is likely to worsen the working environment and labour relations in the unorganised sector.

This class also constitutes an amorphous category. It comprises on the one hand self-employed petty shopkeepers traders, vendors, hawkers, and on the other, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the informal sector. They are the least organised of the urban groups in India.



**Activity 2**

In your neighbourhood select ten people of different occupational backgrounds and chart out the class to which they belong, such as, landlord, tenants, artisans, agricultural labourers, capitalists, professional class, petty traders and shopkeepers or working class.

- 1) What are your reasons to put these people in these classes? Give at least two reasons for each
- 2) Write a note of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with other students of your Study Centre.

**23.6.5 Working Classes**

Origin of the working class could be traced back to the British rule. This was the modern working class which was the direct result of modern industries, railways, and plantations established in India during the British period. This class grew in proportion as plantations, factories, mining, industry, transport, railways and other industrial sectors developed and expanded in India. The Indian working class was formed predominantly out of the pauperised peasants and ruined artisans. Level of living and working conditions characterised their existence. A large proportion of them generally remained indebted because of their inability to maintain themselves and their families. The government passed legislation, from time to time, such as the Indian Posts Act, the Workmen's Compensation Act, the Factories Act, the Miners Act, etc. These were however, considered by social thinkers as inadequate to protect the rights of the labourers.

These hard conditions of life and labour led to the emergence of trade unions and the growth of working class movement in India. This was evident from the participation of the workers in, strikes and other activities launched by trade unions from time to time. As a result, there was considerable improvement in the wage structure and working conditions of the working class populations in India.

India has undergone rapid industrialisation after Independence. This industrialisation is no longer confined to a few urban centres as was the case in colonial period. Further, it is also no longer confined to a few traditional sectors such as textile, jute, mining and plantation. It has diversified into new spheres. The state itself has played a pivotal role in the expansion of heavy and strategic industries.

In view of this working class has grown in volume in post-independent India. They have also been dispersed to different parts and different sectors of the industry. Thus, the working class has become much more heterogeneous. It consists of workers employed in different types of industries that have different social and historical background. This diversity in the working class has given rise to a complex set of relations among the different sectors.

The attitude of the government towards the working class too underwent change in the post-independence period. The government's attitude towards working class had become more favourable. It had imposed some regulation on the employers and had granted some protection to the workers. Several Acts were passed granting some facilities to the workers. Some of these are Payment of



Bonus Act, Provident Fund and Gratuity Act etc. All these affected the working class people in the country.

It is a changed scenario ever since India adopted New Economic Policy and Structural Adjustment programme in 1991. The New Economic Policy, which operates under an open and liberalised economic regime, has emphasised a deregulated regime with less emphasis on regulation of labour and employment conditions. This trend largely went against the interests of the working class. The major adjustment policy followed by the private as well as public sector has resulted in an increase in the casualisation of labour on a large scale. It also resulted in the redundancy of existing workforce and relocation of units to lower wage areas with temporary workforce. Apart from that companies had resorted to direct reduction of workforce. The industrial units resorted to no new recruitment or replacement, retrenchment, voluntary retirement schemes, increased sub contracting, automation and shut down of departments and closure. This is accompanied by the shift in the government policies away from protection of employment by withdrawing certain pro-labour legal provisions. The result is that the workers are made to work under exploitative conditions without much bargaining power.

The trade union organisation too shows some change in the post-Independence period. Till Independence, political and economic struggles of the trade unions had been directed against imperialist subjugation. After Independence their struggle has been against the employers of labour and it is more specific in its goal. Yet, considerable division exists among the trade unions in terms of control, sector and region of the industries. Much of the resistance in the form of strikes has been generally organised industry wise or region wise. Trade unions have also taken refuge and found support in different political parties. As a result, trade union movement in post-Independence period has been subjected to further divisions and subdivisions.

The process of current industrial restructuring has a negative impact on trade unions. The new management strategies created an atmosphere of job insecurity among the workers and severely curtailed trade union activity. Due to the consequences of liberalisation of the Indian economy as well as closure of sick units and changing pattern of work and organisation, the trade union's influence has come down to lowest possible level, resulting in loss of membership. These developments have posed a serious challenge to trade unions reflecting a deep crisis in their existing structure. In the emerging scene the trade unions also adopted different strategies. Providing a joint trade union platform, formation of unity among public sector Unions, merging of central trade unions, addressing the needs of the unorganised sector are some worth mentioning here. In the present circumstances the trade unions have to adopt new strategies and have to leave behind their confrontationist approach, which depend heavily on agitations and protest which became irrelevant (Radhakrishna 1998).

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Identify two important factors, which paved the way for industrialisation in India. Use about three lines.

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- .....
- ii) List four major fields in which early industrialisation took place. Use about three lines.

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- iii) Spell out two factors, which facilitated the growth of professional classes in India.

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- iv) What accounts for the growth of petty traders and shopkeepers in India? Use about three lines.

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## 23.7 LET US SUM UP

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Social classes constitute an important segment of social structure in modern India. Social classes have always been present through all ages but the social classes as we see them today in India, had their origins in the British rule.

Therefore, first of all, we outlined the impact of British rule on the class formation in India. In this connection, we pointed out the creation of new economy in British India. This reflected in the agricultural sector, in the form of introduction of private property in land, new revenue system and the increasing commercialisation of agriculture, which was a consequence of Agrarian Reforms introduced after Independence. The other spheres of this new economy were the growth of trade and commerce, extension of railways, introduction and expansion of industrial enterprises. The development of state and administrative system coupled with modern education were the other important social forces, which shaped the new classes in India. In the process we also pointed to the consequent uneven growth of social classes in different parts and communities of India. We then studied the rural classes in India. We classified them broadly into five divisions, such as, landlords, peasant proprietors, tenants, agricultural labourers and artisans. Each was studied with reference to its emergence and character. Major changes in their composition after Independence were pointed out. Similarly, urban classes were divided into five categories. These comprised

commercial and industrial classes, the corporate sector, professional classes, petty traders, shopkeepers and unorganised workers, and working class. They too were studied with reference to their emergence, character and changing situation, in the post-Independence period.

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## 23.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Agricultural Labourers</b>	Social categories drawing livelihood mainly from selling their labour powers.
<b>Commercial and Industrial Capitalists</b>	Owners of industrial establishment and large-scale business.
<b>Green Revolution</b>	Accelerated growth of food production through combination of improved seeds, fertilizers, pesticide and irrigation.
<b>Intermediaries</b>	Social categories between state and the actual cultivators.
<b>Landlords</b>	Owners of estates who leased out land to others in pre-British period.
<b>Peasant Proprietors</b>	Cultivators with proprietary rights in land who emerged after independence.
<b>Petty Traders and Shopkeepers</b>	Population engaged in small business and trading.
<b>Professional Classes</b>	Occupational categories involving prerequisite qualifications such as, education, training and skill.
<b>Sharecroppers</b>	Tenants/cultivators cultivating land on share basis.
<b>Social Classes</b>	Social categories differentiated and hierarchically ranked in terms of primarily income, wealth and assets.
<b>Tenants</b>	Cultivators holding land from owners on some tenure.
<b>Working Class</b>	Those who work in the industries.
<b>Zamindars</b>	Owners of estate, created due to the introduction of Permanent Settlement in 1793 in certain regions of India. However, the word <i>Zamindar</i> is used in different senses in different regions of India.

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## 23.9 FURTHER READING

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## 23.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Social class is a kind of social group, which is neither legally defined nor religiously sanctioned. It has been defined as a stratum of people who share a similar position in society. They are relatively open and anyone who satisfies the basic criteria of wealth and associated style of life, etc. can become its member. Social classes in a society are ranked hierarchically on the basis of primarily wealth and income. Classes are the characteristic features of industrial societies.
- ii) Some of the changes that have led to the emergence of social classes in India are (a) changing land system, (b) trade and commerce, (c) industrialisation, (d) state and administrative system, and (e) modern education.
- iii) The uneven growth of social classes took place in two spheres. One was the various parts of India and the other, in the various communities in India.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) *Ryotwari* settlement was a settlement made by the British. Under this settlement the ownership of land was vested in the peasants who were the actual cultivators.

## Caste and Class

- ii) Permanent settlement was a settlement made by the British. Under this settlement the right of ownership was conferred on the *Zamindars*. Their only obligation was to pay a fixed land revenue to the British Government.
- iii) The rich peasants are proprietors having considerable landholdings. They are rich enough to hire agricultural labourers to do field work and they generally supervised cultivation. They take personal interest in the management and improvement of their land. In comparison to them, the middle peasants own medium size landholdings. They are self-sufficient and they use only family labour for land cultivation.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) The two important factors, which paved the way for industrialisation, are introduction of railways and the accumulation of savings.
- ii) The four major fields in which the early industrialisation took place are (a) plantation, (b) cotton, (c) jute, (d) mining.
- iii) The factors, which facilitated the growth of professional classes in India, are (a) trade, commerce and industry, (b) state and administrative system.
- iv) Growth of towns and cities, on a large-scale accounts for the growth of petty traders and shopkeepers in India.

### Structure

#### 24.0 Objectives

#### 24.1 Introduction

#### 24.2 Nature of Backward Classes

##### 24.2.1 Definition of Backward Classes

##### 24.2.2 Composition of Backward Classes

##### 24.2.3 British Rule and Backward Classes

##### 24.2.4 Backward Classes and the Indian Constitution

#### 24.3 Social Background of Backward Classes

##### 24.3.1 The Scheduled Tribes

##### 24.3.2 The Scheduled Castes

##### 24.3.3 The Other Backward Classes

#### 24.4 Features and Problems of Backward Classes in the Context of Social Change

##### 24.4.1 Context of Social Change

##### 24.4.2 The Scheduled Tribes

##### 24.4.3 The Scheduled Castes

##### 24.4.4 The Other Backward Classes

#### 24.5 Let Us Sum Up

#### 24.6 Keywords

#### 24.7 Further Reading

#### 24.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 24.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with the backward classes in India. After studying this unit you will be able to

- explain the meaning of the term “backward classes” and the social categories which constitute it
- describe the social background of each of these categories
- identify some of the distinctive features and problems of each component of the backward classes in the context of social change.

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### 24.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Unit 23 we had discussed the emergence and role of classes in India. Here we shall focus on the **backward classes**. The backward classes constitute an important segment of Indian society. They account for more than thirty per cent of the total population. Their condition is intimately connected with many of the basic features of Indian social structure.



The unit has been divided into three sections each dealing with one of the aspects spelt out in the objectives. In section 24.2 we have defined the composition of the backward classes. In section 24.3 we have given the social background of the backward classes and in section 24.4 we have described the distinguishing features and problems of the backward classes in the context of social change. Finally, in section 24.5 the unit has been summed up. Now let us examine the nature of backward classes.

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## 24.2 NATURE OF BACKWARD CLASSES

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The term 'class' signifies a form of social stratification. It is defined as a stratum of people who share a similar socio-economic status or position. It is relatively open as compared to other forms of stratification like caste. A class is considered to be backward if its members are economically and educationally less privileged compared to the other classes in that society. Let us see how a backward class in India is defined and what is its nature. Then we shall discuss the phenomenon of backward classes during the British period and finally, we will discuss how the Constitution has dealt with them.

### 24.2.1 Definition of Backward Classes

The backward classes in India can be understood only when we understand the basic character of Indian society which consists of a number of closed status groups. The 'backward classes' do not constitute one single whole but a multitude of social groups with varying positions and socio-economic standing in the social hierarchy of Indian society.

They suffer from disadvantages and disabilities which are age-old and which derive their sanction mainly from the caste system. Low status, poverty and illiteracy are social problems, which they have inherited due to their ascribed status of being born in a low caste or tribe.

### 24.2.2 Composition of Backward Classes

The backward classes constitute a large and mixed category of persons. They comprise roughly one-third of the total population of the country. They are made up of (i) the scheduled **tribes** (*adivasis*); (ii) the **scheduled castes** (the *Harijans*), and (iii) the **other backward classes**. The scheduled castes (SC) and the scheduled tribes (ST) are well-defined categories in the Indian Constitution. The other backward classes are not listed and defined. The problems of this category of people are, therefore, diverse and complex (Kuppuswamy 1984: 192).

### 24.2.3 British Rule and Backward Classes

The problems of the backward classes came to be more sharply focused during the British rule. The policy, the British government followed towards the backward classes, was partly humanitarian and partly political. The Government desired to do away with certain disabilities of the traditional social structure, which went against the Western principle of social justice and equality. They also extended economic benefits to low castes by encouraging certain occupations or trades such as liquor, hides and so on. The British policy, however, also emanated from another dimension. The Indian national

movement was gaining momentum. Its leadership was provided by the new intelligentsia which came from the upper castes. The British government did not look at them with favour. The perpetuation of cleavage between the high castes and the low castes was in their interest. This they ensured by extending economic and political benefits to the low castes. In this way the wedge was maintained between the high castes and the low castes during the British rule.

#### 24.2.4 Backward Classes and the Indian Constitution

The Indian Constitution is silent on the definition of the backward classes. What one finds, however, is the characteristics of **backwardness** described and spread over the different articles of the Constitution. Article 15 (4) speaks of social and educational backwardness. In Article 16 (4), mention is made of backward classes and their inadequate representation in services. Article 23 speaks of forced labour. Article 46 refers to weaker section of the people in which the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are included.

Along with such references of backwardness, the Constitution also makes special provision for their upliftment. In addition, there is also legal provision. Article 17 of the Constitution, for example, abolishes untouchability. This gives the scheduled castes the same legal rights as any other caste. To reinforce this, the Untouchability (Offences) Act was passed in 1955, which fixed penalties for offences on this score. Similarly, the extension of adult franchise has given the scheduled castes the political power. The real problem, however, is not the removal of legal disabilities but social disabilities. To overcome this, the Constitution has laid down certain provisions under Article 46. It states that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic advancement of the weaker sections of the people, in particular the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It shall also protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Finally, there is the Article 340 which makes provision for the state government to investigate the condition of the backward classes. Keeping these points in mind, we will now focus on the social background of the backward classes.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Distinguish between the usage of backward classes in general and its usage in India. Use about four lines.

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- ii) What is the composition of backward classes in India? Use about three lines.

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- iii) Tick the correct answer to the following question.

What was the nature of the policy of the British Government during the colonial period?

- a) Very humanitarian
- b) Very political
- c) Partly humanitarian and partly political
- d) None of the above

iv) Tick the correct answer to the following question.

In the Indian Constitution, what does the Article 17 speak about?

- a) Social and economic backwardness
- b) Weaker section of the people in which are included the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
- c) Abolishing untouchability
- d) Making provision for the state to investigate the condition of the backward classes

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## 24.3 SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF BACKWARD CLASSES

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As mentioned to you earlier, the backward classes in India are socially, economically and educationally most backward section of Indian society. In this section, we will examine each category of backward classes, like the scheduled tribes, the scheduled castes and the other backward classes in detail. The details will include mainly their distinctive features with a special focus on their economic status. Let us first begin with the scheduled tribes.

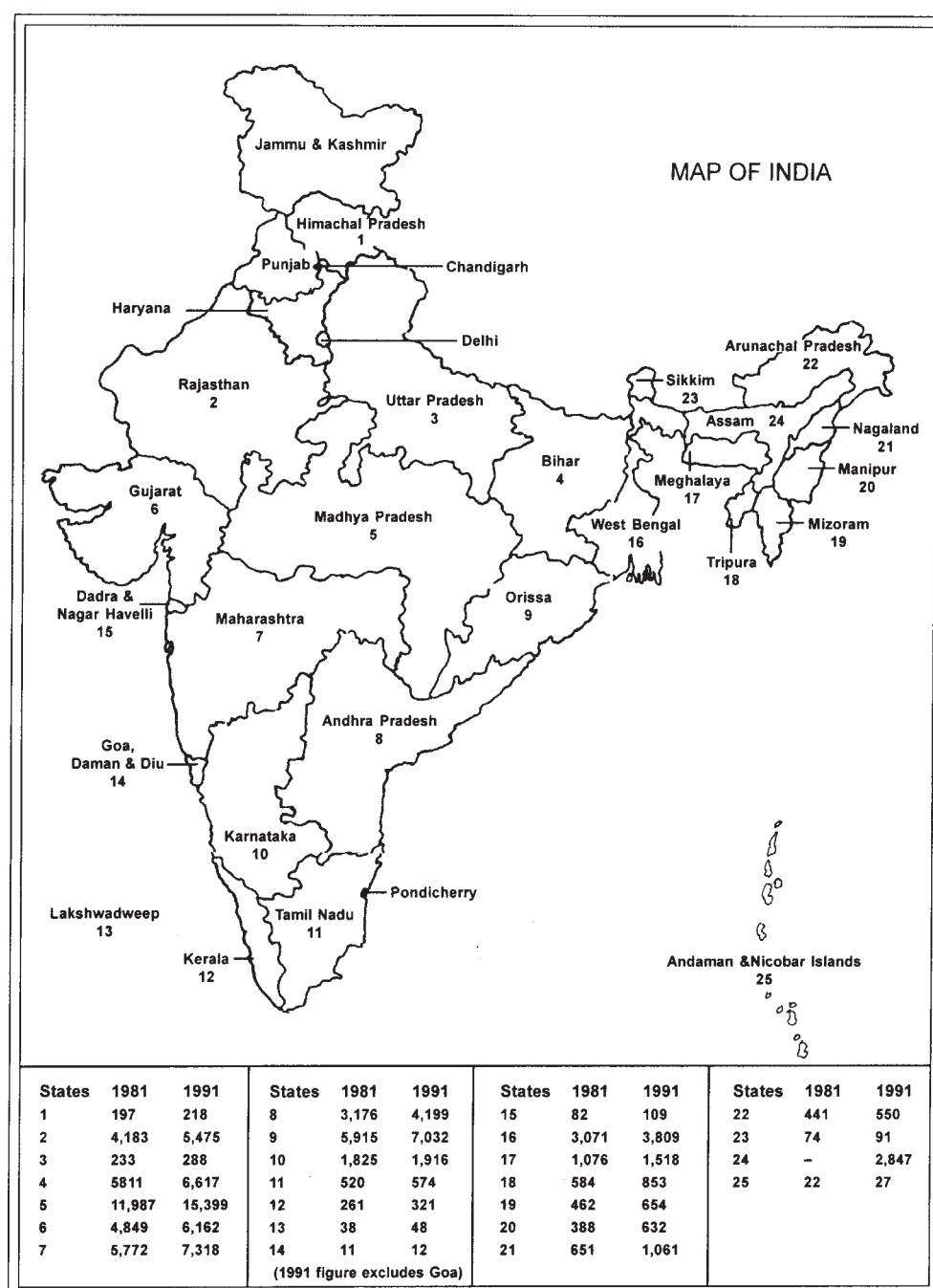
### 24.3.1 The Scheduled Tribes

Before we describe the features of the scheduled tribes let us clarify the meaning of tribes. A tribe is defined as a group of people who can be identified as a homogeneous unit with certain common characteristics. The common characteristics that they share are a common territory, a common language and descent from a common ancestor. Apart from these features they are very often backward in technology, pre-literate and observe social and political customs based on kinship (Kuppuswamy 1984:194).

#### i) **Distribution**

According to the 1981 census, the scheduled tribes constituted nearly seven per cent of the total population. And as per the 1991 census they constitute 8.08 percent of the total population. They are believed to constitute the aboriginal element in the Indian society referred to as the '*Girijan*' or '*Janjatis*' or '*Adivasi*'. They are concentrated in certain geographical areas like the northern and north-eastern mountain valley and the eastern frontiers, hills and plateau between peninsular India and Indo-gangetic plains, hills and ghats in the south-western part of India. The Scheduled Tribe Lists Modification Order, 1956 listed 414 tribes in various states of India. They are scattered over almost

every state in India. They have, however, a fairly large concentration in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Gujarat. In Madhya Pradesh (M.P.), there are nearly seven million tribal people who belong to 68 different groups. In Bihar and Orissa, there are more than four million tribal people. Article 164 provides for a Ministry of Tribal Welfare in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa while the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution provides a considerable degree of social, cultural and political autonomy for the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. The other tribal regions i.e. besides those which came under the 6th Schedule are referred to as the "Scheduled Areas" for the purpose of administration in the Constitution. The population of Scheduled Tribes in different Indian states as per 1981 and 1991 census is given in figure 24.1.



**Fig. 24.1: Population of scheduled tribes 1981 and 1991 census**

In spite of having a large population of tribal people in the states of M.P., Bihar, Orissa and some other states, these people only constitute a minority in the total population of these states. In contrast, north-eastern states present a different picture. The total tribal population in these states is small in comparison to those of the other states; but the tribals constitute a large percentage of the total population of these states. Besides these there are several other tribal regions like Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar, etc. where some very primitive tribes are found, which are increasingly becoming extinct.

### ii) **Distinguishing features**

The tribal populations in India speak a large variety of dialects. There are numerous variations in their habits, customs and arts.

They live generally in the hill and forest areas. The ecological and social **isolation** has been historically one of the principal features of the tribal population. This isolation had left a definite mark on their social system. For example, until recently, they enjoyed a certain measure of political autonomy. Today, it is difficult to define the tribal people of India in terms of any single set of criteria. The difficulty arises from the fact that tribes in India are tribes in transition. Their political boundaries have collapsed. Their ecological and social isolation has been broken. A section of the tribal population has got absorbed into Hindu society, some have converted to Islam and some to Christianity. They have also been drawn into the various sectors of the economy, such as, plantations, mines, industries, etc. This makes the generalised description of the tribal population more difficult. Problem of description is not merely an academic problem, it is also a problem of vital practical concern. The benefit of many welfare programmes goes only to those groups which are listed under the category of scheduled tribes. The list of the scheduled tribes has, therefore, been drawn after careful consideration of each individual tribe so that no group is left out. Generally, such lists have been drawn keeping in mind the geographical isolation and the relative independence of their political and cultural system.

### iii) **Economic status**

Economically, tribes vary all the way from food gatherers to the industrial labour force. There are many tribes such as the Kadar, the Malapantaram and the Paniyan of Kerala, the Paliyan of Tamil Nadu who are dependent on forest products. They are essentially food gatherers. They collect fruits, roots and other forest products and supplement them with hunting and fishing.

The bulk of the tribal population of India is dependent on agriculture with forest produce as secondary support. Some of these like the Mizo, the Garo, the Khasi, the Naga, practice shifting or '*jhum*' (i.e. slash and burn) cultivation. Others like the Oraon, the Munda, the Bhil, the Gond are engaged in permanent, settled cultivation. Many of the tribal groups have also migrated in large number to Assam and West Bengal and work as plantation labourers (see Jain 1988). Similarly, areas in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, which are rich in coal, iron and other minerals, have led to the emergence of industrial labour force which consists of the tribals.

**Activity 1**

Select at least two people living in your neighbourhood, who belong to the category of backward classes. Talk to them about the following:

- a) Have they faced any discrimination so far as an individual or as a social group, for example, a family group?
- b) If yes, then specify in which field(s) they have faced? social, political, economic, educational-school level or college level, and occupational.

Write a short note of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

**24.3.2 The Scheduled Castes**

We have already discussed in unit 22 of this Block, the term 'scheduled caste'. This term was coined by the Simon Commission (1927). The expressions 'Depressed Classes', 'Exterior Castes' and 'untouchables' were commonly used for the scheduled castes during the colonial period. Gandhiji called them '*Harijans*', (the people of God). But since the passage of the Government of India Act of 1935 they have been generally referred to as 'scheduled castes'.

**i) Distribution**

The scheduled castes constitute about 15.3 percent of India's total population according to the 1981 census and 15.93 percent as per the 1991 census. They, unlike the tribes, did not have a history of isolation. They have lived with the other castes and communities in segregation rather than isolation. Whereas the tribal people are concentrated in blocks in specific geographical regions, the scheduled castes are scattered through every state and practically through every district. They are concentrated in rural areas and are found commonly in multi-caste villages. Such distributional characteristics lead to certain difficulties. Development measures cannot be uniform, as the individual needs of each group belonging to the SC category are different. It is easier to implement special programmes of development for the scheduled tribes than for the scheduled castes. There is also more scope for the development of separatist political movements among the tribal groups than amongst the scheduled castes due to the very same reason of disparate needs and socio-economic statuses of each group.

**ii) Distinguishing marks**

The social condition of the scheduled castes has been governed in important ways by the Hindu concept of pollution. The idea of purity and pollution has generally been considered a factor in the genesis of the caste system. This idea was central to the practice of untouchability since ages. That is, social groups following occupations like scavenging, leather work, removing dead cattle and so on were looked upon as polluting groups; contact with them was considered to be defiling. So they were required to live in a separate colony outside the village. Many areas of social life were not accessible to them. They suffered various sorts of restrictions and disabilities. They were socially and legally prohibited from taking up any other profession than what was traditionally ascribed to them. They had no right to enter the temples. They



did not have the freedom to use public wells and tanks which the caste Hindu used. They were not allowed to wear the type of dress the upper caste Hindu wore. In several parts of India, women were not allowed to cover the upper portion of their body and wear ornaments. The practice of untouchability was at its worst in different parts of India. In Kerala, for example, to avoid upper castes being polluted, the distance at which the polluting castes had to remain was prescribed by tradition. Such practices were also maintained in north India. Although the practice of untouchability has been made an offence, the stigma of pollution has not by any means entirely removed. Their economic, social and ritual status continues to be depressed although there are certain indications of change.

### iii) **Economic status**

Economically, they are among the poorest sections of the Hindu society. Traditionally as mentioned before, they were engaged in the most degrading occupations like scavenging, removing dead cattle, leather work and so on. Being predominantly rural, they are mainly engaged in agriculture today. Even in agriculture they are mainly found as landless agricultural labourers and marginal sharecroppers and peasants. As a result they are found in varying degrees of bondedness in different parts of the country.

### **24.3.3 The Other Backward Classes**

We have observed that the Indian Constitution specially provides reservation for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Ever since the framing of the Constitution, the demand has been raised for a similar provision for castes, other than the scheduled castes and tribes, which are educationally and socially backward.

This category is, however, mentioned in the Constitution in only the most general terms. There is no all India list for the other backward classes. Lists have of course, been drawn by the Ministry of Education and by the State Governments.

There has been, however, much discrepancy in these lists. The Backward Classes Commission was hence set up in 1953 under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalekar, with a view to decide the criterion on the basis of which socially and educationally backward classes could be identified. The Commission pointed to a good deal of ambiguity in the lists prepared by the Central and State Governments. It also prepared a detailed list of the other backward classes. The list was prepared on the basis of the position of the castes in social hierarchy, percentage of literacy and its representation in services and industries. The Commission was of the view that the majority of the backward classes are ignorant, illiterate and poor. The recommendation of the Commission was not accepted as authoritative by the Government and hence its recommendation was not implemented. Since then the State Governments have been allowed to use their own criteria in drawing up the lists of the other backward classes. Some states like Karnataka did make some provision for the other backward classes. Special commission was appointed and special lists identifying the backward castes were prepared. Suitable laws were introduced by the Government to provide for reservation or special facilities. Some other southern

states too adopted similar measures. However, in states where such provisions were not made or where only half-hearted provisions were made, the demand for reservation of the backward castes began to be expressed in the shape of the movements. When this demand started acquiring the form of a national problem, the Central Government constituted the Mandal Commission to look into it. No sooner was the Mandal Commission report published than the question of reservation became an issue of heated debate and controversy.

Even though the commission submitted its report in 1980, the Union Government implemented its recommendation in 1990 only. The terms of reference of the Mandal Commission inter alia i) to determine the criteria for defining social and educational backwardness, ii) to recommend steps to be taken for the advancement of the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens of India, iii) to examine the desirability or otherwise of making provisions for the reservation of posts in favour of the backward classes. The national government under the leadership of V.P. Singh implemented one of the principal recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report reserving twenty-seven percent posts in central government services and public sector undertakings for the socially and educationally backward classes. The result was widespread agitation against the decision by the middle and upper castes (Nayak 1996). Similar commissions were also instituted by the state Governments of Gujarat (Baxi and Rane Commissions) and Madhya Pradesh (Mahajan Commission). The acceptance of their recommendations by the respective state Governments led to widespread violence by the upper castes in these two states. Thus, we can see that there was a lot of controversy over the definition of Other Backward Classes.

#### i) **Criterion**

The Central Government has since 1961 been pressing for the adoption of economic criteria in defining the Other Backward Classes. There has been some opposition to this from a number of state governments. Some of the castes included in the earlier lists of the other backward classes are fairly powerful in state politics. They have, therefore, exerted pressure on state governments to have the old criteria retained. The Lingayats of Karnataka and the Ezhavas of Kerala provide good instances.

The Central Government has not insisted on the old lists being abandoned. Yet economic and other pressures have been exerted on the state governments for the adoption of economic criterion. By now the majority of the states have adopted this criterion for defining backwardness for the award of scholarships to the other backward classes, other than the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

#### ii) **Economic status**

The core of the other backward classes consists of peasant castes of various descriptions. The position occupied by these castes is different from that of the scheduled castes. Frequently, they occupy a low position in the caste hierarchy, but are above the untouchables. They have no tradition of literacy. They have, therefore, lagged behind in the pursuit of modern education. They are often poorly represented in government jobs and **white-collar occupations**.

In spite of this, such castes sometimes occupy a dominant position in the economic and political system of the village. When they are also numerically preponderant, their control over the village, a group of villages or even a district may be decisive. It appears that **dominant castes** of this kind have developed a vested interest in remaining backward in the legal sense i.e. as a category, so that they can enjoy the number of benefits in education and employment provided by the Government (Srinivas 1962: 40).

### Check your Progress 2

- i) What was the most distinguishing feature of tribal populations? Tick the correct answer.
  - a) Segregation
  - b) Absorption
  - c) Isolation
- ii) List the major features of the scheduled castes in traditional social structure. Use about two lines.

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- iii) Who constitutes the core of the 'other backward classes? Use about three lines

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## 24.4 FEATURES AND PROBLEMS OF BACKWARD CLASSES IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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We have so far surveyed the social background of each of the component of the backward classes. We shall now focus on some of the distinctive features emanating from the changing social situation.

### 24.4.1 Context of Social Change

The traditional Indian society was highly segmented and hierarchical in character. The segments within it were separated from one another by clear-cut boundaries of marriage, restriction in interdining and other forms of social interaction. Social separation between different segments, each pursuing its own style of life could be kept intact so long as the society was fairly closed. In the traditional society, mobility-vertical or horizontal-was slow and limited. The expansion of transport and communication, spread of modern education, new economic opportunities, opportunities of political articulation ushered in during the British rule brought about significant changes in the traditional social structure. This led to the system being more open, allowing for greater mobility.

Of the many changes taking place among the backward classes, two in particular deserve special attention. They are (i) changes in their style of life, and (ii) changes in their relation to the political system. Of course, both are intimately related with changes in their economic life.

#### i) **Changes in style of life**

The changes in the style of life have followed two trends. They are **Sanskritisation** and **Westernisation**. Sanskritisation is defined as a process by which a caste or social group moves up the social hierarchy by adopting the style of life associated by tradition with the upper castes. These upper castes can be Brahmins, Kshatriyas or even Vaishyas. Westernisation in the Indian context, on the other hand, refers essentially to the process of social change introduced by the British rule in India. Individuals and groups began to respond and adopt to British ideals, relating to politics, economy, education, dress, manners, customs and so on. This follows from their taking up western education and getting into a modern occupation.

The process of Sanskritisation was at work even before the advent of the Europeans, however, it was slow and gradual. The reason being that the economy was relatively static and population movement very limited. Over and above, there were strong legal and ritual sanctions, which acted against the large-scale movement of people from one region to another. For example, each caste was identified with a certain occupation like *Dhobi*, *Nai*, *Kumbhar*, etc. and each family of these castes had a traditional patron whom it served, within the framework of *jajmani* system. Nobody in the traditional system could take over the occupation of another caste and as such, they could not give up their own caste occupation and go away to another place unless and until they were allowed to in special circumstances.

The pace of Sanskritisation was accelerated during the British rule due to factors mentioned earlier. Both the processes of Sanskritisation and Westernisation led to a change of life-style among the backward classes in India.

#### ii) **Changes in relation to the political system**

Alongside this process, there were changes in the political system. The political system, which developed during the British rule, gave increasing opportunities for political articulation to the people of India, especially those who acquired western education. This facility was taken advantage of by the backward classes. The advent of Independence and the introduction of adult franchise and more recently Panchayati Raj institutions have increased the access to power, especially political power, to the backward classes.

Such access led to a shift from Sanskritisation to competition for positions of higher bureaucratic and political power. These two aspects of change will now be examined with reference to each component of the backward classes, namely scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, and the other backward classes.

## 24.4.2 The Scheduled Tribes

### i) Changes in the style of life

Changes in the style of life are, as mentioned before, two. First is Sanskritisation and second is Westernisation. Let us understand these now in relation to the scheduled tribes.

#### Sanskritisation

Culturally the distance was greatest between the tribal and the scheduled castes on the one hand and the better off upper caste sections of society on the other. The tribal people were ecologically isolated. They had developed their own traditions, customs, habits and ways of life. Despite this, social forces were at work leading to transmission of cultural elements from the more dominant and better-off sections of society to the more backward viz. the tribals. Two of the most important of such forces at work were Sanskritisation and Westernisation.

The tribal people have been isolated to a far greater extent from the broad stream of Sanskritisation than the scheduled castes and other backward classes. In spite of this, they have felt the impact of Sanskritic ideas and values. This impact has gathered momentum over the last several decades. This has no doubt been largely due to the opening of the tribal areas to the outside world. One of the most general effects of Sanskritisation of tribal communities is that it leads to the **integration** of segments of tribal society unto the wider caste structure and its **assimilation** in the wider Hindu fold. There have been numerous examples of this kind of integration or cultural assimilation. The Bhumij of eastern India, the Raj Gond in Central India and the Patelia in western India are some examples of such integration in the caste structure. This integration cannot be understood simply in terms of changes in rituals or style of life. Rather it is a reflection of fundamental transformation viz. tribal people getting integrated more fully into the wider economic system.

#### Westernisation

The Christian missions play an active part among tribal communities in India. They operate as agents of social change. Besides providing an alternative system of religious values, the missionaries introduce many new features into tribal society such as education and modern medical facilities. The spread of education and conversion to a new religion, i.e. Christianity have led to rapid Westernisation among the tribal communities. The process is more pronounced in the tribal belts of the north-eastern region than elsewhere. The Mizo, Naga, Khasi are some examples representing such a process. Conversion to Christianity has also taken place in the region of Chotanagpur (Bihar).

The opening of tribal areas to traders, money-lenders and others on the one hand, and cultural contact on the other, have led to disintegration of tribal social organisation. Economically, they have been facing great hardship due to land alienation, and indebtedness, which resulted from opening up of tribal areas to the outside world. Their cultural and social life too has been greatly affected by this process. The question of their integration into the mainstream has become an important subject of discussion. Broadly there were three schools of thought in this regard (i) One of these schools of thought supported the

case of isolation. J.H. Hutton and V. Elwin favoured such a position with a view to protecting tribal people from the evil effects of uncontrolled social and cultural contact. Their policy of isolating the tribal regions was also called “National Park Policy”. (ii) A second school of thought, which found favour with G.S. Ghurye and some social reformers, advocated the assimilation of tribal people in the larger social structure. (iii) Later both Ghurye and Elwin discarded their earlier stand in favour of the policy of integration. The policy of integration aims at bringing the tribal people into the mainstream, but without the loss of their distinctive social organisation and culture.

## ii) **Changes in Relation to the political system**

The impact of change on the political system of the scheduled tribes has been of great importance. Let us see what these changes are.

The approach to the tribal problem differs in many ways from the approach adopted towards the scheduled castes. In the case of tribals, there are certain special problems also. These arise partly from their geographical isolation and partly from their ethnic identity. The consciousness of their distinct ethnic identity has led to organised political activity. The demand for a tribal homeland and the growth of political parties indicate politicisation of tribal society. Through these political processes tribal communities, like the Naga, Khasi, Garo, Mizo attained their separate tribal state. Such processes are still at work in some parts of the tribal belt. The demand existed in the past for a separate Jharkhand state in parts of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh illustrates this trend. It ultimately resulted in the formation of Jharkhand State in the year 2000.

### **Activity 2**

Read an article about the backward classes which has appeared in any magazine or newspaper within the last six months. Note down

- a) the issue about which the article is written
- b) the role of the backward classes
- c) your view regarding the issue discussed.

Write a note about two pages. Compare, if possible, your note with those of the other students at your Study Centre.

In this section we examined the distinctive features and problems of the scheduled tribes in the context of social change. We saw the changes that have taken place in their cultural life in terms of the process of Sanskritisation and Westernisation. Next we examined the changes in their political system and their role in it. Now let us examine these changes and their impact in the case of the scheduled castes.

## **24.4.3 The Scheduled Castes**

### **i) Changes in the style of life**

The scheduled castes have experienced some changes in their style of life. We will discuss some of these changes here.



## Sanskritisation and challenge

Like the tribal population the scheduled castes too had a distinct culture of their own. As mentioned earlier, they were not just one group but several groups, which were all hierarchically placed with relation to each other. They were excluded from temples, bathing ghats, wells and other public places. In south India, and some parts of north India, they were not allowed to use sandals, umbrellas, silken cloth and so on. Their women could not wear upper garments. A large number of civic rights were denied to them by caste and ritual sanctions. Despite this, social forces were at work and there was certain measure of Sanskritisation even in the traditional period, although quite limited.

The new courts established by the British introduced the principle of equality before law. By doing so, it removed one set of obstacles to change in the social life of the scheduled castes. But this did not automatically enable them to exercise their civic rights. Various kinds of sanctions were still applied to keep them in their inferior position.

Since they were economically dependent on the upper castes, they could not press their legal claim to equality. Even the dominant castes among the backward classes rarely looked with favour upon the scheduled caste's claim to equality of status. Physical violence or threat of it has been frequently made on them for attempting to exercise their civic rights. This happens particularly in villages.

In fact, as early as 1930, the assertion by the Adi-Dravida untouchables against traditional disabilities had aroused the wrath of Kallar caste in Tamil Nadu. The disregard of traditional disabilities has led to the use of violence by the Kallars against the untouchable castes whose huts were burnt, granaries and property destroyed and livestock looted. Such incidents do take place even today in villages of Bihar, U.P. and a few other states. Sanskritisation has thus never been easy for the scheduled castes. This is so because the effective adoption of the Sanskritic style of life is dependent on a number of preconditions. These include a minimum of economic and political power and not too inferior ritual status. The scheduled castes on the other hand, have a very low economic, political and ritual status. This has made Sanskritisation difficult for them.

## Education and mobility

At the same time the channels of mobility on the economic front is still very restricted. This is largely due to the level of literacy and education, which is still very low. Owing to their very inferior economic position, education turns out to be an important channel of **social mobility**. There is strong demand for education among the scheduled castes population. The government too is making considerable investment in the form of scholarships to meet such demands. Indeed, some groups amongst the SCs have already been making effective use of facilities provided by the government to better their socio-economic and educational position. Formerly, many of the posts in the higher services reserved for members of these communities could not be filled for want of suitable qualified candidates. This is no longer the case now and is not likely to be so in future. With such efforts, especially by the government to promote the mobility of SCs one can expect a change in their style of life. However, much of the benefits and privileges provided by the government for

the SCs has been cornered by a small section of them who are referred to by Sachchidanand as the “*Harijan Elites*”. Majority of the SC population in the remote corners of India is still suffering from poverty and exploitation (see unit 22 for more details).

There is also a measure of ambivalence in the attitude of the scheduled castes. On the one hand, there is an urge to adopt many of the symbols of the upper caste groups and on the other there is also an undercurrent of resentment against the traditional order. Such an attitude is most easily perceptible among the younger generation of the scheduled castes who have been exposed to the ideas of secularism and democracy. In some places, it has been nourished by strong social movement of fairly organised nature.

In Tamil Nadu, the Self-Respect movement of the Adi-Dravidas challenged the traditional social and ritual order. In Maharashtra, a considerable section of the scheduled castes became converts to Buddhism. The neo-Buddhist movement spearheaded by Ambedkar, a prominent leader of the scheduled castes, was in fact an assertion of self-respect on the part of the scheduled castes. Buddhism was not the only religion, which attracted this alienated section of the Hindu society. Islam, Sikhism and Christianity too attracted converts from the lower sections of the society. The scheduled castes have been converted in large numbers to Christianity, particularly in south India. However, in spite of the conversions these people have not benefited much in terms of social status.

## ii) **Changes in relation to the political system**

The impact of change in relation to the political system has been very significant amongst the scheduled castes. Let us see what these changes are.

The channels of mobility in the status system or in the sphere of economy are very restricted. On the other hand, the new political system has thrown open many possibilities of advancement to people from the scheduled castes. Today, if a scheduled caste person cannot find place in higher status group economically or socially, he or she can still hope to become an influential political leader. And where the scheduled castes and *adivasis* are concerned, the principle of reservation provides a sure method of political representation.

There is a clear trend towards increasing participation in the political process by a section of society, which has hitherto been excluded from position of power. They have had the experience of several elections. Their awareness of political parties, movements, propaganda, etc. has grown. Younger sections of the groups are busy building political connections.

The institution of Panchayati Raj has quickened the pace of politicisation. Provision has in general been made for some reservation of seats for the scheduled castes at all levels of local self-government. The participation has led to conflict and cleavage especially with the groups of the other backward classes. Where the scheduled castes are more or less matched in numerical strength with caste Hindus, a certain amount of tension and even violence has become a part of the system. Their participation in the political system has been more marked at the national and state levels than at the village or district level. So far we talked about the features and problems of the scheduled castes in the context of social change. Let us see how and in what ways the other

backward classes have undergone changes in their socio-cultural and political life.

#### **24.4.4 The Other Backward Classes**

##### **i) Changes in style of life**

The changes in the style of life of the other backward classes have been described in this section.

##### **Sanskritisation**

The other backward classes occupied a low position in the traditional society but were above the line of untouchability. Many of the castes included in this category also enjoyed a measure of economic and political dominance. A good example of this is provided by the Okkaligas of Mysore studied by Srinivas. These castes (classes) or a section of them were, therefore, the first to seize the new opportunities offered during the British rule in comparison to the scheduled tribes and the scheduled castes. They drew maximum benefits from new economic opportunities. And they were also the ones most interested in Sanskritising their style of life in order to get social acceptance of their material success.

##### **Social movements**

Yet they experienced considerable gaps between themselves and the upper castes who were rapidly westernising themselves. The upper castes such as the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and the Vaishyas not only adopted the western life-style but took up western education with all seriousness. And because of their tradition of education they did not find it very difficult to do so. The result was that western education was mostly confined to them. In view of this, only the members of these castes could get the jobs, in the government services and could further increase their prestige. This increased the cultural, social and economic distance between them and the other backward classes even more. Thus, the social inequality was perpetuated in the new system to a large extent. The lower castes realised that mere Sanskritisation was not enough to improve their social condition. It did not provide them the avenue to obtain well paid and prestigious jobs in the administrative services. So they desired to get themselves educated through the English medium in order to qualify for these jobs. In fact, the demand for educational concessions was the major objective of the Backward Class Movement, which started in the early part of the twentieth century. The movement was strongest in Madras, Mysore and Maharashtra where Brahmans had almost total monopoly in higher education, professions and government employment (Kuppuswamy 1984: 187).

A characteristic feature of this movement was that it was caste based. The caste organisations had made education of their children an important part of their programme. However, it was soon realised that the qualified youth could not get admission in the professional and post-graduate courses as admission was based on marks in high school and college examinations. Naturally they were handicapped, since the boys from such homes where the tradition of education existed were able to secure higher marks as compared to them.

The other dimension was that lecturers and examiners, as well as, those who held government jobs were from upper caste groups. This increased the fear

among the other backward classes that they were being discriminated against. Hence, they formed associations and federations to advance and protect the interest of the non-Brahman especially in south India. Reservation of seats in professional courses, post-graduate studies, and in government services, became their major demands. The opposition to Brahman dominance thus did not come from the low and oppressed castes but from the leaders of powerful rural dominant castes such as the Kamma and Reddi of Andhra Pradesh, Vellala of Tamil Nadu, Nayar of Kerala, Okkaliga of Mysore, Yadava or Ahir and Kurmi of U.P. and Bihar and so on.

## ii) **Changes in relation to the political system**

Today, there is considerable debate regarding the reservation policy to uplift the backward classes. This has become more pronounced after the publication of the Mandal Commission Report. The controversy is not on whether or not to have reservation but on the criterion of reservation in the context of social change. To put it differently, the question centres around the criterion of backwardness in the wider perspective of social change.

There are those who view that reservation should be in terms of economic class instead of castes. They say that the caste based reservation is against the basic spirit of the Constitution. The Constitution promises equality and non-casteist and non-communal society. They also argue that the caste system is disintegrating. The relationship between caste and traditional occupation is breaking down. The definition of backwardness is altered with change in its form and basis. Under the changed situation, no group can be called forward or backward.

Further, if caste-based reservation is carried on, then the benefits are likely to be grabbed by those within the concerned castes who are economically and educationally better off. Hence, to them, the basis of backwardness should not be caste but economic category. That is deprivation in terms of income, education and occupation should form the basis of backwardness and, therefore, also the criteria of reservation policy.

Those who are opposed to this view, however, argue that caste basis was/is aimed at countering and removing social injustice and not mere economic backwardness. They argue that the problem of backwardness has arisen out of a long history of exploitation and oppression. The backward castes have hence not been able to enter into the normal process of development and social change. They face not only material obstacles of lack of education and resources but also come across innumerable hurdles in the form of social norms and restrictions. Hence they argue for caste basis of reservation.

The controversy has thus centred around the determination of (a) the unit, and (b) criterion for delineating the backwardness. The national and the regional upper caste elites are in favour of individual as the unit. Accordingly, they prefer deprivation in income or education as the sole criterion of backwardness. As against this, the backward caste elites, both national and regional, emphasise caste as the unit as well as the sole criterion in determining the backwardness.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Distinguish between Sanskritisation and Westernisation. Use about five lines.

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- ii) List some of the approaches to tribal policy. Use about three lines.

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- iii) Identify three factors standing in the way of rapid Sanskritisation among the scheduled castes. Use about four lines.

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- iv) List the bases of backward class movement. Use about three lines.

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## **24.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you have seen that the term “backward classes” has different connotations in India and the backward classes consist broadly of three major components, viz. the scheduled tribes, the scheduled castes and the other backward classes.

Social background of each of these three components has been discussed in this unit in terms of their geographical distribution, distinguishing features and economic status. Major emphasis in the unit is on the distinctive features and problems emanating from the changing social situation. This has been studied in terms of changes in their life style and in relation to the larger political system.

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## 24.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Assimilation</b>	Process of fusion into larger social system
<b>Backwardness</b>	Lack of educational and economic advancement
<b>Backward classes</b>	Communities or groups falling into the larger category of scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and the other backward classes
<b>Dominant caste</b>	A relatively high caste enjoying numerical preponderance, economic and political power.
<b>Integration</b>	Process of getting closer to larger social system but without loss of distinct socio-cultural identity
<b>Isolation</b>	Lack of contact with outside world
<b>Other backward classes</b>	Castes occupying low position but above the untouchables, known also as the backward castes
<b>Sanskritisation</b>	Process by which a caste or group moves up the social hierarchy by adopting the life style of the upper castes
<b>Scheduled caste</b>	Ritually low castes, constituting the lowest strata of Hindu society who used to be considered to be polluting by the upper castes
<b>Social mobility</b>	Process by which an individual or group moves from one position to another in the social hierarchy
<b>Tribes</b>	A culturally homogeneous community, which shares a common territory, language and traces its descent from a common ancestor. It is generally low in technology, is preliterate and observes social and political customs based on kinship
<b>Westernisation</b>	Process by which a community adopts the life-style of Europeans, especially the Britishers
<b>White-collar occupation</b>	Pertaining to, or designating, the class of workers, as clerks, etc. who are not engaged in manual labour

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## 24.7 FURTHER READING

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## 24.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Backwardness in general is understood in terms of lack of economic and educational advancement. In this sense, it is taken as an attribute of an individual. In India backwardness is taken as an attribute not of an individual but of a certain group in which membership is determined by birth.
- ii) The composition of backward classes in India includes the scheduled tribes, the scheduled castes, and the other backward classes.
- iii) c)
- iv) c)

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) c) Isolation
- ii) a) degrading occupation,  
b) settlement outside the village  
d) social, political and cultural disabilities.
- iii) Peasant castes with low position in caste hierarchy but above the scheduled castes constitute the core of the "other backward classes".

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Sanskritisation is a process by which a low caste adopts the life-style of upper castes and attempts to move up in the local social hierarchy; while Westernisation is a process of social change mainly brought about by the impact of British rule in India. In this process individuals or social groups adopt the values, customs, life-style of the Europeans, especially Britishers.
- ii) Some of the approaches to tribal policy are
  - a) isolation,

- b) assimilation and
  - c) integration.
- iii) The factors, which are standing against the rapid Sanskritisation of the scheduled castes, are
- a) low ritual status
  - b) low economic status and
  - c) low level of political participation.
- iv) Backward Classes Movement was based mainly on the realisation of the gap between lower castes and upper castes in terms of a) higher education and b) appointments in government services.

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### Structure

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### 25.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we are going to introduce to you the concept of tribe in the Indian context and discuss some of the most characteristic external features of the social structure of the Indian tribes. After you have studied this, you should be able to

- indicate what is meant by social structure in relation to the tribes in India
- describe important external features of their social structure
- provide suitable examples from Indian tribes illustrating the external features of their social structure.

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## 25.1 INTRODUCTION

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Block 6 on Tribes in India aims at familiarising you with various aspects of tribal life in our country. In this unit, we have described external features of social structure of the tribal groups. For this purpose, the unit first discusses in general the concept of social structure and then examines the concept of tribe in the Indian context. Next, the unit classifies tribes in India by their geographic distribution, racial and linguistic affinities and demographic features. It also discusses the issue of isolation from and interaction with other groups. Further it describes economic pursuits followed by various tribal populations. These external features of their social structure act like boundary markers and give the tribals identity. Finally, the unit also describes the socio-economic changes, affecting social structure of these groups.

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## 25.2 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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Social structure is one of those concepts in social sciences, which has been discussed at length and often the views of the different authors differ significantly. The concept is important enough so that it cannot be given up. Whether by social structure we mean actually existing relations among persons, or consistent constant groups in society, or a system of expectation, or a set of ideal rules or a mental construct, we agree that social structure refers to what is persistent and tend to recur in the society. For example, if we meet a stranger on the road and ask for some information, that relationship with the stranger will not be considered a dimension of structure but our relationship with our parents, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts will be and so also our rights, duties and obligations arising out of those relationships. If these are infringed, curtailed and violated then there has to be some mechanism to bring things to order.

Without order no social structure can work. In the process of restoring order some changes may occur. For example, among the Khasi, a tribe of Meghalaya, the clan title runs from mother to daughter. It is the youngest daughter who is the custodian of family property and it is the mother's brother who should manage the property and look after his nieces and nephews. But now the social context in which the Khasi life has changed. The Khasi people come in contact with many other people with different customs and practices and are exposed to modern communication media, knowledge and institutions. Thus the Khasi men like other **patrilineal** groups would also like to have property and manage their own family rather than that of their sisters. The result is that the Khasi **matrilineal** system is changing.

In other words, although a person is born into a given social structure, it is not static. In order that a social structure is able to maintain itself, its members should be replenished, old will die, young should take their places. There should be some mechanism through which knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, customs and practices of the community are transmitted to the young ones. As we have seen in the case of the Khasi, there is internal dynamics but there is also a pressure of external factors on their social structure. Although geographical, racial and linguistic factors are external they continuously interact with the internal factors of the social structure in complex ways and so also is the case with the size of the population and the way people earn their living. How far a people are isolated from others and what

is the nature of their interaction with others are equally important factors. The factors, both those, which are within and without, are continuously in interaction with one another in a variety of ways. Such is the dynamic concept of social structure. Let us now turn to the concept of tribe in the Indian context.

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## 25.3 TRIBES IN INDIA

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In India, 427 groups had been recognised as scheduled tribes in the year 1981. They formed approximately 8.08 per cent of the total Indian population. In absolute numbers, according to 1981 census, their population was 51,628,638. By 1991 their number reached 67,758,000, around 8.10 percent of the total population. Their decadal growth during 1981-1991 was 31.64 percent, which was higher than the national growth (23.51 percent) (Census of India 1991, Final Population Totals). In the year 2003, there are 533 tribes as per notified schedule under Article 342, with largest of them being in Orissa (62) (Annual Report, Ministry of Rural Development). Who are these people?

The term tribe is derived from the Latin word 'tribus'. Earlier Romans used this term to designate the divisions in the society. Later use suggests that it meant poor people. The present popular meaning in English language was acquired during the expansion of colonialism particularly in Asia and Africa. The present popular meaning of a 'tribe' in India is a category of people, included in the list of the scheduled tribes. Tribal populations are relatively isolated and closed groups, forming homogeneous units of production and consumption. Being backward in economic terms, they were and are exploited by the non-tribals. Let us examine how the category of people, known as the scheduled tribes, came into being.

### 25.3.1 In Ancient and Medieval Periods

In none of the Indian languages there was a term for tribes. In earlier times, they were known by their specific names such as the Gond, the Santhal, the Bhil etc. In modern Indian languages, new words like *Vanyajati*, *Vanvasi*, *Pahari*, *Adimjati*, *Adivasi*, *Anusuchit jati*, have been coined to designate the people called as tribe. Though much work on the history of tribes has not been done, the names of tribes like the Kurumba, the Irula, the Paniya in South India; the Asur, the Saora, the Oraon, the Gond, the Santhal, the Bhil in Central India; the Bodo, the Ahom in North-East India, occur in old classical Indian literature. Some of the tribal populations, like the Gond in Central India, the Ahom in North-East India, had large kingdoms. The Banjara, a nomadic trading community, covered a wide tract in Western and Central India. In brief, in ancient and medieval periods of India it appears that the so-called tribal populations interacted with other populations in a variety of ways in the region of their habitation.

### 25.3.2 During the British Rule

The modern phase of the tribal history begins with the advent of the British. The British were keen to establish their rule in all parts of the country and were also looking for resources for their industries. In the process, vast areas of India were opened up and brought under centralised administration. They not only levied new rents for land but also made new land settlements. The areas, which were relatively secluded but rich in natural resources, experienced entry of a new variety of people, namely forest contractors, labourers, officials, neo-settlers, moneylenders etc. In

many places the indigenous populations resented new regulations, new levies and new settlers in their areas and they rebelled.

At this stage for a variety of reasons, the British thought of protecting the indigenous populations by bringing a regulation in 1833. Certain parts of Chotanagpur were declared as non-regulated areas, which meant that normal rules were not applicable on such areas for example, outsiders were not allowed to acquire land in these areas. The administrators of such areas acquired vast discretionary powers. Later on this policy was extended to other areas too. In 1874, the British passed Scheduled Area Regulation Act and in due course the idea of a distinct and special arrangement in such areas got accepted. In the meanwhile, the concept of a tribe as a social category was emerging, which was meant to distinguish them from the Hindu, the Muslim, and other organised religious groups through an over simplified assumption that the tribes were animist while the latter were not. By the Act of 1919, the idea of wholly excluded area and partially excluded area emerged for some of the areas where tribal populations were concentrated. These areas were excluded from the application of normal rules. The 1935 Act incorporated these provisions and a policy of reservation emerged for the people so notified for it.

While these policies were emerging, the British Government was still not sure how to classify the people, who were neither Hindu nor Muslim. Their confusion is apparent from the terms they used to classify tribal populations in their decennial censuses. In different censuses the terms used were animists, hill and forest tribe, primitive tribes, and tribe.

### **25.3.3 In Independent India**

Following Independence, the policy of protection and development for the population identified as tribe has been made into a constitutional obligation. A list of tribes was adopted for this purpose. In 1950, this list contained 212 names, which was modified by successive presidential orders. In 2003, the list contained 533 names. The Constitution, however, does not provide a definition of a tribe. The people who have been listed in the Constitution and mentioned in successive presidential orders are called scheduled tribes. This is the administrative concept of a tribe. In February 2004, the Government of India circulated a Draft National Policy on Tribes. It has now become a subject of debate among scholars.

About the geographical distribution, racial and linguistic features and demographic characteristics of tribes we will discuss in sections 25.4, 25.5 and 25.6. Here, we will now turn to the views of scholars who have studied tribal populations in India.

#### **Activity 1**

What is the word for 'tribe' in your language? Write at least five names of Indian leaders who belong to tribal groups. Give reasons for their fame.

### **25.3.4 Understanding of the Concept of Tribe by Some Scholars**

Academics too have been making their efforts to define tribe. Tribes have been defined as a group of indigenous people with shallow history, having common name, language and territory, tied by strong kinship bonds, practising endogamy, having distinct customs, rituals and beliefs, simple social rank and political organisation, common ownership of resources and technology. Such definitions are not very helpful because when the situation of tribes is examined carefully not

only do we find a lot of variations in their life styles but also many of these features are shared by the caste people. This raises the problem as to how to distinguish them from castes.

There have been other conceptual attempts to define tribes. They have been considered as a stage in the social and cultural evolution. Some others have considered that the production and consumption among the tribes are household based and unlike peasants they are not part of a wider economic, political and social network. Bailey (1960) has suggested that the only solution to the problem of definition of tribes in India is to conceive of a **continuum** of which at one end are tribes and at the other are castes. The tribes have **segmentary, egalitarian** system and are not mutually inter-dependent, as are castes in a system of organic solidarity. They have direct access to land and no intermediary is involved between them and land.

Sinha (1965) too thinks of tribe and caste in terms of a continuum but his ideas are more elaborate and he brings in the concept of civilisation. For him, the tribe is ideally defined in terms of its isolation from the networks of social relations and cultural communications of the centres of civilisation. In their isolation the tribal societies are sustained by relatively primitive subsistence technology such as shifting cultivation and hunting and gathering, and maintain an egalitarian segmentary social system guided entirely by non-literate ethnic tradition (Sinha 1982: 4).

It has been suggested that wherever civilisations exist, tribes can be described, defined and analysed only in contrast to that civilisation which it may fight, serve, mimic or adopt but cannot ignore. In India, there are numerous examples of tribes transforming themselves into the larger entity of the caste system; others have become Christian or Muslim. They also join the ranks of peasantry and in modern times become wage-labourers in plantations, mining and other industries. Thus, in our concept of tribe we should not overlook these changing aspects.

Having briefly discussed the various issues involved in defining tribes, for our purpose, we will take here those people as tribes who have been termed as scheduled tribes.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Write, in one line, the modern terms for tribes in Indian languages.

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- ii) Write, in five lines, how the idea of scheduled tribes emerged in India?

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- iii) Discuss, in ten lines, how different scholars have defined the term tribe?

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## 25.4 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

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Considering the widespread distribution of tribes all over the country it is necessary to group them into broad geographical regions. On the basis of ecology, it is possible to group them into five distinct regions namely, Himalayan region (with tribes like the Gaddi, the Jaunsari, the Naga etc.), Middle India (with tribes like the Munda, the Santal etc.), Western India (with tribes like the Bhil, the Grasia), South Indian Region (with tribes like the Toda, the Chenchu etc.) and the Islands Region (with tribes like the Onge in Bay of Bengal, the Minicoyans in Arabian Sea). The following map (figure 25.1) shows the location of some of the tribal groups in India.

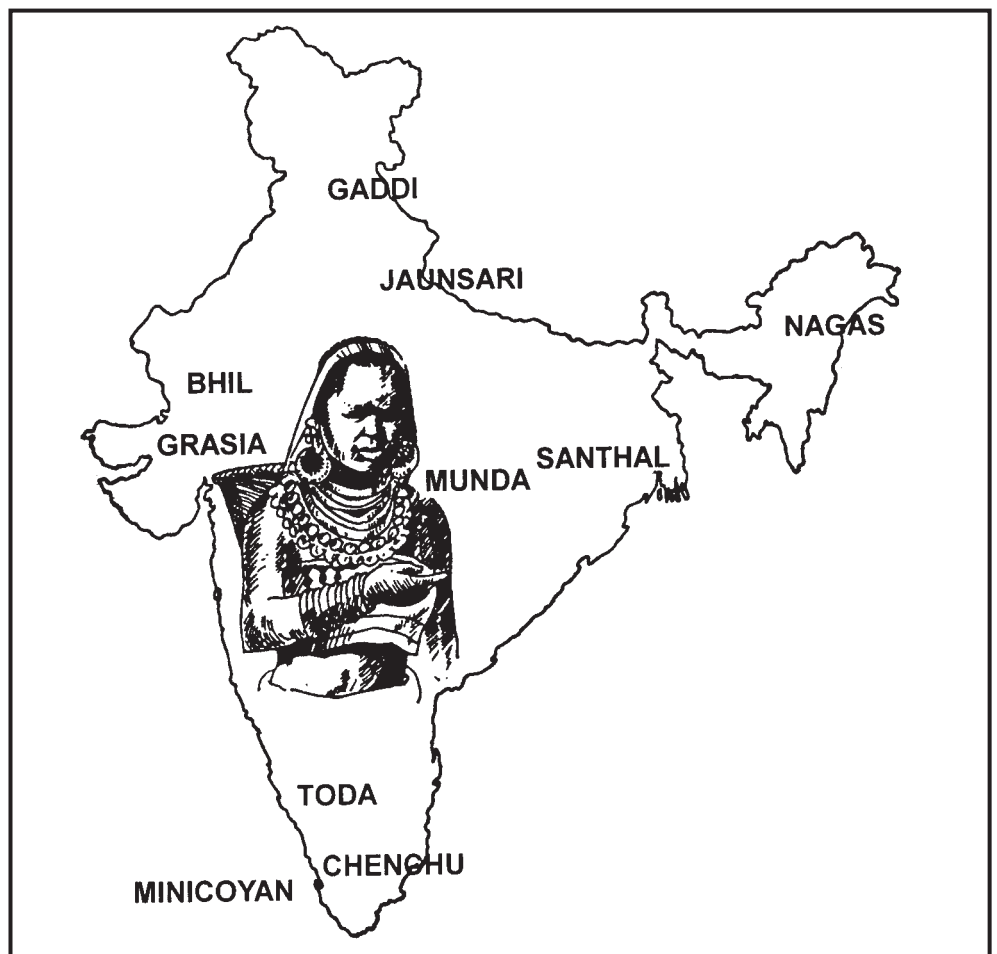


Fig. 25.1: Location of some tribal groups in India



The tribal populations in India have a long history. They have migrated to distant places in pre-historic and historic times and therefore, we find that almost all races of the Indian population are represented among them. Physical features do indicate the stock to which a population belongs and may also throw some light on their migration, the route they may have taken, and the traditions they carry with them.

### 25.5.1 Three Main Racial Divisions

Here, we discuss, in broad and general terms, the racial features and linguistic affiliations of Indian tribes.

On the basis of racial features, Guha (1935) considers that they belong to the following three races.

#### a) **The Proto-Australoids**

This group is characterised by dark skin colour, sunken nose and lower forehead. These features are found among the Gond (Madhya Pradesh), the Munda (Chotanagpur), the Ho (Bihar) etc.

#### b) **The Mongoloids**

This group is characterised by light skin colour; head and face are broad; the nose bridge is very low and their eyes are slanting with a fold on the upper eye lid. These features are found among the Bhotiya (Central Himalayas), the Wanchu (Arunachal Pradesh), the Naga (Nagaland), the Khasi (Meghalaya), etc.

#### c) **The Negrito**

This group is characterised by dark skin colour (tending to look like blue), round head, broad nose and frizzle hair. These features are found among the Kadar (Kerala), the Onge (Little Andaman), the Jarwa (Andaman Islands), etc.

### 25.5.2 Linguistic Affiliations

Linguistically the situation is far more complex. According to a recent estimate the tribal people speak 105 different languages and 225 subsidiary languages. This itself indicates what great variety is found among them. For languages are highly structured and in many ways reflect the social structure and the values of the society. However, for the purpose of clarity and understanding, the languages have been classified into a number of families. The languages spoken by the tribes in India can be classified into four major families of Languages. These are, with examples, as follows:

- 1) **Austro-Asiatic family:** There are two branches of this family, namely, Mon-Khmer branch and Munda branch. Languages of the first branch are spoken by Khasi and Nicobari tribals. Languages of Munda branch are Santhali, Gondi, Kharia etc.
- 2) **Tibeto-Chinese family:** There are two sub-families of this type, namely Siamese-Chinese sub-family and Tibeto-Burman sub-family. In extreme North-Eastern frontier of India Khamti is one specimen of the Siamese-Chinese sub-family. The Tibeto-Burman sub-family is further sub-divided into

several branches. Tribals of Nagaland and Lepcha of Darjeeling speak variants of Tibeto-Burman languages.

- 3) **Indo-European family:** Tribal languages such as Hajong and Bhili are included in this group.
- 4) **Dravidian family:** Languages of Dravidian family are, for example, spoken by Yeruva of Mysore, Oraon of Chotanagpur.

This broad classification does not necessarily mean that there is mutual intelligibility among the speakers of different languages within a family. For example, among the Naga there are at least 50 different groups, each one of them has a speech of its own and quite often the speakers of one speech do not understand the speech of others.

Let us now turn to the population-size of tribes in India. But before discussing demographic features, complete Activity 2.

### Activity 2

- a) Identify the racial division to which you belong. Are people in the area of your domicile from the same or different racial group? If different, describe their physical features.
- b) Identify the stock of language to which your language belongs. Do people in the Area of your domicile speak the same or different language? If different, name the stock of language to which their languages belong.

## 25.6 DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

Social structure is closely related with the size of the group. An optimum size is absolutely necessary for a group to replicate itself socially and biologically. A group must produce enough number of people to replace its members of either sex and of different age groups. This would ensure physical continuity of the group but it also needs human beings for maintaining its social structure. The human beings have knowledge and skill for production, values, beliefs, and the ability to relate to the nature as well as to human beings; norms and customs to lead an organised life and many other concerns. All this can be maintained, replenished and transmitted if there are enough human beings but it must also have adequate balance between sexes and age groups. At one time, the Toda of the Nilgiri were facing biological and social crisis because their number had fallen to a mere 475 and there were not enough females in reproductive age. Biologically it was facing extinction, socially it could not maintain its various institutions. It is like in a football game a team not having enough players to man the different positions. The game cannot go on. In the same predicament are the Great Andamanese in Andaman Islands. Their total population is just in two digits.

On the other side, there are tribes like the *Gond* of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, the Bhil of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and the Santal of Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal whose population runs into lakhs. There are a very large number of groups which fall in the intermediate category like the Dubla in Gujarat, the Chenchu, the Irula in South, the Boro-Kachari in the North-

East. Then there are small tribes like the Toda and the Kota in the Nilgiris, the Birhor in Bihar, etc. The larger tribal groups are spread over into a number of states and, therefore, the same group is subjected to different policies and programmes, which ultimately influence their social structure. For example, the Kurumba, a small tribe in south are distributed in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka states. Not only are they called by different names in different states but also are exposed to different development programmes. In each state they are given education in the official language of the State. In Kurumba's case it is Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada in respective states. Their own language has become less important. This has far reaching consequences for their society. Besides many other changes, they have become endogamous, that is, they marry within the Kurumba group of the State of their habitation. Clearly the factors of isolation and interaction are quite crucial in describing social structures of tribal populations.

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## 25.7 ISOLATION FROM AND INTERACTION WITH OTHER GROUPS

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The issue of isolation and interaction is of critical importance in understanding social formation among the tribes. The idea that the tribes have always remained isolated is not based on history. Migrations in India were frequent for political, economic and ecological reasons. We have already stated that some of the tribes had formed large kingdoms. Even the most isolated groups were part of a wider network of economic relations.

### Some examples of Interaction

- i) The Jenu-Kuruba, a food gathering tribe of Karnataka, were adept in catching and training elephants and perhaps were the main suppliers of elephants to the temples as well as to the armies of different states. Many of them supplied various kinds of forest goods within their region and in return took the goods of their necessity. Many of them paid taxes, rents or whatever was levied on them. Some also participated in the regional religious practices. (For more details on Jenu Korba see the video program, 'simple societies' produced by the Electronic Media Production Centre of IGNOU).
- ii) The Toda of the Nilgiri in Tamilnadu worshipped the deity at Nanjangud in Karnataka, some 140 km away across dense forest. Those who practised settled cultivation had varying degrees of contact with neighbouring peasants and castes.
- iii) The Munda in the nineteenth century were socially and economically integrated with the neighbouring populations.

Ghurye (1943) calls the tribal populations of India as imperfectly integrated segment of the Hindus. Bose (1971) discusses how the Hindus absorbed the tribal population in their fold. There are tribes, which are fully integrated with the wider social, economic, political and religious framework, and others are so integrated in varying degrees. Then, there are tribes playing the role of bridge and buffer to their neighbours. Let us see what this means.

### The Role of Bridge and Buffer

In North-East India, the tribes played the role of bridge and buffer to their neighbours. That is some tribes allowed two powerful neighbours to interact through

them, that was the role of a bridge. In some other cases they kept the two powerful groups separated, that was the role of buffer.

The Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh practised highly specialised terraced cultivation. They were also good in making swords, knives and in weaving. The Dafla, a neighbouring tribe, took rice, swords, knives and textile from them and in return gave them pigs, dogs, fowls, tobacco, cotton, etc. Often they fought because of uneven exchange for the goods they transacted.

There are only a few tribes, which are totally isolated like the Jarwa and the Sentinelese in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. In their case, too, it appears that their isolation is a later development, as they are not the original settlers of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Thus, if we take a long view of the history we find that the tribal populations have been interacting within their regions in a variety of ways. They also developed regional patterns of interaction. In the process of interaction they contributed to the development of Indian civilisation.

For a people geographical distribution gives a sense of space and belonging to it; features like racial, linguistic, demographic, and a group's interaction with others give them an identity, which distinguishes them from others. These are elements that shape the structure of a society. After discussing these features, we will discuss economic activities of tribal populations in India.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Give geographical distribution of Indian tribes. Illustrate each zone with suitable examples. Use six lines for your answer.

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- ii) Classify Indian tribes in terms of their physical features and languages spoken by them. Use seven lines for your answer.

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- iii) Why demographic factor is important in considering social structure of a population? Use ten lines for your answer.

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- iv) Give two examples of relatively isolated tribes, which are part of a wider network of economic relations. Use ten lines for your answer.

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## 25.8 ECONOMIC PURSUITS

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How a group satisfies its material needs has far reaching consequences in almost all aspects of life. Some scholars would say that it has determining qualities. In order to satisfy material wants, resources have to be located and means to exploit them have to be designed. For this appropriate technology and organisation are required so that with minimum efforts maximum products can be obtained on a continued basis. Also the product so obtained has to be appropriately controlled and distributed. People develop rights and claims over the resources and products; these eventually provide basis for social and political power. However, there are always constraints on resources and ecology, which technology tries to resolve. For example, those who live entirely on food gathering require larger land base to support themselves than those who live on coast. The sea offers immense store of food. Similarly those who live on higher altitude cannot practice settled agriculture. They have to be nomadic because of the severity of the climate and have to be traders like the Bhotiya or pastoralists like the Gujjar. Such groups cannot also sustain large populations. In comparison to them, the settled agriculturists have the

capacity to produce more than they require. The surplus they produce can be exchanged for various other goods and services and may lead to specialisation in various activities. These may eventually develop into elaborate rules for exchange.

On the basis of their economy, the tribes of India can be classified into the following seven categories.

### **25.8.1 Food Gatherers and Hunters**

Food gathering, hunting and trapping animals were the first adaptations mankind made and it lasted for thousands of years before being taken over by animal husbandry and agriculture and then by industrialisation. The changes in human society were very rapid once human being learnt to produce food. The pace of these changes got accelerated with industrialisation. Now there are very few tribes on the mainland who live exclusively by food collection and hunting. However, the Cholanai of Kerala present a classical example of this kind of economy.

### **25.8.2 Shifting Cultivators**

Several specialised techniques are used in this form of cultivation. Essentially, it means selecting a plot of forest land, cutting the trees and plants on it allowing them to dry and burning them, after which the seeds may be sown. This way a plot may be cultivated for a few years and then may be abandoned for several years. Such cultivation is widely practised in the tribal regions of North-East India. The Khasi of Meghalaya practise this form of cultivation. Of course, now they engage themselves in several other occupations. Shifting cultivation is practised by many tribes in Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, but as the restrictions on forests have increased and there is not enough land to shift, this form of cultivation has decreased considerably.

### **25.8.3 Settled Agriculture**

Settled agriculture is practised by a majority of tribal population in middle, western and southern regions of the country. It is the primary source of subsistence for them. However, the technique of cultivation practised by the tribes is generally simple. The tribes having a tradition of agriculture are being increasingly drawn into the economic, social, political network of the wider society.

### **25.8.4 Artisans**

The number of tribes subsisting on crafts like basket making, tool making, spinning and weaving is small. Such tribes either combine these occupations with agriculture or may totally depend upon craft. Either way, they have to exchange their products for food articles through market or by establishing exchange relations with some other tribes. The Kota of the Nilgiris has exchange relations with the Badaga for agriculture products. The Birhor of Bihar make ropes and in the past were nomadic. The population of such groups is small. The members of the group learn the skill of the craft in the process of growing up. The craftwork is done at the family level but raw material may be collected at the community level. For example, the basket makers may go collectively for obtaining bamboos but basket making may be a family enterprise.

### **25.8.5 The Pastoralists and Cattle Herders**

The classical examples of the pastoralist tribe are the Toda in the Nilgiris and the Gujjar, the Bakarwal and Gaddi in Himachal Pradesh. Although the Toda have a



fixed abode, in certain season they move their buffaloes for pasture. The buffaloes are individually owned but certain tasks related to the buffaloes and their dairies are collectively done. Like artisans they too exchange the dairy products for other items of their use particularly agriculture products. In the past, the Toda had exchange relations with the Badaga.

### 25.8.6 The Folk Artists

There are a variety of groups who carve out a living for themselves by performing acrobatic feats, entertaining people and providing some services to their patrons. Some of them lead nomadic life and others inhabit villages but periodically move out to their clients. Movements are planned and organised. Movement is always performed in small units comprising a few families, closely related to each other. The essential feature of their economy is that their resource base is other groups of human beings. The Pradhan, a tribe of Madhya Pradesh, are the official genealogists to the Gond. Their women act as midwives to the Gond and also tattoo Gond girls. The Pradhan are dependent upon the Gond, but the visit of a Pradhan to his patron's house is an occasion for rejoicing, for recollecting the events of the intervening period since his last visit, recording of births etc. The Pradhan sing, recite poetry and are experts in story telling. They regale their patrons with ready wit.

#### Activity 3

Describe various economic pursuits of the people in your district. Take help of section 25.8 in grouping these activities in appropriate categories.

### 25.8.7 Wage Labourers

At the turn of the present century large chunks of tribal territories came under plantations. Mining and industrial development also increased in tribal areas. Many of the tribal people had to leave their traditional occupations and seek employment in these enterprises as wage labourers. The tribals of Chotanagpur were taken to North-East India to work on tea plantations. The Santhal have been employed in coal mines of Bihar. This was indeed a major change. From a subsistence economy they were pushed into cash-oriented industrial economy which had its impact on their society.

### 25.8.8 Recent Economic Changes

The economic scene in the tribal regions has been changing. The economic changes may be listed as follows:

- i) Forest resources have dwindled and forests have been increasingly brought under reservation. They are no more under the control of the tribal people except in certain areas of North-East India.
- ii) Tribal people have lost a lot of land to more experienced agriculturists, to industries, and for big projects like hydro-electric reservoirs
- iii) A number of big industries like steel plants have been established in their areas. So, on the one hand, they have been displaced by such projects and, on the other, they have been given employment as wage labourers.
- iv) Penetration of market economy resulted in the tribals producing for market rather than for meeting their own needs.

- v) Development measures are designed to promote settled agriculture and intensive cultivation.

All these and several other factors have made the tribal people more and more a part of the wider economic network. They now produce commodities for market and not for self-consumption. In the process their traditional skills, technology and organisation of labour have become redundant. They must learn new skills, have new technology and should have capital to produce. They are now less of a self-reliant people. All this requires different organisation of economic activities.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) How would you classify Indian tribes on the basis of their economy? Use five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write, in three lines, the major steps in shifting cultivation.

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- iii) Give, in one line, an example of a pastoralist tribe in India.

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- iv) What is the resource base on which the Pradhan, the folk genealogists, depend? Use two lines for your answer.

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## 25.9 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have discussed the following five points:

- i) The concept of social structure has been variously defined but it is a useful concept and is dynamic. In order that a social structure is able to function, its members should be continuously replenished. These members carry and transmit the essential knowledge of the society to others. The social structure does not operate in isolation. It has its internal and external factors, which interact in a complex manner to give it a shape.
- ii) 'Who are the tribals in India?' has been an interesting and vexing question. None of the Indian languages have appropriate term for tribe. The concept of tribe emerged in India with the coming of the British. The problems for the British were how best to protect the tribal areas for the 'time being' and how

to distinguish them from castes. Gradually the concept of reservation emerged and through that emerged the idea of scheduled tribe in independent India.

- iii) Scholars have tried to define the term tribe by enumerating their characteristic features, by considering them as a stage in the evolutionary framework, by distinguishing them from castes and by considering them as a part of Indian civilisation.
- iv) Tribes in India can be classified by their geographic distribution, racial and linguistic affinities, demographic features, isolation from and interaction with other groups and their economic pursuits. These features act like boundary markers and give them identity. They are also elements in giving shape to their social structure.
- v) The tribal scene has been changing. They have lost control over their resources such as forest and land. There has been change in their economy. All round development efforts too have made their impact on their social structure.

This unit has given you an idea of the concept of social structure and tribe. Then, it has discussed the external features of social structures of tribal population in India.

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## 25.10 KEYWORDS

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<b>Continuum</b>	Anything that is continuous and does not show sharp distinction of content except by reference to something else.
<b>Egalitarian</b>	A system in which all sections of the people have equal rights and privileges.
<b>Matrilineal</b>	It is a system in which descent is traced through the mother.
<b>Patrilineal</b>	It is a system in which descent is traced through the father.
<b>Segmentary</b>	It is a system in which a tribe or a section of tribe is considered to be complete in itself. The opposite of it is organic in which a group may be tied up with other group in various kinds of relations.

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## 25.11 FURTHER READING

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Ghosh, Abhik 2003. *History and Culture of Oraon Tribe: Some Aspects of their Social Life*. Mohit Publications: New Delhi

Ghurye, G.S. 1983. *The Scheduled Tribes*. Popular Book Depot: Bombay.

Sahoo, Chaturbhuj 2001. *Indian Tribal Life*. Sarup: New Delhi

Sinha, Surjit 1982. *Tribes and Indian Civilisation Structure and Transformation*. N.K. Bose Memorial Foundation: Varanasi.

Vidyarthi L.P. and B.K. Rai, 1977. *The Tribal Culture of India*. Concept Publishing Company: New Delhi.

## 25.12 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) *Vanyajati, Vanvasi, Pahari, Adimjati, Adivasi, Anusuchit jati*, etc.
- ii) To provide resources for their industries, the British administration began to reach different parts of Indian territory. In the process they faced rebellious protests on the part of tribal populations. In order to protect such groups, in 1833, they declared certain areas outside the limits of normal rules and regulations. In 1874, the British passed Scheduled Area Regulation to administer such areas. By 1919, people of these areas began to be recognised as different from the Hindu, the Muslim and other religious groups. The Act of 1935 provided a policy of reservation for the people notified as Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution of Independent India also maintains a list of Scheduled Tribes.
- iii) The scholars have tried to define the term 'tribe' by describing their characteristics. Such definitions do not take care of variations in tribal lifestyles. They do not also explain the differences, which the tribals have from the caste people. Some scholars consider tribes as a stage in the process of social and cultural evolution of mankind. Some others consider household based production and consumption as a main feature of tribal life. Bailey suggested that tribes should be conceived as one end of a continuum, which has castes at its other end. For Bailey, tribes have segmentary and egalitarian social system and they are not mutually inter-dependent as are castes. Also, they have direct access to land without an intermediary between them and land. Sinha described tribes as systems isolated from the networks of social relations and cultural communications of the centres of civilisation. Such systems are maintained by primitive subsistence technology and these egalitarian, segmentary systems are guided by non-literate ethnic traditions.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) On the basis of ecology, geographical distribution of Indian tribes can be grouped into five regions, namely (a) Himalayan region, with the Gaddi, the Jaunsari and the Naga tribes, (b) Middle India, with the Munda, the Santhal etc., (c) Western India, with the Bhil and the Grasia etc., (d) South Indian region, with the Toda, the Chenchu etc, (e) the Islands region, with the Onge and the Minicoyan etc.
- ii) In terms of their physical features Indian tribes can be divided into three racial divisions, namely, the Proto-Australoids, the Mongoloids and the Negritos. Examples of the first type are the Gond, the Munda and the Ho, of the second type are the Bhotiya, the Wanchoo, the Naga and the Khasi and of the third type are the Kadar, the Onge and the Jarwa.

Languages spoken by Indian tribes can be classified into four major families of language, namely, Austro-Asiatic family, Tibeto Chinese family, Indo European family and Dravidian. Examples of the speakers of the first type are the Khasi, Santal and Nicobari, of the second type are Khampti, Bhotiya, Kachari, Dimasa, Angami and Singpho. The examples of the third type are Hajong and Bhili and of the fourth type are Yeruva, Toda, and Oraon.

- iii) The size of the group or the demographic factor is important in the context of social structure of a population because it provides an essential external basis for the very existence of a group. An optimum size is absolutely necessary for a group's physical continuity. Secondly any group to survive has to continue socially also. For maintaining a group socially, it needs human beings with knowledge and skill for production, values, beliefs, norms and customs. With adequate balance between sexes and age groups, people can carry on the business of maintaining, replenishing and transmitting social life of a group. So we can see how in order to examine its social structure, it is important to take into account the demographic factor of a group.
- iv) One example of a relatively isolated tribe using wider economic network can be that of the Jenu-Kuruba of Karnataka. This is a food-gathering tribe, which also specialises in the art of catching and training elephants. This tribe supplied elephants to temples and armies of different states. It also supplied other forest products and in return received the foods of their necessity. A second example of this kind can be that of the Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh. This tribe practised highly specialised terraced cultivation and made swords, knives and woven cloth. It had economic relations with the neighbouring tribe, the Dafla who gave pigs, dogs, fowls, tobacco and cotton in exchange of rice, swords, knives and textile from the Apa Tani.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) On the basis of economic pursuits, Indian tribes can be classified into the following groups: (a) Food gatherers and hunters, (b) shifting cultivators, (c) settled agriculturists, (d) artisans, (e) the pastoralists and cattle herders, (f) the folk-artists and (g) wage labourers.
- ii) Steps in shifting cultivation are
  - a) a plot of forest land is selected
  - b) trees and plants on it are cut and allowed to dry
  - c) dried plant trees are burnt down and
  - d) seeds are sown in the plot
  - e) after cultivating a plot for a few years, it is abandoned
  - f) the cultivator may select the same plot after several years for repeating the above process.
- iii) The Gaddi in Himachal Pradesh is an example of a pastoralist tribe in India.
- iv) The Pradhan, the folk genealogists, depend on the Gond tribe of Madhya Pradesh. The Pradhan men make genealogies of the families of their Gond patrons and the Pradhan women act as midwives to the Gond and tattoo Gond girls. Thus, the Pradhan men and women derive their economic well being from their dependence upon the Gond.

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## UNTT 26 TRIBES SOCIAL STRUCTURE - II

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### Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Internal Features of Social Structure
- 26.3 The Food Gatherers and Hunters: The Cholanaicken
  - 26.3.1 Habitat
  - 26.3.2 Grouping
  - 26.3.3 Marriage and Family
  - 26.3.4 Sharing
  - 26.3.5 Authority
  - 26.3.6 Recent Changes
- 26.4 The Shifting Cultivators and Matrilineal: The Khasi
  - 26.4.1 Brief History and Habitat
  - 26.4.2 Grouping
  - 26.4.3 Family, Kinship and Marriage
  - 26.4.4 Residence Pattern
  - 26.4.5 Authority: Political and Ritual
  - 26.4.6 Recent Changes
- 26.5 The Pastoralist and Polyandrous: The Toda
  - 26.5.1 Brief History, Habitat and Relations with Other Populations
  - 26.5.2 Grouping
  - 26.5.3 Family, Kinship and Marriage
  - 26.5.4 Authority: Political and Ritual
  - 26.5.5 Recent Changes
- 26.6 The Settled Agriculturists: The Mullukurumba
  - 26.6.1 Brief History and Habitat
  - 26.6.2 Grouping
  - 26.6.3 Family, Kinship and Marriage
  - 26.6.4 Authority: Political and Ritual
  - 26.6.5 Recent Changes
- 26.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.8 Key Words
- 26.9 Further Reading
- 26.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 26.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you should be able to

- discuss the composition of a group
- discuss how a tribe is divided into groups and further into smaller units like clan, family



- outline status and roles that different kin have at different times in the development of the domestic group
- discuss the major changes in recent times.

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## **26.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In unit 25, we indicated the general features of social structure of tribes in India. Now we give our specific observations on the social structure of selected tribes.

In this unit we are going to discuss the internal features of the social structure of the Indian tribes. This we will discuss under the following headings: Habitat, Groupings, Family, Marriage, Kinship, Political and Ritual Authority. Finally, we will also briefly deal with recent changes. Since economy is an important factor, which enables people to meet their material needs and form some organisation to facilitate production, distribution, we will select a tribe from each group representing a major economic category. We select one tribe each from food gatherers and hunters, shifting cultivators, pastoralists and settled agriculturists. The groups we have selected are the Cholanaiken, the Khasi, the Toda, and the Mullukurumba. By discussing social structure of these tribes, we hope that you will get an idea of the internal features of tribal social life in India.

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## **26.2 INTERNAL FEATURES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

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All human groups have a tendency to demarcate themselves from others, as if making an imaginary boundary around them. This establishes their identity. In this the name of the group, the place/region it acquires for its habitation, its racial and linguistic features, customs and beliefs are important. The groups of these units acquire their identities, and in the process of growing up acquire statuses, roles, rights and obligations.

The family is the basic unit in all human societies, its nature may be different. Marriage is the starting point of redistribution of productive resources (who will own land, cattle and other wealth). Similarly, rules of reproduction (the persons with whom marriage is possible and with whom it is strictly tabooed) bring about changes in jural status of the spouses. A woman after marriage may move to her husband's house whereas her husband may acquire unrestricted rights over her sexual and economic services. This phase of the family begins with marriage and will expand when the children are born to them. The dispersal of the family begins with the marriage of the eldest and will complete with the marriage of the youngest child. The final phase begins when the heir in the family takes over the family responsibility and it ends when both parents die. This cycle of the family augmentation and depletion repeats over generations and is an ongoing phenomenon.

In this process of transformation the members of the group generate forces and values. The younger generation in the process of growing up may rebel and may like to change the arrangement. So there may be frictions among the people belonging to different generations. This friction may bring change in the social structure. This is the dynamic concept of social structure.

Formation of the family also indicates which relatives get what status, and what sorts of roles are given to them and what generally is expected of them. For example, in many societies, the responsibilities given to father's brother are different from mother's brother. Generally, most societies make a distinction between consanguineous (established through blood) and **affinal** (established through marriage) relatives.

Further, distinctions are based on sex, age and generation. Some relatives are put into such category with whom no sex relations can be established. Transgressing this rule would be considered incestuous. There may be some relatives with whom marriage is prescribed or preferred. There are some relatives with whom contact, oral communication or even sight has to be avoided. This is a relationship of avoidance. In many communities the relationship between father-in-law and daughter-in-law is of this type. There are some relatives with whom one has joking relationship or of easy familiarity. The relationship between a man and his elder brother's wife in many communities is of this type.

The economic, political, ritual rights are also associated with the development of family. Every generation when it reaches maturity must gain possession of the right to use and dispose of the reproductive resources. Thus, there is a built-in tension within the family and it intensifies as the members start coming of age. The force that it generates is channelised, controlled, and diffused in a variety of ways by different communities. The essential feature is that this force rises and diminishes with the augmentation and depletion of the family cycle. We will now discuss these aspects of social structure in relation to each of the selected tribes. We begin with the Cholanaicken of Kerala.

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## **26.3 FOOD GATHERERS AND HUNTERS: THE CHOLANAICKEN**

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There are very few communities in the world today who subsist by food gathering and hunting alone. Such people do not have any knowledge of agriculture, do not domesticate any animal and generally do not import food by barter, trade or service. In order that such people are able to survive and lead their own way of life, they must inhabit a generous natural environment. The Cholanaicken of Nilambur valley, Ernad taluk, Malapuram district, Kerala (see Map) is one such group. In 2001 its total population was 205.

### **26.3.1 Habitat**

The valley inhabited by the Cholanaicken is at an altitude of 400 feet above sea level. The rainfall is heavy ranging from 200 cm to 406 cm. The valley is covered by evergreen well preserved forest. The valley is dotted with streams and rivers.

The Cholanaicken usually live either on the banks of these rivers or in the caves. During rainy season they move away from the riverbanks. The rivers provide them water and fish. They protect them from wild animals and are used for demarcating their territories in relation to other Cholanaicken. Figure 26.1 shows the location of Cholanaicken habitat.

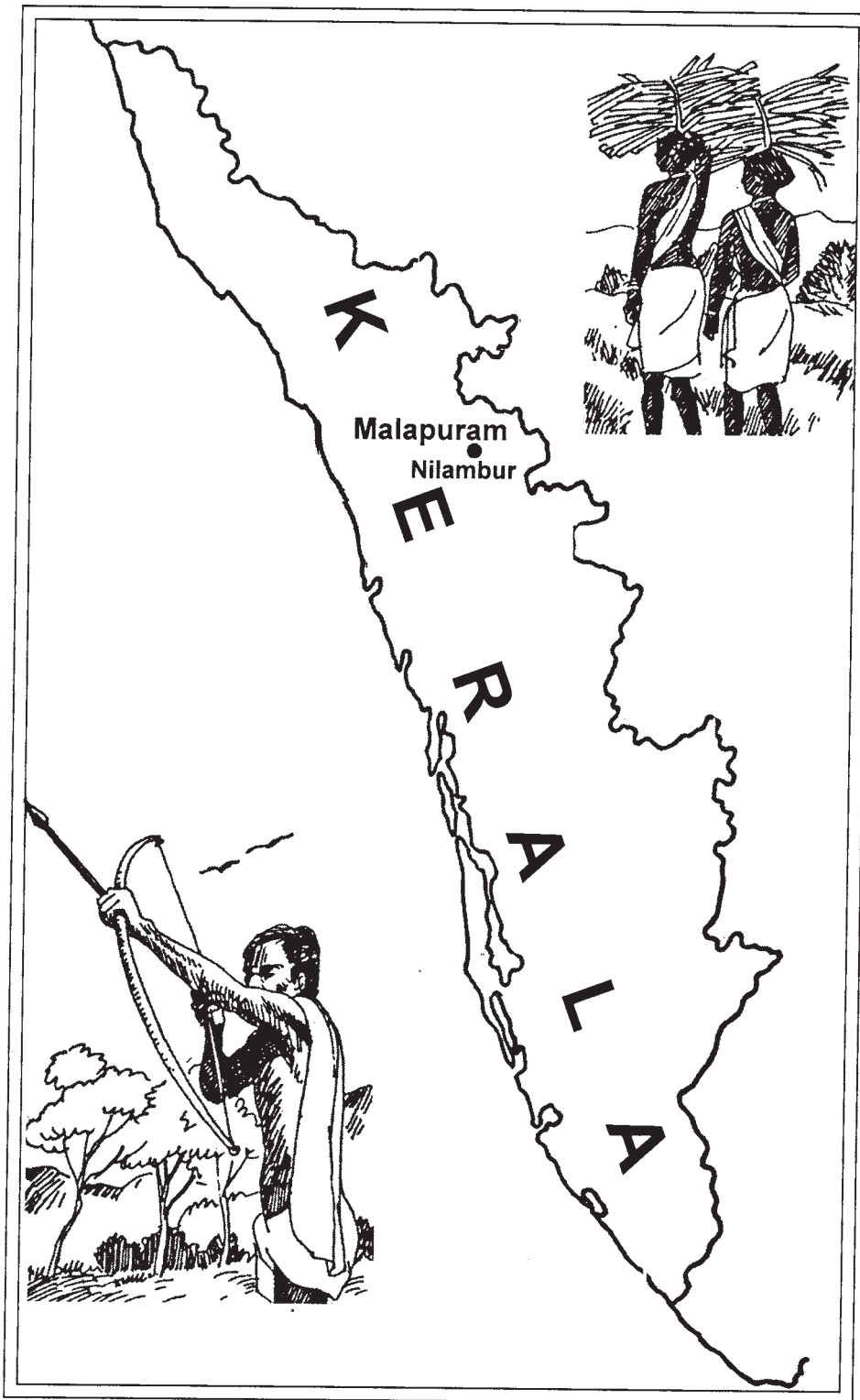


Fig. 26.1: Kerala: Location of the Cholanaicken Habitat

### 26.3.2 Groupings

The Cholanaicken inhabiting the valley are divided into ten bands. Each band is identified with the territory in which it moves for its subsistence. The territory of the Cholanaicken is known as *tsenman*. The limits of *tsenman* are marked by hills, rivers, trees, rocks, etc. A Cholanaicken does not encroach into the territory of another for collection of any sort of forest produce. If this rule is transgressed knowingly or unknowingly, they think the spirits that guard their territories will give appropriate punishment to the culprit. However, the Cholanaicken have the right

to visit the territory of their neighbours as a guest on reciprocal basis. On such visits a guest is allowed to collect food and hunt and is also given food by each family in the territory he is visiting. He is also given gifts in the form of food when he departs. Such visits and gifts not only reinforce the mutual ties and ensure cohesion but also are very much helpful when the resources in one territory get depleted or a person is disabled. A *tсенman* may have two or more families in it related to each other. Territorial rights are inherited by sons from their fathers. Women move to the territory of their husbands. Thus a territory consists of people who are related to each other from father's side. The members of *tсенman* share many things in common like the resources of territory, the caves etc., and stresses and strains of living in an environment which may be bountiful but difficult. Each *tсенman* has a leader called *tсенmakkaran*.

The Cholanaicken bands move from one place to another in their territories for gathering food, hunting, fishing and collection of other minor forest produce. They also move to seek shelter in more secure caves and to protect themselves from wild animals and for social intercourse with other Cholanaicken of their territory and members of other territories. The food gathering activity is carried on round the year but their movement varies from season to season.

### 26.3.3 Marriage and Family

Pre-marital sex is allowed in the community but prohibited within the same territory. Apparently there is no formal marriage ritual but when the couple has sex and lives together and there is no objection from the community then such a union is recognised as that of husband and wife. They form family and raise their children. Generally such unions are formed between the members of neighbouring territories but care is taken to avoid such relatives with whom sex relations are prohibited. Although the men among the

Cholanaicken enjoy higher status, the consent of the woman is necessary to form a union. If she is willing, she indicates by accepting gifts from the man trying to woo her and elopes with him and eventually moves into the territory of her man. The approval of the community of the union is deemed to have been obtained when they are allowed to return to the camp and live along with others, and exchange food and gifts with other members. If there is any objection to this union the kinsmen of the girl bring the girl back to their territory. If for some reason she is dissatisfied with the man, she returns things that she had received from the man as gifts and the union is considered as broken. Such men and women are free to seek their partners afresh. **Monogamy** is the general rule among the Cholanaicken. The Cholanaicken prefer marriage with mother's brother's daughter. The Cholanaicken encourage widows to remarry.

#### Activity 1

Name another tribal group, which does not observe formal marriage ritual. Take help of video programmes for the first elective course of B.A. (sociology) at IGNOU for identifying such a group. Describe the procedure for marriage in this group.

A separate hearth emerges in the camp and a new family is formed when a couple starts living together in a camp with others. This unit like others is a unit for procreation, recreation and socialisation of children when born. This unit like others has to maintain itself by gathering tubers, roots, hunting, fishing and collection of

minor forest produce, which they have to share with other members of the camp. The division of the work in the family is clear. Collection of food articles and minor forest produce is done by men and women. But fetching water, collection of firewood, and cooking food and taking care of infants are the jobs of women. Hunting, making of baskets and instruments are the jobs of men. Also all exchanges and religious performances are done by men.

### **26.3.4 Sharing**

Mutual sharing of food articles among the Cholanaicken is an important mechanism by which the cohesiveness of the members of a camp is demonstrated and relations across the group are reinforced. This way the whole community of the Cholanaicken gets connected.

A portion of the material, which a Cholanaicken family gathers and hunts, is given to each of the family in the camp. When the food is cooked in the evening after they return from their collection, equal portion of the food is given to each family in the camp. Thus, there is a multiple give and take of raw and cooked food among the families of a camp. This is a daily routine and followed methodically. This reciprocal exchange of raw and cooked food works alright as long as the number of families in a camp does not exceed four or five. If it does, a new camp is formed. The daughter's husband has the right to collect food from the territory of his father-in-law.

### **26.3.5 Authority**

The eldest male member of the family is the head. He organises the gathering and collection of minor forest produce and is responsible for all exchanges. He plans for fishing and hunting. He commands respect from the other members of the family and has the authority to allocate work.

Each territory has a chieftain. His decisions are carried out by the members of the territory. It is believed that the chieftain has supernatural powers. He is the sole custodian of the idols of the deities of the group. The deities represent the spirit of the ancestors. He also acts as diviner. The Cholanaicken believe that diseases are caused either by such acts, which violate their customary norms, or if someone has invoked evil spirits. Only the diviner can give the cause and also the remedy for the problem. The chieftain, through this belief system, is able to maintain social control among the members of his territory and also between the members of the territories.

### **26.3.6 Recent Changes**

Other groups and the contractors in search of minor forest produce are increasingly infringing the Cholanaicken area. Increasingly the Cholanaicken work more for collection of minor forest produce they exchange for food items. This has reduced their leisure time and is also responsible for increasing friction among them. The authority of the chieftains has decreased. The Cholanaicken women have been increasingly enticed by outsiders particularly by the members of a neighbouring tribe. As a result of these changes the existence of the Cholanaicken itself is threatened.

**Check Your Progress I**

- i) Distinguish, in six lines, between joking and avoidance relationship.

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- ii) Write, in seven lines, how the groups among the Cholanaicken are formed.

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- iii) Give reasons, in four lines, why the Cholanaicken move from one place to another.

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- iv) Write, in six lines, how people get married among the Cholanaicken.

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- v) What is the social significance of sharing of raw and cooked food among the Cholanaicken? Use four lines for your answer.

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- vi) What is the authority of chieftain among the Cholanaicken? Use five lines for your answer.

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## 26.4 THE SHIFTING CULTIVATORS AND MATRILINEAL: THE KHASI

The Khasi are a Mongoloid population inhabiting the east and west Khasi hill districts of the State of Meghalaya in North-East India. They are well known as they practice the **matrilineal** system. Though all the Khasi share fundamentally the same language and social structure there are some sharp differences regarding their culture, dialect, economy etc., between the Khasi of different regions. Here, the discussion is limited to the Khasi inhabiting the plateau of the west Khasi hill district of Meghalaya.

### 26.4.1 History and Habitat

The Khasi Hills generally remained outside the influence of Assam and Bengal. They were governed by a number of petty native chiefs; there were 25 chiefs ruling the Khasi Hills when the British administration took over. Since then significant changes have taken place in the area. It was opened up for military, trade and commercial activities. The missionary activities too were intensified. Churches, schools and hospitals were opened up. The majority of the Khasi were converted to Christianity. The Khasi got their separate state, Meghalaya, in 1972. Their population is above 4 lakhs. Introduction to potato cultivation in 1830, brought many changes in the Khasi area. Potato cultivation to some extent replaced shifting cultivation. But is still practised in the Khasi region as well as other parts of Meghalaya.

The Khasi habitats are located on hilly tracts, slopes and valleys. The rainfall is heavy to very heavy. The region is rich in fauna and flora. The houses in Khasi villages form agglomeration. These agglomerations of houses develop as a result of the social custom. The elder sisters of the family are hived out of the ancestral homes. In the past they made their houses near about their ancestral homes but now in other villages also. The Khasi also practice village endogamy as a result of which most of one's **agnatic** and affinal kin are found in the village itself.

#### Activity 2

In a map of India, show the location of the state of Meghalaya and indicate the area of the Khasi hills in this state.

### 26.4.2 Grouping

The Khasi population consists of a number of *kur*, matrilineal clans whose members consider themselves to be descendants from a common ancestress. The members of the same *kur* have a common *mawbah* (grave stone) in which the bones of all the dead members belonging to the *kur* are buried. When a *mawbah* becomes full or some of its members move away to a considerable distance, a branch *mawbah* is found, creating a new *kur*. Thus, in course of time every *kur* throws up branches. Each branch has a *kur* name but can be grouped with a major *kur*. Members of a *kur* do not marry among themselves and also in the branch *kur*. The members of a *kur* are distributed over a wide area cutting across territories of different regions. Consequently, a village may be composed of people belonging to several *kur*. The Khasi have another unit called *kpoh*; its members are descendants of one great grandmother. Such a group of matrilineal kin is generally confined to one domestic family or a group of families linked by direct extension to the main family.

### 26.4.3 Family, Marriage and Kinship

The Khasi kinship organisation makes a clear distinction between matrilineal kin called *kur*, and non-matrilineal kin called *kha*. The Khasi have numerous prohibitions on marriages between kin on both paternal as well as maternal sides. The first and second parallel cousins are avoided. There is no preference for marriage with cross cousin (e.g. mother's brother's daughter) but such marriages are allowed.

The most important functional descent unit is called *iing*. It is the lowest unit of clan segmentation. It is smaller than *kpoh*. An *iing* may have people of two to four generations, sometimes it may have only mother and child. It is the *iing*, which arranges marriages. Husbands are excluded from wife's *iing* though they share a common household. The members of an *iing* consist of a set of strictly matrilineal descendants, who have a common right over the ancestral property, are subject to a common authority and practice some joint rituals.

The *iing* membership is through mother. The custodian of the property is the mother and her right is inherited by the youngest daughter while authority to manage property and to maintain the tradition is in the hands of mother's brother. His right is inherited by his sister's son. Thus the Khasi clearly separate the right to own property from the right to authority. A man continues to be a member of the same *iing* all his life. A woman if she is not heiress will branch off after her marriage and though she herself will continue as a member of her mother's *iing*, the third generation from her will form an independent *iing*.

The marriage may be arranged by the elders but generally the young men and women select their partners. The marriage is solemnised provided they do not belong to prohibited alliances.

### 26.4.4 Residence Pattern

Traditionally a man after his marriage stays in the mother's house and visits his wife's house at night. That is for a man there is two residences one of his sister and other of his wife. Thus, a domestic unit generally is composed of a woman, her children, woman's unmarried sisters and brothers including widows or divorcees. This form of residence, in course of time, may change. A husband may move into

the house of his wife. If he becomes a widower he may move into his sister's house again. These are the different stages in the development cycle of the domestic unit of the Khasi. If the marriage is with non-heiress that is, not with the youngest daughter, the couple may stay in the wife's house till the first child is born. Thereafter they may form a household of their own.

### 26.4.5 Authority: Political and Ritual

Traditional political structure of the Khasi is elaborate. It functions at four levels namely clan, village, *raid* (a group of villages) and state. Each level has a head and a council where issues are discussed before a decision is taken. The responsibility at lower level is to allocate clan lands for cultivation and to settle disputes.

Several *raid* together form a state. The head of the state is called *Syiem*. *Syiem* is elected by an electoral college consisting of the functionaries of clan *durbar*, village *durbar*, and *raid durbar*. *Syiem* is expected to protect his people as a mother would protect her children. The British had curtailed the power of the various traditional bodies. In independent India the region under Meghalaya comes under sixth schedule of Indian constitution which provides several provisions and safeguards for the region as well as traditional institutions.

### 26.4.6 Recent Changes

The Khasi area has been increasingly opened up for trade, commerce and industry. The economy too is changing. The literacy is high both among men and women. The most important change that is taking place is conversion of the public land into private. This has many far-reaching consequences. Family structure too is changing. More and more people are trying to form their own nuclear families. The authority of maternal uncle has become weak. Men are more busy with their own families rather than their sister's. Though the women still hold on to their rights, they are facing challenges and getting influenced by the patrilineal system of their neighbours. The Indian Constitution has strengthened the autonomy of the region as well as of the tribe.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Explain, in six lines, the terms kur, kpoh and iing.  
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- ii) Who has the right to property among the Khasi? Use one line for your answer.  
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- iii) Describe, in six lines, the traditional political units among the Khasi.  
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## 26.5 THE PASTORALIST AND POLYANDROUS: THE TODA

The Toda have attracted worldwide attention. In the literature they are known as one who practice adelphic **polyandry**. Under this system a woman on her marriage automatically becomes the wife of all the brothers of her husband. Physically the Toda look different from other neighbouring population. Toda men and women have their own distinctive hairstyles. Both men and women drape themselves in colourful embroidered cloaks. They are perhaps the only tribe who claims to be vegetarians. Their subsistence is dependent on their buffaloes. It has been established that they are an ancient population and belong to the region of their habitation.

### Activity 3

Describe the practice of adelphic polyandry and give examples of its practice in India on the basis of your knowledge of Indian myths, tribal groups and literature.

### 26.5.1 Brief History, Habitat and Relations with Other Populations

The Toda inhabit the higher altitudes of the Nilgiris of South India. For centuries the Toda, the herdsmen of the buffalo, have shared the mountains with the Kota, who are cultivators, leather workers, smiths and potters and the Kurumba and the Irula, the forest dwellers who practice hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation. While the Toda and the Kota inhabit the higher regions, the Irula and the Kurumba live on the lower slopes. Sometimes before the beginning of 17th century, these four indigenous people were joined by Kannada speaking people called the Badaga. They came to the Nilgiris in several waves from the plains of Mysore region. They were agriculturists. These five Nilgiri peoples, the Toda, the Kota, the Kurumba, the Irula and the Badaga had ritual, economic and social relationships among themselves and developed a certain degree of mutual dependence. Though they exchanged goods and services among themselves, a certain amount of hostility too had developed there among them, on account of their different interests.

After the British entered into the Nilgiris in early nineteenth century, economic, demographic and social situation there changed rapidly. They started plantations there. They brought many more people to the Nilgiris from the plains. The market forces too entered. All these had far reaching impact on the indigenous people of the Nilgiris. The traditional ties between them also broke down.

The traditional Toda settlements look unique with half barrel shaped houses and dairy buildings. Their dairies are in fact their temples. The Toda life revolves around

the care and milking of buffaloes. Their dairy and buffaloes are considered sacred. The most important feature of their social structure is separation between pure and impure. There are different degrees of sacredness of their buffaloes, dairies and priests. The Toda try to maintain appropriate correspondence between them. In their settlement too, the underlying principle of separation of pure from impure is reflected. The domestic portion of the settlement is clearly separated from their dairies and buffalo pen. According to the Toda tradition no woman can be around their dairy or buffalo pen; and no Toda man who has not been properly ordained can enter into their dairy. The principal requirements for a Toda settlement are good pastures, a forest in the neighbourhood and water streams nearby.

The traditional Toda houses are built of mud, stone and cane. The half barrel shaped houses have a very low entrance. Inside the house, front and rear portions are clearly demarcated. The front portion is considered pure and rear as impure. Only in the front part of the hut churning of the milk to produce butter and buttermilk can be done. Since churning of milk is exclusively men's work, the front part is associated with men. The rear portion where the hearth is located is the women's area. The women are principal sources of impurity in the Toda society.

### 26.5.2 Grouping

The Toda are divided into two endogamous sub-groups called *Tartharol* and *Teivaliol*. The most striking contrast between the two Toda sub-groups is that the *Tartharol* people alone can own the most sacred dairy temples but only *Teivaliol* men can be the priests of those temples. However, *Tartharol* claim superiority over *Teivaliol* people. No *Teivaliol* women can visit a *Tartharol* settlement but no such restriction is imposed on *Tartharol* women. Each Toda sub-group is divided into a number of exogamous clans called *mod*. At present there are ten such clans among the *Tartharol* and five among the *Teivaliol*. These clans too are stratified.

Women on marriage are incorporated into their husbands' clans. Since infant marriage is the ritual requirement of the society, the incorporation of the girl in her husband's clan takes place in infancy. Young girls continue to live with their parents until their maturity but they are the members of their husbands clan. If she dies her funeral rites will be performed by her husband's family and not by her father.

### 26.5.3 Family, Kinship and Marriage

The lowest unit of their social structure is the family. The people who usually occupy a single dwelling hut are husband, wife and unmarried children. It may also include the widowed parent of the husband and sometimes the family of a married son who has not yet been able to build his own house. In the past, the Toda domestic unit was a polyandrous family; two or more brothers married to the same woman lived together with their children. Although their polyandrous system is fading away, a married man or woman is allowed a sexual partner in opposite sub-group. Such partners have some ritual role to play particularly on the death of the partner.

In the Toda society biological paternity has no importance. Paternity for social purpose is recognised when a man performs bow and arrow ceremony in the seventh month of the pregnancy of his wife. Thereafter, all the children born of that woman would be considered his unit until someone, usually his brother would perform another bow and arrow ceremony. The children born after that would be considered his brother's.

Siblings of parents belonging to same sex, that is father's brothers and mother's sisters, too are considered as parents. The behaviour towards parents is of respect and humility. When a woman meets her father or mother, actual or classificatory, she bows to them. In sharp contrast are the parent's **siblings** of opposite sex that is mother's brother and father's sister. The behaviour towards them is not that of restraint. The term used for them is the same as one would use for one's father-in-law and mother-in-law. Cross cousin marriage is preferred among the Toda.

The procedure for establishing a marriage begins with the boy's parents looking for a suitable girl. Their first preference will be the daughter of a mother's brother or a father's sister. Once the choice has been made on an appointed day, parents of the boy bring gifts for the girl before an assembly of the Toda men and women. After some discussions a person may announce that the proposal has been agreed upon by the concerned parties. The marriage rituals are initiated in infancy and completed at maturity when husband takes his wife from her parental home to his own parents.

Funeral rites of the Toda are elaborate and bring into focus the complex interpersonal, inter group relations and also the organisations of their dairies. All his relatives must assemble when a Toda man is near death. After the death, the corpse is washed and is draped in a new cloak. A day of the funeral is fixed for the funeral. During this period it is the duty of all relatives to pay their respect to the deceased. On the day before the funeral, men of the opposite sub-group bring wood for the pyre. *Bier* must also be prepared by the men of the opposite sub-group.

The animals sacrificed on funeral are female. If the funeral is for a man, both temple and domestic buffaloes will be sacrificed but for a woman only domestic ones. Custom not only decides what kind of buffaloes are to be sacrificed but also who is to give them. One buffalo must come from son-in-law of the deceased. The principle is that this buffalo must come from a man who has taken his wife from the clan of the deceased. The other buffalo is of the deceased. But now there are restrictions on the number of buffaloes that can be sacrificed.

At intervals, before the funeral the men of the opposite sub-group dance and sing in honour of the deceased. Finally, it is the members of the opposite sub-group who catch the sacrificial buffalo and bring it for sacrifice. The dairy buffalo is sacrificed by the principal dairyman, the other buffaloes by the appropriate category of people.

#### **26.5.4 Authority: Political and Ritual**

The Toda society does not have a headman except at the level of the household where the eldest male member has the authority. The Toda have a strong council, which ensures that norms of the society are observed, disputes are settled and actions taken against those found guilty. The Toda council meets frequently. Fines and punishments are imposed and quickly realised too. If the issue is not decided in one *noyam* (the Toda council) it will be in another *noyam* but it gradually emerges. Leaders are generally older and influential people. The issues nonetheless are thoroughly discussed. A man of the sub-group opposite to that of the guilty party announces the judgment of the *noyam*.



26.5.5 Recent Changes

In spite of significant changes in the economy, demography and ecology of the Nilgiri region, the Toda have remained consistent. They continue to remain dependent upon their buffaloes. Though some of them have acquired land, they do not practice agriculture themselves. They lease out their lands to other agriculturists. Their traditional relationship with other tribal groups of the region has almost broken down. Their internal division has remained the same but the endogamous character of the ‘sub-group’ is coming under challenge by young reformist group of the Toda.

They have also tried to stop the buffalo sacrifice, as well as child marriage as part of reform but so far the efforts have not been successful.

Their *noyam* continues to be a powerful body upholding the traditions of the community and punishing the deviants.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Describe, in four lines, the most characteristic features of the Toda.

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ii) Explain, in five lines, how paternity is decided among the Toda.

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iii) Write, in four lines, on the institution of noyam among the Toda.

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26.6 THE SETTLED AGRICULTURISTS: THE MULLUKURUMBA

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The Mullukurumba are one of those tribes who have known settled cultivation for a long time. They have been successfully combining cultivation of paddy with other means of food procurement. Like many other food producing communities they have to share a part of surplus production to meet their other needs. The

Mullukurumba interact with the groups inhabiting their region and continue to live on the edge of the forest. With other groups in the past their relationship was hierarchical, based on the notion of 'purity'. They also got some services from a few functionary castes of the region.

### 26.6.1 Brief History and Habitat

One of the theories is that modern day Kurumba are the descendants of the ancient Pallava, who were once powerful throughout southern India. Recent researches suggest that the indigenous population of the Wynad participated in rebellions against the British.

The Mullukurumba inhabit the hilly tracts of Wynad in Kerala and Gudalur *taluk* of the Nilgiris in Tamilnadu. The Mullukurumba settlements are known as *veedu*, no other tribe or caste live in their settlements. The Mullukurumba settlements have a striking appearance by which they are easily identifiable.

For centuries the Mullukurumba share their region with the Chetty, the Uralikurumba, the Katu Naicken and the Paniya. Each one of these groups lives in exclusive settlements. Of these, the Uralikurumba, besides practising agriculture were expert basket makers, potters and blacksmiths. These groups exchanged services and goods among themselves and were tied in a hierarchical relationship. The Chetty were at the top, followed by the Mullukurumba. At the bottom of this hierarchy were the Paniya. This hierarchy is clearly reflected in their day to day relationship and also on ritual occasions.

In the past the Mullukurumba were mostly dependent on agriculture, fishing and hunting. Now hunting has been totally stopped. Those who have been successful in retaining their land, practice intensive cultivation of paddy, cash crops like pepper, tea and coffee. A good number of the Mullukurumba now work as wage labourers on the fields of others and on plantations.

### 26.6.2 Grouping

The Mullukurumba population is distributed in an area of about 20 miles in radius. According to the Mullukurumba, their population is distributed into four regions. The boundaries of these regions for them are well demarcated. The function of this territorial division is now notional.

The Mullukurumba are strictly endogamous. They have four exogamous matri clans. The clan title is inherited through mother. Now these clans have only ritual importance. They also have patrilineal clans. For a marriage one must avoid patri clan as well as matri clan. The property is inherited from father to son.

### 26.6.3 Family, Kinship and Marriage

The domestic unit or the family of the Mullukurumba generally consists of husband, wife and their children. But this unit in course of time grows and it may also have married sons. In such cases, often the married sons have a separate house to sleep in. The girl on marriage moves to the house of her husband, which always is in another village because the Mullukurumba observe village exogamy. The growing domestic unit breaks into nuclear units when there is more than one married son in the unit or when the grandparents die. Thus, the Mullukurumba domestic unit goes through the process of augmentation and depletion by natural events like birth and death, and social events like marriage and partition. The breakaway domestic unit

among the Mullukurumba is formed in the same village. Another house structure comes up in the village. There is very little out migration of the Mullukurumba males from their respective villages. In the family the eldest male member has the authority. He makes most of the decisions. The eldest son gets more importance than others in the unit. The daughters-in-law of the unit are given complete charge of the work of the house such as washing, sweeping, bringing water, husking grains, cooking etc. They also work in the field or may go for wage earning. The Mullukurumba girls of different ages in a village from approximately seven years onwards sleep in their age-grade dormitories. Generally, there are separate dormitories for girls of the age group seven to eleven, twelve to sixteen and seventeen and above.

### Avoidance and Joking Relationship

The relationship between the daughter-in-law and her real or classificatory father-in-law or husband's real or classificatory elder brother is that of avoidance. But her relationship with her husband's younger brother is friendly. They can cut jokes with each other. A woman has relationship of avoidance with her younger sister's husband. While a man avoids talking to his younger brother's wife, he has joking relationship with his wife's younger sisters. People who stand in avoidance relationship to each other are said to belong to *theenda kulam* (untouchable clan).

Father's brothers are given status and respect, almost equal to that given to father. If one's father is not alive, he has to take guidance from his father's brother. The term used for them is *peyappan* or *eayappan*, meaning elder father or younger father. Similarly mother's sisters too are treated with respect as one would treat one's mother. The terms used for them are *peyamme* and *eayamme* meaning elder mother and younger mother. Interestingly their husbands are called by the same terms as for one's father's brothers. *Chetan*, *eniar*, *eattathi* and *eniathi* are terms used for a large number of classificatory kin. *Chetan* means elder brother, *eniar* younger brother, *eattathi* elder sister and *eniathi* younger sister. These terms are used for one's brother and sister as well as one's cousins, parallel or cross. The cousins have equal status; difference is made on the basis of age.

### Marriage

The Mullukurumba maintain endogamy. They observe clan and village exogamy. Kin are also avoided in choice of marriage. Earlier marriage by elopement and marriage by force were more popular among them. In the marriage by elopement, the consent of both the boy and girl was there whereas in the other i.e. marriage by force, the boy kidnapped the girl from the pond or riverside when she was bathing or washing clothes. The former type is called *odi koodal* (run and join) and the latter, *atru kadavu* (transporting from the riverside). The arranged marriages are referred to as *veetu kadavu* (through the house). *Atru kadavu* is so much popular among them that they have introduced a mock flight in arranged marriages too. In this mock flight the groom's party pulls one hand of the bride, uttering the words "Come to our *veedu*, we have a big river there for fishing and bathing. Leave this place". The bride's party resists them by pulling the bride to their side holding her other hand.

There is another form of marriage prevalent among the Mullukurumba. It is locally called *mukka vazhi* (three-fourth of the way) in which a bride, who is a widow or a divorcee is met by groom's party not in her house but somewhere half way between her house and the groom's house and taken to groom's house.

The Mullukurumba have a system of taking bride price and this amount has been increasing. Divorces are not frequent in their society. Remarriages of widows and widowers are allowed.

#### Activity 4

Like the Mullukurumba have different terms for various forms of marriage in their society, look for similar terms for different forms of marriage in your society. Make their list and describe each form in one line.

### 26.6.4 Authority: Political and Ritual

The Mullukurumba have an elaborate structure of the council of elders. The chief of this council used to be a Nair but that office has become defunct. But the structure below him headed by the Mullukurumba is intact. A group of the Mullukurumba villages are under a Mullukurumba chief called *moopan*. There are 13 such chiefs who form the council of elders. The offices are hereditary but the chief of the council of elders is the eldest person. The functions of the council are to settle disputes between the Mullukurumba and to see that the traditional rights are maintained. The chief has a variety of roles in social and religious functions of their respective villages. Authority of the elders is recognised by the Mullukurumba at every level-household, village and inter-village.

The Mullukurumba observe various life cycle rituals of which birth, puberty, marriage and death are most important. In these rituals various kin, the chief of the village, and people of other castes and tribes have roles. In birth, puberty and death, they have rituals to remove pollution. On such occasions they have to collect *ennai* (ritual oil) from a Nair barber. On childbirth and attainment of puberty of a girl, they have to collect *mathu* (ash and water) from a Nair washerman to remove the pollution.

These rituals promote social solidarity among the Mullukurumba and show internal division of privileges and responsibilities and their relations with other groups.

### 26.6.5 Recent Changes

The Mullukurumba continue to remain a closely-knit group but on account of various economic, social, political changes, there has been some dispersal in their population. The authority of the *moopan* is now basically confined to religious spheres.

The hierarchical relations with neighbouring groups have broken down. The Nair barbers and the Nair washermen do not provide the ritual services any more.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- i) Name, in two lines, the groups living in the neighbourhood of the Mullukurumba.  
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 .....
- ii) Write, in six lines, on joking and avoidance relationship among the Mullukurumba.

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- iii) Explain, in six lines, the different ways by which a person may marry among the Mullukurumba.

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- iv) Describe, in six lines, the structure of the council of elders among the Mullukurumba.

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## 26.7 LET US SUM UP

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At whatever level the human groups may be, they tend to establish their identity by having a name, inhabiting a particular territory and by observing certain customs and practices. Such defined groups internally are further divided into sub-groups. Basis of this division may vary from group to group but one of the important functions such divisions perform is to regulate marriages within the group. Marriage is the most important event in the family. It ensures reproduction of human beings in an ordered manner and thereby continuation of the group. Developmental cycle of the family shows that it goes through the process of augmentation and depletion by natural events like birth and death and social events like marriage, separation, etc.

Family members have certain statuses and roles, which are passed on from one generation to the other. This process of transformation generates force and may cause friction among different categories of people. A group may have a formal or

informal authority, which may regulate the affairs of the group and exercise social control.

These various structural issues have been examined by taking the example of a hunting and food gathering group, a shifting cultivator and matrilineal group, a pastoralist and polyandrous group, and settled agriculturist group.

The Cholanaicken, do not produce any food. They depend upon forest for their subsistence. Territory is the basis of the division among their society. Though they do recognise close blood relatives among whom marriage is tabooed, concept of clans has not emerged among them. Division of labour is based on sex. The status of women is lower than men. Sharing of resources and food is the most important principal of their society. It ensures survival of the group and brings cohesiveness among the Cholanaicken. The Chief among them has the power of divination and derives his authority from supernatural sources. His son inherits his authority.

The Khasi produce their own food. They are matrilineal and have a well-developed concept of clan in which the immediate descendants are distinguished from the distant to make the concept functional. They have clearly divided the roles among the kin. The youngest female in the family has the power, the maternal uncle has the authority. Women have a higher status. They allow cross cousin marriage but village endogamy is preferred. The Khasi have elaborate authority structure from village to the state level. Progressively the secular and sacred roles of the authority are separated from one level to the other.

Though the Toda do not produce their own food they have been a part of the regional network in which goods and services with others are exchanged. They are divided into two endogamous groups. These groups remain within the fold of the Toda society as they have many reciprocal roles to perform. The clan organisation is well developed. Their notion of hierarchy is based on the concept of purity and pollution. Based on this concept they grade their dairies, buffaloes and other activities. The status of women is lower than men though they practice polyandry. In kinship structure like many other groups they make clear distinction between the siblings of the parents of the same sex and siblings of the parents of the opposite sex. The Toda do not have an institution of chief but their council is powerful.

The Mullukurumba produce their own food. Like other food producers they have been a part of a regional network in which goods and services are exchanged. They have territorial and also well developed clan divisions. The former has become notional. Their relationships with other people and within the community are guided by the concept of purity and pollution. They maintain village exogamy. They do not allow marriage between cousins, parallel or cross. They do not make distinction as the Toda do between the siblings of the parents of same or opposite sex. The authority of the male as the head of the family is clearly established. They too have the system of chiefs, which is well developed, but their authority is much eroded in the present context.

This presentation clearly brings out the distinction in social structure between the food procurers and food producers. However, each case has its own unique features. It is clear that both the Toda and the Mullukurumba are nearer to caste people.



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## 26.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Affinal</b>	Those who are related through marriage, like husband and wife, one's wife's or husband's relatives
<b>Consanguinious/agnatic</b>	Those who are related through blood like parents and their children, brothers and sisters etc
<b>Matriliny</b>	A system in which the descent is traced through female line
<b>Monogamy</b>	A marriage in which a husband has one wife only
<b>Polyandry</b>	A marriage, in which a woman has more than one husband, they may be related to each other as brothers or may not be. If they are related it is called adelphic polyandry
<b>Siblings</b>	Children of the same parents

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## 26.9 FURTHER READING

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## 26.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- When contact, oral communication or even sight are forbidden between some relatives, we say that there exists the relationship of avoidance between them. In some societies, the relationship between father-in-law and daughter-in-law is of this type. With some relatives, one has, on the other hand, relationship of easy familiarity. This is called joking relationship. In many communities the relationship between a man and his elder brother's wife is of this type.

- ii) Group formation among the Cholanaicken is based on territory. They are divided into ten bands. Each band is identified with a territory in which it moves for its subsistence. Such a territory is known as *tseman*. Each *tseman* may have two or more families in it related to each other. As territorial rights are inherited by sons from their fathers, a territory consists of people related to each other from father's side.
- iii) The Cholanaicken move from one place to another for (a) gathering food and other minor forest produce, hunting and fishing (b) seeking shelter to protect themselves from wild animals (c) establishing social intercourse with other Cholanaicken of their territory and members of other territories.
- iv) There is no formal marriage ritual among the cholanaicken. A woman accepts the gifts from the man trying to woo her and elopes with him. She eventually moves to his territory. The man and the woman live and exchange food and gifts with other members of the group. They are then considered married.
- v) Sharing of raw and cooked food among the cholanaicken demonstrates cohesiveness of the members of a camp. Exchange of food articles across the groups reinforces the connectedness of the whole community of the cholanaicken.
- vi) Chieftain of a territory has the authority to take decisions, which are carried out by the members of the territory. He acts as a diviner to give cause and remedy of diseases. He maintains social control among the members of his territory and between members of the territories.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) A matrilineal clan whose members consider themselves to be descended from a common ancestress is called *kur*. Descendents of one great grandmother are grouped in a unit called *kpoh*. Such a matrilineal kin group is generally confined to one domestic family or a group of families linked by direct extension to the main family. The lowest unit of the clan segmentation is called *iing*. It is the most important functional unit. It may have people of two to four generations, sometimes, it may have only mother and child. Marriages are arranged by *iing*, members of which consist of a set of strictly matrilineal descendents, who have a common right over the ancestral property, are subject to a common authority and practice some joint rituals.
- ii) Right to property is inherited by the youngest daughter from her mother.
- iii) Political units among the Khasi are clan, village, *raid* (a group of villages) and state. Each of the four units has a head and a council where issues are discussed and a decision is taken. At clan level the clan lands are allocated and disputes are settled. Several clans form a village and several villages form a *raid*. A state is a cluster of many *raid*. The head of the state is called *Syiem* who is elected by the functionaries of clan *durbar*, village *durbar* and *raid durbar*. *Syiem* protects his people as a mother protects her children.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Main characteristic features of the Toda are:
  - a) adelphic polyandry, b) their own distinctive hairstyles and colourful embroidered cloaks, (c) vegetarianism, (d) buffalo dependent subsistence.

- ii) The Toda do not recognise the principle of biological paternity. For social purposes paternity is recognised when a man performs a bow and arrow ceremony in the seventh month of the pregnancy of his wife. After one ceremony all the children born of that woman are considered his children, until another man (usually a brother) would perform a bow and arrow ceremony. The children born after that would be reckoned as the other man's children.
- iii) The Toda have a strong institution of *noyam*, which is a council to ensure that norms of the society are observed. This council also settles disputes and takes action to punish those found guilty. Leaders of the *noyam* are generally older and influential people.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- i) The groups living in the neighbourhood of the Mullukurumba are the Chetty, the Uralikurumba, and the Katu Naicken.
- ii) Avoidance relationship among the Mullukurumba exists between the daughter-in-law and her real or classificatory father-in-law or husband's real or classificatory elder brother. People who stand in such a relationship to each other are said to belong to *theenda kulam* or untouchable clan. Joking relationship among the Mullukurumba exists between a woman and her husband's younger brothers. Similarly, it also exists between a man and his wife's younger sisters.
- iii) Earlier, marriage by elopement and marriage by force were common among the Mullukurumba. The former type is called *odi koodal* (run and join) and the latter, *atru kadavu* (transporting from the river side). The arranged marriages among the Mullukurumba are called *veetu kadavu* (through the house). The marriage of a widow/divorcee is called *mukka vazhi* (three fourth of the way).
- iv) The Mullukurumba have an elaborate structure of the council of elders. It's chief used to be a Nair. But now this office has become defunct. But the composition of the council below this office remains intact. A group of Mullukurumba villages organise under a Mullukurumba chief, called *moopan*. Thirteen such chiefs form the council of elders. The office of the chief is hereditary while the office of the chief of the council is according to seniority in age.

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## UNIT 27 RELIGION IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

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### Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Chief Characteristic of Tribal Societies: Simple Form of Religion
- 27.3 Tribal Lifestyle
- 27.4 Tribal Ritual Complex
  - 27.4.1 Ritual Space
  - 27.4.2 Ritual Time
  - 27.4.3 Ritual Language
- 27.5 Tribal World View
  - 27.5.1 Simple Belief of the Tribals and the Upanishadic Complex Thought
  - 27.5.2 Some Ethnographic Examples
  - 27.5.3 Anthropological Studies of Primitive (Tribal) Religion
- 27.6 Impact of Other Religious Belief Systems
  - 27.6.1 Hinduism and Tribal Religions
  - 27.6.2 Christianity and Tribal Religions
- 27.7 Socio-religious Movements
  - 27.7.1 Tana Bhagat Movement
  - 27.7.2 Birsa Munda Movement
- 27.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.9 Keywords
- 27.10 Further Reading
- 27.11 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 27.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit you will be able to

- discuss that tribal societies are characterised by simple forms of religion
- show that understanding of religious notions is vital to the understanding of tribal lifestyle
- describe that tribal worldview recognises no differentiation or opposition of the sacred and the secular
- discuss the impact of other religious faiths on tribal religions
- describe the occurrence of socio-religious movements among the tribal groups.

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### 27.1 INTRODUCTION

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In units 25 and 26 we discussed broad patterns of social structure in the tribal societies of India. In this unit we will try to understand how **faith** in supernatural is structured in tribal society.

If we go by the 1961 census of India, it would appear that about 89 per cent of the tribals claimed to profess Hinduism and 5 per cent had converted to Christianity. About 4 per cent were enumerated as following tribal religions, which number 52 (Mitra 1966). Vidyarthi and Rai (1976: 238) hold that the tribals in India are mainly Hindu. They quote many scholars who also hold a similar view. Here we have not gone into the details of these opinions. Let us for a minute assume that most of the tribals in India follow some or the other form of Hinduism. It is obvious that this is due to the contacts the tribals had with their Hindu neighbours. So also is the case with regard to Christianity, which was introduced among the tribal groups during the British rule. Therefore we will discuss in the last part of this unit both Hinduism and Christianity as aspects of the impact of other faiths on tribal religions. The first part of the unit will deal with the nature of tribal **religion**, the main theme of this unit.

We will here discuss main features of the **ritual** complex of tribal people. Next we will show how tribal **worldview** recognises no differentiation of the **sacred** and the secular. We also show that tribal simple beliefs are in agreement with the highly sophisticated worldview of the **theologically** self-conscious society. Then we take up the issues of the impact of other religious belief systems on tribal religions. In the end we discuss the occurrence of socio-religious movements in the tribal societies of India. In many parts of the world, such movements have been reported to occur among the aboriginal populations, and the tribal groups in India share with them belief in millenarianism.

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## 27.2 CHIEF CHARACTERISTIC OF TRIBAL SOCIETIES: SIMPLE FORM OF RELIGION

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Every religious system consists of a set of three essential elements: (a) belief in the existence of a superhuman world; (b) human's relationship to it; and (c) practice of ritual as an instrument of establishing relationship.

Here (a) refers to the belief system, (b) to the value system, and (c) to the action system. The form and meaning of these elements, i.e., religious belief, religious value and religious action, may differ from one order to another.

Religion of a **tribe** is simple insofar as it is expressed in everyday language and experienced in everyday life. It is descriptive, demonstrative and readily discernible. Among the tribes religious **myth**, belief, religious value and religious action are not treated as something apart from other kinds of belief and behaviour, as followed in social, economic and political contexts. Yet, the meaning of beliefs and behaviour of the tribals appears mysterious to the outsiders. This is precisely because theirs is a religion without explanation. However, tribal religion is no less complete than the highly developed form of complex religion to the extent that its implicit philosophy recognises the same universal truth.

Let us now explain to you all these features of tribal religion, its implicit philosophy and the worldview. This we will do by discussing tribal lifestyle, tribal ritual complex and tribal worldview.

## 27.3 TRIBAL LIFESTYLE

Religion pervades all aspects of tribal life that is why for understanding the tribal lifestyle we need to first understand the tribe's religious notions. To explain this, we will take an example of the pastoral Toda of the Nilgiri in South India (see Walker 1986).

By their own account, the Toda and their long horned buffaloes were created on the high massif of the Nilgiri Hills by the great goddess Teikirzi. Their settlement is marked by the unique barrel-vaulted houses and dairy buildings. The dairy buildings are temples. The following illustration (figure 27.1) shows the entrance of a dairy building and in the foreground is a Toda male pacifying a buffalo with butter.

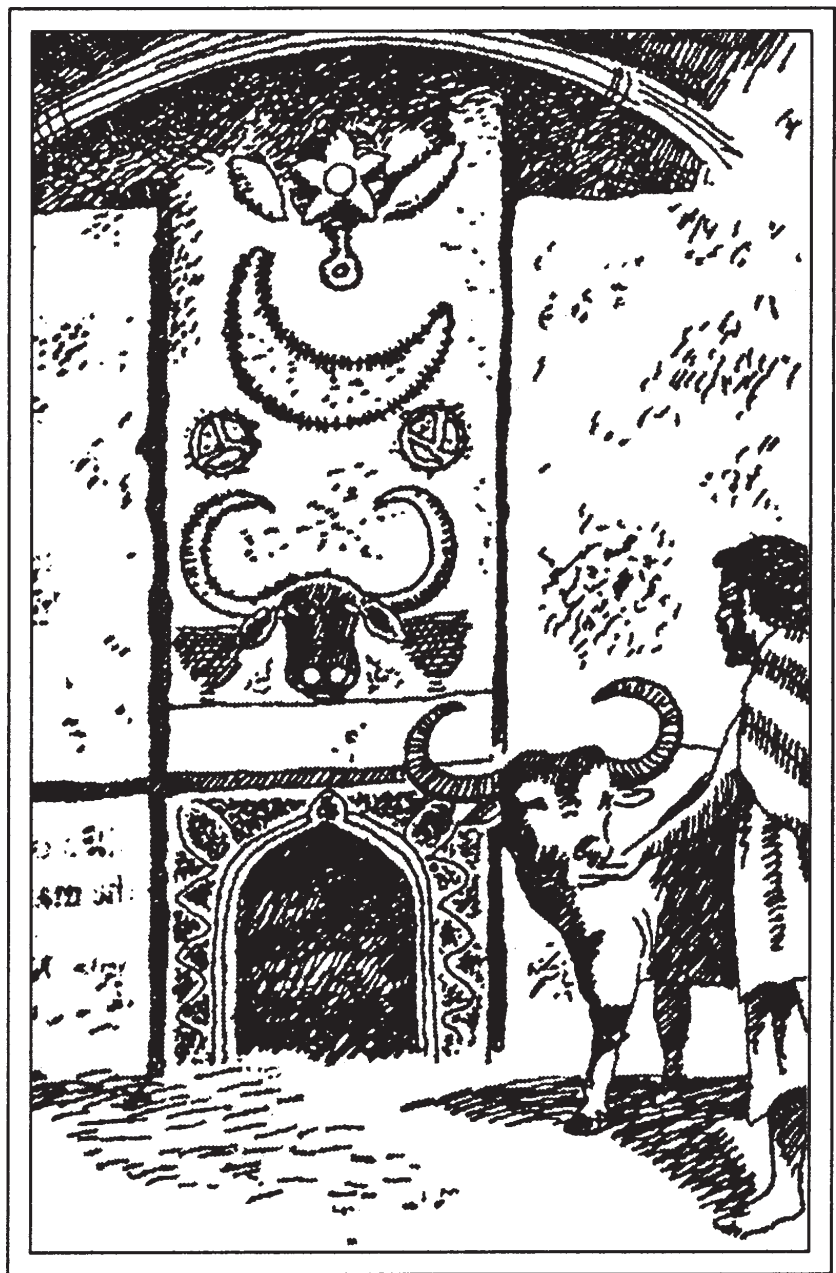


Fig. 27.1: Entrance of a Dairy Building and a toda male pacifying a buffalo

The Toda are socially organised into two endogamous sections, named *Tarthoral* and *Teivaliol*. The division is based on ritual specialisation. The *Tarthar* people



alone can own the most sacred dairy temples with their associated herds; the *Teivaliol* men, called 'the servants of the gods' fulfil the highest priestly tasks associated with them. Their economic and social lives are centred on the buffaloes. The greater part of their religious observance is also focused on this animal. The buffaloes are ritually guarded. Every task of the dairyman, every object and place associated with the herds has received the impress of ritual. The Toda observe a number of special ceremonies related to the dairies, the buffaloes and the pastures. There are rites by which they honour the dairy, purify it when it has been defiled, and make offerings to it. There are rites associated with rebuilding and rethatching. Next are the rites for naming a buffalo, milking a temple buffalo for the first time, giving salt to the herds and moving them to the new pastures. There is also the rite of lighting the gods' fire to ensure the fertility of the pastures.

Life's major events are highly ritualised among the Toda. The first pregnancy of a Toda woman is seen as ritually contaminating and hence in approximately fifth month she spends a complete lunar month in a temporary 'pollution hut' outside her hamlet. In her seventh month of pregnancy, the husband ritually gives her a bow-and-arrow to establish the social paternity of the unborn child. If a child were born to a woman who had not been given a bow, it would be a bastard with no **patrician** affiliation. In former days when **polyandry** was the norm, the several husbands of a woman took turns to assume the paternity of her children.

Childbirth is a polluting event. It is not only the mother and her child who are ritually defiled, but also all other people and things which come in close contact with them. Purificatory rite is performed on or just before the day of the new moon after birth. The 'face-uncovering' ceremony is performed some time between one and three months after the birth of a child. It is only then the Toda child is recognised as a social being.

The name-giving ceremony follows it. Marriage is initiated in childhood and completed at maturity. Meanwhile the ear-piercing ceremony is performed for all boys. For a girl there are two distinct rites supposed to precede her entry into womanhood. The two rites essentially are symbolic and an actual defloration is performed before a girl's first menstruation. When the partners in a marriage alliance reach maturity, arrangements are made for their cohabitation and for the subsequent payment of dowry. On this occasion the girl's father performs 'the girl-sending' ceremony. The passage of a Toda man or woman into middle or old age is not marked by ritual. As death approaches, the elders can look forward to an afterlife not radically different from their present one. As the goddess Teikirzi rules over the living Toda and their buffaloes, so does her brother, On, who reigns over the dead. Death generates the greatest profusion of ritual. The corpse of the deceased is cremated at the end of the first funeral ceremony during which buffaloes are sacrificed so that they may accompany the **spirit** to the afterworld. A second ceremony is held, usually months after the first, in which a relic of the deceased (a lock of hair and a skull fragment) is cremated.

What comes through this description of the Toda passage through life cycle, as also the organisation of their territory, society and economy, is the great importance of religion. You have seen how the complex web of ritual is woven around the comparatively simple tasks of the husbandryman. One might, therefore, conclude that tribal life and society cannot be fully understood without understanding their religion. However, as Winter (1978) has pointed out, in some societies religion plays a much more important role in group structure than it does in others. This

has been illustrated with reference to African tribes. The social structure of the Iroquois cannot be described without taking religion into account; that of the Amaba can be described in such a manner.

### Activity 1

Identify some areas of your lifestyle, which require an understanding of your religious notions. Write a note of 200 words on this aspect of your lifestyle. Compare, if possible, your note with those of other students in your Study Centre.

## 27.4 TRIBAL RITUAL COMPLEX

For a religious human, the superhuman world is the real world, which is ritually replicated in space and time. The believer communicates with this world through a symbolic code which Saraswati (1982) calls the **ritual language**, consisting of (a) esoteric word, *mantra*, (b) gesture, *mudra*, (c) sound, *dhvani*, (d) everyday language of interaction, *vyavahariki*.

The tribal ritual complex may be described along this line. Here we will first speak of ritual space and then of ritual time. Next, we will discuss ritual language in terms of *mantra*, *mudra*, *dhvani*, and *vyavahariki*.

### 27.4.1 Ritual Space

In the tribal perception the space is filled with spiritual beings. There are two classes of space: cosmic space and physical, or object space. The Santal believe that the creator *Thakur Jiu* dwells up in the sky; the *Sin Bonga* or the Sun God also occupies the cosmic space. There is also the *Hanapuri*, or the land of the dead. The spirits occupy concrete objects in and around their settlement. Such spaces are named after the spirits associated with them. For instance, the spirit of the region, the spirit of the village boundary, the house spirit, the spring spirit, the mountain spirit, the forest spirit, the spirit of the rice field, the spirit of the threshing floor, cremation ground, etc.

The ritual space is different from the ordinary space inasmuch as it is sacred-effective. But any ordinary space can become a ritual space, depending on its association with the spirit. Generally, it is allowed to retain its natural form. For instance, the *Jaher*, or the sacred grove of the Santal consists of a clump of *sal* tree with one *mahua* standing near. Three trees in a line are dedicated to *Mama Buru*, the spirit who dwelt with the first Santal, *Jaher Era*, the spirit of the sacred grove, and to *More ko Turuc ko*, the spirit called Five-Six. Another *sal* tree is dedicated to *Pargana Bonga*, the spirit of the region, while *Mahua* tree is reserved for *Gosae Era*, the spirit of the sacred house. At the base of each of these trees, a stone is embedded and all five are known as *Bonga* trees. A simple construction may also mark the sacred space. The Santal *Manjhithan* consists of smoothly cemented plinth of mud with two stories to represent the founder of the village, *Manjhi* and his wife, a centre pillar of *sal* wood, a second and smaller pillar supporting a pot of water and finally a roof of thatch or tiles.

Tribes, by and large, entertain no notion of hierarchy of the sacred spaces. But, as Walker (1986) has reported, the Toda dairy temples are graded into a complex

hierarchy according to relative sanctity. The higher they are, the more elaborate is the ritual associated with the daily tasks of the dairyman, and the higher must be the purity in which the dairy, its appurtenances, and the dairyman himself are maintained.

### 27.4.2 Ritual Time

The tribes order their ritual time on the Nature's signal, i.e., on the blossoming plants and trees, on the position of stars and moon, the biological time, and, if the circumstances so demand, by direct **divination**. The principal festival of the Oraon is called *Sarhul*, the Feast of the *Sal* Blossoms, also known as the Marriage of the Earth. Another festival known as *Kadlota*, is celebrated when rice grains have formed in the rice plants. The Toda perform their rituals according to the position of stars and new moon. The star called ket (Tamil *kettai*, Sanskrit *jyestha*), the 18th *naksatra* or lunar mansion, is considered to have a malignant influence. Most rituals are performed on or about the new moon. The moon-time is followed rather strictly. As you have seen, the Toda regard childbirth pollution particularly dangerous to the ritual condition of the sacred dairies of the hamlet. Thus they insist that a new mother and her child should be taken, as soon as the woman could move, out of her hamlet to the pollution hut. The length of the time mother and child were compelled to remain in this hut depended upon whether or not the child was her first. In the case of the second or subsequent child, the period of seclusion would last until the new moon following the birth, possibly just a few days. But for the first born it had to be a complete lunar month following the new moon after the delivery. Thus, if a woman had given birth to her first child just after a new moon, she would have to endure almost two months of seclusion. On the third day of the new moon the newly delivered mother receives butter and buttermilk from the dairy, which event marks the end of the restriction on her drinking milk and consuming milk products from the dairy. The 'social paternity rite' or 'bow-and-arrow ceremony' is performed on the day of the new moon. The first funeral rite is also held on the day of the new moon. Most tribes consider biological time as an occasion to perform ritual, such as the first menstruation, childbirth, and death.

### 27.4.3 Ritual Language

Forms of ritual may vary from one tribe to another, but the basic ritual code of *mantra*, *mudra*, *dhvani*, and *vyavahariki* is applicable to all cultures.

- a) **Mantra.** In the complex form of religion, such as in the *Vedic* and *Tantric* traditions, the conception of mantra is fully developed. The *Vedic* mantra is considered as the **primordial** word of which neither human nor **God** is the author. It is not even the message of the God; it is the God itself. Briefly, a *mantra* is that letter or combination of letters, which evokes the deity. The *mantra* used by the tribes in the performance of a ritual are simple words of everyday language. For instance, the Kharia tribal priest recites the following mantra to the village spirits:

O ye Khunt and Baghia spirits!

Today I am offering sacrifices

Today in your name I am offering to you

Mahua, Ber, fig-all these fruits,

I am worshipping you.

Do ye protect (our) bullocks, buffaloes,  
goats, men, etc., in jungle and brushwood,  
from tigers and bears.

This *mantra* may appear as **prayer**. For, the Kharia priest offers a sacrifice to the spirit, which in return is asked to reciprocate. But, on closer inspection you will find that in this there is both a command for boons and the hope of reciprocity. Some scholars (for instance, Woodroffe 1955) are of the opinion that *mantra* is not the same thing as prayer. A *mantra* intoned in the proper way becomes effective by the very structure of its soundbody; a prayer, on the other hand, is a mere individual thinking expressed without determined sounds.

- b) **Mudra.** There are various kinds of hand gestures and bodily positions representing specific feelings and esoteric actions. In tribal dance the movement of steps, interlocking of hands and other hand gestures have both aesthetic and ritualistic significance. The most common forms of the tribal dance *mudra* are interlocked arms at the waist level in front and back; swinging of one leg while holding all the weight on the other foot; open movements of arms above shoulder level; outstretched hands held diagonally-one above the level of the head and the other at the level of the knee; taking such tiny steps that the lifting of the feet from the ground is hardly perceptible, the arms held down to the sides and the eyes downcast; fast movement of foot back and forth; swinging; rolling; rotating; hanging head down; and so on and so forth. There are also gestures of ceremonial greetings, such as *Johar* of the Santal.
- c) **Dhvani.** Sound is the third component of ritual language. The sound of musical instrument guides the dance *mudra*. Certain forms of sound have special significance. The Santal produce peculiar sound at the annual hunt. They shout “Der der, Deper deper” during the *Bitalaha* dance. The Toda shout “0 haw how” during the thatching of their sacred dairy temples. The tribes of North-East India also produce a wide variety of sounds, sometime giving expressions to their virility. The sound of flute, the sound of the drum, whistle, and cries are associated with a number of ritual performances. Certain forms of sound are considered inauspicious. According to the Birhor, if a jackal of the Fekar kind (which emits a peculiarly hoarse sound) is heard calling near the settlement, it is apprehended that some one in the community will fall sick or die. The croaking of a raven near the Birhor’s hut is believed to indicate that the news of the death of some near relative is about to come. Ceremonial weeping at the time of death may also be included in the category of ritualistic sound.
- d) **Vyavahariki.** In course of the performance of a ritual what follows in the form of prescriptions or instructions, thoughts, methods and behaviour is the *vyavahariki* code. The following description (Walker 1986) of making offerings to a Toda dairy will be a good illustration: All Toda dairies must be kept in a state of high ritual purity. Dairies are participants in the divinity of the gods of the sacred places believed to be able to grant boons and punish wrong doers. The manner in which the Toda go about requesting a boon from a dairy is strictly prescribed. It involves presenting to the dairy certain

gifts: a buffalo or a dairyman's black loincloth, silver coins, or a silver ring. If the presentation is to be a buffalo, the ceremony lasts two months; if it involves no more than a silver, the whole affair can be completed in a couple of days. But in any case, it involves all the male adults of the patrician and the ritual interaction of the two clan divisions known as *kwir* horns. On the day before the new moon following the announcement of the act of offering a buffalo, all female members of the chief settlement must leave the hamlet, as must all males of the buffalo-giver's *kwir*. On the Sunday following the new moon, the buffalo will be presented to the dairy. The man who wishes to propitiate the dairy must provide a female calf, between one and two years old, unblemished, with clear eyes and no parts of its ears or tails cut. On the morning of the ceremony, members of the gift-giving *kwir* must bathe from head to foot and abstain from food. When they are ready, they assemble at the outskirts of the chief hamlet from where they approach the settlement in a group with the calf; each man bares his right arm (a ritual sign of respect) and carries a green stick. When the members of the resident *kwir* see these people approaching, they shout, "Give the buffalo! Come here".

The gift-giving *kwir* enters the hamlet and the two divisions face each other. The dairyman addresses a ritual three times with the question "Shall I give the buffalo!", to which the reply each time is "Give the buffalo!" Then all the men drive the calf past the buffalo-giving stone, by which act it becomes the property of the resident *kwir*. The whole assembly now bows toward the dairy entrance as they recite a short prayer, which differs from clan to clan. After the prayer, All approach the dairy and bow, one by one, at the threshold, after which every one partakes of a feast prepared by the receiving *kwir*. The food on this occasion is a Toda delicacy, large balls of puffed millet and jaggery, served with generous helpings of honey and ghee. After eating, the gift-giving *kwir* must again leave the chief settlement and stay away for another lunar month. Members of the gift-receiving *kwir* may come and go as they please, except the resident dairyman. Two or three days after the new moon, everybody (including the womenfolk) may return and the whole community is invited to participate in a celebratory feast. Dancing is an integral part of the festivities. Life in the chief hamlet now returns to normal, having been disrupted for two months.

The underlying structure of the tribal ritual complex, as you must have realised, is not a mere reflection of and association with the superhuman world, but a strong reinforcement of the human world itself. Both social and aesthetic aspects of life are enriched. The social implications of primitive religion have been highlighted by Durkheim and Weber and many other sociologists of religion. The integrative function of religion in tribal society is demonstrated in their common goal (superhuman world) and common means (ritual). Unlike the salvation-seeking complex religions, tribal religion is concerned with the maintenance of social and cosmic harmony and with attaining this worldly goods-rain, harvest, children, health, victory, and so on.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) "Tribal life and society cannot be properly understood without understanding tribal religion". Illustrate. Use eight lines for your answer.

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- ii) What is ritual language? Use five lines for your answer.

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- iii) How do the tribes determine their ritual time? Use three lines for your answer.

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## 27.5 TRIBAL WORLDVIEW

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Evolutionary anthropologists of the last century held that the primitive man's mental equipment is very different from that of the civilised man. Since then several statements have been made supporting the view that the civilised mind is logical, rational, supremely abstract and scientific, while the savage mind is prelogical, irrational, supremely concrete and superstitious. We may (must) not take this difference seriously.

The primitive lack of differentiation in their worldview does not necessarily prove that they are intellectually incapable to reasoning and interpretation. As we shall see in a while (subsection 27.5.1) the principle of undifferentiated reality has found a place of pride in the highly intellectualised Vedantic philosophical system.

Secondly, as Geertz (1978) has said, nor is it necessary to be theologically self-conscious to be religiously sophisticated.

Thirdly, the development of religious systems cannot be established by finding correlations between social and psychological needs and the degree of religious articulation.

Lastly, the so-called primitive societies make no difference between the technical order and the spiritual order, and hence in their case the consideration of social and psychological factors influencing the religious life is totally irrelevant.



### 27.5.1 Simple Belief of the Tribals and the Upanishadic Complex Thought

Saraswati's (1986) exploration and analysis of the tribal myths of North-East India has led him to say that in the archaic vision, human, cosmos and the supernatural are not separate realities but are related and closely communicable to the extent that the Land of the Dead is the archetype of the Land of the Living. In support of his argument he quotes the Apa Tani's **eschatological** beliefs, as recorded by Furer-Haimendorf (1953): "The Apa Tani believe that the souls, *Yalo*, of all those who die a natural death go to *Neli*, the place of the dead, which looks like an Apa Tani village with long rows of houses. As an Apa Tani lived on this earth so will he live in *Neli*; a rich man will find the cattle he has sacrificed during his lifetime. Every woman returns to her first husband, but those who died unmarried may there marry and beget children. Life in *Neli* is similar to life on earth: people cultivate and work, and ultimately they die once more and go to another Land of the Dead". In the *Katha* Upanishad, Yama, the god of death, had told Nachiketa:

"Whatever is here, that is there,  
What is there, that again is here,  
He who sees any difference here,  
Goes from death to death".

Comparing the Upanishadic complex thought with the tribal Apa Tani's simple belief, we find that both comprehend the essential oneness to the same degree of sophistication. The Apa Tani's description of the land of the dead is an apt illustration of the Upanishadic *Rishi*'s conceptualisation of the fundamental unity of all experience and the intrinsic harmony of all existence.

### 27.5.2 Some Ethnographic Examples

Furer-Haimendorf (1962) describing the event of an earthquake in a Konyak Naga village addresses himself to the problem of tribal mind: "What is the Konyak's idea of the natural phenomena that sometimes threaten his life and his property?" The answer given by Furer-Haimendorf is that the Konyak Naga man is not a primitive, living in mortal fear of the unknown. In fact, his worldview is rather clear and simple. A Konyak Naga's ideas on-nature are derived from logical deduction.

Mawrie's (1981) self-interpretation of Khasi religion points to the same intuitive rationality. According to Mawrie, a Khasi family facing affliction or distress or financial problems believes that all such events have a cause. The cause may be an offense, displeasing the spirits. The family generally finds out the cause by resorting to divine consultation. After discovering the cause they perform sacrifice to atone the shortcomings so that the affliction may disappear.

Tribal traditions make no real distinction between man, animal and god (spirit). A woman give birth to twins, of whom one is human and the other tiger; animals talk, and also behave, like man; of two brothers, one is the father of mankind, and the other the father of the spirit (see Elwin 1968). This notion makes the interpersonal communication between man, animal and god theoretically conceivable and ritually possible.

Ritual actualises the man-god interaction in concrete observable contexts. Here is an example from an account of the Kharia by Roy and Roy (1937). He writes that the spirit doctor (Deonara) is called to diagnose when anyone suffers from a serious illness. In the manner of a medical practitioner, he feels the pulse of the patient and examines his body. Then he finds out if some spirit (Dubo) is the cause of the malady. Identification of the offended spirit (Dubo) is carried out by the spirit doctor when he gets into a state of spirit possession. He may also find this out by reading the nature of the way a wick flickers. If the flame is whitish and weak, a minor spirit is declared to be the cause of the malady, if the flame is red, an ancestral spirit or family deity is indicated. If the flame is strong and flickers only a little, a particularly malevolent spirit is indicated. After confirming the identity of the spirit, the spirit doctor prescribes appropriate sacrifices, which are offered by the head of the family.

### Activity 2

Ask someone either in your family or neighbourhood to tell you the story of Nachiketa or try to read it from literary sources and write it in your words.

**OR**

Write a note on how you would explain when your family falls into affliction or distress or financial deterioration.

Compare your story/note with those written by other students of your Study Centre.

### 27.5.3 Anthropological Studies of Primitive (Tribal) Religion

The early **evolutionary** study of religious phenomena in Tylorian, Morganian and Frazerian style was replaced by the structure-functionalist approach initiated by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. In more recent years, social anthropologists, such as, Evans-Pritchard, Lienhardt and Worsley, have developed the study of primitive religions further. During the last few years there has been greater sophistication in understanding the structure and meaning of the primitive belief systems, largely in terms of their symbolic significance, owing much to Claude Levi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz. But most anthropological analyses of primitive religion, in some form or the other are still geared to the evolutionary problems and preoccupations. Religions of the so-called primitive and the so-called civilised are marked off on the recognition of the notion of historical progress from simple to complex and the nature of primitive and of modern society. If progress means differentiation, then primitive means undifferentiated and modern means differentiated. It has been observed that the contemporary primitives live technically, socially, economically, and politically in the most simple and undifferentiated conditions, and so also in their personal worldview. But this does not prove that a society tend to be so differentiated in its worldview. You have seen how the simple Apa Tani residing in the undifferentiated social conditions and the Upanishadic *Rishi* of a highly differentiated society share the same thought of the essential oneness.

- i) Is it necessary to be theologically self-conscious to be religiously sophisticated?

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- ii) What is the tribal perception of man, animal and god?

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- iii) How do the evolutionary anthropologists differentiate between the so-called primitive and the so-called civilised thought worlds?

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## 27.6 IMPACT OF OTHER RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEMS

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As mentioned in the introduction of this unit, many tribal religions have blended with other faiths of non-tribal groups. Of these Hinduism and Christianity are the major religious systems which have affected the tribal communities. Let us first consider the impact of Hinduism on tribal religious beliefs and practices.

### 27.6.1 Hinduism and Tribal Religions

Ethnographic studies of different tribal groups show that the contact of the tribals with their neighbours varied from part-isolation to complete assimilation. The Tharu (Srivastava 1958) and the Khasa (Majumdar 1962), the two central Himalayan tribes in North India are a good example of completely assimilated or Hinduised tribes. By adopting Hindu caste names, wearing the sacred thread, establishing social links with the local Rajput and Brahmin groups, these tribals have incorporated their identity with high caste Hindus. Similarly, the Kshatriya model (Srinivas 1966) of Hinduism has been adopted in middle India by the Chero, Kharwar, Pahariya of Bihar and the Bhumij of Madhya Pradesh. The Bhumij Kshatriya Association, founded in 1935, showed wider implications of Hinduisation of the tribals. The concept of tribal Rajput continuum (Sinha 1961) was evolved in the course of historical studies of the Bhumij Raj of Birbhum.

In Eastern India the Bauri of West Bengal (see Shasmal 1967) accepted to observe the prescribed number of days of pollution for mourning, wear the sacred thread,

go to pilgrimage and follow Vaishnavism. They now claim to belong to the Brahmin caste.

Adhering to beliefs in the Hindu concepts of Karma, pollution, merit (*punya*) and observing Hindu life cycle rituals, the Mahali of West Bengal (Sengupta 1966) have adopted and assimilated the elements of local belief and practices of the Hindus. Similarly, in many of the Oraon villages of Chotanagpur, Hindu gods and goddesses are worshipped; Hindu priests are employed to carry out ritual performances during life-cycle ceremonies (Sahay 1962 and Sachchidanand 1964).

In Western India also, we find that many of the Hindu deities are worshipped by the tribals. For example, Mahadev is the main deity of the Bhil tribe. Shah (1964) has shown that in Gujarat the Dubla, Naika, Gamit and Dhanaka are quite Hinduised and employ a Brahmin to perform the rituals.

Looking at the situation in South India, we find that beliefs and practices of the neighbouring Hindu castes have been adopted by the Chenchu, Kadar and Muthuvan. Hindu gods and goddesses like Aiyappan, Maruti and Kali are worshipped by the Kadar. Presiding deities of Madurai temple, Palaniandi and Kadavallu are treated as their chief deities by the Muthuvan.

Here we would like to also mention that contacts between the tribals and their Hindu neighbours have not only resulted in the impact of Hinduism on tribal beliefs and practices, “We find also the impact of tribal religions on the practices of certain Hindu groups living in tribal villages. For example, the process of tribalisation in the Bastar region of Madhya Pradesh reflected in acceptance by high caste Hindus of tribal morals, rituals and belief (see Kalia 1959: 32). Majumdar mentions the concept of transculturation among the Ho of Singhbhum, signifying reciprocal impact of tribal culture on local Hindu castes. Hutton (1931) observed that Hinduism and tribal religions share a common base, while Bose (1971: 6) is of the opinion that the tribal population of India has contributed to the making of Hinduism.

It is not out of place here to mention that the tribal groups have also been affected by their neighbours. Such as the Buddhists and the Muslims. In upper Lahaul and the Ladakh region, the Bhot tribals are mainly Buddhists. Similarly, the Gujar of the North-Western Himalayan region and the Bhil of Rajasthan have close contacts with Muslim groups and are affected by their beliefs and practices.

In this section, we have simply mentioned about the neighbouring groups’ impact on the tribal groups. We have not discussed the process of these changes. This point will be examined in the next unit on *Tribes and Modernisation in India*. Let us now look at Christianity, which has affected many of the tribal groups in India.

### **27.6.2 Christianity and Tribal Religions**

Beginning with the conversion of the Khasi of Assam in 1813, of the Oraon of Chotanagpur in 1850 and of the Bhil of Madhya Pradesh in 1880 (Sahay 1963, 1967) by Christian missionaries, Christianity has brought about many changes in the cultural life of the tribals in India. The missionaries attempted to convert numerically major tribes. As a result, minor tribes remained untouched by the new religion while mass conversion of major tribes gave the impression of the hold of Christianity on tribal India.

Of the total population of Christians in India at least one sixth belong to tribal groups. Most of the tribal Christians are found in the North-East Himalayan zone. Elwin (1961) estimated that ranging from half to almost the entire population of the Mizo, Garo and Naga tribes professed Christianity.

In middle India, two-thirds of the Khasi, one-fourth of the Munda and one fourth of the Oraon follow Christianity. In the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, we find small pockets of Christian tribals. The tribes like the Chero, Kharwar, Pahariya, Birhor, Baiga, Balhudi, Bedia, Karmali, do not have a single Christian convert.

In South India, Hill Pulaya, Malayarayan and Palliar tribals of Kerala have been **proselytised** and nearly two-third of their population has accepted Christianity.

Conversion to Christianity gave the tribals a model of westernisation. We will discuss this point in unit 28. Here it will suffice to say that the Church organisation, western education, values and morals reached the tribals through Christianity. Their introduction implied a demand to give up tribal belief and practices. In some cases, traditional festivals were reinterpreted in terms Christianised myths. For example, origin of the festival Sarhul of the Munda was, after conversion, associated by them to the fight between Alexander and King Porus in 400 B.C. Sahay (1963) has concluded that the Oraon of Chainpur in Ranchi district (formerly part of Bihar state and now the capital of the newly formed state of Jharkhand that was carved out of Bihar on 15th November 2000) of Jharkhand gave up their faith in traditional Sarna religion and adopted Christian faith. This resulted in considerable changes in celebration of festivals, village organisation, economic life and other aspects of their culture. Thus, some scholars have viewed Christianity as a source of disintegration of tribal religion.

We can also mention the element of fusion with Christianity introduced among the tribal groups. Under the rubric of one denomination of Christianity some of the previously separated tribal groups came together and even accepted marital relations across tribal boundaries. Under the Church organisational network, many tribal groups scattered over a wider area came together and built contacts not only with the provincial and national but also international Church bodies. Sahay (1963) has studied the process of Christianisation of the Oraon tribals and identified a set of five processes, signifying different forms of interaction between the tribal Christian norms and values. Under the patronage of British rule, conversion to Christianity had found a favourable environment while in independent India, many revivalist movements among the tribal groups have led the tribals to go back to their traditional religious beliefs and practices. In the next section, we will discuss some of these movements and evaluate their significance for tribal India.

### Activity 3

Give an example of the impact of one religious system on another religious system. Elaborate, in 200 words, on the nature of this impact. Compare if possible, your note with notes of other students at your Study Centre

## 27.7 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

All over the world, socio-religious movements have evolved in almost all religions. These range from **cargo cults** (Lawrence 1964) to millenarian movements (Burridge

1969). The word millenarian means, literally, a thousands years and refers to the belief that the world order is soon going to end, giving way to a new and perfect society. Ethnographic material is well researched and documented to explain the emergence of such movements. Here we will examine the emergence of some of the socio-religious movements among the tribal groups as products of change within the group, of contact with the out-group, and of reinterpretation of the sacred realm. As the sacred realm bears direct relationship with society, reinterpretation of the 'sacred' forms an important feature of such movements. By focusing on these movements among the tribal groups, we do not mean to say that such movements do not occur among other groups.

In fact, many such movements have been recorded among the untouchable and middle castes in India. Examples of such movements among the tribals are the Munda Rebellion, Jatra Bhagat Movement and Kharwar Movement. All these examples show that the tribals (among whom the movements emerged) were never totally isolated from the main currents of Indian society. Secondly, the exploitative forces (against whom the movements were addressed) were not only colonisers, but also the non-tribal upper castes. Thirdly, the influencing contact with the out-group did not come only from Christian missionaries but also from Hindus and Muslims.

We may have to ask ourselves the question as to why it is that no socio-religious movement had emerged in the North-Eastern Frontier Agency while many did among the tribals of Chotanagpur. If we go by the theory of deprivation as one of the causes of emergence of such movements, it may appear that perhaps the tribals of Chotanagpur were deprived to the worst extent and hence among them a multiplicity of such movements arose.

We may also look at the question of duration of contacts between different cultures. We may ask, at what stage of contact, does a socio-religious movement arise? Due to varying intensity of crises, various durations may be necessary in particular groups for the movements to crystallise. Also, a movement may emerge, become active and then lie dormant (see Lawrence 1964). Again, a socio-religious movement may come at the initial stage of contact or it may come after the completion of acculturation.

When one culture meets the other, one social order is affected by the other. In section 27.6 of this unit we talked about the impact of other religious groups on tribal religions. Here, while reemphasising the same, it can be said that most of the time meeting of cultures has been prompted by colonisation. The colonisers (be they foreigners or other cultural groups within the country) integrate their colonies into wider markets by introducing different forms of economy, by exporting the local products and raw materials. As a result rapid changes take place and the existing social order breaks down. In the case of tribal India, large scale changes were introduced by the missionaries. These changes, in turn, produced disturbance in the way society was previously organised among the tribals. The disturbances caused many a dilemma for the people, leading to both psychological social deprivations. These are the situations, which triggered the path to socio-religious movements.

With this background of their emergence, let us now take two examples of socio-religious movements, namely, the Tana Bhagat Movement among the Oraon of Bihar (Jharkhand) and the Birsa Munda movement of the Munda in and around



the districts of Ranchi and Singhbhum in Chotanagpur Division of present day Jharkhand. Both these movements are essentially religious in nature. Here, Jatra Bhagat and Birsa Munda, the tribal leaders of the respective movements were essentially fighting the foreign exploiters, like the landlords and contractors. The tribals, feeling deprived and isolated, found through these movements a sense of unity and a common identity. Yet, the two movements also differed from each other. Let us consider each of them separately.

### 27.7.1 Tana Bhagat Movement

In Tana Bhagat Movement, as in other Bhagat movements, an attempt is made to emulate the way of life of the Hindu higher castes. Tana Bhagat movement is one kind of the Bhagat movement that emerged among the Oraon of Chotanagpur, Jharkhand. There were other Bhagat movements like Nemha Bhagat and Bachi-dan Bhagat. The term Bhagat has been employed in many parts of Bihar and Jharkhand to refer to sorcerers and magicians. Among the Oraon it is however applied to a distinct section of the tribe which subscribes to the cult of Bhakti. The entire Bhagat movement, attempting as it did to raise the status of its members in the eyes of the surrounding Hindu society, is characterised by large scale incorporation of Hindu belief-practices into its ideology.

The leader of Tana Bhagat movement was called Jatra Oraon who lived in village Beparinwatoli in Bishanpur Thana of Gumla sub-division of Ranchi district. In 1914, this person announced in the month of April that Dharmesh, the high god of the Oraon, had revealed to him that the people would have to give up the worship of **ghosts** and spirits and the practice of exorcism. He told his people that they would have to refrain from animal sacrifice, meat eating, liquor drinking etc. Even cultivation by plough with the use of animal power was rejected. It was believed that god had given to Jatra certain songs or spells by which fever, sties, and other ailments could be cured.

The leaders of this movement believed that the tribal spirits and deities whom they had been worshipping were of no use to them since it did not help them alleviate the socio-economic ills of their community. They also tried to prove that in fact it was these deities who were responsible for their present state of misery and degradation. By asserting that these tribal deities were of Munda origin, the founders of Tana Bhagat movement embarked on a programme of proselytisation and agitation for the exorcism of the foreign spirits and deities. The cult emphasised a return to the original Oraon religion.

Its earliest manifestation was in the expulsion of evil spirits imported from the Munda and in the active rebellion against unfair landlords who exploited them. Even when their leader Jatra Bhagat was imprisoned, some of the cult members refused to pay rents to their landlords and ceased to cultivate their lands. Such and other rebellious activities like ghost-hunting drive and holding meetings by the followers of the Tana Bhagat movement were regarded with suspicion and branded as 'disloyal and illegal' gatherings.

This movement broke up into several smaller cults after sometime. Some of these cults are extremist and orthodox like Sibu Bhagat. The rest are mixtures of tribal and Hindu religious beliefs and practices.

### 27.7.2 Birsa Munda Movement

During the second half of the nineteenth century the whole of Chotanagpur underwent a tremendous change. The old Munda system of *khuntkatti* tenure gave way to a new and alien system of exploitation by the landlords known as *Jagirdar* and *Thikadar*. Under their greed and cruelty the tribal population was squeezed out of their land and other possessions. Suffering economically and politically, the Munda were assigned low social status. Later the Christian missionaries tried to give the Munda back their rights on their land. But this too had a price, which was conversion to Christianity. A large number of the Munda did convert to Christianity. But in due course they realised that this was not the solution. The missionaries had failed to redeem them from abject poverty and oppression.

At this time when the Munda community was seething with discontent, in 1895, Birsa Munda of Chalked started a movement. In him the Munda found the embodiment of their aspirations. He gave them leadership, a religion and a code of life. He held before them the prospect of Munda Raj in place of a foreign rule.

Under the influence of a learned Satnami Pandit, Birsa Munda became a vegetarian and the religion that he preached had elements of both Hinduism and Christianity. His religion promised to end the misery of his community and so it was a means to an end.

His religion had the element of charisma. Birsa came to be regarded as an embodiment of god '*Birsa Bhagwan*'; his people believed that Birsa could bring the dead back to life. Whenever there was epidemic he visited his people and cured them. He had the magic touch and proclaimed himself to be the prophet of Sing-Bonga, the one and only God. So far Birsa was seen as a provider of new and better life for his people,

But later his movement assumed quasi-political and militaristic shape. As he organised a force to fight oppressive landlords, Christian missionaries and British officials, he was imprisoned. Since his people believed in Birsa's magical power, they did not ask for his release, rather they wanted to go to jail with him. They believed that within three days he will himself come out of jail. He was released only after two years.

Out of jail, Birsa asked his people to ready their arms to fight injustice. He trained his army and became the politician leading his people to their goal of self-rule. He was however arrested again and died in jail. Yet the seeds of unrest were sown among his people and they continued to fight against injustice. The erstwhile, 'Jharkhanda Movement', which ultimately culminated in the formation of the Jharkhand State(see unit 28) has its roots in this movement (Singh 1983).

Our description of both the Tana Bhagat movement and Birsa Munda movement underlines the importance of a 'prophet-like' figure, who is the guiding spirit of the movement. He draws his legitimacy from the divine revelation. His prophecy appeals to the crisis situation. He becomes the epicentre of the collective expectations of his people. He suggests rejection of certain activities, rituals and customs. He incorporates new elements and adapts certain components of out-group culture to suit the needs of collective expectations. He reinterprets the myth, reformulates the ritual and prepares his people for collective action. In section 27.2 of this unit, we say that cult myths are dynamic aspects of tribal religion as they express the

hopes of the people. We can conclude here that by discussing some of the socio-religious movements among the tribals we have gained an added understanding of tribal religions.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Are socio-religious movements a product of change within the group or of contact with the out-group? Use one line for your answer.

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- ii) Who does the term Bhagat refer to? Use one line for your answer.

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- iv) Did Birsa Munda ever organise an army to fight injustice? Use one line for your answer.

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## 27.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have made the following observations:

- a) Religion of a tribe is simple. Religious beliefs and behaviour are not treated as something apart from other kinds of beliefs and behaviour. Religion pervades all aspects of their life. Tribal life and society cannot be fully understood without understanding their religion.
- b) Tribal ritual complex is not a mere reflection and association with the superhuman world but a strong reinforcement of the human world itself. The integrative function of religion in tribal society is demonstrated in their common goal (superhuman world) and common means (ritual).
- c) Most anthropological analyses of primitive religion are still geared to the evolutionary problems and preoccupations. It has been observed that the contemporary primitives live technically, socially, economically, and politically in the most undifferentiated conditions, and so also in their personal worldview. This does not prove that a society characterised by a high degree of social differentiation will tend to be differentiated in its worldview. The simple tribal eschatological belief is in agreement with the highly sophisticated worldview of the theologically self-conscious society.
- d) Due to culture contact, tribal religions were affected by the religious beliefs and practices of other groups. We have also mentioned that some of the non-tribal groups were affected by tribal customs and practices.
- e) Lastly, we discussed the emergence of socio-religious movements among the tribals. These movements were primarily religious in content and reflected the articulation of collective hopes of the tribals.

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## 27.9 KEYWORDS

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<b>Cargo cults</b>	of Melanesia are considered a form of millenarian movement, which refers to a belief in a miraculous arrival of bountiful goods.
<b>Divination</b>	means discovering the spiritual means.
<b>Eschatology</b>	means doctrine of death and afterlife.
<b>Evolution</b>	is a scientific paradigm taken to mean the change of one form into another, following the biological laws of variation, selection, survival, adaptation and progress.
<b>Faith</b>	is a constitutive human dimension by which human beings understand their ontological relation to God or whatever name one may give to the foundation of being.
<b>Ghost</b>	is an apparition of dead person etc.
<b>God</b>	is the transcendent being worshipped as divine power of creation, preservation and destruction.
<b>Myth</b>	is that unquestioned which is taken for granted and purifies thought so that the unthought may emerge and the intermediary may disappear.
<b>Patrician</b>	is the largest group of agnates between whom marriage is forbidden and sexual intercourse regarded as incestuous.
<b>Polyandry</b>	means polygamy in which one woman has more than one husband.
<b>Prayer</b>	is the act in which and by which man enters into contact with the core of the real.
<b>Primitive</b>	in a pejorative sense characterises an evolutionary stage of prelogical human mind oriented to undifferentiated conditions.
<b>Primordial</b>	is the first age of world.
<b>Proselytism</b>	is practice of conversion to another faith.
<b>Religion</b>	is a system of faith, which relates man to the ultimate conditions of his existence.
<b>Ritual</b>	is a transcendental phenomena from which has arisen all creative impulses and vitality and which leads ultimately to that distant and secret destination which mankind has been exploring from the beginning of his existence.
<b>Ritual Language</b>	is a symbolic ritual code consisting of esoteric word ( <i>mantra</i> ), gesture ( <i>mudra</i> ), sound ( <i>dhvani</i> ), and everyday language of interaction ( <i>vyavahariki</i> ).
<b>Sacred</b>	is a category sui generis, i.e., it differs in nature and quality from all that is human, secular or profane.

<b>Spirit</b>	is disembodied person or incorporeal being.
<b>Theology</b>	is the philosophical treatise of a religious order.
<b>Tribe</b>	is a social group usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural, homogeneity and unifying social organisation, ideally characterised by lack of interaction and absence of any hierarchical system, and isolated from other ethnic groups in ecology, demography, economy, politics and other social relations.
<b>Witchcraft</b>	is the use of black-magical practices dealing with devil or evil spirits.
<b>Worldview</b>	is the view of the world based on a particular ideology that defines the world.

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## 27.10 FURTHER READING

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Mawrie, H.O. 1981, *The Khasi Milieu*. Concept Publishing Company: New Delhi. (Read Chapters 3 and 4).

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Saraswati, Baidyanath 1982. "Ritual Language: a Transanthropological Perspective". *Man in India*. N.K. Bose Memorial Foundation: Varanasi Vol. 62, No. 1.

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Walker, Anthony R. 1986. *The Toda of South India: a New Look*. Hindustan Publishing Corporation: Delhi. (Read Chapters 6 and 7).

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## 27.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Here we take an example of the Toda tribal. The Toda are pastoral people. They and their buffaloes are believed to be a divine creation. Their dairies are the temples. Ceremonies are associated with the dairies, the buffaloes and the pastures. Life's major events are highly ritualised. Even the social

paternity of a child is determined not biologically but ritually. The Toda economy and society revolve round the complex web of ritual. No aspect of Toda life can be described without taking ritual into account.

- ii) Ritual language is a symbolic code, which points beyond what cannot be expressed in human language. In its essential form it is a fourfold code, consisting of (a) esoteric word, (b) gesture, (c) sound, (d) everyday language of interaction in the form of prescriptions or instructions, thoughts, methods and behaviour.
- iii) Tribes order their ritual time on the Nature's signal, i.e., the blossoming plants and trees, on the position of stars and moon; the biological time, and by direct divination.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) No. Comparing the theologically self-conscious Upanishadic views with those of the theologically unaware Apa Tani tribals on the fundamental unity of all experience and intrinsic harmony of all existence, we find that both comprehend the essential oneness to the same degree of sophistication.
- ii) Tribals make no real distinction between man, animal, and god (spirit). A woman gives birth to twins, of whom one is human and the other tiger; animals talk and also behave, like man; of two brothers one is the father of mankind, and the other the father of spirit. This notion makes the interpersonal communication between man, animal and god theoretically conceivable and ritually possible.
- iii) The evolutionary anthropologists consider that the primitive man's mental equipment is very different from that of the civilised man. The civilised mind is logical, rational, supremely abstract and scientific, while the primitive mind is prelogical, irrational, supremely concrete and superstitious. The primitive people lack differentiation in their thoughtworld; the civilised means differentiated.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Socio-religious movements may emerge as a result of changes within a group but mostly they are a product of contact with the out-group.
- ii) In Bihar the term Bhagat refers to magicians and sorcerers.
- iii) In 1897, after a spell of two years in jail, Birsa Munda asked his people to take their bows and arrows to fight injustice.



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# UNIT 28 TRIBES AND MODERNISATION IN INDIA

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## Structure

- 28.0 Objectives
- 28.1 Introduction
- 28.2 Scheduled Tribes in India
  - 28.2.1 Contacts of the Tribal Societies with Other Tribal and Non-tribal Social Groups
  - 28.2.2 The Tribals and the British Policy
- 28.3 Case-studies to Examine the Impact of Modernisation
  - 28.3.1 The Baiga Tribe of Madhya Pradesh
  - 28.3.2 Apa Tani and Other Tribes of the North-East
  - 28.3.3 Rabari
  - 28.3.4 Toda
  - 28.3.5 Santal Tribe in Transition
- 28.4 Different Aspects of Modernisation in Relation to the Tribal Societies
  - 28.4.1 Industrialisation
  - 28.4.2 Education
  - 28.4.3 Adverse Effects of Modernity
  - 28.4.4 Tribal Movements
- 28.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 28.6 Keywords
- 28.7 Further Reading
- 28.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 28.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the contacts of the tribal populations with non-tribal social groups
- describe the nature of the British Policy towards the tribals
- give examples of specific tribal groups for showing different levels of modernisation among them
- identify some aspects of modernisation in relation to the tribal societies in India.

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## 28.1 INTRODUCTION

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After discussing social structure and religion of the tribal societies in India, we now examine the impact of the process of modernisation on them. Before proceeding to discuss the tribal societies of India in relation to modernisation process

a point of caution needs to be inserted here. Tribes in India are characterised by extreme heterogeneity, being placed at different levels of social and economic development. Each one has reacted differently to the forces of modernisation. Some have become devastated as they came into contact with highly developed societies. In contrast, there are some who have richly benefited from the gains of modernisation. Because of differential impact the tribals have received, it is hazardous to generalise, although some of the basic trends of modernisation and change may be conveniently outlined. To give an idea of differing impacts of modernisation, we shall first describe the heterogeneous character of the tribal societies and see how in anthropology a tribe is conceptualised in relation to its contacts with other tribal and non-tribal groups. Secondly, we will give some case studies to show the nature of modernisation in the tribal groups from different parts of India. Then we will discuss different aspects of modernisation in relation to the tribal societies.

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## 28.2 SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA

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Scheduled Tribes in India constitute, according to 1981 Census, 8 per cent of the total population, divided into 427 communities, and inhabiting almost all the regions and parts of India. By 1991 they were 8.10 per cent of the total population (Census of India, 1991) with 533 communities of which 75 were said to be primitive tribes. They widely differ in their demographic and cultural characteristics. The Great Andamanese number only in two digits the Toda are in three digits; Hill Miri (Arunachal Pradesh) are in four digits; there are Chenchu in five digits; Saora constitute a population of six digits; the Gond are more than 4 million, and so are the Santal and Bhil. Santal, Gond, Bhil and Munda are plough-cultivators; Rabari (Gujarat) are pastoralists; Chenchu are hunters and food-gatherers; Maler (Rajmahal Hills) are shifting cultivators like some of the tribes of the North-East. The large, plough-cultivating tribes are not different from the peasants (Beteille 1974: 58-74). They are politically conscious, aware of their rights, and their level of modernisation and development is relatively high. They have come to be known as *haldar* (owner of the plough), *Kisan* (peasant), *Kashtkar* (tiller of the land) in different areas. They have also responded to modern education. In independent India, they have started taking advantage of the policy of reservation. Similarly, the tribes of the North-East have modernised by seeking advantages of the educational institutions.

But such is not the situation with a large number of other tribes especially what are called 'minor' ones. Some of them, especially the tribes of Andaman Islands (Jarawa, Onge, Great Andamanese, Shompen, and Sentinel) and Toda, are facing the problem of declining numbers and extinction. During the Fifth Five-Year Plan, it was felt that the benefits of state-sponsored modernisation and development activities were being chiefly monopolised by the big tribes, thus the gulf between them and the other smaller tribes was widening. The need was to have special schemes for them. From the list of Scheduled Tribes, the communities which were educationally and socially backward and nearly isolated, surviving at a pre-agricultural level, and had a declining or near-constant population, were separately placed in a list of Primitive Tribes. There were 72 such communities in India in 1981. In the year 2003, 75 communities were termed as primitive. The degree of modernisation amongst them is low. As their number has been less, with people

living in dispersed villages, most of these tribes have not been able to form 'associations' that could exercise pressure on the state or central government. Some of them have 'associations' but they are concerned with social reforms rather than acting as effective pressure groups.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Give examples of the Indian Tribes, which follow the following types of occupation; a) Hunting and food gathering, (b) Cattle rearing, (c) Shifting cultivation, and (d) Plough cultivation. Use two lines for your answer.

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- ii) Name, in two lines, at least six of the tribes called minor.

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- iii) How many 'Primitive Tribes' are there in India in 2003? Use one line for your answer.

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### **28.2.1 Contacts of the Tribal Societies with Other Tribal and Non-tribal Social Groups**

In anthropology, a tribe was conceptualised as a relatively isolated or semi-isolated community. Such a community had its own cultural system being defined by self-sufficiency, political autonomy, a well-demarcated territory, a common dialect, folklore and deities. It had a sense of belongingness to the same group. The geographic and cultural isolation of a tribe, thus defined, had implications for methodology. A tribe could be studied in itself without necessarily referring to other exterior social units. If a tribe was 'whole society' the peasant constituted 'part-society' with 'part-culture'. Such a neat formulation of 'tribe' as juxtaposed to 'peasant' was an ideal representation, far from both historical and contemporary reality.

A large number of examples were offered to show that a tribe was never completely isolated. It entered into a set of relationship with its neighbouring communities, tribals as well as non-tribals (Bose 1971: 4; Dube 1977: 2). The relationship in some cases was of intense hostility, punctuated with cases of periodic raids (as was the case with the tribes of Naga Hills). Or some economic exchanges obtained between independent tribes, a classical example of which was described by Mandelbaum (1955: 223-254; 1972: 600-1) from the tribes of Nilgiri Hills. Notwithstanding these relations between independent tribes, each one of them was a cultural whole, if not a cultural isolate.

And moreover, the inter-tribal relations did not contribute to vast magnitudes of acculturative changes. In spite of sharing the same geographic and ecological zones, each tribe maintained its own identity and cultural patterns. For example, in several tribal villages of Ranchi, Oraon and Munda live together. They may have faith in the local holy men. For instance, the holy man (Baba) of Kamre village (Ranchi district) was 'worshipped' by both Oraon and Munda. But the historic facts of

living together and several cross-cutting ties did not mitigate the inter-tribal cultural and linguistic differences: Oraon speak Kurukh which is Dravidian while Munda belong to the Austro-Asiatic branch of linguistic groups in India.

Besides the inter-tribal relations, the tribal settlements close to caste Hindu villages had exchange relations on the pattern of *jajmani* with other patron and occupational castes (Dumont 1962: 120-2; Sinha 1965: 57-83). As a result, some of the tribal communities came to call themselves *Adivasi jati*. Once they entered into service relations with other jati, they also started incorporating certain Hindu deities and the elements of Hindu **cosmology**. Gradually, the little tradition of the tribals became a part of the great tradition of the Hindus. But such an absorption of the tribals in the caste system, as Bose (1971) has described it, did not signal the beginning of their modernisation, which actually began when they came in contact with the wider world? the world that had already undergone qualitative changes because of the colonial rule.

### 28.2.2 The Tribals and the British Policy

The British policy towards the tribals had two major elements. Firstly, it favoured isolation of the tribal areas from the mainstream (Bhowmick 1980; Chaudhuri 1982). Thus was given the concept of 'excluded' and/or 'partially excluded areas'. Because the British tribal policy was political and colonial, the British administrators feared, that if these tribals (bow-and-arrow armed tribals were often labelled as militant, unruly and *jungle*) were to have contact with the mainstream of Indian society, the freedom movements would gain further strength. In this background it seemed logical to them to isolate, administratively and politically, the regions that had predominantly tribal populations.

Secondly, at the level of reform, the British administration was interested in 'civilising' these people. In an **ethno-centric** assessment, the tribals were viewed at par with stage of bestiality. The classical theory of evolution, which had gripped academic attention in late nineties and early twenties, had treated the 'contemporary primitives' as the remnants or survivals of the early stages of humanity, savagery and barbarism. In the words of Sir E.B. Tylor, these people inhabiting the hilly or forested terrain with sparse population and difficult communication were 'social **fossils**'; a study of whom would illuminate the prehistoric phases of human existence.

The intellectual climate about the historical and evolutionary place of these 'primitives' considerably influenced the political action. Missionaries were sent to some of the difficult areas inhabited by these people. Animism, as the tribal religion was often characterised, was replaced by one or the other denomination of Christianity. Schools were opened up, and obviously English was opted as the main language of instruction. Along with came the Western medical system, which slowly started exorcising the traditional practices of cure. Styles of life and ways of behaviour began changing. And they became very conspicuous in dress patterns, especially of men.

The Westernisation of tribals had begun. Here, two things need to be mentioned. Not all tribes were subjected to the efforts of modernisation. There were many which continued to survive in their traditional modes till India's Independence. Secondly, the decision of the Administration to admit missionaries in some areas to open schools there was conditioned by strategic factors. Chotanagpur plateau and the North-Eastern India were the main candidates for the mission activities

and concomitant modernisation. In these cases, as well as in others, Christianity was the sole vehicle of modernisation. The neo-converts not only became a part of the Great Tradition of Christianity, but were also linked to the Great Tradition of the Western culture, English language, Western dress, mannerism and medicines, being ineluctable components of the rulers, culture, flourished as far superior and 'advanced' to the local culture. The fate of traditional material culture and styles of living was decided: they were to be 'preserved' as museum specimens.

And this evaluation – the tribal culture must be 'museumified' lest it disappear with the onslaught of modernity – promoted the classical ethnographic studies. In them, the way they were changing was not attended to. The attempt was to record as meticulously as possible the tradition, or better the dying tradition of the people.

These studies served another purpose. They provided the administrators with the cultural background of the people they were going to rule. Detailed accounts of the local customary laws were written so that the administration of people and arbitration of their inter-personal conflicts could be done very much in terms of their laws and rules of conflict settlement. Along with this, attempts were made to synthesise the customary and the modern laws. In all these efforts, the focus was on modernising the tribals. But the colonial experience elsewhere had taught the protagonists that were the people to be detached from their tradition almost completely, there would be a backlash of modernisation and breakdown of its agencies. In the next section we discuss actual cases of the impact of modernisation on selected tribal groups of India.

## **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Is it possible, in your view, for a tribe to be completely isolated? Give your answer in three lines.

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- ii) Do inter tribal relations affect cultural and linguistic identities of the tribes? Use three lines for your answer

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- iii) Do the contacts of a tribe with its Hindu neighbours signal the beginning of its modernisation? Use two lines for your answer.

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- iv) Give, in two lines, the two elements of British policy towards the tribal populations

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- v) Which were the two main areas for the Christian mission activities and corresponding modernisation? Use one line for your answer

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- vi) What is the main approach of classical ethnographic studies of Indian tribes? Use two lines for your answer

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## 28.3 CASE-STUDIES TO EXAMINE THE IMPACT OF MODERNISATION

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Modernisation is a process of spreading the values, institutions and technical aspects of 'modern society'. To highlight different responses to the forces of modernisation we give you five case studies of the tribal groups from different parts of India.

### 28.3.1 The Baiga Tribe of Madhya Pradesh

The Baiga tribe of Madhya Pradesh is famous in anthropological literature because it was in its context that Elwin (1938: 511-521) suggested one of the first, most controversial approaches to the tribal problem. According to him, since the genesis of tribal problem lay in their contact with the non-tribal exploiters, the tribes (and in this case, the Baiga) should be isolated in a 'tribal reserve area', where the entry of non-tribals, missionaries, landlords and other exploiting elements should be completely prohibited. Though Elwin later withdrew his advice of isolating the tribals, the positive consequences of isolation, fostered by geographical factors and strongly supported by the Administration, have been noticed in some hill tribes, the most outstanding being the Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh, a case we shall discuss after that of the Baiga. Having a population of 1,76,934 individuals (according to Census 1971), the Baiga, one of the six Primitive Tribes of Madhya Pradesh, are mainly concentrated in the districts of Mandla, Shahdol, Sidhi, Balaghat, Bilaspur and Surguja. According to a Tribal Research Institute (Bhopal) Report (1986: 5) they are 'one of the most backward tribes of the state', with the percentage of literacy among them being 4.51.

The Baiga used to practice shifting cultivation (*bewar*) till quite recently. They have now been advised (or 'forced') to give it up. Only inside the Baiga-Chak reservation, which has fifty-two villages, in Mandla district, that they are permitted to pursue *bewar*-cultivation in a restricted manner. Though mentally adjusting to the new requirements of plough cultivation now, they are nostalgic about their past when they used to grow twelve varieties of grain through *bewar*. The Baiga term *Bewar* refers to tilling of the land by the axe.

Their cultural system has not undergone any perceptible changes. Traditionally, the males used to keep tangled hair, almost resembling a bun, on the **occiput** region of their head. Now, except for a couple of educated people, this cultural trait is still valued. Similarly, the women were tattooed on every part of the body, including forehead. Even now this custom prevails. The Baiga had been famous as **shaman** (*gunia*). The shamanistic lore has not weakened over time. Marriage rules are strictly adhered to. The inter-personal conflicts are resolved in the village



by the intervention of their council. As a matter of fact, the details of their culture as documented by Elwin in his field work from 1932 till 1939 are not very different from the facts collected by a contemporary ethnographer.

The headquarters of Baiga Chak is called *Charha*. There is a dispensary having a resident doctor, a pharmacist and a nurse. Only a negligible number of the Baiga attend the dispensary when they are ill. Their faith in shamanistic healing (*gunia*) is unshakable.

It has primary, middle and secondary schools. But there are very few Baiga children attending the schools as compared to the Gond. As one moves to higher classes, the number of the Baiga further declines. Drop-out rate amongst them is much higher than among other communities. There are only two Baiga teachers in the whole region. The following photograph, taken by Dr. Surinder Nath, is from Baiga Chak, Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh. Here two Baiga teachers, in shirt and trousers, are convincing an illiterate Baiga about the importance of modern education inspiring him to send his children to the school.

A couple of changes may be noticed in their economic life. As said earlier, the plough-hating Baiga (for them, ploughing amounted to 'tearing the mother earth's breasts') have taken up settled cultivation. Some of them work as agricultural labourers with the Gond. They also work on the jobs provided by the forest department like, wage labourers for making the forest wall, working in the rope-making factory, in jobs of plantation, etc. In spite of all this, they have maintained aloofness in behaviour, mixing less with the Gond and other communities. Even today, it is not uncommon to see the Baiga running away to seek shelter in dense forests when they encounter non-tribal cosmopolitan people coming to their hamlets.

### 28.3.2 Apa Tani and Other Tribes of the North-East

Apa Tani, numbering about 15000, live in the high lands of Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. For a very long time, they maintained a self-contained social order, which was uninfluenced by outside power. Though they had developed an efficient system of rice cultivation, they did not have the knowledge of plough and wheel, and their cattle were not used for traction, carriage, or milking (Furer-Haimendorf 1947; 1980). They used to produce a surplus of grain for barter with neighbouring tribes. Their economy was non-monetised. Besides speaking their own language and a few languages of their neighbours, they did not know any other national language or any other language of wider communication. Knowledge of Assamese could have helped them in communicating with the wider world.

In view of the Apa Tani's geographical and cultural isolation, it may be assumed that they would have greater obstacles in the path of their development and modernisation compared to the tribes of Central India, like the Gond, who have been in touch with advanced and modern societies (Furer-Haimendorf 1948; 1982; 1983: 1-25). But this has not been so.

Apa Tani have made tremendous progress in the direction of modernisation. Despite the literacy rate of 14.04 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh (Census 1981), they have done extremely well in seeking modern education. By the beginning of 1980, there were forty-five Apa Tani with university degrees. Many of them were studying in the universities of Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Shillong and even Delhi. Most of these University graduates had entered government employment, out of which in 1978, there were no less than fifteen serving in gazetted and 342 in non-gazetted posts.

Furer-Haimendorf (1982: 296-297), who had been studying these people from 1944, in his field work in the early 1980s, found some fully qualified doctors and a pilot officer in the Indian Air Force amongst them.

The gains of this development are cumulative? over generations even more Apa Tani will take advantage of modern education, entering bureaucratic jobs. With these changes, however, the Apa Tani have been able to keep their cultural identity intact. There have been negligible changes in their religious and ritual life. Furer-Haimendorf (1982: 299) says that in traditional ritual practices, “even the most educated participate with undiminished dedication”. Similarly, their marriage rules and family life have undergone fewer changes.

For Furer-Haimendorf, this has been a case of rapid modernisation in material, technological and social life, without the loss of distinct ethnic identity. In their modernisation, geographic isolation protected by the governmental measures of not allowing the outsiders to take advantages of the local resources and opportunities, has been the crucial factor. Furer-Haimendorf writes, “One of the causes of the rapid economic and educational development of the Apa Tani is their freedom from oppression and exploitation by more advanced communities.”

The North-East India, beyond the present-day Assam, was always protected from the entry of the outsiders by the Inner Line Policy. Even today, Indians from other states have to seek Inner Line permit to enter certain states of the North-East like Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh etc. The outsiders are not permitted to establish their own business enterprises. In the model of indigenous development, only the locals are eligible for obtaining contracts of developmental works and business. Thus, the North-East was saved from the uneven, even devastating, influences of cultural contact as in Central India, where the outsiders played havoc with the local resources. They usurped the land of the tribals, the proud owners who were reduced to the state of serfdom (Furer-Haimendorf 1983: 5-7).

In addition to the Inner Line Policy, Christian missions played a responsible role in modernising the people, especially in Nagaland and Mizo hills, Khasi and Jaintia hills, and NEFA (Sema 1986). Modern educational institutions were introduced. English became the language of instruction. Western dress and culture came along (Furer Haimendorf 1976).

But these missions did not uproot the people from their traditional moorings. The local tribal languages were not replaced by English. They were treated with respect. Each one came to have its own script, with Roman alphabet along with accent marks. For facilitating an **exogenous** religion, Christianity in this context, to reach grass-root levels, the religious scriptures and holy books, regulating the daily life of the people, were translated (and subsequently published) in local languages. Dictionaries of the local languages were compiled (for example, the English-Khasi Dictionary by V. Nissor Singh was published in 1906). Gradually, the local people were trained to take up the role of religious functionaries. With this, the effects of modernisation were visible in all aspects of the society.

We saw in the case of the Apa Tani that in spite of developments and modernisation, they have been able to retain their distinct cultural identity. And such can be said about other tribes of the North-East. The Naga, for example, are one of the modernised tribes of India. But this exterior facade of modern values, dress and mannerism has not mitigated their sentiments of belonging to the same society, the

Naga (Horam 1977: 94-108). In these cases, one may notice continuity in change; modernisation has not diluted the traditional bonds of social cohesion.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Name, in one line, the districts of Madhya Pradesh, where the Baiga tribe is mainly found.

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- ii) Has the cultural system of the Baiga undergone visible changes? Use three lines for your answer.

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- iii) Has geographical and cultural isolation of the Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh posed any obstacle in the path of its modernisation? Use two lines for your answer.

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- iv) Did the Christian missions in the North-East try to uproot the tribal groups from their traditional culture?

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### 28.3.3 Rabari

The Rabari are a lesser studied community, spreading from Western Rajasthan to the Kutch region of Gujarat. Their settlements (locally called *dhani*) are also found in some villages of Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Numbering more than 400,000 members, these people have been differently designated in the states of their predominance for the grant of preferential treatment, in Gujarat, they are one of the Scheduled Tribes while in Rajasthan they are included in the lists of other Backward Classes (OBCs) and the Semi-nomadic Tribes. Some confusion also entails from their nomenclature: in Gujarat, they call themselves Rabari (or Rahbari) while in Rajasthan, the term used is Raika. The Rabari are pastoralists. They domesticate camels, sheep, cows, buffaloes and goats. As the grazing areas have drastically reduced, and the areas they have been traditionally inhabiting have a harsh climate with a measly rainfall, these people are constrained to migrate with their flocks to other regions rich in fodder (Saizman 1986: 49-61). They have permanent villages, which for the most part of the year are inhabited by the women, old, and infirm people, as the men are away with their cattle.

At one time, the Rabari of Western Rajasthan were patronised by the princely lineages. They looked after the imperial camels, took them out for grazing, looked after their diseases, trained them for various tasks, and more important, these camel-riding Rabari were entrusted with the job of carrying confidential mail from one part to the other. Once these imperial lineages declined, and the importance of camel reduced, there was a subsequent decline in the position of the Rabari.

Actually, the term Raika used for the Rabari was an occupational one: it designated a 'camel riding messenger' (Westphal-Hellbusch 1975:126).

Living in hamlets which were outside the main boundary of the village and leading an isolated existence, the Rabari were less affected by the development plans (Srivastava 1987: 317-334). Only in recent years, they have started taking advantage of modern education. Some of the Rabari have taken up teaching profession. The other educated people are working in government offices, police, camel and sheep breeding farms, and private and public sector. And the Raika teachers and other professionals are making every effort to inspire the new generation to take education as an important source of mobility.

The Rabari of Gujarat have changed much more than their counterparts in Rajasthan. In Gujarat, they identified themselves with the dominant pastoral caste, the Bharwad, and were able to enter milk-cooperatives as dairymen, thus their economic status improved (Salzman 1987: 44-50). There was a Rajya Sabha M.P. from the Rabari of Gujarat. For taking up the issues of their community, the Rabari have founded an Association, and it publishes some periodicals titled *Gopalbandhu* (from Gujarat) and *Raika Jagriti* (from Haryana). They provide a forum where the problems of their community are identified and the efforts to modernise it are discussed.

#### 28.3.4 Toda

The Toda are well known in anthropological literature for having been pastoralists with a 'sacred complex of buffalos'; for practising fraternal polyandry where the fatherhood of a child was established through a ritual ceremony called 'bow-and-arrow'; and for participating in a complex network of economic, social and ritual relationships with three other groups of Nilgiri Hills, Kota, Badaga and Kurumba (Mandelbaum 1970). Though the Toda society is still rooted in tradition, it "at the same time is branching out into modernity" (Walker 1986: 286).

The **symbiotic** relations between the Toda and other Nilgiri communities were initially based on an exchange of services. Now each economy has replaced barter exchanges. The network of relations among the Toda has become open. They now have social and business relations with other immigrants from surrounding plains and beyond. Their contacts with a great many government agencies like Nilgiri Collectorate, Agricultural Department, Veterinary, Health and Medical Offices, Police Department etc, have increased. Further the Toda hamlets-especially those close to Ootacamund-attract tourists and travellers from various parts of the world. These contacts along with a number of others that the Toda have with other communities and immigrants have influenced the spread of modernity among them.

One of the changes that modernisation has brought in small communities, which at one time were relatively isolated, pertains to the domain of religion. Once their isolation was broken, they developed contact with communities that preserved the great tradition of a religion. The Toda, as an example of this process of change, have become oriented to South Indian Hinduism. In the markets of Ootacamund, which they frequent quite regularly, they hear of the religious merit of pilgrimages to the Hindu shrines in the Nilgiris and far beyond. Pictorial representations of Hindu gods and goddesses have found an honourable place in many Toda households. This fact of their drawing closer to popular Hinduism has not shown

a decline in their indigenous rituals. The modern Toda, Walker (1986: 288) writes, has accepted the “efficacy of two parallel ritual systems: his own and that of popular South Indian Hinduism”.

Education has been, as is the case with other tribal societies, another factor of change. But compared to market and temple, the schools took longer time to bring about desired effects. In the Indian context, modernisation, has reinforced both English and the regional language. In Kohima district, for example, both English and Angami are equally strong; in Meghalaya, both English and Khasi have been developed, similarly among the Toda, Tamil and English have been equally accepted. Having been educated in Tamil and English, some of the Toda have taken up white-collar occupation, unheard of by their ancestors.

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) Name, in one line, the animals the Rabari tribals domesticate.  
.....
- ii) Indicate how education has become a source of mobility for the Rabari. Use two lines for your answer.  
.....  
.....
- iii) Name in two lines the agencies, which have spread modernity among the Toda.  
.....  
.....
- iv) Has coming closer to South Indian Hinduism meant a decline in the practice of Toda rituals? Use two lines for your answer.  
.....  
.....

#### **28.3.5 Santal Tribe in Transition**

Through the Santal case, we would try to explicitly show various steps in the process of modernisation of a tribe. A summary of this case may be presented at the outset.

- i) The first exposure of the Santal to exogenously introduced changes was when the outsiders? money lenders, *zamindars*, missionaries? started encroaching upon their area. Their land was forcibly annexed by some of them, and the Santal were subjugated to the state of serfdom.
- ii) Against such an exploitative and oppressive state, the Santal Uprising (also called Santal Rebellion) 1855-1857 took place, and was brutally crushed.
- iii) The building of steel mill and company city at Jamshedpur had an important bearing on the Santal, where both the educated and illiterate could find suitable work.



- iv) Having close interaction with caste Hindus, the Santal, especially of upper classes, imbibed Hindu religion, caste practices, and claimed the status of Kshatriya.
- v) As a result of the revival movement, mainly to save the Santal from a steady loss of land, exploitative and oppressive interests of the outsiders, the Santal leaders rejected the Hindu model.
- vi) With Jharkhanda Party, the Santal acquired an important political organ for mobilising their interests.
- vii) Industrialisation especially in Jamshedpur had important consequences: the Santal became aware of new sources of upward mobility; importance of education was realised, and the political path of raising one's status became clear to them. In other words, industrialisation and education were crucial to the modernisation of the Santal.

Here we will examine under the following six sub-headings various changes in the life of the Santal tribals.

#### i) **Rejection of Hinduism and the Reference Groups of Upper Castes**

All this is rooted in the revivalistic movement, which began in mid-nineteenth century. Despite little political cohesion among the Santal. There is considerable cultural similarity, thanks to the revivalistic movement, and a strong feeling that the Santal are different from the Hindus. The Sanskritic values emulated by the Santal, when they were attracted to Kshatriya or Brahmin model, are being given up under the tremendous impact of the cultural identity movement. Jharkhanda movement's role has been crucial in this regard. Martin Orans' (1965: 108) observation is worth quoting here: "Once I saw a young party activist who had grown up in the Jharkhanda movement persuading an older Santal with a few years of education that he must take up beef-eating again if he wished to preserve the Santal caste". The rejection of Hinduism or Hindu identity and the most sacred Hindu element (sacredness of cow being one) is not only for returning to the chaste Santal identity, it is also because their exploiters? money lenders, land lords, etc. who were all Hindus.

#### ii) **Santal Uprising: 1855-1857**

The first event to take the Santal on the inroads of a conscious cultural identity was their uprising of 1855-1857. On 30th June 1855, a massive rally of Santal, over ten thousand, protested against their exploitation and oppression. The rally, led by Sidho and Kano, took an oath to end the oppressive rule of the British, *Zamindars*, and money lenders, and it decided to set up an independent *Santali Raj*. The money lenders and *zamindars* had flocked into the Santali areas, the legal procedures and financial institutions they imposed were patronised by the colonial government. The crops of the Santal were forcibly seized, the interest charged on loans varied from fifty to five hundred per cent. Once the complaints of people fell on deaf ear, they decided to rise in arms. It is estimated that fifteen to twenty-five thousand Santal were killed in this uprising. The courage of the Santal against the oppressive rule is still commemorated in the local folk songs and traditions.



There have also been other revolts in which the cultural identity of the Santal was reasserted. In 1917, the Santal of Mayurbhanj revolted against their recruitment to serve in Egypt during the First World War (Mahapatra 1986: 16).

### iii) **Influence of Christianity**

For a very long time, the Santal had been living with the non-tribals. The latter became prosperous by fleecing the Santal of their land and property. Those of the upper classes took over to Sanskritic practices? like worship of Hindu deities, abstaining from eating beef, offering liquor on festive occasion, observance of the norms of purity and pollution? so that they could be identified with higher *varna* categories. But the Hindu model was essentially traditionalistic. Sanskritisation offered ritual mobility in the caste system. It did not provide them an opportunity to modernise.

Christianity was a prime mover initiating modern changes among the Santal. In their area, Scandinavian and American Missions made efforts to convert the local people. These missionaries as elsewhere in India opened educational institutions preparing people to enter new occupations. Christianity gave the people a ready-made great tradition. The institutions like hospital and school that came with the missions introduced them to the wider world, beyond the interaction they had within themselves and with other non-tribals. Notwithstanding the introduction of the Santal to modernity through the missions their identity was eroded because of Christianity. If their immediate exploiters were Hindus, those who patronised these cases of exploitation were Christians. Thus, any movement for a reassertion of the cultural identity required a rejection of both Hindu and Christian models of change.

### iv) **Impact of Industrialisation**

The installation of industries in Santal dominated areas was another very important factor of change and modernisation. These industries provided jobs to both educated and illiterate and offered a new source of mobility.

Moreover, these industries were free from one or another religious domination. They promoted caste-free and class-free occupation. A large number of Santal found jobs in them. These industries, having recruited local tribals, provided an opportunity to the people to further cement their traditional linkages: in fact, these industries were the 'world of kinsmen'. Santal identity was further strengthened by the tribal-workers.

### v) **Cultural Identity Movement**

The educated Santal played a central role in the cultural identity movement. As said earlier, for launching any kind of political pressure, the cultural identity needs to be revitalised and preserved. The educated Santal worked in this direction. Protest was launched against the enumeration of Santal as Hindu in pre-1951 census. A cult was founded, in which the traditional concept of sarna was given a pivotal place. It was called *Sarna Dharm Samelet*, Sacred Grove Religious Organisation. Santali script (*Ol Chiki*) was devised. A long epic heroic play was written, having maxims and precepts for the Santal.

The new ritual complex emphasised worship of traditional tribal deities in the sacred grove, with the offerings of liquor, sacrifice of cow, and dancing was promoted on all religious occasions. The underlying theme in all of them was rejection of Hinduism, and also to show that the Santal were not pre-literate as were made out to be.

They had their own script, epic, a whole set of rituals, and cosmology, which were lost somewhere, and needed to be discovered. Mahapatra (1986: 24) writes, “The Santal identity is thus part of the process of Santalisation, a cultural phenomenon which is demonstrated through marriage, ritual, food habit, occupation and belief, value-system and ideals”.

#### vi) **Cultural Identity and Political Action**

The articulation of cultural identity into political term was facilitated once the Jharkhanda Party was founded. This Party demanded creation of a tribal state. For the Santal in the industrial belt, most of the traditional customs and practices have been weakened, but the tribal identity is reinforced through Jharkhanda movement remains primary. The Santal in the city are akin to other city dwellers. They too have individualism and aspirations of social mobility. The ethnic ties as expressed politically continue to exist. With modernisation, they are not weakening. Every Santal feels attached to *Ol Chiki*, the *Sarna Dharm*, the parables of mythological origin, and to Jharkhanda Party. At the same time, he aspires to take up modern education, a good job which opens avenues for upward mobility.

Having discussed the Santal tribe in transition, let us now also review, in general, different aspects of modernisation in relation to the tribal societies in India.

#### **Activity 1**

Read sub-section 28.3.5 once more and write a short note of 300 words on changes in Santal social life.

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## **28.4 DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF MODERNISATION IN RELATION TO THE TRIBAL SOCIETIES**

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The cases, discussed in section 28.3, are chosen from different parts of India. They amply demonstrate that modernisation in the tribes can be traced back to their contact with the agencies spreading the values of modernity like open-networks, achievement, competition, equality, caste-and class-free occupations, etc. The entry of missionaries in some areas (as in the North-East) initiated modernisation. Incorporation of a community into milk-cooperatives (as in Gujarat) created situations bringing the local people in contact with developed sections of the society. Encroachment of commercial frontiers and modern markets has contributed a lot to the modernisation of tribals. In some parts of India, especially, the central, installation of heavy industries and creation of urban centres were instrumental in spreading modernity. Let us examine the two factors of change, namely, industrialisation and education.

### **28.4.1 Industrialisation**

During the last four decades and particularly during the Plan periods, there has been an acceleration of mining and manufacturing industries. Forest resources have been gradually exploited, leading eventually to deforestation, in the hilly and forested belts of tribal India. Most of these industries came to be established in or around tribal areas because they were rich in mineral and other resources. Close to these industries grew small towns housing mainly the industrial workers.

As the exploitation of mineral and forest resources was chiefly confined to Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, there was a rapid increase of urban population in these states. Demographer Bose (1962: 26) writes that with a concentration of industries in these states, there was a relative shift of urban population from Indo-Gangetic plain to the hilly and plateau areas which offered new industrial and natural resources.

It was not only industrialisation that was responsible for the migration ? promoted by 'pull', 'push', or 'forced' factors ? of tribals from their homesteads but also other economic institutions. In certain states like Assam and of South India, tea, coffee and rubber estates were formed. The tribals were dispossessed of their land, and were made to work as plantation labourers (Jain 1988). Out-migration from Chotanagpur plateau and other neighbouring regions occurred phenomenally to these estates. The tribes were forcibly migrated to other countries, like the Kol who were sent to Mauritius as labourers. Kondha of Orissa were taken to Mesopotamia to serve in World War I. A large number of Bhil were recruited for military service (Pathy 1986: 74).

Industrialisation in the tribal areas offered new jobs. But the tribals, unskilled in initial stages, could only get the jobs at the lower rungs. At one time owners of land were now depressed into the class of industrial proletariat. This happened because of a number of factors. Firstly, their land had been usurped by the non-tribal *Zamindars* in many areas, and they were looking for some alternatives. Secondly, installation of big industrial and developmental projects in tribal zones required the displacement of the native population, often to unknown areas (Vidyarthi 1968: 13-29, Fernandes 1998). In these cases of uprooting local tribals and non-tribals were equally affected, but as the tribals outnumbered the non-tribals in these areas, they suffered the maximum. Finally, as a result of over-exploitation of forest resources by the outsiders, the tribal economics, which is to a large extent were forest-based, dwindled. Thus, a combination of local impoverishment and availability of new opportunities sent these tribals to seek jobs in heavy industries, tea plantations, construction sites, etc.

These tribals now-turned labourers have changed a lot. The traditional dresses have been replaced by those that came with modernity. Their occupational structure has changed, and it has important implications. A sense of mobility is gradually instilled in the community. Mobility becomes inter-generational as the children of tribal workers aspire to do better in life than their parents, by taking hold of opportunities offered by modernity.

In this process, some of the traditional institutions weaken. For example, in his study of tribals working in Bokaro Steel Plant, Vidyarthi (1968: 21), says that their village institutions like the '*jajmani* system', the cycle of festivals and rituals, the caste-affiliations etc., have completely been disintegrated, and all round depression and despair seems to have affected the life of the uprooted villages. This, however, does not mean that there is also a subsequent decline in the feeling of oneness amongst the tribals in a new set-up. Industrialisation has fostered a new sense of solidarity between the co-workers. Once there already exist ethnic and social ties between the tribals, the relations in the industry cement them further. Trade unions on the lines of tribal-workers crystallise (Bhowmik 1982: 461-473). The feeling of ethnicity becomes strong and they begin exerting pressure on the state and the centre.

### 28.4.2 Education

Having been exposed to industrialisation for almost four decades, having migrated to various industrial towns, and having imbibed the spirit of upward mobility, the tribals have realised the importance of modern education.

The missionaries have played an outstanding role in spreading Western education. The Government is also committed to the idea that one of the avenues to speedy development is education. For diversifying the tribals to different occupations, they must be educationally equipped to face the challenges. Besides the fact that education promotes social mobility and enhances the ability of the people to think about their amelioration, it can save them from being exploited by money lenders who have been taking advantage of the illiterate tribals by forging and tempering with the promissory notes.

According to Census 1981, literacy rate in India was 36.23 per cent; among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, it was 21.38 and 16.33 per cent respectively. The North-Eastern states had done exceptionally well: the highest literacy is in Mizoram (59.63 per cent), followed by Nagaland (40.31 per cent), Manipur (39.74 per cent), and Meghalaya (31.55 per cent). The literacy rates in India in 1991 and 2001 were 52.21 and 63.38 percent respectively. As per the 1991 Census the literacy rates of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were 37.41 and 29.60 percent respectively. The literacy rate of the tribals in 1991 was 23.63 per cent. This is lower than not only of the general population figures but also of the SC population figures. The literacy rate of the rural tribal women was recorded in 1991 to be 12.74, which was the lowest of all social groups in India. Literacy rate for STs was lowest in Andhra Pradesh (17.16 percent) and highest was in Mizoram (82 percent).

Ashram schools, especially meant for tribal children living in remote and isolated villages, have been opened up. While a separate school for each tribal hamlet is not feasible, the nearest regular school for all children with no specification is too far away, for them to attend it and return home the same day. That is why the Ashram schools are residential, providing free board and lodging to the pupils. In terms of their curriculum, they are supposed to impart craft-based education, thus linking learning with productive activities. Once the students finish the school, they are sufficiently prepared to take up any of the craft-based occupations. In this way, diversification of tribals in different jobs is expected to result.

But the evaluative studies of these schools speak otherwise. The curriculum is more tilted towards literacy-based education. Half-hearted attempts are made to impart craft-oriented education. And the specific character of Ashram schools is relegated to the background. They start resembling the regular schools.

A study of the patterns of tribal education in India raises two important issues. The dropout rate of the tribal children is very high, and as one moves to secondary and higher levels, this rate increases exponentially. According to Census 1981, the dropout rate in primary, middle and secondary stages was 75 per cent (boys 71.57, girls 78.43), 84.99 per cent and 91.65 per cent respectively. Secondly, the number of tribal students reaching professional and university courses is very low. Writing about the Gond of Andhra Pradesh, Furer-Haimendorf (1982: 130) concludes that, "in thirty-six years of tribal education only five Gond and two

Pradhan have been awarded university degrees”. The representation of tribals in professional courses, according to the figures of 1978-79, given in the Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1986-88 (Twenty-eighth Report: 522-523) it is clear that very few tribal students reach post-graduate courses in professional disciplines. Therefore, their distribution in higher professional positions is almost negligible.

This Report shows also that the Scheduled Tribes have done well as compared to the Scheduled Castes. But, the figures from North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong, a central university, have in fact tilted the graph in favour of the Scheduled Tribes. In this University, there are five Professors, nine Readers, forty-six Lecturers, and five Research Associates from various tribal communities. Thus all the five Professors and all the nine readers in central universities are from NEHU. Out of a total of 50 Scheduled Tribe Lecturers, 46 are from this university. When we take the figures from NEHU, thinking that Meghalaya is predominantly a tribal state with Khasi and Garo having a long tradition of education, we find that in none of the teaching and research positions does the percentage of Scheduled Tribes reach fifty. There are only 10.20 per cent Professors, 10.71 per cent Readers, 31.72 per cent Lecturers and 45.45 per cent Research Associates from tribal communities in NEHU. In other words, even in tribal states the non-tribals are holding a majority of the higher positions. Some tribes like Meena of Rajasthan have been quite successful. A large number of them have taken up jobs in administration (Civil Services), private sector, financial institutions and colleges.

Certainly there has been an increase in tribal literacy. But the number of students continuing to stay in schools till higher classes and then entering the portals of college is very low. Dropout rate, as said earlier, is very high, and for girls, it is much higher. In mixed areas, where small tribes live with larger ones, the dropout rate among the former is higher. In the schools of Baiga Chak, we saw that the Baiga students generally failed to stay in schools after the primary, while the Gond continued to study till higher classes. Education is one of the crucial factors of modernisation, but when the tribals fail to seek its advantages, the degree of modernity, mobility and diversification of occupations among them is sharply reduced.

There are several reasons accounting for high dropout rate. The curriculum in most cases is not relevant to the conditions in which the tribals live. They find education a kind of onerous burden. Low standard of teaching and facilities in tribal schools is another factor. It has also been found that teachers in these schools are generally from non-tribal communities and they take posting in tribal areas as a kind of punishment. Thus, they are able to evince little interest.

Domestic duties of the tribal children, especially the girls, are another factor. From young age, they are entrusted with household chores, fetching water to looking after the younger brothers and sisters. Absence of feedback from the family, inspiring the children to take their study seriously, is an important factor. The economic status of tribal households, in most cases, cannot afford to keep the children as consuming, rather than producing members for a long time. Table 28.1 gives percentage distribution of persons aged seven years and above at different levels of education by social group for 1999-2000.



**Table 28.1: Percentage Distribution of Persons Aged 7 Years and Above At Varying Levels of Education by Social Group: 1999-2000**

Social Group	Rural India			Urban India		
	Note Literate	Upto Middle Level Schooling	Educated Persons	Not Literate	Upto Middle Level Schooling	Educated Persons
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Scheduled Castes	53.4	40.3	6.3	33.8	50.4	15.8
Scheduled Tribes	57.8	37.0	5.2	30.0	47.5	22.5
OBCs	45.2	45.1	9.7	24.7	51.0	24.3
Others	32.2	50.8	17.0	13.5	44.3	42.2
All Groups	44.0	45.2	10.8	20.2	47.3	32.5

Source: NSS Report No. 473 (55/1.0/11), September 2001, pp. 20.24.

In some cases, the medium of instruction poses grave problems. If the Kond are taught in Oriya instead of their own dialect, they may find learning an uphill task (Mahapatra, 1984: 376). Moreover, the objectives of educational departments in imparting teaching to students are not clear. Their chief interest lies in raising literacy, rather than making education a productive activity, guaranteeing social mobility and ameliorating the local people in their traditional milieu.

### Check Your Progress 5

- i) Read the following statements and write T against True and F against False statements:
  - a) The relations in industry affect negatively the ethnic and social ties among the tribals.
  - b) Industrialisation in tribal areas offered new job opportunities.
  - c) The process of industrialisation weakens traditional institutions.
- ii) Who has played an outstanding role in spreading education among the tribal groups of India? Use three lines for your answer.
 

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- iii) What is the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes? Use one line for your answer.
 

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- iv) Give, in five lines, the reasons for high dropout rate among tribal students.
 

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### 28.4.3 Adverse Effects of Modernity

The aim of modernisation is to bring the society on the path of progress, to diversify its occupational structure, to provide the people with efficient technology which vouchsafes higher production, to give them avenues of social mobility and to bring them on par with other developed sections of the society. But the results are not encouraging in all cases. With an introduction of development plans, some societies have found themselves disintegrated. Modernity has given rise to adverse effects.

Take the case of industrialisation. As we saw earlier, the establishment of heavy industries, construction of dams and launching of development plans in tribal zones has necessitated displacement of the local population. Thousands of tribal families were displaced from their traditional habitats. Compensation was supposed to be provided to them in terms of money and alternative land, but not all of them got an alternative place to live.

The report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for 1962-1963 informed that in Ranchi district of Bihar, 14,461 tribal families were displaced from an area of 62,494 acres, and only 3,479 of them were allotted alternative land. The compensation provided to them in cash was recklessly spent. The tribals not fully conversant with cash economy squandered the money on various attractions that were available in nearby industrial towns. Soon their funds had depleted. With their land gone for developmental activities and left with no training, equipment or aptitude for skilled or semi-skilled jobs, they had no option but to enter the town as unskilled labourers, taking up various 'marginal jobs' of domestic servants, rickshaw pullers, vendors, hawkers, etc. They could enter the industrial sector at the lowest level, and their chances of moving up were meagre as they remained untrained for industrial jobs requiring technical know-how. Eventually they were proletarianised. Furer-Haimendorf (1982: 321) writes, "...in the streets of Ranchi one can still see Munda and Oraon rickshaw-pullers who not long ago were independent cultivators tilling their own land".

Contact situations with the outsiders have been equally detrimental. Destruction of the forests as a consequence of felling of trees for industrial purposes has threatened the small communities of hunters and food-gatherers. Modern diseases unknown to tribals have been introduced with the entry of outsiders in tribal areas. The tribal population in Andaman Islands has greatly declined because of high mortality rate. Measles and influenza, the killer diseases for those who had not developed any resistance to them, played havoc with the Andaman tribals.

Similarly, at the time of Independence, the Toda population had fallen to under 500. The chief cause of their decline was the prevalence of venereal diseases (Walker 1986: 283). In most cases, depopulation of a tribe was mainly because of rapid ecological changes that created imbalances in their habitats. For new schemes, either of medical treatment or development, the people were not fully prepared to accept them. Hence, they reacted in a lukewarm manner to all those institutions that could have changed and modernised them.

Modernisation created economic disparities in various sections of the society. Those who could take advantages of new economic and educational frontiers were able to better their lot, while a large sections of the tribals, not adequately prepared to deal with new challenges, gradually depressed into poorer sections of the society. Against economic and social disparities, they have raised a collective voice. Modernisation, in other words, has given rise to a new consciousness amongst the people. The already existing solidarity between them has become strengthened.

**Activity 2**

On the basis of sub-section 28.4.3, try to work out adverse effects of modernity on your own community and write a note of 250 words on Negative Impact of Modernity on My Community.

**28.4.4 Tribal Movements**

In the latter half of the last century, the tribals, especially in central India, had reacted against their exploiters. These movements were directed towards freeing their land from all those who exploited them economically and culturally. At the same time, each of these movements put emphasis on revitalisation of their culture, their traditional culture which was swayed under the impact of the outsiders.

The Tana Bhagat movement, for example, derived its name from the ritual of ‘expelling from the Oraon land foreign spirits, nefarious powers and ghosts’, borrowed from the Munda. Along with this, they also sought to drive away the ‘evil powers of modern innovations’ like steam boat, motor car, bicycle, etc. These modern innovations that were being introduced into their land were seen as the means of exploitation. Exorcising the ‘ghost of modernity’, they desired to revert to their original religion, the *Kurukh Dharma* (Roy 1915). The charismatic leaders of Oraon, Santal and Munda were believed to free the people not only from the webs of evil supernatural powers, but also from the ‘iron clutches’ of the non-tribal exploiters and oppressors (Roy 1915; 1928; Singh 1983). Another such movement occurred in 1922 among the tribals of South Gujarat where under supernatural command of the female goddess, Devi, they stopped consuming liquor, and later on it took nationalist turn (Hardiman 1987).

The rebellion of 1855-1857 was a great event in history of the Santal. This event is still remembered in their folk songs and talks. It was an attempt to recover the tribal land, which was steadily lost to the outsiders, and to wipe out the non-tribals from their territory (Mahapatra 1986: 8-29). In the Santal myths of the nineteenth century, there was a description of the ancient days of independence and glory, and all this was swept away once the outsiders with modern weaponry started infiltrating into their areas. Martin Orans (1965: 35) writes, “The Santal are thus pictured as independent, powerful and constituted exactly in the image of an ideal Hindu Kingdom”. The movement had the aim of reverting to their traditional religion *Sarna Dharam*, and social structure.

As a response to modernity, and the fact that traditional institutions of the people disintegrate under its impact, there have been conscious attempts to revive traditional ways of living. Cultural identity is cemented, because it can be instrumental in achieving political goals. Consciously the tribals have tried to introspect into their cultures to single out and eradicate their ‘evil customs and practices’. For regulating the behaviour of people, so that the feeling of collectivity remains intact, rules have been collectively arrived at. Nonconformity to any one of them may call for an imposition of fine. Modernity has made people conscious of their culture.

For example, the Sahariya of Morena district (Madhya Pradesh) have founded their association called *Adivasi Jati Sudhar Sangha*. For ‘purifying’ their people, it has identified twelve principles like regular bath, education for the children, abstaining from eating ‘dirty’ animals (like swine, sambur, etc.), respect for the educated people, etc. (Joshi 1987: 308-317). Similarly, the Rabari have formed

*Akhil Bhartiya Rawari Rayaka Samaj Mahasabha*, where measures for uplifting the community and eradicating its evils have been collectively arrived at. In the same way, one of the major aims of the Toda Uplift Society is “to strive for the eradication of bad habits”, and by ‘bad habits’ they mean “polyandry, wife-capture, drunkenness and the excessive sacrifice of buffaloes at funeral ceremonies” (Walker 1986: 289).

These tribal associations serve two purposes. They endeavour their best to keep the whole group united. For such a unity, the traditional styles of living, except those, which are ‘bad’ cannot be given up. They must be revived. Such a unity is needed for demanding better deal from the government. The ethnic interests of the tribals, thus, merge with political demands for separate states and are voiced and sustained.

One of the best studied cases is of Jharkhanda movement. The Jharkhanda Party, founded by Jai Pal Singh, an Oxford educated Christian of the Munda tribe, demanded carving out of a new state, spreading from Palamau in Bihar to Keonjhar in Orissa and from Surguja in Madhya Pradesh to Midnapur in West Bengal, of the Indian union of which tribal people would be numerically dominant. The basic issues behind this movement were land and forest alienation, training and job deprivation due to influx of the outsiders, cultural submergence, and imbalanced development (Munda 1988: 31). As you already know, Jharkhand has now achieved the status of a state. Coming to the North-East, the Bodo and the Naga movements are good examples of how ethnic identity takes up political route for realising their interests. Uneven development and modernisation, concentration of gains in some areas and their non-dispersal to the others, and urban-oriented models of growth are the chief causes in all these separatist movements.

### **Check Your Progress 6**

- i) What were the tribal movements in Central India? Use two lines for your answer.

.....  
.....

- ii) What was the main aim of the Santal movement of 1855-57? Use one line for your answer.

.....

- iii) What purposes are served by tribal associations, such as, *Adivasi Jati Sudhar Sangha* of the Sahariya of Morena, Madhya Pradesh, *Akhil Bharatiya Rawari Rayaka Samaj Mahasabha* of the Rabari and the Toda Uplift Society? Use four lines for your answer.

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## 28.5 LET US SUM UP

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To summarise, modernisation is a process of spreading the values, institutions and technical aspects of 'modern society'. The tribals, living mostly in hilly terrains and forested belts, and having autonomy in every sphere of their social existence, remained by and large untouched by modern developments till their territories were opened up for strategic reasons. These reasons involved exploitation of forest and mineral resources. At the same time the need for manual labour was also important. Once these tribals were exposed to the wider world, they underwent traumatic experiences of losing their rights and land, and being incorporated into a system that they knew little about.

The impact of modernisation of tribals is varied. Some tribals (like of the North-East) have benefited a lot from modernisation, while others (like those of Central India) have been losers. Further, modernisation does not lead to a total change in the society. Certain aspects of culture, especially pertaining to economic and technical domain, change at a faster pace. Social institutions do not show such a qualitative change. Religious and ritual life may continue to survive essentially in a traditional mould. Modernisation reinforces traditional links and bonds. Thus, the consciousness of belonging to a tribe, or tribalism, is accentuated, and this may transform a tribe into a strong ethnic and pressure group.

The separatist movements coming to settle in some large tribes may be curbed if the benefits of modernisation and development are equally distributed. The effects of modernisation should be visible in all institutions of society. Since the historical experiences of a society shape the incoming modernity, the concepts derived from the experiences of other society, particularly western, are not applicable for a complete understanding of modernity in the tribal societies of India.

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## 28.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Bewar</b>	The Baiga term, referring to the type of tillage in which the axe and not the plough is the primary instrument
<b>Cosmology</b>	is the science of universe.
<b>Ethno-centric</b>	This is used to describe the attitude that one's group is superior.
<b>Exogenous</b>	This adjective is used to describe that which originates from external causes.
<b>Fossil</b>	remnant; preserved in strata of earth; recognisable as remains or impressions of past; belonging to the past
<b>Occiput</b>	The back part of the head or skull
<b>Reference group</b>	Those groups of people whose attitudes, beliefs and actions are taken as appropriate. People do not have to be members of the groups to which they refer. Also, attitudes can be formed by both a positive identification with a reference group and negative comparisons or rejections of it.

<b>Shaman</b>	refers to a priest who uses magic for curing the sick, divining the invisible and controlling events.
<b>Symbiotic</b>	It is used to describe living together of two dissimilar elements in a mutually advantageous relationship.

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## 28.7 FURTHER READING

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## 28.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Examples:
  - a) The Chenchu are the hunters and food gatherers,
  - b) The Rabari are pastoralists,
  - c) The Maler are shifting cultivators,
  - d) Santal, Gond, Bhil and Munda are plough cultivators.
- ii) The tribes of Andaman Islands, namely, Jarwa, Onge, Great Andamanese, Shopmen, Sentinel and Toda of South India are called 'minor' tribes.
- iii) In 2001 there are seventy five 'Primitive Tribes' in India.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) It is not possible for a tribe to be completely isolated. Some or the other type of relationship always exists between a tribe and its neighbouring communities. Such communities may be other tribal groups or non-tribal

groups. The relationship may be of friendly exchanges of economic goods or of hostility, involving even warfare.

- ii) The fact of inter-tribal relations does not substantially affect the ethnic and cultural identity of a tribe. For example, the Oraon and the Munda have lived side by side and interacted socially in many areas of life, yet both the groups have maintained their separate cultural and ethnic identities.
- iii) Coming into contact with the neighbouring Hindus did not mark the beginning of tribal groups' modernisation. This process, in fact, began when these groups came in contact with the wider world which itself had experienced many changes because of the colonial rule.
- iv) The two elements of the British policy towards the tribals were that (i) it favoured isolation of the tribal areas from the mainstream and (ii) at the level of reform, the British administration was interested in 'civilising' the tribals.
- v) Chotanagpur plateau and the North-Eastern India were the main areas for the Christian mission activities and corresponding modernisation.
- vi) The classical ethnographic studies of the tribal societies in India recorded as meticulously as possible the traditions of the people and provided the administration with the cultural background of the people they were to rule.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) The Baiga tribe is mainly found in the districts of Mandla, Shahdol, Sidhi, Balaghat, Bilaspur and Surguja.
- ii) The cultural system of the Baiga has not undergone any appreciable changes. The details of their culture as recorded in 1932-39 are not very different from what is found today.
- iii) Geographical and cultural isolation of the Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh has not posed any obstacle in the tribe's modernisation. Rapid modernisation in material, technological and social life has not however meant the loss of the tribe's distinct ethnic identity.
- iv) The Christian missions have played a responsible role in modernising the tribals. They did not uproot the people from their culture. The local tribal languages were treated with respect and not replaced by English. This helped the people to retain their culture.

### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) The Rabari tribals domesticated camels, sheep, cows, buffaloes and goats.
- ii) In recent years taking advantages of modern education, some of the Rabari have become teachers. Other educated Rabari work in government offices, camel and sheep breeding farms, and private and public sectors. They make efforts to also inspire the younger generation to take education as a means of raising their social status.
- iii) The contacts with government agencies like Nilgiri Collectorate, Agricultural Department, Veterinary, Health and Medical Offices, Police Department etc. have helped the spread of modernity among the Toda.



- iv) The Toda came into contact with South Indian Hinduism. As a result, they have begun to worship Hindu gods and goddesses. But this does not mean that they have any less respect for their traditional rituals, they simply accept and practice both.

### **Check Your Progress 5**

- i) a) False  
b) True  
c) True
- ii) The Christian missionaries have played an outstanding role in spreading education among the tribals of India. The government is also committed to provide education to these groups.
- iii) Literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes, according to Census 1991, is 23.63 per cent.
- iv) The high dropout rate among the tribal students can be related to the following factors:
- a) the curriculum is often not relevant to the tribal society,
  - b) low standard of teaching and lack of facilities in tribal schools,
  - c) domestic duties of tribal children,
  - d) absence of encouragement to students from the family to take their studies seriously,
  - e) medium of instruction,
  - f) education is often aimed to raise literacy rather than to promote social mobility.

### **Check Your Progress 6**

- i) The tribal movements in central India were mainly against the exploiters of the tribals.
- ii) The Santal movement of 1855-57 was aimed at reverting to the Santal religion.
- iii) Tribal associations, named here, serve two purposes? a) they try to keep the group united and b) they form an interest group to demand better deal from the government. For the first purpose, they ask their people to preserve the traditional

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### Structure

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  - 29.2.1 Gender
  - 29.2.2 Role and Status
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### 29.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we have discussed the status of women in contemporary Indian society. After you have read this unit you should be able to

- explain the concept of **gender**, role and status in terms of the status of women in Indian society
- describe the status of women in contemporary India, and within the family in relation to household work
- describe women's status in the context of employment
- discuss the aspect of **gender role** stereotyping and its impact on women's health and education
- explain and exemplify the status of women in the media programme.

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## 29.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit introduces you to the issues affecting the status of women in Indian society. Here, we have examined various aspects of women's status in contemporary Indian society in terms of their work, education, health and media images. This unit in brief will provide you the background for further discussion in the following units of this block. In the later units, we discuss in great detail gender issues relating to and important facets of women's movement, work, education, health and legal aspects.

This unit begins with a brief discussion on some of the key concepts of sociology viz. gender, role and status. These concepts have been examined here in terms of women's status in contemporary Indian society. In section 29.3, we examine the status of women in the family. Here we discuss the aspects of women's status in the context of lineage, rule of residence, and household chores. In the section on women and paid employment we discuss how women perceive themselves as workers and how traditional role expectations influence women's work. The employer's attitude towards women employees, and the traditional positions of authority in the rural and urban areas, which have been affecting the status of women in society, are also explained in this section. In section 29.4 and 29.5 of this unit we have discussed in good length the impact of gender role stereotyping on women's health and education.

In the section on women's health we discuss aspects of food discrimination, amniocentesis and sex discrimination and women's psychological responses towards these. In section on education we examine the educational status of women in terms of their performances and enrolment in various courses of study and gender biases in the textbooks. Lastly in Section 29.6 we present an overview of the status of women in media. Here we analyse a **case study** on the television programmes of Doordarshan. We also discuss briefly the changing facets of women's status in contemporary India.

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## 29.2 RE-EXAMINING SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

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In this section we shall be examining the concepts of gender, role and status and the traditional view on women's role and status.

### 29.2.1 Gender

If you have already studied the units of Blocks 1, 2 and 3 of the first elective course of sociology for B.A. at IGNOU, you may wonder why we are going to look at such terms as role, status, function and even family and education once again. We are going to do so because it is now generally accepted that sociology and sociological theory have not paid adequate attention to the fact that societies are divided or stratified into not only on the basis of caste, class, religion and so on, but also on the basis of what we call "gender". The dictionary meaning of gender is "classification of objects roughly corresponding to the two sexes" as well as the properties of these two sexes. While discussing the differences between the sexes we generally focus on biological and reproductive functions, but differences in gender relate to various other

attributes, which may be socially and culturally determined. In other words sex is biological whereas gender is sociological, namely, the social meaning we attribute to it. Over here we shall be looking mainly at some of these attributes and how they come into existence. Further, we shall be looking at how the concepts of 'woman' and 'man' become important not only in terms of the difference between them, but also as concepts which help us better understand society and social relationships.

### 29.2.2 Role and Status

You are already aware of or will now realise the vital importance of the terms such as role, status and function for an understanding of society. These terms tell us how individuals and groups organise themselves as well as relate to each other. Very simply, role tells us about what is expected from an individual in a particular situation, while status deals with her or his expectations arising out of that situation. To put it another way, a role deals with duties and obligations while status deals with rights (but not necessarily legal rights). You will, of course, realise that these definitions or explanations are very simply put and may in fact overlook many complexities and even conflicts. For instance, it is commonly assumed that a mother is a woman, a wife, a cook, a teacher of her children, a daughter-in-law and so on. What happens when the mother is also the principal of the local village school? Not only does she have to deal with a range of roles and statuses, but also with the tensions that may arise out of her role as mother and her role as an administrator. We shall try and show you how conventional analyses have tended to concentrate on the traditional and accepted roles of women as bearers and rearers of children and not on their other roles. So far, biological differences have been focused on without adequate attention to the implications of these differences.

### 29.2.3 Traditional Expectations and Women's Role and Status

As a girl or boy living in contemporary India, you would have heard of, or even been witness to, caste and religious conflicts and wondered how these conflicts arise. In many cases they occur because of differences in expectations. You would perhaps also have heard of how a certain caste or community oppresses or ill-treats members of other castes and communities. Such matters are now routinely discussed in the school, within the home and among the friends. Occasionally there may also be cases of men of one group or caste molesting or raping women of another group or caste. Such matters are also discussed, but perhaps less freely. As in cases of other inter-caste and inter-community conflicts, blame is attached to one side or another. You might also hear some comments on how it was really the Chamar woman's fault: why was she walking by a deserted path late at night? Or if a large number of women have been molested you might also hear people justify this in terms of "the Chamars need to be kept in their place, and the only way to do so is to attack their women". In so doing their *izzat* or honour is threatened.

There may be some further discussion on how such situations arise. How often though, have you heard people say that the Chamar woman was walking home in the dark because she had to look for work in the neighbouring village so as to keep her children alive? Or that the scheduled caste women were molested because the men were too frightened or powerless to defend them?

If you have heard such arguments you would realise that these relate to expectations: women are assaulted because it is expected that they will not strike back. More importantly in attacking them higher caste men are fulfilling their expectations associated with their superior position. Caste oppression is a recognised expression of power and control of one group over another.

You are probably now quite confused by the manner in which terms, such as ‘keeping people in their place’, ‘honour’, ‘conflict’, ‘power’ and so on have been used. To make it simpler we are now suggesting that it is essential for us to take into consideration how the various roles and expectations of social groups may compete with one another. By giving you above the random examples of the tensions experienced by an individual woman and then of women from a group caught up in conflict situations we wanted to make you aware of the fact that a study of Indian society needs to take into consideration the role of gender to understand the concepts of role, status, and conflict.

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## **29.3 WOMEN’S STATUS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA**

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In the following sections we shall be discussing various aspects of women’s status in society in terms of some important indicators. The form and extent of work and political participation, levels of education, state of health, representation in decision making bodies, access to property etc. are some relevant indicators of status of the individual members in a society. However, not all members of a society have got equal access to the factors which constitute these indicators of status. Gender is one of the crucial dimensions behind this inequality. Hence, due to various socio-cultural factors the economic and political roles of women have remained mostly unrecognised. In our society they are marginalised and economically discriminated against.

Contemporary Indian society has been exposed to the broad processes of social transformation, agricultural modernisation and economic development, urbanisation and rapid industrialisation and globalisation. However, these processes have generated regional imbalances, sharpened class inequalities and augmented the gender disparities. Hence, women have become critical symbols of these growing imbalances. All these have affected adversely the various aspects of women’s status in the contemporary Indian society. Within the limited scope of this unit we shall not be able to cover all aspects of women’s status in our society. Hence, we shall concentrate only on the aspects of women’s work, health and education, in this unit. Besides these we shall also present a case study on images of women as presented in popular media programmes. This will help you to analyse how media programmes reflect the status of women in Indian society.

### **29.3.1 The Family and Women’s Work**

It is not enough to say that any society consists of men and of women. It is equally important to look at how the two groups of people interact, as well as at the roles and expectations each group has of the other. Such roles and expectations are a product of the stereotypes of each gender. By gender stereotype we mean attributes and qualities commonly associated with a gender. These attributes arise out of the interaction of a complex set of factors, many

of which operate in the context of the family. We shall now see how these stereotypes come into existence.

### i) Lineage, Residence and Women

Those of you who have read Block 2 of ESO-12 will be familiar with many of the terms being used here. Most families in India, irrespective of their caste and religion, are **patrilineal**. The exceptions are the matrilineal Nairs of Kerala and tribes like the Khasis of Meghalaya. Simply put, patrilineality implies descent and inheritance through the male line. It also usually implies patrilocalty or living of the husband in his father's home, quite often with his father, brother or brothers and their wives and children. This is also a simplified definition of a joint family. Under patrilocalty a wife's visits to her natal home are usually restricted to ritual occasions, and a child is socialised mainly according to the values of the father's family. Even though a mother has a vital part to play in the child's life, major decisions regarding his/her future and that of others in the family are taken by the men in the family.

### ii) Gender Role Stereotyping and Household Chores

Thus the first idea on gender role differences which a child acquires is that of women of one's family marrying and leaving their homes to live with different groups of people. Secondly, men appear to exercise far greater influence in decision-making and are far more visible and audible than their wives. Third, most of the tasks within the home are done by the mother, grand- mother,

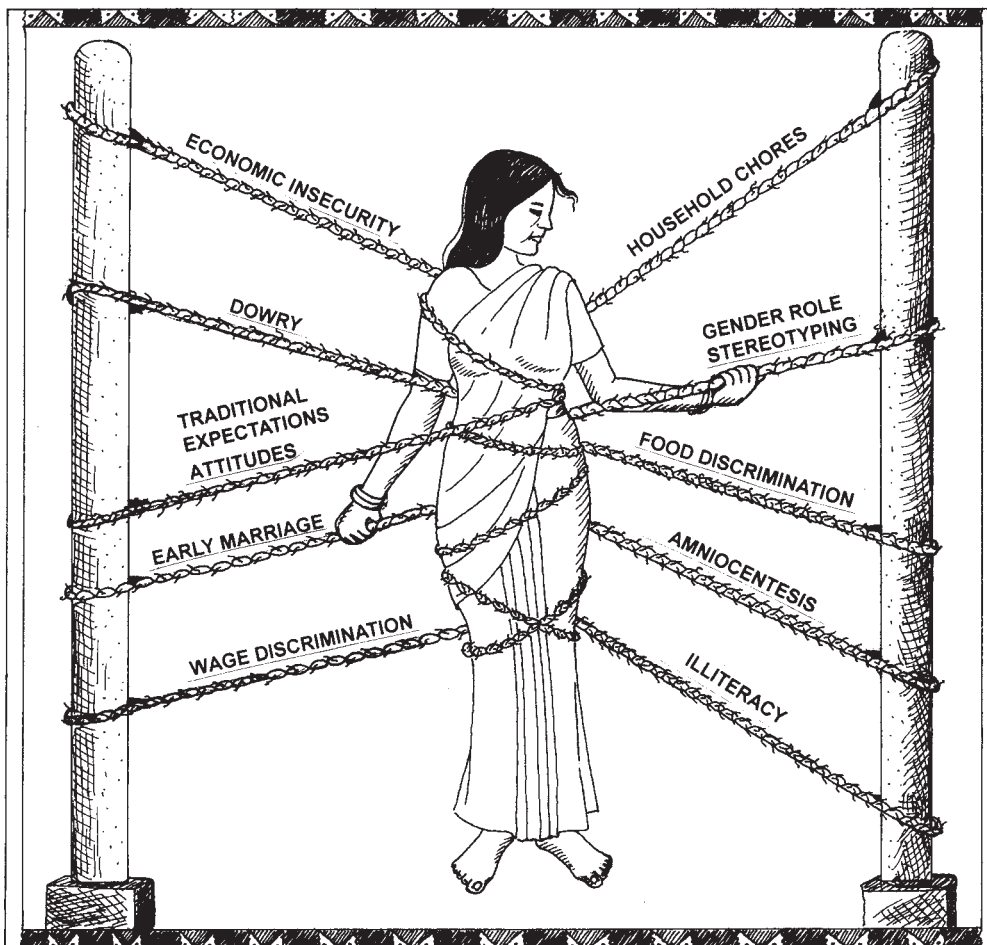


Figure 29.1 Status of women in India

sisters and so on. At meal times, they carry food to the fields for the men. All these tasks which consume time and energy are not counted as ‘work’ or ‘employment’ and there is no payment involved. In Western countries, women’s groups, politicians and other concerned individuals have been arguing for payment for housework and childcare. In India the question of payment for household jobs has not really been an important issue or demand. As we shall see, there are many other issues, which require urgent attention. At the same time, it is important for us to remember that non-payment should not also mean non-recognition. The fact that women are expected to perform all these tasks as a part of their conventional roles and no special merit is awarded to them for these tiring and tiresome jobs. In fact, you are all familiar with stories of how Meena’s bad cooking resulted in her mother-in-law’s continued stomach ailments or criticism of Rashmi’s job as a teacher which left her little time to knit the usual number of sweaters for her family members. Figure 29.1 shows different concerns that determine the status of women in India.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) What are the major attributes of gender differences? Use three lines for your answer.

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- ii) What do you mean by gender stereotype? Use three lines for your answer.

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- iii) Give an example of gender role differences in two lines.

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### **29.3.2 Women and Paid Employment**

Not only is women’s productive work within the house unpaid, but also it often is not understood how multiplicity of roles may result in conflict in their performance. Let us discuss the issue of women’s work participation and grasp the nature of complexities regarding their work.

#### **i) Women’s Work Participation**

As per to 1981 figures, 19.7 percent of Indian women were recorded as paid workers, of whom over 87 per cent were in the unorganised or informal sector of the economy. The work participation rate of women in 1991 and 2001 was 22.3 and 25.7 percent, respectively. The increase in the work participation of women during the decade 1991-2001 is mainly due to the increase in the proportion of marginal workers (6.3 percent to 11 percent) in the total female work force. The proportion of the main workers, in fact, decreased from 15.9 percent to 14.7 percent. It is held by many observers of Indian economy that



without women's paid or unpaid labour the Indian agricultural economy would not be able to function. In the informal sector, there is no legal redressal for problems; no maternity or other leave benefits and little security of service. Working long hours as domestic servants, stitching clothes for the garment export industry, working on the assembly line of small electronics manufacturing units or the beedi, tobacco, cashewnut factories, women live in fear of retrenchment, exploitation (often of a sexual nature) and inadequate wages.

What is particularly important here is that repeated under-representation of women's work in census and other statistical exercises is a reflection of a combination of factors. Women's work participation and their status as workers have been affected by various factors. Some of the important ones are women's self-perception, employers' attitude to women employees, traditional positions of authority in the rural and urban areas, and traditional role expectations. In the following sub-sections we shall be discussing a few important aspects of these factors.

## ii) **Women's Self-perception**

Let us look at how women perceive themselves as workers. Once in a job how a woman relates to it depends on her primary **socialisation**. If, as is the case with most, she has internalised the dominance of the homemaker role, she is likely to adopt a non-competitive, uninvolved and low profile at work. She is committed to the value system, which stresses that her energies and motivations are to be directed to making a success of her home and not her job. Interestingly, this is true of women in highly skilled occupations as well. In her study of women scientists, Maithreyi Krishna Raj (1978) found that though women were concerned about continuing their jobs, they were not looking for better prospects nor have they 'begun with a long range career strategy'. Once in a job, women rarely attempted to acquire further qualifications, which would help in promotions. In fact, their attitude towards promotions was by no means clear-cut. T.S. Papola's (1982) study of working women, which covered a range from those in supervisory posts in industrial establishments to unskilled workers in Lucknow city, showed that women were more different than men in respect of their promotion prospects. They felt insecure about their qualifications, personal attributes and ability to pass requisite in-service examinations. A small though significant proportion said that if promotions involved transfers outside the city or giving more time to the job, they would not be in a position to apply.

Apart from not applying for promotions because it would conflict with one's family commitment, some women do not even enter the profession for which they have been trained. For instance, according to the 1971 census, 7.1 per cent of doctors were women, though the number of women actually qualified was about 25 per hundred. While some may have migrated to other countries or been temporarily unemployed for a variety of reasons, the likelihood of voluntary abstention from the profession of their choice cannot be ruled out. It is not improbable that a work environment which involves interacting with male colleagues and patients in a variety of situations as well as being on night duty would deter parents and conjugal families from allowing women to practice as doctors. The requirement of rural service for government doctors is another factor, which deters families as well as the women themselves.

### iii) **Employers' Attitude**

Familial proscriptions and women's own apprehensions are not uncommonly exploited by employers. Papola's (1982) study showed that women were discriminated against at the time of promotions and tended to be crowded into lower status clerical and primary school jobs. They were rarely promoted to executive and supervisory posts. Among skilled and unskilled workers, the reasons put forth for preferring men were their greater physical strength and lower rate of absenteeism. As regards employment and promotion to supervisory and clerical categories, male employers defended themselves by pointing out that women did not come forth to be recruited or promoted. When questioned further, over half the employers said that in any case a woman's primary responsibility was to her home, and with a high male unemployment rate, women who were often secondary earners, should not be given preference over men.

### iv) **Traditional Positions of Authority in Rural Areas**

Where the ownership of land, means of production as well as decision-making are dominated by men, the division of labour within the family as well as in the employment market is weighted in favour of those in positions of authority. Case studies show that even when men are not the chief breadwinners, women, steeped in a tradition which reveres men as the *annadatas* (bread givers), rarely speak of themselves as the heads of households or those who can make major family decisions. In her in-depth study of five working class women in Kerala, Leela Gulati (1981) concluded that though in three families women were the principal earners, employment did not improve the women's self-estimation or status in the social hierarchy. Notions of female dependency and inferiority are carried over to areas where in fact, men have to rely on their wives' skills for survival. In Narasapur (Andhra Pradesh) where women make fine lace, the menfolk took the produce to distant areas to sell. Women spoke of their dependence on men, but did not point out that without their skills, husbands may well be unemployed if not destitute. They were characteristically modest about their role in productive labour. Though women were aware that their work was quite distinct from housework and was by no means a leisure time activity, they did not attach much importance to their economic roles.

### v) **Traditional Positions of Authority in Urban Areas**

In the urban areas, the working class, and men in particular have a wider range of job options available to them. The study by Leela Kasturi (1990) shows that when unemployed weavers from Tamil Nadu migrated to Delhi, the womenfolk found jobs only as domestic servants, while men became mechanics, cooks or drivers. The shift in residence meant a severance with an established way of life and the support of the extended family. Men who had few options at home became more whimsical and choosy about jobs in the metropolitan city. Women could hardly take anytime off from work to look around for alternatives; yet, men as well as women regard the unpaid and paid work of men as supportive and women's earning as supplementary. In a study of sweeper women of Delhi it was found that women supported unemployed husbands unquestioningly and even put up with physical abuse from them. The husbands were the *maliks* or masters, entitled to such services (*seva*) as massage of the legs and feet. Govind Kelkar (1981) found that women had to

perform such services after full day's work in the areas of Green Revolution in Punjab. Female 'misdemeanours' such as answering back, serving food which was regarded as unpalatable or occasionally exchanging information on family matters were punished with beatings.

A study of the sweeper community in Delhi by Malavika Karlekar (1987) shows that husbands were moving out of the traditional occupation and women actively supported male attempts at getting better jobs in the urban environment. Women appeared convinced that men had a right to better lives, while they rarely had such thoughts for themselves. Restricted physical mobility, full responsibility for housework as well as fairly rigid views on where women from certain castes should work led women automatically to a situation where it was assumed that occupational mobility was meant for men only. Not unexpectedly, most daughters after the age of eight years or so joined their mothers at work or cooked and cleaned at home. Boys rarely helped, and it was not unusual to see sons playing in the alleys while their younger sisters were at work, either at home or with their mothers.

#### vi) **Working Conditions**

For the majority of working class women, a job is essential. In relation to the men they have fewer choices as well as limited chances for occupational mobility. When men and women work in the same occupation, female tasks are often the more arduous and time-consuming. For instance, in paddy cultivation they spend long hours in sowing, weeding and transplanting. In Kerala the extraction of the cashew seed from a corrosive liquid is women's work. Again, when both sexes do identical jobs, women often get paid less than men. Protests are rare, apart from ignorance of legal and other rights; there is a fear of exploitation and sexual harassment by the landlord or contractor.

#### **Activity 1**

If you are living in a nuclear family, describe in about 10-15 sentences a day in the life of all your family members and state approximately how much time they spend on household chores and employment activities within and outside the home. Before doing so, identify each family member by age, sex and relationship to you. If you live in a joint family, describe the same as above for only the female members of the family. Compare, if possible, your note with the notes of other learners at your Study Centre.

#### vii) **Traditional Role Expectations**

Irrespective of social class there is, at the level of belief, widespread commitment to the notion that a woman's job must not interfere or compete with her primary role of wife and mother. There is also concern with her physical safety and the respectability of the occupation. Clearly, working class families are far less able to ensure these conditions, and often their women work under very difficult circumstances. Highly rated occupations for middle class women are teaching jobs at various levels, librarianship, medicine, particularly with specialisation in gynaecology and paediatrics, health visitorships and so on. However, as the availability of jobs is dependent on the market situation, as well as on access to higher education, many women have to be content with being telephone operators, clerks, typists and nurses.

As you are reading these pages, you may well think back on your own life experiences: how often have you heard your father or your brother discuss their work and work related issues and problems? And how often have your mother, wife and sister, irrespective of whether they are housewives or school teachers, clerical workers or college teachers, talked about tensions in running the house, arguments with their bosses on a matter of principle or about how they enjoyed teaching the parts of a flower in a different way? If you reflect on the matter, you will probably find that men talk and express more in the home environment on their work-related lives, women tend to discuss marriage negotiations, incidents with other relatives, the price of kerosene and so on much more with family member. What is involved is a question of perceptions, which is vital for an understanding of how individuals view their roles. Women, much more than men, irrespective of their multiplicity of roles, tend to internalise the view of home-maker and nurturant provider. This self-perception is more acute in a patrilineal system where official authority figures are men.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

Select the correct answer to the following questions.

- i) According to the 2001 census the female work participation rate is
  - a) 25.7 percent
  - b) 22.5 percent
  - c) 39.3 percent
  - d) 15.9 percent.
- ii) Studies show that if a woman has internalised the dominance of home makers role she is likely to adopt a
  - a) competitive, involved and high profile at work
  - b) non-competitive, uninvolved and low profile at work
  - c) both of the above
  - d) none of the above.

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## **29.4 ROLE STEREOTYPING: IMPACT ON WOMEN'S HEALTH**

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We have spent quite some time discussing work either for a wage or otherwise primarily because it both describes as well as defines an individual woman's position in her family and in society. We concluded that the patrilineal family was largely responsible for the formation of such images. At the same time, there are agencies and agents outside the family, which help in the formation of stereotypes. It is important to know how women react to their situation. The following sub-sections discuss food discrimination in the family, amniocentesis and sex discrimination within the given definitions of roles and expectations. These show how women's mental and physical health is affected by such definitions of roles and expectations.

### 29.4.1 Food Discrimination

As you have seen, women work long and tedious hours, often under difficult and unhygienic conditions. A number of studies have also documented how in a scarcity situation, women and girls suffer as a result of food discrimination. By this we mean that men and boys eat first, and are given the larger and more nutritious portions. Traditionally, women eat after men in our society, and when there is limited food to be distributed, they automatically get less.

What is important here is that food discrimination is not only a function of poverty and scarcity, but also of perceptions and expectations. It is assumed that men need better and more food because they work hard and are the bread winners. The fact that women may work as hard and earn as much is rarely taken into consideration. Certainly the labour and energy they expend in household-related tasks are rarely taken note of. These perceptions are a part of a system where little value is attached to female life.

### 29.4.2 Amniocentesis and Sex Discrimination

You have probably heard of amniocentesis or the process by which the amniotic fluid is extracted from a pregnant woman to determine the health of the foetus or unborn child. Some birth-related defects are more common in girls and others in boys. Thus, the process of the test involves determining the sex of the child so as to establish the presence or otherwise of some or other defects. The aim of the test is not to ascertain the sex of the child, though it is now being misused for pre-birth sex determination. In 1985, a study of the Greater Mumbai area showed that there had been 40,000 abortions of female foetuses following amniocentesis. Most women who go in for the tests leading to abortion of the female foetus are from middle class homes, and may even have college education.

The misuse of this test has now resulted in banning of this test in India. What is important here is to understand and make the distinction between a test conducted only for medical reasons and one, which is used to destroy a healthy female foetus. It is the latter situation with which we are concerned. Why is an unborn baby girl less valued than a male child? This is not an easy question to answer particularly when you have seen how much work a woman does. In part we can answer this question by looking at roles, expectations and obligations. We can say that certain obligations, namely that of a daughter to be educated, clothed and married with a dowry, outweigh expectations arising out of her role as a contributor to the household in a variety of ways. You may say that the question of contribution did not really occur in the case of the urban middle class, among whom amniocentesis became so common.

Here one could perhaps argue that the considerations of dowry to be paid is the most important factor. Secondly, it is possible that with the rising cost of living and increasing expectations, the small family norm is becoming more popular among those who had earlier large families. Here, in cases of accidental pregnancy, abortion following amniocentesis may have been practised, particularly if the foetus was that of a female. The argument of course remains the same: a girl is less wanted than a boy. It can be hypothesised that irrespective of the sex of the first child, it was unlikely that the second foetus, if it was that of a boy, was aborted, even if the parents want only two children, and that too, preferably one of each sex. On the other hand, a female foetus was likely



to be aborted more readily. In a study conducted among the Kallar caste of Madurai district of Tamil Nadu, female infanticide had become a way of resolving the burden of dowry on poor families. Hospital records showed that mothers who had given birth to daughters ran away from their hospital beds in large numbers with newborn infants. Follow-up enquiries by the hospital staff showed that the babies were killed by women desperate to survive themselves. In the year 1997, data on female infant death due to 'social cause' an euphemism for female infanticide from the primary health centre (PHC) records showed that on an average around 3000 cases of female infanticide occur in a year in Tamil Nadu. This accounts for one-sixth to one-fifth of all female infant deaths in the state (Venkatesh, 2000). A daughter is unwanted, as she would mean long-term problems for her poverty stricken parents.

### 29.4.3 Women's Psychological Response

It is not as though there is no reaction from girls and women to their deteriorating position. The incidence of a range of physical ailments, neurotic disorders and spirit possession are manifestations of how women react, at one level, to their situation. The unit on women's movement will show you how this growing resentment if not anger has been channelled into effective action. Nonetheless, individual woman's response is very important, particularly as it tells us something about the inner workings of a human mind.

#### a) **Accumulated and Repressed Rage: Psychoanalysis**

On the basis of case studies, particularly of rural women, psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar (1983) was struck by their accumulated and repressed rage, the helpless anger of young women, and their lack of social emancipation being the canvas on which the individual picture of hysterical illness is painted. In the Indian context, hysteria takes the form of possession by ghosts of forbidden sexual and aggressive wishes. Families become actively involved in ridding girls of these malevolent spirits, often through trips to shamans, gurus and *matas*. At the same time, psychiatrists have pointed out that urban middle class families tend to respond more quickly to the obvious maladjustments of male children: underachieving at school, tantrums and depression at home result in trips to remedial clinics in hospitals. Girls either do not express themselves (that is, they repress their resentment and unhappiness) or even if they do, families tend to take more notice of boys' problems than those of girls. After a certain point, internalised unhappiness manifests itself in more concrete forms. It is not being suggested that women sham illness or even possession states in order to gain attention. What is being suggested, however, is that at the level of the unconscious, a sense of social marginalisation and anguish leads to an obsession with the self either at the psychic and physical level or at both. This compensation by the individual for collective neglect often leads to illness of various forms.

#### b) ***Maibis* and Polygyny Among Meitei**

Interestingly, among the Meitei of Manipur where women enjoy considerable freedom in choosing their marriage partners as well as economic autonomy and control in the area of weaving, an important source of income for entire families, the percentage of women shamans or *maibis* is high. Who become *maibis*? Surely not all independent-minded women, though according to a Meitei proverb, 'stubborn women are destined to become *maibis*'. In a society



where men define social reality, a stubborn woman is perhaps one who is not sufficiently deferential to the man's point of view. While spirit possession among women is accepted in some societies as an institutionalised form of female rebelliousness, it does not help in improving women's general status. Rather, it leads, as in the present case, to labelling women who differ as potential *maibis*. Or it may also result in the resurgence of certain other practices aimed at subjugating women. For instance, among the Meitei, polygyny in the urban areas is on the increase. The right of one man to claim control over the sexuality as well as the economic potential of more than one woman is of considerable significance in a society where female independence has been traditionally valued. While the author records a growing number of *Kainabas* or divorces instituted by women, Chaki Sircar (1984) has documented the suffering of those who were forced into a situation of competing with co-wives.

It is now time for us to look at how institutions outside the family work to create or to reduce inequalities between women and men. In the following sections we shall look at education, and then briefly at the media.

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## **29.5 ROLE STEREOTYPING IN THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIALISATION PROCESSES**

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You are perhaps aware that many more Indian boys than girls are enrolled in schools, and finish their education up to certain levels. Looking around you will see girls helping their mothers at home, going out to work, or taking care of their younger brothers and sisters. Such situations are discussed at length in the unit on education (unit 10, Block 1 of the first elective course of sociology for B.A. at IGNOU).

What we shall look at here is how the educational system itself perpetuates stereotypes and creates new ones. We are using the term educational system to include what is taught in class, namely the syllabus, attitude of teachers and school and college administrators and the views put forth in textbooks. At the level of policy, there has been a certain degree of confusion regarding the right kind of education for girls. What are the views of those who argue for more home science colleges for girls and computer courses for boys?

### **29.5.1 Gender Differentiation in Courses of Study**

Are girls not capable of becoming neurosurgeons, engineers, nuclear scientists, and so on? A look at the school (Class XII) results for 1985 shows that girls secured a higher pass percentage than boys in all the four groups namely science, humanities, commerce and vocational studies. Of the 6,644 students who offered science, 4,852 or 73 per cent were boys while of the 26,716 appearing in the humanities group, 59 per cent were girls. The commerce group was evenly divided between boys and girls. Interestingly, though a fewer number of girls were in the science group, their pass percentage was as high as 83.8 per cent as against 70.7 per cent for the boys. The all India figures of girls' enrolment in higher education in science was 40 per cent of all those in college while only 4 per cent were studying engineering or technology.

Medicine, which gained early respectability as a profession suitable for women, accounted for a ratio of one girl to every three boy students.

**i) Factors Influencing the Choice of Subjects**

There are certain tentative conclusions to be drawn on the basis of the empirical data given above. On the whole, arts subjects are more attractive to students irrespective of sex. More boys than girls study science and engineering and girls are clustered in lower status courses and institutions. However, most importantly, these figures are not a true reflection of actual ability. The fact that science, technology and engineering education is unequally distributed among the sexes does not necessarily represent differences in aptitudes. The streaming which takes place at the relatively early age of 16 years is not based only on academic factors. Conversations with principals and teachers of leading schools in Delhi indicate that often bright girls opt out of the science stream for reasons which have no connection with their academic performance. Classroom behaviour may also provide some clues on what factors influence the choices and attitudes of girls. While doing practice teaching in some of the capital's important schools/student-teachers not only found a sharp drop in the numbers of girls studying science at the Plus-Two level, but also that their class participation was substantially different from that of boys. Those who taught classes IV and VII found that girls were as assertive and definite in their points of view as their male peers. At the higher levels, they became quiet and reserve non-participants, though they were diligent with their homework and performed well in unit tests. Outside class too, older girls tended to wander around in groups by themselves while boys could be heard shouting lustily on the playing fields.

**ii) Choice of Subjects and Professional Mobility**

A principal commented that most of the girls who took up science hoped to enter medical colleges. Of those who were not successful, the majority went into home science, biochemistry or switched to arts subjects. Very few aspired to be engineers, research scientists or geophysicists. Studies of girls who do become scientists and professionals in competitive areas indicate a lower degree of job involvement and concentration in the lower echelons of service. One reason for this, of course, is that women do not remain long enough in a profession or job to be eligible for promotions. Often, familial reasons such as marriage, limited physical mobility due to the nature of husband's employment, reluctance to spend more time at work as it would mean compromising with responsibilities at home and so on are responsible for well-demarcated hours of work and degrees of participation. Role conflict is minimised by a socialisation process, which stresses the primacy of home-oriented duties. Girls are trained to be good housewives early as participation in culinary and other activities is actively encouraged and applauded by family members.

**29.5.2 Biases in Textbooks**

There have been a number of studies on the content of text books which suggest that boys are invariably depicted as out-going, adventurous, brave and helpful; girls on the other hand are shown as dependent, submissive, quiet and obedient. At the same time, girls are expected to study and to perform well, however, they are not to be excessively competitive or demand too much freedom of thought and expression.

29.5.3 Differentiation in the Socialisation Process

Educationist Krishna Kumar’s (1986) experiences of “growing up male” are amply substantiated by Leela Dube (1988) and psycho-analyst Sudhir Kakar’s (1983) studies of male and female socialisation in India. Thus, watching girls heading straight home in “silent cluster” from school led Kumar to believe that “girls are not individuals”. As boys, he and his peers were free to spend time on the way, experiment with their cycles and watch the world go by. Such joys are rarely available to a large section of middle class girls. Bar those girls in the villages who have to earn a living, or help at home and do odd jobs of fetching and carrying, restrictions on movement are not so severe. If you live in a village you will observe that a girl can, until puberty, be allowed to move about quite freely in public places. You would perhaps think that she could be spending that time in school. If you are an urban dweller, you will be familiar with discussions at home, or perhaps on the radio and television, of how difficult it is for parents to allow their daughters to stay back after school hours, to participate in extra-curricular activities. Parents and guardians are constantly bothered with their safety on public buses; and, in any case, there is always the question of relations and friends who want to know why it is necessary for Rani to play basket ball or learn music after school hours. That is the time when she is expected at home, to participate in a variety of household chores. Such questions, however, are less often raised in case of her brother, Ravi, who is always late in coming home from college. A part of stereotyping process assumes that boys, more than girls, have a right to more independence and self-expression. Expectations and obligations are more rigid in the case of girls, and their rights are accordingly fewer.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Why does food discrimination exist in the family? Answer in five lines.

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ii) What are the reasons behind low degree of job involvement and concentration in the lower echelons of service of the women scientists and professionals? Give your answer in about six lines.

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## **29.6 MEDIA, WOMEN AND THE CHANGING SCENARIO**

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Listening to radio programmes and watching the television and reading the newspaper reports you may feel that issues, relating to women are now receiving more attention. Whether it is a horrifying description, of a 'dowry death' or of atrocities against a scheduled caste or tribal woman, of more girls going to school each year, there seems to exist more information of what we can call gender issues. At the same time the media through advertisements, television serials and other programmes continue to portray women as either weak, defenseless creatures, or as bewitching maidens, out to win the hearts of unsuspecting young men. Anything ranging from a motorcycle to a soap is advertised with an appealing woman model inviting us to buy the particular item.

### **29.6.1 Women as Projected on Television**

There has been gender bias in the television programmes. Over here we shall look briefly at the findings of a report on how stereotypes are formed and perpetuated in Indian television programmes. The study conducted by Prabha Krishnan and Anita Dighe (1990) was based on intensive viewing of all Delhi Doordarshan programmes on alternate dates of the month of July 1986. Thus every programme became a part of the sample which was classified in seven broad areas. We shall look briefly at some of the important findings of their study.

Men appeared as 'newsmaker' in 77.4 per cent of the cases while women were in that role in only 6.5 per cent cases and for the rest, a categorical analysis was not possible. The authors pointed out that when reporting on politicians, women appeared in the political news as wives, mothers and daughters of well-known leaders. They appeared as victims of calamities and as members of audiences. In areas where curfew was imposed, women were shown as shoppers when curfew was relaxed. With the emphasis on developmental programmes, the official media did give some coverage to women working in agriculture, sericulture, tea gardens and so on.

### **29.6.2 Biased Representation of Women in the T V Serials and Cinema**

In their analysis of serials and cinema, the authors observed that men characters were almost double that of women characters. In terms of occupation women appeared mainly as housewives. If employed, they were invariably school teachers, office workers and flight attendants. By and large, women are depicted as dependent, submissive and sacrificing, whereas men are self-confident, dominant, ambitious and even ruthless. Krishnan and Dighe conclude that "women are underrepresented in general, marriage and parenthood are considered more important to women than to men" and female-dominated occupations are played up. The authors also point out that television programmes have distorted the women's movement and its role.

### **29.6.3 Changing Scenario**

We need to remember that since the 1980s there has been some resistance to the stereotypes formed of women. Secondly, certain laws as well as legal

judgments have worked towards greater gender equality. Textbook reforms, agitations against the portrayal of women in the media and moves to involve more women in the political process at various levels and so on are all part of a new phase of awareness in Indian society. This has led to resurgence of women's movement in various parts of the country in recent years. We shall discuss these aspects in detail in the next unit (unit 30). The consciousness has not only made all of us more sensitive to the situation of half the country's population but has also generated a lot of data, studies and reports on relevant issues. It has led to the development of **Women's Studies** as an area of academic research and teaching, which acts as an essential input in correcting our biases in knowledge. It can also be hoped that this new knowledge will help to correct stereotyping of women and their role and therefore carry positive impact on status. We shall discuss these aspects in greater detail in unit 30.

### Activity 2

Remember the plot of a story in a book, or a television programme or serial you have read or viewed in the last month. How many male and female characters appeared in it and what were their roles. Describe these in about fifteen sentences. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of your co- learners in the Study Centre.

## 29.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the meaning of role, status and expectation in the context of women's status in contemporary Indian society. We have analysed the status of women in family and work place. We have also examined how women's perceptions of work, employer's attitude, traditional positions of authority and role expectations have affected women's employment in our society. The aspects of women's role stereotyping and their impact on women's health and education have also been analysed in this unit. Lastly, we have examined the status of women in media programmes with special reference to the television programmes presented on Doordarshan.

### 29.8 KEY WORDS

<b>Case Study</b>	In-depth enquiry of a case or subject. It is a research approach that involves thorough analysis of a single case.
<b>Gender</b>	Humans are divided into two sexes or two genders - male and female. While sexual differences are biologically determined, gender differences are culturally constructed. A woman is not only a biological entity, but is expected to fulfil certain functions according to the norms of her society. Thus while all women are members of the female sex, their gender roles may vary according to the societies and families into which they are born.
<b>Gender Role</b>	The process by which roles are assigned to boys and to girls and later men and women, on the basis of social expectations.

<b>Patriliney</b>	Descent through the father's lineage.
<b>Socialisation</b>	The process through which young children are taught about roles, status, and expectation by family members and later by the school.
<b>Women's Studies</b>	This can be a separate discipline or can concentrate on revising existing syllabi and curricula by introducing data on women in a variety of roles. Currently, in India, there is no undergraduate degree in Women's studies, but attempts are being made to revise curricula at the college and university levels particularly in social sciences and humanities.

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## 29.9 FURTHER READING

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CSWI 1974. *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India*. Ministry of Education and Social Welfare: New Delhi

Gopalan, Sarala 2002. *Towards Equality - the Unfinished Agenda. Status of Women in India*. National Commission for Women: New Delhi

Kapadia, Karin 2002. *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*. Kali for Women: New Delhi

Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishna Raj 1987. *Women and Society in India*. Ajanta Books: New Delhi

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## 29.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) While discussions on differences between sexes generally focus on biological and reproductive functions, differences in gender relate to various other attitudes. These attitudes may be social and cultural as well.
- ii) By gender stereotype we mean attributes and qualities commonly associated with gender. These attributes arise out of interaction of a complex set of factors, many of which operate in the context of the family.
- iii) Men appear to exercise far greater influence in decision-making and are far more visible and audible than their wives.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) a
- ii) b

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) It is not only because of the poverty and scarcity in the family but also because of perceptions and expectations. It is assumed that men need



better and more food, because they work hard and are the breadwinners. The fact that women's hard work and earnings are rarely taken into consideration. These perceptions are part of system where little value is attached to female life.

- ii) One reason is that women do not remain long enough in a profession or job to be eligible for promotions. Besides this, familial reasons such as marriage, limited physical mobility due to nature of husband's employment, household responsibilities and the process of socialisation in the family where girls are trained to be good housewives are also responsible.

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## UNIT 30 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

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### Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 Women's Movement : A Variant of Social Movement
- 30.3 Reform Movements and Women's Issues in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
  - 30.3.1 The Brahmo Samaj
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  - 30.3.3 The Arya Samaj
  - 30.3.4 Muslim Women and Social Reform
- 30.4 Women's Participation in the Freedom Movement
  - 30.4.1 Role of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru
  - 30.4.2 Women's Organisations and Issues
  - 30.4.3 Forms of Women's Participation in the Freedom Movement
- 30.5 Institutional Initiatives and Women's Issues in the Post-Independence Period
  - 30.5.1 Constitutional Provisions and Social Legislations
  - 30.5.2 Planned Development and Women's Issues
  - 30.5.3 Women's Political Representation
- 30.6 Resurgence of Women's Movement in the 70s: Issues and Actions
  - 30.6.1 Emergence of New Organisations and Approaches
  - 30.6.2 Deforestation and Ecological Movement
  - 30.6.3 Issue-based Movements in the 70s and 80s
  - 30.6.4 The Emerging Trends and Government's Response
- 30.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 30.8 Key Words
- 30.9 Further Reading
- 30.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 30.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we have discussed the historical and contemporary dimensions of women's movement in India. After going through this unit you should be able to

- describe women's movement as an important variant of social movement
- explain how women's issues are raised in the reform movements of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- state and describe the basic aspects of women's organisation, issues and their participation in the freedom movement

- describe the changing facets of women's movement in the post-Independence period
- explain the resurgence of women's movement in the 70s and 80s.

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## 30.1 INTRODUCTION

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Social movement has been defined as an organised effort by a group of people either to bring or resist change in the society. Women's movement is an important variant of social movement in the sense that it aims to bring changes in the institutional arrangements, values, customs and beliefs in the society that have subjugated women over the years. In section 30.2 of this unit we have discussed women's movement as an important variant of social movement. The reform movements of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on women's issues. The Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj played important role in projecting women's issues in a wider context. You will find these aspects in section 30.3. Social reforms among the Muslim women have also been discussed in this section. In section 30.4 you will read about women's organisation and participation in the independent movement. In this section you will also observe the role played by Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru in encouraging women to participate in the independence struggle.

In the post-Independence period constitutional provisions and social legislations for women, planned economic development and social change affected women's movement significantly. We discuss the changing facets of women's movement in the post-Independence period in section 30.5. During the 1970s and 1980s occurred the resurgence of women's movement in India. Section 30.6 of this unit deals with this aspect. Here we discuss the attempts of women to organise on the basis of ecological, social and economic issues. Issue-based movements in the 1970s and 1980s included anti-dowry, anti-sati, anti-rape movements. Here we also discuss the emerging trends of the contemporary women's movement and government's response to women's issues.

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## 30.2 WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: A VARIANT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT

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The study of social movements is not an area for historians alone. Sociologists studying social structure, processes and change would logically be interested in social movements. It is a process through which a collective attempt is made at mobilisation for change or resistance. However, in the context of change it differs from **evolutionary process** of social mobility and change in the sense that movements are based on a perception of injustice or oppression of a certain section or sections within the society. Social movements adopt protest, confrontation or conflict as a method to focus attention on different issues and attempt to bring about qualitative changes in the traditional social structures and social relationships, which are unequal and oppressive. The women's movement is an important variant of social movements. It is an important but neglected aspect of studies on social movements like tribal and ethnic, peasant and workers, backward classes, cultural and religious movements, etc.

In Indian society, differences based on caste, class, religious and ethnicity distinguish the life and problems of women in different parts of the country. An overwhelming majority of 80 percent people in India live in rural areas. The process of development and change affects various sections of women differently. It is in the context of a culturally diverse and stratified or unequal society that the emergence of women's movement needs to be understood.

In this unit women's movement is discussed under four broad headings i) Reform Movements and Women's issues, ii) Women's participation in the freedom movement. iii) Institutional initiatives and women's issues in the post-Independence period and iv) Resurgence of women's movement in the 70s and 80s. Let us begin with the first one.

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### 30.3 REFORM MOVEMENTS AND WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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The position of women in India has varied in different periods and in different classes, religion and ethnic groups. By nineteenth century there were several evil social practices like Sati (burning of widow on the funeral pyre of her husband), child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, polygamy etc. which were a matter of debate.

During the British rule the spread of English education and Western liberal ideology among Indians and spread of Christianity and missionary activities, resulted in a number of movements for social change and religious reform in the nineteenth century.

The broad objectives of these movements were caste reform, improvement in the status of women, promoting women's education and an attack on social practices whose roots lay in social and legal inequalities and religious traditions of different communities.

In the earlier phase of the social reform movement during nineteenth century, the initiatives came largely from male reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The issues that were taken up by them were Sati, ill treatment of widows, ban on widow remarriage, **polygyny**, child marriage and denial of property rights to women and the need to educate women. Struggle for women's education initiated by men resulted in setting up of women's schools, colleges, hostels, widow homes, protection homes etc. The social reformers' assumptions were that female education would revitalise the family system, which was threatened by the increasing communication gap between educated men and their uneducated wives. The social reform movement saw the emergence of women's organisations and institutions. However, the movement was led by men and originated in **metropolitan cities**.

Leaders of the social reform movement also realised that religious reforms cannot be separated from it. The British policy was to keep different religious communities separate from each other and maintain each system of family laws, which was closely related to the religious and customary traditions of each community. Social reform movement never developed as a unified movement but developed within each community.

This period has witnessed the proliferation of various organisations. These organisations took the lead to project important issues, which adversely affected the status of women in the society. The most important of these organisations were the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj. In the following section, we shall be discussing these organisations briefly.

### 30.3.1 The Brahmo Samaj

It was founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1825, and attempted to remove restrictions and prejudices against women, which had their roots in religion. These included child marriage, polygyny, limited rights to inherit property and seclusion of women. Education of women was seen as the major instrument to improve women's position. Keshab Chandra Sen stressed the need for educating women at home and government support was sought for this purpose. A women's magazine called *Bambodhini Patrika* was started. An inter-caste marriage was also solemnised under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj. Opposition to such moves from Hindu orthodoxy resulted in the passing of Civil Marriage Act, 1872. This Act, which permitted inter-caste marriage and divorce, fixed 14 and 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys respectively.

The influence of the Brahmo Samaj was confined to Bengal and North India.

### 30.3.2 The Prarthana Samaj

It was founded in 1867 and had more or less similar objectives as Brahmo Samaj. However, it remained confined to western India. M.G. Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar were the leading figures. In 1869 the Bombay Widow Reforms Association was formed which arranged the first widow remarriage in 1869. Two leaders of the Prarthana Samaj, R.G. Bhandarkar and N.G. Chandravarkar, later became Vice-chancellors of the first Women's University set up by Karve in 1916 in Bombay. This was later named as the SNDT Women's University.

Both these movements stressed women's education to bridge the widening gap between males who had the benefit of modern education and women of the family.

The idea was to make them better wives and mothers. The debate on women's education that raged in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shows that it did not originate from the influences of Western education only. Other reformers also stressed the need for women's education.

Both these movements were the outcome of the reaction of urban, western educated men and aimed to change women's position within the family.

### 30.3.3 The Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj was founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. Unlike the above two movements the Arya Samaj was a religious revivalist movement. While rejecting Hindu religious orthodoxy, idol worship and the caste society, the slogan of this movement was to go back to the vedic period. Painting a glorious position of women in ancient India, it advocated reform in the caste system, compulsory education for both men and women, prohibition of child marriage by law, remarriage of child widows. It was opposed to divorce and

widow remarriage in general, and emphasised separate school for girls and boys. Several Arya Kanya *Pathashalas* were set up which later became colleges and contributed to the cause of women's education. Though mainly an urban movement, its influence also extended to semi-urban and rural areas. While rejecting the caste system it never demanded its abolition. Preference for arranged marriages within the caste group and emphasis on home-making roles of women limited its contribution to the cause of women's emancipation.

Social reformers (like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, M.G. Ranade and Swami Dayanand Saraswati) eulogised the position of women in ancient India. However, the radicals like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule and Lokhitvadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh attacked the caste system, which they said was responsible for the subjugation of women. Phule said that Sudras and women had been denied education so that they would not understand the importance of human rights of equality and freedom and would accept the low position accorded to them in law, custom and traditions.

### **30.3.4 Muslim Women and Social Reform**

Similar movements began, within the Islamic community in the late nineteenth century. However, emphasis on *purdah* system and slow spread of education among women delayed the development of a progressive movement to improve the opportunities for Muslim women. People like Begum of Bhopal, Syed Ahmad Khan and Sheikh Abdullah in Aligarh and Karmat Hussain in Lucknow spearheaded a movement to improve women's education. In 1916 Begum of Bhopal formed the All-India Muslim Women's Conference. The traditionalists disapproved such activities and were enraged by the resolution passed by the Muslim Women's Conference in 1917 that polygamy should be abolished. In the later years several Muslim women joined the nationalist struggle and non-cooperation movement against the British.

Similar movements also emerged among other communities in different regions. A few women leaders like Pandita Ramabai and Vidyagouri Neelkant faced bitter opposition for marrying out of caste or obtaining education.

All these movements had a very limited perspective of changing the position of women within the family without challenging the social structure and caste inequalities, which perpetuated women's lower position. Their appeal was limited to urban middle class. The gender bias of the reform movement was most pronounced in the argument that education would improve women's efficiency as housewives and mothers. Gender equality was not on their agenda.

The movement was not conceived as a radical onslaught on the religious orthodoxy, which subjugated women. Social reformers viewed women's question as a social problem.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) What were the major objectives of the social and religious movements of the nineteenth century? Answer in about four lines.

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- .....
- ii) What were the major women issues raised by the Brahmo Samaj? Answer in about four lines

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- iii) Tick mark the correct answer of the following question.

Which of the following movements pointed out the glorious position of women in the ancient India?

- a) Arya Samaj
- b) Prarthana Samaj
- c) Brahmo Samaj
- d) All of the above

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## 30.4 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

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During the freedom movement, the struggle for Women's right and equality was seen as an integral part of the struggle for national Independence. Many women who fought for the country's freedom were also active on the issues of women's rights. In 1885 the Indian National Congress was founded. In its 1889 Bombay Session, ten women participated. With the spread of women's education among middle class by the last part of the nineteenth century, several women became active in the social and political life of India. Gandhiji's call to women and large scale participation of women in India's freedom movement brought about changes in the perception of nationalist leaders.

### 30.4.1 Role of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru

Mahatma Gandhi played the most significant role in involving large number of women in the nationalist movement. Hence it is important to understand the impact of Gandhian ideology on women's movement. He proclaimed: "Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of activities of men and she has the same right to freedom and / liberty as he.... By sheer force of vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have". He said "I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights". However, at the same time he idealised mythical figures like Sita, Damyanti who were symbols of women's sufferings. He stressed that participation of women in the freedom struggle was an integral part of women's *dharma* (duty). He felt that women were most suited for *Satyagraha* (protest) as they have qualities

appropriate for non-violent struggle and for constructive social uplift programmes of the Congress. He said women had great qualities for self-sacrifice and tolerance and an ability to endure suffering, which were needed for non-violent struggle. He saw women's role as complementary to men.

Jawaharlal Nehru was influenced by the Western suffragettes and was exposed to liberal views on women's question in the West. He believed that 'without economic freedom other aspects of women's equality would not be realised'. He disagreed with the limited view that women's education alone can bring about the desired changes and he wanted women trained in all human activities. He said that "if women's struggles remained isolated from the general political, economic and social struggles, the women's movement would not gain strength and will remain confined to the upper classes".

There cannot be any doubt that a single factor which contributed to the transformation of women's roles and status in the Indian society was their massive participation in the national freedom movement. Equality between men and women was accepted as one of the objectives in the Fundamental Rights Resolution of the Indian National Congress in 1931.

### **30.4.2 Women's Organisations and Issues**

The emergence of women's organisation was closely linked with both social reform movement and the nationalist movement. During the early twentieth century several women's organisations were formed. The Women's India Association (WIA) was formed in 1917 by Margaret Cousins, an Irish and an Indian nationalist. This was followed by the formation of the National Council of Indian Women (NCIW) in 1926 and All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927. Jyoti Singh in Gujarat (1934) played an active role in harnessing energies of women. Several women active in the nationalist movement became founders of women's organisations.

#### **i) Women's Suffrage**

For the first time in 1917, the demand for women's right to vote was raised. A deputation of women including Sarojini Naidu and Margaret Cousins met the Viceroy to put forward the demand for female **franchise**. The Indian National Congress supported the idea and the constitutional reforms in 1919 allowed provincial legislatures to decide the issue. Madras was the first province to allow women to vote. Women also became legislative councillors. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy was the first woman to become legislative councillor in Madras in 1927. The demand for women's suffrage was later changed to adult franchise within the national movement.

#### **ii) Question of Participation in the Freedom Movement**

Despite women's active participation in the freedom movement and demand for voting rights, when the civil disobedience movement began in 1930 some of the women leaders took a position that women's organisations should keep away from party politics as women were concerned with social issues and British Government's help was necessary to bring about social change in women's position through education and legislation. There were other women leaders, however, who believed that they should align themselves with the national movement. They believed that sitting on the fence served no purpose and women will progress only with political emancipation.

The gradual change in looking at women's issues, from social and educational to political perspectives, occurred with a closer link between the Congress and women's groups and mass participation of women in the freedom movement. Many advocates of women's rights looked upon freedom for women as dependent on freedom for the country. In the 1920s and 1930s women participated actively in the Civil Disobedience movement. Women were more active in *Swadeshi* movement (campaign to wear home spun *Khadi*) and picketing of shops selling foreign goods and liquor.

Advocates of women's participation in the freedom movement, however, stressed that though Indian culture approved women's equality, it recognised their goals as separate from that of men.

### 30.4.3 Forms of Women's Participation in the Freedom Movement

Women participated in the freedom movement in various ways. They participated in political protests, picketed shops selling foreign goods and organised *Prabhat Pheri* (singing patriotic songs). Women all over the country provided food and shelter for underground political activists and carried messages to political prisoners. In 1930, women in large-number participated in Salt March (Gandhiji urged people to break the salt law by making salt themselves). Thousands of women were jailed.

Within the Indian nationalist groups, however, there were a few more militant groups, which were active in Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra as well as abroad. Some foreign women also worked with Indian revolutionaries abroad. Bhikaiji Cama, Perm D S Captain, Saraladevi Choudhurani (Bengal), Sushila Devi and Durga Devi (Punjab), Roopavati Jain (Delhi), Kalpana Dutt and Kamala Dasgupta (Calcutta), Lakshmi Sahgal (who was in charge of the Rani Jhansi Women's regiment, part of the Indian National Army formed by Subhas Chandra Bose) were involved in revolutionary activities.

Women's participation in the national movement helped in breaking several of the old barriers of tradition and custom. Women's organisation side by side raised their voices for removal of social and legal disabilities; however, these organisations were dominated by urban middle and upper classes. Women from poor working class families and their problems hardly came into the picture.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- i) What were the two opposite positions, taken by the women's organisations, on the question of their participation in the Nationalist movement? Answer in eight lines.

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- ii) Write a note on Nehru's views on women's equality and women's movement in Indian society. Answer in about ten lines.

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### **30.5 INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD**

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In the post Independence period a series of institutional initiative has been introduced for the emancipation of women in the society. The most important of these pertain to the constitutional provisions and social legislation for women and planned economic development. Women's movement has been widely influenced by these broad socio-economic and political processes of this period. Let us examine briefly a few important aspects of these processes and the manner they have affected women's movement in the latter half of the twentieth century.

#### **30.5.1 Constitutional Provisions and Social Legislations**

The Constitution of independent India followed the basic principle of women's equality as accepted in the Fundamental Rights Resolution of the Karachi Congress. The provision of Article 15(3), which empowered the state to make special provisions for women and children, suggests that there was a realisation of women's disadvantaged position and the need for the state to enact special measures to bring them at par with men.

During freedom movement it was felt that with the nation's Independence would disappear many of the disabilities, and problems of women attributed to colonial rule. The national government undertook to remove the legal disabilities suffered by women and initiated major reforms in Hindu family laws. The legal reforms in the 1950s sought to provide greater rights to Hindu

women in marriage, inheritance and guardianship. However, they failed to bridge the gap between legal and social realities. Similar changes in the family laws of other communities like Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews, have not yet come up due to political resistance despite the Directive Principle of State Policy clearly stating the need for uniform laws for all the communities.

With these legislative measures in the fifties women's organisation became passive and lost the vigour shown during the pre-Independence period. Several of these organisations received government grants and their activities were shaped by the grants they received for activities like adult education, nutrition programmes for children, tailoring classes under vocational training programmes and family planning programmes. Most of these organisations were urban-based and the leadership came from the educated middle and upper class women.

In the post-Independence period, two important organisations for rural women were set up, i.e., Kasturba Memorial Trust and *Bharatiya Grameen Mahila Sangh* (Indian Rural Women's Organisation). Their main objective was to assist the rural women in developing leadership potential.

### 30.5.2 Planned Development and Women's Issues

In the post-Independence period it was assumed that economic development policies i.e., agriculture development and modernisation, industrialisation, technological development etc., will bring about better life for everyone including women. The overall growth strategies failed to take note of the existing class, caste and gender inequalities. Planned development in India increased socio-economic inequalities. Let us discuss the observation in more detail.

#### i) Thrust of Development Policies

The main thrust of development policies for women was provision of education, health and welfare. The continued absence of concern for women's economic roles till the Sixth Five-Year Plan shows that women's economic independence was given a low priority. In the Sixth Plan a separate chapter on women and development was included in the Plan document for the first time. It reviewed the status and situation of women in general and came to the conclusion that in spite of legal and constitutional guarantees, women had lagged behind men in almost all sectors. For the first time it clearly spelt out that the economic independence would improve the status of women and suggested setting up of cells at the district level for increasing women's participation through employment. The successive five-year plans continued suggesting programmes for the improvement of the status of women. The Ninth Plan stressed the need for national policy for the empowerment of women for empowering women as the agents of social change. It also discussed the need for reservation of seats for women in the Parliament and State legislative assemblies. However, it must be said that women are as yet nowhere near receiving their due share of the planned development (Seth 2001). Apart from this the nature of economic development in the post-Independence India benefited only a small section of urban educated middle and upper class women whose visibility as legislators, administrators, doctors, lawyers, teachers etc. led to an erroneous belief that women have made great strides and have achieved equality.

**ii) Women's Educational and Economic Status**

The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974) was a watershed in the debate on women's issues in India. The Committee provided evidence of the decline in women's employment due to technological changes, biases on the part of employers to 'replace women by men and machines'. High illiteracy among women particularly among the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and poor rural and urban women coupled with inadequate training facilities for them. In the year 1981 the rate of female literates was around 29 percent and in the years 1991 and 2001 this rates was 39.29 and 54.16 respectively. In the rural areas the female literacy rates was around 21 percent and 30 percent in 1981 and 1991 respectively.

The Committee on the Status of Women in India was of the view that planners, government officials, employers and trade union leaders perpetuated the middle class perceptions of women's primary role as the homemaker and not as the bread winner. Such a view ignores the realities of millions of women in the poorer sections in rural and urban areas, who work for the survival of the family. Millions of rural women work hard on family farms and within the home as unpaid workers, collect fuel, fodder and water, work as artisans, craftworkers (weaving, cane and bamboo works etc.) with their men but are recognised as helpers and not as workers. When they work as wage labourers they are invariably paid less wages than men. The Government passed the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), however, it remains ineffective.

The neglect of women's economic roles, which you will study in greater detail in unit 31 of this Block, results in exploitation of women workers, unequal wages between men and women, higher unemployment due to loss of jobs in traditional sectors like textiles, mining, manufacturing and household industries.

**30.5.3 Women's Political Representation**

Several women leaders, who had actively participated in the freedom movement, occupied important positions in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha (the two houses of Parliament), state legislatures. They became governors, chief ministers, cabinet ministers and held other position within major political parties. Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister. Despite the prominence and high visibility of a few women at all levels of political leadership women remain underrepresented. Their number has never gone beyond seven per cent in the Lok Sabha or State Assemblies. Forty eight women MPs were members of the thirteenth Lok sabha.

One of the weaknesses in the political strategies of women's organisations in the 1950s and 1960s was their inability to mobilise ordinary women and issues that concerned them. The lack of efforts to reach to the masses and expand the base of women's movement limited its effectiveness and agenda for action. The position of peasant and working class women deteriorated and only a small minority of women benefited. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments in the Constitution have, however, brought reservation of 33.33 percent for women in local governance at the Panchayat level. More on this point will be discussed later in this unit.



- i) What is the constitutional provision for women's upliftment? Answer in about four lines.

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- ii) Point out one weakness of the political strategies of women's organisations in the fifties and sixties. Answer in two lines.

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### 30.6 RESURGENCE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE 70S: ISSUES AND ACTIONS

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The late 1970s and 1980s was marked by a resurgence of women's struggle and emergence of new women's groups and organisations. After their participation in nation's independence struggle women again withdrew from public life and the debate on women's issues also faded out from the public arena. Several scholars have talked about the absence of women's movement in the 1950s and 1960s in India and the slow erosion of concern for women's issues. The growth of 'protest politics' and breaking out of a limited perspective of legislation and education as the main instrument for improving women's position marked the women's movement in the 1970s. Even the older women's organisations set up during the pre-Independence or during the 1950s which were mainly engaged in 'welfare' and 'charity' work, gradually started changing their stand on several issues concerning women. There were various issues that inflamed women's movement in India. Figure 30.1 depicts some of them.

However, many women activists, who were working with political parties, trade unions, peasant and workers movements, realised that they were hesitant to take up issues which concerned women exclusively. The issues women raised were the retrenchment of women from textile mills and other industries due to technological changes and replacing them by men who received training on new machines, lack of maternity benefit to women workers, lack of provision of children at work place, wage discrimination between men and women, inadequate education and training facilities for women workers and discrimination at work places. These led to the emergence of separate women's organisations in various parts of the country, which seriously attempted to organise poor women for change.



Figure 30.1 Women's Movement

### 30.6.1 Emergence of New Organisations and Approaches

The growing economic hardships of poor rural and urban women (fifty per cent of the households were below poverty level at the end of the Sixth Five Year Plan) and failure to take up women's issues by the general agrarian and industrial workers' movements resulted in women labourers organising separately. Let us now look at the new organisations and approaches in more detail.

#### i) Organisation

Such new organisations as Self-Employment Women's Association (Gujarat), Working Women's Forum (Tamil Nadu), Sramik Mahila Sangathna (Maharashtra) concerned themselves with the plight of women workers in the unorganised sector. Organising women labour and taking up the issues of their wages, working conditions, exploitation and health hazards became an important task for these women's organisations. Research on women in the unorganised sector helped in developing new strategies for dealing with the problems of poor rural and urban workers.

Anti-price rise movement in 1973-74 was a united front of women's organisations belonging to several parties.

#### ii) Approaches

In the late nineteen seventies several women's organisations emerged which were not affiliated to political parties or to trade unions. They were called 'autonomous women's organisations'. They rejected the 'welfarist' approach adopted by the previous women's organisations, many of which were set up during the pre-Independence period, and adopted 'protest politics' for mobilising women on specific issues.

### 30.6.2 Deforestation and Ecological Movement

Economic hardships faced by women in the Himalayan region due to cutting down of forests resulted in spontaneous mobilisation of women. They hugged the trees to prevent the contractors from felling them. This is popularly known as *Chipko* movement. The disappearance of forests means acute hardships to women who are primarily responsible for the collection of fuel, fodder, fruits, herbs for medicine and other forest produce which give them income and employment. This is why we find that women are even now in the forefront of these ecological agitations.

### 30.6.3 Issue Based Movements in the 1970s and 1980s

The ineffectiveness of social legislation at reform is clearly indicated by several studies in the 1970s. The autonomous women's organisations' took up issues related to women's oppression like dowry, violence within the family, alcoholism among men and wife-beating, discrimination at the work place etc. to mobilise women for collective action. For the first time some groups in Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Patna etc. raised issues such as sexual exploitation of poor scheduled castes and scheduled tribe women by upper caste landlords. Issues of rape, dowry murders, crime and violence against women were taken up. All India anti-dowry and anti-rape movements were launched by women's organisations and Civil liberties and democratic rights organisations also joined them. They launched important issue based movements. Let us examine few of these movements.

#### i) Anti-dowry Movements

Dowry murders have witnessed a sustained campaign by several women's organisations and civil rights groups. Journalists wrote extensively about the dowry problem. In the 1980s several women's and other progressive organisations formed a joint front in Delhi called "*Dahej Virodhi Chetna Manch*". Organisations in other major cities also campaigned through protest, demonstrations, discussions, street theatre, posters etc. against the ghastly murders of young brides for dowry. The Law Commission and the Parliamentary Committee also looked into the problem. After a sustained campaign, finally a Bill was introduced in the Parliament in 1984, which made certain changes in the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act of 1961. The Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act, 1984 was passed. The Act sets a limit to the amount given in dowry but does not ban dowry. While cruelty by the husband and his relatives leading to suicide or death has become an offence, punishable with imprisonment, still dowry deaths continue. In 1986 alone 1,285 dowry deaths were reported but there were few convictions. In 1998, as many as 6917 dowry deaths were reported throughout India (National Human Development Report 2002).

#### ii) Anti-sati Movement

In 1829 the practice of Sati was abolished through a legislation which marked the culmination of a debate initiated by the British.

The burning of a young widow Roop Kanwar in 1988 on the funeral pyre of her husband in Deorala, Rajasthan, sparked off strong protests by women's organisations. The delayed response of the government came in the wake of mounting agitation in the shape of Commission of Sati (Prevention) Bill, which

was hurriedly passed in the Parliament. The Act assumes that it is a practice sanctioned by the custom. It does not seek to punish those who profit by raising money by selling photographs and raising donations in the name of so called 'sati'. There is nothing on preventive action. The pre-sati feeling within the community mounted a counter agitation against the so called attack on their religious custom. It is strange that the barbaric practice, against which social reformers raised their voices, still persists in a country, which reveres mother goddesses.

### **iii) Anti-rape Movement**

An anti-rape movement was launched in the last decade demanding review of the Supreme Court judgment in a rape case, which acquitted the culprit. Women activists forced the government to review Rape Laws. Several women's organisations and legal and social activists held discussions with the Law Commission to amend the law and in 1983 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act was passed.

In the 1990s women took up the issue of communalism and globalisation through a wider networking both at the national and international level. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the women's organisations in India are linked together through networks on different issues and campaigns. While former methods of protest and advocacy are still used, new methods of resistance and mobilisation for change are also being evolved.

### **30.6.4 The Emerging Trends and Government's Response**

One should not get the impression that women's movement in India is largely urban based. We find that it has also involved middle class educated women. There are several active grassroot organisations of poor rural and urban working class women, tribal, self-employed women who are fighting against all forms of oppression, injustice and exploitation. Various national and regional political parties and trade unions have also set-up women's wings.

As a response to women's movement that began in the late 1970s, the government set up women's cells within a few ministries (Rural Development, Labour and Human Resource Development). In government's programme for rural poor 30 per cent women beneficiaries are to be selected for training and income generation programmes. In the late 1980s the government prepared a National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000 A.D.), which has made several recommendations relating to legal, economic, social and political status of women. The government also appointed a National Commission on self-employed women and women in the informal sector to look into the specific problems of unorganised women labour who constitute eighty seven per cent of women workers but do not get any protection from Labour Laws like equal wages, maternity benefits, childcare facilities and better working condition. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments of the Constitution prepared in the late 1980s was passed in 1993 and it contained an across the board reservation of 33.33 percent in panchayats, panchayat samitis, zilla parishads and local body institutions for women. The National Commission for Women was set up in 1992 envisaging to cover all facets of issues relating to safeguarding women's rights and promotion of their empowerment. It was visualised as an expert body to advice the government on women's issues and be a powerful advocate of their rights and hence a statutory body to lend it independence (*Annual*

*Report of Women and Child development Department, Ministry of Human Resources, 2002).* Besides this the government has come out with various programmes such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY), Balika Samriddhi Yojana (BSY), Swasakthi Project etc. for the benefit of the women.

The shift in issues and agenda for action within the women's movement and response from the government are also due to the fact that research on women's problems, particularly on women in the working class and other weaker sections especially during the 1970s and 1980s has thrown several challenges for the women's movement as well as the government.

The new knowledge, being generated by scholars to understand the subordination and oppression of women and their points of strength, is broadly termed as 'women's studies' or 'gender studies'. It is gradually finding a place in universities, colleges and schools as teaching material. 'Women's Studies' scholars and women's organisations see a strong link between 'Women's Studies' and action for change. The women's movement during 1970s and 1980s while being effective in bringing women's issues back into the arena of public debate, was only a beginning of the long struggle ahead for equality, justice and dignity to all women.

### **Activity 1**

Read section 30.6 again very carefully and list the issues that have led to agitation among women in the 1980s. Now write an essay comparing these issues with the issues prevalent in your society. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes prepared by other learners in your Study Centre.

### **Check Your Progress 4**

Tick mark the correct answers to the following questions.

- i) Which one of the given issues is not raised by the women's organisations in the post-Independence period?
  - a) Lack of maternity benefits
  - b) Wage discrimination between men and women
  - c) Replacement of male workers by trained female workers
  - d) Lack of provisions of childcare
- ii) What was responsible for the shift in responses of the government regarding women's issues in the post-Independent period?
  - a) Shift in issues and agenda for actions within women's movement
  - b) Research on women's problems
  - c) Both of the above
  - d) None of the above

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## 30.7 LET US SUM UP

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This unit began with a brief discussion on women's movement as an important variant of social movement. Then we discussed how women's issues were focused in the reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries especially in the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj movements and in the social reform movements among the Muslim women. We have also discussed in detail the aspects of women's issues and women's participation in the nationalist movement. The broad socio-economic and the political processes, which have affected women's movement in the post-Independence period, are also discussed in this unit. Lastly, we have discussed the resurgence of women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

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## 30.8 KEY WORDS

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<b>Evolutionary Process</b>	A process of gradual change in a society from one stage to the other
<b>Franchise</b>	Right to cast vote
<b>Metropolitan city</b>	Urban places with more than one million population
<b>Polygyny</b>	A form of marriage in which a husband has more than one wife at the same time

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## 30.9 FURTHER READING

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Jayawardena, K. 1986. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. Kali for Women; New Delhi (Chapter 6)

Geabrielle, D. 1988. *Women's Movement in India: Conceptual and Religious Reflections*. Breakthrough: Bangalore.

Seth, Mira 2001. *Women's Development the Indian Experience*. Sage Publications: New Delhi

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## 30.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The broad objectives of these movements were caste reform, improvement in the status of women, promoting women's education and an attack on social practices whose roots were in social and legal inequalities and religious traditions of different communities.
- ii) The restrictions and prejudices against women which had their roots in religion. These included child marriage, polygamy, limited rights to inherit property and, seclusion of women. Education of women was seen as the major instrument to improve women's position.
- iii) a) Arya Samaj



## Check Your Progress 2

## Women's and Movement

- i) Some of the women leaders took position that women's organisation should keep away from the party politics as women were concerned with social issues. They also thought that the British Government's help was necessary to bring about changes in women's position through education and legislation. There were other women leaders, who believed that they should align themselves with the national movement, as they will progress only with political emancipation.
- ii) Nehru believed that without economic emancipation, it is not possible to realise equality for women. He disagreed with the limited view that women's education alone can bring about the desired changes and he wanted women trained in all human activities. He said that if women's struggle remained isolated from the general political, economic and social struggles, the women's movement would not gain strength and will remain confined to upper classes.

## Check Your Progress 3

- i) Article 15(3) of the Constitution of India empowers the state to make special provision for women and children. It also suggests that there is a realisation of women's disadvantaged position and need for the State to enact special measures to bring them on par with men.
- ii) Their inability to mobilise the ordinary women and to understand the issues which concerned these women.

## Check Your Progress 4

- i) C
- ii) C

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## UNIT 31 WOMEN AND WORK

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### Structure

- 31.0 Objectives
- 31.1 Introduction
- 31.2 Nature, Range and Patterns of Women's Work
  - 31.2.1 What is Women's Work?
  - 31.2.2 Unpaid Work in Home-based Production and Family Farms
  - 31.2.3 Female Child Labour
  - 31.2.4 Paid Work
  - 31.2.5 Women Workers and the Growth of Unorganised Sector
- 31.3 Determinants of Women's Work
  - 31.3.1 Structural Factors
  - 31.3.2 Socio-cultural Factors
- 31.4 Processes which Transform Women's Roles
  - 31.4.1 Education and Training
  - 31.4.2 Technological Changes
  - 31.4.3 Access to Land and Other Productive Resources
  - 31.4.4 Women Producers and Worker's Organisations as Pressure Groups
  - 31.4.5 Macro Processes and State Policies
- 31.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 31.6 Keywords
- 31.7 Further Reading
- 31.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 31.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with the various social aspects of women's work. After studying this unit you should be able to

- describe the distinctive features of women's work
- describe the nature of paid and unpaid work within and outside the household
- explain the factors which determine women's work
- discuss the social, political and economic processes which transform women's work roles.

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### 31.1 INTRODUCTION

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In unit 29 of this Block we discussed how traditional expectations and concept of women's role have affected their status in our society. Work participation is an important indicator of one's status in the society. Women's work participation

has been affected by various socio-economic factors and traditional role expectations. Besides a significant amount of their work has remained invisible and unrecognized. In this unit we discuss some of the important aspects of women's work. This unit begins with a discussion on the nature, range and patterns of women's work within and outside the household. Here we will introduce you to the concept of 'work' and why much of the work which women do is not included while accounting for working population. The unit is divided into three major sections.

The first section (31.2) describes what women do and their direct and indirect contribution to the family and society both as paid and unpaid workers. An understanding of the determinants of women's work will help you understand the differentiation in men's and women's work roles in different socio-economic categories. The second section (31.3) of the unit provides an in-depth view of how such factors as sexual division of labour, differential socialisation of girls and boys and different role expectations, differential investment in their education, training and skill development, directly and indirectly lead to gender inequalities. The last section (31.4) discusses the processes, which transform women's work role in society.

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## **31.2 NATURE, RANGE AND PATTERNS OF WOMEN'S WORK**

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In this section we shall be dealing with the various components of women's work. Women do various types of work. Their household work remains mostly invisible and unrecognized. Here it is essential to categorise various types of work done by women in terms of paid and unpaid work. This will give us a broad idea to understand the significance of women's work both in the family and in the society. Let us begin with the nature of women's work.

### **31.2.1 What is Women's Work?**

According to anthropologists and some historians, women were the major producer of food, textiles and handicrafts throughout human history and continue to provide a major labour input where production is still in the small scale subsistence sector.

Defining the exact nature, scope and magnitude of women's work remains a problem area because a good deal of women's work is either invisible or is only partially accounted for in the data on workforce participation.

Components of women's work include housework, paid and unpaid work related to home-based craft activities, family enterprise or business and paid work outside home. You must have observed differential work participation of men, women and children within the family both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The kind of work women do is determined by women's position in the society and family's location in the social hierarchy. Figure 31.1 shows various forms of women's work.

The basic elements of women's work within the home are related to the division of labour between men and women. Activities included under 'housework' broadly differ according to age, gender, income, occupational group, location (rural/urban), size and structure of the family.

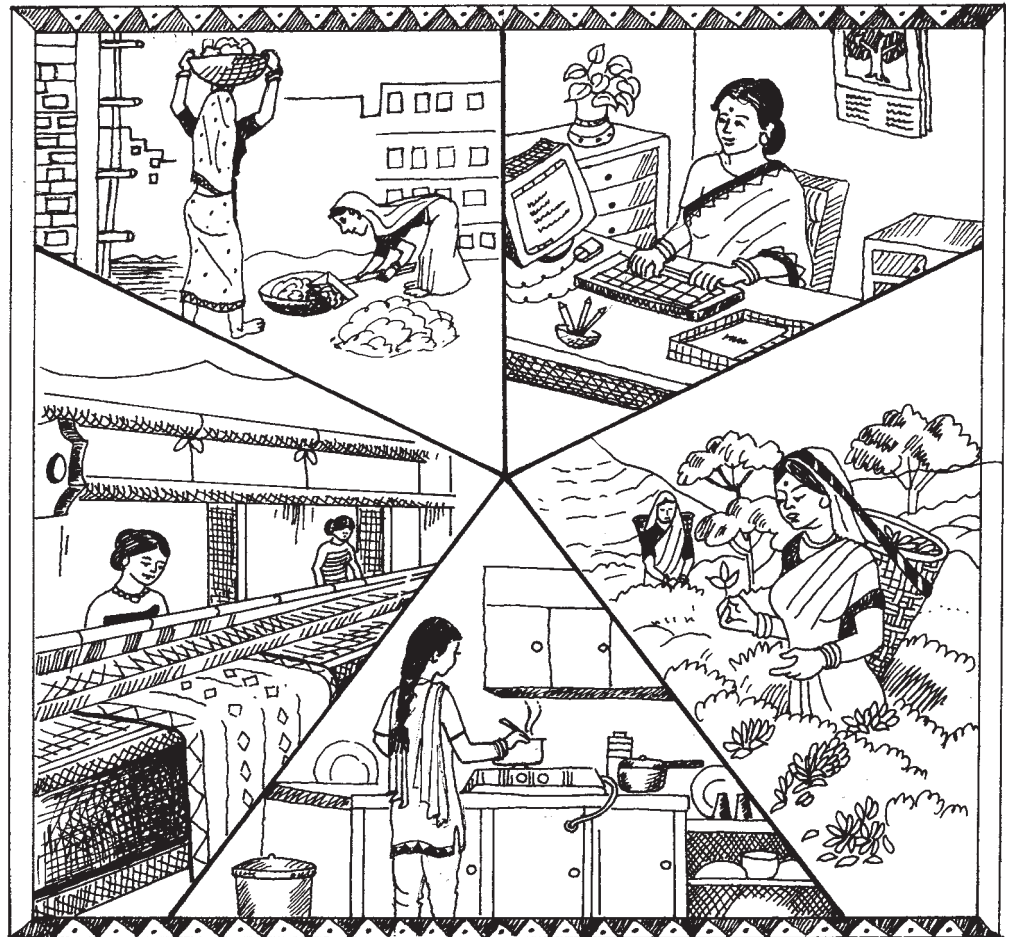


Figure 31.1 Women and work

### 31.2.2 Unpaid Work in Home-based Production and Family Farms

Economists distinguish between production for **self-consumption** and production for the market. Only the latter is counted as 'work'. The parameters of work used in official data reflect this bias. Much of the work that women do in household industries and processing of agricultural products, if unpaid, is not recognised as 'work' in the data systems.

In rural areas the women from the poorer households engage in various activities such as cooking, processing of food for household consumption, storing grains, childcare, fetching fuelwood, fodder and water, collection of forest produce, preparation of cow dung cakes, care of livestock and cattle and house repair and maintenance. Much of this work, which is important for the maintenance of families, is largely done by women. However, this work is unpaid and is not accounted for as productive work as it is meant for self-consumption. The conventional definition of 'work' does not include activities, which are of **use-value** and do not have **exchange-value**.

In the agricultural sector small and marginal farmer households utilise family labour as they cannot hire labour like big landlords. In the non-agricultural sector such as handicrafts, handloom weaving, pottery, food preservation and processing etc., a large proportion of women are home-based workers.

Activities like dairying, small animal husbandry (poultry, piggery, goaterly etc.) fisheries, weaving, handicrafts, are family activities and every member assists

in some aspects of production. A major part of the work is done within the home and yet a woman is not accorded the status of a worker. Non-valuation of women's unpaid work within the home results in non-recognition of women's crucial economic contribution.

### 31.2.3 Female Child Labour

Girls continue to provide free labour in home-based production. Studies on rural girl child labour show that she works nine hours a day providing goods and services, which keep her out of school. She works on an average 318 days a year in the fields and at home providing free labour.

The 1981 Census reported that there were 1.4 crore child workers in India constituting 4.3 per cent of girls and 2.1 per cent of boys under fourteen years of age. Between 1971-81 while the percentage of working boys in rural areas declined, the percentage of working girls increased. This means that more girls are being inducted into work while more boys are sent to school thus widening the gap between boy's and girl's opportunities. According to the 1991 census figures there were 4.3 million female child labourers, out of which a vast majority (eighty one percent) were engaged in agriculture and related activities.

Girls are also employed in large numbers in carpet industry of Kashmir, in lock making in Aligarh, in gem polishing in Jaipur, in match industry in Sivakasi and in bidi rolling. In match industry of Sivakasi, ninety per cent child workers are girls under the age of fourteen. They work under hazardous condition. Female children working in home based industries are beyond the purview of child labour laws. These laws are not enforced even in factory based industries. Even in piece-rate system, her labour is seen as an extension of her mother's labour and is not given an independent value.

Such work cuts them off from schooling, literacy, learning technical skills and improving their job prospects. These handicaps remain insurmountable throughout the life.

### 31.2.4 Paid Work

Women also work for wages in fields, forests, mines, factories, offices, small scale and household industries. The nature and extent of such work differs according to the location of family in the social hierarchy. In the rural sector the subsistence work burden falls heavily on women, while in higher castes and higher income groups 'non-work' of women is given more value. Many micro studies have reported inverse relationship between income level of the household and nature of women's work participation. Women in the subsistence sector have no option but to work. However, their options are limited as they are non-entrants or drop-outs from school. They are often the primary breadwinners of the family, but the ideological bias views men as the primary breadwinner of the family. Let us examine some other important aspects of women's paid employment.

#### i) Education, Paid Employment and Household Responsibilities

The spread of education among the middle and upper class women has opened up new avenues of employment. However, we are to keep in mind here that education does not necessarily lead to employment. On the one hand, illiteracy

among the majority of women in the lower socio-economic group constitutes a major barrier to increasing and diversifying work and training opportunities. On the other hand, pre-defined roles, ideology and labour market forces in a labour surplus economy effectively restrict women's work opportunity among educated women of certain sectors. (Studies have shown wastage of skill and ability among women scientists and degree holders.)

In middle class families, women work for improving or maintaining the standard of living of the family or to provide a cushion against rising cost of living. Working outside home on the same terms and conditions, as men, does not absolve them from their domestic responsibilities. The **dual burden of work** creates physical, mental and emotional strain. Very few women may be lucky to get domestic help or kin-support. One of the consequences of double burden may be delayed promotions or sacrificing new job opportunities due to family responsibilities. Employment by itself does not guarantee equal sharing of work at home or better status of women.

## ii) Agricultural and Industrial Sectors

Gender inequalities exist in all sectors. Inequalities are reflected in distribution of women workers in different sectors, in job hierarchies and in wages and earnings between men and women.

In the latter half of the twentieth century there was very little structural change in women's employment. The proportion of female agricultural workers which was less than one-third of the total workforce in 1951 rose to more than fifty per cent, which means greater dependence on agriculture sector. In 1993-94,

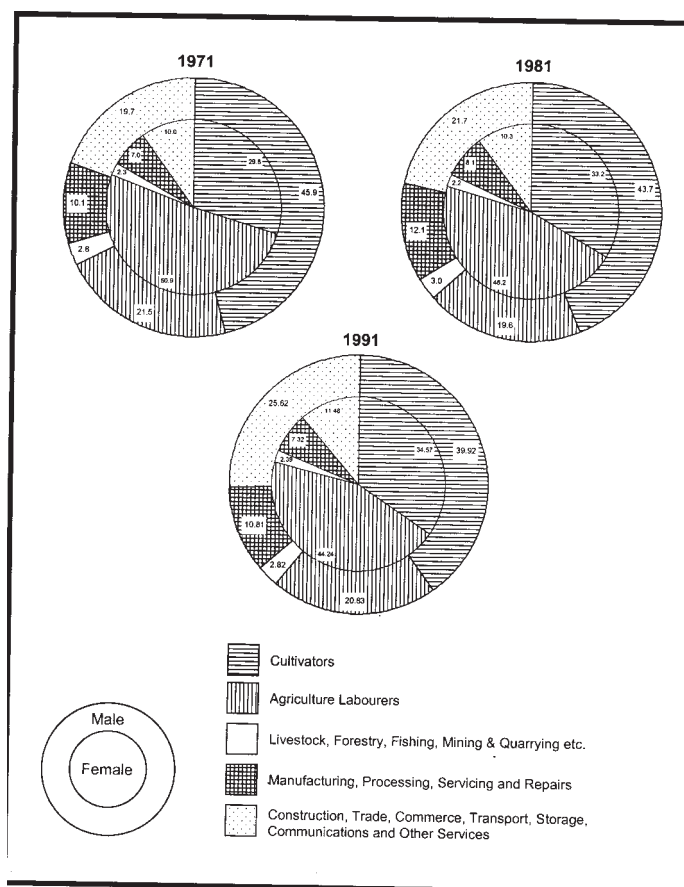
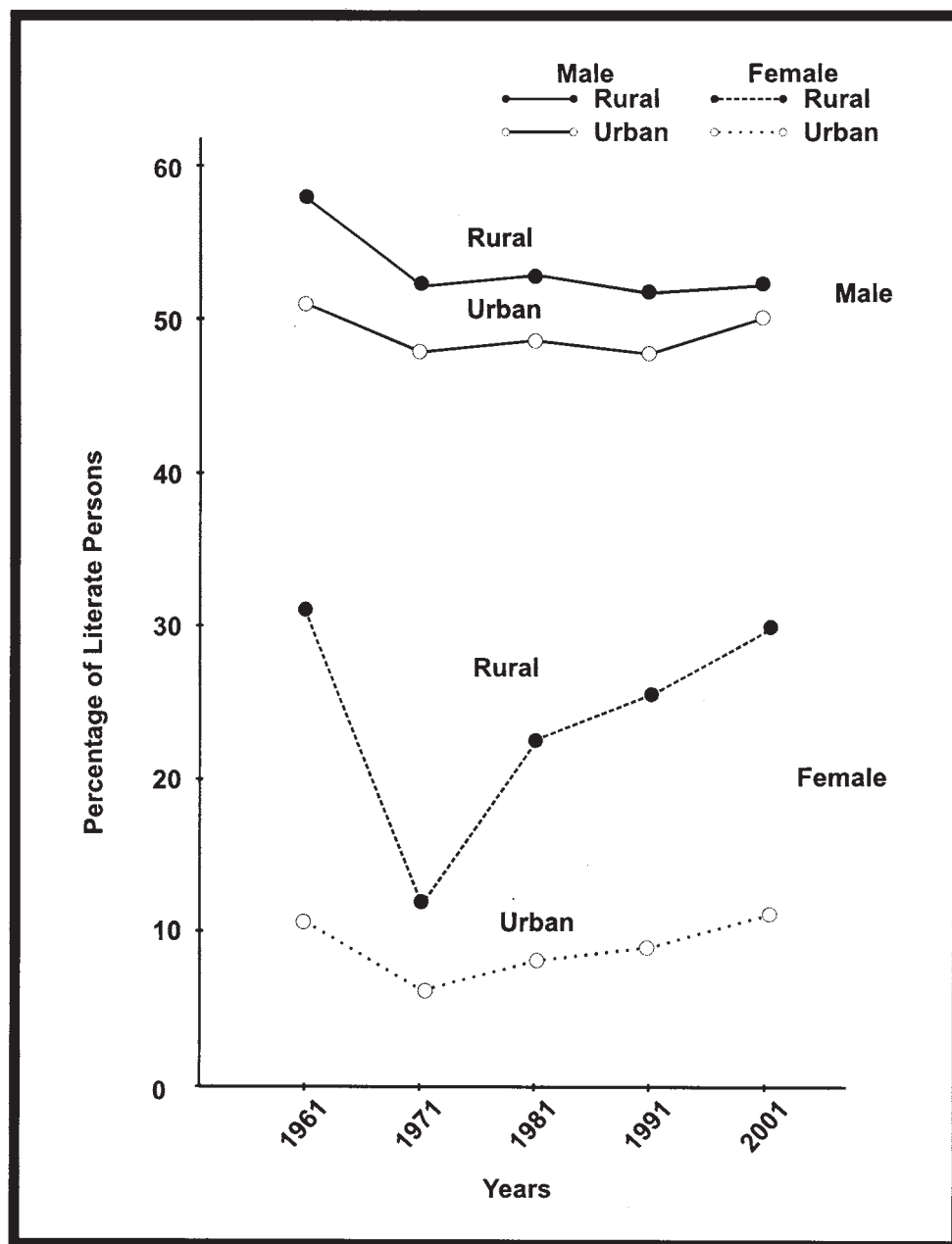


Figure 31.2 Work participation rate by sex in different sector of economy during 1971-1991



as many as 86.2 percent female workers were engaged in the primary sector, which includes agriculture and allied sector such as forestry, livestock etc., in the rural areas. Agriculture accounts for eighty seven percent of women work force in the rural areas and 17.5 percent in the urban areas. Within agriculture they mostly work as agricultural labourers or cultivators (NSSO 1996). Figure 31.2 shows the work participation of both men and women in different sectors of economy during 1971-1991 and figure 31.3 the work participation rate of the total population by sex and place of residence during 1961-2001.



**Fig. 31.3: Work participation rate in India by sex and place in residence (1961-2001)**

Industrialisation has created more work opportunities for a small section of educated women but at the same time has reduced work opportunities for unskilled women workers who were the traditional workers in textiles, jute, mines etc.

Women workers are concentrated in plantations (seventy two per cent), food products, tobacco and textiles, cane and bamboo work, silk worm, rearing coir products, domestic services, education and health services. The high concentration of women in household industries rather than factory-based production affects their status as workers with no control on their labour and earnings.

### iii) **Women in Services and Professions**

As far as women in services and professions are concerned there is no wage discrimination but they are concentrated in certain types of jobs like teachers, nurses, typists and stenographers and very few occupy higher positions in administration, business, technical jobs and professions.

Despite impressive increase in the number of educated women in urban areas the gap between men and women in the services and professions is large. The reasons are many. Some of them are given below.

- a) Girls are generally socialised for their domestic roles
- b) Less investment in the vocational and technical training of girls and female and male stereotypes determine attitude to work and differential expectations from girls education, which is rarely seen as an investment for future. In the middle class families it is seen as a contingency to be drawn on in times of need.
- c) Higher concentration of girls is found in humanities and social sciences rather than vocational and technical courses.
- d) There is less physical mobility among women after marriage.

### iv) **Earning Differentials**

**Earning differential** has been a crucial feature of women's paid employment. The division of labour between men and women works against women. An expression of discrimination against women in labour market is wage differential. They not only get unequal pay for equal work but many jobs that women do are categorised as low skilled jobs for which lower wages are paid. For example, men usually do weaving which is better paid while spinning, usually done by women, is low paid. In construction also men are supposed to do skilled jobs and women do unskilled work and get lower wages. Sexual divisions of labour and lower duration of women's work are reflected into lower wages for women. Women workers on an average are found to earn only sixty percent of male wage for full time work. Wage differentials exist in both agricultural and non-agricultural occupations. The ratio of male to female real wage rates in agriculture is calculated as around 1.3 in 1995, i.e. for every one rupee earned by a female, the male earns 1.3 (thirty three percent) more (NSSO, 1996). Earning differentials also reflect differences in skill acquisition, education and training.

## **31.2.5 Women Workers and the Growth of Unorganised Sector**

A majority of women (eighty seven per cent) are working in the rural and urban unorganised sector without the protection of labour legislation regarding

wages, hours of work, working conditions, health and maternity benefits and childcare services. Those women workers include agricultural and construction labourers, women in dairying, small animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry, handlooms and handicrafts, small vendors and hawkers selling vegetables and food items, washer-women, scavengers, domestic servants, crafts workers and **piece rate** workers in home based production. The labour force in this sector is characterised by higher incidence of casual labour and intermittent nature of work, low wages, and low capital incentives.

In 1988, a National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector carried out a comprehensive analysis of the problem of these workers and suggested to undertake concrete actions for their protection and organisation. According to an estimate of the Commission ninety four percent of the total women labour force were in the unorganised sector. The Commission produced a report entitled '*Shram Shakti*', which made a number of important recommendations for legislative changes for the benefit of women.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) What are the major components of women's work? Use three lines to answer.

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- ii) Write a short note on the types of unpaid work done by the women from the poor households in the rural areas. Use seven lines to answer.

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- iii) Briefly narrate in about five lines, the impact of industrialisation on women.

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## 31.3 DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S WORK

There are various factors, which determine women's work. We can classify them under two broad headings: structural factors and socio-cultural factors. In this section we shall be examining these factors in detail. Let us begin with the structural ones.

### 31.3.1 Structural Factors

The key structural variables, which determine women's work, are: i) the family, caste, class and community, ii) regional differences, iii) labour market iv) environmental changes; and v) the growth of unorganised sectors.

- i) **Family, Caste, Class and Community:** The inequalities in our social structure based on caste, class and community have a significant influence on women's work roles.

As you have already noted the basic elements of women's work within the family are related to division of labour between men and women. Learning role ideology is not only confined to family but to the world of school, media and work which also play an important role in perpetuating attitudes and beliefs regarding women's work roles.

Women from upper caste in rural areas do not engage in out of home wage employment, as 'non-work' is linked to the notion of 'higher status' and prestige. There are some caste-based occupations also such as smithery, pottery, weaving, leather work etc. where there is a well-defined sexual division of labour.

There are different notions among different classes, castes and community about 'appropriateness' or 'suitability' of certain types of work for women. For example, teaching and nursing are considered to be suitable jobs for women. So also in agriculture the tasks of sowing, threshing, breeding transplanting etc. are women's job. Differential access of women to education, training, and resources and skills among different classes also determines the types of work women do.

Majority of the schedule castes and schedule tribes have been socially and economically deprived. The Indian Constitution has made special provision for them and government has followed the policy of reservation of seats in educational institutions and jobs. However, majority of them are not able to take advantage of these provisions. Within these groups women are more deprived. The enrolment of girls is far below that of boys. In the year 2000-01, out of 10,995 students enrolled in the primary school only 4665 were girls. The reasons are both socio-economic and environmental constraints. Large number of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women are landless labourers.

- ii) **Regional Differences:** Another structural factor affecting women work participation in India is the regional variation. In the South, North-East and Central tribal belt, women's work participation is high in comparison to North India. Women's work participation is higher in rice growing areas than in wheat growing areas. The reasons are both cultural and economic.

- iii) **Labour Market:** The family ideology which determines ‘suitability’ and ‘unsuitability’ of certain jobs for women is also reflected in job stereotyping in labour market. For example, in agriculture women do not plough, they do weeding, transplanting and harvesting. In industries like electronics women are mostly employed in assembly jobs. Similarly, in services women are concentrated in teaching, nursing and office jobs.

### Activity 1

Observe the daily activities of two employed women preferably from different socio-economic backgrounds, continuously for one week. While observing please note the types of work done by them inside the house and, if possible, at the work place. Now write an essay in about 20 lines on the double burden of work regularly undertaken by them. Exchange your notes, if possible, with your co-learners at your Study Centre.

- iv) **Environmental Changes and Women’s Work:** You have read earlier that women in poorer households spend a great deal of time in providing goods and services for family’s needs. Many studies have shown that in the areas hit by water scarcity and deforestation, women spend long hours in collecting fuelwood for cooking, fodder for cattle and water for home consumption. In the hill areas of Uttar Pradesh women actively participate in the *Chipko* movement to prevent destruction of forest as it resulted in increasing difficulties in the collection of fuel, fodder and water and other daily requirements of their life (see Jain 1984).

### 31.3.2 Socio-cultural Factors

Values, institutions, norms, attitudes, customs, family ideology, process of socialisation, sexual division of labour, and self-perception are important socio-cultural variables affecting women’s employment. Let us examine these variables briefly.

- i) **Values, Norms, Attitudes and Customs:** Values, norms, attitudes and customs governing women’s work are not static and keep changing over time and space, however these exercise greater control over women’s work than in the case of men. For example, agricultural development has brought significant changes in the life style of the villagers in many agricultural developed areas. It has changed the values and attitudes to work among certain caste groups. Hence the obvious result has been that of the withdrawal of women from manual agricultural activities among these caste groups. Similarly, the process of Sanskritisation leads to the withdrawal of women from manual activities in the families moving up in the social hierarchy. Besides change in the values, norms and attitudes, existing social customs also affect women’s work. For example, *purdah* system restricts women’s mobility and work pattern.
- ii) **Family Ideology and Socialisation of Girls:** Family ideology expresses itself in so many ways i.e. control over girls and women by defining sex roles, notions of family prestige/status, de-value women’s work, girl’s entitlement to family resources (health, nutrition, education) and structures of male dominance, supportiveness and conflict. Girls are socialised from their childhood to accept the family ideology. The traditional social isolation

process introduces gender stereotyping. It not only affects the women's work roles, but also determines the self-perception and role expectation. We have already discussed these aspects in unit 29 of this Block.

- iii) **Gender-based Division of Labour:** The gender-based of labour not only defines the nature of work to be done by the women, it also imposes discriminatory work norms for them. It is one of the important reasons for the high concentration of women workers in the low paid jobs.
- iv) **Self-Perception of Need to Work-choice vs. Compulsion:** Women internalise the ideology of gender roles. Their own perception of work and their attitude to work stems from the link seen between education, earnings and family's status and the importance of their economic contributions to the family. For middle class women in white-collar employment and for women in higher professions, work or employment has a different meaning than for agricultural labourers or factory workers or domestic workers. Clearly there is a difference in attitude to work depending on whether women are working for subsistence or for social mobility. The rationale for work is different in different sections. In poorer households women have no options but to work, yet their choices are severely restricted.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Narrate in six lines how caste values and sexual division of labour affect women's work participation.

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- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Tick mark T if it is true or F if it is false.

- Women's work participation is higher in the rice growing areas than in the wheat growing areas. True/False
- In India, eighty-seven percent of the women working force is engaged in the rural and urban organised sector. True/False

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## 31.4 PROCESSES WHICH TRANSFORM WOMEN'S WORK ROLES

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Social, economic and political processes transform women's work roles. In this section we shall discuss how these processes transform women's work role in society.



### 31.4.1 Education and Training

There are strong links between education, training and better-paid jobs. It is argued that women's education can help them to seek higher quality employment. Such evidence is visible among middle class educated working women in large cities.

There are a few problems still to be tackled. You must have noted that quality of education and access to professional and higher educational institutions differ according to class and gender.

The problem of retaining girls in school and high drop-out rate is due to the fact that poor families rarely see education from the point of view of better prospects or investment for the future. The compulsions of daily living deprive girls of any meaningful investment in their education.

Only a small section of educated girls among middle and upper classes plan their careers. Sometimes their education is viewed as 'deferred' investment to be utilised when the need arises. Women opt for liberal arts, humanities and home science due to sex stereotyping of roles and sometimes reluctance on the part of families to make a long-term investment in technical and vocational education and training of girls and for various other reasons. This is clear from the enrolment figures of girls in vocational and technical institutions.

### 31.4.2 Technological Changes

Questions of technological changes and women's work cannot be studied without considering the issues of division of labour, ownership of means of production and inequality between men and women in control over resources and access to education and training.

For reasons stated earlier and class and gender bias in technical education, women are often at a disadvantaged position when technical changes are of labour-replacing type.

Agricultural modernisation and industrialisation have displaced women unskilled workers. For example, in green revolution areas mechanisation of farm operations like weeding, harvesting, threshing etc. has replaced women from their traditional jobs.

Data from several studies on the impact of technology on women industrial workers (in food, tobacco, textiles and minerals) demonstrates that capital intensive industries had adverse effect on female labour absorption. Introduction of technology needs new skills and training and women are often disadvantaged.

### 31.4.3 Access to Land and Other Productive Resources

In a culture with a universal preference for sons and a predominantly male inheritance system, gender often determines women's access to productive resources (Land, Capital and Technology). A combination of socio-economic factors determine women's access to resources further strengthening the barriers to their access to credit, technology and skill development to improve their earning opportunities. For example, women have low access to land. Since most of the land is owned by the male members of the family, institutional credits including technological know-how are sanctioned by the development agencies in the name of the male members of the household. Thus, deprived

of the productive resources, women become increasingly dependent on men. However, the dimension of this problem varies in different classes.

#### **31.4.4 Women Producers and Worker's Organisation as Pressure Groups**

Poor working women largely in the unorganised sector have gained very little from the trade union movement. Over the years the participation of women has not only decreased in the organised workforce but also within the trade unions. It is only since the nineteen seventies that efforts to organise women workers had slowly begun. Women workers organised to protect their rights and demanded access to resources, land, credit, market, raw material and training.

##### **Activity 2**

Interview five women, preferably from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Enquire from them about the form and extent of their ownership of land, household assets and the other productive resources. Now based on your findings write a note on women's assets and other productive resources. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at the Study Centre.

#### **31.4.5 Macro Processes and State Policies**

Changes in and expansion of work opportunities for women may be brought about through government policies in different sectors of economy and employment share of various sectors. For example, growing need for women doctors, teachers, nurses and functionaries for development programmes, i.e., health, education, welfare, rural development etc. will expand women's work opportunities. Similarly, location of industries or promotion and credit support for handicrafts, handlooms, dairy and fisheries etc. can bring about expanded work opportunities for women. Modernisation of industries or agriculture operations where women were employed earlier may, on the other hand, cause displacement. Policies of economic development relying on technological progress, export promotion and capital intensive industries have serious implications for women workers in the factory sector, if they do not have adequate training opportunities.

Within these given social processes women's work has to take into account the interconnections between gender-based division of labour, household work, access to resources, education and skill development and their economic roles. All women workers carry double burden. However, their family maintenance work remains invisible and unaccounted for. In poorer households the distinction between subsistence work and economic activity is very thin and is largely a matter of subjective judgement.

Most women work in the unorganised or informal sector marked by low wages, occupational segregation, exploitative working conditions and insecure employment. Only a small section of educated middle and upper class working women has benefited from expanding educational and employment opportunities.

Most of the women workers face varying degrees of discrimination (overt or covert) and forms of control due to gender-based division of labour and cultural factors. Gender-based role ideology of the patriarchal family restricts women's options by accentuating gender inequalities in education, vocational training and diversified job opportunities. Labour market discrimination partly reflects these differences, which is itself a consequence of discrimination within the family.

The year 2001 was declared by the government of India as 'women's year of empowerment', which had promised to ensure for women their rightful place in nation's social, political and economic life apart from equitable distribution of resources and a just social order (India 2003). But in contradiction to this promise of the government, more and more women are pushed to the labour market for survival mainly to the informal sector market which is highly exploitative and with little labour protection. The Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) was adopted by the government in 1991 as a part of the wider economic reforms, designed to open up the economy to the international competitiveness. Among other policy changes it included privatisation of public enterprises, devaluation of rupee, progressive abolition of subsidies, and financial cuts to the social programmes. Privatisation and export oriented production have given rise to a major increase in unemployment and the women are the worst affected since they are the ones to be sacked first. They find it hard to re-enter the organised work force. In the emerging scenario more and more women enter the unorganised sector, which is notorious for its exploitative labour, flouting of labour laws and hazardous to health.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) What has been the impact of modern technology on women's employment?  
Answer in four lines.

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- ii) Write in five lines about the ways to bring about changes and expansions in women's work opportunities.

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## 31.5 LET US SUM UP

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Work participation is an important indicator of status of an individual or a group in society. In this unit, we discussed the nature, range and patterns of

women's work participation in India. We discussed that women's work incorporates unpaid work in home-based production and family farm, women's work participation is affected by various structural and socio-cultural factors. Lastly, this unit examined the social, economic and political processes that may transform women's work roles in society.

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## 31.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Dual burden of work</b>	Burden of unpaid household chores and paid employment
<b>Exchange value</b>	Price of a commodity or a service
<b>Earning differentials</b>	Difference in the earnings based on certain socio-economic attributes
<b>Piece-rate system</b>	Money paid per piece or for a fixed job
<b>Self-consumption</b>	Goods and services produced and consumed by a person or a family
<b>Use-value</b>	Intrinsic value of a commodity or service, which is not exchanged for money in the market

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## 31.7 FURTHER READING

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Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974. *Towards Equality*. Deptt. of Social Welfare, Govt. of India: New Delhi, Chapter V

Desai, N. and M. Kishnaraj (Ed.) 1987. *Women in Society*. Ajanta Publications: New Delhi

Jain, D and N. Banerjee (Ed.) 1985. *Tyranny of the Household - Women in Poverty*. Vikas Publishing House: New Delhi

Marthe, Fetherold Loutifi 2002. *Women, Gender and Work: What is Equality and How do We Get it*. Rawat: New Delhi

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## 31.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The components of women's work include housework, paid and unpaid work related to home-based craft, activity, family enterprise or business and paid work outside home.
- ii) In rural areas women from the poorer households engage in activities such as cooking, processing food for household consumption, storing grains, childcare, fetching fuelwood, fodder and water, collection of forest produce, preparation of cow-dung cakes, care of livestock and cattle and house repair and maintenance. Much of this work which is important for

the maintenance of families is largely done by women is unpaid and is not accounted for production work as it is for self-consumption.

- iii) The impact of industrialisation on women's work has not been uniform one. Though industrialisation has created work opportunities for a small section of educated women at the same time it has reduced work opportunities for unskilled women workers who were the traditional workers in textile, jute, mines etc.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Women from upper caste in rural areas do not engage in out of home wage employment as the state of 'non-work' is linked to the notion of higher status and prestige. The basic elements of women's work within the family are related to division of labour between men and women. There are some caste-based occupations such as smithery, pottery, weaving, leather work etc. where there is well defined sexual divisions of labour.
- ii) True, True

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Agricultural modernisation and industrialisation have displaced women unskilled workers. For example, in green revolution areas mechanisation of farm operations like weeding, harvesting and threshing etc. have replaced what were primarily women's jobs.
- ii) Changes and expansion of women's work opportunities may be brought about through government policies in different sectors of economy and changes in employment share of various sectors. For example, growing need for women doctors, teachers, nurses and functionaries for development programmes will expand women's work opportunities.

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## UNIT 32 WOMEN AND EDUCATION

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### Structure

- 32.0 Objectives
- 32.1 Introduction
- 32.2 Education and Gender Inequality: An Overview
- 32.3 Factors Affecting Female Enrolment and Retention
  - 32.3.1 Familial and Social Factors
  - 32.3.2 Limitations of Structures and Delivery Systems
  - 32.3.3 Content and Ideology of Education
- 32.4 Women's Education through Non-formal Education and Adult Literacy Programme
- 32.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 32.6 Key words
- 32.7 Further Reading
- 32.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 32.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- describe briefly the nature of gender inequality in education in India
- identify and describe the important reasons for the low educational participation of girls
- analyse shortcomings of the educational system
- discuss alternatives to the formal school.

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### 32.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit begins with an overview of the educational status of women and the aspect of gender inequality attached to it. We discuss these aspects in section 32.2. Female enrolment and retention in the educational institutions are affected by various factors. A broad description of these factors is given in section 32.3. In section 32.4 we have discussed the familial and social factors affecting women's education. Here we have discussed in detail the factors, like early marriage, *purdah* and other social customs, social and familial expectations and high opportunity cost of education. These factors have affected women's education adversely. In section 32.5 we have examined the limitations of the structures and the delivery systems. In this section, we discuss in detail how distance from homes, inflexible school schedules, absence of women teachers, incentives, buildings and equipment and inadequate childcare facilities have critically affected women's educational status. Content and **ideology** of education in the form of teaching methods and gender biases among teachers, in the textbooks and in the syllabi have also adversely affected women's



education. We discuss these issues in section 32.6. The Government of India has made various efforts for the rapid eradication of illiteracy through non-formal education and adult **literacy** programmes. We have examined these aspects of women's education in section 32.7.

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## 32.2 EDUCATION AND GENDER INEQUALITY: AN OVERVIEW

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Education is the most important instrument for human resource development. Education of women, therefore, occupies top priority amongst various measures taken to improve the status of women in India. However, in India education is constrained by the socio-economic conditions of the people, their attitude, values and culture. During the pre-British era, education was linked to socio-religious institutions, reinforcing a repressive and limiting social structure. During the British period, education became a tool of colonial power, enabling a small minority to have access to education and all the benefits it entailed. The social reformers of the nineteenth century raised the demand for women's education. Since Independence, policy makers have argued for universal education and for making education a tool for bringing about social equality. However, in spite of the efforts made so far the education system has not been able to make sufficient contribution towards women's equality (NPPW 1988).

### i) Female Literacy

During 1951 and 1981 women's literacy rate improved from 7.93 percent to 24.82 percent. However, the absolute number of illiterate women shot up from 15.7 million to 241.7 million (excluding Assam) in the same period. If we go further Census reports shows that in 1911, there were 1,055 illiterate women to 1,000 illiterate men, in 1981 the figure for women had gone up to 1,322. The census figures of 1981 showed that women comprised 57 percent of the illiterate population and 70 percent of the non-enrolled children of school stage were girls. The female literacy rate for the year 1991 was 39.28 percent and in 2001 it had become 54.28 percent. In 1991 out of the total illiterates 60.8 percent were women and this rate was higher in the rural area (69.7 percent). And in 2001 out of the total illiterates 64 percent were women. The gap between male-female literacy rates of 18.30 percentage points in 1951 increased to 26.62 percent in 1981. In 1991 this gap was marginally reduced to 24.84 and in 2001 it has gone down to 21.70 percentage points. Figure 32.1 shows the progress of literacy separately for male and female, during 1901-2001.

### ii) Regional Variations

Inequality in education between women and men varies region wise. In 1981, in Kerala a state known for its general level of awareness, female literacy was as high as 73 percent, whereas in Rajasthan, one of the nine states officially recognised as being educationally backward, less than 12 percent women were literate. States like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were also lagging behind in girl's education. Again, though the overall female literacy figure according to the 1981 Census was 24.8 percent, in rural areas it was around 18 percent while in the towns and cities women's literacy had gone up to 47.8 percent. Kerala continues to occupy the top spot in female

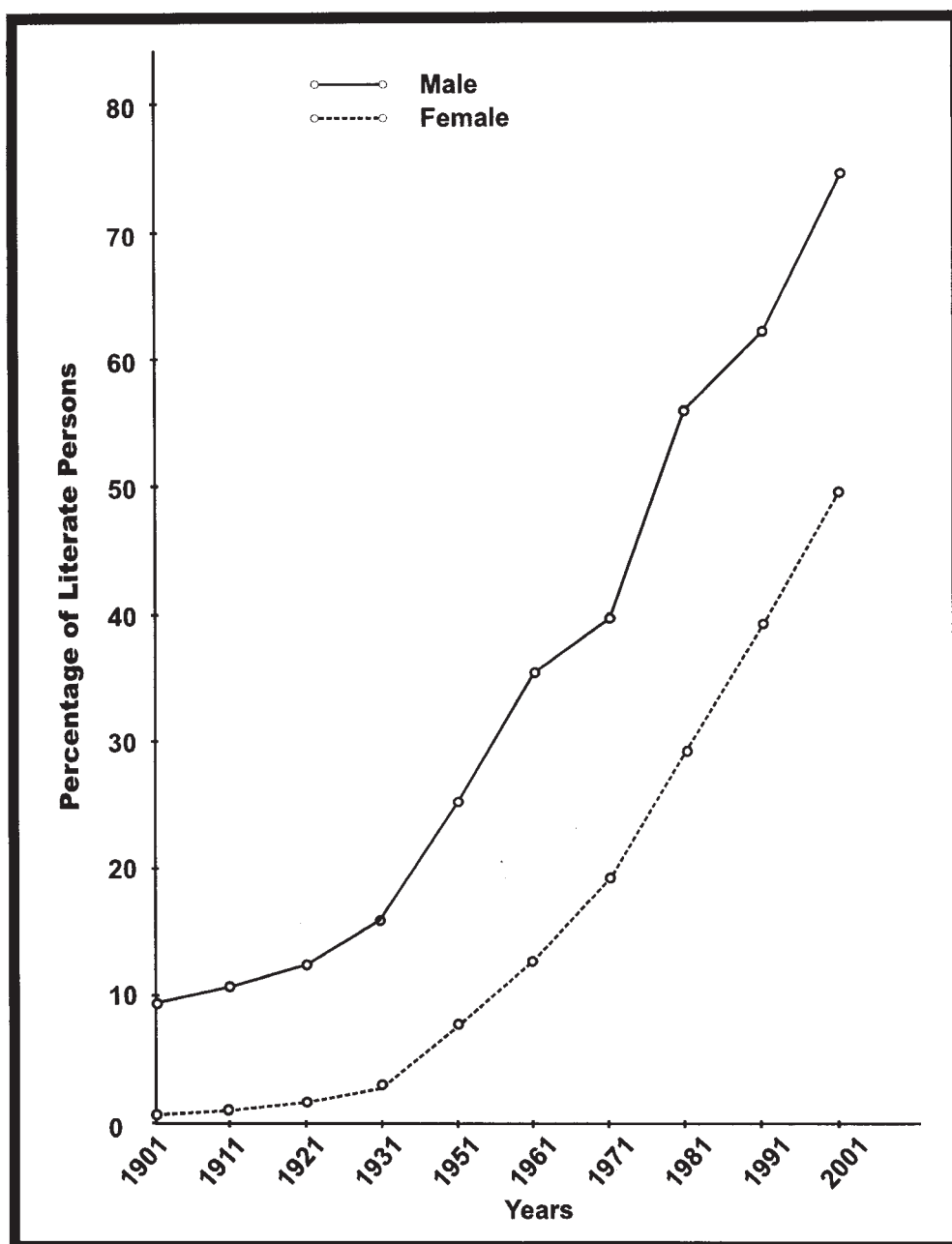


Fig. 32.1: Progress of literacy (1901-2001)

literacy with 87.86 percent even in the year 2001 and Bihar recorded lowest rate (35.57 percent) of female literacy. The States or Union Territories having less than 50 percent literacy rates are Rajasthan (44.34 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (44.24 percent), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (42.99 percent), Uttar Pradesh (42.98 percent), Jammu and Kashmir (41.82 percent) and Jharkhand (33.57 percent). In 2001 the female literacy rate for the rural area was 46.58 percent which was much less than the urban area (72.99 percent). The States with low female literacy rates are shown in the figure 32.2.

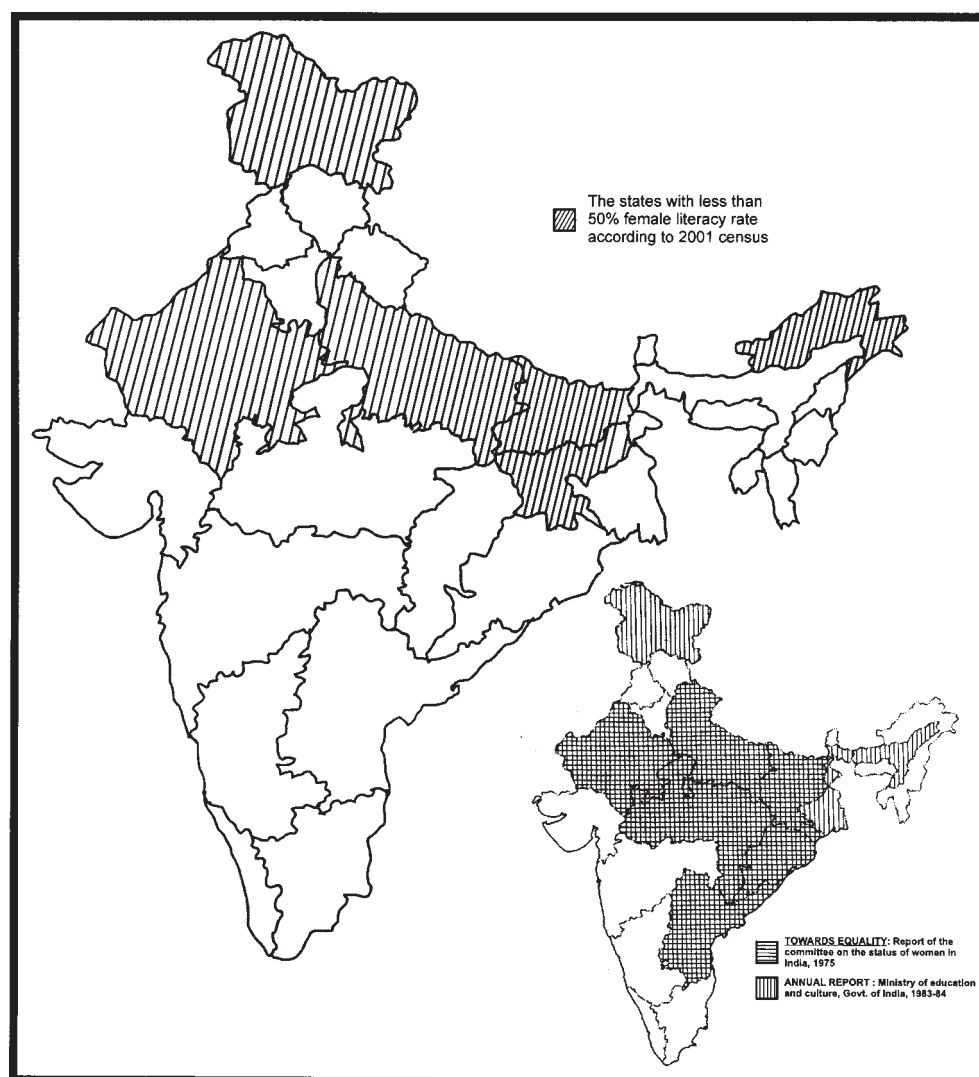


Fig. 32.2: States declared backward in women's education

### iii) Enrolment

1981 census figures showed that 93.6 percent of the total population in the age group 6-11 years was in school. It is also observed that as all boys at this level were enrolled, universalisation was hindered by the lower participation of girls. It is also true when we look at later data. In the year 1997-98 while the rate of enrolment of the boys was almost cent percent, only 81.2 percent girls were enrolled at the primary level (*Annual Report*, Ministry of Human Resources 1999). However, it is necessary for us to view enrolment targets and figures somewhat critically from three points of view: first, under- and over-age children would account for about 20 percent of total enrolments, in a specific category, thus inflating the actual figure. Second, this set of official figures needs to be compared with the figure of almost 50 million children in the labour force. Even if it is accepted, for purposes of argument, that most working children were from the older age groups, where enrolments were lower, we cannot overlook the existence of a certain percentage of whole-time under-ten year old workers. It would thus be more realistic to keep in mind that actual attendance was in fact much lower. Names may figure on school registers without children ever attending school. Third, in 2005 it is possible that all girls in the 6-11 years age group would be enrolled in school. It is of

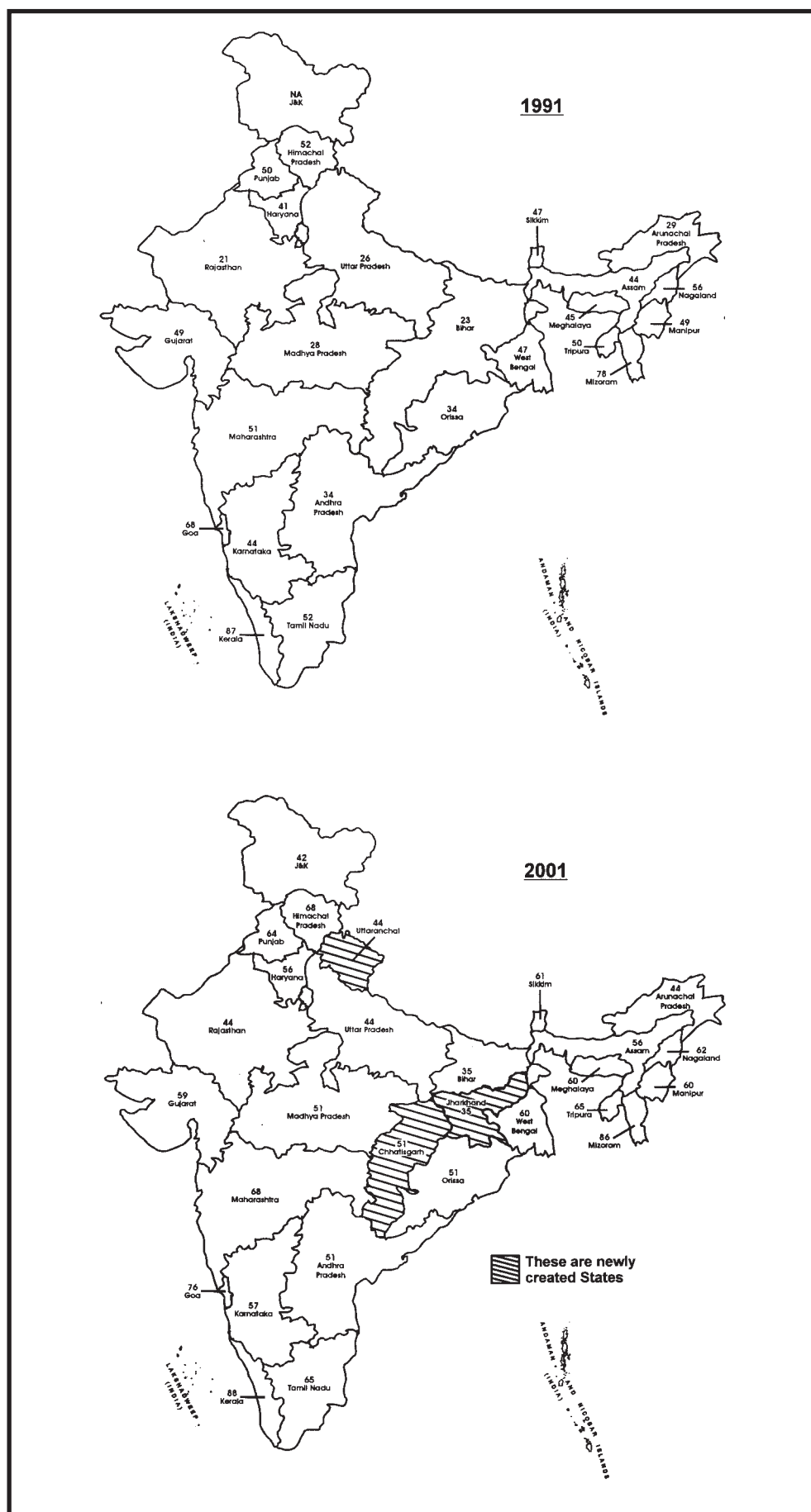


Fig. 32.3 Statewise percentage of female literacy

equal importance to see where these children are going to be in 2010 A.D. Are they still on the school rolls or are they back at work in the fields, homes or in various occupations? In the following sections we shall look at why girls either do not go to school or leave after a few years. Figure 32.3 shows the state wise percentage of female literacy rates in 1991 and 2001.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Write a short note in about four lines on the educational system of the pre-British and British period.  
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 .....  
 .....  
 .....
- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Tick mark T if it is true or F if it is false.
  - a) In 2001 the female literacy rate was lowest in Bihar. (True/False)
  - b) Women comprised only 25 percent of the illiterate population in the year 2001. (True/False)

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## 32.3 FACTORS AFFECTING FEMALE ENROLMENT AND RETENTION

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Though various efforts are made to improve girl's enrolment and provide adult education for women, their enrolment in the educational institutions is much lower than that of men. The drop-out rates are significantly higher among the females. Factors affecting enrolment and retention of girls in the educational institutions are many. These can be categorised under three broad headings a) familial and social factors, b) limitations of the structure and delivery systems, and c) content and ideology of education. Before examining these factors in detail let us have a glance at the various aspects of these broad factors given below.

- a) **Familial and Social Factors**
  - i) Family traditions and early marriage
  - ii) Purdah and social customs
  - iii) Social and familial expectations
  - iv) The high opportunity cost of education
- b) **Limitations of Structures and Delivery System**
  - i) Distance of school from homes
  - ii) Inflexible school schedules

- iii) Absence of women teachers
  - iv) Absence of girls' schools
  - v) Insufficient number of teachers
  - vi) Insufficient incentives such as scholarships, mid-day meals, free books
  - vii) Insufficient facilities such as physical structures and equipment
  - viii) Inadequate childcare facilities.
- c) **Content and Ideology of Education**
- i) Teaching methods
  - ii) Biases among teachers and in textbooks and syllabi.

In the following three sub-sections of this unit we shall deal with these factors in detail.

### **32.3.1 Familial and Social Factors**

In this sub-section, we shall discuss the major familial and social factors affecting women's education in general.

#### **i) Family Traditions and Early Marriage**

By and large, irrespective of socio-economic background, the notion of what it means to be a girl comes into conflict with the ideal of education. For their survival and unity families build on the nurturant and docile aspects of womanliness. These often run counter to a value system which stresses a certain degree of independence of thought, spirit of enquiry, learning by rote, and at a more mundane level, relating to peers and developing non-familial loyalties. While, as shall be seen later, middle class families strike a balance by allowing girls access to certain kinds of courses. Among the large majority, withdrawing a girl from the family's labour force to go to school is viewed as illogical and pointless. The distribution of functions within the household, or what is now known as the gender-based division of labour at home, allots a number of tasks to women and girls. It is seen to be a girl's inherent nature to tend and care for others and not waste time on self-oriented activities such as going to school or playing with friends.

Related to notions of femininity are traditions of early marriage, and *purdah* or the seclusion of women. The Child Marriage Restraint Act (popularly known as the Sarada Act) which was enacted in 1929 and enforced in 1930, fixed the minimum age of marriage for boys at 18 and for girls at 14. The Act was subsequently amended in 1949 and in 1956, raising the minimum age for girls to 18 and that of boys to 21. Yet, a study conducted in late 1980s by the Family Planning Foundation of India found that one crore girls below the age of 11 years were married. Rural women tended to be married by 15, and at a year later in the cities. According to the 1991 census among the currently married women 53.3 percent married below 18 years of age. And as per the National Family Health Survey (1993-94) almost 33 percent women were married by the age of 15.



On “Akha Teej”, annually over 50,000 children are married in Rajasthan, many of whom are mere babies. Other studies reported in newspapers from Belgaum district in Karnataka and Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh indicate that child marriages are common in those areas. According to official statistics, of the 4.5 million marriages that take place annually, at least 3 million brides are in the age group of 15-19 years, many of whom come from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. These are also the states where low educational enrolment of girls is coupled with high female and maternal mortality.

## ii) **Purdah and Social Customs**

By and large, throughout the country, the time span between the onset of puberty and betrothal, if not marriage, is regarded as one of potential danger for sexually vulnerable girls. It is also a phase when girls first experience *purdah* or seclusion as well as restraints on activities within the home during menstruation. The link between a family's *izzat* or honour and control of its women's sexuality results in not only limits on physical activities but also taboos associated with purity and pollution such as regarding women as unclean at specific times. At the same time, girls have to be kept chaste and pure so as to be acceptable in the marriage market. Apart from affecting school enrolments, these constraints and values have led to the acceptance or internalisation of a negative self-image among girls. Such an attitude works counter to the school culture, which should ideally aim at developing healthy competition and a questioning mind.

## iii) **Social and Familial Expectations**

Since the nineteenth century, in the West as well as India, whether girls should have access to the same body of knowledge or not has been an area of major ideological and **pedagogic** debate. In the post-Independence period all major Committees and Commissions have concluded that girls should have access to the same kind and extent of education as boys. Nonetheless, it is only a small minority of girls who are free to exercise choices in this vital area. A look at enrolments after class X indicate that girls tend to go into the Arts and Vocational Educational streams in large numbers. What is interesting is that given their results, a far greater number could study Science and Engineering. The fact that they do not is a direct reflection of familial expectations and an internalisation of these expectations. A similar pattern is repeated at the higher education level.

While girls comprise 24 to 50 per cent of those enrolled in higher education in 1981, there were 23 girls to 100 boys in Science courses, and only 6 to a 100 boys in Engineering and Technology courses. By the year 1998 while the percentage of girls who selected science stream for higher education was around 25 percent only, there was an improvement in the percentage of girls who selected engineering and technology courses for higher education. Thus, far fewer girls do, in fact, go in for Science and Technology than would be reasonable to expect from their school-leaving results. Clearly then there are important non-academic factors and situations which influence choices at the age of sixteen or seventeen. These are related to social and familial expectations of what a girl's basic role in life is to be. In the majority of cases, it is assumed that she is to be a good wife and devoted mother, who may, if she has time,

work as a teacher or as a clerk. There seems little point in investing time and energy on a career in science and other related areas. Again, if it is a question of investment of scarce family resources, these are invariably spent on the technical education of a boy. Even if his sister has similar **aptitudes**, she more often than not, redirects them to traditional feminine-oriented courses. Underlying many of these decisions is, of course, a deep-seated conviction that a woman's basic nature equips her to perform better in certain areas than in others. Even when school results point to the contrary, families and indeed girls themselves choose to believe that there can be no true fulfillment in combining too many roles, or in competing to enter male-dominated disciplines. The percentage of faculty-wise enrolment for both men and women is given in the figure 32.4.

A survey of parents, conducted in a private co-educational school in New Delhi, found that 25 percent said that they would not discriminate in role distribution between sons and daughters. On the other hand, work outside the home such as fetching eggs and bread from the market, taking the dog for a walk or running an errand at the neighbours' were regarded as the boy's legitimate area of activity. Thus only 1 percent of the parents expected their sons to help in the kitchen, while 58 percent felt that this was a daughter's function. She was also expected to sweep the floor, dust furniture and wash the occasional dish in many more instances than was the case for a son. Another questionnaire (Parthasarathi 1988) circulated among 66 teachers (44 women and 22 men) indicated that "male teachers display a traditional expectation of role-behaviour from girls, whereas the women teachers believe in a definite personhood being given to girls and ascribe roles to girls that are incongruent

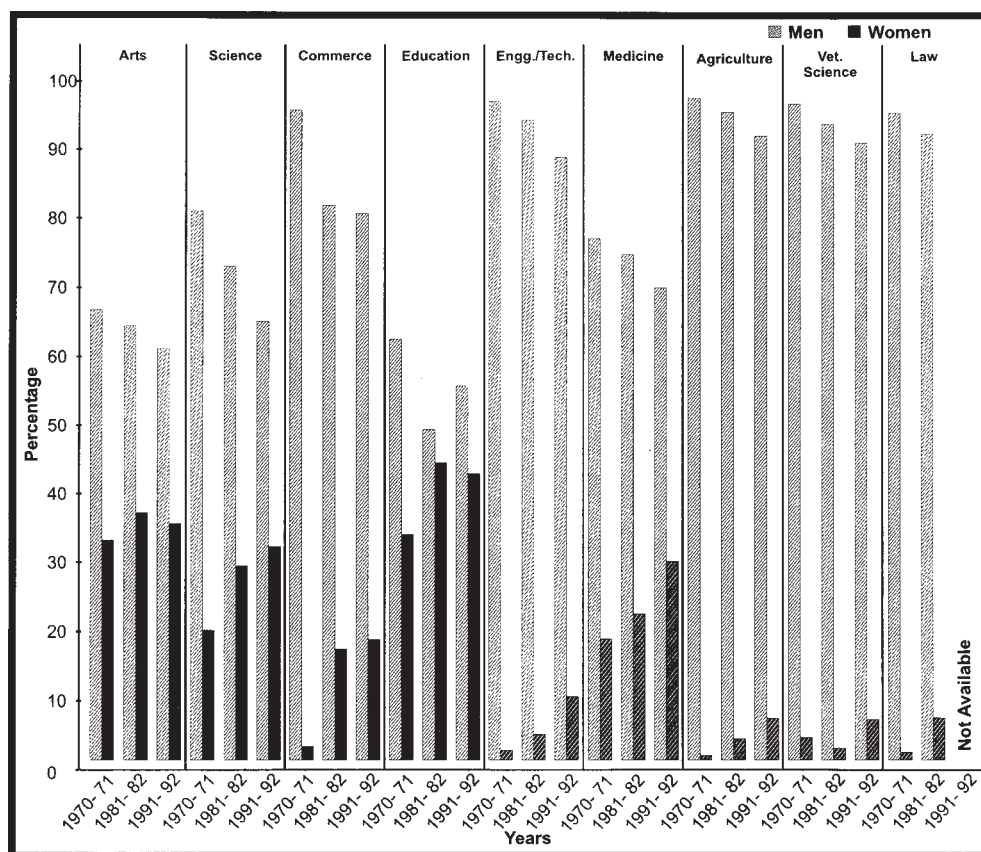


Figure 32.4 : Facultywise enrolment 1970-71 TO 1990-91

with our society's expectations". Interestingly, though teachers of both sexes expected girls to be good at studies, there was greater variance regarding their social role.

#### iv) **High Opportunity Cost of Education**

You have earlier read about the high opportunity cost of education. Most poor families do not consider it worthwhile to educate their children who can work at home or for a wage. It is clear from the figures on child labour that the existence of poor families is heavily dependent on the labour of children and of women. In such a situation, the returns on education, which normally means a few years of schooling, are low. Being in school means foregoing the opportunity to earn or help in the home, thereby releasing adults for productive activity. In a poverty situation, the cost of education in real terms are too high and schooling is seen as a poor investment, which provides no sure access to better employment.

One of the main areas involving the labour of girls is that of sibling care. While their brothers play marbles or go to school, young girls, either in the villages or in urban slums are initiated early into the maternal role. This releases mothers and older female kin for productive work both within the house and in the wider economy. At present, it is estimated that at least 4.5 crore children need childcare services. Yet, government sponsored schemes and those in the organised sector cover a mere 3 lakh children.

Most working girl children also are in the rural areas (see section 2.3 of unit 31 of this Block). It is estimated that almost half of the women's share in agricultural operations is covered by female child labour. In the Sivakasi match industry, of the 45,000 working children, at least 90 percent are girls below 14 years of age. Girl children work in large numbers in the coir industry in Kerala, and in the home-based production of incense and papads, beedi rolling, gem polishing, and in the making of paper bags, the stitching and embroidering of readymade garments and linen as well as in the assembling of electrical and electronic goods. Again, as is the case with adult women, girls are concentrated in more tiring, monotonous and time-consuming tasks (Burra 1989).

#### **Activity 1**

Interview 15 housewives from your neighbourhood. Ask each of them:

- i) age at her marriage
- ii) upto which class has she studied?
- iii) if a drop out, ask why she gave up school or college?

Based on the collected information write a note in about 20 lines stating the manner in which familial and social factors have affected these women's education. If possible, compare your notes with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

### **32.3.2 Limitations of Structures and Delivery Systems**

Women's education has been affected by various non-familial factors, especially by the structure and the delivery system of education. By delivery system we mean availability of education to the population. Let us examine these factors in detail.

- i) **Distance of School from Homes:** In a situation where families impose restrictions on girls, particularly after a certain age, easy accessibility to a school is essential to ensure at least a few years' of schooling. Well over 90 percent of the population have access to primary school within a kilometre of the habitation. Yet, the Fifth All-India Educational Survey published in 1989 showed that 32,000 habitations with a population of 300 or more had yet to be provided with primary schools. This figure accounted for 6 percent of habitations with a population of 300 or more. At the time of Sixth All India Educational Survey the rate of habitations having 300 or more population not served by primary school increased slightly to 6.97 percent. As per the government policy, a habitation should have a minimum population of 300 for opening a primary school. The Sixth All India Educational Survey (1997) shows that there were 5,80,590 habitations with a population of 300 or more out of which 93.03 percent habitations have access to primary school facility upto a distance of one kilometre. Out of 6.97 percent (40467) habitations which do not have primary school facility within one kilometre, 2.09 percent did not even have upto two kilometres.
- ii) **Inflexible School Schedules:** The existence of daily as well as yearly school time tables which do not take into account the work patterns of households deter the participation of children. It is interesting that though the demand for a more environmentally sensitive school-schedule was mooted first by the Hartog Committee (1929) and has been mentioned often by other Committees and Commissions, the issue has not been given adequate time or thought.
- iii) **Absence of Women Teachers:** That the education of girls is substantially dependent on whether they are taught by women or not, has, over the years, been clearly established. From 1983 onwards the Government of India has sponsored a new scheme for financial assistance to encourage the appointment of women teachers in the nine educationally backward states. Yet the supply of women teachers continues to be inadequate for the country's requirement. Despite the fact that teaching is a preferred option for a majority of the middle class working women, only 26 percent of primary school teachers were women in 1981. Interestingly at the middle and secondary school levels, the figure had risen from 15 percent in 1951 to 30 percent in 1981. In 1991 there were only 29 percent women teachers at the primary school level and 33 percent at the middle school and 32 percent at the secondary school level. In 2001 while there was an improvement in the rate of women teachers at the primary and middle level (35 percent and 38 percent respectively), there was no difference at the secondary level (*Annual Repot*, Ministry of Human Resources 2002-03).
- iv) **Absence of Girls' Schools:** The issue of co-education versus single sex schools involves certain specific pedagogic principles and points of view. In the Indian context among certain social categories and in parts of the country co-education at any level is unacceptable, and affects girls' enrolment adversely. Though the financial viability of co-educational institutions is undoubtedly much higher than running several single sex institutions with low rates of enrolment, by and large, the present situation

demands segregation as a pre-condition for the mass schooling of girls. Yet, some figures show that the ratio of such institutions to all institutions is only about 10 to 15 percent, when the overall enrolment of girls is approximately 35 percent.

- v) **Insufficient Number of Teachers:** Under the Operation Blackboard (National Policy of Education, 1986) it was stipulated that in primary schools, “at least two teachers, one of whom a woman, should work in every school, the number increasing as early as possible to one teacher per class”. Figures from the Fifth All-India Educational Survey indicate that 2,628 schools in the country have no teachers; fifty per cent of these institutions were in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. It is possible that teachers were absent on the day of the Survey; nonetheless, the time lag involved in transfer as well as situations where teachers are unwilling to take up postings in remote areas need to be taken into account. Further, 23.91 percent schools have only one teacher, and most of these are in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Meghalaya and Rajasthan. According to the Sixth All India Educational Survey out of the 5,70,455 primary schools in the country 20.12 percent are single teacher schools and another 0.77 percent do not have any teacher at all. There is a decrease in the percentage of single teacher schools since Fifth Survey. The National Educational Policy of 1986 envisaged that each primary school should be provided with two teachers under the Operation Black Board scheme. The aforesaid decrease may be due to the impact of this scheme. The problems of zero teacher and single teacher school are acute in rural areas. There are more than one third of primary schools in Andhra Pradesh (33.49 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (45.46 percent), Jammu and Kashmir (35.26 percent), Meghalaya (37.13 percent) are single teacher schools. Dependence on one individual means that in the event of his or her illness, absence or even transfer, children are left on their own. Again, in such situations parents would be reluctant to expose their daughters to a potentially ‘unprotected’ environment.
- vi) **Insufficient Incentives such as Scholarships, Mid-day Meals, Free Books:** The midday meal scheme which has been introduced in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa has succeeded in attracting children to school, as well as keeping them on for more years. It is also in these states that the scholarships and free books schemes have been encouraged. As per the Sixth All India Educational Survey, out of the 8,22,486 schools in the country 14.39 percent has provisions for midday meals. And 52.60 percent provide free book facility. Nonetheless, delivery systems are not free from snags. A study of Scheduled Caste children, in 1980s, in the Ballia and Azamgarh districts of Uttar Pradesh found that as supplies of stationery and freeships rarely arrived on time, parents did not have the resources to support their children in the interim period. Further, small fees had to be paid to the teaching staff for transfer and pass certificates known as pass *karahi* fees. In Maharashtra where schooling has been made free for girls, teachers have reported two kinds of responses: while the principal of a rural school in Dhulia district said that enrolments had doubled with free education, the experience from a suburban Bombay school was less positive. Boys now teased girls as being inferior, and similar to the Scheduled Castes, who,



they said, basically studied *phukat* or without paying fees. This negative attitude in a previously more or less egalitarian atmosphere resulted in girls becoming withdrawn and resentful. In both cases the Principals reported that they had discussed at length with their teachers strategies to cope with a not unexpected situation. (based on interaction with school teachers and Principals)

**vii) Insufficient Facilities such as Physical Structures and Equipment:**

Over 90 percent of educational expenditure go to the salaries of teaching and other administrative staff. Consequently, very little is left for buildings and equipment. The Fifth All-India Educational Survey points out that 13.50 percent (71,495) primary schools in the country are without buildings and operated out of thatched huts, tents and open spaces. And this has increased to 14.18 percent at the time of Sixth All India Educational Survey. Another 7.69 percent have no classroom and almost 40 percent have only one classroom. An earlier document showed out that almost 40 percent schools have no blackboards and 54.72 percent have no drinking water. The Sixth All India Educational Survey states that 63.08 percent schools do not have adequate number of class rooms. And 25 percent schools have no black board and 52.59 percent have no drinking water facility.

**viii) Inadequate Childcare Facilities:**

Studies have shown that school enrolments go up when facilities for childcare are available in or near primary schools. Children, in particular girls, can then sit in class knowing that their younger siblings are being taken-care of. However, as we have seen, childcare facilities are very inadequate, and despite recommendations from individuals, groups and committees, the State has yet to take the issue of child minding seriously.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Mention five limitations of structures and delivery systems affecting women's education.

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- ii) Write a note on the opportunity cost of education for a girl child of a poor family. Use about seven lines to answer.

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The content and ideology of education has also contributed enormously towards the low educational status of women. In this section we shall be discussing how the teaching methods and sex biases in text book, which form the basis of the content and ideology of education, have affected the educational status of women in India.

#### i) **Teaching Methods**

The institution of the school is based on specific norms regarding age at enrolment, sequential promotion on the basis of examinations, teaching from prescribed textbooks within a certain time period and a policy of punishment and reward. These norms assume a certain level of receptivity, awareness and judgment within an age cohort or age group. In most cases, as educational planners and administrators as well as authors of text-books have been and continue to be from middle class urban backgrounds, their assumptions are based on the experience of children from the same environment. In India, where a majority of schools and pupils are in the rural areas, the validity of these premises needs to be re-examined. A lack of imagination and initiative in teaching methods is usually combined with a rigid admissions policy. The single-point entry system which permits entry into school only at class I and by a certain age is generally followed in India. In this context, debarring a child merely because he or she is over-aged keeps potential students away from school.

Due to the factors discussed earlier, a number of those who left out are often girls. At the same time, it is true that a 9 year old tribal girl would possibly find it difficult to relate to 6 and 7 year olds in class II. Her sense of **alienation** and feeling different may mean that she would leave school within a few months. The problem can in part be solved by the introduction of multiple-point entries at different ages in specially based on primary schools where teaching is based on using innovative techniques for those with a greater degree of maturity.

#### ii) **Biases Among Teachers, in Text Books and in Syllabi**

We find that teacher assessments can be influenced by variables such as caste, class and religious background, as well as sex of the child. Quite apart from the inherent injustice of categorising a child as a low achiever merely because he or she wears torn clothes or is unable to pronounce words with the correct intonation, there is the equally important issue of how the boy or girl reacts to such a situation. It is not unlikely that the 10 year old girl who leaves school to look after her younger brother often does so unwillingly. Her inability to relate to textbooks, which talk about unfamiliar situations in an alien dialect, heightens her sense of inferiority. She feels more at home gathering firewood, chatting to her mother about known experiences and characters and doing jobs she has grown up with. For this young girl the situation is compounded by the fact that textbooks and indeed teachers perpetuate ideas about a woman's basically dependent and inferior status. In so doing the school merely reinforces common familial attitudes towards a girl's, and later woman's role in life. These are particularly relevant

when they influence decisions on subject and career choices of that small minority of girls who qualify to go in for higher education.

Textbook writing often reflects a middle class, urban, male viewpoint. This comes through in the style of writing, choice of subjects and stories. Awareness among textbook writers could result in material, which is sensitive to girls and their dilemmas in a stratified society. We find that irrespective of whether a child studied English or Mathematics, the text can convey ideas on gender equality and justice.

Textbook revision and in-service orientation programmes for teachers have been initiated in several parts of the country, with a view to understanding the issues in girls' education better. Nonetheless, these constructive measures have to contend with a basically conservative teaching force and problems associated with large-scale syllabi and textbook reforms. In addition teachers and educational administrators have genuine problems relating to finishing unwieldy courses within an inflexible time schedule. This results in a somewhat single-minded and unimaginative focus on the content of books encouraging learning by rote.

**Activity 2**

Interview 15 girls from your locality. Enquire about the major problems faced by them in continuing their studies.

Classify these problems in terms of the familial and social factors, limitations of structure and delivery systems and content and ideology of education. Now write a note on the factors affecting girls' education in contemporary society based on your findings. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

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## **32.4 WOMEN'S EDUCATION THROUGH NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMME**

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An awareness that the formal school system alone can not solve the problem of illiteracy led to an early expansion of the non-formal education programme. In addition, the need to reach out to adult illiterates with relevant learning schemes was also recognised. The target groups of non-formal education are those children who have to work either for a living or within the home. The underlying assumption of the programme is that when not at work, with the right type of encouragement, children will find their way to functional literacy and non-formal education classes. Though there have not been enough follow-up studies on the impact of non-formal education on girls, there are sufficient indications that this scheme, like all those affecting children who have to combine productive work with other roles, will suffer until the issue of childcare facilities is solved.

- i) **The National Adult Education Programme:** The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was launched by the Janata Government in 1978 with the aim of bringing those in the age groups of 15 to 35

years within the ambit of literacy within the next five years. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, adult education was included as a part of the Minimum Needs Programme and the National Literacy Mission (NLM, 1988) in the beginning has aimed at the eradication of illiteracy in the 15-35 year age group by 1995. When they couldn't reach the objective by the targeted time, they further extended the target. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the goal of National Literacy Mission is to attain full literacy, i.e., a sustainable threshold of 75 percent by 2007 by imparting functional literacy to non-literates in 15-35 years. Out of the 600 districts in the country, 587 districts have been covered by the National Literacy Mission under the literacy programmes. Its focus is to be on women and backward communities living primarily in the rural areas. About 60 percent of participants or beneficiaries are women. These targets continue to be out of tune with reality. Nonetheless, there are indications that well-run programmes may well benefit entire families.

- ii) **Few Evidences of Change:** An extensive study in a backward part of Andhra Pradesh shows that an integrated programme of education with basic maternal and child health and nutritional services resulted in a high degree of awareness and receptiveness to modern health practices. Follow up studies on programmes built around women in various stages of pregnancy and early childhood showed that knowledge on nutrition, health and general development through the Mother Child Centres (MCCs) and Functional Literacy Classes (FLITs) has increased considerably. The minor ailments were dealt with more competently and dietary practices of both pregnant women as well as infants appeared to have been influenced by government-run programmes. What is important is receptivity to change.

Organisers of income generating schemes for rural women in Punjab reported that some familiarity with numeracy helps in learning simple counting exercises. While calculating aggregates for a number of days at a time was difficult, women easily learned how to compute their daily earnings. This helped them in dealing with exploitative middlemen as well as with family members who were interested in appropriating most of their earnings. Various alternatives for the advancement of women's educational status is shown in figure 32.5.

- iii) **Alternative Schemes:** We find that a major criticism against the adult education programmes for women is that they reflect by and large a middle class world view and rarely take into account the vital role of their client groups in income generation and other productive activities. Such programmes stress the role of home-maker and provide training in conventional areas such as health, nutrition, childcare, home economics, sewing, embroidery and so on. While these are undoubtedly important, it is equally relevant to train such women - most of whom are earners - on how to increase productivity as well as provide information on alternative channels of employment and create awareness of their rights as workers.



Figure 32.5: Women and educational development

These are also areas where non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) have provided alternative models and schemes. Two case studies of the *Kasturba Vanvasi Kanya Ashram* (KVKA) in Madhya Pradesh and the *Kumaon Mahila Utthan Mandal* (KMUM) in Kausani, Uttar Pradesh, indicate that community participation helps in keeping little girls in the educational system. Both are Gandhian organisations, and in Madhya Pradesh the Ashram is the focal point. Attraction to the Ashram led in turn to an involvement with the school, which was perceived as “a place which provides the necessary strength to the members of their families in coping with local pressures”. The centre in Kumaon functions more informally providing *balwadi* services to pre-school children and non-formal programmes for older girls with “little access to primary schools in the hilly areas”. All the staff are local persons, and “the daily routine is close to home life – not too ‘schoolish’ whether it is ‘living’ or food or other aspects”. Both organisations are successful because of community involvement with a **curriculum**, which is relevant and at the same time provides “linkages with mainstream education” (Based on newspaper reports).

- i) How 'single point entry' policy affects girls education? Answer in about five lines.

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- ii) What is the main objective of the National Adult Education Programme? Use three lines to answer.

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- iii) Write a note on the alternative models or schemes of women's education in India in about six lines.

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## **32.5 LET US SUM UP**

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We find that within the broader theme of equality of educational opportunity, women and girls' education needs special attention. In this unit, we have discussed that the social environment, attitudes towards women and more specifically, familial expectations limit the nature and extent of girls' education. We have looked at some of the factors responsible for such a situation and at the inter-linkages between the State, society and the individual. You would also have noted growing disillusionment with the existing system; that alternatives are being thought about outside the formal structure is indicative of the desire for change and positive action. It is important to note that such action can easily fall into established patterns of inequality. Educational reform can be meaningful when concerned individuals and organisations work towards influencing attitudes by demonstrating the possibilities of alternatives. Hence, besides analysing the content and ideology of contemporary education, we have also discussed alternatives to the contemporary system.

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## 32.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Alienation</b>	The inability of an individual (or group) to relate to an environment, workplace or even family situation. This is due to situational factors or the individual/group's own misgivings, hesitations and perhaps failures or a combination of both.
<b>Aptitude</b>	To have tendency or flare in a particular area. For instance, pupils are put into different streams (Arts, Science) on the basis of their aptitudes, which are reflected in their examination results.
<b>Curriculum</b>	Course of study; extra and co-curricular activities such as games, music, theatre, when these are not a part of the formal curriculum
<b>Ideology</b>	The beliefs, attitudes, opinions that guide and direct a system, political party, group, family or individual
<b>Literacy</b>	It is defined as the acquisition of the basic skills of reading and writing, through the formal school system or non-formal learning.
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Methods of teaching particularly through the formal system of education

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## 32.7 FURTHER READING

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Chanana, Karuna (ed) 1988. *Socialisation, Education and Women*. Orient Longman: New Delhi.

Chanana, Karuna 2001. *Interrogating Women's Education: Bounded Visions, Expanding Horizons*. Rawat: Jaipur

Deem, Rosemary 1978. *Women and Schooling*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.

Desai, Neera and Krishna Raj, Maithreyi 1987. *Women and Society in India*. Ajanta Publications: New Delhi.

Indiresan, Jaya 2002. *Education for Women's empowerment: Gender Positive Initiatives in Pace Setting Women's Colleges*. Konark: New Delhi

Karlekar, Malavika 1983. "Education and Inequality" in Andre Beteille (ed) *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

Shukla, Suresh Chandra and Krishna Kumar, 1985. *Sociological Perspective in Education*. Chanakya: New Delhi.



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## 32.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) During the pre-British era, education was linked to the socio-religious institutions, reinforcing an oppressive and limiting social structure. During the British period, education became a tool of colonial power, enabling a small minority to have access to education and all the benefits it entailed.
- ii) a) True    b) False

### Check Your Progress 2

- i)
  - a) Inflexible school schedules
  - b) Absence of women teachers
  - c) Absence of girl's school
  - d) Distance of school from home
  - e) Insufficient number of teachers
- ii) The existence of the poor families is heavily dependent on the labour of children and of women. In such a situation, the returns on education, which normally means a few years of schooling, are low. Being in the school means forgoing the opportunity to earn or to help the family, thereby releasing adults for productive activity. In a poverty situation, the cost of education in real terms is too high and schooling is seen as a poor investment, which provides no sure access to better employment.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) In India, a vast majority of the schools and pupils are in the rural areas. The single point entry system permits entry into school only at class I and by a certain age. In this context, debarring a child because he or she is over-age, keeps potential students away from school. Hence, the majority of those left-outs are often girls.
- ii) It was launched by the Janata Government in 1978 with the aim of bringing those in the age groups of 15 to 35 years within the ambit of literacy within the next five years.
- iii) Non-governmental organisations and voluntary agencies have provided alternative models and schemes. These indicate that community participation helps in keeping little girls in the educational system. The community participation led to an involvement with the school that was seen as a place, which provides the necessary strength to the members of their families in coping with local pressures.

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## **UNIT 33 CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S ISSUES: HEALTH AND LEGAL ASPECTS**

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### **Structure**

- 33.0 Objectives
- 33.1 Introduction
- 33.2 Women's Issues: Concept and Content
  - 33.2.1 The Concept of Women's Issues
  - 33.2.2 Gender Role Stereotyping and Women's Issues
  - 33.2.3 Emergence of Women's Studies
- 33.3 Women and Health
  - 33.3.1 Sex-ratio and Life Expectancy
  - 33.3.2 Early Marriage and Women's Health
  - 33.3.3 Pregnancy and Women's Health
- 33.4 Women and Law
  - 33.4.1 Marriage, Dowry and Divorce
  - 33.4.2 Property and Inheritance
  - 33.4.3 Work, Remuneration and Maternity Benefits
  - 33.4.4 Crime against Women
  - 33.4.5 Problems related to the Implementation of Law
- 33.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 33.6 Key Words
- 33.7 Further Reading
- 33.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### **33.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this unit, you should be able to

- state and explain the concept and content of women's issues
- describe aspects of women's health as an important dimension in contemporary women's issues
- describe the legal status of women.

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### **33.1 INTRODUCTION**

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You will find that this unit begins with a brief discussion on the concept of women's issues. Here we shall describe women as a social category, analyse the nature of their issues, and the aspects related to the emergence of women's studies. There are a series of women's issues in terms of low access to productive resources, medical facilities, educational and employment opportunities and various other social and economic discriminations faced by them. In the earlier

units of this Block we discussed some of the important issues like education, work and employment and the socio-cultural conditions which are responsible for the discrimination against women in the society. The latent discontent of women has been manifested in the form of women's movements in various parts of the country in the last few decades. We have discussed this aspect in unit 30. Issues pertaining to women's health and legal status have emerged as crucial in the contemporary women's movement. In the section on women's health we have looked at the causes of low female sex ratio, the problems of early marriage and pregnancy. In the section on women's legal status we have reviewed the laws related to marriage, age at marriage, dowry, divorce, property and inheritance, sati and violence against women. We have examined some legal measures related to work, sex determination test and indecent representation of women. Lastly, we have tried to understand the problems related to the implementation of these laws and have suggested the ways for better legal status of women in society.

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## **33.2 WOMEN'S ISSUES: CONCEPT AND CONTENT**

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This section introduces you to the concept of women's issues and their content. Besides these, we shall also be dealing with the aspects pertaining to the emergence of women's studies.

### **33.2.1 The Concept of Women's Issues**

Women form an important social category. The basis of this category is not simply the biological entity but also the socio-cultural construct. Social status and roles of women are defined not only in terms of the gender dimension but also in terms of the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and customs of the society. Women as a social category cut across the boundary of caste, class, race, estate etc. social groupings. Please keep it in mind that women do not form a homogeneous category. They belong to diversified socio-economic groups and are also divided in terms of spatial considerations like rural and urban. However, women are frequently an especially oppressed group within each unit of socio-economic stratification (Agarwal 1983: 1).

The concept of women's issues does not pertain to women alone because it neither exclusively belongs to the domain of women nor is it totally an outcome of injustices meted out to women by men. In our society, we find several instances in our religious traditions, which relegate women to an inferior status in comparison to men. However, we cannot simplify women's issue as a conflict between men and women, or the women's movements as a crusade against men. Indeed, these issues are an outcome of the prevailing social system. The norms, values, customs and old socialisation processes govern each member of society, over generations to form his/her attitudes and behavioural patterns. Similarly, these also formulate expectations of each member of society. The structural arrangement of the society provides women low position. They are economically exploited and discriminated, socially subjugated and politically rendered a powerless group in the society. Women's issues are thus perceived to be linked to social issues. These issues are especially focussed on women's unequal access to productive resources,

decision-making bodies, health care facilities, education, employment opportunities and social justice. In this respect, the study of women's issues needs to be incorporated within the discussion of wider social issues, concerning the rights of underprivileged sections of society.

### **33.2.2 Gender Role Stereotyping and Women's Issues**

The institutional arrangements, the values, norms and customs of the society create and sustain female role stereotypes. For example, within this socio-cultural set up, with the concept of marriage as the true destiny of a woman and with her important obligation to bear a son, the roles of wife and mother emerge as proper to women (CSWI, 1974). Hence, by eulogising her motherhood, religion binds a woman to the home and to her role of creating and nurturing children (Anklesaria, 1985: 141).

Women play crucial roles both in the productive and reproductive activities. However, in the process of rapid economic development and social change women's contributions have remained invisible and unrecognised within the given process of role stereotyping and traditional role expectations. Women have been subjected to marginality in all realms of life. In the earlier units, of this Block (especially unit 29), we have discussed how traditional concepts of role and status generate gender role stereotype and expectations of women affecting women's status adversely in society. While these issues have remained in the society since the ages, these have come into sharp focus only in the latter half of 1970s with the resurgence of women's movements and women's studies. In unit 30, we discussed women's movement. Here let us have some idea on the emergence of women's studies.

### **33.2.3 Emergence of Women's Studies**

The interest in women's studies spurted during the 1960s in the West, with the emergence of a broad heterogeneous women's protest movements.

In India, the area of women studies emerged in 1980s. It was in the seventies that, after the United Nation's General Assembly Declaration of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1967), and the subsequent UN request to its member states to submit report on the status of women in their countries, the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) was set up. The Committee submitted its report in 1974 (Mazumdar 1983: 24). Again in response to the U.N. Call for Action (1975) and on the basis of the findings of the CSWI report, the Government of India has drawn up a Draft National Plan of Action for Women. The Plan accords priority to the need of purposive research in "education, health, welfare and employment of women with special emphasis to the weaker section of women whose conditions have most adversely affected the process of social change" (ICSSR 1975: 7). The ICSSR has recognised the status of women as the priority area of research. The University Grant Commission (UGC) has also opened Women's Studies Centres in some Universities all over the country. Besides the ICSSR and UGC, various research organisations and Universities, like Centre for Women's Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, SNDT University have also taken women issues as the focal point of their study.

In India a large body of literature has emerged on women studies since the 1980s. These have covered various aspects including their social status,

economic roles in agriculture, industry and plantation, political participation in the national movement, peasant movements and industrial unrest. Some recent studies have also touched upon their legal and medical status. Besides the social science studies various national committees and commissions have also produced important reports stating the status of women in contemporary Indian society. The most important of these have been that of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974, National Commission on Self-Employed Women, 1988, National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988, National Commission for Women, 1992 etc.

While the social scientists, policy planners and the media generated enormous data on women's issues in India, since late nineteen seventies there have emerged numerous women's organisations in various parts of the country. These organisations have made their presence felt through various mass mobilisations and protests against women's discrimination in the society. Since the beginning of 1980s there has been increasing awareness among the women, both in the rural and urban areas, though in varying degrees. They have raised the issues related to the socio-economic injustice faced by them in the society. With the growing awareness women's issues have come into sharp focus in literature, media, discussion and policy formulation. Hence, women's health and legal status have emerged to be crucial contemporary women's issues in India. In the following sections we shall be discussing these issues in detail.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) What do you mean by women's issues? Answer in six lines.
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- ii) Write a note on the priority of research as accorded by the National Plan of Action for Women. Use four lines for your answer.
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## **33.3 WOMEN AND HEALTH**

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In India, within the given socio-cultural matrix women get low access to medical care. Women belonging to the low strata of the socio-economic hierarchy and to the rural areas have been the critical manifestation of this aspect. Women's health is affected by a series of interrelated economic and

socio-cultural factors, viz. levels of earnings and educational background, and “the attitudes to marriage, age of marriage, value attached to fertility and sex of the child, the pattern of family organisations and the ideal role demanded of Women by social conventions” (Government of India 1988: 97). Hence we are to examine the question of women’s health within the given context.

In this section we shall be examining some of the important features of women’s health-status in India.

### **33.3.1 Sex-ratio and Life Expectancy**

Sex-ratio (number of female per 1,000 male) is an important indicator of women’s status in the society. The census figures show that while the female population has increased from 117 millions in 1901 to 329 millions in 1981 and 495 million in 2001, the number of females per thousand males is steadily declining. In 1901, there were 972 females per 1,000 males, while by 1971, the ratio had come down to 930 females per 1,000 males. In 1981 there has been only a nominal increase in the female sex-ratio with 934 females to 1,000 males. It has further declined to 927 in 1991. And it has gone slightly up in 2001 to 933.

Similarly, though life expectancy has increased for both the sexes, the gap between the two is widening. In 1921 the expectation of life for both males and females was 26 years. By 1961-71, the male life expectancy increased to 47.1 years, while that of females to 45.6 years only. Life expectancy has increased over the decade from 44.7 years in 1971 to 54.7 in 1980 for women. It was estimated to be slightly higher in 1980 for women than men: 54.7 and 54.1 years at birth respectively. During 1995-2000 the life expectancy for women and men were 64.9 and 61.9 respectively. However, age specific death rates indicate higher mortality for female children and women for every five year period till 35 years of age (Government of India 1988: 97). The low female sex-ratio and the life expectancy of the female are partly due to differential sex-ratio of newly born infants and partly due to high female mortality rate. Female mortality is to a great extent due to neglect during early childhood, death during childbirth and infant mortality. Let us discuss these aspects briefly.

#### **i) Neglect During Early Childhood**

The neglect of the girl child starts very early in life. The extent of neglect varies from family to family depending on their economic position. But in comparison to her male counterpart a female child is relatively neglected in most of the socio-economic strata. Throughout the country it has been noticed that when the girl child depends on breast feeding the chances of her survival are relatively more. Data from various sources shows that from infancy till the age of fifteen the death rate far exceeds the mortality rate of male child. There are several causes underlying this. Firstly, the female children are breast fed for a far shorter period than their male counterparts. Secondly, during illness parents show a greater concern towards male children. This neglect is quite often enforced by poor economic condition. Finally, in addition to the intake of insufficient and non-nutritious food the female child is exposed to a greater workload very early in life. Often in families of weaker economic strength the girl child is found attending the household chores as well as taking care of her younger brothers and sisters.



## ii) **Death during Childbirth**

Early marriages expose women to longer child bearing period. This means greater health hazards to women and children. Several studies show that teenaged mothers' risk to health for both themselves and their children. This risk is further enhanced by poor nutrition. Various surveys indicate that women's caloric content is about 100 calories (per women per day) less than they expend, whereas men show an 800 caloric surplus intake. Women expend a great deal of energy working inside and outside the house, whereas they often have insufficient food. Customarily they often eat after the men and other members of the family have eaten. This is especially true in joint families in both urban and rural areas. This results in complications due to incorrect methods of delivery. Besides these, lack of knowledge and improper care during post natal period, and frequent pregnancies lead to larger foetal wastage, birth of larger number of low weight babies, and death of young women.

## iii) **Female Infanticide and Foetal Killing**

This refers to killing the infant soon after its birth or at the foetus stage. The former is common amongst certain tribes and caste groups such as the Kallars of Tamil Nadu. The Kallars live in abject poverty. For livelihood they work in illicit liquor distilleries and coconut groves. Which require more male hands. The birth of a daughter is burden for them for not only there's insufficient occupation for her, but dowry has to be given for her wedding and other gifts to be given to her husbands family on various occasions after the solemnisation of the marriage.

Foetal killing has been a crucial problem in some urban areas. A medical diagnostic process called, amniocentesis, is used in the U.S.A. to check possible deformities of the unborn child. However, this is fast being used by parents to select the sex of their child. Misuse of the sex determination test has been a crucial issue in some urban places in India. This has resulted in a new type femicide i.e., abortion of female foetuses. A survey carried out in Bombay during 1984 revealed that out of 8,000 abortions 7,999 were female foetuses (Government of India 1988: 98). It is reported that in Dharampuri district of Tamil Nadu, the place where female infant mortality rate as per 1991 census was 100.1, 105 female infants were killed every month in 1997. Testing for sex determination of the unborn child has been now banned in India. The causes and concerns of women's health hazards are shown in figure 33.1.

## **33.3.2 Early Marriage and Women's Health**

Early marriage affects women's health status adversely. A vast number of girls are married at the teenage. According to the 1991 census among the currently married women 53.3 percent married below 18 years of age. And as per the National Family Health Survey (1993-94) almost 33 percent women were married by the age of 15. It leads to teenage pregnancy and various physiological problems. In 1981, 7 percent of the girls in the age group of 10-14 and 43 percent in the age group of 15-19 were married (Government of India 1988). Thus, 50 percent of the girls is introduced to the sexual life and to the reproduction processes at the teenage. Because of malnutrition, overburden of work, illiteracy, ignorance of the sex-behaviour these pregnant girls take high risk of life. Around 10 to 15 percent of the annual births are from these adolescent mothers. However, most of their babies suffer from malnutrition, under weight, and risk of mortality.

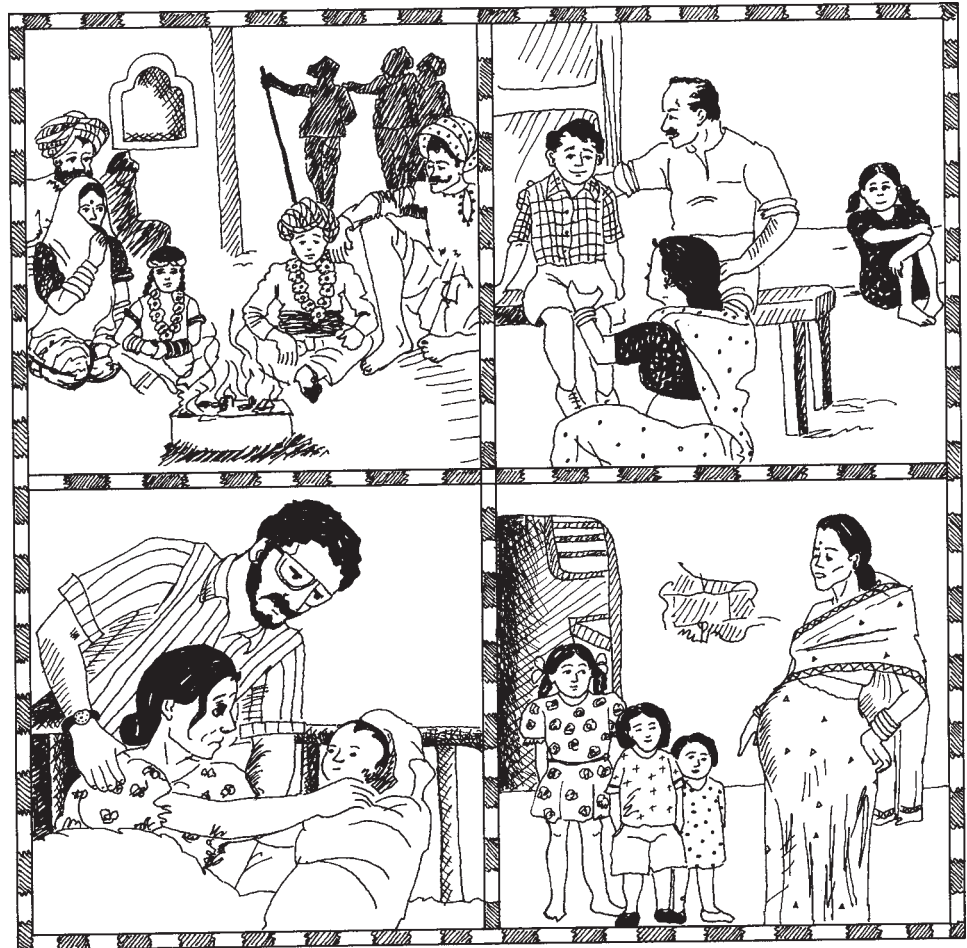


Figure 33.1 Women and health

### 33.3.3 Pregnancy and Women's Health

In India, women have on an average 8-9 pregnancies and they spend around 80 percent of their reproductive years in pregnancy and lactation. Study shows that in the low income group pregnant women have deficiency of 1,100 calories and lactating women 1,000 calories. Women of the lower socio-economic groups gain only around 3-5 kilograms during pregnancy which is far less than the required weight. Anaemia in pregnancy accounts directly 15 to 20 percent of all maternal deaths in India. The maternal-mortality according to official report is 400 to 500 per 1,00,000 births. However, this figure is as high as 1,000 to 1,200 in some rural areas. Again, more than 71 percent and 29 percent of the deliveries in the rural and urban areas took place without trained personnel (Government of India 1988).

In most of the rural areas, Medical Termination of Pregnancy services are not available. Besides, women are not aware about the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 that has made abortion legal. Hence, illegal abortions by incompetent persons continue, resulting in abortion-related mortality and morbidity as serious problems (Government of India 1988).

#### Check Your Progress 2

Tick mark the correct answers of the following question.

- i) Which one of the following is a reason for female mortality?
  - a) Neglect of female during early childhood

- b) Death during childbirth
  - c) Infant mortality
  - d) All of the above
- ii) Which one of the following is a cause of high risk to the life of the adolescent mothers?
- a) Malnutrition
  - b) Over-burden of work
  - c) Illiteracy
  - d) All of the above

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## 33.4 WOMEN AND LAW

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Women's access to legal equality has been one of serious concerns of the women's movement. During the social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century, the movements for women's rights in India centered around the major problems of infant marriages, widowhood and property rights for women. During the freedom struggle and the discussion on Indian Constitution the major debate on women's legal equality centered around the Hindu Code Bill. The debate recognises that "women are not accepted as man's social, economic or political equals and that the discriminations can be effectively reduced, if not eliminated by passing appropriate laws and evolving an effective machinery to implement those laws. And so, after Independence we have the phase of legal reform, progressive, bold, legislative initiatives, which translated constitutional commitments and guarantees into laws to help improve women's legal status" (Government of India 1988: 135).

In the post-Independence period many laws were enacted with the objective of improving the social status of women and ending discrimination and oppression against women. In the following sub-section we shall be examining some of these laws.

### 33.4.1 Marriage, Dowry and Divorce

In this sub-section we shall discuss some of the major laws relating to marriage, dowry and divorce. In independent India significant laws and amendments to the existing laws have been introduced in these areas.

#### i) Marriage

In traditional India, the institution of **polygyny** where a man could take more than one wife at the same time, was widely prevalent. It is only in the last few decades that polygyny is steadily on the decline. The Government of India has banned polygamy for all the government servants. Monogamy has been accepted in the laws of all other religions except Islam. Muslim law regards marriage as a contract where the husband has the right to have more than one wife and children through other wives. He also has the right to divorce his first wife without having to pay any compensation to her.

This gives rise to a growing sense of insecurity for the wife and the children, who not only have to live at the mercy of the husband and father respectively, but can also be rendered destitute on divorce. Divorce can be obtained among the Muslims by the mere utterance of the term '*talak*' thrice by the husband.

The Supreme Court has upheld Muslim Women's right to receive maintenance allowance from her former husband but this does not invalidate the very act of polygyny, as it does not stand legally wrong. According to the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), it is important to ban polygyny in order to establish social justice and equality for Muslim women. The Committee observed that "full equality of sexes can hardly be possible in a legal system which permits polygamy and a social system which tolerates it. The only personal law, which has remained impervious to the changing trend from polygamy to monogamy, is Muslim law. We are of the firm view that there cannot be any compromise on the basic policy of monogamy being the rule for all communities in India. Any compromise in this regard will only perpetuate the existing inequalities in the status of women".

#### **ii) Age at Marriage**

To curb the practice of getting girls married even before they have attained puberty, the Sarda Act or Child Marriage Restraint Act was introduced in 1929, which fixed the age at marriage for girls to 15 years. This Act applied to all the communities. This was later revised in 1954 when the Special Marriage Act was passed which fixed minimum age of marriage at 21 years for males and 18 years for females. However, investigations show that quite often marriages of the girls are fixed below 18 years.

There are prejudices and certain beliefs underlying this preference for child marriage, especially among rural and backward communities. Dominant is the popular notion of the woman's role defined in terms of marriage, child bearing and rearing and taking care of all other domestic activities. Thus women are regarded as dependent beings who would ultimately move from the father's house to the husband's house. This largely explains the parent's reluctance in sending girl children for formal education. Instead they tutor the girl child to handle all domestic chores which are to benefit her after marriage.

Added to these above reasons is the loophole in our legislation, which while penalising the performance of child marriage on one hand, recognises the marriage itself is valid (ICSSR 1975: 43).

#### **iii) Dowry**

At the beginning of the 1980s, due to spurt in the incidents of deaths of young married women reported as "dowry victims" there has been an increasing concern of many voluntary organisations to raise their voice in protest against the issue of dowry. They have pressurised the government to take strong action against the practice of dowry. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 was amended in 1984 and again in 1986 to make the provision of this law more stringent. Under this law court now has powers to act on its own knowledge or on a complaint by any recognised welfare organisation. The offence has been made cognisable for the purpose of investigation. A new section on dowry-murder is added in Indian Penal Code (IPC). The Indian Evidence Act amended to shift the burden of proof to the husband and his family where dowry is

demand and the bride dies within 7 years of the marriage otherwise than under normal circumstances. This amendment has also made provision for the appointment of Dowry Prohibition Officers and Advisory Committee to look after the issues pertaining to dowry (Government of India 1988). Anti-dowry cells are also established in some important urban centres to tackle this issue effectively.

#### iv) **Divorce**

The personal laws clearly discriminate between the husband's and the wife's rights to seek divorce. In the Christian law the husband can seek divorce if the wife has committed adultery. But the wife has to prove a second offence along with adultery (incest, bigamy, cruelty, desertion) in order to obtain a divorce. Similarly, the Muslim law grants absolute power to the husband to dissolve the marriage at his will. The wife on the other hand could seek dissolution only if

- a) it's a divorce on mutual consent.
- b) divorce by agreement on the wife's giving some consideration to the husband ;
- c) divorce where the husband delegates.

The Muslim women are also not given any compensation besides the trivial *mehr* or dowry amount. However, the Muslim personal law granted the right to women to keep their children till the age of seven, after the custody cases are decided. But as these cases are dragged on for a long time it became very difficult for the Muslim women and never get the right to keep their children.

However, quite often these laws are not implemented because of sheer ignorance of a majority of the women of their rights to divorce, maintenance and adoption.

It is important to mention here that women and men of all religious communities have the choice of getting married under Special marriage Act, 1954. It has more equitable provisions for marriage and divorce. However, society looks down upon a divorced woman as the 'culprit' while man is able to remarry without a stigma. Moreover, most women suffer from lack of education and economic independence and are left in a desperate situation after divorce.

We need to take a note of the amendment in the Hindu Marriage Act as well as the Special Marriage Act in December 2003. It eases the restrictions on judicial jurisdiction in matrimonial matters. Earlier the wife and the husband could file matrimonial proceedings only where they last resided together or where their marriage had been solemnised. The latest amendment allows one to file a case in the family court of one's current place of residence.

### **33.4.2 Property and Inheritance**

Women are relegated to a secondary status in terms of property and inheritance. The Hindu Laws as well as the Indian Succession Act, 1925, which applies to all minority communities, grant women only negligible ownership rights.

- i) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 was introduced in place of the *Mitakshara* and the *Dayabhaga* Schools that had governed Hindu Succession rights for a long time. The position of women was one of the



dependence with barely any proprietary rights. The Act of 1956, brought radical changes in the pattern of succession, the most important being equal rights for male and female heirs. But this was later codified in the face of resistance and a power structure was laid down which excluded women from exercising direct control over family assets. The Act makes discrimination between unmarried, married and widowed daughters. It grants residence rights only to unmarried and widowed daughters or daughters whose husbands have deserted them. Thus immovable property in the form of house and land remains under the direct control of males. This is further supported by the virilocal pattern of residence where women are expected to leave their natal home to reside in their husband's home after marriage. This practice levels credibility to control property by male members in order to avoid partition of property. In addition, strong **filial ties** restrain a woman from dragging her brother to the court of laws. On the other hand, in her husband's house too, the woman does not have direct control over his land and property. This makes her the ultimate loser.

Interestingly, at the level of the central government, there are indications of support from some significant elements within the State and initiated measures towards reforming Hindu inheritance laws in a gender equal direction. But these initiatives remained low key due to the lack of adequate local mobilisation by the civil society (Agarwal, Bina 2002).

- ii) Amongst the Muslims too, the son gets two-thirds of the property whereas the daughter gets only one-third. If a man dies leaving only his daughter she gets only half of his estate. The rest goes to distant **kindreds**. The widows face the worst. If a husband dies without a child, she gets only one fourth of the property. If there are children then she gets only one-eighth.
- iii) Among the Christian community if a husband dies without making a will, his widow is entitled to only one-third or Rs. 5000 of his property. The rest is shared by his lineal male descendants, i.e., his father's brother or his sons. If he dies leaving no **lineal descendants**, but has kindred, only half his property goes to the widow. The distant relatives can claim the rest.

The Christian law is complicated by the non-applicability of this law in certain areas. For instance, the Travancore High Court has upheld that the Indian Succession Act should not apply to Christians of Kerala. The Travancore Succession Act governs Christians in Travancore other than Protestants and Latin Catholics. Similarly, the Cochin Christian Succession Act governs Christians in the former Cochin State but not the Anglo Indian or Tamil Christians.

- iv) Among the Parsis too a son's share to his father's property is twice that of the daughters. If a woman predeceases her husband, her son is entitled to an equal share of the mother's property along with the daughter, but the daughter is not entitled to the same rights when she inherits the property of the father.



### 33.4.3 Work, Remuneration and Maternity Benefits

According to the Equal Remuneration Act, 1973, men and women are to be paid equally for doing the same or similar work. This Act also forbids discrimination on the basis of sex at the time of recruitment and after. However, this Act is not applicable to the unorganised sector where the bulk of the women work.

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 provides for the maternity leave to women working in the factories, mines, plantations and in the government and semi-government establishments. Provisions are also made for the crèches to care for the children of women working as contract labourers under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 and the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979,

### 33.4.4 Crime against Women

There are various forms of crime against women. Sometimes, it begins even before their birth, sometimes in the adulthood and other phases of life. Let us examine some of the important laws introduced for eradication of crime against women.

#### i) Sati

So far we have seen that in the Indian society, the position of women is always perceived in relation to the man, from birth onwards and at every stage of life, she is dependent on him. This perception has given birth to various social customs and practices. One important manifestation of these customs and practices has been that of Sati. It is seen as a pinnacle of achievement for a woman. This custom of self-immolation of the widow on her husband's pyre was an age-old practice in some parts of the country, which received deification. The popular belief ran that the goddess enters into the body of the woman who resolves to become a sati.

The practice of sati has been abolished by law with the initiative of Raja Rammohan Roy in the early decades of nineteenth century. However, there has been a significant revival of the practice of sati in the last few decades. Indeed, Rajasthan has been the focal point for this practice in recent years.

India has witnessed a strong social reaction in the form of organised agitation in the late 1980s against sati following the burning of the young educated Roop Kanwar on the funeral pyre of her husband in Deorala, Rajasthan. In response to the public demand the Parliament passed the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987. This law declares the practice of sati unlawful and "any act towards such commission shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may be extended to six months or with fine or with both...." The Act also prescribes the maximum punishment for the abetment of the commission of sati, to equate it with murder rather than abetment of suicide, as has been done in the earlier cases of sati. The Act also makes glorification of the practice of sati an offence and goes a long way in refuting the myth that sati is a manifestation of the glory of Hindu Women (Government of India 1988: 137-138).

## ii) Violence against Women

Violence against women both inside and outside of their home has been a crucial issue in the contemporary Indian society. To respond to the growing incidence of violence against women the Parliament amended the Criminal Law Act, 1983. This amendment gives legal recognition to the domestic violence by making cruelty inflicted by the husband or his relatives an offence. Again the Indian Evidence Act has also been suitably amended to provide that if a married woman commits suicide within seven years of her marriage the assumption in law will be that her husband or his relatives abetted the suicide.

Based on the 84th Report of the Law Commission on Rape and Allied offences the government amended the Criminal Law Act in 1983. This amendment prescribed the protection of the rape victim from the glare of publicity during investigation and trial. It also introduced change in the definition of rape to remove the element of consent. It also enhanced the punishment for this crime (Government of India 1988).

### Activity 1

In recent years there has been increasing number of violence against women. Prepare a list of violence against women based on the report of the newspaper or radio or T.V. or any other mass media. Also write down the types of legal measures initiated against these violences. Now based on these collected information, write a note in about 25 lines on the “Violence against women and legal measures in contemporary India”. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at the Study Centre.

## a) Sex Determination Test

You have learnt above the misuse of sex determination test in section 33.3.1 of this unit and also in unit 29 of this Block. Now let us have an idea on the laws related to the foetal killing in India. According to Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 abortion is legal in India. Again the Government of Maharashtra has gone far ahead by passing the Maharashtra Regulation of use of Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1988. This law has made prenatal sex determination test illegal in Maharashtra. Government of India passed the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (regulation and prevention of misuse) Act in 1994. It was proposed to prohibit pre-natal diagnostic techniques for the determination of sex of foetus leading to foetal infanticide. This Act was again amended in 2001. The government of Tamil Nadu passed a similar law in 1996.

## b) Indecent Representation of Women

Indecent representation of women in the media has been a crucial issue in India. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 has been passed by the Parliament. This law seeks to ban the “depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or regatory to, or denigrating women or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals” (Government of India 1988).

### 33.4.5 Problems related to the Implementation of Law

In India, various progressive laws (see figure 32.2) have been passed and significant amendments have been introduced to the existing laws for women's emancipation. However, within the existing values and norms of the society many of the progressive laws have not got the scope of full expression. The CSWI report points out that certain "pend provisions in the law are definitely influenced by the established patriarchal system, the dominant position of the husband and the social and economic background of women" (CSWI, 1974).

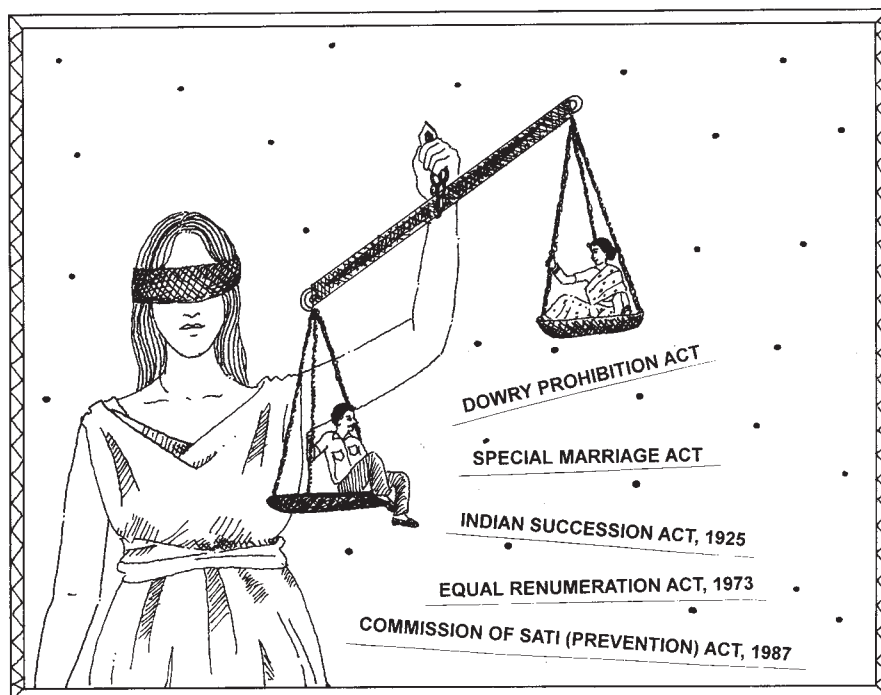


Figure 33.2: Women and law

Again, there are several loopholes and gender biases in the existing laws. For example, the personal laws pertaining to marriage provides a provision for restitution of conjugal rights and this is equally available to the husband and wife. However, in most of the cases, it is used by the husband against the wife ignoring the fundamental rights of the latter.

On the one hand, women have been subjected to discriminatory traditional norms and values and gender biases and on the other, a vast number of them have remained unaware about the significant provisions of the laws. Hence, there is a great need to educate women about the legal provisions and to make specific provisions for free legal aid to women. The NPPW observes:

“Legal aid programmes for women have to be developed which are not litigation oriented. These must consist of:

- i) creating legal awareness amongst the people and especially women,
- ii) holding local aid camps ...,
- iii) conducting para-legal training programmes for social workers and voluntary agencies, and
- iv) supporting public interest litigation, by which social workers can participate and carry forward the legal aid programmes for women” (Government of India 1988: 144).

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Write a note on the CSWI observation on the practice of polygyny in India. Use four lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write a note on anti-dowry legislations in about seven lines.

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- iii) Tick mark the correct answer of the following question.

In which sector does the Equal Remuneration Act, 1973 stipulate the equal remuneration for man and women doing the same kind of work?

- a) The organised sector
- b) The unorganised sector
- c) Both in organised and unorganised sectors
- d) None of the sectors

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### **33.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we have discussed women as a social category and the concept of women's issues at the very out-set. We have examined the role and status of women within the given socio-cultural context and the emergence of women's studies. Women's health and legal status are important contemporary women's issues. In the section on women's health we reviewed the causes of women's low sex-ratio, and the health problems related to early marriage and pregnancy. In the section on law we discussed women's legal status in terms of various laws enacted in India related to marriage, dowry, divorce, inheritance, practice of sati, violence against women, work and remuneration and indecent representation of women's body. We have looked briefly at some of the problems related to the implementation of these laws.

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## 33.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Filial ties</b>	Relationship between the parent and their children.
<b>Kindred</b>	Relatives of both sides - consanguine and affinal.
<b>Lineal descendant</b>	Members of the same descent group.
<b>Polygyny</b>	A form of marriage in which a husband has more than one wife at the same time.

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Government of India 1988. *National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000*. Department of Women and Child Development. Govt. of India: New Delhi (Chapters V& VI)

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## 33.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Women's issues are perceived to be linked with the social issues. These issues are specifically focussed on women's unequal access to the productive resources, decision-making bodies, health facilities, educational opportunities and social justice. In this respect, the study of women's issues needs to be incorporated within the discussion of wider social issues, concerning the rights of underprivileged sections of the society.
- ii) The Plan accords priority to the need of purposive research in education, health, welfare and employment of women with special emphasis to the weaker sections of women whose conditions have been most adversely affected by the process of social change.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) d
- ii) d

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) The Committee observed that full equality of sexes could hardly be possible in a legal system, which permits polygamy, and a social system, which tolerates it. The committee strongly suggested that monogamy should be the rule for all communities in India.
- ii) Under the present form of the Dowry Prohibition Act the court has been given power to act on its own knowledge or on a complaint by any recognised welfare organisation. A section on dowry murder has been added in Indian Penal Code (IPC). Again the Indian Evidence Act is amended to shift the burden of proof, to the husband and his family where dowry is demanded and the bride dies within 7 years of the marriage otherwise than under normal circumstances.
- iii) a



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## UNIT 34 ETHNIC RELATIONS AND CONFLICTS

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### Structure

- 34.0 Objectives
- 34.1 Introduction
- 34.2 Concepts Associated with Ethnic Relations
  - 34.2.1 Ethnic and Ethnic Group
  - 34.2.2 Ethnicity
  - 34.2.3 Ethnic Identity
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  - 34.2.5 Majority and Minority Groups
  - 34.2.6 Conversions
- 34.3 Widespread Interest in and Basic Approaches to the Study of Ethnic Relations
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- 34.5 Role of the British Administration and the Constitution of India in Relation to Ethnic Groups
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  - 34.5.2 Constitution of India
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  - 34.6.2 Religious Conflict
  - 34.6.3 Common Features of Ethnic Conflicts
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- 34.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 34.9 Key Words
- 34.10 Further Reading
- 34.11 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 34.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- define and clarify the concepts related to ethnic relations
- state the factors associated with the spurt in the interest on ethnic relations
- describe the basic approaches to the study of ethnic relations
- list and explain the major premises on which ethnicity operates in India

- state the position of the British administration and the Constitution of Independent India toward ethnic groups
- describe the types of ethnic conflicts found in India
- state the measures suggested to tackle the problems of ethnic conflicts.

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## **34.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous Block of ESO-12 we looked into the role and status of women in India. We also examined some contemporary issues relating to women's status. In this unit, we are going to describe ethnic relations and ethnic conflicts in India. We will begin our description with definition and clarification of concepts associated with ethnic relations. The concepts defined are ethnic, ethnic groups, ethnicity, ethnic identity, ethnic boundary, majority and minority groups and conversions. We will then proceed to outline the major factors associated with the increasing and widespread focus on the issue of ethnic relations all over the world. We will also lay out the basic approaches in sociology to the study of ethnic relations. Then we shall turn our attention to ethnic relations in India. We will first describe the premises on which ethnicity operates in India. This will be followed by an observation of the role of the British administration and the Constitution of free India on ethnic relations in India. In our description of ethnic conflicts in India, we shall focus mainly on conflicts based on language and religion. We shall also summarise the main features exhibited by ethnic conflicts in India. This will be followed by a section on suggestions to solve the problem of ethnic conflicts in India.

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## **34.2 CONCEPTS ASSOCIATED WITH ETHNIC RELATIONS**

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Across the world today, there is a serious and growing concern over the issue of ethnic relations and conflicts. India too shares this concern, as ethnic conflicts pose a serious problem in Indian society. Before we describe the nature of ethnic relations and conflicts in India, we must be clear in our minds as to what the term ethnic and other terms associated with ethnic relations mean. So our first task is one of definition and clarification of terms associated with ethnic relations. In this section we will define the following terms. (1) Ethnic and ethnic groups, (2) ethnicity, (3) ethnic identity, (4) ethnic boundary, (5) majority and minority groups, and (6) conversions.

### **34.2.1 Ethnic and Ethnic Group**

The term 'ethnic' is derived from the Greek word 'ethno' meaning 'nation'. It was originally used to denote primitive tribes or societies that formed a nation on the basis of their simplistic forms of government and economy.

But sociologists and social anthropologists use the term ethnic in a wider sense, based on their studies of pre-colonial and plural societies. Their studies revealed the coexistence of many groups that can be termed 'ethnic' within a nation. So in the course of time, ethnic has come to mean that which pertains to a group of people who can be distinguished by certain features like race, language or any other aspect of culture.

Ethnic group, is, therefore, defined as a cultural group whose members either share some or all of the following features—a common language, region, religion, race, endogamy, customs and beliefs. Members may also share a belief in common descent. On the basis of this definition we may say that the Jews, Negroes, Japanese, Muslims, Biharis all form distinct ethnic groups. Ethnic group thus refers to a group of people who share some common physical and/or socio-cultural characteristics.

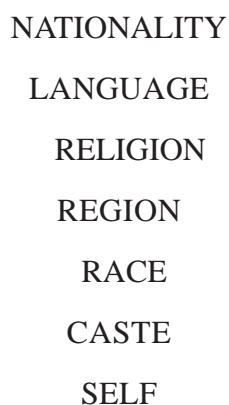
Here we may ask the question; why is it so important to understand the concept of ethnic groups in the context of our examination of ethnic relations? We may say it is important because ethnic group defines an individual's social personality. It is formed on the basis of cultural and racial uniformity. The essence of this group lies in the individual's feeling of belongingness to it because of cultural association shared with other members. Birth determines incorporation into these groups, thereby making membership relatively restrictive, however, exception to this rule exists, for instance, in the form of conversions. We shall talk about conversion later on in this section.

### **34.2.2 Ethnicity**

Ethnicity refers to the interrelationships between ethnic groups. Thus the phenomenon of ethnicity becomes more pronounced when viewed at an interactional level. Cohen (1974) defines ethnicity as a process of “interaction between culture groups operating within common social contexts”. Though ethnicity is manifest in intra-ethnic relations, it becomes more apparent in inter-ethnic situations, as the very essence of ethnicity stems from the need to establish ethnic identity.

### **34.2.3 Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity reflects both ‘likeness’ and ‘uniqueness’. On the one hand, it reflects on what the members of an ethnic group hold in common, at the same time differentiating them from other ethnic groups. The following is a diagrammatical representation of some of the factors of ethnic identification as arranged around the ‘self’.



The order of arrangement may vary from one social context to another depending on the issue. Also some of these factors may vary in significance from society to society. For example, in India, caste happens to be an important form of ethnic identification but it is of no significance when studying a European community.



### Activity 1

Go to any locality in the place where you live and find out the following information from at least 15 households.

- 1) Religion to which the members of the household belong
- 2) Language i.e., their mother tongue
- 3) Region and State to which they belong
- 4) The identity they value most
  - a) caste
  - b) religion
  - c) region/language or
  - d) any other
  - e) all of the above

Write a note of about two pages on “Ethnic Composition and Identification of a Group”. Compare, if possible, what you have written with those of other students at your Study Centre.

### 34.2.4 Ethnic Boundary

Ethnic boundary refers to a social boundary, which does not always correspond to territorial boundary. The individual defines one self through one's ethnic identity whereas ethnic boundary defines the social limit of the ethnic group. A dichotomisation of “others” as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, has two implications:

- i) The recognition of one's own social boundaries (in group and out group) and
- ii) The limitation of common understanding and mutual interest. People outside the boundary are not expected to have a common understanding and interest.

### 34.2.5 Majority and Minority Groups

The study of ethnic groups incorporates both the majority and the minority groups. The term ‘majority groups’ refer to the numerical representation of persons in a group and its control over economic and political resources. Usually it has been noticed that one ethnic group appears to be in dominance over other ethnic groups. However, we cannot overlook the internal disparities that exist within each ethnic group in terms of economic status. That is, certain sections in the minority group may enjoy majority status and vice-versa, in which the group may occupy either minority or majority status as a totality.

There exists a relationship of inequality between the majority and minority groups. The dominant group or the majority group enjoys numerical strength and control over economic and political resources. This group has all the privileges and advantages. The minority group on the other hand consists of

people who are immigrants to the host society. Their numerical strength is low and they are in a subordinate position to the majority group, in relation to control over the limited resources.

The co-relation between numerical strength and control over economic and political resources is a point of argument. As history provides many evidences of minority dominance over mass majority, for example, the British colonialism in India and the domination of a White minority on the Black majority in South Africa during the days of apartheid. In the 1980s we had the immigrant Bengali minority occupying higher offices in Assam. These instances reveal that the myth surrounding the 'minority group' concept, as being a group, which is subjected to dominance and inferior status because of its low numerical strength, is not true. As it is obvious that a group having control over political and economic resources irrespective of its numerical strength becomes a 'majority minority'.

### **34.2.6 Conversions**

In the earlier subsection 34.2.1 we mentioned that membership into an ethnic group is primarily determined by birth, though conversions constitute an exception to this rule. Conversion, literally, means change into another form. The most popular example of conversion is religious conversion.

Conversions pose a problem in group-identification and boundary maintenance. That is, in situations, where members of one group have become members of another ethnic group there develops a problem regarding the allegiance of these converted members to either of these ethnic groups. The process of conversion has gone on for centuries. For instance, Hindus have converted themselves into either Islam or Christianity. Caste mobility has also taken place, whereby using a higher caste as their reference group, the lower castes have gradually claimed a higher caste status. Process of **miscegenation** has taken place, whereby children have been born from racial intermixture. These kind of conversions lead to a problem in the study of inter-ethnic relations. But in spite of these conversions ethnic groups still persist, as they are not affected by these changing loyalties.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

i) Which of the following would you identify as ethnic groups?

Tick the right answers.

- a) Politicians
- b) Khasi
- c) Brahmin
- d) Girls
- e) Landlords
- f) Gujaratis
- g) Buddhist

- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Make a T for true or F for false against each statement.
  - a) Membership into an ethnic group is open to all and not restricted.
  - b) The factors, which constitute ethnic identification, may vary in significance from one society to another.
  - c) A minority group in every society is economically and politically very backward.
  - d) Ethnic boundary always corresponds to a territorial boundary in a society.
- iii) Write any three ways of achieving conversions in the Indian context. Use four lines for the answer.

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### 34.3 WIDESPREAD INTEREST IN AND BASIC APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ETHNIC RELATIONS

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In the previous section, we clarified the terms associated with ethnic relations. We observed that ethnic groups refer primarily to categories of ascription and identification by actors or individuals themselves. We said ethnic identity constitutes the basic form of identity by which an individual defines himself or herself and others. We undertook the task of definition and clarification because this exercise provides a framework for understanding ethnic relations in specific contexts. Before, we move on to examine ethnic relations in the Indian context, we have to be clear about two more things. Firstly, what are the reasons behind so much interest being shown in the study of ethnic relations and secondly what are the basic approaches in sociology toward the study of ethnic relations.

#### 34.3.1 Factors Associated with the Widespread Interest

Let us take the first question. What are the factors held responsible for the spurt in focus on ethnic relations. Research has pointed out that there are several inter-related factors that have promoted this widespread interest in the study of ethnic relations. The important factors have been:

- i) **Migration:** The movement of individuals from one place to another, within a nation or between nations has led to multiplicity of groups existing within an area.
- ii) **Culture contact:** When people migrate, they take their culture along with them. They come into contact with another type of culture existing in the area to which they have migrated. This leads to the existence of different

kinds of culture groups within an area. The nature of interaction between the groups varies from place to place and from time to time depending on several factors.

- iii) **Development of technology:** Technology especially improvement in transport and communication has made the world a smaller place to live in. It has facilitated both movements of people as well as ideas and things from one place to another.
- iv) **Emergence of thickly populated cities:** The growth of cities along with the opportunities provided for varied kinds of employment has attracted many people from different socio-cultural and geographical backgrounds to converge in a city. Cities host a plurality of ethnic groups within it.
- v) **Conflict:** The increased frequency of ethnic conflicts, specially between different racial groups and religious groups has drawn world wide attention.

### 34.3.2 Basic Approaches

Now coming to the question relating to the basic approaches to the study of ethnic inter-relationships, we can say that explanations regarding ethnic relations can be broadly classified under two categories, namely the 'consensus approach' and the 'conflict approach'. Let us look at them separately.

#### a) **Consensus Approach**

This approach views the phenomenon of ethnic inter-relationships from structural- functional perspective. Structural functionalists believe that society, like the human body, is a balanced system of institutions. Each unit or institution in society serves a function in maintaining that society. Events outside or inside the society may disrupt the social order of that society, but social institutions make necessary adjustments to restore stability. The consensus approach is based on the above mentioned belief of structural functionalism. We will refer to two theories, which are based on the consensus approach here. One theory is based on the study of ethnic relations in American society. It is called the 'Cultural **Assimilation**' theory or the 'Melting Pot' theory. The other theory is based on the study of pre-colonial societies. This theory was further developed by sociologists like Barth in the 1960's to understand ethnic inter-relationships in a wider context.

#### i) **Cultural Assimilation Theory or Melting Pot Theory**

The theory of 'Cultural Assimilation' or the 'Melting Pot Theory' reflects the consensus approach. The theory is based on the study of American society. This theory assumes that the immigrant minority communities will get totally assimilated into the host society to the extent that they imbibe all the values, norms and attitudes of the host society. In other words, the ethnic identity of the minority group will be merged into that of the host community. In the context of the American society, this meant that the identities of the immigrant communities would get merged into the American identity and they would begin thinking from the standpoint of the Americans in general. This theory did not meet with wide acceptance, as later studies reveal that the immigrant communities such as the Italians, Chinese and others maintain their distinct identity.

## ii) **Theory based on the Study of Pre-Colonial Societies**

Another theory was put forward by sociologists is based on the study of pre-colonial societies. The basic tenet of this theory is that, though ethnic groups coexisted within a nation, they each maintain separate identities through minimal social contact. This is exemplified by the presence of ethnic division of labour, which means, the preferential treatment meted out to the members of one's own ethnic group during recruitment to jobs. This indicates an absence of shared values and common will between members of diverse ethnic groups.

This theory was later developed further by sociologists like Barth (1969). According to him ethnic groups are not "maintained due to an absence or mobility and contact" but it entails the "social process of exclusion and incorporation". Stable social relations are maintained across ethnic boundaries like those of occupational and neighbourhood relations. In fact, Barth says that, social interaction between ethnic groups becomes the foundation for ethnic distinctions. The very persistence of ethnic groups in contact implies not only criterion for identification but also the structuring of interactions, which allows the persistence of cultural differences. For instance, in any social milieu we can observe the coexistence of national institutes, which cut across ethnic boundaries and at the same time we have voluntary associations and institutions that are formed to facilitate the pursuit of cultural and educational activities of a particular community.

## b) **Conflict Approach**

In contrast to the above mentioned consensus approach we have the conflict approach to the study of 'ethnic relations'. Conflict approach views ethnic groups as interest groups, which are in relation of inequality, competing for common goals which may lead to a total change in the social system. The protagonists of this theory argue that since conflict is ingrained in society, any approach that overlooks this aspect is incomplete. The theorists view ethnic conflict as a means of protest for either improvement of the existing social system or a demand for total change in the system. In 1980s there was a spurt in ethnic conflicts all over the world, for example, the racial discrimination of the Blacks by the Whites in South Africa, religious conflicts between the local Sri Lankans and the immigrant Tamils, and many others. The manifestations have been in terms of riots, terrorism, demonstrations, wreckage, killing and burning of property. Ethnic conflicts are said to arise between groups that are based on unequal relationship, namely the 'majority group' and the 'minority group'. The attempt of the dominant group is to maintain their social status and authority whereas the minority group tries to alter this position. Sometimes, these attempts may take the shape of peaceful protests and endeavour to bring about change through constitutional and democratic means. But mostly, it takes the shape of deviant behaviour ranging from violent protests, riots and disturbances to crimes against person and property, organised terrorism and overthrow of the existing power.

## **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) State the five factors associated with the widespread focus on the issue of ethnic relations. Answer in about four lines.

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ii) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

Which the following approaches is reflected in the Cultural Assimilation Theory or the Melting Pot Theory?

- a) The consensus approach
- b) The conflict approach
- c) The evolutionary approach
- d) None of the above

iii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark T for true or F for false against each statement.

- a) The study of ethnic relations is confined only to the U.S.A.
- b) The consensus approach views the phenomenon of ethnic relation from the Structural Functionalist Perspective.
- c) Barth, the sociologist, emphasises that ethnic groups can coexist and interact with one another without losing their cultural distinctiveness.
- d) According to the conflict approach ethnic conflicts arise between groups that are based on unequal relationship.

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## 34.4 DIMENSIONS OF ETHNIC RELATIONS IN INDIA

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The previous two sections, 34.2 and 34.3 provided us with the background knowledge about ethnic relations and interactions. Equipped with this fair amount of conceptual information about ethnic relations, let us turn our attention to India. In this section we will describe the major dimensions of ethnic relations in India.

India is a country of immense diversity. In Block 1 unit 1 of ESO-12 we outlined the different forms of diversity in India. We said race, language, religion and caste constitute the major forms of diversity in India. Groups of people in India differ from each other not only in physical or demographic characteristics but also in distinctive patterns of behaviour. These patterns of behaviour are determined by social and cultural factors like language, region, religion and caste. According to Punekar (1974) the four major premises where ethnicity in India operates are language, region, religion and caste. It may be argued that castes are divided into subcastes, language into dialects, region into sub-regions, religion into sects on ethnic lines. However, ethnic diversity is less obvious at these sub levels when compared to the larger levels of caste, language, religion and region.



Let us now examine each of the premises in detail. Language and region have been combined, as in India the division of territory or states is on the basis of language.

### 34.4.1 Language and Region

During the colonial rule, India was divided into several provinces for administrative purposes. This division paved the way for other language communities, in the post-colonial era, to make demand for a separate state of their own. The formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1953, on the demand of Telugu speakers in Madras Province, opened doors for other language groups to make similar demands. Further, these demands were endorsed by some of the nationalist leaders. Thus today, each language group has a State of its own, such as, Gujarat for the Gujaratis, Kerala for Malayalees and so on. At the state level, regional language is often used as the medium of instruction in schools, and colleges. This affinity and allegiance felt towards one's own language and region is often reflected outside the State of origin, that is when migrants to a new setting start their own voluntary associations to cater to their cultural needs. Thus language, in India, has been an important premise on which people have established their identities and have drawn social boundaries for defining their 'in group' and the 'out group'. Thus, it is not uncommon to find a Tamil Association in northern belt like UP or Delhi or a Malayalee association in Middle East or a Bengali association in the U.S.A.

Figure 34.1 shows the varying dimensions of ethnic conflict in India.

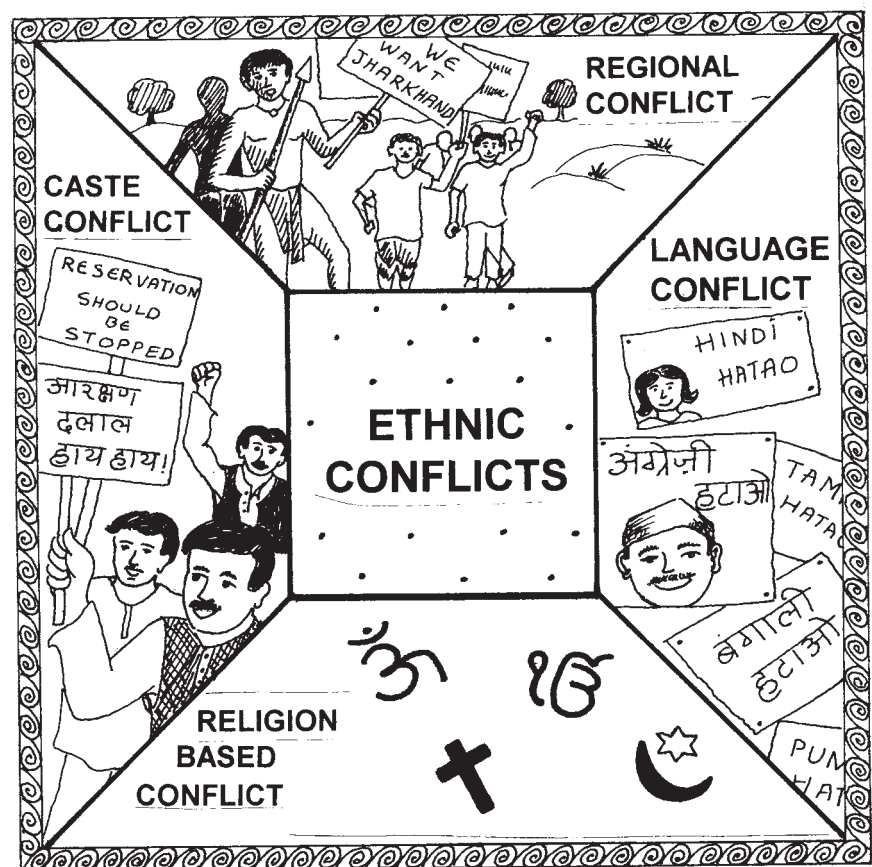


Fig. 34.1: Ethnic conflicts

### 34.4.2 Religion

Another form of ethnic identification is religion. In India Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism are some of the religions practised by its people. In Block 4 of this course, you were introduced to the social organisation of these religious communities in India. In terms of numerical strength, Hindus form the majority community in India. A number of Hindu Gods and Goddesses are worshipped by different linguistic groups spread across India. It is the numerical strength of the Hindus that has been one of the factors which have led certain Hindu loyalists like the RSS (*Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh*) to assert that India is a Hindu State. In terms of economic dominance, there are disparities within a religious group and between religious communities. For instance, the Zoroastrian community is numerically very small in India. But their economic resources and status are much better than many other communities.

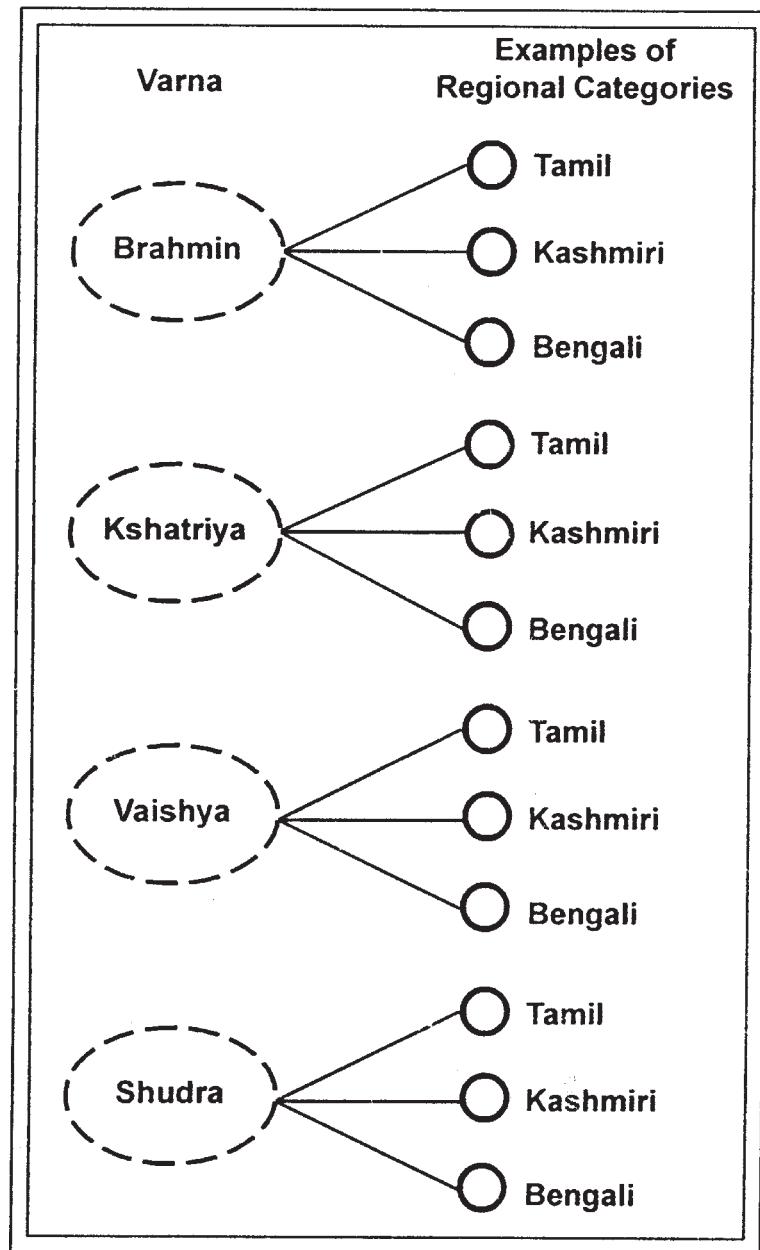
There is historical evidence to prove that the various religious communities in India have coexisted peacefully through time. Of course, there is also evidence that reflects the conflict between religious communities. The most well known clashes have been between Hindus and Muslims. One of the major social problems of India has been the communal divide problem. When one group asserts its interests and identity at the cost of another group, the communal divide emerges. For more information on the problem of communal divide, you must listen at your Study Centre to the audio program that has been specially prepared for this unit relating to Block 8.

### 34.4.3 Caste

Caste is another very important premise for ethnicity in India. Caste operates in different ways in the context of ethnic relations. Generally speaking people belonging to the same caste of different linguistic states belong to one ethnic group. However they rarely intermarry or involve themselves in any other close interactions. This has made some scholars to assert that there is no conscious solidarity of caste across the language boundaries. Some others argue caste at the same time causing fission within a particular ethnic group. For example, the Kashmiris are divided into several caste groups, which causes fission within the group, yet at the same time, a Kashmiri Brahmin finds his counterparts in other linguistic groups such as the Tamils and the Bengalis, this brings fusion to the group in a broad sense. Further, in an otherwise unranked system of ethnic dichotomy, this pan Indian system of stratification is the only factor that ranks ethnic groups hierarchically. The following figure (no. 34.2) will make this explanation clear. Under the varna system, the total Hindu population can be divided into four categories - the Brahman, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Shudra.

The early vedic literature and religious texts prescribed each of the castes with their rightful occupation, rights and duties. The Brahmins, with their occupation of priesthood and scholarly pursuits, occupied the top of the social ladder; the Kshatriyas were the warriors, and were second in status, the third were the Vaishyas, the traders and the last were the Shudras, who pursued menial and lowly occupations. The 'outcastes' like the Chandals were not included in the *varna* scheme. There was restriction of social interaction between the three "twice born" castes and Shudras, and no interaction with the outcastes. Thus

members of a caste group formed as in-group and others who did not belong to it formed the out-group. Caste identity was important for the individual and social boundaries were drawn for interaction between castes.



**Fig. 34.2: Examples of categories of varna system**

The *varna* system, however, has provided flexibility in terms of social mobility. Over the ages, several lower castes have used a higher caste status as a reference group, and have sanskritised their ways and formulated mythologies to legitimise their claims. For instance, a tailor caste in Tamil Nadu, which claimed the status of the Bhavsara Kshatriyas, went to the extent of organising an All India Conference in order to legitimise their claims.

This social mobility when accompanied with economic and political power automatically brought about an enhancement in the status of the lower castes. But most of the situations show the close association of ritual purity, economic and political power and education, as echoed in the varna scheme. Thus the “twice born castes” not only had ritual purity but also had greater access to

economic and political power and education. The Shudras and the outcastes, on the other hand, not only suffered the stigma of ritual impurity but also lived in abject poverty, illiteracy and had no political power.

Since the British rule, however, the political, economic power equation, between different castes has been altered. Both the British government and the Constitution of free India tried to introduce legal provisions to reduce the inequality between castes. The Backward Classes movement which emerged significantly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also contributed to upward social mobility of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes. Groups of cognate (related) castes formed a large ethnic block and began to fight for a shift in the traditional distribution of power. They became politically viable. In the next unit, on social movements, we will be referring to the Backward Classes movement. What is important to remember here is that the caste has become an important basis of division between different groups of castes. In some cases, the cleavage has been between the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin upper castes. For instance, the *Satya Shodhak Samaj* (Truth Seekers Society) founded in 1873 by Jotiba Phule was anti-Brahmin in its orientation. Phule fostered a sense of identity among many middle level non-Brahmin castes like the Kunbis, Malis and Dhangars in Maharashtra, Brahmins were identified as exploiters and the non-Brahmins as the exploited (Rao 1974: 10).

In some other cases the cleavage has been between upper non-Brahmin castes and lower non-Brahmin castes as in many parts of north India. Lower non-Brahmin castes have formed their own caste associations in order to gain access to modern economic, educational and political benefits. Still another kind of cleavage has been between certain untouchable castes and the clean Hindu castes. The SNDP movement, which we will be describing in our next unit, is an example of this type of conflict. Izhavas (toddy tappers of Kerala) organised themselves in the late nineteenth century to fight the exploitation of clean Hindu castes like the Nayars and Nambudiris of Kerala (Rao 74: 11-12). The Scheduled Tribes have also formed their own respective ethnic block in different parts of India in order to fight the exploitation by the non-tribals.

Let us now briefly look at the position of the government toward ethnic groups in both British India and Independent India.

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### **34.5 ROLE OF THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION AND THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA IN RELATION TO ETHNIC GROUPS**

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So far we have observed that language, religion and caste have been the premises on which ethnicity operates in India. It would be interesting at this point, to find out what has been the attitude or position at the governmental level toward ethnic groups. In this section, we will briefly state the role of the British administration and the Constitution of Independent India towards ethnic groups.

### 34.5.1 British Administration

As mentioned in the earlier section, it was during the British rule that ethnic groups like certain backward castes and classes began to organise themselves into strong associations. The British administration, on its part, provided its own source of legitimacy to the awakening among the non-Brahmin and depressed castes. Several new avenues were thrown open for claiming higher status. English education became the basis of new employment opportunities, which were free of caste consideration. Education was made available to everyone, though in actuality only the Brahmin and upper non-Brahmin castes made use of it.

The British introduced a series of administrative reforms such as the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909, Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 and the Govt. of India Act of 1935 which gave the backward classes and minority groups increased political power, economic benefits and educational opportunities (Rao, 1974: 6). In 1850 the Caste Disabilities Removal Act was passed to provide liberty to all for conversions at will from one religion to another or from one caste to another. Members converting into another religion or caste did not lose their rights of inheritance, including property. Freedom to practice one's own religion, language and culture was bestowed on all.

### 34.5.2 The Constitution of India

After the advent of independence in 1947, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was appointed Chairman of the Drafting Committee and Minister of Law in the Government. For deliberations of important subjects different committees were set up. The Minorities Committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel. Reservations in Legislature and Services was discussed by this committee. After heated debates it was agreed that the Constitution that was being drawn for India must contain adequate safeguards for those people who have been hitherto discriminated and exploited. The Constitution of India conceived of equality in terms of equality of opportunity and equal protection under the laws.

Certain groups were specifically singled out for special treatment namely: (a) the Scheduled Castes, (b) the Scheduled Tribes, and (c) the socially and educationally Backward Classes. The Constitution sanctioned reservation of seats in the educational institutions, in public employment and in State legislatures including the national Parliament in favour of members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. It also sanctioned reservations in educational institutions and public employment in favour of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens.

The Constitutional provisions are arranged in five sections. The various provisions relate to several aspects like right to equality, prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and right to profess and practice religion. The Constitution through its article 17 abolishes the inhuman practice of untouchability and forbids the practice of it in any form, making it an offence punishable by law.

The Constitution has also made provisions for the minorities. Though the Constitution has not specifically defined a minority, it has established the liberty of the minorities by making freedom from disabilities a fundamental right.

According to the Constitution any group which constitutes numerically less than 50 percent of the population can be called a minority. But this leaves the term ambiguous, as it does not explain whether this “less than 50 percent of the population” is as compared to that of a region or State of India. The minority Acts however, cover all religions excepting Hinduism, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The following are some of the Acts passed in favour of the minorities. Article 15 of the Constitution, explains the specific discriminatory situation on religion, caste race, sex and so on. It prohibits the subjection of any citizen to any disability, liability, restriction or conditions on groups only of the above mentioned factors. Article 29(1) endows the right to any citizen who possesses a distinct language, script or culture to conserve the same. Article 30(1), bestows the right on the linguistic and religious minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

The intention of the Constitutional guarantee on minority rights, is mainly to promote the distinctiveness of religious and linguistic minorities in the country. Their distinctiveness was not seen as division by the founding fathers of Indian Constitution, but as a positive contribution to the rich tapestry of unity in diversity in India. They felt that minorities were in a weaker position and that they needed protection if they were to participate in national development. The legislation on Scheduled Castes, Tribes and other Backward Classes was meant to promote the advancement of socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

Both minority rights and reservation policy for the Backward Classes are becoming increasingly sensitive issues in Indian society. In several ways and at different times both have been the focus of divisive debate and destructive violence. In our next section, we will describe certain forms of conflicts that have emerged on ethnic grounds.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) What are the premises on which ethnicity operates in India? Use three lines for your answer.

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- ii) How did the British contribute to the formation of an ethnic bloc among the backward classes? Answer in about four lines

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- iii) Tick the right answer.



- a) does not support the reservation policy or the policy of protective discrimination.
- b) grants protection only to Scheduled Castes and Tribes.
- c) grants protection to minorities and promotes the advancement of the socially and economically disadvantaged groups.
- d) grants protection only to linguistic minorities.

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## 34.6 ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN INDIA

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The civil rights endowed with the minorities and the existence of social relations across ethnic boundaries have not prevented the occurrence of violence between ethnic groups. Over the years, from time to time, we have evidenced a great show of violence and hostility breaking out between ethnic groups. This surge of violence is a concerning issue for the government. The question arises as to why people who have co-existed peacefully for decades, suddenly turn hostile towards one another. The manifest issues are mostly religion and language.

In the following pages we shall examine a few of these issues and analyse the latent causes behind these violences.

### 34.6.1 Language Conflict

In 1980s tension and conflict arose over the issue of language. The government's desire to create a wider national movement in an otherwise segmental ethnic society expedited tensions in several parts of the country. The Government selected Hindi as the national language to create a national community by joining all the members of the different ethnic communities. This attempt at 'unity in diversity' had adverse effect on the Indian population. We have evidences of violence in the South like Tamil Nadu, where severe rioting took place over the Hindi issue. According to the non-Hindi speakers, the language policy of the government meant an advantage for the Hindi speakers, who are perceived to dominate the economic institutions and have political authority. To illustrate this type of conflict, we will describe the language conflict in Assam.

In Assam too, riots broke out in 1972, between the immigrant Bengali Hindus and the local Assamese population. The Assamese demanded the withdrawal of the option of answering in Bengali. Earlier, similar riots had occurred after independence, when the Assamese had demanded their language be made the regional language. These conflicts must be viewed within the economic and political structure of Assam.

There are three communities that dominate the different sections of the economic sphere of Assam. The Bengali Muslims, who are migrants from Bangladesh, who either serve in the tea gardens or manage their own land; the Marwaris, who monopolise trade; and the Bengali Hindus, who are migrants from West Bengal, and dominate the administrative services. The Assamese were unable to avail these opportunities as they lacked in skills and contacts to take up banking activities of the Marwaris. Secondly, they lacked education

to take up the administrative jobs. Finally, they were unwilling to work in the estates at low wages.

India's Independence had two effects on Assam. The Congress party that came to power in the State then, was dominated by Assamese and there was a growing emergence of an Assamese middle class. This middle class with its interest in the administrative services considered the Bengali Hindus an obstacle to their economic advancement. Also any policy giving job preference to the Assamese would have automatically applied to the Bengali Hindus who have lived there for many decades. And the latter being more qualified stood a better chance for recruitment. These facts materialised in the growing fear of economic domination amongst the Assamese middle class who wanted to prevent the growing economic strength of the Bengali Hindus. The Assamese middle class reacted through an assertive regional identity in order to claim their due share in the economic development.

### 34.6.2 Religious Conflict

The genesis of religious conflicts in India is often attributed to the advent of Muslims to this country. But this kind of theorisation is erroneous, as communalism, as a socio-political form is a modern phenomenon. Tensions had prevailed between the Hindus and Muslims prior to the colonial rule, due to the expropriation or dispossession of power of the Hindus by the Muslims (Malabar). But these tensions were accentuated later with the British introduction of electoral policy and the imperialist divide-and-rule policy; this gave rise to the competitiveness and hostility between the two communities. This later materialised in the emergence of the Muslim League leading later to the formation of Pakistan.

Though the nationalist leaders believed that the communal problems would be resolved in the post-Independent period, they were proved wrong. Let us look at some examples of ethnic conflict based directly on religion.

#### i) Hindu-Muslim Conflicts in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh

The manifest cause behind the rioting of August 1980, was the entry of a pig in a congregation during Id. Some 50,000 persons were gathered to listen to the *qutbah* or sermon, when the pig wandered inside violating the Muslim sense of cleanliness and defiling the sanctity of the prayer. This incident was followed by looting, arson, and rape by a frenzied mob. The rampaging and killing by one group was retaliated by the other party.

This incident throws light on in the socio-political structure of the town. The Muslims in this town had been traditional artisans engaged in making brassware vessels. In the latter part of 1970s, some of them have started manufacturing brassware and exporting it to the West Asian countries. This has broken the existing monopoly of the immigrant Punjabi businessmen. These immigrant Hindu Punjabis were originally from Pakistan who came to India after Partition. The relative success and prosperity to the Muslim businessmen disturbed their Hindu counterparts. The Muslims were securing extensive orders from West Asian countries and their commonality of religion with these West Asian countries magnified and adverse fears of the Hindu businessmen on communal lines. The Muslims were rapidly acquiring sufficient capital to purchase sophisticated tools, to own property and were expanding their business in a

large scale. The spectre of Muslim dominance and Gulf money was raised. The political parties exploited these fears. The trade interests and economic jealousies became instrumental in fanning the fires of communalism aided by political parties and financed by traders. A climate of hostility and suspicion was created, which resulted in violent rioting.

**ii) Hindu-Sikh Conflicts in Punjab**

When viewing the Hindu-Sikh situation we are faced with a problem. Compared to the previous cases of language and religious conflicts discussed earlier, here we are confronted with people who are culturally well assimilated. The Hindus and the Sikhs in Punjab often intermarried. The case of one of the sons of a Punjabi-Hindu family being converted to Sikhism is not uncommon. Unlike the Hindu-Muslim relations, there have been no historical animosity between the Sikhs and the Hindus. Yet sharp conflicts arose between the two communities in 1980s.

There had occurred a succession of violent happenings. Starting with the killing of innocent people in Punjab, followed by the army action in the Golden Temple, and the subsequent assassination of the late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This assassination was followed by a frenzy of mass killing of Sikhs in Delhi and surrounding areas. There was a one sided brutal assault on the Sikhs. Their property was set on fire and goods stolen from their shops. The whole community was made a scapegoat for the actions of a few co-religionists. The intensity of the violence was more on the outskirts of the city than within.

The Punjab problem can be viewed in the light of the political rivalry between one-time ruling Congress party at the Centre and the Akali Dal in Punjab. This militant political wing of the Sikh community demanded not only religious autonomy but economic and political autonomy as well. Their demand of share in river water, hydro-electric power, control over Chandigarh, Abohar and Fazilka areas, all echoed this desire.

The Akalis represented the aspirations of the Sikh upper class, who had come in direct conflict with the Punjabi Hindu upper class. The difference in the ideologies of the Hindus and the Sikhs could be traced to their social division. A high proportion of the Sikhs resided in the rural areas and were engaged in rural activities, whereas a high proportion of the Hindus lived in the urban areas and followed commercial and administrative services. In their inter-commercial rivalry, the businessmen of the two communities found it to their advantage to mobilise their respective communities. The Akalis on their part wanted to assert their religious hold over the prosperous Jat Sikhs, who dominated the rural areas, and were getting increasingly alienated from the traditional religious hold. Thus both for the Akalis and the affluent section of the Sikhs, the assertion of the communal identity by way of religious channel had become most essential for mass support. This growing need to alienate from the mainstream of Indian nationalism, derived its support and finance from affluent Sikhs, especially those residing abroad. The Sikhs were divided into the terrorists, the supporter of the fundamentalist ideology and those who did not support it, the moderates.

### 34.6.3 Common Features of Ethnic Conflicts

Certain general features can be observed from the study of ethnic conflicts in India. These are:

- Ethnic conflicts are a consequence of organised communal bodies. For the conflict to become a public issue, usually the organised bodies, which are backed by political parties, have to come to the fore. Thus communal bodies become institutionalised.
- Ethnic conflicts indicate that whatever be the manifest cause - language, region or religion - the latent cause is not rooted in cultural disparity. Conflicting economic and political interests form the basis of the latent cause. The tensions generally arise when a minority group feels deprived of an equal position in either the economic or political sphere as compared to the majority group, uses the primary ties to motivate and activate their ethnic group against the dominant group. For instance, the Hindu-Sikh conflict was between peoples who were not culturally different, but rather were well-assimilated group. Thus, we may say, that ethnic conflicts arose not because of some common goals but because of conflicting interests.
- The allegiance or the basis of group loyalty depends on the principle of mutual interest. For instance, during the 1972 Assam riots, the Bengali Muslims, who share cultural similarities with Bengali Hindus did not side with them, instead they supported the Assamese in exchange of not being ousted from their land, by the politically active Assamese.

#### Activity 2

Take a month's issue of a newspaper. Note down the following:

- i) Reports about common, friendly celebration of festivals by members belonging to different ethnic groups.
- ii) Reports about ethnic conflicts.

Here note down a) what is the main issue involved, b) which are the groups in conflict and c) who are the leaders backing this conflict.

Write a note of about two pages on 'Ethnic Relations and Conflicts'. Compare, if possible, what you have written with those written by other students at your Study Centre.

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## 34.7 SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS

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A coherent and effective response to ethnic conflicts has to keep in mind, the common as well as the unique factors, which account for clashes between groups of people. Some insist that so long as economic inequalities exist, such clashes are bound to persist. Since it is not easy to end economic disparities between people, ethnic conflicts will also not be easy to stop.

Some others argue that before looking at the long-term solutions to these problems, certain immediate steps can be taken. Those who favour this suggest that the first step towards sustenance of communal harmony is to identify the causes that flare up riots. These are: (a) rumours, (b) suspicion against the other community, (c) building up sectarian feelings amongst people by religious heads, local political party, and self styled leaders. To overcome these it is important to induce encouragement in people to widen their perspectives, to keep an open mind and to be tolerant towards others. This can be achieved by encouraging the members of the different communities to have a dialogue, with each other. This would help in understanding the other community and also reflect their own limitations and the possibility of overcoming them. People favouring these measures also insist that cross-cultural participation must be more frequent, especially during festivities and ceremonies. The people in the riot prone areas must be made to understand not to give ear to rumours unless it is followed with evidence. Because of the absence of direct communications, politicians, self-styled leaders and miscreants circulate rumours, which cannot be verified. This aggravates tensions. The process of sustenance of communal harmony is most essential in spite of it being slow and requiring a lot of patience and toil to reach to the grassroot level of society in order to motivate and socialise people.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) Which of the following would you list as an ethnic conflict? Tick the right answer.
  - a) Fight between X and Y politicians for the post of Chief Minister.
  - b) Hindu-Muslim conflict in Moradabad in UP in the 1980s.
  - c) Clashes between two women over jumping a queue at a bus stop.
  - d) The non-Brahmin movement in South India to fight against exploitation by the Brahmins.
- ii) What are the common features exhibited by ethnic conflicts in India? Use four lines for your answer.

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- iii) What is the long-term suggestion advocated by some to contain the problem of ethnic conflicts? Use two lines for your answer.

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## 34.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we examined the phenomenon of ethnic relations and ethnic conflicts in India. We began the unit by defining and clarifying terms like ethnic, ethnic groups, ethnic identity, ethnic boundary, majority and minority groups and conversions. We defined ethnic as something pertaining to a group of people who share some physical and/or socio-cultural characteristic. Then we moved on to state the factors associated with the widespread interest in the study of ethnic relations all over the world. The factors mentioned are migration, culture contact, technology, cities and conflicts. We also outlined the basic approaches to the study of ethnicity namely, the consensus approach and the conflict approach. Having sketched the framework for looking at ethnic relations in specific societies, we went on to describe ethnic relations in India. We described the premises on which ethnicity operates in India namely region, language, religion and caste. We noted the role of the British and the Constitution towards the ethnic groups in India. We then observed that clashes have occurred between ethnic groups over control of social, economic and educational resources. We then outlined the forms of ethnic conflict in India namely language conflicts and religious conflicts. We summarised the common features found in ethnic conflicts. Lastly, we stated the solutions offered to tackle the problem of ethnic conflicts in India.

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## 34.9 KEYWORDS

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- Assimilation** It refers to a mental process, whereby the minority migrant group starts identifying themselves with the host community. Its identity merges into that of the dominant group.
- Miscegenation** This is a term introduced by a group of sociologists, in their study of ethnic relations between the Whites and the Blacks in America. It means racial intermixing.

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## 34.10 FURTHER READING

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Barth, F. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organisation of Cultural Differences*. Alien and Unwin: London.

Barua, Indira et al (ed.) 2002. *Ethnic Groups, Cultural Continuities and Social Change in North-East India*. Mittal: New Delhi

Danda, Ajit K. 1999 (ed.) *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Integration*. The Asiatic Society: Calcutta

Gupta, Dipankar 2000. *Culture, Space and the Nation-State*. Sage Publications: New Delhi

Weiner, Myron 1978. *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*. Oxford University Press: Delhi



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## 34.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) b, c, f and g
- ii) a) F b) T c) F d) F
- iii) The three ways of achieving conversion in Indian Society are (a) inter-ethnic marriages, (b) taking up another religion, (c) caste mobility.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The five factors are migration, culture contact, technology, emergence of thickly populated cities and conflicts between ethnic groups.
- ii) a
- iii) a) F b) T c) T d) T

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) The premises on which ethnicity operates in India are language, region, religion and caste.
- ii) The British threw open educational and employment opportunities to all members irrespective of their caste or religion. They passed a series of legislative reforms, which gave increased economic political and educational benefits to the hitherto backward classes.
- iii) c

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) b and d
- ii) Ethnic conflicts in India seem to be an organised body of conflicts supported by political parties. Though the manifest cause seem to be the region, language, religion or caste, the latent cause seem to be conflicting economic and political interests.
- iii) Reduction or removal of economic inequalities between people is a long term solution to the problem of ethnic conflicts.

### Structure

- 35.0 Objectives
- 35.1 Introduction
- 35.2 Social Change and Social Movements
- 35.3 Nature of Social Movements
  - 35.3.1 Definition
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  - 35.3.4 Functions
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  - 35.4.4 Importance of Understanding the Origins
- 35.5 Role of Leadership and Ideology in Social Movements
  - 35.5.1 Leadership
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### 35.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- describe the link between social change and social movements
- explain the nature of social movements with the help of definitions, examples, types and functions
- examine the main factors associated with the origins of social movements
- describe the role of leadership and ideology in social movements
- point out the various stages in the life cycle of social movement.

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### 35.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit of this course we looked at ethnic relations and ethnic conflicts in India. In this unit we will discuss some aspects of collective actions of people which lead to social change. These types of actions are known as social movements. We will begin this unit by pointing out the link between

social change and social movements. We will then define what a social movement is, cite some examples of social movements, list the types of social movements and point out the functions of social movements. This will be followed by an examination of the origins of social movements. Here we will focus on the three factors associated with the emergence of social movements. The three factors described are **relative deprivation, structural strain and revitalisation**. We shall also point out the importance of discussing the origins of social movements. In the section after this we will be describing the role of leadership and **ideology** in social movements. Then we shall briefly state the stages in the life cycle of a social movement.

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## 35.2 SOCIAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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One of the main problems of sociology is to understand how and why societies change. All societies undergo changes. In some cases these may be radical in the sense that some social institutions may be replaced by new ones. Or, there may be major changes in the existing social institutions. For example, the prevalence of nuclear families in the place of traditional joint families has brought a change in the family as a social institution. Furthermore, there are other institutions, which no longer exist. For instance, if a society based on slavery is replaced by feudalism then the social institutions in that slave society may disappear too. If we observe societies over a period of time (i.e., historically) we will find that changes have taken place in all of them. In some cases these may be gradual, i.e., spread over a long period of time. In others they may be rapid.

Social change, as we know by now, does not take place merely by chance or due to some factors predetermined by fate. There are several forces operating simultaneously in society, which bring about change. Some of these may be external to social institutions. Changes caused by a change in the economy or the production relations is one such instance. Industrialisation creates changes in social institutions. The changes in the family structure, mentioned above, are caused by the impact of industrialisation. Nuclear families are more adaptive to the nature of industrial societies than joint families. The latter are more suited to pre-industrial, mainly agrarian, societies. At the same time, there are change producing agents inside a society as well. Social movements are one of these internal forces, which contribute to changes. Of course, they may at times prevent or resist changes. We shall look at the change promoting and change resisting aspects of social movements in our next section.

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## 35.3 NATURE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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In this section we will describe the main features of social movements. We will be giving definitions, examples, types and functions of social movements.

### 35.3.1 Definition

The International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences (1972) defines a social movement as a variety of collective attempts to bring about change. The attempts

may be to bring about change in certain social institutions and to create an entirely new social order. Or the attempts may represent a socially shared demand for change in some aspects of the social order. Turner and Kilhan define a social movement as a “collectivity which acts with some continuity to promote or resist change in the society or group of which it is a part” (cited by McLaughlen 1969: 27). Toch (1965) emphasises that a social movement is an effort by a large number of people to solve collectively a problem they feel they share in common.

These definitions bring out, above all things, two important qualifying features of a social movement. Firstly, that social movements involve collective action as against actions of a small group of individuals. Secondly, the collective attempt is designed to promote change or resist change in the society in which the attempt is made. So collective attempt may be to alter, inaugurate, supplant, restore or reinstate all or some aspects of the social order.

Let us look at these two features in a little more detailed manner in order to understand how social movements are different from other kinds of collective behaviour like a mob or a crowd. We will also see the difference between social movements and other movements like a cooperative movement or a trade union movement.

Social movements involve collective action by the people. Any form of collective action cannot be labelled as a social movement, even if it is directed towards changing the existing social values. For example, in some places when a car or a truck knocks down a pedestrian a mob collects immediately and starts beating up the driver. The mob is provoked because the driver's actions have led to injury or loss of life. Hence this could be regarded as a form of collective action to ensure sanctity of life and to prevent rash driving. But can we call this a social movement? No, because this is just an impulsive outburst. Hence, another feature of a social movement is that it should be sustained and not sporadic. Similarly social movement differs from a crowd by being a long-term collectivity, not a quick spontaneous grouping. However crowds may emerge as a result of social movements. A *morcha* taken up by members of a woman's organisation, a part of the women's social movement may attract a crowd.

At the same time one has to keep in mind that social movements are different from other movements in society. For instance, we have the cooperative movement or the trade union movement, which we are quite familiar with. Both these movements have features, which are common to those discussed above. Namely, they attempt to change the existing social relations and try to promote change. They are also sustained movements as they have existed over a period of time. However, they have one feature, which excludes them from being social movements. These movements are institutionalised movements. By this we mean that trade unions, cooperatives or such other organisations function under a given set of rules. These include procedures for recruitment and subsequently, expulsion, exclusion and punishment. The membership of these organisations is not open to all. In fact membership may not be open to even those who are expected to be participants of the movement. Let us clarify this. A trade union is expected to fight for protecting and enhancing workers' rights. But all workers do not automatically become members of a trade union. They can become members only if they agree to

the objectives of the trade union and they formally enroll as a member. Similarly a cooperative which is expected to help poor peasants will not automatically include all such people as its members. There are some formalities to be fulfilled such as registration of membership, purchase of shares etc. Therefore these organisations have a formal set of rules for membership. Only those accepting and abiding by these rules can hope to be included as members can be dropped or suspended from membership.

A movement, which is institutionalised in the above manner, can function with a fixed structure and a hierarchy. In other words, the structure of such organisations cannot change. A trade union will have its hierarchy based on authority. There will be a president, secretary and committee members etc. Each of them has separate responsibilities and they hold varying degrees of authority. This type of a hierarchy is necessary for any institutionalised movement. In fact this is what helps it to sustain itself.

Social movements on the other hand, will not have any of the above features. The two features of social movements, namely, sustained action and spontaneity operate simultaneously. These together distinguish a social movement from other movements. Existence of either of these features does not result in a social movement. To explain, earlier examples of trade unions and cooperatives show that these movements have sustained over a period of time. But this is because they are institutionalised and not because they are spontaneous. On the other hand, sporadic outbursts such as beating up a rash driver are collective behaviour, which is spontaneous. It is not a social movement because it is not sustained.

We are laying stress on spontaneity because social movements do not follow a fixed pattern of hierarchy. They are thus able to innovate new features of organisation. Institutionalisation would in fact prevent any form of innovation because of its fixed structures.

If we now take into account the features which we have discussed so far, we can define social movements as, collective action by large groups of people which is directed towards changing some of the values, norms and social relations in a society but which are spontaneous and sustained.

We had mentioned earlier in this section pertaining to the two qualifying features of social movements. That a social movement constitutes a collective attempt not only to promote change but also to resist change. This feature has to be kept in mind because all social movements do not attempt to change the existing situations. For instance, we all know that right from the nineteenth century there have been collective attempts to remove the social practice of sati. Raja Ram Mohan Roy actively campaigned against sati and was chiefly responsible for legal action being taken against sati in the nineteenth century. Even during his time, there were collective attempts to resist the introduction of the law abolishing sati. Even today there is a sizeable section of population who do not recognise or pay heed to the law against Sati.

The enthusiasm with which some people tried to celebrate and promote the performance of Sati in Deorala, Rajasthan, was a movement which could be regarded as change resisting (see figure 35.1). In addition, there could be movements, which promote casteism or, more specifically, attempt to reinforce the hegemony of the castes. Movements, which preach domination or

superiority of certain castes or a particular religion over others, movements that spread communal or ethnic prejudice, are all change-resisting movements. They attempt to change the prevalent norms, values and social relations and replace them with **obscurantist values**.

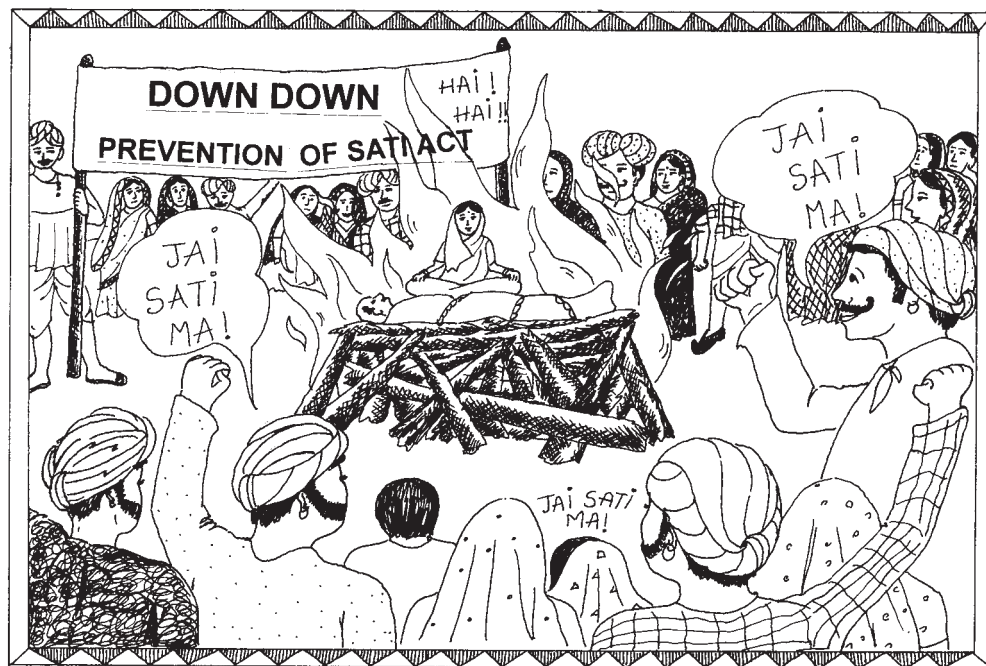


Fig. 35.1: Collective action to resist change prevention of sati act

### 35.3.2 Examples of Social Movements: Some Concrete Instances

We have so far attempted a definition of social movements. This should help us understand what social movements are and how they differ from other movements. However the discussion so far may appear somewhat abstract. Till now we only know some features of social movements. But what in concrete terms are social movements? One example which comes to our minds immediately is the process of sanskritisation expounded by the eminent sociologist, M.N. Srinivas. In this process we find that members of a caste group try to elevate their position to that of a caste deemed higher than their own. They do so by internalising the values, rituals and social behaviour of the members of that caste. Prof. Srinivas has given the cases of the Lingayats in Karnataka. We can find similar instances elsewhere. In a similar move the Rajbanshis in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal sought to elevate their position to that of the Kshatriya caste. This community belongs to the Bodo-Kachari group of North East India. Its members inhabit, apart from the above mentioned districts, parts of the neighbouring states of Assam and Bangladesh. Till the Census of 1901, the Rajbanshis were bracketed with the Koch, a tribe belonging to the same group. It was then believed that both came from the same ethnic origin. However in 1909 the Rajbanshis, under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Barman declared that their identity was different from that of the Koch. They stated that they were in fact Kshatriyas from North India who had taken refuge in this part of the country. The Kshatriya Sabha was formed and it urged all Rajbanshis to revert to their original status. The Rajbanshis started following the rituals of Kshatriyas such



as wearing the sacred thread, change in marriage practices, abstention from eating beef or pork, etc. They also started adopting the title “Thakur” along with their names. The Rajbanshis have been recognised as a separate group since the Census of 1911.

This movement is a social movement because it displayed the features of a social movement discussed earlier. Though the Rajbanshis formed an organisation (*Kshatriya Sabha*) and operated through it to elevate their status, it was not a formal organisation like a trade union or a peasant organisation. The *Sabha* did not have a formal set of rules and regulations relating to membership.

It is not necessary for a social movement to strive only for elevation of status; there can be movements with political or cultural dimensions. The Naxalite movement, which started in 1968 in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, could also be regarded as a social movement. In this movement peasants and agricultural workers engaged in a violent struggle against those whom they defined as their exploiters. The movement spread to other parts of the country and it was declared illegal by the government. This in fact prevented it from developing a formal, institutional structure. The different groups engaged in various regions could operate only clandestinely i.e., secretly. However after 1978 the government removed the ban on Naxalites provided they discarded violence and used peaceful means to press for their demands. As a result several Naxalite groups declared themselves as political parties and developed formal institutional structures. The movement then ceased to be a social movement.

In the cultural field too we have social movements. We can observe such movements in literature and in drama. In films, the New Cinema or Parallel Cinema movement started in the late 1960s is one such instance. Young film-makers started making films, which were realistic and dealt with the everyday life of the common man. This was in contrast to the romantic films in the commercial sector. This movement did not originate from a formal organisation such as a federation or an association. It was started by film-makers who shared the common belief that realistic films based on good literature should be shown to the people.

We can cite the SNDP Movement (*Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana* Movement) as an example of a social movement which has social, political, educational and religious dimensions to it. The movement arose as a backward classes movement in the nineteenth century in Kerala. It focused on the conflict between untouchable castes (Izhavas, toddy tappers of South Travancore, Kerala) and the clean Hindu upper castes (Nayars, Nambudiris). The Izhavas were subject to several ritual as well as civil disabilities. They had to maintain a prescribed limit of distance from the upper caste, could not use the roads, tanks, wells or temples used by the higher castes. They were denied admission to the traditional caste Hindu schools and were kept away from administrative jobs. Under the leadership of Sri Narayana Guru Swamy, the Izhavas formulated a programme of social uplift. The issues they undertook were right of admission to public schools, recruitment to government employment, entry into temple and political representation. They fought for social mobility, for shift in the traditional distribution of power, and transformed themselves into a large ethnic block, which became politically viable. (Rao 1974: 22).

**Activity 1**

Take a map of India with all the states marked on it. Identify at least one social movement that has been associated with each state. Remember that a social movement can cover more than one state. Compare your answers if possible with those given by other students at your Study Centre.

We can now see that social movements have varied dimensions. As such they can cover all parts of our lives. There can be social movements, which promote change, and there can be those which resist change. This distinction has to be kept in mind because all social movements do not attempt to change the existing situation. Now let us move on to another aspect of social movements, namely, types of social movements.

**35.3.3 Types of Social Movements**

Social movements can be classified under various typologies depending on such factors like aim of the movement, organisation, means adopted to achieve the aims, value strength and so on. Some of the types are:

- i) **Migratory movements:** When a large number of people migrate due to discontent and or due to the shared hope for a better future in some other land, we talk of migratory movements. For instance the mass exodus of men to Gulf countries specially from the state of Kerala is an example of a migratory social movement. Similarly the mass migration of people from Bangladesh to India during troubled times is another instance of a migratory movement.
- ii) **Reform movements:** This type of a movement constitutes a collective attempt to change some parts of a society without completely transforming it. A reform movement accepts the basic pattern of the social order of that society and orients itself around an ideal. It makes use of those institutions such as the press, the government, the school, the church and so on to support its programme. Reform movements usually, rise on behalf of some distressed or exploited group. Reform movements are almost impossible in an authoritarian society. Such movements are mainly possible in democratic societies where people tolerate criticism. For example, the socio-religious reform movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India aimed to remove social practices like sati, denial of education to women, ban on widow remarriage, ill treatment of widows, child marriage, caste disabilities and so on.
- iii) **Revolutionary movements:** Such a movement seeks to overthrow the existing system and replace it with a totally different one. Revolutionary movements aim at reconstructing the entire social order. They challenge the existing norms and propose a new scheme of values. The examples that immediately come to one's mind are the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution which resorted to overthrow the existing socio-political order prevailing in France and Russia respectively.
- iv) **Resistance or Reactionary movements:** These arise among people who are dissatisfied with certain aspects of change. The movement seeks to recapture or reinstate old values. For example the Islamic Fundamentalist movement and the *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* (RSS) can be classified under the heading reactionary or resistance movements.

Within every society, at different points of time we can have general movements or specific movements. All these types of movement generally have a programme of protest and action, establishment of a power relationship favourable to the movement and promotion of membership gratification.

### 35.3.4 Functions of Social Movements

So far we have defined and explained the main features of social movements with the help of examples and typologies. Another important aspect of social movements, which needs consideration, is the functional aspect of social movements.

According to Touraine (1968) social movements have three important functions. They are:

- i) **Mediation:** They help to relate the individual to the larger society. They give each person a chance to participate, to express his ideas and to play a role in the process of social change.
- ii) **Pressure:** Social movements stimulate the formation of organised groups that work systematically to see that their plans and policies are implemented.
- iii) **Clarification of Collective Consciousness:** This is a significant function. Social movements generate and develop ideas which spread throughout society. As a result group consciousness arises and grows.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Define a Social Movement. Use two lines for your answer.  
.....  
.....
- ii) Which of the following are social movements. Tick the right answers.
  - a) Bhakti Movement
  - b) Panchayati Raj
  - c) Strike by workers
  - d) Brahmo Samaj
- iii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true or F for false against each statement.
  - a) All social movements strive only for elevation of status.
  - b) Reform movements aim to change some parts of a society while revolutionary movements want to reconstruct the entire social order.
  - c) Social movements help an individual in a society to relate himself to a larger group in that society.
- iv) Which of the following movements are change promoting (CP) and which are change resisting (CR). Mark CP or CR against each of the following movements.

- a) Anti-Reservation movement
- b) Sati Movement
- c) Women's movement for equal status
- d) Literacy Movement
- e) New Cinema Movement
- f) Movement for entry of untouchables into temples.

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## 35.4 ORIGINS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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After having described the main features of a social movement, let us move on to the question of emergence of a social movement. What are the social conditions or motivational forces that are both necessary and sufficient to the generation of a social movement? In this section we will discuss the origins of social movements by describing three factors which are associated with the emergence of social movements. But before doing so, let us specify the minimum conditions that are necessary for a social movement to emerge.

A social movement represents an effort by a large number of people to solve collectively a problem or problems that they feel they have in common. In doing so the people must first of all understand the problem. Therefore, the problem must be observable. Secondly, it must be objective. This means that it exists even if we are not aware of it. A low caste status or lack of realism in films is there even if people at a given point of time are not aware of its existence. When people become aware of the problem it means that their consciousness of the problem is real. Hence they are now subjectively aware of the objective situation. This would mean that problems are not created by people out of nothing. They exist in reality but it is only when people actually understand a problem that they try to find out means to overcome it.

All this may seem somewhat complicated but it actually is quite simple if we try to go into major details. First of all we must try to understand why there is a sudden need for collective action. We are using the word 'sudden' because if a problem exists in reality why is it that people react to it only at a given point of time and not earlier. In order to understand this mystery, or rather, understand the very existence of social movements, we must go into its origins. It is only then that we can understand the nature of any social movement. M.S.A. Rao (1979) had done a great deal of research on social movements and he identified three factors relating to the origins of social movements. We shall attempt to explain these in this section.

### 35.4.1 Relative Deprivation

The first factor is relative deprivation. A social movement usually starts because the people are unhappy about certain things. They may feel that they are not getting enough. In other words, they feel that they are deprived of something. The Naxalite movement would have this as a cause. The peasants felt that they were being exploited and deprived of their rights and the fruits of their labour. They therefore decided to protest. Similarly, the movement for abolition of reservation of seats for backward classes in educational institutions, which

took place in Gujarat, was again a result of relative deprivation. The upper castes felt that their children were being deprived of seats in good schools because of the reservation policy. At the same time those pressing for more reservation are doing so because they too feel deprived.

We should keep in mind that deprivation is relative and not absolute. A movement against or for reservation does not mean that the concerned castes feel that they are totally deprived of educational facilities. They in fact feel that given their ability they are getting less. What we are trying to stress on here is that social movements do not arise only when there are extreme conditions, e.g. contradiction between the very rich and the very poor. Social movements can arise out of relative expectations and not necessarily out of extreme or absolute conditions.

### 35.4.2 Structural Strain

However, all social movements do not arise out of relative deprivation. They can also originate from structural strain. When the prevailing value system and the normative structure does not meet the aspirations of the people, the society faces strain. What happens at this time is that a new value system is sought so as to replace the old. This leads to conflicts and tension. Usually individuals in such a situation violate the social norms. For example where intercaste marriage is not permitted we may still find a few cases of such marriage, in violation of the norms. However only when individual actions are replaced by collective action does a social movement take place.

Let us take the example of the women's movement to illustrate the point. In a largely traditional society like India, women are usually assigned passive roles. A woman is expected to be subordinate to males. It is believed that as a daughter a female must obey her father; as a wife, her husband and as a widow, her sons. Such a value system would encourage women to be content as housewives and mothers. The duties outside the house, such as education, earning a livelihood etc. are the domain of males.

Over the years we can see that opportunities for both education and employment are being increasingly made available for women. As a result, the roles of women are changing. However the value system remains the same. Therefore, women may take up jobs but their household duties remain unchanged. This obviously results in greater burden of work on the working woman.

In employment too women are discriminated against. All jobs are not open to them. For example, though the employment of women as salaried workers has increased they are mainly employed as school teachers (that too in primary schools) or as office employees. In other jobs, such as factory work, the number of female employees has decreased. In technical education there is no legal discrimination against women, but we find that there are very few women engineers. In management institutes too the number of female students is very few.

These disparities occur mainly because we have, in keeping with our value system, categorised certain types of employment as 'manly' or masculine. Factory work, engineering, flying planes, managing industries or offices are 'manly' jobs. Women are more suited to 'feminine' jobs such as teaching children, working as typists, receptionists, telephone operators, airhostesses

etc. Parents and elders impress upon girls the type of jobs, which are suitable for them. If a girl has an aptitude for engineering her parent may dissuade her to take it up as a career and may possibly impress on her to read home science instead. Therefore even when there is no legal ban, the value system enforces women not to pursue certain careers.

Moreover, if a woman's place is in the home, a single woman working in the city and living alone is viewed as something unusual. Girls who go out to work or study are looked down upon in many places. People feel that if women educate themselves and take up jobs they will neglect their traditional duties and they will refuse to subordinate themselves to the men folk. Independent minded girls or those who are bold enough to venture out of their homes are regarded as easy prey to males. Such people are victims of eve teasing.

An accumulation of all these factors have made women challenge the existing values. This has resulted in the women's movement, which is also referred to as the feminist movement. Women who have become conscious of these prejudices and evils in society are now collectively trying to redefine the value system. This need has arisen because the traditional value system is causing strain to women who want to think and act as independent beings. As such this movement is not directed against males. It is only an assertion that a new value system based on equality of all human beings should replace the existing value system.

### **35.4.3 Revitalisation**

We may quite often find that relative deprivation and structural strain are related to each other. They together form the basis of a social movement. In the case of the women's movement, relative deprivation is a cause for structural strain. Similarly an examination of social reform movements may reveal that both these causes exist. However we must keep in mind that social movements are not merely protest movements. Though social movements express dissatisfaction and dissent against the system, they may also offer a positive alternative. Indeed they may be started for revitalising the existing system which is undergoing structural strain. Revitalisation is therefore the third factor associated in the emergence of a social movement.

This urge for revitalisation can generate a movement, which promotes patriotism, and national pride could be caused by youth movements, which encourage young people to help and organise the oppressed, or the literacy movements are other examples. These movements are started in order to solve a problem collectively. They do not merely protest against what they define as wrong but also try to provide an alternative.

### **35.4.4 Importance of Understanding the Origins**

The three factors discussed above are not exclusive, in the sense that if one exists the other two cannot. They are, as we have seen, interrelated. In fact we may find that all three can be found in most social movements. At the same time we will find that normally in any movement one of these predominates over the other two. In examining the origins of a social movement we have to try to locate the one which predominates. This is important for determining the shape of the movement. What does the movement try to gain? Which



interests does it represent? These are important questions for sociologists or for any one interested in studying changes in society. After all, if features of social movements are similar how does one distinguish one social movement from another? All social movements are not the same. They represent or fight for different sections of the population. At times two social movements may be contrary to one another. The pro- and anti-reservation stirrings are such instances. In some parts of Bihar we find that the poor peasants are organised under the Naxalite movement while the landlords have organised themselves under the *Bhoomi Sena* Movement. Different caste groups or religious communities organise social movements for revitalisation but these may be counterposed to each other. An analysis of the genesis of a social movement will help us in understanding these issues.

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## **35.5 ROLE OF LEADERSHIP AND IDEOLOGY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

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People organise themselves to begin a social movement because they are discontented with the way things are. They wish to see it changed but despair at the available means of doing so. The mobilisation of discontent lies in bringing the affected group into action. Social movements constitute people's efforts to organise themselves to fight against inequalities, discrimination and deprivation. Widespread collective mobilisation has led to organised movements with defined ideologies and leaders who have brought important changes in the societies from which they originate (Rao 1979:1). Apart from the three factors mentioned in the previous section relating to the emergence of social movements, there are two more factors, which contribute to the origins as well as the sustenance of social movements. These factors are leadership and ideology. Let us look at them separately.

### **35.5.1 Leadership**

No social movement begins all of a sudden because thousands of people feel that they have a common problem. While studying social movements we will inevitably find that in the initial phase or even later on, one person or a small group has motivated the others to start a movement. In most of the movements mentioned earlier we will find that they were shaped by a leader. The Rajbanshi Kshatriya movement was under the leadership of Panchanan Thakur who was the first to assert that the Rajbanshis were Kshatriyas. He mobilised the people around this demand. The Naxalite movement had the initial leadership of Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jungal Santhal in West Bengal, N. Patnaik and Chandra Pullu Reddy and Nagi Reddy and Seetharamiah in Andhra Pradesh. The women's movement too has several leaders in different parts of the country. In Kerala the SNDP movement had Sri Narayana Guru as its chief leader. The movement was, characterised by collective leadership with a division of labour among the different types of elites (Rao 1979: 251).

Leaders are important for movements because they help clarify the issues and thus shape the movement. It is the leaders who provide guidance to a movement. They prevent it from becoming a desperate, unruly collection of people. A movement can degenerate into a mob if it does not have a leader or a group of leaders guiding it.

The importance of leadership does not necessarily mean that it is all pervading, that people have no independent role to play and they are manipulated by the leaders. On the contrary, the leadership is expected to reflect the views of the people. Just as we have seen earlier that social movements arise when there is a concrete problem and when people become aware of it. Similarly, a leader is able to visualise this problem. The person does not necessarily create it. The most important aspect of leadership is that it tries to articulate the views of the participants. It is impossible for all people to give their views simultaneously. This would result in chaos. The leader tries to present these views in an organised manner.

At the same time the leadership of a movement also tries to impress its own views on the people. The leader has ideas about the movement, the shape it will take and the nature of its demands. Leadership therefore involves a two-way process. On the one hand the leader tries to lead according to his understanding of the situation and the issues involved. On the other hand the leader incorporates the views and ideas of the participants and articulates them in the process. Both aspects must be present to ensure a stable leadership of a movement. If a leader only tries to impose his or her own views without taking into account the views of the participants the movement is likely to degenerate. A similar situation will occur if the leadership solely relies on the diverse views of the participants without enunciating its own.

We can therefore see that leadership is necessary for helping to develop and shape a social movement. The objectives of a social movement arise out of the problems the people are facing. In the case of the reservation movements both pro and anti) it would mean greater seats for that section of the people. For the women's movement it would mean greater freedom and less oppressive social restrictions. At the same time, how the participants attempt to achieve the stated objectives will be largely determined by the leadership the movement can throw up. We can thus find that social movements with common objectives adopt different strategies for achieving their goals.

### 35.5.2 Ideology

Apart from the role of the leader another important factor in determining the nature of a social movement is ideology. There are other important aspects of a movement, which are determined by its ideology. Let us look at this aspect in greater detail.

In very rare cases are people attracted to a movement because of a promise for better facilities. There is something deeper, which makes people committed to it. People do not join a movement because they take a fancy to a leader. Normally they follow the leader because of what he represents, i.e., the ideas that he places before the people. People can be lured by promises of better physical facilities and opportunities for social life only for a short time. They however need something more to sustain their interest in the movement. This is where ideology plays a role in sustaining the movement.

What exactly do we mean by ideology? Ideology very simply denotes a set of related beliefs held by a group of people. It helps in understanding a situation. Further it legitimises actions pursued by the people. Therefore, just as a leader is important for guiding a movement, an ideology is also important as it makes

people understand and justify the implications of their actions. One can rarely conceive of a social movement without an ideology.

Let us try and illustrate the above with some examples. When women perceive the problem of sexual inequality in society they organise a social movement which attempts to fight against the problems which are there. What form does this collective action take? This depends on how the problems are perceived. Will the problem of sexual inequality be looked upon as a male, female problem where the solution lies in an attack on the menfolk? Or will it be seen as a problem inherent in the social values and hence the solution lies in changing these values. Like these, there can be other interpretations of the same problem. The actions taken for achieving the goals will also be diverse. For some the use of violent means may be regarded as a corrupting force. Others may believe that they are necessary means. These types of diversities, which are found in social movements, both in identifying the problem and in the means to attain the goals, are determined by ideology. Ideology therefore indicates the goals, means and forms of practical activities of social groups and of individuals. It supplies the justification for various social, political and moral ideals.

We can often see that social movements having the same goals may adopt different means to attain them. Both the Naxalite movement and the *Bhoodan* movement had the same goal of helping to overcome the problems of the rural poor. The Bhoodan movement adopted a peaceful, non-violent approach. It sought to distribute land to the poor by appealing to the rich landowners to donate their surplus land to the rural poor. The Naxalite movement on the other hand adopted more forceful means. It believed that the landlords were the enemies of the poor. Hence the only way to help the poor would be to eliminate their enemies. Both movements justified their actions. Therefore we can see that ideology distinguishes one social movement from one another, even though the goals of both may be similar.

We can take another example to illustrate the above point. The movement for preservation of the ecology has taken different paths. The aim of these different movements is the same: preservation of the natural environment. However there are differences on how environment should be preserved. Sundarlal Bahuguna is leading a social movement, which has become internationally renowned. His emphasis is on protection of trees in the hilly regions. The *Chipko* movement, as it is called, has been effective in preventing felling of trees in the Gharwal region of Uttar Pradesh. This movement also believes that if the environment is to be preserved, growth of industries must be checked, industrialisation will destroy the environment, and subsequently, the local population. On the other hand there is another movement in the same region based on the same goal of preserving the forests, led by Chandi Prasad Bhatt. The means are somewhat different from those of the *Chipko* movement. Bhatt's movement believes that small industries should be allowed in this region to provide employment to the people. The existence of forests is necessary, this movement asserts, but if forest related employment is not available the people may be forced to cut down trees to earn their livelihood. This movement views industrialisation as a form of modernisation but it has to be regulated. The *Chipko* movement has a different view on this matter. The divergence in the two movements is not based on scientific analysis, though both use scientific data to prove their respective stands. Ideology plays an important part in

determining these actions and in analysing the situation. Bhatt's movement believes that industrialisation is a form of progress whereas Bahuguna's movement has different views on this. Both justify their approaches on ideological basis.

Apart from helping to distinguish one movement from another, ideology helps to sustain a movement. It distinguishes a social movement from mere instances. People can be mobilised when they feel that they are being deprived. However in order to carry on the movement they need some justification for their actions. The Kshatriya movement began when the Rajbanshis felt that they were being treated as inferiors. But in order to sustain the movement they needed the belief that they were in fact originally from an upper caste.

We can therefore see that ideology is an important component of a social movement. It conceives a movement, sustains it and offers solutions. Both leadership and ideology are indispensable as leaders operate within the ideological framework.

### Activity 2

Read in detail about any one of the following social movements.

- 1) Chipko Movement
- 2) Sarvodaya Movement
- 3) Yadav Movement
- 4) Bhoodan Movement

Write a note of not more than two pages on nature of the movement, root cause for its emergence, ideology and leadership. Compare, if possible, your note with those written by other students at your Study Centre.

## 35.6 LIFE CYCLE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

After having described the crucial role played by leadership and ideology in social movements, let us now state the stages through which generally a social movement passes through.

Stage one reflects the social unrest present in a society. Almost all social movements are rooted in social unrest and problem. Collective tension builds up as a result of this. This stage is followed by stage two in which collective excitement can be witnessed in the society, where people feel they have a problem in common. Certain social conditions are identified as the root cause of the misery and excitement sets in. The movement gains support and a guiding ideology. Agitations rise everywhere. This period is generally brief and leads quickly to action.

Stage three is the formalisation stage through some movements, like migratory movements, may be able to operate without formal organisation. In this stage, a chain of officers is drawn up. There is division of labour among leaders and the followers. Fund raising is systematised and ideology becomes clearer than before. The leaders clarify the ideology in that they remind people of the discontent they share in common, identify their opponents and state the

objectives of the movement. The strategy and tactics for protest and for action are drawn and a moral justification for having adopted a particular course of action is established.

The fourth stage is one of institutionalisation. The movement crystallises into a definite pattern. Efficient bureaucrats replace agitators; buildings, offices are established. The aims of the movement become accepted in that society. This period may last indefinitely. The fifth stage is one of dissolution. Different movements come to different ends at different points of time: some movements end early while some dissolve after the objective has been achieved. Sometimes differences of opinion among the leaders within a movement may lead to divisions within a movement, with each group having its own ideology and programme of action. Only some movements achieve full institutionalisation.

It is not necessary that all movements pass through all these above mentioned stages. But what can be certainly said about all social movements are:

- a) they play a major part in social change,
- b) they help in quickening the pace of change, and
- c) they influence many aspects of the peoples lives: moral, political, social, and cultural.

In India social movements have tried to change certain aspects of the traditional value system though they have not always been successful in doing so.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) What are the three factors associated with the emergence of social movements? Use two lines for your answer.

.....  
.....

- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true or F for false against each statement.

- a) Structural strain is caused when the norms and values of a society disappear suddenly.
- b) The leadership of a social movement plays an important role in achieving its objectives.
- c) Ideology gives always a political slant to a movement.
- d) Ideology helps in distinguishing between movements with similar objectives.

- iii) Identify the name of the movement with which each of the following leaders is associated.

- a) Vinoba Bhave
- b) Charu Mazumdar
- c) Sri Narayana Guru
- d) Sunderlal Bahuguna

- iv) List the stages through which a social movement is generally seen to pass. Answer in about four lines.

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## 35.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we looked at an important component of collective behaviour and social change in India, namely social movements. We began the unit by pointing out the link between social change and social movements. We said social movements are one of the internal forces, which contribute to change in a society. We then moved on to describe the nature of social movements. We first defined a social movement as a collective attempt to promote or resist change. We elaborated the definition with the help of examples. We then moved on to types of social movements. Here we talked of migratory, reformative, revolutionary and reactionary movements. We then stated the functions of a social movement namely mobilisation, pressurisation and clarification of collective consciousness. In our discussion of origins of social movements we focused on three factors associated with the emergence of social movements. The three factors are relative deprivation, structural strain and revitalisation. In the section on origins we also stated why it is important to understand the origins. We said that examining origins helps us to locate which factors predominate and shows us how a movement takes a particular shape. We then moved on to discuss the role of ideology and leadership in stimulating as well as sustaining a movement. Finally, we stated the stages through which a social movement is seen to generally pass.

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## 35.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Ideology</b>	A set of related beliefs held by a group of people
<b>Obscurantist Values</b>	Values, which are, opposed to inquiry, reform or new knowledge i.e. values, which have become redundant with time
<b>Relative Deprivation</b>	A feeling or a state of being deprived in relation to certain conditions and expectations
<b>Revitalisation</b>	Restrengthening
<b>Structural Strain</b>	The strain experienced in a society because the prevailing values and norms do not meet the aspirations of the people.



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## 35.9 FURTHER READING

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Kumar, A. 2001. *Social Transformation in Modern India*. Sarup: New Delhi

Rao, M.S.A. 1979. *Social Movements and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India*. Macmillan: Madras.

Shah, Ganshyam (ed.) 2002. *Social Movements and the State*. Sage Publications: New Delhi

Wilson, John 1973. *Introduction to Social Movements*. Basic Books: New York.

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## 35.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) A social movement is a collective effort by people of a society to promote or resist change.
- ii) a and d
- iii) a) F b) T c) T
- iv) a) CR b) CR c) CP d) CP e) CP f) CP

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The three factors associated with the emergence of social movements are relative deprivation structural strain and revitalisation.
- ii) a) F b) T c) F d) T
- iii) a) *Bhoodan* Movement  
b) Naxalite Movement  
c) SNDP Movement  
d) *Chipko* Movement
- iv) The stages are:
  - a) Social unrest
  - b) Collective excitement
  - c) Formalisation
  - d) Institutionalisation
  - e) Dissolution.

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# UNIT 36 DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND CHANGE

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## Structure

- 36.0 Objectives
- 36.1 Introduction
- 36.2 Link between Development, Planning and Change
- 36.3 Perception of Social Thinkers on Development and Change
  - 36.3.1 Development and Change as Interchangeable and Logically Related Terms
  - 36.3.2 Development and Change as Modernisation
- 36.4 Contemporary View of Development, Planning and Change
  - 36.4.1 Development
  - 36.4.2 Planning
  - 36.4.3 Change
- 36.5 Development Planning and Change in the Indian Context
  - 36.5.1 Development: Mixed Economy and Rural Development
  - 36.5.2 Planning: Five Year Plans
  - 36.5.3 Change in Relation to Caste, Rural and Urban Life and Women
- 36.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 36.7 Key Words
- 36.8 Further Reading
- 36.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 36.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- state the link between development, planning and change
- describe the perceptions of different social thinkers on development and change
- define and state the contemporary view on development, planning and change
- describe the approach to and experiences of development planning and change in the Indian context.

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## 36.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit we described **social change** in terms of social movements. In this unit, we are going to focus primarily on changes that are brought about through conscious and deliberate planning. Before we proceed to describe the structure of this unit, we want to point out two things. Firstly, we would advise

all students to go through Block 8, units 33 and 34 of the first electric course of Sociology of Bachelor's Degree Programme at IGNOU, the Study of Society, before reading this unit. Units 33 and 34 of Block 8 of that course are on Social Change and Social Development. These units will help you to have a conceptual clarity about the terms change and **development**. Secondly, in this unit, we have described development planning and change under separate headings in order to help you understand the way they have been defined and described in social sciences. We have focused on the link between development planning and change wherever possible.

Coming to the structure of this unit, we have begun the unit by stating the link between development, planning and change. Then we have proceeded to describe the way development and changes have been viewed by sociologists over the years.

We have focused on the perceptions of social thinkers who have viewed development and change as interchangeable and logically related terms. We have also stated the perceptions of thinkers who viewed development and change in the context of **modernisation**. This description of the perceptions of social thinkers will provide background information relating to development and planning in modern times. We then proceeded to define and describe development, planning and change in contemporary times. We can say that all this constitutes the first part.

In the second part we will look at the relevance of development planning and change in the Indian context. We will begin our description by stating the Indian approach to development. We will then describe some of the schemes of development relating to rural India. In our examination of planning in India, we will refer to the approaches of the five-year plans. This will be followed by a description of changes in 'caste', 'rural and urban life' and 'position and role of women' in India. Here again the focus of description is on the changes that have taken place in the above mentioned areas as a result of planned development.

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### 36.2 LINK BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND CHANGE

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Development, planning and change are interrelated terms. In sociology, development essentially refers to a process of social change, which is planned and desired by a society. Development is a value-laden concept. Social change refers to alterations that occur in the social structure and social relations. It is a value-free or neutral concept. Planning, which simply means arrangement of parts in a certain design or a formulated scheme for getting something done, is an important factor in social change. Planning implies that ways and means are devised and decisions for future actions are chalked out well in advance. All cases of social change cannot be described as development. Only, planned and desired social change can be described as development. Thus, we can see that the three terms are closely inter-linked but have their own specific meaning.

There has been an immense sociological contribution in the area of social change and development. Compared to the contributions in these areas, the role of sociologists in the analysis of planning has been very recent and limited.

In the next section we shall briefly describe the important sociological contributions in the areas of social change and development. This will provide a background for understanding development planning in the context of change.

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### 36.3 PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL THINKERS ON DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

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In the early sociological writings, the terms and notions of development and change are used interchangeably. A clear distinction could either not be made, or if made, they were treated as logically related terms. In many of the early sociological theories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the notions of 'change', 'development', 'evolution' and 'progress' are sometimes confused or combined in a single term. In the mid twentieth century the terms 'change' and 'development' were primarily viewed in the context of 'modernisation'. Let us now look at the perceptions of some social thinkers on development and social change.

#### 36.3.1 Development and Change as Interchangeable and Logically Related Terms

We will look at the perceptions of thinkers like Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Weber and Marx.

- i) **Auguste Comte:** Auguste Comte tried to understand social changes that occurred in the early years of the industrial revolution as an evolutionary process. Evolution implies gradual transformation or change through a series of stages. The theory of evolution explains that societies pass through a number of stages starting from a simple form and becoming more complex as the process of evolution progresses.

Auguste Comte put forward the idea of evolutionary change and also related the idea of progressive change through the development of intellect, in particular the scientific thought. He was of the opinion that the human mind, human society and human knowledge all went through a process of development and change, from metaphysical (non-scientific) to positivism (scientific).

- ii) **Herbert Spencer:** Herbert Spencer treated human society as a biological organism and, therefore, tried to study 'development' in the sense of change from within. In his opinion, social bodies are like living bodies. Thus, with increase in size, their structural complexity too increases. Spencer propounded an analogy between society and an organism and between social and economic growth.
- iii) **Emile Durkheim:** Durkheim conceived society in terms of an evolutionary scheme. He talked about social solidarity. By solidarity he meant the moral beliefs and ideas which defined the commonness underlying social life. Like a social evolutionist, he opined that in pre-industrial societies, mechanical solidarity was based on agreement and identity among people, while in post-industrial societies organic solidarity derived from agreement to tolerate a range of differences, conflicts being moderated through a variety of institutional arrangements. Division of labour was almost absent

in pre-industrial societies, while it is highly specialised and categorical in modern societies.

Durkheim tried to explain social change as the result of changes in the bonds of morality, which he called social solidarity. He also laid emphasis on the processes of social evolution. According to him, alterations in the modes of functioning of societies as organic wholes could be studied scientifically.

- iv) **Max Weber:** He examined the question of development and change in the context of his study on capitalism. According to him, culture (people's beliefs and values) is the key element in development. Unlike Durkheim, he tried to find as to what it was in people's religious and ethical beliefs that had enabled societies which started with similar technological endowment to develop and change in quite different ways.
- v) **Karl Marx:** Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in contrast to Durkheim and Weber argued that the processes of social change and development were in their nature not gradual and evolutionary; rather they were characterised by conflict of interests among classes in society. They essentially talked about disequilibrium between the productive potential of a society and the distribution of goods and services among its members. Therefore, according to this view, social change arises out of potential struggles and radical breaks in continuity, rather than from gradual evolution. Class struggle has been recognised as the driving force of social change and development.

### 36.3.2 Development and Change as Modernisation

We will look into the contributions of W. Moore, Mc Clelland and critics of the modernisation theory.

- i) **Wilbert Moore** (1951) understood social change as total transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into a technology-dependent social organisation, generally found in the advanced, economically prosperous and relatively politically stable nations of the western world. He described the general conditions for industrialisation which include change in values, institutions, organisations and motivations. According to the modernisation theory development takes place from within a society and follows essentially the same pattern in all societies. The end-result of development, according to the modernisation theorists, is prosperity and relative political stability.
- ii) **David Mc Clelland** (1961), like Max Weber, emphasised that internal factors like the values and motives of the persons provide opportunities to shape their own destiny. Thus, the problems of backwardness, poverty, malnutrition etc. are vitally linked to traditional and non-traditional thought. Therefore, educational programmes and technical aid aimed at increasing the 'need for achievement' of the people of backward areas are needed to solve these problems. Mc Clelland's idea of the need for achievement crystallises this view of the motive force in social change in general and the industrialisation process as a particular case of social change. He concluded that modernisation or development could be achieved through a process of diffusion of culture, ideas and technology.

- iii) **Critics of the Modernisation Theory:** A.G. Frank (1967) opined that the modernisation theories are inadequate from the policy point of view, because they fail to define correctly the kinds of social and economic processes at work in the developing countries. Rejecting the western model of development, he asserted that it is not necessary that development would occur in all societies if they adopt the economic policies and parliamentary democracy on the pattern of west.

The modernisation theories could not come true, as experience showed that all developing societies have not followed the path of development of the already developed countries. It is suggested that each society's development problems can be understood only in relation to its place in a world system. This viewpoint raised questions as to whether or not the best path to development is revolution or complete withdrawal from the world system of social, political and economic relations. These thinkers became known as 'Dependency Theorists'. Their theories do not give much weight to the role of culture and ideas in development. They provided a simple and powerful model of the origin and nature of underdevelopment. However, the experience of development of Third World countries and the continuing failure of the developed countries to cater to the needs of all their citizens to achieve their own steady economic growth and development made it apparent that neither Durkheimian nor Weberian theories/traditions explain the process of change adequately.

Barrington Moore (1966) gives an explanation that stands apart from dependency theory. He differs from both Marxism and modernisation theory. He views development primarily as an internal process, the result depending on the relative power of social classes. He argues that there may be different routes to development, such as bourgeois democratic revolution led by a strong indigenous middle class; fascist revolution where middle class with its entrepreneurial skills was weak; capitalism characterised by an authoritarian style; and peasant revolution leading to communism in a situation under which centralised monarchies stifled the impulse to capitalistic development and the way forward depended on an uprising by the mass of peasants led by intellectuals.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true F for false against each statement.
- a) All change is development.
  - b) Early sociological theories by Comte, Spencer and Durkheim viewed development and change as interchangeable and/or logically related terms.
  - c) According to modernisation theorists the end result of development is prosperity and political stability.
  - d) Development refers to unplanned process of social change in modern times.



- ii) How did Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels view social change and development? Answers in about five lines.

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- iii) Tick mark the correct answer of the following question.

Who among the following viewed human society as a biological organism?

- a) Herbert Spencer
- b) Max Weber
- c) Emile Durkheim
- d) Karl Marx

- iv) Write any two criticisms of modernisation theory. Use seven lines for your answer.

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## 36.4 CONTEMPORARY VIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND CHANGE

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We have seen how in many of the early sociological writings, the terms, concepts and notions of development, change, evolution and progress are used interchangeably. In the mid twentieth century development was used in the context of modernisation theory. A clear distinction could either not be made, or if made, they were treated as logically related terms. The general level of abstract ideas and words does not always have a clearly defined meaning. In this situation, it is important not only to define the terms precisely, but also see how they were defined in different periods of time, so that they can be understood by a large number of people.

In the following section, we will state how the terms development, change and planning have been defined and described in sociological writings since the mid twentieth century.

### 36.4.1 Development

As defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, development means a gradual unfolding; a fuller working out, of the details of anything; the growth of what is in the germ. Thus, we can apply the term to understand the development of a child or of a disease. However, its usage in the last five decades in social sciences has been quite different and complex. It has been used in different ways by different people. Development inevitably means different things for different individuals and social groups. Due to different assumptions made about the nature of the development process, various words are frequently used to describe the process. Areas where development is slow, for instance, the economically backward areas are termed as less developed, developing, underdeveloped, and traditional.

#### a) Development as Industrialisation and Technological Advancement

The term development has been used to make a distinction between the prosperous industrial societies versus the rest of the societies and also to describe the process of industrialisation and modernisation. This usage has several distinctive features and does not take into consideration the general theories like the theory of social evolution. It takes into account only a specific kind of changes, which occur either at the present time or took place in the recent past. Three terms are commonly used to indicate the stage of development: traditional societies, transitional societies, and modern societies. Growth of knowledge and control over nature, which in other words, means development of human powers of production, is treated as the most significant element in the transformation of a society. Technological determinism and industrialisation are the important features of this type of development.

Industrialisation, urbanisation and development are related processes. Increasing urbanisation and rising number of factories and movement of goods and labour from rural areas to urban areas are the inevitable consequences of these processes. Industrialisation, in fact, is a phase of economic development in which capital and labour resources shift both relatively and absolutely from agricultural activities to industry. Industrial production can be contrasted with craft production in terms of its scale; employment of a large number of workers; use of machinery; and the resulting geographical concentrations and production for a large market. Thus, the key elements of an industrial society seem to be the type of technology employed in production, the scale of organisation of labour in relation to that technology, and the extent of specialisation leading to various types of changes in society. With the introduction of new technologies, less labour is required for agricultural production and more for industry. The industries being more concentrated in the urban areas the surplus of rural agricultural labour migrates to the urban areas. The migrated population has to find new ways of earning a livelihood with new rules. These changes, besides technological changes, include changes in the way people come to see themselves and others and changes in the ideological framework. In the process, a contradiction is said to exist between the forces of production, such as technology, technical knowledge, and crafts, and their relationships with production like legal arrangements, social organisations, forms of contracts, forms of distribution, etc. Modernisation theory, building on the ideas of Durkheim and Weber, emphasises that industrialisation involves changes in people's attitudes and expectations as well as in the structure of their

relationships. Planned changes in economic, social, political and other spheres have been more recently defined as development.

### **b) Development as Socio-Cultural Development**

Since the 1960s there is an increasing emphasis by sociologists to look at development from a 'holistic' point of view. This means, defining development not only in terms of industrialisation or economic dimensions but also in terms of socio-cultural dimensions. Until recently, the popular notion was that economic growth was a sufficient and necessary condition to stimulate development in all other sections of society. This has been proved incorrect. Economic advancement of one group of people has not and does not trickle down to all other groups in a society. Also the achievement of high levels of economic advancement by some countries has not helped to solve some of their serious social problems. It is therefore, increasingly being emphasised that the ultimate aim of development is the improvement of the quality of life of every human being in society. Development is multidimensional. It takes into consideration matters like equity, social participation, environmental sustainability, decentralisation, self-reliance, basic human needs satisfaction etc.

Some sociologists emphasise that improvement in quality of life involves psychological, social and moral dimensions apart from political, economic and cultural dimensions. For instance, they point out that an improvement in the psychological quality of life entails the idea of life satisfaction including positive mental health. This requires a proper balance between material and non-material life goals of a people. The improvement in social quality of life means an increase in the strength of family stability, interpersonal bonds and social solidarity. An improvement in the moral quality of life means developing a concern for others and not merely a concern for self. (Sharma 1986: 20). Thus the sociological approach to development looks at this process as alterations that affect the whole socio-cultural matrix of society. Development has come to mean a planned, stimulated movement of all sectors of a social system in the direction of the overall desired goals set by a society. Today Sociology of Development attempts to understand development and experiences of masses in a particular society in respect of their struggle to survive and change. One of the important aspects of Sociology and Development is to understand how transition occurs in society from one stage to another.

### **36.4.2 Planning**

In the present century there have been several attempts to bring about social change by planned efforts. Planning has become an important factor in social change. Changes result from simultaneous decisions on many aspects and usually cause mixed positive and negative impacts. Planned change or development may be defined as transformation that aims to minimise the negative impacts on society. In the past, efforts were oriented towards achieving economic growth assuming that the benefits of economic growth will automatically trickle down to all sections of society. However, it could not come true. Economic growth has failed to lessen the gaps between different sections of society. It is proved now that economic growth alone is not effective. Inequality and poverty have persisted despite impressive rates of growth. Somewhere they became worse during the growth period. Active government

interventions into the socio-economic system are, therefore, needed; reliance on market forces alone not being sufficient.

Planning is a needed strategic intervention to bring about development. Planning becomes necessary to promote economic and social development. The task of planning is to design strategic interventions for social change. Each country, based on its history, socio-political institutions, development priorities, resource endowments and institutional structure, undertakes development planning. Planning generally improves policy making.

The methodologies of planning are usually concerned with the choice of technique. Planning can take place at different depth levels. It may be carried out in many different ways. However, it is desirable to have a multiple perspective in development planning.

Developmental planning methods, which take into account different dimensions and integrate them into one are in their infancy. Endogenous development is the main focus of developmental planning efforts. Developmental planning is usually done from the perspective of government agencies. Sociologists have constantly reminded government agencies to extend the notion of planning from the idea of a planned economy to that of a planned society.

Developmental planning is at the cross-roads today. Social and cultural dimensions of development are usually understood as additional programmes and as investment outside the industrial and agricultural growth frameworks. This is where sociological analysis assumes immense value. By “keeping everything in view”, by defining clearly and describing the interconnections between social phenomena of different kinds, a sociologist makes planning more effective. (Bottomore 1987: 308).

### **Activity 1**

List the development schemes that have benefitted both the people as well as the natural environment of the locality in which you live over the past five years. Compare your list, if possible, with the list prepared by other students at your Study Centre.

### **36.4.3 Change**

Change is an empirical reality. Sociology has its roots in the attempt to understand the processes of social change. Except a few sociologists like Marx and Sorokin, many of the early grand theories of social change (like the linear theories of Comte and Spencer and the cyclical theories of Pareto and Toynbee) paid relatively little attention to the analysis of particular processes of social change. They did not also discriminate factors involved in social change (Bottomore 1987: 276).

In the recent decades, there have been attempts to analyse social change in terms of specific models, which are based on the experience of change in particular societies. Attempts are being made to construct these models within a broader theoretical framework. Sociologists are focussing on questions relating to change, the direction and rate of change and the factors in social change.

Social change, as defined in an earlier section, is looked at as an alteration in social structures (including the alteration in the size of a society) or in particular social institutions or in the relationship between institutions (Bottomore 1987: 279).

In order to understand the manner, direction and rate of change, sociologists have tried to seek historical description and interpretation. For instance, the direction and rate of change in India before and after independence were different. Comparisons between societies cannot be made unless each society has been understood in terms of its historical linkages and internal processes.

Regarding the rate of change, it has become a popular observation that there is an acceleration of social and cultural change in modern times. Ogburn (1922) was one of the first sociologists who systematically examined rate of change especially in the sphere technological inventions. He pointed out the gap between the rates of change in different sectors of social life. For instance, there is a gap between the rapid rate of technology and the slower rate of change in familial, political and other institutions and in beliefs and attitudes. He made a distinction between material and non-material cultures. The situation where changes in the non-material culture do not synchronise exactly with the changes in material culture has been described by the concept of culture lag. The problem of culture lag, in recent decades, has acquired greater importance with the emergence of planned socio-economic development in the developing countries as a primary issue in world politics (Bottomore 1987: 379).

Sociological studies have focused on changes caused by industrialisation, specially the disharmonies in the transitional period and the adaptation of the individual to rapid social changes. In the technologically and industrially advanced societies studies have focused on changes in the family, social stratification, law, moral and religious ideas attitudes the social problems stimulated by rapid economic advancement.

Regarding the factors in change, it is now increasingly being emphasised that social change is brought about due to the cumulative impact of a host of interrelated factors. Conquest, demographic, technological geographical factors, decisions and actions of individuals and planning are the factors in social change.

There may be various factors which bring about social change, and these may be categorised as those inherent in social systems; those related to the impact of the social environment on the social system; and those arising from the impact of the external environment. A change from one source may lead to a sequence of changes. Technological, agricultural, industrial and ecological changes tend to affect the social structure. The consequences are structural differentiation, integration or establishment of new coordinative structures and social disturbances.

Since 1960s, there has been a growing emphasis on social planning as an important factor in bringing about desired social change. Planning for development has become a popular slogan and approach in many of the Developing countries. In our next section we will look into development planning and change in the context of Indian society.

- i) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

What is the focus of the sociological approach to development?

- a) Economic aspect of development
- b) Socio-cultural, psychological and moral as well as economic aspects of Development
- c) Psychological and moral aspects of development
- d) None of the above

- ii) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

Which of the following effects can be termed as social planning?

- a) Conscious and a deliberate effort to bring about change
- b) Unconscious and accidental effort to bring about change
- c) Sporadic effort to bring about changes in the economy alone
- d) None of the above

- iii) What do you understand by sociological approach to development? Use five lines for your answer.

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## **36.5 DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND CHANGE IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT**

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So far in the first part of this unit we have defined and described the concepts of development, planning and change in the sociological context. In this part we will see how these terms find their application in the Indian context. We will begin with a description of India's approach to development since independence.

### **36.5.1 Development: Mixed Economy and Rural Development**

India embarked on the process of planned, socio-economic development after independence. The various schemes of development drawn up by the leaders of independent India not only cover economic aspects but also non-economic aspects like health, education, population control, political participation etc. Thus we can say that India's emphasis is on socio-cultural development and not merely on economic development.



The goals of development have been enshrined in the Constitution and various planning documents. Soon after Independence the Constitution laid down that its aim was to build a socialist, secular and democratic polity. This meant a social order, which guaranteed equality, freedom and justice. In order to achieve these goals the government devised institutional mechanisms and mobilised both human and material resources to achieve the goals set by the Constitution. The Planning Commission has stated the following with regard to the goals of development: “To initiate a process of development which will raise living standards and open out to the people new opportunities for a richer and more varied life” (Government of India 1952).

It is not possible to list here all the schemes of development. Let us state some of them and see how the principles of socialism, equality, social justice and democracy have been incorporated in the developmental schemes. Figure 36.1 shows various schemes of planned development.

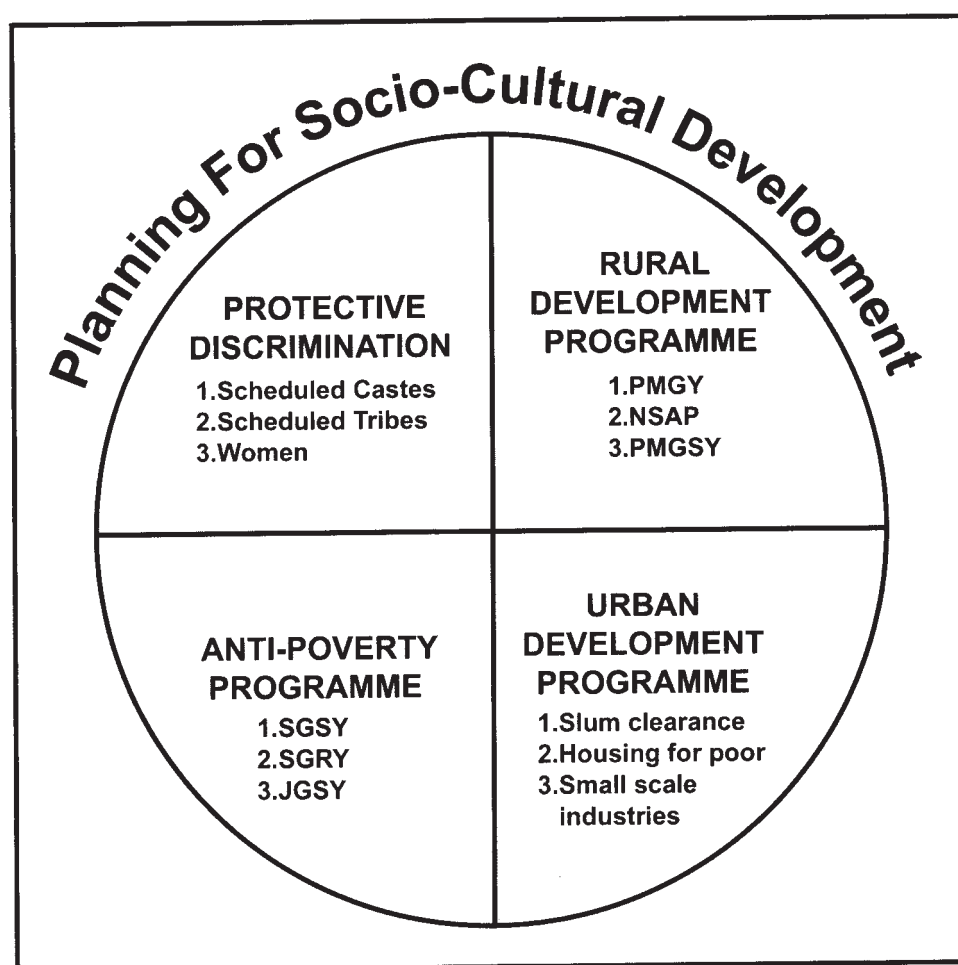


Fig. 36.1: Various schemes of planned development

#### 1) Socialist Path and Mixed Economy and New Economic Policy

India has adopted a path of development, which is known as the mixed economy. On the one hand, India has encouraged private business and industry and on the other it has almost full control, at least in principle, over all the major entrepreneurial and business activities. The State acts as an entrepreneur in setting up heavy industries such as steel and generation of electricity. Banks

have been nationalised. Railways and postal services are also a part of the public sector (i.e. run by the government). That the state of India exercises dominant control on key sectors of the economy is indicative of the ideology of socialism. Certain industries have been reserved for the private sector to encourage individual enterprises. In certain industries like textile and cement both private and state enterprise have been allowed to operate. In many other sectors too like health, education and transport both private and state agencies work either independently or in collaboration.

Some scholars argue that India's path of development, in practice has become a capitalist one. They point out that privately managed industries have become attractive and profitable and economic power has come to be concentrated in the hands of a few big private business houses. However, one cannot deny the fact that India is trying hard to pursue a mixed path of development.

In early 1990s India adopted the New Economic Policy with more stress on liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Progressive privatisation of the government owned entities, decontrol of industries, structural changes in the economy aimed at export led growth, elimination or reduction of all subsidies are some of the major policy decisions taken by the government as a part of it (refer section 10.3.4 of unit 10, Block 3 of ESO 12). Such changes in the development approach have pushed Indian economy further from a socialist path to a capitalist one.

## 2) Rural Development

Majority of India's population has been living in villages. The developmental plans have devoted a lot of attention to rural sector. A number of programmes like the Community Development Programme, Panchayati Raj, Cooperative Institutions and Target Group-Oriented Programme have been launched over the past four decades.

Two streams of thought primarily have guided rural development through these decades since independence. One of these was initiated by Gandhi and the other by the government. Gandhi's vision of development was that of self-supporting, self-governing and self-reliant village community where every body's needs were met. People lived in harmony and cooperation. He wanted the village community to be politically autonomous and economically self-sufficient. He strongly believed that social equality would prevail in a village community, which would be devoid of any form of exploitation. His plan was one of moral reconstruction of the social order where development involved every aspect of human life, social, economic and political. Many of his followers have launched programmes in different parts of the country based on his ideas. But all his ideas have not been incorporated in the policies and programmes adopted by the government for rural development in post-independent India (Chaturvedi 1987). Let us briefly describe some of the programmes launched by the government.

- a) **Community Development Programme (CD):** CD programme was the first major effort for rural development. It was conceived as a method through which the Five Year Plans would initiate a process of transformation of the social and economic life of the village. The emphasis of CD programme was not on material prosperity but on non-material aspects of community life.

The goals laid out were: a) increase in employment, b) increase in production through application of scientific methods of agriculture, c) establishment of subsidiary and cottage industries, d) promotion of self-help and self-reliance and e) extension of the principle of cooperation.

CD programme came to be viewed as a social movement with active involvement of the people and aimed at all-round development of the countryside. Operationally, this programme was based on the assumption that the described change could be ushered into the countryside by providing the necessary infrastructural facilities in the villages. However, the programme could not achieve the desired results due to several factors arising from such sources like governmental structures and a divided rural society based on caste-based land relations and hierarchical social organisation (Chaturvedi 1987).

- b) **Panchayati Raj:** A committee headed by Balwantrai Mehta was appointed in 1957 to assess the impact of Community Development Programme. The report of the committee pointed out that the goals of CD programme have not been achieved. It advocated that rural development would be possible only with local initiative and local direction. The committee favoured devolution of power at lower levels. So in 1958 Panchayati Raj came into existence in different states with power and duties allocated at different levels. Like the Community Development Programme, this scheme too did not achieve its desired results though the scheme was evaluated and revised time and again through the 70s and the 80s.

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, which came in to effect from April 1993 provided constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions. The salient features of the Act are: i) to provide three-tier system of Panchayati Raj to all states having a population of over 20 lakh; ii) to hold Panchayati Raj elections regularly every five years; iii) to provide reservation of seats of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled tribes and women (not less than one-third of total seats); iv) to appoint State Finance Commission to make recommendations regarding financial powers of the Panchayats; v) to constitute District Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the district as a whole.

According to the Constitution, Panchayats shall be given powers and authority to function as institutions of self-government. The powers and responsibilities to be delegated to Panchayats at appropriate level are: a) preparation of a plan for economic development and social justice; b) implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to the 29 subjects given in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution; and c) to levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees. Moreover the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act gives constitutional status to the *Gram Sabha*. *Gram Sabha* means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Gram Panchayat. *Gram Sabha* may perform such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide (India, 2003). An all India *Panchayat Adhyakshas' Sammelan* was held on 5th and 6th April 2002

in New Delhi. On the basis of the discussions and deliberations in the *Sammelan*, a 'National Declaration' was adopted by consensus to strengthen the Panchayati Raj system in the country (Balai Chandra 2003).

- c) **Cooperative Institutions:** Cooperative institutions were set up in the villages, as supportive institutions of CD programme and Panchayati Raj. The aim of the cooperative institutions was: a) to provide essential agricultural inputs and credit to farmers, b) to ensure adequate return to the farmers for their produce, c) to ensure supply of essential commodities to villagers at reasonable rates and d) to promote harmonious relations and a sense of participation among rural people. Credit societies, service cooperatives, producers' cooperatives and labour cooperatives came into existence, as the cooperative movement grew. The dairy cooperatives specially became a big movement, which resulted in what is popularly known as the "white revolution" in India. Though the cooperative societies increased in number through the decades, critics observe that the movement has been only a partial success. It has no doubt provided infrastructural facilities credit and essential agricultural inputs to the large and middle farmers. But the landless and poorer people have not benefitted by this scheme (Chaturvedi 1987).

### Activity 2

Go to any cooperative institution in the city/village/town where you live and find out about its aims, functions and difficulties. Write a note of about two pages. Compare, if possible, what you have written with those written by others at your Study Centre.

- d) **Target-Group Planning:** Realising the inadequacies of the programmes launched in the villages, the planners redefined the concept of rural development in the Fourth Five-Year Plan. The focus was on the rural poor, which was defined as the 'target group' for ameliorative measures. The target group included small and marginal farmers, tenants, agricultural workers and the landless. Some of the programmes launched were Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP), Food For Work (FFW), Minimum Needs Programme (MNP) etc. These programmes were directly administered by the central and state governments. The programmes though well intentioned ran into many difficulties. It paved the way for increasing regional disparities in development; it expanded the power of bureaucrats and undermined the role of local and popular participation in rural society (Chaturvedi 1987).

On the whole, while assessing the development of the rural society in India, it can be said that on the economic front, food production has increased over the years. But the Green Revolution and the White Revolution (mentioned earlier) has not helped in reducing the socio-economic disparities between regions or groups of people. The goal of establishing a social order based on equality and social justice seems still distant.

## 36.5.2 Planning: Five-Year Plans

So far we have described India's schemes of development. Let us now describe the Indian approach to planning.

Social planning represents an important factor in social change in India. It has been described by some as a movement towards socialism (Bottomore 1987). Social planning in India has aimed at drawing the mass of people into a process of rational and deliberate transformation of their social life. The aim of planning has been to bring social change under purposeful human control.

The Indian Constitution of 1950 defined the purposes of independent India's political system as being to establish social economic and political justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief and worship, equality of status and opportunity and fraternity. The National Planning Commission was set up in 1950 and was conceived as an important agency for achieving the purposes. The National Planning Commission was given the task of assessing the natural and manpower resources of the country. It also had to prepare plans for mobilisation of these resources for economic development. In fact, the two main aims as outlined by the First-Five Year Plan (1951-52 to 1955-56) are to increase productivity (economic development) and to reduce inequalities of income, wealth and opportunities (social development). The first Five-Year Plan ambitiously aimed at achieving, progressively, for all members of the community, full employment, education, security against sickness and other disabilities and adequate income. Thus through planned development, India aimed to bring about a change in the traditional social structure so that through education and full employment, it would become possible for the individual to participate in every aspect of development.

A careful scrutiny of the aims and objectives of each and every Five-Year Plans reveals the emphasis on growth, equality and social justice. The Second Plan (1956-57 to 1960-61) emphasised the achievement of a socialistic pattern of society. The Third Plan (1961-62 to 1965-66) aimed at securing a major advance towards self-sustaining growth. The Fourth Plan (1969-70 to 1973-74) aimed at raising the standard of living of the people through programmes which were designed to promote equality and justice. Between 1966-69 three Annual Plans were formulated. The Fifth Plan (1974-75 to 1977-78) emphasised the objective to achieving self-reliance and adopted measures for raising the consumption standards of people living below the poverty line. The Sixth Plan (1980-81 to 1984-85) evaluating the achievements and shortcomings of the previous plans laid down its foremost object as removal of poverty. The Seventh Plan (1985-86 to 1989-90) emphasised growth in foodgrain production employment opportunities, self-reliance, and social justice (Govt. of India, 1988).

There had been two Annual Plans during the period 1990-91 and 1991-92 formulated within the framework of the Approach to the Eighth Five-Year Plan and the basic thrust of these Annual Plans was on maximisation of employment and social transformation. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-93 to 1996-97) was launched immediately after the initiation of structural adjustment policies and macro stabilisation policies, which were necessitated by the worsening Balance of Payment position and inflation position during 1990-91. The Plan aimed at the annual growth rate of about 7.5 per cent. These growth rates were planned to be achieved with relative price stability and substantial improvement in the country's Balance of Payments. The specific objectives of the Ninth Plan included i) priority to agriculture and rural development ii) accelerating the growth rate with stable prices iii) ensuring



food and nutritional security to all iv) containing growth rate of population rate and v) promoting an developing people's participatory institutions like Panchayati Raj institutions, cooperatives and self-help groups among others. The Approach paper to the Tenth Plan (2002-2007) was approved in 2001. The Approach Paper envisages making agricultural development as its core element of the Plan, encouraging rapid growth in sectors with high employment opportunities and restructuring of the target programmes to emphasise cross-sectoral synergies for special groups (India 2003).

India has prepared Five-Year Plans with a long-term perspective. Within the framework of the Five-Year Plan, annual plans have also been prepared and have been integrated with the budgetary process. Every Five-Year Plan has a mid-term appraisal. India has completed more than five decades of planning. Five-Year Plans have been viewed as instruments a) to evolve a socialistic pattern of society, b) to usher in growth with social justice and c) for removing poverty.

Dubashi (1987: 37-8) describes India's approach to planning in the following manner.

- a) Indian plans are comprehensive and balanced and include both public and private investment. Growth of all sectors of the economy is encouraged.
- b) The Indian approach can be called as democratic planning as different from totalitarian planning. In democratic planning people regularly and effectively organise and develop their own social life through active participation. In totalitarian planning, people's participation is not encouraged.
- c) India's approach to planning is aimed at setting up a socialistic pattern of society. Both economic and social aspects of development are considered. Though the Plans have not always succeeded in achieving the objectives, they have constituted a third way to development, rejecting a total capitalistic and a communist way to development.
- d) India's approach to development has strived to combine the economic, technological, human and institutional components of development. For instance, attention has been paid to improvement and upgradation of traditional technology adopted by village and cottage industries. Along with this, India imports high technology from different countries to keep pace with the technological development around the world.

According to Dubashi (1987) India's approach to planning tries to reconcile planning with democracy and increased production with equitable distribution. India's developmental plans encourage establishment of large industry with promotion of cottage industries and introduction of latest technology with upgradation of traditional technology. The Indian approach to planning emphasises both upholding of human values and pursuit of material advancement.

Critics of India's approach to and strategies of planned development point out that all these development efforts have benefited only a class of people namely the industrial, commercial and financial groups, segments of the rural rich comprising sections of landlords and rich peasants; and a section of the urban



unemployed and underemployed also reveals the fact that the development measures have not been able to utilise the vast human resources for economically gainful purposes. On the whole, critics point out that disparities between different regions and groups have been increasing over the decades (Desai 1984). Fundamental problems relating to land reform, modernising village structures, and controlling population growth remain unsolved in spite of five decades of planned social change. The achievements in industrial production, agriculture and foreign trade have not helped in achieving the main objectives of planning namely growth with equality and social justice.

A study of the measures, launched in 1991 and the liberalisation process that is still on would show the impact of globalisation and liberalisation policies on productivity, efficiency and growth. “The main gainers have been the MNEs (multinational enterprises) and their affiliates which have better access to technology and other intangible assets.” (Siddharthan 2004). Those with earlier technologies have lost out. Beneficial impact of trade liberalisation on productivity has not yet surfaced. Perhaps more reforms, encouraging in-house development of more efficient ways of production would usher in social change that India has tried to achieve during the last fifty years. It is a pity that the Indian IT (Information Technology) sector has not on the whole been responsive and it does not yet empower local communities to open up the way for expansion. All that one can say at this stage is that current recovery in balance of payment and reserves needs to be sustained in the coming years so that we may expect social change backed by strong economic growth.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

India has embarked on which path of economic planning?

- a) A totally capitalist path of economic development
- b) A communist path of economic development
- c) A socialist path emphasising on mixed economy
- d) None of the above

- ii) List the specific objectives of the Ninth Five-Year Plan. Answer in about five lines.

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- iii) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

What is the type of the Indian approach to planning?

- a) Democratic

- b) Totalitarian
- c) Communist
- d) None of the above

### 36.5.3 Change in Relation to Caste, Rural and Urban Life and Women

So far we have said that India has embarked on a path of planned socio-economic change. Social planning has been an important factor in social change in India since independence. A detailed examination of the process of social change in India has to include a multitude of interrelated factors apart from planning which have shaped the content, rate and direction of change. Historical forces and internal processes have to be linked up in a description of social change. For instance, colonial rule, specially the introduction of British ideas, science and technology is an important element in social change in India. This element has to be linked up with the caste-anchored character of Indian society while describing the content rate and direction of change. Many who have examined social change in India, have mainly looked at the changes that have taken place in various spheres of life since the British rule in India. Some have emphasised the point that colonialism and the struggle for independence, on the one hand and the pluralistic, caste based stratification of Indian society on the other, has been a major influence of the ideology and the strategies, India has adopted relating to planned socio-economic change since independence.

In each of the previous Blocks of this course, we have dealt with some aspect or the other of social change. In Block 2, we described the changes that have taken place in the institutions of family, marriage and kinship. In Block 3, we outlined the changes in rural and urban economy. In Block 4, we examined the changes in the social organisation of some of the major religions in India. In Block 5, we examined the changes in the caste and class system. In the next Block, which is on Tribes in India, the focus is on change in terms of modernisation of tribal society. In Block 7, the changing role and status of women has been described. In this Block too, we have focused on change via ethnic conflicts and social movements. Instead of repeating what we have described about social change in each of the earlier Blocks, we will briefly recapitulate some of the main features of social change that have been specially brought about as a result of development planning. Here, again we cannot go into details relating to every sphere of life that has been affected by development planning. We will focus only on a few important spheres of change.

Changes in the social structure, institutions and relationships which came in the wake of the British rule has often been described under the following broad headings: i) changes in caste, ii) changes in rural and urban life and iii) changes in the position and role of women. Let us take each of them one by one and highlight the main trends of change that have taken place in these spheres as a result of development planning since Independence.

#### i) Caste in Contemporary India

The striking feature relating to changes in the caste system is that caste activities have increased and widened into many spheres like education, economy and

polity. In certain castes the old association between caste and occupation has broken down. The government policy of opening educational and occupational opportunities to all and the policy of giving preference to the hitherto underprivileged groups have greatly contributed to the upward mobility of classes. The gradual transfer of power from the British to Indians has been accompanied by a growing activity of caste in politics. Since independence caste activity is increasingly being manifested in political parties and elections. The growth in agriculture, the introduction of land reforms specially in the fifties and new technology have led to import changes in the power relations between castes. These development programmes have eroded the influence of traditional upper castes in the power structure. It has contributed to the rise of a new middle caste-class as a dominant group in many parts of the country (Singh 1987: 59). The type of social stratification that has emerged over the past four decades since independence reflects the growing entanglement between caste and class (Singh 2000).

## **ii) Changes in Rural and Urban Social Life**

Industrialisation, urbanisation and the politico-administrative changes that have taken place since independence have affected various aspects of rural and urban life in India in many ways. Industrialisation, for instance, has made its impact upon the growth of towns and cities, property, joint family, law, division of labour traditional occupations and the caste system. Migration from villages to towns has been increasing over the years. Improvement in medical care, both in urban and rural areas, has affected the mortality rate and is thus a major factor in the rapid rise of India's population.

According to Y. Singh (1987: 57-59) a striking consequence of the development planning activities in India is the emergence of different categories of powerful middle classes in both rural and urban India. For instance, he points out that industrialisation and expansion of development administration has led to an expansion of categories of middle class. This includes civil and professional services, the ministerial services, the army and police services. It also includes, self-employed professional traders etc. He also points out that a class of "merchant capitalists" has significantly risen in size over the past so many years. This class, he identifies, as being different from the industrial capitalist class, which rose to a powerful height in the national economy during the course of the national movement. The merchant capitalist class is a product, according to Y. Singh of speculative entrepreneurship, which mushroomed as a result of expansion of the contractor - commerce sector of economic activities. This class operates with relatively small capital and has a close connection with black market economy and some sections of the political and bureaucratic elite. New technology, new system of government, administration, judicial procedures, forms of education, new cultural values introduced by the British and free India have not only challenged the old structures in rural and urban society but have also given rise to new kinds of conflict and confrontation between castes and between classes.

Some scholars have pointed out that the concept of culture lag is very relevant to India when we look at the contradictions and conflicts in rural and urban India. The increasing activities of castes seem incompatible with the rationality, mobility and equality of a democratic polity (Bottomore 1987: 285). According to Y. Singh (1987: 61) erosion of authority, delegitimisation of established

institutions and dissatisfaction with the existing processes of development and change has contributed to the problems of violence and lawlessness in the country. The rural-urban nexus has strengthened over the decades, but along with it social problems like poverty, unemployment, crime, violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, juvenile delinquency have increased in both rural and urban areas.

## **ii) Changes in the Position and Role of Women**

There is no denial of the fact that the position and role of women has been subject to important changes over the last hundred and fifty years and more. Socio-religious reform movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, national movement for independence and the constitutional provisions have had a significant impact on the status and role of women.

Right from the nineteenth century, legislations have been passed to emancipate women from disabilities, which confined their role and lowered their status. With independence, there has been a constitutional commitment to promote justice, liberty and equality. The period after independence witnessed the enactment of a number of laws that sought to apply the principle underlying the constitutional guarantees to the sphere of social life. The reform in personal laws governing marriage and inheritance, the labour laws ensuring human conditions of work, maternity benefits and welfare of workers have been some of the measures aimed at removing the disabilities that contributed to the low status of women.

The policies and programmes of planned socio-economic development attempted positive action to improve and widen opportunities for women to participate in the socio-economic processes of development in a more effective manner. With the acceptance of planning it became evident that if development was to be accelerated, the economy could not afford to ignore the potential for contribution of half the population. Hence efforts were made to involve women in the development process.

Two developments contributed greatly to the special focus on women in the planning process since the 1970s. The UN Declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year and 1975-85 as the Women's Decade can be considered as important landmarks in matters pertaining to women. World attention was drawn towards women's problem, needs and their potential. Debate and research led to a re-examination of women's role in society and in the development process. There was also a demand for measures which would enable them to realise their full potential and contribute to society. Action was initiated on several fronts, but most notably on health, education and employment by national, international government and non-governmental agencies.

The other factor, which sharpened the focus on women's participation in development, was the change in development theory. The realisation that the benefits of planned process of development do not trickle down automatically to poorer and weaker sections of society stimulated special efforts towards the weaker and exploited sections of society. Specially targetted programmes were conceived and implemented along with other measures to raise the rate of growth. Women were identified as one such disadvantaged group to whom special attention needs to be paid. Education, vocational training, health

services, family planning, welfare schemes sought to change and improve the conditions of living and mental horizons of women. To cite an example, the government began its efforts to promote self-employment of women around 1978 with a series of measures. These measures included skill training and provisions of services and facilities in the area of credit, material supply, marketing, product development etc. The new Industrial Policy Resolution of 1978, for the first time recognised, women entrepreneurs as a special group needing support and assistance.

However, developmental efforts undertaken in every sphere, have not had always the desired and a uniform effort on all categories of women. We must remember that women do not constitute a homogeneous category in India. Groups of women not only differ from one another in terms of physical and demographic characteristics but also in behaviour patterns determined by factors like region, caste, class, religion etc. Only certain sections of women like the upper and middle castes and classes have benefited by these programmes. A vast majority of Indian women, across the nation are still subject to discrimination, exploitation and lead a confined, restricted life.

The limitations arising out of a limited and faulty conception and implementation of developmental measures pose problems towards the progress in the desired direction. Apart from these limitations, problems arise because the degree of social acceptance of desired goals set by the Constitution vary from group to group and from time to time. Attitudes which define women primarily as a housewife, wife and a mother influence the treatment and position accorded to women. Even among the educated and working women, conflict between home-making and seeking a career occurs. The contours of a woman's life have expanded but her options and choices in life are still limited. Both men and women have to redefine their attitudes and values if the goals of equality, justice and development are to be achieved.

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) What are the important changes that occurred in the caste system in the last five decades of the twentieth century? Answer in about six line.

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- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true or F for false against each statement.

- a) Caste activities have greatly decreased in all village since development planning has been undertaken.
- b) Industrialisation and expansion of development administration have stimulated the growth of the middle class.

- c) With development planning, India has been able to solve its basic problems of unemployment, population growth and poverty.
  - d) India's development planning has given special focus to integrate women into development process.
- iii) What are the two factors, which sharpened the focus on women's participation in development since the 1970s? Answer in about five lines.

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## **36.6 LET US SUM UP**

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This unit describes development planning and change in general and in the Indian context. We began the unit by pointing out the linkages between development, planning and social change. We said development is a planned social change and planning is a factor in social change. Development is a value-loaded term while change is a value neutral term. All change is not development. Then we went on to describe the perceptions of some social thinkers on development and change. Here we identified those perceptions, which viewed development and change interchangeably or as logically related terms. We also stated the perceptions of those who viewed development and change as modernisation i.e., the process of social change whereby a less developed country tries to catch up with the technological advancements of more developed countries. Then we moved on to define and describe the contemporary connotations of development, planning and change. All these were described in a general context. While coming to a specific context we looked at development planning and change in the Indian context. We outlined the approach and schemes of planned development in India. We described the mixed economy approach and stated some of the schemes relating to rural development. The schemes described are CD programmes, Panchayati Raj, Cooperative movement and Target Group Planning. We then examined social planning in terms of the basic approach of the Five-Year Plans. While describing change as a result of planned development we focused on changes in caste, rural and urban life and position and role of women.

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## **36.7 KEYWORDS**

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<b>Development</b>	A process of social change, which is planned and desired by a society
<b>Modernisation</b>	A process of social change whereby a less developed country tries to catch up with the achievements of a technologically advanced country



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## 36.8 FURTHER READING

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Bottomore T. 1987. *Sociology. A Guide to Problems and Literature*. III Edition. Allen and Unwin: London.

Byres, Terrence, J. 1997. *The State Development Planning and Liberalisation*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi

Shukla, K.S. (ed.) 1987. *The Other Side of Development*. Sage Publications: New Delhi.

Singh, Y. 2000. *Culture Change in India: Identity and Globalisation*. Rawat: Jaipur

Srinivas, M.N. 1986. *India: Social Structure*. Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India): Delhi (Originally published in 1969 by the Director, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting: New Delhi.

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## 36.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) F b) T c) T d) F
- ii) According to Marx and Engles social change and development are charecterised by conflict of interests among classes in society. They argued that social changes arise out of potential struggles and radical breaks in continuti, rather than from gradual evolution.
- iii) a
- iv) 1) Modernisation theories fail to define conclusively the kinds of social and economic process at work in the developing countries.
- 2) Modernisation theories argue that each society's development problems can be understood only in relation to its place in the world system. But it is not proved that all developing countries follow the path of development of already developed countries.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) b
- ii) a
- iii) It looks development as alterations that affect the whole socio-cultural matrix of society. Here development is viewed as a planned and stimulated movement of all societies of a social system in the direction of the overall directed goals set by the society.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) c
- ii) a) priority to agriculture and rural development b) accelerate the growth rate with stable prices c) ensuring food and nutritional security to all d) containing the growth rate of population rate and e) promoting and developing people's participatory institutions like panchayati raj etc.
- iii) a

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) The caste activities have increased and widened into many spheres like education, economy and polity. The association between caste and occupation has broken down. The new educational and occupational opportunities facilitated the upward mobility of the underprivileged groups. The growth in agriculture and introduction of land reforms have led to changes in power relation between castes.
- ii) a) F b) T c) F d) T
- iii) The two factors are a) the UN declaration that 1975 was to be the International Women's Year and the declaration of 1975-85 as Women's Decade, b) the change in development theory specially the realisation that economic benefits do not trickle down and that oriented-programmes have to be devised.

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## UNIT 37 ECOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF SOCIETY

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### Structure

- 37.0 Objectives
- 37.1 Introduction
- 37.2 What is Ecology?
- 37.3 Approaches to the Study of Ecology
  - 37.3.1 Determinism and Possibilism
  - 37.3.2 Cultural Ecology
  - 37.3.3 Ecosystem Model
  - 37.3.4 Systems Model
- 37.4 Ecology in the Context of Indian Society
  - 37.4.1 Basic Needs of Human Society
  - 37.4.2 Situation in the Indian Context
- 37.5 Health and Environment
  - 37.5.1 Food Contamination
  - 37.5.2 Effects of Toxins
  - 37.5.3 Effects of Chemical Effluents
  - 37.5.4 The Pesticide Threat
- 37.6 Exploitation of Forests
  - 37.6.1 Deforestation
  - 37.6.2 The Timber Business
  - 37.6.3 Tree Density in U.P.
  - 37.6.4 Hug-the-Tree-Movement (*Chipko Andolan*)
- 37.7 Preservation of Forests: Steps towards Future
  - 37.7.1 Forest Use in States of India
  - 37.7.2 Conservation and Afforestation
  - 37.7.3 Subsidy and Conservation
  - 37.7.4 Further Developments
- 37.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 37.9 Key Words
- 37.10 Further Reading
- 37.11 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 37.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- define ecology and state the interconnection between human beings and their environment
- list some of the approaches in ecology

- state the basic needs of human society and describe the nature—human beings nexus in the context of Indian society
- describe the health hazards that follow from pollution of water, atmosphere and soil
- examine the situation regarding forest exploitation
- describe the social movement which has emerged to check forest exploitation
- list the measures taken to preserve forests for the present and for the future.

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## 37.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit describes certain aspects of the interaction between human beings and their environment in the context of Indian society. We have begun this unit by stating what is ecology and gone on to describe the interconnection between human beings and their environment. We have outlined some of the basic ecological approaches, which explain this interrelationship between society and environment. Then we have focused on ecology in the context of Indian society. We have listed the basic needs of human beings and described the situation regarding human dependency on nature in India and the condition of India's environment. We have focused our attention on sources of water and atmospheric **pollution**. We have then listed the health hazards that follow from food **contamination**, toxins, chemical **effluents** and pesticides. While examining the situation regarding human exploitation of forests we have described **deforestation**, timber business and the growing social movement in Uttaranchal (*Chipko* movement) to check indiscriminate felling of trees. While describing the efforts taken to preserve forests and the steps towards future use of forests we have focused on measures relating to conservation and **afforestation**.

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## 37.2 WHAT IS ECOLOGY?

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Ecology is the study of the interrelationship between organisms and their environment. It is viewed as an interdisciplinary or multi disciplinary field of science which systematically draws knowledge from many disciplines like genetics, anthropology, sociology etc. As sociologists we are interested in the interrelationship between human beings and their environment. By environment, here, we mean the natural environment, including forests, rivers, lakes, seas, mountains, plains, etc.

Human beings have always had a dynamic interaction with the environment. The interaction has been reciprocal i.e., two-way relationship. Four factors in the environment have been crucial in this interaction. The factors are climate, land and soil configuration, specific location i.e., in a desert, wooded or water logged area, and natural resources including forests, mining deposits and so on. These four factors have had a deep effect on human societies. The culture of a society, to a great extent, reflects the profound impact of environment on human thought and behaviour. Occupation, food, clothing, shelter, religion,

arts, morals, ideas and so many other cultural creations of human beings are influenced by the kind of environment they live in.

At the same time, human beings have also made a deep impact on their natural environment. The culture of a society, especially the quantity and a quality of technology has affected many elements in the environment. For instance, the invention of saw or axe or electronically operated cutting machines has helped in a quick and efficient way of felling trees. Timber is needed by human beings for a variety of purposes. Excessive felling of trees produce a strain on the environment that a new approach and technology is required to combat the ill-effects created on the environment as well as the human society due to a quick and drastic reduction of forest cover. The way in which human societies deal with the environment determines their future.

As industrialisation specially technology has advanced in a society, the interaction between human beings and their environment in that society has taken an alarming turn. Air, water, atmosphere, forests, rivers, plants and many elements of nature have been affected by the kind and quantity of technology used. Nature affected by technology, in turn, has created problems for man especially in terms of health. Pollutants, for instance, from factories, is so much changing the environment that the entire culture, a product of the environment must adjust to the situation of its own making.

There are many facets to the interaction between human beings and their environment. This interaction varies not only between cultures but also within a society. It is not uncommon to find that within a nation or a country there are groups of people who differ from one another in many aspects of living. Sometimes, a government, keeping in view national development, may introduce or impose technology on a group of people depending on nature for their living. Such a group of people, who have been depending on and interacting with nature with simple technology, may find the new technology absolutely disrupting. The equilibrium that they had created with nature may be destroyed by the new governmental plans and schemes. Such a group of people may feel totally uprooted and alienated when their source of economic, social, moral, physical and mental well being is altered by the introduction of new technology.

What we are trying to emphasise here is that the interconnection between human beings and their environment is a complex one. It has varied through time, place and people. Where there is a balanced, reciprocal relationship between a human society and their environment, there is little to worry about. But what seems to be a growing threat to the quality of human life and the very survival of man, is the problems created by the exploitation of nature by human beings. The problems of “taking too much from the environment and restoring too little” have to be solved. In this unit we are going to focus only on certain aspects of the interrelationship between human beings and their environment. We will focus our attention especially on the problems created by indiscriminate use of nature by human beings in the Indian context. But before that let us describe some of the approaches to the study of the interrelation between human beings and their environment. The ecological approaches gives us an idea as to what factor and how much each factor contributes to the interaction between human beings and their environment.

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## 37.3 APPROACHES IN ECOLOGY

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Approaches to the study of the interrelationship between organisms and their environment are varied. Here we will describe four approaches. They are 1) **Determinism** and Possibilism, 2) Cultural Ecology, 3) Ecosystem Model and 4) System model.

### 37.3.1 Determinism and Possibilism

The first approach in the study of ecology that we introduce is called determinism. The determinist argument revolves basically around the question of which factor influences the other more—human beings or their environment. In this theory the environment is given primacy in terms of influence. In doing so, however, it is understood that human beings are not entirely passive. That is to point out that humans are not completely at the mercy of their environments. However, it should be noted here that in modern civilisation nature does not determine human behaviour so much. In fact, in many areas human beings are taking a heavy toll of nature. This toll has been in terms of cutting down forests indiscriminately.

In possibilism approach, primacy is given once again to environment. The basic idea of this theory is that environment is the key factor in civilisational developmental possibilities. That is to say if the natural environment provides mineral and forest, good climate, proper topography and so on, it leads to a strong powerful nation. If resources like timber, oil, precious metals coal, etc., do not exist in sufficient quantities then a nation becomes weak, inefficient, and dependent on other nation-states. Let us take an example. Often developing nations have to export timber and other raw materials. When timber resources fall below a certain danger mark, say ten per cent forest area, then the donor country suffers. The people and communities have to bear with the consequences.

### 37.3.2 Cultural Ecology

We now consider the theory of cultural ecologists. These ecologists feel that the state of environment is directly related to the state of technology prevalent in any society. Cultural ecologists feel that technology, economics and population form the basic influences on societal processes. The relationships between technology and natural environment are significant. Thus, if we have electronic sawing machines, huge trucks to load it away, and a great need for timber for houses, furniture, shipbuilding and so on, forest cover (for example) will reduce greatly. So cultural ecology deals with the impact of culture on nature. There are occasions when this impact is beneficial, at others it is not so. Today, there is an imbalance against forests in India and the World.

### 37.3.3 Ecosystem Model

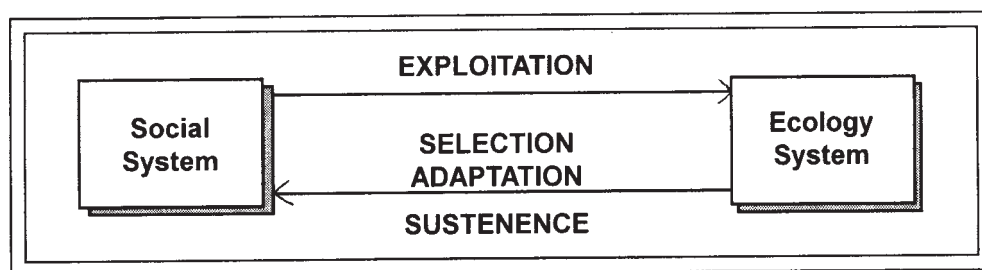
This model points out that human beings play powerful role in maintaining the balance between organisms and their environment. Human beings can preserve or destroy nature. The main advantage of this ecological model is that it is dynamic. Here the human being is considered to be one part of the overall ecosystem. The model points out that nature cannot now destroy entire towns and cities in a regular way. It may be possible in a calamity like a major earthquake. But this is a factor not to be easily ignored. It has been seen that



deserts infiltrate into villages, and floods inundate many fertile fields with silt. Thus, the ecosystem model indicates that there will be a severe backlash from natural disasters if human beings do not mend their irresponsible attitude. This includes all environment including forests, urban dwellings, transport system and even developmental paradigms or models.

### 37.3.4 Systems Model

Let us now examine the Systems Model. The advantage of this model is that it puts human beings at the centre of the scheme of ecological issues. Nevertheless it retains its interactive view. This is a great advantage since it posits mutuality between human beings and nature. This implies that ecological devastation can be halted only by a new creative and regenerative attitude. Thus the environment itself cannot be held responsible. So, human beings cannot expect the forest to regenerate itself! Human society must take the initiative to reverse the damage in all ecological areas of which acute deforestation is a real problem. Consider the diagram (figure 37.1) given below:



**Fig. 37.1: The systems model of ecology**

As we can see here the social system or society as a whole selectively exploits the ecological system. Simultaneously, the ecological system adapts to society and sustains it and its technological needs. Thus we find that the social system takes inputs from the ecological system including fuel, petroleum, food, wood, and so on. On the other hand, human beings very often do not pay back to nature for what they have taken. In other words, this “ecological borrowing” is on a vast and usually non-returnable basis.

We have seen in this section on ecological approaches that the interconnection between human beings and nature is reciprocal process. All these models indicate to us without any exception the guilt of humans in destruction of forests, minerals, and other natural wealth. It is human beings who pollute the river and seas with chemical effluents and technological wastes. It is amply clear that the flora and fauna are simply not considered when the forests are attacked and destroyed for commercial profits. This scenario can be changed only when all of us, no matter in what part of the country or world, decide to save our natural, forest and other wealth from permanent destruction. If the warnings that are given against this mass destruction are not heeded then mankind, as a whole will be in grave danger. The consequences may be totally unpredictable and uncontrollable. The people should be made aware of the advantages of the forests (McIntosh, 1985). A Certificate Programme in Participatory Forest Management was started in 1999 by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) with the general objective of developing an approach to the integration of forest depended communities into forest management.

In our next section we will look at ecology in the context of Indian society.

**Check Your Progress 1**

Use the space given below for your answers.

- i) What is ecology? Use two lines for your answer.
- .....
- .....
- ii) What is the Cultural Ecology Approach? Use three lines for your answer.
- .....
- .....
- .....
- iii) Briefly explain the basic advantage of the systems model. Use four lines for your answer.
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

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**37.4 ECOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN SOCIETY**

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In this section we will list the basic needs of human society before we look into the situation regarding the interaction between human beings and their environment in the context of Indian Society.

**37.4.1 Basic Needs of Human Society**

All living systems at all biological levels remain interacting with the environment, which makes a complex network of ecosystem. Ecosystem is defined as the interaction of all living beings within themselves as well as with the environment, living in a single location (Malik and Bhattacharya 1986: 3). Human beings interact with one another as well as the environment. The environment including rivers, lakes, sea, atmosphere, forests, plants, deserts, hills, plains etc. helps in satisfying some of the basic needs of human society. Water and air, for instance, are essential for human survival. Water is needed for a variety of human purposes. Apart from human beings, plants, trees, animals, soil also need water for their sustenance and growth. Human beings also need plants, trees, soil and animals for their survival. Hence, there is a complex system of interdependency between living organisms and their environment. Similarly, the atmosphere (including air) is a basic and crucial component in the life of all living organisms including human beings. Air is needed for breathing. Without air no human life is possible.

Hence, it is very important that the water, the human beings use and the air they breathe are free from contamination. It is also essential that every human society has enough stock of healthy water and atmospheric resources, in order to build up a healthy future for its oncoming generations. Preservation of natural resources, and prevention of indiscriminate use of nature by human beings are essential steps for ensuring a long and better quality of life for all living organisms.

### **37.4.2 Situation in the Indian Context**

That nature has been so much a part of Indian social life. Its significance has been very much evident in both the oral and written traditions of Indian literature. Trees, plants, streams, rivers, lakes, seas, sky, waterfalls, hills, mountains, snow, rain etc. have been intertwined with every kind of human experience. But, like in many other countries of the world, the interaction between human beings and their environment is taking an alarming turn in India too. Overemphasis on industrialisation, eagerness to catch up with the technological advancements of the developed world, pressures created by a rapidly increasing population are some of the factors which are threatening the human environment equilibrium in Indian society.

As it stands today, technology has not advanced so much that Indians are less dependent on nature and more dependent on technology. The average Indian citizen is still very much dependent on natural environment for the satisfaction of his/her basic needs. Agriculture is the main occupation in India. And this occupation is so much intertwined with nature. Water, soil, atmosphere greatly shape the kind and extent of agricultural activities in India. If monsoons fail a chain of serious and alarming consequences follow. Every aspect of human activity is affected by lack of or insufficient supply of water. To a sizeable extent, the problems posed by environment factors are created by the way human beings have used nature. Contamination of water sources, indiscriminate felling of trees, atmospheric pollution created by smoke and fumes, extensive use of pesticides for plants and crops are some of the problematic areas in Indian society. Indian society cannot afford to misuse nature upon which is dependent both the quantity and quality of life.

Let us now briefly describe the way in which water, atmosphere (including air) plants, crops and soil are contaminated by technology and human misuse in India.

### **37.4.3 Water Pollution**

India is a nation, which is the abode of many rivers such as the Ganga, Jamuna, Krishna, Indus, Brahmaputra, Godavari. The longest river in the world, the Brahmaputra also runs through India. These rivers are not only a source of life but also religiously significant to the people of India. Apart from this many beautiful lakes such as those of Udaipur, Nainital, Bhimtal, Ootacamund and so on also exist. However, water is still a very scarce and valued resource. Of all available water seventy per cent has become polluted over the years. This is a very large percentage of water to be polluted. This includes the waters of the Dal Lake of Srinagar down to the Chaliyar and Periyar rivers in the South. Again we find that the waters in the Hooghly and the Damodar in the East and the Thane in the West have water pollution levels that are very high.

Ganga, a symbol of purity has had chemical effluents continuously dumped into it from the factories.

Water pollution is also evident from our bad drainage system. The disease arising from dirty water drains, and from the waste matter from human settlements are major pollutants. Pollution from them accounts for four times as much as does industrial effluents. Most of these pollutants are disposed of untreated into the water-ways. In 1981 out of India's 3119 cities and towns only 217 had some sewage treatment facilities. Take example of Delhi which had a population of 3 million in 1960 and by 2003 the population is about 14 million. The available water resources cannot support the increase and water treatment capacity of waterwork is simply too low in comparison. In Delhi, urban genocide is a real prospect (Soni 2003). Such a high percentage of pollution is a cause of grave concern. It has been discovered that two thirds of water based diseases like typhoid, cholera and jaundice cause very severe health problems. As quoted in Gadgil (1998), as per an estimate of World Health Organisation more than five million people die every year because of unsafe drinking water

### Activity 1

Observe the functioning of the drainage system in your area and answer the questions.

- i) Is it functioning properly?
- ii) If not, then how is it affecting your life and the life of the people living in your area?
- iii) Are people in your area aware of the effect of bad drainage on their health or not?
- iv) Do you think the functioning of the drainage system is related to your social life? If so, give two examples.

Write a note of about two pages and compare your answer, if possible with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

When water sources get polluted we find that all life forms are affected for the worse. Industrial effluents and pollutants very often kill fish forms, and plants. This leads to lowering of our food quantum and breaks down the livelihood of many Indians.

Similarly, all over India the pollution of river and lake water due to direct drainage of sewage into it, the unloading of industrial effluents, and the unabated washing of clothes with detergents has led us to badly polluted water sources. It is really necessary to find out what can be done about these problems. They must be resolved. This is because pure drinking and potable water is a must for forging ahead towards health and greater prosperity.

Today steps are being taken to contain water pollution. Government as well as voluntary agencies are using the television, radio, press, and other educational sources to warn people of the dangers of living with water contamination. However, the 1987 water policy of the Government of India was not able to change the way water resources were managed in India. Unless,

an operational agenda is adopted, even the 2002 water Policy is likely to result in non-implementation (Shah and others 2004).

### 37.4.4 Atmospheric Pollution

Let us now turn to the issue of atmospheric pollution and the problems that have arisen due to this. In its pristine (pure) state atmosphere provides man and animal a clear source of oxygen for breathing. If it is not pure due to exhaust fumes from industries and motor cars then we find that it can lead to many diseases including tuberculosis, asthma and even cancer. The Motor Vehicles Act, 1989 has a major objective to check this pollution emitted from motor vehicles. The atmosphere is not unlimited and we find that industrial production, commercial and private use of vehicles leads to a blackening of the atmosphere. In fact, inhaling of the polluted atmosphere in a big city equals the nicotine smoke of several cigarettes. One of the most dangerous forms of pollution is cigarette smoke. Not only does it cause ill health for the smoker but also the non-smokers in the vicinity also. The government banned this in public places, buildings and institutions. The increasing amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have led to the “greenhouse” effect whereby the earth’s temperature becomes much higher than it should be for efficient environmental functioning. The immediate effects of air pollution are diminished visibility, health hazards, and diseases of crops and vegetation. In fact, the marble of the Taj Mahal itself is getting dangerously eroded due to the polluted air that is poured out from industrial chimneys.

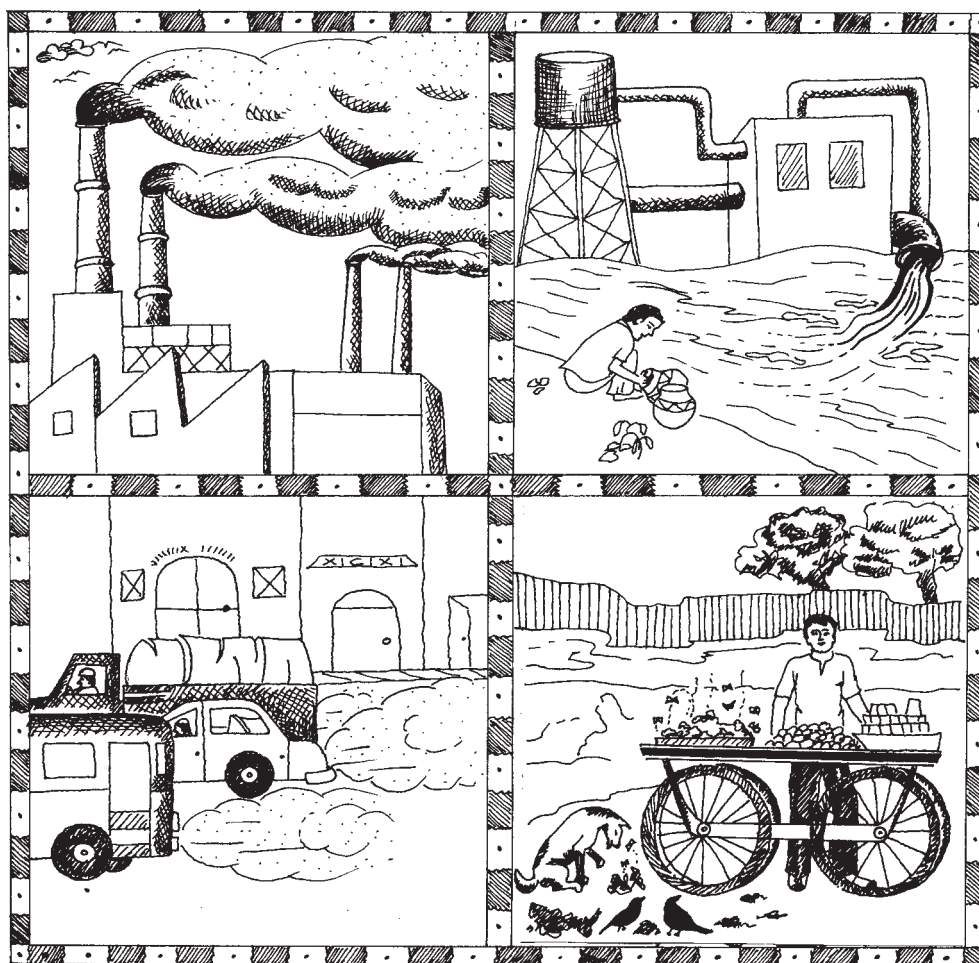


Fig. 37.2: Environmental Pollution



Our knowledge of the long-term ill effects of atmospheric pollution is not very much, but we do know the matter is serious. An increase of 1-2°C in world temperature would completely upset the efforts of Indian agriculturists. There would be more heat in the summer and more rains in the monsoon. Thus atmosphere is an important fact for all human activity. Endeavours should be made to make the air pure. Air pollution levels are being steadily controlled in many major cities of the west. However, in India these levels are alarmingly increasing. A large percentage of metropolitan dwellers in India suffer from respiratory diseases. Figure 37.2 shows various sources of environmental pollution in our society. Those living in large cities and their congested conditions are well aware of the various types of pollutants that plague the atmosphere. Compulsory use of compressed liquid gas for running public transport in Delhi had been known to reduce the pollution level in Delhi's air. Yes, this does not seem to be adequate measure to contain the extreme air pollution of the city. We need more efforts in several directions.

### 37.4.5 Land Degradation

On the fertility of agricultural land depends our capacity to feed the population of India. Increased foodgrains production is feasible only by intensive farming and multicropping. Water resources are relatively unharnessed and efforts can be made to harness a larger percentage of these.

India's total area comes to about 328 million hectares. Of this the cultivated land is about 43.6 per cent, and permanent pastureland is about 14.6 per cent. Potentially arable land is about 14.6 per cent. Forested area makes up about 10.7 per cent. Barren and uncultivable lands are 6.4 per cent. Urban land is about 5.5 per cent. Under the above distribution of lands, according to forecasts, India should reach a target of 300 million tonnes in foodgrains. This estimate is based on an average of four tonnes per hectare, from lands that are irrigated. On a similar projection for 2000 A.D., the production was upto 426 million tonnes. However, such estimates are based often on very many factors remaining constant. For example, they would need good regular monsoons. This is not a realistic assumption, more so, with atmospheric pollution disturbing geographic air movements.

The Indo-Gangetic Plain a major agricultural belt is very much subject to top-soil **erosion**. Hence, unless top-soil is kept fertile we find that it will become much less productive. Crop leftovers and organic manure needs to be further used to maintain fertility. The reason they are not used is the ready and cheap availability of relatively crude/inferior chemical fertilisers. However, with organic manures greater productivity is possible. They also regenerate the soil and make it more fertile. This knowledge needs to be disseminated to all Indian farmers. It is also important that the land be made nitrogen rich for higher productivity. Thus, the land's fertility needs to be protected and it should be seen that we keep manuring and fertilising it. This would help restore and maintain an ecological balance, with land fertility. Such soil erosion leads to severe economic stress on human societies. The yield is lowered if the soil erodes and therefore this must be protected (Chopra 1982).

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Write a note on Water Pollution. Use three lines for your answer.



- .....
- .....
- .....
- ii) Write a note on atmospheric pollution. Use about five lines for your answer.

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## 37.5 HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

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While describing the situation regarding water and air contamination we referred to the health hazards that contamination gives rise to. The nature and extent of use of environment by human society is closely related to health systems. Let us look at the health aspect more closely. For example, the water we drink, the food we eat is closely related to our physical well being. If drinking water is contaminated disease inevitably follows. Thus, the drinking water should be clean and free of diseases. Of all diseases that take a significant toll of human lives only small pox has been fully eliminated. Due to the unfortunate and widespread use of pesticide sprays in India where wheat, lentils and rice are usually taken as meals the toxic pesticide residues of DDT (Dichloro Diphenyl Trichloroethane) and BHC (Benzene Hexachloride) are also inadvertently consumed. Although, the amount taken involuntarily ingested is miniscule it is more than the danger level defined by WHO (World Health Organisation) Surveys which have shown that toxic pesticides like DDT and BHC enter into the food chain and poison the diet of Indians. Deplorably, it has also been found that miniscule quantities of DDT are deposited in the breast milk of mothers. Baby foods available in the markets are also not free from such contamination. Toxicologists believe that not only present generations of babies but future generations too will suffer because of this. Social systems and institutions, such as hospitals and allied medical services are all pressed into service severely because of this 'slow' food poisoning. Measures to remedy this must be taken post haste. All acts concerning prevention of food adulteration must be strictly enforced via inspections and other measures. Let us now examine the impact of food contamination, toxins, chemical effluents and pesticides on health.

### 37.5.1 Food Contamination

We cannot say with great certainty what food contaminations will ultimately result in, yet some concrete indicators do exist. In the Chikmangalur and Shimoga districts of Karnataka about 300 people suffer from arthritis, since 1975. Many people have suffered from terrible personal tragedies because of food contamination.

Another similar tragedy took place in 1975. Farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh had been using BHC for foodgrain preservation. The people who used such foodgrains suffered from severe convulsions.

The danger of pesticides to human health is that they usually get into the human system and accumulate there. When pesticides like BHC and DDT are swallowed they go into the small intestine. There they hook into fatty tissues of the body forming about ten per cent of total body weight. These pesticides often attach themselves to the vital human organs such as kidney, liver, heart and thyroid.

### **37.5.2 Effects of Toxins**

Toxins create health and mental problems like anxiety, sleeplessness, depression and so on. Headache, memory loss, body tremor, blurred vision, even nervous breakdown are reported. However, these symptoms occur due to prolonged exposure and intake of malathion and other pesticide drugs.

The problem is that since pesticide intake via food may take many years to take its poisonous effect the link between the diseases and pesticide, intake is not easy to prove. However, the question now being debated is whether pesticide intake through foodstuffs is carcinogenic or not. Researchers investigating the Bhopal gas tragedy reveal that we are only able to detect and see very limited aspects of chemical damage caused to human health in the long run.

So far as vegetables are concerned we find that pesticide sprays on vegetables, create high levels of toxicity. This happens in the case of cauliflowers to make them appear white. Ladyfingers are dipped in copper sulphate to make them look alluringly green. Further, the rule that no spraying should be done at least a week before the harvest is generally flouted.

It has been suggested as a preventive health maintenance measure that washing with water and dousing into vinegar can help remove the toxins to a large extent.

Further, it has been researched that dangerous illegal dyes are being used in chilli powder and turmeric to heighten their colour tone. Mustard oil is being adulterated with linseed oil and the toxic argemone oil. The latter causes limb swelling, heart attack and blindness. There is thus no knowing to what extent these environmental hazards contribute to physical diseases.

### **37.5.3 Effects of Chemical Effluents**

Another major source of health problems and hazards is the chemical effluents, which are let out without any thought into rivers and into fields. This is a major source of health hazard. As mentioned earlier in urban centres, the fumes of exhausts of motor vehicles poison the atmosphere. Such fumes contain large quantum of manganese and lead. These settle on water and food sources themselves.

If absorbed by human beings, beyond the danger level they can cause nerve damage and death, more so among children. The social system is thus in a malfunction. Human life is being endangered. The other related problem is whether industrial packing of tin, plastic, paper etc. is sufficiently safe.

In agriculture, which is now deeply committed to using many pesticides the problem is acute. Thus, the use of pesticide sprays has now become ten times more in the last 30 years. They have become an absolutely necessary part of the whole agricultural scene. The pesticides that are in the use do not become harmless or inoperative easily and can have damaging effects even upto twenty years after ingestion. The soil soaks up these pesticides allowing crops and groundwater to absorb them. Trees and wildlife also suffer the onslaught. Thus, it is not only human beings that suffer degradation but animals, plants, and soil as well. The entire efficiency of the social system is thus at stake.

It is not only vegetarian food that is contaminated but non-vegetarian food also. The animals swallow grasses and fodders which have been sprayed with pesticides. As such they themselves imbibe high amounts of DDT which lodge in their flesh milk and eggs.

### 37.5.4 The Pesticide Threat

In the 1980s the pesticide threat was considered to be acute. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) analysed 1,500 samples of food. Almost all of them were contaminated by DDT and BHC. In over 25 per cent of samples the pesticides had crossed the safety limit to quite an extent. The findings were alarming. Milk from 50 lactating mothers in India had four times as high DDT and BHC residues than in other countries examined. Thus, this contamination chain can be illustrated (figure 37.2) as follows:

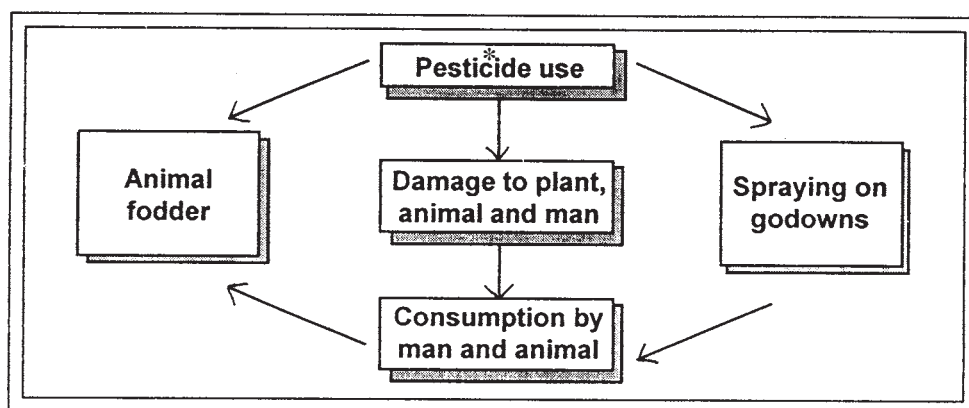


Fig. 37.3: Contamination Chain

As things stand today babies are consuming through food and milk three times as much as the safe digestion limits of pesticides. However, according to some researchers pesticide levels according to them are still relatively safe. No large-scale studies have been done on this subject in India as yet. The advanced countries of the west had a similar laxity of approach until the publication of the book, *Silent Spring*. This was written by a genetic biologist Rachael Carson (1962). It indicated that vast environmental and health problems were being caused due to pesticides.

If fact, almost daily we are finding in newspapers reports by various agencies about poisonous elements in water, milk, fruits, vegetables, eggs, meat, wheatflour, bottled water and soft drinks. Reports have come out against pesticides that have damaged brains of infants in Rajasthan, led to cancer cases in Kerala.

A seven-year study conducted across twelve states by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) found dangerous levels of residues of pesticides (DHCH and DDT) in milk products. Delivering the sixth JRD Tata Memorial Lecture in 2003, Dr. Swaminathan called for a National Pesticides Policy.

What then can be done to make pesticides and their chemicals less hazardous to human health? i) Pesticides should not be misused, and ii) no spraying should be done a week before harvest. Thus there should be pest management programmes for judicious use of pesticides. iii) War on pests using their natural enemies like bigger insects should be waged. iv) Industries should be asked to stop dumping untreated chemical wastes into the rivers by statute. v) Dangerous pesticides like DDT and BHC should be replaced by less dangerous ones. Finally, market surveys to warn of toxicity levels in various food items should be initiated. Thus an overall policy needs to be enunciated if the war on pests is to be of great use to human beings and not adversely affect our health. This is of course, easier said than done. Even the rich countries have had trouble developing new less deadly pesticides. However, the future of society is deeply dependent on eliminating these dangerous chemicals. They should soon be replaced by less dangerous ones.

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## 37.6 EXPLOITATION OF FORESTS

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We will now turn our attention to another aspect of interaction between human society and environment. We will describe the way human beings have been increasingly destroying the forest cover in India.

Today the situation of forests in India is alarming. Barely 10 per cent forest cover exists. The minimum 'safe' forest cover is about 30 per cent. Safe forest cover means that monsoons and all agricultural activities related to the same will be benefited and go on normally. The forests too will regenerate themselves. The ministry concerned should attempt to ensure that forest cover does not go below 10 per cent and is raised gradually to the maximum extent possible. Forests and flood control are closely interlinked. Forests play a most important role in controlling floods by:

- i) regulating water run offs from the forests
- ii) allowing water to go into the soil
- iii) preventing landslides and topsoil erosion.

One of the most important features that a good forest provides is a brake against flash floods. These are prevented by a strong forest cover of 30-40 per cent. Such floods are often associated with major landslides. These were true of the Teesta (1968), Alakhananda (1970) and Bhagirathi floods (1978). In each case, floods led to landslides, which blocked the river. These in turn led to damming of rivers and even more violent floods. In October 1968 the human effect of such floods was seen. Landslides blocked the Teesta and when it broke loose some 33,000 people died in three days in Sikkim and West Bengal. Thus, such imbalances can take a heavy toll on society and its day to day working.

The degraded land in India is about 178 m hectares and total arable land is under moderate to serve degradation process (Prakash and others 2003).

In the following subsections we will focus our attention on the increasing exploitation of forests via deforestation and timber business. We shall also point out how in the State of U.P. attempt has been made to check this exploitation.

### **37.6.1 Deforestation**

Let us consider now whether deforestation or reduction of forest cover reduces rainfall. Studies have indicated that annual rainfall is closely connected with forest cover. The higher the forest cover the greater is the rainfall. Thus droughts, which cause immense social problems, are the result of over-cutting of trees. Droughts create conditions for further droughts, as cattle are replaced by goats, which graze fodder grasses. The problem is that forests have been mercilessly and thoughtlessly denuded during the last hundred years in India. Between 1951 and 1972, 3.4 million hectares of forested area was cut for use in industry, dams, roads, and so on. The present rate of deforestation in India is still an incredible one million hectares every year. These statistics do not include the areas near dams and industries whose tree cover has been completely destroyed. They also do not account for illegal felling and 'contract' felling by the forest department. On the one hand, tree felling creates disturbances in the climatological cycle. On the other it makes room for tree use in houses, furniture etc. However, the negative factors far outweigh the positive factors of the situation as has been indicated.

Forest department statistics say that 23 per cent of India's is forest land. But this is not forested area. It simply means area that is under the control of the forest departments. For example, the State of Forest Report of the Forest Survey of India shows that Delhi's green cover of 8,800 hectares in 1999 increased to another 2,310 hectares in 2001. But the final report of the Supreme Court Appointed Environment Protection and Control Authority (CEPCA) noted that most of the city is devoid of forest cover because the forest cover is concentrated in New Delhi and South Delhi.

The National Forest Policy of 1952 wanted to bring 33 per cent land under forest cover. Again progress during 1951-80 was meagre. Of the 3.18 million hectares that were "greened", only 0.6 million hectares (19 per cent) were for trees. The National forest Policy of 1988 was a kind of breakthrough that aimed to involve local communities in protection and management of degraded forests and to share benefits derived from such activities. Consequently. The Joint Forest Management Programme gave impetus to formation of village forest protection committees. Reviews of the practice of JFM show that we need to take lessons from grassroots experiences of JFM and evolve new strategies to save and augment India's forest wealth.

What is very problematic is that large portions of the population are deprived of firewood for their hearth. Most parts of India are facing this problem, from North to South. The problem of facing firewood shortage for the hearth is sociological one. However, its origins are in the ecological sphere. When ecology degrades beyond a point, tree cover is decimated. Human beings in the Developing World will find it difficult to even have firewood to cook their food with.

**Activity 2**

Deforestation is a serious environmental hazard in India today. Try to ascertain through the voluntary agencies what percentage tree cover is there in your village/town/city. Also find out if there are voluntary agencies working on afforestation or restoration in your locality. Give your suggestions and observations for the greening of your area in one page.

**37.6.2 The Timber Business**

Timber selling has become a large-scale business. Thus, for example, the Himachal Pradesh government earns about 75 per cent of its revenue from the regular commercial felling of 2,00,000 trees. This amounted to Rs. 600/- per tree in 1982. The commercial value to the feller was about Rs. 2000 to Rs. 2500, which makes it very lucrative for him. Another problem threatening forest and endangering social life is indiscriminate resin extraction from pine trees. While half inch cuts are allowed the contractors make four inch cuts literally bleeding the tree dry. Against a maximum of three cuts, the resin takers make up to ten such cuts. This reduces the life span of the trees to half their hundred years, which is tragic.

The government is however making some efforts to ban commercial felling of trees. Some State governments however want the Central government to make up for the revenue they lose. Police check posts have also been put to detect and intercept timber smugglers. If we take the case of Uttar Pradesh we find that the forests of the foothills were cut down to contain malaria. Crop lands have come up since then and have yielded very good results. However, the fact remains that corruption is given a renewed lease in timber smuggling activities. Something should be done to stop this from occurring. Let us now study the situation of forest restoration movement to conserve the forest cover.

**37.6.3 Tree Density in U.P.**

Before separation of Uttaranchal from the total recorded area of forests in U.P. was 5.17 million-hectare or about 17.5 percent of the land area. Over 67 percent of the forestland occur in the hills with about 15 and 19 percent, respectively in each of the Tarai and the Vindhyan regions while the Gangetic Plains have less than 5 percent forest cover. Of the 17.5 percent of the forest area only 11.5 percent is under the tree cover of which only 8 percent are dense forests which is far less than the required 33 percent of the geographical area (Joshi 2002). The best tree density for soil and water conservation exists only in the remote regions. About 8 per cent of the area is facing severe soil erosion and needs something to be done about it immediately. Chandi Prasad Bhatt, the founder of the Chipko Movement (which aims at preventing indiscriminate felling of trees) feels that this decimation has been very bad ecologically speaking. Thus, the tree felling has led to much social disturbance in the forest area of Gavahat. Women have to walk many miles for firewood and fodder. Hills have been degraded of their top soil. This area is landslide prone and soil erosion is heavy problem. In 1970 the Alakhananda which is a tributary of the Ganga had an immense flood. The whole of village Belakuch was flooded and swept away along with several busloads of tourists. This flood affected a 400 kilometre stretch, killing people, cattle, destroying bridges, timber



and fuel. The silt of the flood water literally blocked the Upper Ganga Canal which starts from Haridwar about 350 km from the beginnings of the Alakhananda. This destruction of habitation, human life and animal life could have been prevented had the thick foliage of the trees has been maintained. It is the trees which prevent flooding by storing water in their roots. Fuel scarcity has also become another problem. As mentioned earlier women have to walk between 1-15 km to collect their fuel wood. Forests of oak and rhododendron (shrubs bearing flowers in clusters) are very difficult to find. Even the afforestation programmes have replaced oak with chir. In 1962-63 the hillsides were blasted to open up communication and road networks. In Chamoli district itself 1100 km of motorable roads came up. As a consequence timber felling become both necessary and very profitable. The issue is the same everywhere picture of exploitation of forests and of ruining the ecological balances. This in its turn implies that individuals are trespassing the concerned laws. It also indicates that there are ruthless groups and lobbies operating in and through these forested areas (Desmond 1985).

#### **37.6.4 Hug-the-Tree Movement (*Chipko Andolan*)**

Has there been some counteraction to indiscriminate tree felling? Yes, the people themselves have come forward and taken action through the Chipko Andolan or 'hug-the-trees' movement. This movement has become known worldwide for its policies of:

- i) hugging the trees earmarked for felling. One's life is risked for that of the tree in defiance of the feller(s);
- ii) having spread countrywide, even into the Southern state of Karnataka as Appiko, where afforestation is relatively more important;
- iii) prevention of depletion of forest cover;
- iv) afforestation programmes.

Such programmes it will be require concentrated mobilisation of social networks, social resources, and organisational skills. They need to do these activities on a long-term basis without expecting immediate results. Society as a whole has to be galvanised into action for ecological restoration of human nature balance.

The *Chipko Andolan* began in Gopeshwar of Chamoli in March 1973. Ten ash trees were to be cut down for commercial use by a sports firm. Where no other argument bore fruit the villagers hugged the trees. A year later in 1974 in Reni (65 km from Joshimath), the women rallied behind Gaura Devi (50) and blocked the path leading into the forest.

The movement is an ecological forest-conservation movement. Its founder Chandi Prasad Bhatt believes in organising people for forest preservation. Sunder Lal Bahuguna on the other hand campaigns and publicises against deforestation. He is for greening of the forests. He believes that saving the forest is a first step towards saving the people themselves (for more information on Chipko movement see Jain 1984, Weber 1987). In the next section we will state some of the problems facing the preservation of the forest cover as well as the steps taken to preserve forests in India.

- i) What are the effects of pesticides on health? Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write a note on the Hug-the-Trees Movement (Chipko Andolan). Use about five lines for your answer.

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## 37.7 PRESERVATION OF FORESTS: STEPS TOWARDS FUTURE

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What is the future regarding Indian forests? What are the major problem areas regarding conservation of forest reserves? Let us look at the problem as it exists in certain states like Meghalaya, M.P., Bihar, Gujarat and Orissa.

### 37.7.1 Forest Use in States of India

#### a) Meghalaya

Here the traditions are oral and as such we cannot find out how much is clan land or community land. There is a simple plywood factory in Meghalaya near the Assam border. However, there is a proliferation of saw mills there. Sawed wood has become a source of much income. The laws are quite unclear. It is this sort of situation, which is giving rise to problems, viz. they provide employment to people in saw mills and transport, carpentering etc. These problems are pitted against those of alarmingly depleting forest reserves. Should society look into its short term interests viz. chopping trees for marginal employment or halt this plunder for larger gains e.g., regular monsoons, topsoil protection, protection of flora and fauna and so on?

There is another problem—that of the shifting cultivation (*jhum* cycle). Fields are left fallow after cultivation for a few years. This is too small a period for any forest to grow. They need 20-30 years. The short *jhumming* cycle does not allow the forest to grow. Rather it destroys it. These slash and burn tactics are running forest and vegetation cover. What is worse is that the steepness of slopes leads to much soil erosion in the monsoons.

b) **M.P., Bihar, Gujarat and Orissa**

The problem in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Orissa is the same. Apart from Himalayan forests those of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa are deciduous and some of them are evergreen. These forests are the home of very many tribals (44 million *adivasis*). These tribals depend on these forests for sustenance. Madhya Pradesh earns 12.5 per cent of its revenue annually from its forests. Certain wood pulp projects accepted by the government go against the interests of the *adivasis*. Again this dealt with monoculture growth of pine trees. This project was finally abandoned but felling of trees goes on unabated. From 1958 to 1975 trees worth Rs. 35 crores were felled in this state. Such wanton commercial plunder of trees is now recognized as criminal. Trees take a long time to grow and mature. To hack them for commercial revenues is, gross misdemeanour stemming from corruption and ignorance. It must be stopped forthwith by law. Alternative building materials for houses like cement, plastic and so on must be encouraged. Some of these are now replacing traditional structures in the hills of U.P. and Uttaranchal.

In Bihar the *adivasis* have now taken up the issue of tree protection in a big way. A large number of tribals have been arrested and about 25 killed in the 'tree war'. The issue on hand is to replace sal by teak. The latter is pure commercial timber of no use at all to the tribals. In 1978 when negotiations failed Singhbhum tribals attached tree nurseries and destroyed saplings and forest buildings. Again during 1978 foresters inspecting a teak nursery were trapped and locked in it for 22 hours. They were rescued by the police. Since mid 1980 the Jungle Kato Movement began cutting down hundreds of trees. In Gua in Singhbhum many tribals were shot at and killed while doing this. This is criminal reprisal against tribals who are raising up for a just cause. They have every right for self-determination concerning their age-old association with the environment. Such police action was unwarranted. The tribals who had maintained the equilibrium of nature were subject to brutal assaults.

**37.7.2 Conservation and Afforestation**

In Gujarat the smokeless *Chullha* was provided at a nominal cost to save on fuelwood. Popular participation became necessary in the afforestation programme. The Gujarat Government has asked villagers to plant fruit, fodder and fuel trees in the forests nearby. School children have also been involved in afforestation programmes. Saplings were given to them and they were asked to care for them. The Madhya Pradesh Lok Vaniki Act, 2001 applies to private and revenue areas which the *Bhuswami*, the Gram Panchayat or Gram *Sabha* intends to manage as tree clad area. It can go to a long way to support private sector participation raising of forests on large degraded lands under agricultural tenures in Rajasthan desert areas and uneconomic holdings in rainfed areas.

In Tamil Nadu a project was undertaken to give 500 saplings of fuel, fodder and fruit trees. Cash incentives were given based on the surviving saplings and plants. The Tamil Nadu Government trained a cadre of people to help in their afforestation efforts. Voluntary efforts have had greater popular response. The Chipko Movement had notable success in the Chamoli District in Uttaranchal. Eco-development camps and the afforestation efforts they espouse

were expected to be successful. Such camps provided ways and means to educated people to view environment, especially trees, in the proper light. These camps tried to cover the entire country and were a kind of literacy programme on the value of trees and forest to the environment (see the video programme *Evergreen Tree* at your Study Centre). Saplings were kept and then planted in the forest. Similar efforts were on at Ranchi and in Jamkhad, Maharashtra. So far as the Chipko Movement is concerned two strands were clearly discernible. The first was that of the Chandi Prasad Bhatt group who saw tree felling in the context of the hill requirements as valid. Sunderlal Bahuguna has gone against this position and for him all trees should be conserved in the hills. Both these movements had mobilised a number of social groups. Many demonstrations were held. Due to these pioneers in Indian ecological movements, awareness of the dangers of poor forest levels (below 20 per cent) increased all over the country. Very much more, however, needs to be done in this crucial area (Bahuguna 1987: 238-248).

Forest conservation priorities cannot be determined in isolation from local people and broader patterns of natural resource use, and this must be complimented by policies promoting sustainable and equitable development of the natural resource base as a whole. In acknowledging this factor, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India issued policy guidelines for the involvement of village communities and voluntary agencies in the regeneration of degraded forest lands on 1 June 1990 under the JFM (joint forest management) programme. Joint Forest Management is a concept of developing partnerships between fringe forest user groups and the forest department on the basis of mutual trust and jointly defined roles and responsibilities with regard to forest protection and development. Under the JFM programme, the user (local communities) and the owner (government) manage the resource and share the cost equally. The effective and meaningful involvement of local communities in evolving sustainable forest management systems is now being looked upon as a significant approach to address the longstanding problems of deforestation and land degradation in India. The linking of socio-economic incentives and forest development has been singularly instrumental in eliciting community participation. The institutional involvement in various forest protection and developmental activities has made promising impacts on the biophysical and socio-economic environment of the JFM areas. Currently, it is estimated that 10.24 million hectares of forest lands are being managed under the JFM programme through 36,075 committees in 22 states. As a follow-up, the Government of India issued guidelines on 21 February 2000 for strengthening of the JFM programme (Ministry of Forest and Environment, Government of India).

Following the lessons learnt from the JFM experiment during the 9th five-year plan, the Government of India's Ministry of Environment and Forests issued in 2003 the guidelines of its National Afforestation Programme (NAP). The guidelines are to initiate steps for implementing the NAP during the 10th five-year plan. Short term objectives of NAP include regeneration and eco-development of degraded forests and adjoining areas on a watershed basis and also augmentation of the availability of fuelwood, fodder and grasses from the regenerated areas. For more information on this point, read IGNOU courses, PFM-04 and PFM 02.

### 37.7.3 Subsidy and Conservation

Also active on environmental issues and tree conservation, Madhva Ashish of Mirtola in Almorah, District Kumaon suggested that overgrazing and overpopulation had severely disturbed the ecological balance of the area. According to him, the hill lands, helped by a good monsoon, provide just three months subsistence rations to hill folks. He suggested that consumption of these three months should be subsidised by the government, and thereby all the ecological benefits would accrue to the hill folk. Overgrazing and overcutting lead to making inroads to non-replaceable capital resources. Ashish had also suggested that a light metal ploughshare be invented as a substitute for the present oak tree ones. Thousands of mature oak trees were felled to make this ploughshare. He further observed that the hill problem would not be solved through agriculture. According to him the stopping of hill agriculture and the subsidising of the hill areas nine months of the year were eminently feasible suggestions. The hill population, he felt, can be rehabilitated in various different ways including compensation for crops, work in the forest department, provision of one high yielding stall fed cow, and a milk collecting scheme. Ashish had thus outlined a feasible ecology programme for the hills specially the Kumaon hills. What is less known, however, is that Madhava Ashish has 'adopted' and has been protecting tree cover in and around the Mirtola area. Mirtola represents one of the most lush and beautiful tree forests anywhere in the country. We each need to follow this example and make trees and forest protection our individual and communal responsibility. This along with government cooperation will lead to a holistic recrudescence (break out afresh) of trees, and ecology. It will gradually but surely redress the imbalance between human beings and nature (Ashish 1981: 25-46).

### 37.7.4 Further Developments

Meanwhile Chipko-lite organisations have sprung up all over. The most famous of these is the Appiko in Karnataka, Pandurang Hegde.

There have also been efforts by the Government to alleviate the alarming rate of tree felling. The Indian Forest Bill of 1980 qualified people's rights in the forest and over its products. Forest officials and police had been given sweeping powers for confiscation and seizure.

The problem concerning contractors has yet to be solved since this is linked with poverty in the forests and hills. For this reason there was marked opposition to the Forest Bill 1980. There are also ambitious plans for afforestation. Forests are, however, not being destroyed only by local population and contractors. Corruption in the Forest Departments, timber traders and smugglers are all part of this destruction. Wildlife too has to bear the brunt of an ever receding home. The big game like the lions, tigers and elephants suffer first. Over time the entire food chain down to the monkeys and squirrels has to bear with man's inordinate greed, rapacity, and folly. The task is an uphill one and it will take years before we can be complacent. Many game reserves have been started to preserve animal life. This is a good start. But, we must aim at a human attitude in which human beings, nature and the ecological world (animals in relation to man) share the planet without fear of being exploited and decimated by human society.

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## 37.8 LET US SUM UP

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We have seen in this unit that environment and human society are intimately related. We began the unit by describing what is ecology. Here, we specially focused on the relationship between human beings and their environment. We said there is a reciprocal relationship between human beings and nature. We then outlined the approaches in ecology, which explained the human being-nature nexus. While focussing on ecology in the context of Indian society we listed the basic human needs and pointed out the situation in India where the environment is very crucial for the satisfaction of needs and survival of human beings. Here we also explained the state of water and atmospheric pollution in India. While examining the interrelationship between health and environment, we focused on health hazards due to food contamination from preservatives, chemical effluents from industries and overuse of pesticides in food. We then considered the related issues of deforestation and the *Chipko andolan* that was the response to it. Finally, we considered the use of forests in certain states and steps taken via conservation and afforestation to maintain a balance between human beings and nature.

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## 37.9 KEYWORDS

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<b>Afforestation</b>	Raising seedlings and plant them in order to raise forest trees on forest land
<b>Contamination</b>	Poison of a food item with a chemical and make it unfit for consumption
<b>Deforestation</b>	Cutting down trees from the forest with no regard for the minimum tree cover required for soil conservation
<b>Determinism</b>	The term refers, in the context of their unit, to the view that ecology determines the entire flow of events.
<b>Effluents</b>	The toxic waste chemicals thrown by industries into the rivers or over land
<b>Erosion</b>	The term refers to the process when topsoil from the land gets torn off and runs away into the gully or hillside and is lost to cultivation.
<b>Pollution</b>	The process whereby through chemical preservatives the environment as a whole gets poisoned.

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## 37.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Ecology is the study of the interrelation between organisms and their environment.
- ii) The thinkers of this school feel that the state of ecology is directly linked to the state of technology. This approach emphasises that technology, economics, population form a basic influence on social processes.
- iii) The advantage of the Systems Model is that it puts man at the centre of ecological issues. Accordingly the social system selectively exploits the ecology system. At the same time the ecological system adapts to and sustains the social system.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The pollution and dirt that arise from water drains and waste matters from human settlements are at times equal to industrial effluents.
- ii) In its natural state the atmosphere provides man with oxygen. However, if this becomes clouded with smoke from cars, factories, stoves and so on it can lead to a source of ill health and disease.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Pesticides affect all vital organs of the body like kidney, liver, heart and thyroid. Headaches, memory loss, body tumor, blurred vision, heart attacks, arthritis, limb swelling are some of the health problems created by exposure to and intake of pesticides.
- ii) The hug-the-tree movement or *Chipko Andolan* arose in the then state of UP around 1973 to check the felling of trees and reduction of forest cover. The villagers hugged the trees (ash trees in Gopeshwar of Chamoli district) which were to be cut down for commercial use by a sports firm. In 1974 women rallied around the forests and blocked the path leading into the forest.

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## Structure

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you should be able to

- explain the concept of unity and diversity
- describe the forms and bases of diversity in India
- examine the bonds and mechanisms of unity in India
- provide an explanation to our option for a composite culture model rather than a uniformity model of unity.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit deals with unity and diversity in India. You may have heard a lot about unity and diversity in India. But do you know what exactly it means? Here we will explain to you the meaning and content of this phrase. For this purpose the unit has been divided into three sections.

In the first section, we will specify the meaning of the two terms, diversity and unity.



In the second section, we will illustrate the forms of diversity in Indian society. For detailed treatment we will focus on the four forms of diversity, race, language, religion and caste.

In the third section, we will bring out the bonds of unity in India. These are geopolitical, the culture of pilgrimage, tradition of accommodation, and tradition of interdependence.

Above all, we will note that the unity of India is born of a composite culture rather than a uniform culture.

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## **1.2 CONCEPTS OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY**

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We begin by clarifying the meaning of the terms diversity and unity.

### **1.2.1 Meaning of Diversity**

Ordinarily diversity means differences. For our purposes, however, it means something more than mere differences. It means collective differences, that is, differences which mark off one group of people from another. These differences may be of any sort: biological, religious, linguistic etc. On the basis of biological differences, for example, we have racial diversity. On the basis of religious differences, similarly, we have religious diversity. The point to note is that diversity refers to collective differences.

The term diversity is opposite of uniformity. Uniformity means similarity of some sort that characterises a people. 'Uni' refers to one; 'form' refers to the common ways. So when there is something common to all the people, we say they show uniformity. When students of a school, members of the police or the army wear the same type of dress, we say they are in 'uniform'. Like diversity, thus, uniformity is also a collective concept. When a group of people share a similar characteristic, be it language or religion or anything else, it shows uniformity in that respect. But when we have groups of people hailing from different races, religions and cultures, they represent diversity. D.N. Majumdar wrote a book with the title, *Races and Cultures of India*. Mark the words in the plural: Races (not Race); Cultures (not Culture).

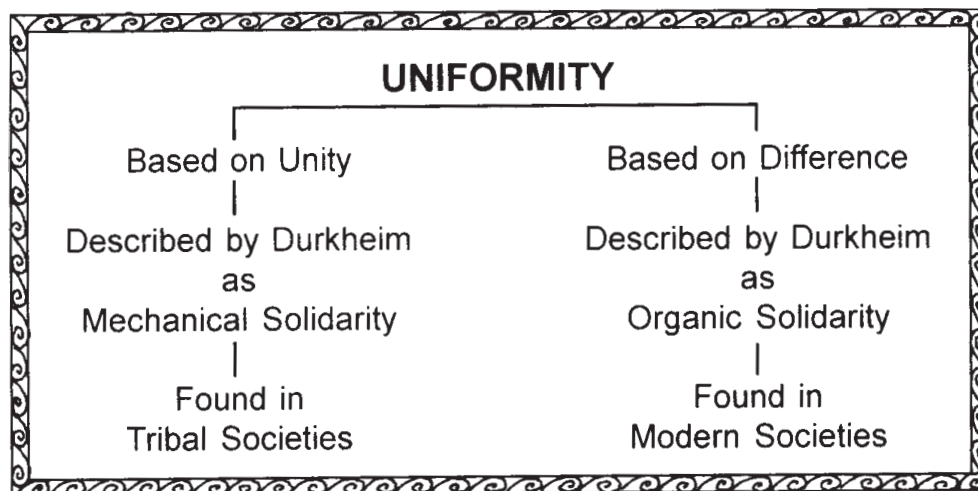
Thus, diversity means variety. For all practical purposes it means variety of groups and cultures. We have such a variety in abundance in India. We have here a variety of races, of religions, of languages, of castes and of cultures. For the same reason India is known for its socio-cultural diversity.

### **1.2.2 Meaning of Unity**

Unity means integration. It is a social psychological condition. It connotes a sense of one-ness, a sense of we-ness. It stands for the bonds, which hold the members of a society together.

There is a difference between unity and uniformity. Uniformity presupposes similarity, unity does not. Thus, unity may or may not be based on uniformity. Unity may be born out of uniformity. Durkheim calls this type of unity a mechanical solidarity. We find this type of unity in tribal societies and in

traditional societies. However, unity may as well be based on differences. It is such unity, which is described by Durkheim as organic solidarity. This type of unity characterises modern societies. Let us see it in a diagram



**Fig. 1.1: Two types of unity**

The point to note is that unity does not have to be based on uniformity. Unity, as we noted earlier, implies integration. Integration does not mean absence of differences. Indeed, it stands for the ties that bind the diverse groups with one another.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Mark which of the following is the correct meaning of diversity?
  - a) Differences between two individuals
  - b) Similarities among the members of a group
  - c) Dissimilarities among groups
- ii) Mark which of the following is the correct example of social diversity?
  - a) Temperamental differences between men and women
  - b) Property differences between the two neighbours
  - c) Differences of religious belongingness between two groups.
- iii) Indicate which of the following statements are true and which are false.  
Use T for True and F for False.
  - a) Unity means absence of differences.
  - b) Unity is opposite of diversity.
  - c) Uniformity is a necessary condition for unity.
  - d) Unity in diversity is a contradiction in terms.
  - e) Mechanical solidarity is based on uniformity.
  - f) Unity signifies integration.

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## 1.3 FORMS OF DIVERSITY IN INDIA

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As hinted earlier, we find in India diversity of various sorts. Some of its important forms are the following: racial, linguistic, religious and caste-based. Let us deal with each one of them in some detail.

### 1.3.1 Racial Diversity

You may have seen people of different races in India. A race is a group of people with a set of distinctive physical features such as skin colour, type of nose, form of hair, etc.

Herbert Risley had classified the people of India into seven racial types. These are (i) Turko-Iranian, (ii) Indo-Aryan, (iii) Scytho-Dravidian, (iv) Aryo-Dravidian, (v) Mongolo-Dravidian, (vi) Mongoloid, and (vii) Dravidian. These seven racial types can be reduced to three basic types-the Indo-Aryan, the Mongolian and the Dravidian. In his opinion the last two types would account for the racial composition of tribal India. He was the supervisor of the census operations held in India in 1891 and it was data from this census, which founded the basis of this classification. As, it was based mainly on language-types rather than physical characteristics; Risley's classification was criticised for its shortcomings.

Other administrative officers and anthropologists, like J.H. Hutton, D.N. Majumdar and B.S. Guha, have given the latest racial classification of the Indian people based on further researches in this field. Hutton's and Guha's classifications are based on 1931 census operations. B.S. Guha (1952) has identified six racial types (1) the Negrito, (2) the Proto Australoid, (3) the Mongoloid, (4) the Mediterranean, (5) the Western Brachycephals, and (6) the Nordic. Besides telling you what the various types denote, we shall not go into the details of this issue, because that will involve us in technical matters pertaining to physical anthropology. Here, we need only to be aware of the diversity of racial types in India.

**Negritos** are the people who belong to the black racial stock as found in Africa. They have black skin colour, frizzle hair, thick lips, etc. In India some of the tribes in South India, such as the Kadar, the Irula and the Paniyan have distinct Negrito strain.

The **Proto-Australoid** races consist of an ethnic group, which includes the Australian aborigines and other peoples of southern Asia and Pacific Islands. Representatives of this group are the Ainu of Japan, the Vedda of Sri Lanka, and the Sakai of Malaysia. In India the tribes of Middle India belong to this strain. Some of these tribes are the Ho of Singhbhum, Bihar, and the Bhil of the Vindhya ranges.

The **Mongoloids** are a major racial stock native to Asia, including the peoples of northern and eastern Asia. For example, Chinese, Japanese, Burmese, Eskimos, and often American Indians also belong to this race. In India, the North Eastern regions have tribes of **brachycephalic** Mongoloid strain. A slightly different kind of Mongoloid racial stock is found in the Brahmaputra Valley. The Mikir-Bodo group of tribes and the Angami Nagas represent the best examples of Mongoloid racial composition in India.

The **Mediterranean** races relate to the **caucasian** physical type, i.e., the white race. It is characterised by medium or short stature, slender build, long head with **cephalic index** (the ratio multiplied by 100 of the maximum breadth of the head to its maximum length) of less than 75 and dark (continental) complexion.

The **Western Brachycephals** are divided into the following three sub-groups: (1) The **Alpenoid** are characterised by broad head, medium stature and light skin, found amongst Bania castes of Gujarat, the Kayasthas of Bengal, etc. (ii) The **Dinaric**- They are characterised by broad head, long nose, tall stature and dark skin colour, found amongst the Brahmin of Bengal, the non-Brahmin of Karnataka, (iii) The **Armenoid**- They are characterised by features similar to Dinaric. The Armenoid have a more marked shape of the back of head, a prominent and narrow nose. The Parsi of Bombay show the typical characteristics of the Armenoid race (Das 1988: 223).

Finally, the **Nordic** races belong to the physical type characterised by tall stature, long head, light skin and hair, and blue eyes. They are found in Scandinavian countries, Europe. In India, they are found in different parts of north of the country, especially in Punjab and Rajputana. The Kho of Chitral, the Red Kaffirs, the Khatash are some of the representatives of this type. Research suggests that the Nordics came from the north, probably from south east Russia and south west Siberia, through central Asia to India. (Das 1988: 223).

### 1.3.2 Linguistic Diversity

Do you know how many languages are there in India? While the famous linguist Grierson noted 179 languages and 544 dialects, the 1971 census on the other hand, reported 1652 languages in India which are spoken as mother tongue. Not all these languages are, however, equally widespread. Many of them are tribal speeches and these are spoken by less than one percent of the total population. Here you can see that in India there is a good deal of linguistic diversity.

Only 18 languages are listed in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution. These are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. Out of these 18 languages, Hindi is spoken by 39.85 percent of the total population; Bengali, Telugu and Marathi by around 8 percent each; Tamil and Urdu by 6.26 and 5.22 percent, respectively; and the rest by less than 5 percent each as per 1991 census report (India 2003).

The above constitutionally recognised languages belong to two linguistic families: Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu are the four major Dravidian languages. The languages of Indo-Aryan family are spoken by 75 percent of India's total population while the languages of Dravidian family are spoken by 20 percent.

This linguistic diversity notwithstanding, we have always had a sort of link language, though it has varied from age to age. In ancient times it was Sanskrit, in medieval age it was Arabic or Persian and in modern times we have Hindi and English as official languages.

### 1.3.3 Religious Diversity

India is a land of multiple religions. We find here followers of various faiths, particularly of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, among others. You know it that Hinduism is the dominant religion of India. According to the census of 1981 it is professed by 82.64 percent of the total population. Next comes Islam, which is practised by 11.35 percent. This is followed by Christianity having a following of 2.43 percent, Sikhism reported by 1.96 percent, Buddhism by 0.71 percent and Jainism by 0.48 percent. The religions with lesser following are Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Bahaism.

While Hinduism saw a slight reduction in the percentage of their followers by the year 1991, most of the other religions increased their strength though by very narrow margin. According to the 1991 census the Hinduism has 82.41 percent followers to the total population. 11.67 percent followed Islam and 2.32 percent followed Christianity. Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism followed by 1.99, 0.77 and 0.41 percent, respectively. And 0.43 reported to follow other religions. (*Census of India* 1995, Series 1, Paper 1 on Religion).

Then there are sects within each religion. Hinduism, for example, has many sects including Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava. Add to them the sects born or religious reform movements such as Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Ram Krishna Mission. More recently, some new cults have come up such as Radhaswami, Saibaba, etc. Similarly, Islam is divided into Shiya and Sunni; Sikhism into Namdhari and Nirankari; Jainism into Digambar and Shvetambar; and Buddhism into Hinayan and Mahayan.

While Hindu and Muslim are found in almost all parts of India, the remaining minority religions have their pockets of concentration. Christians have their strongholds in the three southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh and in the north-eastern states like Nagaland and Meghalaya. Sikhs are concentrated largely in Punjab, Buddhists in Maharashtra, and Jains are mainly spread over Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat, but also found in most urban centres throughout the country.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- i) List, in one line, some of the major forms of diversity found in India?  
.....
- ii) According to Grierson, how many dialects and languages are spoken in India?  
.....  
.....
- iii) What are the various religions found in India? Use two lines for your answer.  
.....  
.....

### 1.3.4 Caste Diversity

India, as you know, is a country of castes. The term caste is generally used in two senses: sometimes in the sense of *Varna* and sometimes in the sense of *Jati*. (i) *Varna* refers to a segment of the four-fold division of Hindu society based on functional criterion. The four *Varna* are Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra with their specialised functions as learning, defence, trade and manual service. The *Varna* hierarchy is accepted all over India. (ii) *Jati* refers to a hereditary endogamous status group practising a specific traditional occupation. You may be surprised to know that there are more than 3,000 *jati* in India. These are hierarchically graded in different ways in different regions.

It may also be noted that the practice of caste system is not confined to Hindus alone. We find castes among the Muslim, Christian, Sikh as well as other communities. You may have heard of the hierarchy of Shaikh, Saiyed, Mughal, Pathan among the Muslim. Furthermore, there are castes like teli (oil pressure), dhobi (washerman), darjee (tailor), etc. among the Muslim. Similarly, caste consciousness among the Christian in India is not unknown. Since a vast majority of Christians in India are converted from Hindu fold, the converts have carried the caste system into Christianity. Among the Sikh again you have so many castes including *Jat* Sikh and *Majahabi* Sikh (lower castes). In view of this you can well imagine the extent of caste diversity in India.

In addition to the above described major forms of diversity, we have diversity of many other sorts like settlement patterns - tribal, rural, urban; marriage and kinship patterns along religious and regional lines; cultural patterns reflecting regional variations, and so on. These forms of diversity will become clear to you as you proceed along Blocks 1 to 7 of this course.

#### Activity 1

What language do you speak and to which stock of languages does it belong? Find out what language/s is/are spoken in the ten families living on the left side of your own family. Divide them according to the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian stock of languages. Write down all this information on a separate sheet. Compare your findings with those of other students at your study centre.

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## 1.4 BONDS OF UNITY IN INDIA

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In the preceding section we have illustrated the diversity of India. But that is not the whole story. There are bonds of unity underlying all this diversity. These bonds of unity may be located in a certain underlying uniformity of life as well as in certain mechanisms of integration. Census Commissioner in 1911, Herbert Risley (1969), was right when he observed: "Beneath the manifold diversity of physical and social type, language, custom and religion which strikes the observer in India there can still be discerned ..... a certain underlying uniformity of life from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin". We will describe the bonds of unity of India in this section. These are geo-political unity, the institution of pilgrimage, tradition of accommodation, and tradition of interdependence. We will now describe each of them in that order.



### 1.4.1 Geo-political Unity

The first bond of unity of India is found in its geo-political integration. India is known for its geographical unity marked by the Himalayas in the north end and the oceans on the other sides. Politically India is now a sovereign state. The same constitution and same parliament govern every part of it. We share the same political culture marked by the norms of democracy, secularism and socialism.

Although it has not been recognised till recently, the geo-political unity of India was always visualized by our seers and rulers. The expressions of this consciousness of the geo-political unity of India are found in Rig-Veda, in Sanskrit literature, in the edicts of Asoka, in Buddhist monuments and in various other sources. The ideal of geo-political unity of India is also reflected in the concepts of *Bharatvarsha* (the old indigenous classic name for India), *Chakravarti* (emperor), and *Ekchhatradhipatya* (under one rule).

### 1.4.2 The Institution of Pilgrimage

Another source of unity of India lies in what is known as temple culture, which is reflected in the network of shrines and sacred places. From Badrinath and Kedarnath in the north to Rameshwaram in the south, Jagannath Puri in the east to Dwaraka in the west the religious shrines and holy rivers are spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. Closely related to them is the age-old culture of pilgrimage, which has always moved people to various parts of the country and fostered in them a sense of geo-cultural unity.

As well as being an expression of religious sentiment, pilgrimage is also an expression of love for the motherland, a sort of mode of worship of the country. It has played a significant part in promoting interaction and cultural affinity among the people living in different parts of India. Pilgrimage can, therefore, rightly be viewed as a mechanism of geo-cultural unity.

### 1.4.3 Tradition of Accommodation

Have you heard of the syncretic quality of Indian culture, its remarkable quality of accommodation and tolerance? There is ample evidence of it. The first evidence of it lies in the elastic character of Hinduism, the majority religion of India. It is common knowledge that Hinduism is not a homogeneous religion, a religion having one God, one Book and one Temple. Indeed, it can be best described as a federation of faiths. **Polytheistic** (having multiple deities) in character, it goes to the extent of accommodating village level deities and tribal faiths.

For the same reason, sociologists have distinguished two broad forms of Hinduism: sanskritic and popular. Sanskritic is that which is found in the texts (religious books like Vedas, etc.) and popular is that which is found in the actual life situation of the vast masses. Robert Redfield has called these two forms as great tradition of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the little tradition of worship of the village deity. And everything passes for Hinduism.

What it shows is that Hinduism has been an open religion, a receptive and absorbing religion, an encompassing religion. It is known for its quality of openness and accommodation.

Another evidence of it lies in its apathy to conversion. Hinduism is not a **proselytising** religion. That is, it does not seek converts. Nor has it ordinarily resisted other religions to seek converts from within its fold. This quality of accommodation and tolerance has saved the way to the coexistence of several faiths in India.

Mechanisms of coexistence of people of different faiths have been in existence here for long. Take for example, the case of Hindu-Muslim amity. Hindus and Muslims have always taken part in each other's functions, festivities and feasts. How did they do it? They did it by evolving the mechanism of providing for a separate hearth and a set of vessels for each other so as to respect each other's religious sensibility. This always facilitated mutual visiting and sharing in each other's joy and grief. They have also done so by showing regards for each other's saints and holy men. Thus, both Hindus and Muslims have shown reverence to the saints and Pirs of each other. And this holds as well for the coexistence of other religious groups like Sikh, Jain, Christian and so on.

### Activity 2

Write the answers of the following questions on a separate sheet of paper and discuss them with other students at your study centre.

- i) Give, at least one example, in each of the following areas, to show the blending of Hindu and Muslim cultures in India.
  - a) architecture
  - b) literature
  - c) music
  - d) religion
- ii) Have you recently attended a wedding in a community other than your own? What has struck you as a markedly different feature, which is, absent during a wedding in your community?

### 1.4.4 Tradition of Interdependence

We have had a remarkable tradition of interdependence, which has held us together throughout centuries. One manifestation of it is found in the form of *Jajmani* system, i.e., a system of functional interdependence of castes. The term "*jajman*" refers generally to the patron or recipient of specialised services. The relations were traditionally between a food producing family and the families that supported them with goods and services. These came to be called the *jajmani* relations. *Jajmani* relations were conspicuous in village life, as they entailed ritual matters, social support as well as economic exchange. The whole of a local social order was involved (the people and their values) in such *jajmani* links. A patron had *jajmani* relations with members of a high caste (like a Brahmin priest whose services he needed for rituals). He also required the services of specialists from the lower *jati* to perform those necessary tasks like washing of dirty clothes, cutting of hair, cleaning the rooms and toilets, delivery of the child etc. Those associated in these interdependent relations were expected to be and were broadly supportive of each other with qualities of ready help that generally close kinsmen were expected to show.

The *jajmani* relations usually involved multiple kinds of payment and obligations as well as multiple functions.

We shall also discuss the *jajmani* system in the next unit on Rural Social Structure. Here it will suffice to note that no caste was self-sufficient. If anything, it depended for many things on other castes. In a sense, each caste was a functional group in that it rendered a specified service to other caste groups. *Jajmani* system is that mechanism which has formalised and regulated this functional interdependence.

Furthermore, castes cut across the boundaries of religious communities. We have earlier mentioned that notions of caste are found in all the religious communities in India. In its actual practice, thus, the institution of *jajmani* provides for inter linkages between people of different religious groups. Thus a Hindu may be dependent for the washing of his clothes on a Muslim washerman. Similarly, a Muslim may be dependent for the stitching of his clothes on a Hindu tailor, and vice-versa.

Efforts have been made from time to time by sensitive and sensible leaders of both the communities to synthesise Hindu and Muslim traditions so as to bring the two major communities closer to each other. Akbar, for example, founded a new religion, *Din-e-Ilahi*, combining best of both the religions. The contributions made by Kabir, Eknath, Guru Nanak, and more recently Mahatma Gandhi, are well known in this regard.

Similarly, in the field of art and architecture we find such a happy blending of Hindu and Muslim styles. What else is this if not a proof of mutual appreciation for each other's culture?

Quite in line with these traditional bonds of unity, the Indian state in post-Independence era has rightly opted for a composite culture model of national unity rather than a uniform culture model. The composite culture model provides for the preservation and growth of plurality of cultures within the framework of an integrated nation. Hence the significance of our choice of the norm of secularism, implying equal regard for all religions, as our policy of national integration.

The above account of the unity of India should not be taken to mean that we have always had a smooth sailing in matters of national unity, with no incidents of caste, communal or linguistic riots. Nor should it be taken to mean that the divisive and secessionist tendencies have been altogether absent. There have been occasional riots, at times serious riots. For example, who can forget the communal riots of partition days, the linguistic riots in Tamil Nadu in protest against the imposition of Hindi, the riots in Gujarat during 1980s between scheduled and non-scheduled castes and communal riots of 2002? The redeeming feature, however, is that the bonds of unity have always emerged stronger than the forces of disintegration.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) List the bonds of unity in India, in the space given below.

.....

.....

.....

- ii) Indicate the mechanism of the following set of terms, in the space provided against each.
- a) geo-political unity .....
  - b) geo-cultural unity .....
  - c) religious accommodation .....
  - d) social interdependence .....
- iii) Distinguish between great tradition and little tradition, in the space given below.
- .....
- .....
- .....
- iv) Distinguish between composite culture and uniform culture models of national integration, in the space provided below.
- .....
- .....
- .....

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## 1.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have studied that diversity refers to i) patterned differences between groups, ii) socio-cultural variety, and iii) lack of uniformity. Unity means integration that may or may not be based on uniformity, a sense of oneness arising from the bonds that hold the members together or that bind the diverse groups with one another.

You have also studied that there are major forms of diversity in India: race, language, religion and caste.

Underlying all the diversities there is a remarkable measure of unity. We have noted four bonds of unity in India: geo-political, geo-cultural, religious accommodation and functional interdependence. Closely related to these bonds are four mechanisms of integration: constitution, pilgrimage, provision of a separate hearth, cook and kitchenware for members of other religious community, and *jajmani*.

Finally, we have noted that India has opted for a composite culture model of unity rather than uniform cultural model.

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## 1.6 KEYWORDS

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### Brachycephalic

In terms of anthropometric measures, heads with a breadth of 80 cephalic index and over are categorised as broad or brachycephalic. Those with an index under 80, but not under 75, are classified

	as medium heads or meso-or mesati-cephalic. Long or dolicho-cephalic heads are those heads, which have the cephalic index of below 75.
<b>Caucasian</b>	Relating to the white race of mankind as classified according to physical features.
<b>Cephalic Index</b>	The proportion of the breadth of the head to its length is expressed as a percentage and it is called the cephalic index.
<b>Mechanical Solidarity</b>	The condition of unity or of one-ness in a society may be based on the elements of uniformity or similarities. Such condition is described by Durkheim as mechanical solidarity.
<b>Mediterranean</b>	Relating to a physical type of the Caucasian race characterised by medium or short stature, slender build, long head with cephalic index of less than 75 and dark complexion.
<b>Mongoloid</b>	A major racial stock native to Asia including peoples of northern and eastern Asia. For example, Malaysians, Chinese, Japanese, Eskimos, and often American Indians also belong to this race. In India, besides several others the Naga tribes in north east belong to this race.
<b>Negrito</b>	A people belonging to the African branch of the black race. In India, the south Indian tribes like Kadar, the Irula, etc. are said to belong to this race.
<b>Nordic</b>	Relating to the germanic peoples of northern Europe and specially of Scandinavia. This is a physical type characterised by tall stature, long head, light skin and hair, and blue eyes. In India, they are found in different parts of north of the country such as Punjab and Rajputana.
<b>Organic Solidarity</b>	The condition of unity or one-ness in a society may arise out of differences of socio-cultural characteristics. Such unity as described by Durkheim as organic solidarity.
<b>Polytheistic</b>	Relating to the worship of more than one god.
<b>Proselytising</b>	Converting from one religion to another.
<b>Proto-Australoid</b>	Relating to an ethnic group including the Australian aborigines and other peoples of southern Asia and Pacific islands, including the Ainu of Japan the Vedda of Sri Lanka. In India, the Chotanagpur tribes of Bihar called Ho and Bhil are considered to be of this race.

- i) the **Alpenoid** is characterised by broad head with rounded occiput (the back part of the head or skull) prominent nose, medium stature, round face. Skin colour is light; hair on face and body is abundant, body is thickly set. This type is found among the Bania of Gujarat, the Kathi of Kathiawar, the Kayastha of Bengal etc.
- ii) Amongst the **Dinaric** people, the head is broad with rounded occiput and high vault; nose is very long, stature is tall, face is long, forehead is receding; skin colour is darker, eyes and hair are also dark. This type is represented in Bengal, Orissa and Coorg. The Brahmin of Bengal and the Kanarese Brahmin of Mysore are also some of the representatives.
- iii) The **Armenoid** is in most of the characters like the Dinaric. In the former, the shape of occiput is more marked and the nose is more prominent and narrow. The Parsi of Bombay show typical Armenoid characteristics.

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## 1.7 FURTHER READING

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Betteille, A. 2000. *The Chronicles of Our Time*. Penguin Books India: New Delhi

Deshpandae, Satish 2003. *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*. Viking: New Delhi

Mukerjee, Radha Kumud 1954. *The Fundamental Unity of India*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay, pp. 17-22

Risley, H.H. 1969, *The People of India* (first print in 1915). Orient Books: Delhi

Srinivas, M.N. 1969. *Social Structure*. Publications Division, Government of India: New Delhi

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## 1.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) C
- ii) C



- iii) Statements a, b, c and d are false. Statements e and f are true.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Racial, linguistic, religious and caste-based.
- ii) 179 languages and 544 dialects.
- iii) Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Bahaism.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Geo-political, geo-cultural, tradition of accommodation, interdependence.
- ii)
  - a) constitution
  - b) pilgrimage
  - c) separate cook and kitchenware
  - d) *jajmani*
- iii) Great tradition is sanskritic, based on sacred texts and scriptures, and elitist. Little tradition, on the other hand, is oral, village-based and popular.
- iv) Composite culture model provides for cultural pluralism while uniform culture model implies dominance of one culture.

### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Nature of Rural Social Structure
  - 2.2.1 Social Structure
  - 2.2.2 Rural Social Structure in India
- 2.3 Family and Kinship
  - 2.3.1 Family in Rural India
  - 2.3.2 Changes in Family
  - 2.3.3 Lineage and Kinship
- 2.4 Caste Groups
  - 2.4.1 Caste
  - 2.4.2 Sub-caste
  - 2.4.3 Changes in the Caste System
- 2.5 Agrarian Class Structure
- 2.6 The Village
  - 2.6.1 The Issue of Village Autonomy
  - 2.6.2 The *Jajmani* System
  - 2.6.3 Changes in the Village Power Structure and Leadership
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Keywords
- 2.9 Further Reading
- 2.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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By the time you finish reading this unit you should be able to

- identify various elements of rural social structure in India, in particular the family, caste, class and village
- describe the characteristic features of these four elements of rural social structure
- state and explain the important changes in the family and the caste system
- describe the nature of the village community in India and explain the changes therein.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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In unit 1 on Unity and Diversity, you learnt about the cross-cutting networks of uniformity and diversity of races, castes, religions and languages etc. You

will note that as the knowledge of this aspect is crucial to study Indian society, we discuss it through all the units of ESO-12.

Unit 2 on Rural Social Structures deals with the major element of diversity of social life in India. Rural way of living is the dominant pattern of social life in developing countries like India in contrast to the predominant urban style in the developed countries. Social scientists, especially sociologists and social anthropologists, have made important contributions to the understanding of rural social structure.

In section 2.2 of this unit, our first effort is to understand the concept of **social structure** and then relate it to rural social structure in India. The specific components of rural social structure in India have been identified as family, kinship, caste, class and village. Further, in section 2.3, important features of family and kinship in India have been described and the nature of emerging changes in family discussed. Section 2.4 deals with the important characteristics of the caste system against the backdrop of the *varna* model of society. The pattern of change in the caste system has been taken note of. In section 2.5, the character of agrarian classes during the colonial and post-colonial period has been discussed. Section 2.6 examines the exaggerated notion of village autonomy. Moreover, '*jajmani*' system, which is an important social institution, has been discussed. In addition, we have tried to discern the pattern of changes in the nature of power structure and leadership in villages in India. Lastly, section 2.7 gives a summary of this unit.

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## **2.2 THE NATURE OF RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

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In order to gain an understanding of rural social structure, we first clarify what we mean by social structure. Then we relate this understanding of the concept to ethnographic description of society in the rural areas of India.

### **2.2.1 Social Structure**

Human world is composed of individuals. Individuals interact with one another for the fulfillment of their needs. In this process, they occupy certain status and roles in social life with accompanying rights and obligations. Their social behaviour is patterned and gets associated with certain norms and values, which provide them guidance in social interaction. There emerge various social units, such as groups, community, associations and institutions in society as a product of social intercourse in human life.

In this scenario, social structure is conceived as the pattern of inter-related statuses and roles found in a society, constituting a relatively stable set of social relations. It is the organised pattern of the inter-related rights and obligations of persons and groups in a system of interaction.

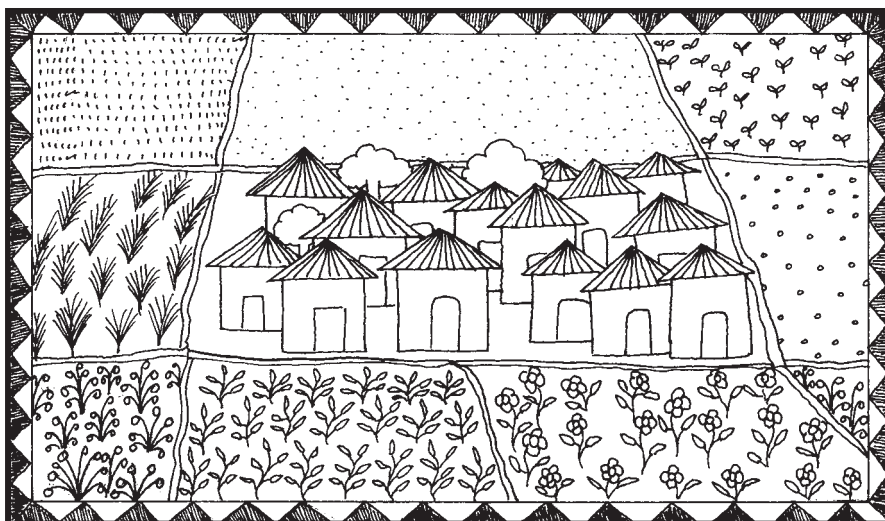
### **2.2.2 Rural Social Structure in India**

India is a country of ancient civilisation that goes back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, which flourished during the third millennium B.C. Since then except for a brief interlude during the Rig-Vedic period (Circa 1500-1000 B.C.) when the urban centres were overrun, rural and urban centres have co-existed in India.

Rural and urban centres share some common facets of life. They show interdependence especially in the sphere of economy, urbanward migration, and townsmen or city dwellers' dependence on villages for various products (e.g., foodgrains, milk, vegetables, raw materials for industry) and increasing dependence of villagers on towns for manufactured goods and market. Despite this interdependence between the two there are certain distinctive features which separate them from each other in terms of their size, demographic composition, cultural moorings, style of life, economy, employment and social relations.

Rural people live in settled villages. Three main types of settlement patterns have been observed in rural areas:

- i) The most common type is the nucleated village found all over the country. Here, a tight cluster of houses is surrounded by the fields of the villagers as shown in figure 2.1. An outlying hamlet or several satellite hamlets are also found to be attached to some villages in this case.



**Fig. 2.1: Nucleated type of settlement pattern**

- ii) Secondly, there are linear settlements in some parts of the country, e.g. in Kerala, in Konkan and in the delta lands of Bengal. In such settlements, houses are strung out, each surrounded by its own compound. However, there is little to physically demarcate where one village ends and another begins.
- iii) The third type of settlement is simply a scattering of homesteads or clusters of two or three houses. In this case also physical demarcation of villages is not clear. Such settlements are found in hill areas, in the Himalayan foothills, in the highlands of Gujarat and in the Satpura range of Maharashtra.

Further, we find that the size of village population is small and density of population low in comparison with towns and cities. India is rightly called a country of villages. According to 1981 Census, there were 4029 towns and 5,57,137 inhabited villages in the country. By the year 1991 this number increased to 4689 towns and 5,80,781 villages. According to 2001 census there are 5161 towns and 6,38,365 villages (including uninhabited villages) in

India (*Census of India* (provisional), 2001). Moreover, as per 2001 census figures about 72 percent of the total population live in villages. Further, rural life is characterised by direct relationship of people to nature i.e., land, animal and plant life. Agriculture is their main occupation. For example, in India agriculture provides livelihood to about 58 percent of the labour force.

Long enduring rural social institutions in India continue to be family, kinship, caste, class, and village. They have millennia old historical roots and structures. They encompass the entire field of life: social, economic, political and cultural-of the rural people. The complexity of social norms and values, statuses and roles, rights and obligations is reflected in them. Therefore, now we will discuss them separately in the subsequent sections.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Define, in four lines, the concept of social structure.

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- ii) According to the 2001 census, how many villages are there in India? Use one line for your answer.

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- iii) How many types of settlement patterns are there in rural areas? Describe one of them in about four lines.

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## **2.3 FAMILY AND KINSHIP**

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Family is the basic unit of almost all societies. It is especially true in India where the very identity of a person is dependent on the status and position of his or her family and its social status.

### **2.3.1 Family in Rural India**

Family is one of the most important social institution which constitutes the rural society. It caters to needs and performs functions, which are essential for the continuity, integration and change in the social system, such as, reproduction, production and socialisation.

Broadly speaking there are two types of family: (a) nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and unmarried children, and (b) joint or extended family comprising a few more kins than the nuclear type. Important dimensions of

**‘jointness’ of family** are coresidentiality, commensality, coparcenary, generation depth (three), and fulfillment of obligation towards kin and sentimental aspect. Coresidentiality means that members of a family live under the same roof. Commensality implies that they eat together i.e., have a common kitchen. Coparcenary means that they have joint ownership of property. Further, generation depth encompasses three generations or more, i.e., grandfather, father and the son or more. Members of the family also have obligations toward their kin. Moreover, they have a sentimental attachment to the ideal of joint family.

Rural family works as the unit of economic, cultural, religious, and political activities. Collectivity of the family is emphasized in social life, and feelings of individualism and personal freedom are very limited. Marriage is considered an inter-familial matter rather than an inter-personal affair. It is governed by rules of kinship, which are discussed in sub-section 2.3.3 of this unit.

### 2.3.2 Changes in Family

Traditional joint family occupied a predominant position in rural areas in India. It was largely prevalent among the landed gentry and priestly caste. But nuclear family also existed in India. Lower caste families whose main occupation was agricultural labour were mostly nuclear. However, they appreciated the ideal of joint family.

Various studies have been conducted to diagnose the change taking place in family in India with increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, changes in economy, technology, politics, education and law in modern times. There are two approaches. The first assumes that the family structure in India has undergone the process of unilinear change from the joint to nuclear form as in the West.

Secondly, I.P.Desai (1964), S.C. Dube (1955), T.N.Madan (1965), and others argue that it is necessary to observe family as a process. They adopt **developmental cycle** approach to understand changes in the family structure in India. They advocate that the presence of nuclear family households should be viewed as units, which will be growing into joint families when the sons grow up and marry. The ‘developmental cycle’ approach implies that a family structure keeps expanding, with birth and marriage, and depleting with death and partition in a cyclical order during a period of time.

Further, empirical studies show inter-regional and intra-regional variations in the distribution of family types. This is evident from the study by Pauline Kolenda (1967) who has made a comparative study of family structures in thirteen regions of India on the basis of 32 publications. In Uttar Pradesh, among the Thakurs of Senapur, joint families constitute 74.4 percent and nuclear families only 25.5 percent; but untouchables have 34 percent joint families and 66 percent nuclear families. In the hilly region of the state of Uttar Pradesh in Sirkanda village, where most of the population is that of Rajputs, the joint families comprise only 39 percent and there are 61 percent nuclear families. In Maharashtra, Badlapur village has 14 percent joint and 86 percent nuclear families. In Andhra Pradesh, in Shamirpet village the proportion of joint families is 18.5 percent and that of nuclear is 81.5 percent. Table 2.1 shows a summarisation of these figures.



**Table 2.1: Inter-regional and Intra-regional variations in the distributions of family types**

State/Region	Village	Percent of Families	
		Joint	Nuclear
U.P. (Plains)	Senapur (Thakur)	74.5	25.5
“ (Hills)	(Lower Caste)	34	66
	Sirkanda (Rajput)	39	61
Maharashtra	Badalpur	14	86
Andhra Pradesh (Telangana)	Shamirpet	18.5	81.5

Here, Kolenda has made a few generalisations. She observes that between regions, the rural areas of the Gangetic plains have higher proportion of joint families than those in the Central India, Maharashtra, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. In the Gangetic plains itself, joint families are more common among the Rajputs and nuclear families predominate among the lower castes. For further details on the joint and the nuclear family see unit 6 of Block 2 of this course.

It has been observed that with the changes in the larger society, the structure and function of joint family in India are undergoing a reconciliatory pattern of change. The traditional world-view of the joint family still prevails.

### Activity 1

Describe various stages of your own family in terms of its developmental cycle. Start with the stage when you were born and its development in terms of family it has so far had.

### 2.3.3 Lineage and Kinship

Within the village, a group of families tracing descent from a common ancestor with knowledge of all the links constitute a lineage; and the children of the same generation behave as brothers and sisters. They form a unit for celebrating major ritual events. Sometimes the word *Kul* is used to describe these units. Usually these families live in closeness and a guest of one (e.g. a son-in-law) could be treated as such in all these families. These bonds of families may go back to 3 to 7 generations. People do not marry within this group. Beyond the known links, there are further connections ? people know the common ancestor but are unable to trace every link. Such families use a more generic term like being “*bhai-bandh*” of one another. They are also exogamous. The word *Gotra* or clan may be used for them.

Adrian Mayer (1960) studied a village in Malwa and distinguished between the **kindred of cooperation** and **kindred of recognition**. The first of these is the smaller unit, where cooperation is offered and taken without formalities. The second one is a larger unit that comes together on specific occasions through information and invitation. These relations can be spread over several

villages for each caste. This is why Mayer studied them within a caste and its region, a point that we need to remember in order to understand the spread of a caste/subcaste across villages and towns. This is also known as horizontal spread of the caste.

With regard to rules of marriage there are some differences between the north and south India. These have been pointed out in unit 6, Block 2 of the first elective course in sociology and will be discussed again in units 8 and 9 of Block 2 of this course. Irawati Karve (1965) noted these differences. Later, an American anthropologist, David Mandelbaum, included them in his popular work on *Society in India* (1972). He reiterates the position “broadly put, in the South a family tries to strengthen existing kin ties through marriage, while in the North a family tends to affiliate with a separate set of people to whom it is not already linked”.

This is witnessed in the prevalence of the rules of **village exogamy** and **‘gotra’ exogamy** in the North but not in the South. In the North, nobody is permitted to marry in his/her own village. Marriage alliances are concluded with the people from other villages belonging to similar caste. But no such proscriptions exist in the South. Further, in the North one cannot marry within his/her own *gotra*. On the contrary, cross cousin marriage i.e., marriage between the children of brother and sister, is preferred in the South. Thus, there is a centrifugal tendency in North India, i.e., the direction of marriage is outward or away from the group. In contrast in South India we find a centripetal tendency in making marriage alliances and building kinship ties. In other words, marriages take place inwardly or within the group.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) List some of the important dimensions of “jointness” of a family. Use about four lines.

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- ii) Define, in four lines, the concept of lineage.

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- iii) What is meant by the ‘developmental cycle’ approach to family in India? Describe it in about four lines.

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## 2.4 CASTE GROUPS

So far we have learnt about smaller units of social structure, groups within which marriage is avoided by tradition. These groups can be called exogamous ('gamy' refers to marriage, and 'exo' means outside); thus exogamy is the practice of marrying outside a group. When members of a group marry within a group, it is called endogamy (endo= within, inside). Thus, family, lineage and clan are exogamous groups. Sub-castes/castes are endogamous groups and we turn our attention to these groups.

### 2.4.1 Caste

People usually marry within the caste or sub-caste. Members of a caste trace their origin from a common ancestor — historical, mythical or divine. The properties of that ancestor are worthy of being remembered by people; and these are well known to such an extent that a mere mention of that name is enough to recognise the group to which a person belongs. Among various views on caste in India, according to the context discussed here, we mention six characteristics of caste, offered by G.S. Ghurye. In his thesis to Cambridge University on *Race and Caste in India*, which has been revised and published several times, G.S. Ghurye (1961) suggested that caste names could indicate six different possibilities. Brij Raj Chauhan used these categories to illustrate the situation in his study, *A Rajasthan Village*, (1968) as shown in table 2.2.

**Table 2.2: Different possibilities for using caste names**

Basis	Examples
1) Principle profession or crafts	Gadaria (shepherd), Nai (barber); Meghwal (leather worker), Suthar (carpenter), Dholi (drum beater)
2) Tribal/ethnic	Bhil
3) Religious movement	Sadhu- (Ramdasi, Kabirpanthi) (satnami in other parts)
4) Specific peculiarity or nick names	Bhangi, Kalal
5) Miscegenation (mixed descent)	Daroga

Here, we have identified two characteristics of caste so far: (i) it is an endogamous group; (ii) it has a common ancestor. As a part of this arrangement descendents of a common ancestor are divided into two groups, the smaller exogamous group, and the wider endogamous group. The first of these groups knows the stages of the links; the second treats it as given.

There are four other characteristics of caste as identified by Ghurye. Occupation is in some ways connected with caste, but not to the extent of prescribing it. Hence Ghurye used the phrase — lack of choice regarding occupation. It has been known for instance that agriculturists, soldiers and confectioners have come from different castes. In some ways however, occupational connection is a ready reference for other groups to identify a person. Each caste has its own social rules regarding things it can take or not take, use or not use. These

relate to dress, ornaments, and even place for living. In southern India, the ecology of the village reflects the caste divisions, the status going down as one moves from the north-east to the south or south-west. For example, in his study of a village in Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu, Beteille (1962) has shown that the Brahman live in an *agraharam* located in the north, non-Brahman somewhere in the middle, and at a distance to the south there is *cheri* or the colony for the lowest castes.

Some of the activities of the castes relate to the wider social setting which is based on the principle of ascription, birth determining the membership of a person and the status of the group. Each group in certain ways represents a segment of the society, and regulates its affairs. This has been called the segmental division of society. In case of the caste-based society as a whole, each group is assigned a particular place on the social ladder. This arrangement reflects the hierarchy of castes, and in that sense other writers, like Kingsley Davis, say that the caste system represents the extreme degree of 'institutionalised inequality' in the world.

### 2.4.2 Sub-caste

A sub-caste is considered a smaller unit within a caste. In the village setting usually we find that there is only one sub-caste living there. A larger number of sub-castes indicate the late arrivals to a village. Thus for all practical purposes a sub-caste represents the caste in the village. In the wider setting of a region, however, we find many sub-castes. One example from Maharashtra is of kumbhar (potters). There are several groups among them; those who tap the clay, those who use the large wheel, those who use the small wheel. All the three are endogamous groups. Should they be called castes or sub-castes? Ghurye favours the second use, Karve the first one.

Both agree that the groups are endogamous, the difference of opinion is about origin. If one group broke into three parts — sub-caste would be a proper usage, and Ghurye thought that was the way things happened. If the three groups had independent origin then they could be called castes — and that is how Karve thought things had occurred. She points out that even linguistic differences exist among the groups and to the extent physical characteristics could help, they show a variation.

In conclusion it can be said that sub-caste is the smallest endogamous group and it has some mechanisms like panchayats to regulate the behaviour of members in the traditional setting. In a village, the difference between caste and sub-caste does not come to the surface but in a region, the difference is visible. (The students are advised to study other units on caste and supplement their readings from them.)

This picture of castes and sub-castes relates to the traditional setting. New forces of change have begun to affect that picture at several points. Some of these points may now be looked in the next sub-section.

### 2.4.3 Changes in the Caste System

Studies by historians and sociologists, namely, Romila Thapar (1979), Burton Stein (1968), Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1957), A.R. Desai (1987) and M.N. Srinivas (1969 and 1978) have shown that Indian society was never static.

The main traditional avenues of social mobility were Sanskritisation, migration and religious conversion. Lower castes or tribes could move upward in the caste hierarchy through acquisition of wealth and political power. They could consequently claim higher caste status along with Sanskritising their way of life, i.e., emulating the life-style and customs of higher castes.

Some important changes have taken place in the caste system in rural areas in the contemporary period due to the new forces of industrialisation, urbanisation, politicisation, modern education and legal system, land reforms, development programmes and government policy of positive discrimination in favour of the lower castes.

Occupational association of caste has marginally changed in rural areas. Brahmins may still work as priests. In addition, they have taken to agriculture. Landowning dominant castes belonging to both upper and middle rung of caste hierarchy generally work as supervisory farmers. Other non-landowning lower castes, including small and marginal peasants, work as wage labourers in agriculture. Artisan castes, namely, carpenters and iron-smith continue with their traditional occupations. However, migration to urban areas has enabled individuals from all castes including untouchables to enter into non-traditional occupations in industry, trade and commerce, and services.

Further, inter-caste marriage is almost non-existent in rural areas. Inter-caste restrictions on food, drink and smoking continue but to a lesser degree because of the presence of tea stalls in villages which are patronised by nearly all castes. The hold of untouchability has lessened. Distinction in dress has become more a matter of income than caste affiliation. In traditional India, the upper castes were also upper classes but it is not absolutely true today because now new occupational opportunities to gain income have developed in villages. People migrate to cities and bring money back to their villages. This has changed the traditional social structure.

Caste has acquired an additional role of operating as interest groups and associations in politics with the introduction of representative parliamentary politics. This has been noted by M.N. Srinivas (1982), Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) and Paul Brass (1965). Various caste associations have been formed transcending sub-caste boundaries to articulate caste interests. Moreover, caste has also witnessed growth of intra-caste factions with differential support to political parties and personal interest of the factional leaders. Thus, caste has undergone both the processes of fusion (merging of different castes) and fission (breaking up of a caste into parts) in the arena of politics.

There is a change in rural power structure in the period since Independence, which has led to some changes in inter-caste relationship. The Brahmins have lost their traditional dominance in South India. Kamma and Reddi in Andhra, Lingayat and Okkaliga in Karnataka, and Ahir, Jat and Kurmi in North India have emerged as the new dominant castes at local and regional levels through acquisition of economic and political power. Some traditional backward castes e.g. Nadar, Vanniyar of Tamil Nadu and Mahar of Maharashtra also have improved their social status.

In his study of Sripuram village in Tanjore district, Andre Beteille (1971) noticed the phenomenon of status incongruence. Traditionally, the upper castes owned land and monopolised political power in the village. But now, due to various

institutional changes, they have lost control in political affairs to intermediate castes without losing their land to any substantial extent.

Thus, we find that caste has undergone adaptive changes. Its traditional basic features, i.e. connubial (matrimonial), commensal (eating together) and ritual, still prevail in rural areas. The core characteristics of the castes, which have affected the social relations, are still operative. However the status quo of the intermediate and low castes has changed due to their acquiring political and/or economic power. High caste, high class and more power went together in the traditional village setting. This hegemony of the high castes has given way to differentiation of these statuses in some regions in India (Beteille 1971 & 1986), so that now high caste does not necessarily occupy a higher class position or power. It can be shown in a diagram (figure 2.3) thus:

Table 2.3: Possible changes in caste positions

Earlier position		New Position	
		a	b
Castes	High	High	Medium
Class	High	Medium	High
Power	High	Low	High

(Source: Beteille 1971)

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Name the title of the thesis in which G.S. Ghurye has described the six features of caste system in India. Use one line
- .....
- ii) What are the main features of caste system in India? Use five lines for your answer.
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- iii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.
- a) Exogamy means marriage ..... one’s own group.
- b) The members of a caste trace their origin from a common ancestor who might be historical, ..... (or) .....
- c) In Tamil Nadu villages the Brahmins reside in the area known as .....



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## 2.5 AGRARIAN CLASS STRUCTURE

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So far we have seen how social structure can be described through institutions based on birth, the family, lineage, sub-caste and caste. An alternate way of describing the structure is through class and here there are two views (i) class is a better spring board for describing structure and (ii) both caste and class are necessary to describe the structure. K.L. Sharma (1980) elaborates the second position, “caste incorporates the element of class and class has a cultural (caste) style, hence the two systems cannot be easily separated even analytically”.

In the modern period, the British land revenue system gave rise to a more or less similar agrarian class structure in villages in India. They were the three classes of the landowners (*zamindars*), the tenants and the agricultural labourers. The landowners (*zamindars*) were tax gatherers and non-cultivating owners of land. They belonged to the upper caste groups. The agricultural labourers were placed in a position of bondsmen and hereditarily attached labourers. They belonged to the lower caste groups.

The impact of land reforms and rural development programmes introduced after independence has been significant. Land reforms led to the eviction of smaller tenants on a large scale. But the intermediate castes of peasants, e.g., the Ahir, Kurmi etc. in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh benefited. Power of the feudal landed families started declining all over the country. The onset of the Green Revolution in the 1960s led to the emergence of commercially oriented landlords. Rich farmers belonging generally to upper and intermediate castes prospered. But the fortune of the poor peasantry and the agricultural labourers did not improve. This has led to accentuation of class conflicts and tensions. Agrarian unrest in India has now become a common feature in various parts of the country.

P.C. Joshi (1971) has summarised in the following manner the trends in the agrarian class structure and relationships. (i) It led to the decline of feudal and customary types of tenancies. It was replaced by a more exploitative and insecure lease arrangement. (ii) It gave rise to a new commercial based rich peasant class who were part owners and part tenants. They had resource and enterprise to carry out commercial agriculture. (iii) It led to the decline of feudal landlord class and another class of commercial farmers emerged for whom agriculture was a business. They used the non-customary type of tenancy.

The process of social mobility has been seen in two directions. In his study of six villages in Rajasthan, K.L. Sharma (1980) observed that in some villages, not only the agricultural labourers but quite a few of the ex-landlords have slid down in class status, almost getting proletarianised. On the contrary, the neo-rich peasantry has emerged as the new rural bourgeoisie replacing the older landlords. Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1957) in his work *Dynamics of a Rural Society* dealt with the changes in the agrarian structure suggesting that a number of classes (categories) were reduced, and that small cultivators were becoming landless workers.

Further, Kotovsky (1964) has noted the process of increasing **proletarianisation** of the peasantry in villages. According to him, “with the agriculture developing along capitalist lines the process of ruination and proletarianisation of the bulk

of the peasantry is growing more intensely all the time”. This is substantiated by the fact that in the two decades between 1961 and 1981 the share of cultivators came down from 52.3 percent to 41.5 percent while during the same period the share of agricultural labourers increased from 17.2 percent to 25.2 percent of the total labour force. During the two decades the proportion of peasants operating less than two hectare increased from 40 percent to 55 percent of the total. By the year 2001 the share of cultivators to the total work force further declined to 31.7 percent and the share of agricultural labourers became 26.7 percent (Census Report (provisional), 2001). The increase in proportion (and certainly numbers) of agricultural labourers has gone along with a general increase in wage labourers in the rural economy.

The process of social mobility and transformation in rural India has been explained by sociologists by the terms **embourgeoisement** and proletarianisation. Embourgeoisement refers to the phenomenon of upward mobility of the intermediate class peasantry i.e., their emergence as new landlords. Proletarianisation describes the process of downward mobility, i.e., depeasantisation of small and marginal peasants and a few landlords and their entry into the rank of the rural landless agricultural labourers.

### Activity 2

If you live in a rural area, describe the changes in the methods of agriculture, in terms of its mechanisation, in your village. What do you think why farmers in your village have adopted mechanical devices in agriculture? Has this practice given them an increased income? Does this mean that such farmers have also gained in social status in the village?

Or

If you live in an urban area, read last one week’s national daily newspapers, one in English and one in Hindi. Underline the news items relating to poor peasantry and agricultural labourers. Describe the main theme of these news items. Compare your notes with other students at your study centre.

## 2.6 THE VILLAGE

We now come to the last of the six components of rural social structure. Here, we discuss the essential nature of Indian villages and mention some of the changes taking place in village power structure and leadership.

### 2.6.1 The Issue of Village Autonomy

In the beginning, the studies by Maine (1881), Metcalfe (1833), and Baden-Powell (1896) gave an exaggerated notion of village autonomy. The Indian village was portrayed as a ‘closed’ and ‘isolated’ system. In a report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, Charles Metcalfe (1833), a British administrator in India, depicted the Indian village as a monolithic, atomistic and unchanging entity. He observed, “The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations”. Further, he stated that wars pass over it,

regimes come and go, but the village as a society always emerges 'unchanged, unshaken, and self-sufficient'.

Recent historical, anthropological and sociological studies have however shown that Indian village was hardly ever a republic. It was never self-sufficient. It has links with the wider society (for further details on this point see unit 3 of this block). Migration, village exogamy, movement for work and trade, administrative connection, interregional market, inter-village economic and caste links and religious pilgrimage were prevalent in the past, connecting the village with the neighbouring villages and the wider society. Moreover, new forces of modernisation in the modern period augmented inter-village and rural-urban interaction. (See also units 4 and 5 of this block.)

But despite increasing external linkages village is still a fundamental social unit (Mandelbaum 1972, Orenstein 1965). People living in a village have a feeling of common identity. They have intra-village ties at familial, caste and class levels in social, economic, political and cultural domains. In fact, village life is characterised by reciprocity, cooperation, dominance and competition.

### **2.6.2 The Jajmani System**

A very important feature of traditional village life in India is the '*jajmani*' system. It has been studied by various sociologists, viz., William Wiser (1936), S.C. Dube (1955), Opler and Singh (1986), K. Ishwaran (1967), Lewis and Barnouw (1956). The term '*jajman*' refers to the patron or recipient of specialised services and the term '*jajmani*' refers to the whole relationship. In fact, the *jajmani* system is a system of economic, social and ritual ties among different caste groups in a village. Under this system some castes are patrons and others are serving castes. The serving castes offer their services to the landowning upper and intermediate caste and in turn are paid both in cash and kind. The patron castes are the landowning dominant castes, e.g., Rajput, Bhumihar, Jat in the North, and Kamma, Lingayat and Reddi in Andhra Pradesh and Patel in Gujarat. The service castes comprise Brahmin (priest), barber, carpenter, blacksmith, water-carrier, leatherworker etc.

The *jajmani* relations essentially operate at family level (Mandelbaum 1972). A Rajput land-owning family has its *jajmani* ties with one family each from Brahmin, barber, carpenter etc., and a family of service caste offers its services to specific families of *jajmans*. However, *jajmani* rules are enforced by caste panchayats.

The *jajmani* relationship is supposed to be and often is durable, exclusive and multiple. *Jajmani* tie is inherited on both sides i.e. patron and client (the *Jajman* and the *Kamin*). The relationship is between specific families. Moreover, it is more than exchange of grain and money in lieu of service. On various ritual occasions, such as marriage, birth and death, the service-castes render their services to their *jajman* and get gifts in addition to customary payments. In factional contests each side tries to muster the support of its *jajmani* associates. Hence the *jajmani* system involves interdependence, reciprocity and cooperation between *jati* and families in villages.

But the *jajmani* system also possesses the elements of dominance, exploitation and conflict (Beidelman 1959 and Lewis and Barnouw 1956). There is a vast

difference in exercise of power between landowning dominant patrons and poor artisans and landless labourers who serve them. The rich and powerful *jajmans* exploit and coerce the poor '*kamins*' (client) to maintain their dominance. In fact, there is reciprocity as well as dominance in the *jajmani* system.

Further, it has been observed that the *jajmani* system has weakened over the years due to market forces, increased urban contact, migration, education and social and political awareness on the part of the service castes.

### 2.6.3 Changes in Village Power Structure and Leadership

Marginal changes of adaptive nature have occurred in power structure and leadership in villages after gaining independence due to various factors e.g. land reforms, panchayati raj, parliamentary politics, development programmes and agrarian movements. According to Singh (1986), upper castes now exercise power not by traditional legitimisation of their authority but through manipulation and cooption of lower caste people. The traditional power structure itself has not changed. New opportunities motivate the less powerful class to aspire for power. But their economic backwardness thwarts their desires. B.S. Cohn (1962), in his comparative study of twelve villages of India, found a close fit between land-ownership and degree of domination of groups. Now younger and literate people are found increasingly acquiring leadership role. Moreover, some regional variations also have been observed in the pattern of change in power structure in rural areas.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- i) Tick mark the correct answer in the following multiple choice questions.
  - a) Who popularised the concept of 'village autonomy' in India?
    - i) Lord Wellesley
    - ii) Charles Metcalf
    - iii) William Bentinck
    - iv) None of the above
  - b) Identify the important social institutions in rural India among the following.
    - i) Family
    - ii) Caste
    - iii) Village
    - iv) All of these
  - c) Family "jointness" in India is characterised by
    - i) coparcenary
    - ii) coresidentiality
    - iii) commensality
    - iv) all of these.

- d) Traditional cultural features of caste have radically changed in rural India with regard to
  - i) connubial dimension
  - ii) commensal dimension
  - iii) ritual dimension
  - iv) none of these.
- ii) Describe the '*jajmani* system' in about seven lines.

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## **2.7 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, we have made an effort to understand rural social structure in India. We have begun with the concept of social structure and then identified the important institutions of rural social structure in India viz., family and kinship, caste, class and village. Further, important features and types of family in India have been discussed along with change in them. Important difference between the kinship patterns in North and South India has been noted. More over discussion on the caste system has begun with understanding the relations between '*Varna*' and Caste. Then salient features of the caste system have been discussed and the changes occurring especially in the modern period are analysed. Moreover the nature of agrarian structure has been described. Lastly, we have discussed the issue of village autonomy, prevalence of the *jajmani* system and changes in the village power structure and leadership.

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## **2.8 KEYWORDS**

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### **Developmental cycle**

In terms of the forms of family, with birth, marriage and death of its members and division of property, each family goes through a cycle of development. For example, a joint family may, after partition, be divided into several nuclear families. After the death of persons in grand-parental generation, it may become an extended family. With the marriage of a child, if the newly married persons also reside with parents, a nuclear family may become an

extended family. Again, with the birth of a grandchild, the same unit may become a joint family. This constant process of change from one stage to another is given the name of developmental cycle.

<b>Embourgeoisement</b>	Bourgeoisement refers to the phenomenon of upward social mobility of lower class people, e.g., entry of a working class individual into the elite class through acquisition of wealth or power.
<b>Jointness of Family</b>	It refers to various dimensions of jointness in family structure, e.g., coresidentiality, commensality, coparcenary, obligation towards kin and sentiment of jointness.
<b>Kindred of Cooperation</b>	The kindred of cooperation are that population, within a village, in which most economic and ritual activities take place without any formalities. This is a smaller unit, referring to the actual ties of kin.
<b>Kindred of Recognition</b>	The kindred of recognition refer to that population in which cooperation in economic and ritual activities is through information and invitation. This is a larger unit, spread over several villages for each caste.
<b>Proletarianisation</b>	Proletarianisation refers to the process of downward social mobility of upper class people, e.g., a landlord becoming landless labourer.
<b>Social Structure</b>	It is the organised pattern of the inter-related rights and obligations of persons and groups in a system of interaction as seen in terms of statuses, roles, institutions governed by social norms and values.
<b>‘Jajmani’ System</b>	It is an age-old social institution that refers to the inter-caste and inter-family social, economic, political and ritual ties prevalent in villages.
<b>Varna</b>	The <i>Varna</i> distributes social groups into four categories, all over India. It is a model of social and ritual hierarchy of caste groups. These are four- Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The <i>Varna</i> provides a cultural idiom to the caste system.
<b>Village Exogamy and ‘Gotra’ Exogamy</b>	Exogamy means marrying outside the group. Village exogamy refers to the tradition of prohibiting marriage within the village in North India. Similarly, ‘gotra’ exogamy prohibits marriage within one’s own <i>gotra</i> (clan).



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## 2.9 FURTHER READING

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Beteille, Andre 1986. *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure*. Oxford University Press: Delhi

Chauhan, Brij Raj 1968. *A Rajasthan Village*. Vir Publishing House: Delhi 1988

Dube, S.C. 1955. *Indian Village*. Cornell University Press: New York

Madan, Vandana (ed.) 2002. *The Village in India*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi

Sharma.K.L. 1997. *Rural Society in India*. Mittal Publications: New Delhi

Srinivas, M.N. (ed.) 1978. *India's Villages*. Media Promoters: Bombay

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## 2.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Social structure is the pattern of inter-related social statuses and roles found in a society. It is the organised pattern of the inter-related rights and obligations of persons and groups in an institutionalised form having social norms and values.
- ii) According to 2001 census, there are 6,38,365 villages (including uninhabited villages) in India.
- iii) There are three main types of settlement patterns in rural areas. The most common type is the nucleated village found in most areas. Here we find a tight cluster of houses, which are surrounded by the field of the villagers. Sometimes an outlying hamlet or satellite hamlet is also found situated around this type.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Some of the important dimensions of “jointness” of a family are: coresidentiality, commensality, coparcenary, depth of three generations at least, and fulfilment of obligations towards kin.
- ii) Lineage is a group of families, which trace descent from a common ancestor. They have full knowledge of the links, which they have with that common ancestor. The members of a lineage of a generation share a brother and sister relationship with each other.
- iii) Developmental cycle approach to the family in India implies that the family structure in India undergoes demographic change in a period of time. A nuclear family expands due to birth and marriage to form a joint or extended family and with death and partition again reverts back to a nuclear family.

### Check Your Progress 3

### Rural Social Structure

- i) The title of the thesis written by G.S. Ghurye is Race and Caste in India.
- ii) Caste is an endogamous and hereditary social group. Each caste is traditionally associated with a hereditary occupation and members of a caste are bound by certain social rules and laws. Castes are placed in a hierarchical order. They have rules of commensality and the concept of purity and pollution is very important in caste relationships.
- iii)
  - a) outside
  - b) mythical, divine
  - c) agraaharam

### Check Your Progress 4

- i)
  - a) (ii)
  - b) (iv)
  - c) (iv)
  - d) (iv)
- ii) The '*jajmani*' system is found in Indian villages. It is the relationship between patrons and clients, or *Jajman* and *Kamin* of different castes, generally within a village. It is a process of exchange of goods and services between castes. Some castes are patrons and some are clients. It is an inherited relationship. The *jajmani* rules are enforced by caste panchayats in rural India.

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## UNIT 3 VILLAGE AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Village and the Wider Economic System
  - 3.2.1 Economic Interdependence before World War-I
  - 3.2.2 Economic Integration in Modern Times
- 3.3 The Village and the Wider Caste and Kinship System
  - 3.3.1 Some Ethnographic Examples
  - 3.3.2 Spatial Expansion of Inter-caste Relations
- 3.4 The Village and the Wider Religious System
  - 3.4.1 Universalisation
  - 3.4.2 Parochialisation
  - 3.4.3 More Examples of Interaction between Great and Little Traditions
- 3.5 The Village and the Wider Political System
  - 3.5.1 The Village in Pre-British India
  - 3.5.2 The Village in British India
  - 3.5.3 The Village in Contemporary India
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Further Reading
- 3.8 Keywords
- 3.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- explain the nature of economic interdependence between the village and the outside world
- examine the role of caste and kinship in the villages
- describe the process of interaction between religious beliefs and practices of the villages and the wider Indian civilisation
- describe the political linkages between Indian villages and the outside world.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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As you have seen in unit 2 of this course, though the village in India has a definable structure, it is not an isolated self-contained unit. In this unit, you will be able to identify how it is and has been traditionally a part of Indian society and civilisation. Here, you will see the village in relation to the outside world.

This unit deals in great length with the process of economic interaction, with special emphasis on the traditional *jajmani* system, and urbanisation and industrialisation in the post World War-I period. Role of caste and kinship in Indian villages has been focused in this unit with suitable illustrations from some village studies. In discussing the socio-cultural linkages we have talked about the process of **universalisation** and **parochialisation**. We have also discussed the process of interaction between the little and great traditions in Indian villages. The unit also shows the political linkages that Indian villages had in the pre-British period. It highlights the pattern of political linkages of the British and the political system of the contemporary period. This unit altogether provides you a broad view of the linkages of Indian villages with the outside world.

## 3.2 THE VILLAGE AND THE WIDER ECONOMIC SYSTEM

The impression that the village in pre-British India was economically self-sufficient was created by the existence of *jajmani* system (caste-wise division of labour), payment in grain (absence of monetisation), and the poor communications, which limited the flow of goods.

### 3.2.1 Economic Interdependence before World War-I

The fact that the weekly markets (see figure 3.1) in neighbouring villages existed in traditional India proves that there was dependence on towns for items not locally available such as, silver and gold which was essential for weddings. The institution of weekly markets still prevails in rural India although considerable improvements in transport and communication have made towns with regular markets accessible to villagers. These markets not only serve an economic purpose but also political, recreational and social purposes.

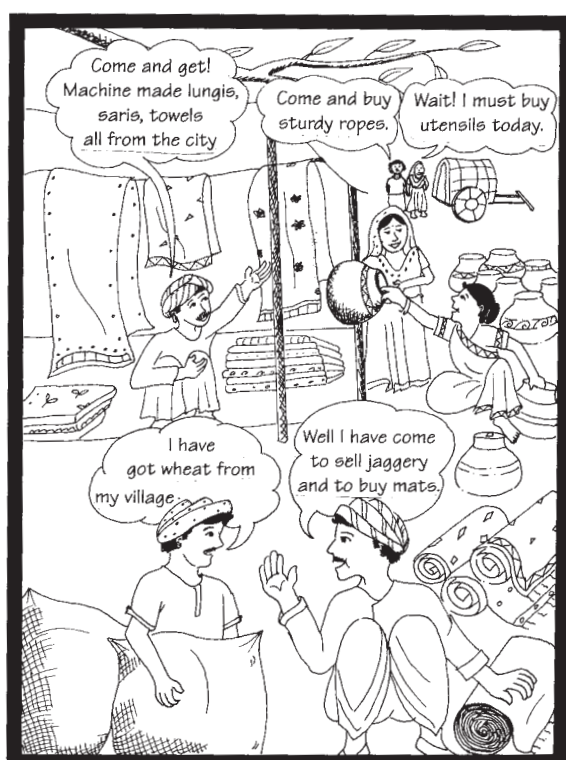


Fig. 3.1: Village and the wider economic system

Again not all the artisan and servicing castes live within a village, particularly in the case of the smaller settlements. The proportion of smaller settlements must have been very high during the pre-British period because it was during British rule that large irrigation projects at all India level were undertaken in different parts of the country. Irrigation enables a large number of people to be supported on a given area. Village studies have shown that certain castes provide services to a number of villages. Villages have always depended on villagers in nearby villages. The urban population depended on the village produce for its basic needs of food grain, raw materials for processed food, and handicrafts.

### **Activity 1**

Have you ever noticed that in your house you have many things, which are produced or manufactured, in rural areas? Today, take a close look at them and list them alphabetically, with a few comments on their place of origin and their utility for you and your family.

### **3.2.2 Economic Integration in Modern Times**

The extension of colonial economy to India brought the Indian villages to the world market for the products like jute and cotton. The availability of new economic opportunities during this century, especially after the World War-I, with industrialisation and urbanisation, has made the village a part of the wider economic system. The new economic opportunities differ in different villages. Taking some case studies we show +you how this process occurred.

- i) The first full length study of an Indian Village by S.C. Dube (1955) devotes one full chapter to the nature of changes coming in rural life which include increasing economic ties of Shamirpet village with the city of Hyderabad, even for groups like the washerman.
- ii) McKim Marriott (1955) gives a graphic description of interaction between the people of different villages around Kishan Garhi in Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh. He writes “Brahman priests, Barbers, Potters, Carpenters, Washermen and Sweepers who live in Kishan Garhi go out to serve hereditary patrons in some fifteen other villages and derive about one half of their income from these outside patrons. Traders who live in Kishan Garhi regularly cover many miles of the county side on their trading tips. Wage workers who maintain homes in Kishan Garhi during the present generation have gone out to work in at least twenty five other places including ten cities. During one period of three months I counted forty four different specialists coming into Kishan Garhi”.
- iii) In the case of Rampura in Karnataka, studied by M.N. Srinivas (1955), World War-II brought increased cash for the dominant landowning Okkaliga caste with wartime rationing and shortages, which encouraged black marketeering. The wartime profits were used in different ways. When the village was electrified two rice mills were set up. Bus lines were also started which made contact with Mysore City much easier. They had “one foot in village and another in the city”.
- iv) In Kumbapettai village, which situated in the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu and was studied by K. Gough (1955), the migration of members of

the dominant Brahmin group to towns for education and employment and the immigration in Kumbapettai of lower castes from the neighbouring and less fertile areas has been responsible for Kumbapettai coming into more interaction with the wider economic system.

- v) In the case of Yadavpur, a village situated on the fringe of Delhi, studied by M.S.A. Rao (1974), the growth of the metropolitan city of Delhi created diversified opportunities of market gardening, dairy and poultry farming, trader and transport and urban employment.

M.S.A. Rao (1974) identified three types of urban impact on the villages in India. Firstly, there are villages in which a sizable number of people have taken employment in Indian cities and even overseas towns. They send money regularly to their families, which are left behind in the villages. The money earned from the urban employment is used to build fashionable houses in their villages and invested in land and industry. Donations are also made to the establishment of educational institutions etc. All this increases the social prestige of their families. Thus the urban impact is felt by such villages even though they may not be physically situated near a city or town.

The second kind of urban impact is seen in villages, which are situated near an industrial town. Their lands are totally or partially acquired. They receive an influx of immigrant workers, which stimulates a demand for houses and a market inside the village.

The third type of impact on the village is the growth of metropolitan cities. As the city expands it sucks in the villages lying on the outskirts. Many villages lose their land, which is used for urban development. The villagers in these landless villages who get cash compensation may invest in land in far off places or in commerce or squander the money. The villagers generally seek urban employment. Those villages on the fringe of a city whose land has not yet been acquired or particularly acquired may engage in market gardening, dairy farming and poultry keeping. Some may seek employment in the city and start commuting.

To sum up, we can say that the Indian village was not economically self-sufficient even in the British times. Industrialisation and urbanisation, which began during British rule and gained momentum after independence, have made the village a part of the wider economic network. Planned development of the countryside has made further dent in the rural economy. Recent studies in sociology have concentrated on agrarian movements, *Bhoodan* movement, land reforms, community development and the green revolution. The organisation of these activities is carried out on a large scale covering several villages and involving many agencies.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Give, in four lines, three reasons for the myth of economic self-sufficiency of the Indian village.

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- ii) What are the two factors, responsible for better integration of Kumbapettai village into the wider economic system?

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### 3.3 THE VILLAGE AND THE WIDER CASTE AND KINSHIP SYSTEM

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The village consists of a **vertical interdependence of castes**, i.e., relationships among different castes. It is reflected in the *jajmani* system. But these vertical ties are cut across by the **horizontal ties of caste** and kinship, i.e., the relationships within the caste, which extend beyond the village to other villages and even towns. One's relatives live in different villages and one has to interact with them on different occasions like births, marriages and deaths. One may also have to depend on them for help in times of need. In north India where village exogamy exists along with caste endogamy, one has to look outside the village for a marriage partner for one's son or daughter. In south India where village exogamy is not a rule and marriage between a woman and her mother's brother or marrying one's mother's brother's daughter is preferred, one may still have to look outside the village for a marriage partner.

#### 3.3.1 Some Ethnographic Examples

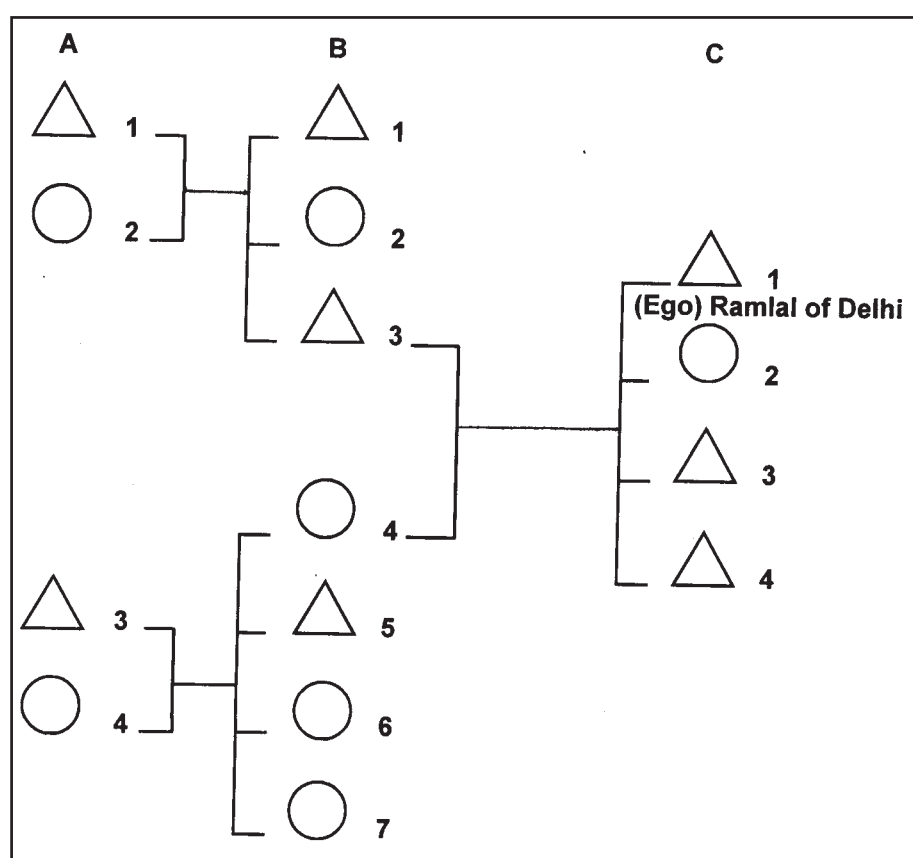
Sociologists, studying Indian villages, have described how the villages form an integral part of the wider caste and kinship system. Oscar Lewis (1955), who made a study of a north Indian village, points out that Rani Khera, like other villages in north India, is basically a part of a larger inter-village network based upon kinship ties. "Other villagers are very often relatives, and entire villages are classified by the kinship terminology as mother's brother's village, grandfather's village, grandmother's village, etc".

Similarly in the case of a U.P. village Kishan Garhi, Mckim Marriott (1955) observed that there were forty six local lineage groups in Kishan Garhi, each wholly separate from every other in descent. There was no marriage inside the village within or among any of these groups. Daughters of the village moved out and wives of the village moved in at marriage, moving to and from more than three hundred other villages. At the time, he made the study, he found that fifty seven marriages connected Kishan Garhi with sixteen towns and cities. Half of the marriage ties of groups in Kishan Garhi connected them with places more than fourteen miles away, while 5 percent connected them with places more than forty miles distant.

#### Activity 2

Draw a genealogical diagram, starting with yourself and show the spread of your kin relationships by giving the place of residence of your relatives on both your father's and mother's side including their brothers and sisters. This will give you an idea of the horizontal spread of your kinship ties. To make a genealogical diagram you will have to make use of certain signs. These signs are:  $\Delta$  = male; O = female; ] = marriage; [ siblingship; and —

= descent (generation). We are giving you here an example of a genealogical diagram to show you how to use these signs. Imagine there is a person called Ramlal (indicated here by C 1. We will trace his genealogy here, by showing three generations. A, B and C. 'A' generation is Ramlal's grandparent's generation on both his father's and mother's side. 'B' generation is his father and mother's generation and his uncles and aunts or both sides. 'C' generation is his own and his sibling's generation. In each generation the number of persons can be shown by serial numbers of 1,2,3, and so on. In this example, Ramlal's sister is shown in generation C, her number is C 2. Ramlal's brother's number is C 3 and another brother is C 4. Ramlal is C 1. In generation B, you see Ramlal's father, whose number is B 3. His mother's number is B 4. Similarly, Ramlal's mother's brother's number is B 5. In this manner you can go on drawing the actual number of relatives on your father's and mother's side.



Δ = male; O = female; ] = marriage; [ siblingship; and — = descent (generation)

### 3.3.2 Spatial Expansion of Intra-Caste Relations

Since caste endogamy is the rule (i.e., one has to marry within one's caste), one's kin normally belong to one's caste. Intra-caste relations and other caste matters are regulated by a caste panchayat whose members belong to different villages. In pre-British India, the horizontal expansion of caste ties was limited by the political boundaries of a number of small kingdoms as well as poor roads and communication. With the unification of the country brought about by the British and the introduction of better roads and railways, cheap postage and printing, there was a rapid spread in intra-caste relations because it was easier to keep in regular touch with each other.

Caste associations were formed which worked for the welfare of caste members. Educational institutions and hostels were set up and scholarships were provided to the needy members of the caste. Each caste also worked at regulating the lifestyle of its members so that the attempt at mobility of the caste, through **Sanskritisation** could be successful.

In the last sixty years or more, horizontal unity of the caste has increased and the strong walls erected between sub-castes have begun to crumble. This is primarily due to two factors. (i) Since numbers are important in a parliamentary democracy, horizontal unity of caste over a wide area provides a 'vote bank' that can ensure the election of a candidate from one's caste. (ii) The need to find educated life partners for one's children and the demand for dowry particularly among the higher castes has widened the endogamous circle and increased the horizontal spread of caste ties.

Thus, you can easily make out that the village has always had ties with other villages and towns for kinship and caste purposes. This was limited in pre-British India when communication was poor and small kingdoms existed whose boundaries acted as effective barriers. The horizontal spread of caste ties greatly increased during British rule and since Independence it linked the village to a much wider area.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) What were the limitations on the development of intra-caste relations over a wide area in pre-British India? Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Account, in six lines, for the horizontal spread of caste-ties during the twentieth century?

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## **3.4 THE VILLAGE AND THE WIDER RELIGIOUS SYSTEM**

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A study of the religion of any Indian village shows a double process of interaction at work between the religious beliefs and practices of the village

and the wider Indian civilisation. McKim Marriott, taking the concepts of ‘**great tradition**’ and ‘**little tradition**’ from Robert Redfield (1955) points out that certain elements of ritual and belief are contributions from village life which spread upward to the formation of India’s great Sanskrit tradition, while other elements represent local modification of elements of the great tradition communicated downward to it. Marriott has given the terms universalisation and parochialisation respectively to refer to the two aspects of this double process of interaction between the little and great traditions. Taking the ethnographic details from Marriott’s work, we explain these terms further in the following section.

### 3.4.1 Universalisation

Marriott (1955) mentions the festival of *Raksha Bandhan* as an example of upward universalisation. This festival coincides and blends in Kishan Garhi with the festival known regionally as *Saluno*, a festival which marks the end of that annual fortnight during which most young wives return for a visit to their parents and siblings. On *Saluno* day many husbands arrive at their ‘wives’ villages to take them back. Before going back with their husbands, the wives as well as their unmarried sisters express their devotion to their brothers by placing young shoots of barley, the locally sacred grain, on the heads and ears of their brothers. Since brothers should accept nothing from their sisters as a free gift they reciprocate with some money. On the same day along with the ceremony of *Saluno*, the ceremony of *Charm Tying* (*Rakhi Bandhan*) is also held. The Brahman domestic priests of Kishan Garhi goes to each patron and ties a polychrome thread with tassels upon his wrist. He also utters a blessing and is rewarded by his patron with some cash because it is considered impious to accept anything free from a priest.

A close parallel can be seen between the Brahmanical festival of *Charm Tying* and the familial festival of *Saluno*. It may be possible that *Charm Tying* had its roots in some such ‘little tradition’ festival like *Saluno*. The thread *charms* of the priests are now factory made and are sold by a local caste group called Jogis. A few sisters in Kishan Garhi have now taken to tying these thread *charms* on their brothers’ wrists. These thread *charms* are also convenient for mailing in letters to brothers who are living far away in cities and towns.

### 3.4.2 Parochialisation

Parochialisation or the downward spread of elements from the ‘great tradition’ to the ‘little tradition’ and the transformation or modification it undergoes can be seen in the festival of Cow Nourisher Worship as it is celebrated in Kishan Garhi. This festival is explained by a story from the Sanskrit book Bhagavata Purana of the tenth century A.D. The story concerns Krishna’s adventures with his cowherd companions at a hill named Gobardhan. In this story Krishna directs the cowherds of Braj to worship the hill that is near at hand rather than such great but distant gods as Indra. Indra, the God of rain, gets angry over the defection of his worshippers and sends violent rainstorms to destroy the cowherds and their cows. Krishna lifts the hill on his finger to provide them shelter and all are saved. At the actual hill of Gobardhan in Mathura District a ceremony is performed annually.

In Kishan Garhi the celebration of this festival has taken on some homely details which have no mention in the Sanskrit myth. Instead of accepting the

meaning of 'Cow Nourisher' (*Go + vardhana*) they explain it as *Gobar + dhan* or 'Cow-dung Wealth'. Hence the women and children of each household construct a small 'hill' made of cowdung with straw and cotton on top to represent 'trees'. Little models of a cowboy and cows are made of dung and placed on the hill. In the evening all the agnates of each family worship it jointly by placing a lamp on it and winding thread around its 'trees' and shouting '*Gobardhan Baba ki jai*', 'Long Live Grandfather Cowdung Wealth'. The next morning, members of the Weaver caste are paid to sing a Cowdung Wealth Song, after which the hill and models are broken up for use as daily fuel. But a portion of the cowdung is kept aside, dried and preserved until the Holi festival when it is used for the annual village bonfire. This case is presented as an example of adding local details to Sanskritic festival.

Marriott admits that since universalisation and parochialisation have both proceeded for a very long time, we are ordinarily unable to trace the course of either process with certainty, or to decide whether a given present configuration of religious contents is the result of one and not also the result of the other of these two processes. But the important point to remember is that in matters relating to observance of festivals, there has been a give and take among the village traditions and the nationwide tradition-thereby showing how the village has not been self-sufficient in this manner.

### **3.4.3 More Examples of Interaction between Great and Little Traditions**

M.N. Srinivas' (1950) concept of Sanskritisation also shows the interaction between religion at the local level and all India Hinduism which is Sanskritic. Sanskritic elements are spread from the higher castes to the lower castes. The spread of Sanskrit theological ideas increased during British rule and after, due to the development of communications and spread of literacy. Western technology - railways, printing press, radio, films and now, television have helped the spread of Sanskritisation. They have popularised the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata and other religious stories about the lives of Saints like Mira, Tulsidas etc. and made the village a part of the wider universe.

One important aspect of the process of Sanskritisation is the identification of a local god or goddess with some deity of the Hindu pantheon. Thus among the Coorgs, Ketrappa is identified with the vedic deity Kshetrapala while the local cobra deity is identified with Subramanya or Skanda, the warrior son of Shiva. This helped the Coorg religious community to become incorporated in the wider Hindu religious community.

Apart from festivals and deities, another important aspect of the religion of the village community is pilgrimage. Pilgrimage centres have attracted people from distant places in India. Thus in Kishan Garhi, Marriott (1955) recorded the names of more than fifty places to which the villagers had gone on pilgrimage. In traditional India, temple towns and sacred cities like Gaya, Mathura, Ajmer, Varanasi, Puri, Tirupathi and Amritsar attracted pilgrims even though roads were very poor and unsafe. Thus we see a continuous interaction between the little and great tradition in the religion of the village.

- i) Define the processes of universalisation and parochialisation. Use about six lines for your answer.

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- ii) Give, in three lines, two examples of the incorporation of Coorg religious community in the wider Hindu religious community.

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### 3.5 THE VILLAGE AND THE WIDER POLITICAL SYSTEM

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Indian villages had been described by British administrators in the early nineteenth century as **‘little republics’** with their simple form of self government and, almost no interference from the higher political authority except for claiming a share in the produce of the land and demanding young men to serve in the wars. The villages functioned normally, unconcerned about who sat on the throne in the kingdoms of which they were territorially a part. They were also described as being economically self-sufficient having nearly everything that they wanted within themselves. This description of Indian villages is an over-simplified one. Yet it influenced the views of important scholars like Karl Marx and Henry Maine and Indian nationalists like Mahatma Gandhi. It was only after gaining Independence that some social anthropologists who made intensive field studies of Indian villages began to question the conventional description of the Indian village. On the basis of their findings they demonstrated that the Indian village has been a part of the wider society and civilisation and not “little republics” as described by British administrators.

#### 3.5.1 The Village in Pre-British India

To say that in pre-British India (i.e. roughly covering the period just before the consolidation of British rule in India) the village was politically autonomous except for paying tax to the local chieftain or the king and providing him young men for his wars is incorrect. The relation between the king and his subjects was a complex one. The king performed several duties towards his subjects. He built roads, tanks and canals for irrigation. He also built temples and gave gifts of land to pious and learned Brahmins. He was the head of all caste panchayats and disputes regarding mutual caste rank were ultimately



settled by him. This function was not confined to Hindu rulers, even the Mughal Kings and feudatory lords settled questions affecting a caste.

The villages in pre-British India were not passive in their relation to the State (mostly the princely states, also known as the Native States). They were certainly concerned about who sat on the throne. They would prefer a king who would protect them from thugs and marauding troops. If the king or chief belonged to a locally dominant caste, his caste fellows would come to his aid in a crisis.

The villages were not helpless in their relationship with rulers. Villagers could rebel and support a rival to the throne (see the example of the Dimasa ruler in Cachar, given in section 17.5 of unit 17 in Block 5 of the first elective course in sociology). Collective flight was another sanction available to villagers against oppression. The ruler was very often the loser when such collective flights occurred. Since land was available for settlement while labour was scarce a ruler would find it difficult to get his land tilled and would lose revenue.

Thus the relation between the village and the ruler was a complex one and it is wrong to describe the village in pre-British India as a 'little republic'. It must however be pointed out that due to the absence of roads and poor communication, the village did enjoy a considerable amount of autonomy as well as discreteness from the higher levels of the political system. The kings let the villagers govern themselves in day-to-day matter. The village panchayat formed mainly of the dominant caste exercised authority in local matters, settled inter-caste disputes and maintained law and order in the village.

### **3.5.2 The Village in British India**

British rule changed the relationship between the village and the ruler. Political conquest was followed by the development of communications. This enabled the British to establish an effective administration. Government employees like the police, revenue official, and others, came to the village. The British established a system of law courts. Major disputes and criminal offences had to be settled in court. This greatly reduced the power of the village panchayat.

### **3.5.3 The Village in Contemporary India**

Since Independence, the introduction of parliamentary democracy and **adult franchise** has made the village even more fully integrated with the wider political system. Villagers not only elect members of local bodies like the gram panchayat but also elect members of the state legislature and parliament. Regional and national political parties are active in the village doing propaganda and mobilising support for their parties. Government policies and programmes like the Community Development Schemes affect the village.

Although the village is a political unit with an elected panchayat to run the day-to-day administration, it is part of the district or *zilla*, which is part of the state. The state is part of the Indian Union. There is interaction between these different levels of the political system.

- i) Why was the village in pre-British India described as a 'little republic'?  
Use about four lines for your answer.

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- ii) Explain why village is a 'little republic' was an over simplified statement.  
Use about six lines for your answer.

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### **3.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, we discussed that although the village has a definable structure and is a clear entity for the villagers themselves, it is also a sub-system within the larger political, economic, social and religious system in which it exists. In pre-British India the absence of roads and poor communications limited interaction between villages, and between villages and towns. Nevertheless, the interaction was there. Even traditionally the village was not self-sufficient economically. Essential items like salt, kerosene, metals, sugarcane, etc., were not produced in most of the villages and they had to visit weekly markets and towns for them. Again every village did not have all the essential artisan and servicing caste and there was mutual dependence between villages for this purpose. Industrialisation and urbanisation during this century, particularly since Independence, have made the village a part of the wider economic network.

Socially too, the village has never been an isolated unit. Kinship and caste ties have extended beyond the village. This is more so in the north, where village exogamy is practised. With the unification of the country under the British rule the barriers to the horizontal spread of caste ties were removed. The building of roads and railways, cheap postage and printing press helped members of a caste spread over a large area to keep in touch. Since Independence, the importance of votes in getting one's candidate elected has further increased the horizontal unity of the caste.

As far as the religion of the village is concerned, a continuous interaction between the localised little tradition and the great tradition of Indian civilisation takes place through the double process of universalisation and parochialisation.

Politically, although the king was willing to allow villagers to govern themselves in day-to-day matters, the payments of a substantial portion of the produce was a symbol of the village's dependence on the king. Besides, the king performed several duties towards the villagers. The British brought most of the country under their rule. The introduction of a uniform law and a centralised administration made the village a part of the wider political system of the country. The introduction of parliamentary democracy and adult franchise increased further the integration of the village with the different levels of the political system.

Thus we see an integration and a continuity between the village and the wider units of Indian society. This is very much visible today but it also existed in traditional India to a limited extent. To understand a village thoroughly, it is not enough to study its internal structure and organisation, but it is also necessary to study its relation to the wider Indian society. It is equally true that to understand the wider Indian society it is necessary to study its parts. Village communities form the major part of Indian society since an overwhelming majority of Indians live in villages.

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### **3.7 KEYWORDS**

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<b>Adult-franchise</b>	Right to cast vote in the electoral process.
<b>Great Tradition</b>	Cultural trait or tradition, which is written and widely accepted by the elite of the society who are educated and learned.
<b>Horizontal Ties of Caste</b>	It is the ties of caste and sub-caste members who are spread beyond the boundaries of a single village.
<b>Jajmani System</b>	A traditional system of exchange of goods and services based on caste-wise division of labour.
<b>Little Republic</b>	A small political entity characterised by popular participation in its political process.
<b>Little Tradition</b>	Cultural trait or tradition, which is oral and operates at the village level.
<b>Parochialisation</b>	A process of downward spread of the elements of cultural tradition, which is written and widely accepted by elites of the society.
<b>Sanskritisation</b>	M.N. Srinivas used this concept for the first time to refer to a process of social change whereby a low Hindu caste or tribe adopts the customs ritual, ideology and life style of the higher caste with a view to improve its own caste status.
<b>Universalisation</b>	A process of spread and upward formation of some elements of little tradition, which come to have wider acceptance at the level of masses.

**Vertical Interdependence  
of Caste**

A pattern of interdependence among higher and lower castes of the same village or a cluster of villages.

**Village and the Outside  
World**

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### 3.8 FURTHER READING

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### 3.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The impression that the village was economically self-sufficient was created by
  - a) lack of monetisation of the economy;
  - b) existence of jajmani system; and
  - c) poor communication which limited the flow of goods. But the existence of weekly markets and the dependence on other villages for certain artisan and servicing castes show that the village was far from self-sufficient economically.
- ii) The two factors are:
  - a) the migration of the Brahmin caste to towns and
  - b) the immigration of lower castes from neighbouring areas to Kumbapettai.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) The limitations on the development of intra-caste relations over a wide area in pre-British India were
  - a) the existence of many small kingdoms (Political cleavages resulted in social cleavages);
  - b) the very poor roads which made communication extremely difficult.
- ii) The unification of the country during twentieth century removed the political barriers to the horizontal spread of caste ties. The introduction of better roads and railways, cheap postage and printing enabled members of a caste scattered over a wide area to keep in touch. Finally the importance of votes to get the candidate from one's caste elected to the seats of power increased horizontal unity of the caste.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Universalisation refers to the process by which elements of ritual and belief, which form part of the localised little tradition, spread upwards to form part of the great tradition of Indian civilisation.

Parochialisation refers to the process of downward spread of elements of the great tradition to the little tradition. In both the processes the original elements undergo transformation.

- ii) The two examples are:
  - a) the Coorg deity Ketrappa is identified with the Vedic deity Kshetrapala
  - b) the Cobra deity among the Coorgs is identified with Subramanya or Skanda, the son of Shiva.

### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) The village enjoyed a considerable amount of autonomy as well as discreteness from the higher levels of the political system. The king let the villagers govern themselves in day-to-day matters. This situation was necessitated by the absence of roads and poor communications.
- ii) To consider the village as a 'little republic' is incorrect because the king performed a number of functions in relation to the village like building some roads and canals, providing protection from thugs and marauding troops and being the final authority for settling disputes regarding caste rank. The villagers were not passive and unconcerned as to who sat on the throne. They would rebel against a bad king and provide help to a ruler who belonged to their caste.

### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Urbanisation: Definition
- 4.3 Urbanisation in India: A Historical Perspective
  - 4.3.1 Classification of Traditional Towns
  - 4.3.2 Some Features of Urbanisation in Ancient and Medieval India
  - 4.3.3 New Features of Urbanisation in Early Colonial Period
- 4.4 Pattern of Urbanisation in Contemporary India
  - 4.4.1 Definition of a Town or City
  - 4.4.2 Demographic Aspect
  - 4.4.3 Spatial Pattern
  - 4.4.4 Economic Dimension
  - 4.4.5 Socio-cultural Character
- 4.5 Problems Concerning the Current Process of Urbanisation
- 4.6 Impact of Urbanisation in Rural Areas
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Keywords
- 4.9 Further Reading
- 4.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit introduces the concept of urbanisation and the features of traditional and contemporary urbanisation in India. After going through this unit, you should be able to

- define urbanisation
- discuss the historical process of urbanisation in India
- explain the main features of modernisation in contemporary India
- assess the impact of urbanisation on Indian rural scene.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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In units 2 and 3 we saw how the villages and their social structure form a significant facet of Indian social life. In the present unit on Patterns of Urbanisation we will see how the urban way of life is also a characteristic mode of living in India. This unit begins with the meaning of the concept of urbanisation. It provides a brief review of the historical process of urbanisation. While describing the pattern of contemporary urbanisation, we have talked about the basic **demographic**, spatial, economic and socio-cultural features in



detail. This section also gives a brief account of the emerging problems due to urbanisation in the towns and cities. Lastly, we have examined the impact of urbanisation in the rural areas.

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## 4.2 URBANISATION: DEFINITION

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Sociologists define urbanisation as the movement of people from villages to town/city where economic activities are centred around non-agricultural occupations such as trade, manufacturing industry and management. Broadly speaking, in order to explain the process of urbanisation we can discuss the following three aspects:

- i) The demographic and spatial aspects
- ii) Economic aspects and
- iii) Socio-cultural aspects

In section 4.4 of this unit we discuss each of these aspects in relation to the process of urbanisation in contemporary India. Here we tell you what each of these aspects generally deal with.

The demographic-spatial aspects of urbanisation deal with shift of people from rural to urban areas, population density in urban areas and change in the pattern of land use from agriculture to non-agricultural activities.

Economic aspects of urbanisation relate to the change from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations. As cities have been the centres of diverse economic opportunities, they attract people from rural areas. This attraction pulls a significant section of the rural population to the urban areas. Rural poverty, backwardness of agricultural economy and the destruction of cottage and small industries also push villagers to urban areas. These pull and push factors of **migration** play an important role in the process of urbanisation.

The socio-cultural aspects of urbanisation highlight the emerging heterogeneity in urban areas. The city has generally been the meeting point of races and cultures.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Give in three lines the definition of urbanisation.

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- ii) Mark the correct answer by ticking ☐ sign in the following question.

The migration of people to the town due to new opportunities is known by which of the factors given below?

- a) Pull factor of migration
- b) Push factor of migration
- c) Poverty factor
- d) Population factor

## 4.3 URBANISATION IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The archaeological findings from several parts of Indian sub-continent tend to suggest that the urban growth in India is as old as the history of her civilisation. While considering the early growth of cities and the development of urban areas in undivided India, one can trace their beginnings to about 5,500 years backwards. Around 2500 B.C. the cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa (since 1947 in Pakistan) were established in the valley of Indus river. Archaeologists and historians have pointed out that around 2000 B.C. urbanisation in the Harappan culture exhibited signs of high development in brick technology, geometry, agriculture and irrigation practices.

Another important phase of urbanisation is said to have begun somewhere around 600 B.C. in India culminating in the formation of early historical cities. During the ancient and medieval periods of Indian history, the kings established various capital regions which developed into towns. For example, Pataliputra (now Patna) and Vaishali developed as towns during the Magadh rule around B.C. 300. Kanauj was the capital town of Harshavardhana in Uttar Pradesh in A.D. 700. Mohammad Tughlaq is noted for shifting his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad (Devagiri) in the southern region in A.D. 1300.

The establishment of the East India Company and the onset of British colonial control of India from the seventeenth century led to the growth of urban centres of Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. These cities (except Delhi) developed along the seacoast in the respective regions where the British had established administrative system in terms of provinces.

### 4.3.1 Classification of Traditional Towns

There were several kinds of towns in ancient India. The Vastusastra (Treatise on Classical Indian Architecture) has differentiated between several kinds of towns based on their functional specificity such as trade, commerce, manufacturing, administration and military marches. However, the traditional towns can be broadly categorised on the basis of their functional specificities:

- i) **Trading and Manufacturing Towns:** Places termed as *nagar*, *pattana*, *dronamukha*, *kheta*, *nigama* etc. belonged to this category. A *nagar* was an ordinary fortified town with inland trade as an important activity. *Pattana* was a large commercial port situated on the bank of a river or sea. The special feature of the *pattana* was that it was a city of the trading castes (*Vaisya*) and was full of jewels, wealth, silk, perfumes and other articles. *Dronamukha*, *kheta* etc. were also small size trading centres. Again *nigama* was a market town consisting of the artisans and also serving as a resting place for “traders and caravans”.
- ii) **Political or Military Town:** *Rajdhani* was a distinctively planned political town. It was the royal capital. *Durga* was a fortified town equipped with an arsenal and well-stored with food stuffs. Similarly *senamukha* and *shaniya* were also the fortified towns of varied locations and importance.
- iii) **Educational or Pilgrim and Temple Towns:** *Matha* and *Vihara* were the towns based on educational and religious activities. A classic example

of this was Nalanda. Again, there were temple towns like Dwaraka, Tirupati, Puri etc. and pilgrim centres like Hardwar, Gaya etc.

### Activity 1

Sketch a map of India and identify the places where the traditional urban centres were located.

## 4.3.2 Some Features of Urbanisation in Ancient and Medieval India

The process of urbanisation in various periods of Indian history had distinctive spatial, economic, religious, socio-cultural, political features. These features are described here under three broad headings.

### 1) Political, Demographic and Spatial Factors

The early processes of urbanisation had their close relationships with the rise and fall of sponsoring political regimes and cultural history of India. Indeed, cities emerged in those periods mainly based on political considerations. “The composition of these towns was built around the ruler and his kinsmen and followers, whose principal interests were centered on agricultural activities in their vicinity and the surplus they could extract from these” (Sabarwal 1977: 2).

Fortification in the form of a girdle of walls and defensive ditches was an important physical feature of the traditional towns. Town planning of ancient cities not only took note of the needs of defense but also of the settlement of various castes in separate wards, and the location of different activities connected with manufacturing, commerce, trade, religion, recreation, administration and justice.

### 2) Economic

In spite of the rise and fall of the political powers and shifting religious biases, the social and economic institutions of the traditional cities have shown certain stability.

Guild formation was an important feature of traditional towns. Merchants and craftsmen were organised into guilds called *shreni*. In those towns there were the guilds based on the occupation of one caste called *shreni* and also the guilds based on different castes and different occupations called *puga*. Rao (1974) points out that the guilds performed important function in the traditional towns in terms of banking, trading, manufacturing and to a limited extent judicial.

### 3) Religious and Socio-cultural

Authorities of the traditional urban centres patronised particular religion or sects. This had been delineated in the social organisation and culture of the towns. For example, Pataliputra reflected the Brahmanical Hindu civilisation under the rule of Chandra Gupta Maurya, while under Ashokan rule Buddhism nourished. Similarly the Islamic civilisation was concretised by the Muslim rule in the imperial capitals of Agra, Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad and in other places. The traditional towns were heterogeneous in terms of multiplicity of

religious, sectarian and caste groups. Certain specialist castes like florist, mason and tailor were to be found only in big towns. Each ethnic or religious group was governed by its own customary laws. The caste and the occupational guilds also had their own laws sanctioned by the political authority (Rao 1974).

### 4.3.3 New Features of Urbanisation in Early Colonial Period

With the coming of European colonial traders in India, the process of urbanisation entered into a new phase. Cities grew up in the coastal areas as ports-cum-trading centres. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries European trading posts were established initially for trading purposes. As the British power grew in the nineteenth century, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras became the political centres too. Indeed, in this period with the introduction and development of advanced technological knowledge, we find the emergence of new economic and political institutions, new modes of communication such as telegraph, railways, advanced system of roads and waterways. The process of urbanisation became smooth and widened the structure of economic opportunity and widened the social horizons of people.

In the nineteenth century, though the process of urbanisation grew in a modest way, the countryside suffered from the gradual process of the destruction of the cottage and small industries in the rural areas. In this situation, the new economic opportunity structure pulled a significant section of population to the urban areas. Many of the artisans became unemployed. Hence, the displaced rural artisans and labourers were also pushed to urban areas for employment. The late nineteenth century, however, witnessed a large-scale migration of the rural labour force especially from Bihar and eastern United Provinces towards the jute mills of Calcutta and other industrial destinations. To avail the new economic opportunities many people migrated either temporarily or permanently to the urban areas.

With the spread of education, the institutional arrangements of the urban centres also changed. The educated people joined the bureaucracy, and also took up jobs as teachers, journalists, lawyers and so on. They brought about a new worldview. The urban centres gradually grew up to be the centres of new social and political ideas, diverse economic activities and of heterogeneous populations. The new process of urbanisation presented various economic opportunities and scope for occupational and social mobility, it was only the upper caste and class people who were able to make use of these opportunities.

The new process of urbanisation, which began, with the advent of the British received a momentum at the beginning of twentieth century. The process of this urbanisation has some distinctive features. In the next section we shall describe the pattern of urbanisation during the twentieth century.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) What do you understand by Shreni? Answer in two lines.

.....  
 .....

- ii) Which of the words given in options a, b, c, and d can fill the blank space in the following sentence?

In the early colonial period, the volume of economic opportunities of people ..... in the urban areas.

- a) enlarged
- b) remained the same
- c) minimised
- d) none of the above

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## **4.4 PATTERN OF URBANISATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA**

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India passed through a phase of rapid urbanisation in the twentieth century. The modern urban centres perform diversified functions in terms of economic, administrative, political, cultural and so on. Here, it is very difficult to classify the towns and cities in terms of a single activity. Generally, people classify urban areas on the basis of some prominent socio-economic and political features. For example, people mention that there are historical cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Varanasi, Lucknow etc., industrial cities like Ghaziabad, Modinagar, Kanpur, Jamshedpur, Bhilai etc., religious cities like Mathura, Hardwar, Madurai, Allahabad etc. Cities reputed for film making, like Mumbai and Chennai, have a special appeal for a villager or a small-town dweller. In sociology, we discuss the pattern of urbanisation in terms of its demographic, spatial, economic and socio-cultural aspects. But before we take up these aspects, let us also briefly explain how we define a town in the Indian context.

### **4.4.1 Definition of a Town or City**

In India, the demographic and economic indexes are important in defining specific areas as town or city. The definitional parameters of an urban area in India have undergone several changes and modifications over the years. The following definition of town adopted in 1901 census was used until 1961.

- a) Every municipality, cantonment and all civil lines (not included in a municipality), and
- b) Every other continuous collection of houses permanently inhabited by not less than 5,000 persons, which the provincial superintendent of census may decide to treat as a town.

The main criterion for describing any area or settlement as urban was its administrative set-up and size and not the economic characteristics. As a consequence of this definition many of the towns in reality were considered only as overgrown villages.

In 1961 the 'urban area' was redefined taking into account the economic characteristics in addition to other administrative and demographic features. The definition adopted in 1961 census was also used in 1971 and 1981. And it remained unchanged in 1991 and 2001 also. According to this definition an urban area is:

- a) a place which is either a municipal corporation or a municipal area, or under a town committee or a notified area committee or cantonment board, or

b) any place which satisfies the following criteria of:

- a minimum of 5,000 persons
- at least 75 percent of the working occupations are non-agricultural
- a density of not less than 1,000 persons per square mile, and
- a place should have certain pronounced urban characteristics and amenities such as newly found industrial areas, large housing settlements, places of tourist importance and civic amenities.

Apart from well defined towns and/or cities, the outgrowths of cities and towns have also been treated as urban agglomerations. At the 1961 census, the concept of ‘town group’ was adopted to obtain a broad picture relating to urban spread. This was refined in 1971 with the concept of urban agglomeration to obtain better feed back in regard to urban continuity, process and trends of urbanisation and other related matters. This concept without any change or modification has remained operative till 2001 census. An urban agglomeration forms a continuous urban spread and normally consists of a town and its adjoining urban outgrowth or two or more physically contiguous towns together with contiguous and well organised outgrowths, if any, of such town. (*Census Report 2001*)

While describing the urban places, the Indian census records consistently employ population size to classify the urban area into six classes as shown in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Classification of cities**

Class I	with	1,00,000	and more	population
Class II	with	50,000	to 99,999	population
Class III	with	20,000	.... 49,999	population
Class IV	with	10,000	.... 19,999	population
Class V	with	5,000	.... 9,000	population
Class VI	with	less than	.... 5,000	population

In India, urban places with less than 1,00,000 population are referred to as “towns”, while urban places with 1,00,000 or more population are referred to as “cities”. Urban centres with more than one million population are categorised as metropolitan cities. The metropolitan centres are a class by themselves characterised by large-scale consumption, and large quantum of inflow of people, goods, services and information (Prakasa Rao 1982: 17). Having described how urban area in India is classified into various categories of towns/cities, we now discuss some aspects of the pattern of urbanisation in India.

### Activity 2

Identify the class of town/city you live in. Use the method of classification employed by the Indian census records.

Or

If you live in a rural area, give the class of the town/city nearest to your village.



#### 4.4.2 Demographic Aspect

In India, population concentration has been one of the key features of urbanisation. The percentage of urban population has been little more than doubled from 10.8 percent in 1901 to 23.3 percent in 1981. And this has been almost tripled by 2001, when it has been recorded to be 27.8 percent. The urban population of India as per the 1991 census is 217,177,625 and this accounts for 25.72 percent of the total population. So far urban population of the country is concerned, only 25.85 million lived in towns in 1901 and by 1991 it increased by more than 8 times to 217.18 million. Out of the total population of 1027 million as on 1st March 2001, 285 million lived in urban areas. The net addition of population in urban areas during 1991-2001 has been to the tune of 68 million where as during the decade 1981-1991 it was 61 million.

Urban population has significantly increased in the post Independence period. For the forty years period from 1901 to 1941 the increase of urban population from 25.85 to 44.15 million has been quite modest compared to the 62.44 million of the next decade. There has been an increase of 115.05 million in urban population from 1941 to 1981. Note that 64.8 percent of this population has grown in the two decades between 1961 and 1981. Similarly the urban population has almost doubled in the decades 1971 (109.11 million) to 1991 (217.18 million).

There was a slow growth (and also decline in 1911) in the proportion of urban to total population in the early decades (1901-21). This is mostly because of natural disasters and slow rate of industrial and economic development. The rapid growth of urban population during 1941-51 has been mostly due to partition of the country and other political reasons, which led to refugee migration in the urban areas. The steady increase in the urban population in the decades prior to 1981 came about not so much because of planned economic development and industrialisation, but due to imbalanced agricultural development. The annual rate of growth of urban population declined from 3.83 percent during 1971-1981 to 3.09 percent during 1981-1991. During the decade 1971-1981 the level of urbanisation increased by 3.43 percent points. During 1981-1991 decade the increase has been only 2.38 percent. The increase in the urbanisation further declined to 2.1 percent points during the decade 1991-2001. As a consequence the annual rate of gain in percentage of urban population has also declined from 1.72 to 1.02 during the decade 1981-1991. This indicates that the tempo of urbanisation in India has slowed down since 1981.

#### 4.4.3 Spatial Pattern

Spatial disparities have marked the Indian urban scenario. These disparities emerged mainly due to regional disparities, imbalanced population concentration and some times because of the change in the census definition of “urban areas”. In this context we need to mention about two concepts, namely over-urbanisation and sub-urbanisation.

##### Over-urbanisation

Towns or urban areas have certain limitations in accommodating population, providing civic amenities or catering to such needs as schooling, hospitals etc.

Beyond certain optimum capacities, it becomes difficult for the town administration to provide facilities for the increasing population. Mumbai and Kolkata are two such examples of cities (among others) which have urban population growth beyond their capacities to manage. This feature refers to over-urbanisation.

### **Sub-urbanisation**

Closely related to over-urbanisation of a town is a feature called sub-urbanisation. When towns get over-crowded by population, it may result in sub-urbanisation. Delhi is a typical example (among others) where sub-urbanisation trend is taking place around it. Sub-urbanisation means urbanisation of rural areas around the towns characterised by the following features:

- a) a sharp increase in the 'urban (non-agricultural) uses' of land
- b) inclusion of surrounding areas of town within its municipal limits, and
- c) intensive communication of all types between town and its surrounding areas.

Now, we can also look at some of the variations in spatial disparities found in the pattern of urbanisation in India.

#### **i) The Growth of Towns and Cities**

The growth of urban towns did not show a unidirectional progress in India. Because of the variation in the census definition of 'urban' areas the number of urban centres declined. Only 1,430 towns out of a total of 1,914 towns existing in 1901 survived till 1961. About 480 areas considered as towns in 1901 lost their urban status because of the new definition of town in 1961 census. It is for this reason that one can see the decrease in the number of towns to 2700 in 1961 compared to 3060 in 1951. For example, in Rajasthan there were 227 towns in 1951, whereas this number declined to 201 in 1981. Similar decline has also been noticed in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. In the 1991 census 4,689 places were identified as towns as against 4,029 in 1981 census. Out of the 4,689 towns of 1991 as many as 2,996 were statutory towns and 1,693 were census or non-municipal towns as against 2,758 and 1,271 respectively in 1981. At the all India level, 93 of the 4029 towns of 1981 census were declassified and 103 towns were fully merged with other towns by statutory notifications of the concerned state/union territory administrations during 1981-1991. As many as 856 new towns were added to the urban frame of 1991. The maximum number of towns declassified were from the states of Punjab (21), Karnataka (19), and Andhra Pradesh (13) and the maximum number of the statutory towns added in 1991 census was from Madhya Pradesh (91).

#### **ii) Variation in Urbanisation among the States**

The pattern of urbanisation among different states in India shows an interesting feature of urban domination in some states. Five states namely Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh altogether accounted for 56 percent (in 1961) to 55 percent (in 1971) of the total urban population of India. In contrast the six states of Orissa, Haryana, Assam (including Meghalaya), Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland

account for 5 percent (in 1961) to 5.5 percent (in 1971) of the total urban population of India. In 1991 census some of the states having a higher proportion of urban population to the total population than the national average of 25.72 percent were Maharashtra (35.73 percent), Gujarat (34.40 percent), Tamil Nadu (34.20 percent) and West Bengal (27.39 percent). As per the Census 2001, Tamil Nadu (43.9 percent) is the most urbanized state followed by Maharashtra (42.4 percent) and Gujarat (37.4 percent). The proportion of the urban population is lowest in Bihar with 10.5 percent followed by Assam (12.7 percent) and Orissa (14.9 percent). Himachal Pradesh is the least urbanized state. These show that the urban domination in some states continues to exist even at the beginning of twenty first century.

Between 1961 and 1971 the pattern of **urban density** for Indian states shows somewhat similar trends. The states of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Assam and Kerala have densities higher than the all India average of 2948 persons per sq. km in 1961. A similar trend was found in 1971 also. States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Nagaland, Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa, Bihar and Rajasthan had densities less than the all India average of 2,048 in 1961. The 1971 census reflected the same trend that was seen in 1961, with respect to the above mentioned states. Urban density for Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Assam lessened, during 1961-71 decade, possibly because of outward migration of people. In the year 1991, the urban density was highest in the state of West Bengal followed by Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Haryana and Punjab. States of Tamil Nadu, Nagaland, Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa, Bihar and Rajasthan had densities less than the all India average of 3,370 in 1991 also. Thus when we look at the census figures we can see that the variation in terms of the urban density continued to the year 1991 almost unchanged.

### **iii) Population concentration in the cities**

The population in the larger urban centres (with 1,00,000 or more) has constantly been growing in India. In 1981 more than 60 percent of the urban population in India lived in this category of cities. By 1991 their rate reached almost 65 percent. Out of the total number of towns, according to the 1991 census, in 300 the population exceeds 1,00,000 each. These 300 urban agglomeration/cities account for 64.89 percent of the urban population of the country. In the case of Maharashtra and West Bengal the share of Class I urban agglomerations/ cities in the urban population is high, being 77.85 percent and 81.71 percent respectively. Class I urban agglomeration/ cities contribute about two thirds of the urban population in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Meghalaya and Tamil Nadu.

### **iv) Growth of Metropolitan Cities**

In India, Kolkata was the only city with a population of over a million in 1901. Mumbai crossed the one million mark by 1911. Till 1941 there were only these two cities in this category, i.e., with a population of over one million. Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad entered into this category by 1951. Ahmedabad and Bangalore by 1961, and Kanpur and Pune by 1971. Lucknow, Nagpur and Jaipur by 1981 crossed the one million mark bringing the number of million-plus cities upto 12. At the time of 1991 census enumeration there were 23 metropolitan agglomerations/ cities with a population of more than a million each. The number almost doubled during the decade 1981-1991. Its number

has been increased to 35 at the time of 2001 census. At the time of 1981 census 25 percent of the total urban population was concentrated in the million-plus cities. By the year 1991 this has become 32.54 percent. That means that these cities in 1991 accounted for roughly one third of the country's urban population and one twelfth of the country's total population.

In 1981 barring Delhi which forms part of the Union Territory of Delhi, the remaining 11 cities are located in 8 states. In 1991, the 23 metropolitan cities were scattered among 13 states in India. But their concentration was more in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh, each having 3 such metropolitan cities. Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have two each and 7 were distributed among Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Delhi. In Kolkata the concentration of urban population was higher than other metropolitan cities for the decade 1971-81. This was followed by Bangalore, Chennai and Ahmedabad. The 23 metropolitan cities exhibited quite a diversified pattern of growth of population during 1981-1991. Of these metropolitan cities the highest growth of population was recorded in Visakhapatnam urban agglomeration (74.27 percent) followed by Hyderabad urban agglomeration (67.04 percent), both of which are in Andhra Pradesh. The lowest growth rate was recorded by Kolkata urban agglomeration (18.73 percent) followed by Patna urban agglomeration. Kolkata urban agglomeration which occupied the prime position since 1901 in terms of highest concentration of urban population relegated to the second position in 1991 and Greater Mumbai which occupied the second position since 1901 has been moved to the prime position in 1991. Kolkata was followed by Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore. In 1988, while describing the glaring disparities that marked the Indian urban scene, the National Commission on Urbanisation stated two main aspects: (a) while the urban centres in India grew at an average rate of 46.2 percent during the 1970s, the million-plus metropolitan centres had an average growth rate of population only 29.6 percent during the same period, and (b) the significant regional variation in the nature of urbanisation process. Indeed, spatially the pattern of Indian urbanisation has been highly localised.

#### 4.4.4 Economic Dimension

Urbanisation is a natural and inevitable consequence of economic development. Urbanisation accompanies economic development because economic development entails a massive shift of labour and other inputs from predominantly rural sectors to those predominantly urban (Mill and Becker 1986: 17). The National Commission on Urbanisation of India recognises the economic importance of the Indian cities and towns. It considers "urbanisation as a catalyst for economic development and that the towns and cities despite their problems are for the millions and millions of our people the road to a better future".

When we examine the various cities in India, we find that some cities have come up during twentieth century in places where there were nothing but forests earlier. One of the first steel cities in India, like Jamshedpur in Bihar, has provided employment to a large number of people including the Santals who are the local tribal inhabitants of this area. These tribals who were relatively isolated earlier have come into contact with a wide section of Indian population, coming from different regions, speaking different languages, and so on. Besides

Jamshedpur, three more steel towns have emerged after Independence. These are Bhilai in Madhya Pradesh, Rourkela in Orissa and Durgapur in West Bengal. Emergence of these steel factories has brought about not only prosperity but has led to the modification of the whole social scenario of this area. Areas that were socio-economically backward have now become prosperous and cosmopolitan (Srinivas 1986:88).

While talking about the economic features of urbanisation in contemporary India, occupational diversification and migration appear to be the key aspects. Let us briefly examine these aspects.

#### **i) Occupation**

The degree of urban-industrialisation and planned development through the Five-Year Plans could not bring about a significant shift in occupational structure in India till 1990. The percentage of Indian labour force in agriculture remained static between 1901 and 1971. In the said period 69.4 percent and 69.7 percent of the total labour force was in agriculture respectively. Though the percentage of urban population increased substantially during this period there have not been corresponding increase in the percentage of the labour force in the urban manufacturing, construction and service sector. Things have started improving slightly by 2001. In 1991 around 67 percent of the total workers were in the agricultural sector. In 2001 only 58 percent of the total workers have been recorded to be in the agricultural sector. The results from 2001 census clearly suggest a shift in the composition of labour force from a predominantly agricultural to moderately non-agricultural sector. (Census Report 2001)

The percentage of urban workers engaged in primary (comprising cultivation, household industry, mining quarrying, fishing), secondary (comprising manufacturing and processing) and tertiary (comprising commerce and service) sectors during 1993-94 is 16.8, 31 and 52.1 percent, respectively (see table 4.2). Whereas the total workforce engaged in these three sectors during the same period is 67.5, 12.0 and 20.5, respectively.

**Table 4.2: Percentage of Urban Workers by Sectors, 1993-94**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Primary	9.0	24.7	16.8
Secondary	33.0	29.1	31.0
Tertiary	57.9	46.3	52.1

**Source:** NSSO 1996

There is widespread unemployment among the unskilled and other marginal workers in most of the cities. Again, unemployment among educated classes in urban areas is a peculiar feature in Indian society. It is estimated that 46 percent of the total educated unemployed are reported to be concentrated in the four major metropolitan cities in India (Sarikwal 1978). During the period 1983 to 1999-2000, the percentage of persons in the labour force at the national declined from 66.5 percent in 1983 to 61.8 percent in 1999-2000. The growth in employment for persons employed in the age group 15 years and above on



the usual principal and subsidiary status has declined significantly in the nineties vis-à-vis the eighties. And this has led to the increased incidence of unemployment. There was an increase in the incidence of unemployment both for males and females on the whole and in particular for rural areas. In the case of urban areas, however, there was a sharp decline between 1983 and 1993-94 from 5.1 percent to 4.6 percent, which has been somewhat eroded by a subsequent increase to 4.8 percent in 1999-2000 (National Human Development Report 2001).

## ii) Migration

In the process of urbanisation in India, migration of the rural people to the urban areas has been continuous and is an important feature. The Urban Commission of India viewed rural urban migration to be “of vital importance for the development of rural areas”. The Commission again points out that besides releasing the surplus labour from the rural areas, for the landless labourers, *harijans* and *adivasis* these cities provide the opportunities, which are enshrined in our constitution. For these millions, our urban centres will continue to be havens of hope, where they can forge a new future (Mehta 1984: 1178).

In India, this increase in urban-ward migration is of fairly recent origin which began in the late 1930s. Of the total migrants in urban areas 20 percent persons are displaced from Pakistan, 51 percent from rural areas of the same state and 2.5 percent from the rural areas of other states. An important feature of the immigrant stream in urban areas is its predominantly male character (Sarikwal 1978: 25).

Due to the increase of unemployment in the rural areas, surplus rural labour force gets pushed to urban centres with the hope of getting employment. The other factors, which have pulled sections of the rural population (including the affluent sections) toward the city, have been the expectation of a variety of glamorous jobs, good housing, medical, educational and communication facilities.

Here it is significant to note that industrialisation should not be taken as prerequisite for urbanisation, as the process of migration from village starts when a relative saturation point is reached in the field of agriculture. This is a result of an imbalanced land/man ratio in the countryside.

### Activity 3

If you live in a rural area find out how many of your relatives in the village have migrated to the urban areas. After making this survey, write a note on the cause(s) of their migration.

Or

If you live in an urban area, visit a slum and write a short note on the causes of migration of about twenty families in that area.

## 4.4.5 Socio-cultural Character

In the process of urbanisation the towns and cities of India have achieved heterogeneous character in terms of ethnicity, caste, race, class and culture. In



the urban areas there has always been coexistence of different cultures. Studies show that though various ethnic and/or caste groups have adjusted themselves with each other in the city, they have also tried to maintain their traditional identity. The migrants have maintained distinctive cultural traditions in the towns. Various migrant groups have maintained their own cultural identity. N.K. Bose (1968: 66) points out that the migrants tend to cluster around people with whom they have linguistic, local, regional, caste and ethnic ties. A study by Jagannathan and Haldar (1989: 315) on the pavement-dwellers in Calcutta shows that they retain close ties with kinship and caste groups for socialising and transmitting or receiving information from the village. Thus cultural-pluralism has been an important socio-cultural dimension of the urbanites.

Many of the Indian towns have a “mixed” character, i.e., they are the capital cities, centres of trade and commerce, important railway junctions etc. In these types of cities we find a “core” area which consists of the old inhabitants (Srinivas 1986). This area is the oldest in the city and on its fringe we find the new immigrants. The pattern of residence of this “core” population shows a close relation to language, caste and religion. Bombay is cited as an example of this type of city.

Lynch (1974) also points out that in many Indian cities, especially in the traditional cities like Agra, neighbourhoods have remained homogeneous in terms of caste and religious groups. There the untouchable Jatavs caste is concentrated in particular areas called *mohallas* (ward). But changes have taken place mostly because of politicisation, spread of education, and occupational diversification. But D’Souza (1974) noticed that in the planned city like Chandigarh neighbourhood has not been developed on the basis of ethnicity, common interest and other similarities. In this city the religious activities, friendship and educational ties are often outside one’s own neighbourhood.

Social stratification has taken a new form in the urban society. It is assumed that with urbanisation caste transforms itself into class in the urban areas. But caste systems do exist in the cities though with significant organisational differences. Ramkrishna Mukherjee demonstrates that people in Kolkata rank themselves in terms of caste-hierarchy. Stratification has also taken place on the basis of occupational categories. For example, Harold Gould (1965) points out that the *rikshawalas* of Lucknow belonging to several religious and caste groups exhibit uniformity in the pattern of interaction and attitudes in respect to their common occupation. Again it has been found that caste has not played a significant role in determining the choice of occupation in the urban areas. But it is important to note that both the caste and the class have their respective importance based on time and space and situational focus (Rao 1974: 275).

Marriage and family are two important aspects of social life. In the urban areas caste norms have been flexible with regard to the selection of mates. There have been increasing opportunities for the free mixing of young men and women. Again the voluntary associations have encouraged inter-caste marriages. As a result there have been more inter-caste and inter-religious marriage in the urban areas than earlier. Though it has been pointed out that joint families are breaking down in the urban areas, studies conducted in several parts of the country also suggest that joint families do exist in the cities among certain castes like Khattris of Delhi and Chettiars of Madras (for details see Kapoor 1965, Singer 1968).

Cities of India have to be studied in the context of cultural heritage. In the cities many little traditions have been brought in by the migrants and the great traditions have also achieved dimensional change. It has been pointed out that many forms of the great traditions are modified in the modern cities. Milton Singer (1968) shows that “the intellectual and ritualistic approaches to God are being discarded in favour of the devotional approach, which is more catholic and suited to urban conditions in Madras city. Technological innovations like microphone, cinema, automobile, etc. are used in promoting religious activities. Religious activities are not on decline in the metropolitan city of Madras but are being modernised”.

## 4.5 PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE CURRENT PROCESS OF URBANISATION

The current process of urbanisation has faced many problems in different parts of India. The most important of these has been the development of slums, in the urban areas. Slum population accounts for a substantial share of urban population in all types of cities in India. Even a planned city like Chandigarh has not escaped slums. The percentages of the slum population in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai are 32, 25 and 24, respectively. Slums are characterised by substandard housing, over crowding and lack of electrification, ventilation, sanitation, roads and drinking water facilities. Slums have been the breeding ground of diseases, environmental pollution, demoralisation, and many social tensions. Crimes, like juvenile delinquency, gambling, have also increased in number in slum areas. Signs of poverty are most visible in these places. A graphical representation of a slum is shown in figure 4.1.

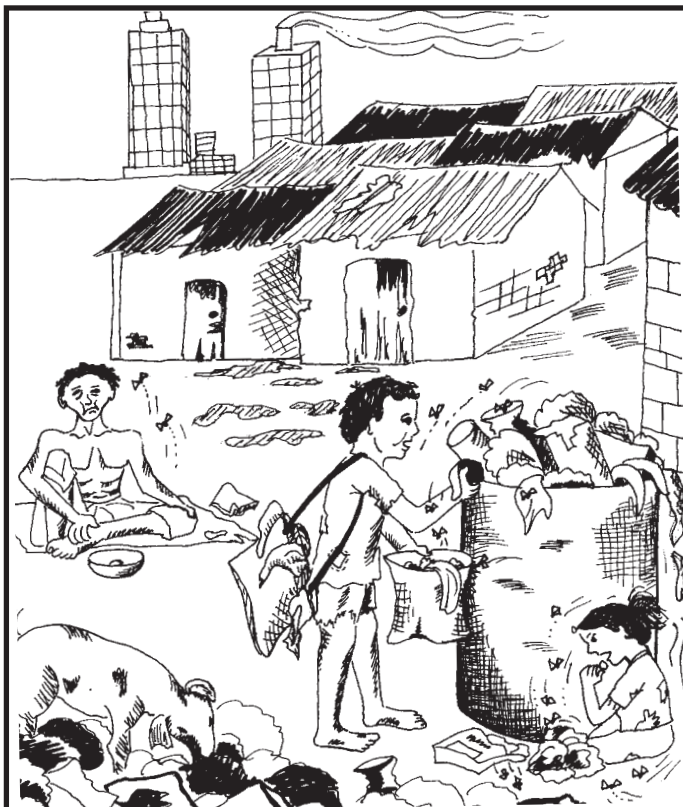


Fig. 4.1: Poverty and slums

Lack of housing has been another important problem in the process of urbanisation in India. This problem has been acute in cities with over a million population. Related to housing there have been problems on the planned use of urban land. The lack of adequate housing has been very marked especially for the lower income group and for the urban poor. In the light of the gravity of this problem, the government has passed the Urban Land Ceiling Act, Rent Control Act etc. The National Council on Urbanisation has also recommended that at least 15 percent of all new developments should be earmarked for the use of the economically weaker sections of the urban population.

Absence of planned and adequate arrangements for traffic and transport is another important problem in majority of urban centres in India. Though various new modes of transport and advanced technology have been used in our metropolitan cities to facilitate the movement of the people, these have remained insufficient to cope with the growing population there. Similarly, the extent of facilities medical, sanitation, drinking water, power-supply have remained insufficient in a majority of the urban centres in India.

After examining the extent of availability of facilities like housing, transport and traffic, medical, sanitation, electricity etc. in the urban areas, and the growth of urban population, one may say that there has been a tendency of over-urbanisation in India. The process of urbanisation in India has also been accompanied by sub-urbanisation. The development of modern modes of transport, and increasing demands on housing have led to the growth of sub-urbanisation. The sub-urban areas are growing at a faster rate in the metropolitan cities like Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi and in all big cities of India.

The Urban Development Policy of India has been formulated to ensure that the urban centres play a positive role in national and regional development, to promote the **rural-urban continuum** and to replace the regional disparities. The Five Year Plans of the government of India have included various programmes pertaining to housing, slum clearance, slum improvement, land acquisitions and development.

The Sixth Plan placed special emphasis on development of National Capital Region (NCR) to de-concentrate economic activity from the core of Delhi into regional towns (Rao 1983). The concept of NCR aims to bring better regional parities in the process of economic development and social change in a vast area around Delhi. It has been formulated in order to meet the growth and expansion needs of the capital. The plan covers integrated development of about 30,000 sq. km in the Union Territory of Delhi and parts of Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. A statutory body has been constituted through an enactment of Parliament in 1985 and a draft regional plan has since been prepared for the development of NCR (Government of India 1987: 597). The resource base of the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) includes budgetary allocation through plan provision and institution borrowing in the form of line of credit, priority sector loans from financial institutions and market borrowings in the form of taxable and tax-free bonds as extra budgetary resources. The Ninth plan provision for NCRPB was Rs.200 crore and during the Ninth plan the board has envisaged Internal and External Budgetary resources of Rs.3120 crore, to be mobilised from the capital market. The NCRPB has facilitated the development of infrastructure facilities in

different cities of the region including roads, bridges, water supply, sewerage disposal facilities etc.

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## 4.6 IMPACT OF URBANISATION IN THE RURAL AREAS

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In India, urbanisation along with westernisation and modernisation has furthered the process of rapid social change both in the rural and in the urban areas. One of the important results of urbanisation is the rural to urban migration. Migration has become a continuous process affecting the social, economic and cultural lives of the villagers widely. Rao (1974) distinguishes three different situation of urban impact in the rural areas. In the villages from where large number of people migrate to the far off cities, urban employment becomes a symbol of higher social prestige. Villages, which are located near the towns, receive influx of immigrant workers and face the problems of housing, marketing and social ordering. Lastly, in the process of the growth of metropolitan cities some villages become the rural-pockets in the city areas. Hence the villagers directly participate in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the city.

Srinivas pointed out that urbanisation in southern India has a caste component and that, it was the Brahmin who first left the village for the towns and took advantage of western education and modern professions. At the same time as they retained their ancestral lands they continued to be at the top of the rural socio-economic hierarchy. Again, in the urban areas they had a near monopoly of all non-manual posts.

However, the anti-Brahmin movement and the economic depression of the nineteen thirties led to the migration of Brahmins from the south and rural areas to metropolitan cities Srinivas 1974: 468).

As a result of migration there has been a flow of urban money into the rural areas. Emigrants regularly send money to their native villages. Such money facilitates the dependants to clear off loans, build houses and educate children.

The urban centres of India have become the centres of national and international linkages. At present, many cultural traits are diffused from cities to the rural areas. For example, dress patterns like pants, shirts, ties, skirts, jeans etc. diffuse from cities to the rural areas. Besides these, new thoughts, ideologies are also diffused from the cities to the rural areas due to increase in communication via radio, television, newspaper, computer, the Internet and telephone. The urbanism, which emerges in the cities gradually, reaches to the rural areas, depending on their proximity to the cities.

The process of urbanisation has not been an isolated phenomenon. At present, along with the whole gamut of occupational diversification, spread of literacy, education, mass communication etc., continuity between rural and urban areas has increased. Urban jobs and other amenities of living have become status symbols in the rural areas. Many modern techniques of agricultural development and many of the institutional frameworks for rural development also generate from the urban centres. The large-scale commercialisation of agriculture has also been facilitated by the process of urbanisation. Similarly, agricultural

requirements for machinery have generated the growth of manufacturing units in urban areas.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) What is the trend in the flow of urban population in India? Tick mark the correct answer.
- a) A steady increase
  - b) A state of stagnation
  - c) Both of the above
  - d) None of the above

- ii) Fill in the blank space in the following sentence by selecting one of the option given below.

The spatial feature of urbanisation in India has been .....

- a) localised
- b) balanced
- c) localised and balanced
- d) neither localised for balanced

- iii) Explain, in four lines, the concept of National Capital Region.

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## **4.7 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, we have defined urbanisation and taken a historical perspective to understand its patterns in India. We have then examined the spatial, demographic, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of urbanisation in contemporary India. We have also pointed out some of the problems which have arisen as a result of current process of urbanisation in India. Lastly, we have discussed the impact of urbanisation on the rural way of life.

Having looked at various facets of the patterns of urbanisation in India, we may conclude that it has been marked by regional and inter-state diversities, large scale rural to urban migration, insufficient infrastructure facilities, growth of slums and other allied problems. As we mentioned in section 4.6 some steps to solve some of the problems have been taken by the Government of India.

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## 4.8 KEY WORDS

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<b>Demographic</b>	Related to age, sex, density and overall structure of population
<b>Migration</b>	Movement of people either temporarily or permanently from one part of the country to another
<b>Rural-Urban Continuum</b>	A process of socio-economic interaction between the villages and the towns or cities
<b>Urban Density</b>	It refers to the number of people in an urban area per square kilometer
<b>Urbanism</b>	Urban way of life.

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## 4.9 FURTHER READING

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Jayapalan, N. 2002. *Urban Sociology*. Atlantic: New Delhi

Rao, M.S.A.(ed.) 1974. *Urban Sociology in India*. Orient Longman: New Delhi

Saberwal, S. (ed.) 1978. *Process and Institutions in Urban India: Sociological Studies*. Vikas Publishing House: New Delhi

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## 4.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) In a specific sense urbanisation refers to the movement of people from village to the towns or cities where economic activities are centred around trade, commerce, industry, manufacturing, management and so on.
- ii) a

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) “Shreni” was the caste-based occupational association of traditional Indian towns. This kind of guild formation was an important feature of towns in ancient India.
- ii) a

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) a
- ii) a
- iii) The concept of National Capital Region has been formulated to meet the growth and expansion needs of the capital city of Delhi. For integrated development of Delhi, the region includes 30,000sq. km. of Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.



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## UNIT 5 URBAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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### Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Meaning and Definition of Urban Social Structure
- 5.3 Main Features of Urban Life
  - 5.3.1 Formality and Impersonality of Human Relationships
  - 5.3.2 Rationality
  - 5.3.3 Secularism
  - 5.3.4 Increased Specialisation and Division of Labour
  - 5.3.5 Decline in the Functions of Family
- 5.4 Organisational and Socio-Cultural Aspects of Indian Urban Communities
  - 5.4.1 Family, Marriage and Kinship in Urban India
  - 5.4.2 Caste
- 5.5 Urban Politics
- 5.6 Urban Social Issues
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Keywords
- 5.9 Further Reading
- 5.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you should be able to

- discuss the meaning and definition of urban social structure
- explain the urban social structure in terms of kinship, religion, caste, and politics from a sociological point of view
- examine the changes in the urban social structure
- describe issues involved in the study of urban social structure in India.

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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You have already studied the characteristic features of rural social structure and patterns of urbanisation in units 2 and 4 respectively. Unit 5 deals with the main features of urban social structures in India. In this respect, the unit explains another significant aspect of Indian social life and highlights the theme of continuity of basic social institutions in urban India.

The unit first gives the meaning and definition of urban social structure and then describes the main features of urban life. These features have been identified in the context of urban life found in industrialised societies. It next

describes the organisational and socio-cultural aspects of urban communities in India.

Here it becomes quite apparent that the features of urban life, discussed in section 5.3 are not exactly features found in Indian urban life. Instead the institutions of family, kinship and caste are dominant features of our urban life.

A brief discussion of politics in urban areas is given to show how the family, kinship and caste network figure prominently in political processes. Finally, we examine some of the issues involved in the study of Indian urban social structure.

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## 5.2 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF URBAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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When we think of the term “urban” we immediately associate it with the term “city” and also with a distinct way of life. Both the terms “urban” and “city” are frequently used by us to denote the same thing. However, in the ancient civilisations like Greek, Mesopotamian, Sumerian, the term “civitas” was used for the religious and political association of families and tribes while “urbs” was the place of assembly, the dwelling, place where the association of families lived.

During the seventeenth century and ever since then, the term city has come to be understood as a kind of place while urban is understood as a quality of life which is found typically in the cities. It is the size of population and degree of complexity of organisation which differentiates a village from a town, a town from a city, and a city from a metropolis.

According to various social scientists, like Gordon Childe, Max Weber, the crucial feature of a city is the presence of a market and a specialised class of traders in it. Other religious, political, economic, technological institutions, complex administrative structures, religious centres, which complement the trade and commerce networks, find a place in the city. Thus, it is the factor of market economy and commerce, which brings together in a city the people of diverse origins, socio-cultural backgrounds. They all learn to live together. Out of the necessity to fulfil their needs and interests, the people of urban areas learn to organise themselves in relatively complex organisational arrangements. These organisations are based on indirectness of relationships and **rationality** of procedure in their functioning, for example, a hospital organisation, a super market, the court, etc. The rural social structure can be easily separated from the urban social structure in terms of these organisational arrangements, which are the basic ingredients of urban life. Other major features are complexity of outlook and behaviour, heterogeneity of population, anonymity, and impersonality. We will discuss some of these features in section 5.3.

The simplest definition of urban social structure has been given by geographers in terms of demographic criteria such as the size and density of population. The easiest way is to count heads. In the Indian context, for example, the 1961 census defined an urban place as a fixed community with a population of at least 5,000. The definition continued to be the same till 2001 census.

The second view which may be called ecological approach used for defining urban social structure has its origins in biology and botany in particular. Like the botanist who studies how particular plant species exist in nature, the sociologist taking the ecological perspective focuses on the spatial distribution of urban activities such as the residence pattern, markets, political institutions, business centres, etc. and on the processes and forms of urban growth.

Although the demographic and ecological factors are important to study urban social structure, it is essential to relate these factors to the socio-cultural dimensions of society. Only then they become more meaningful for sociological understanding of urban social structure.

The third view, which we may call the socio-cultural approach, emphasises the importance of cultural, psychological and other social dimensions of urban life. It focuses on the distinctive orientations, attitudes, and values of urban dwellers and on the distinctive patterns of human relationships found in urban settings. While it is relatively easy to identify large population concentrations, commonly referred to as urban areas, it is more difficult to characterise the style of life and social interaction patterns within these areas.

The degree of urbanism (urban way of life) of any given community is indicated by its size, density and heterogeneity of population. By heterogeneity, we mean the presence of a large number of people belonging to different socio-cultural castes and communities, having different languages, food habits, etc. For example in Delhi, we find people from all over India living in one colony speaking different languages, wearing different styles of clothes, eating different kinds of foods and so on. In rural society we do not find this kind of diversity. The larger, denser and more heterogeneous a population, the more we expect it to display a distinctly urban-character. Each one of the three indicators is capable of exerting an independent effect on social structure and individual attitudes.

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## **5.3 MAIN FEATURES OF URBAN LIFE**

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A close examination of the dominant features of urban life shows that there are significant differences between those who live in cities and those in rural areas. Louis Wirth (1938: 1-24) has described the principal features of urban life. Urban values discussed by Louis Wirth and other sociologists in their studies of urbanism in western countries are not yet completely predominant in India. We can say that they are beginning to take roots in Indian cities. Thus, in the Indian context, the following description is not wholly relevant. It is being given here for the purpose of familiarising you with the following features generally associated with urban life. Another purpose is to urge you to find out for yourself to what extent you can observe these features in Indian city-life.

### **5.3.1 Formality and Impersonality of Human Relationships**

Large size of urban areas prevents intimate and face-to-face contacts among all the members in the community. In urban communities, people interact with each other for limited and specialised purposes, for example, teachers and

students in a classroom, buyers and sellers in a store and doctors and patients in clinics. Urbanites do not usually come to know each other as 'whole persons', i.e., they are not usually concerned with all aspects of a person's life. Apart from their family members and friends they do not normally interact with others, except for limited or specialised purposes. This feature among the urban dwellers results in formal, impersonal, superficial, transitory, segmental and secondary contacts. This is in contrast to the primary contacts of people in villages who share personal, face-to-face, intimate, longstanding relationships with each other.

### 5.3.2 Rationality

With the impersonal nature of urban relationships, the urban orientations tend to be utilitarian. That is, people then enter into relationships, after calculating potential gains from these associations rather than for the intrinsic satisfaction of association. Here relationships are generally of contractual kind where profit and loss are carefully evaluated. Once the contract is over, the relationship between the people tends to end, as for example, in having the services of a trained nurse for a sick person, or entering into a contract with an agency to advertise your product, etc. This should however not give you an impression that all relationships between individuals in urban areas are only utilitarian. Always, there exists a wide range of variety in individual relationships. Here, we are only pointing out the general character of urban relationships.

### 5.3.3 Secularism

Heterogeneity of physical such as racial, social and cultural elements in urban life results in routine exposure to divergent life styles and values. People become more tolerant of differences as they become accustomed to seeing others very different from themselves. This rational and tolerant attitude produces secular orientations in life. Even though it is very difficult to measure concepts such as rationality and secularism, it is assumed that secular as opposed to religious orientations have often been thought to be associated with urban social structure. However this feature is not always present since we do find communal riots taking place in Indian cities more often than in rural areas. But generally, in a relative sense, we can say that secular values are associated with urban areas.

### 5.3.4 Increased Specialisation and Division of Labour

Population growth leads to a higher ratio of people to land, called '**material density**' by Emile Durkheim. He differentiated two types of density, namely (i) material density, that is, simple ratio of people to land and (ii) **dynamic or moral density**, that is, the rate of interaction, or communication within a population. In his theory of social development, Durkheim viewed tribes or families as the basic social units in pre-industrial or pre-urban societies. When they grow in size both their material and dynamic densities also increase simultaneously. This results in greater interaction between formerly separated social units.

Trade and commerce between units serve as stimulus to the **division of labour**. In other words, when similar but separated social units are fused by increased interaction into a larger and denser settlement, the new and larger units exhibit more specialisation in terms of the division of labour than that found in some of the previously separate units.

### 5.3.5 Decline in the Functions of Family

Many of the educational, recreational and other functions, performed within a rural joint family context, are taken over by other institutions such as schools, clubs and other voluntary organisations in the urban social context. In urban society there is generally a clear demarcation between the home and place of work, which is not always found in rural society. Correspondingly, at a psychological level urban dwellers' identities are not necessarily bound with their family roles. And also because, of' greater geographical mobility, regular contact between kin is often difficult if not impossible in these families. This however does not suggest that families are not vital in urban societies.

Having discussed the general features of urban social structure, it is not out of place to mention that the dichotomy emphasising rural-urban contrasts used by many western scholars is of little value for understanding urban social structure in India. Many studies completed during the fifties and sixties questioned the usual assumption that the process of urbanisation led to decline of family size, weakening of family ties, especially joint family and **secularisation** of caste and religious values, deeply rooted in Indian culture. We are now going to discuss these issues in the next section, dealing with organisational and socio-cultural aspects of urban communities in India.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) List three approaches for defining urban social structure. Use two lines for your answer.

.....  
.....

- ii) List three indicators of the degree of urbanisation. Use two lines for your answer.

.....  
.....

- iii) Tick among the following options those features, which you think characterise urban social relations.

- a) Face to face contact
- b) Secondary contact
- c) Impersonality
- d) Informality
- e) Formality
- f) Superficiality

- iv) Distinguish, in two lines, between material density and moral density.

.....  
.....

## 5.4 ORGANISATIONAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF INDIAN URBAN COMMUNITIES

Urbanisation has been viewed as an important force of social change. In India, this process has, on the one hand, meant economic growth, political change, new values and new attitudes. It reflects also the elements of continuity between rural and urban social structures. That is why, our discussion of the elements of urban social structure in India is in terms of the basic social institutions of Indian society, namely, family, marriage, kinship and caste. We show how in some respects, basic values and attitudes continue to dominate and how new ideas are gradually taking roots in the urban population.

### 5.4.1 Family, Marriage and Kinship in Urban India

It is usually assumed that the process of urbanisation leads to a decline in family size, weakening of family ties and break up of joint family system into nuclear families. This assumption presupposes that joint family, as it is found in India, is an institution of rural India associated with agrarian economy.

But as a matter of fact joint families are found in urban areas as well. The correlation of “joint” family with rural areas and “nuclear” family with urban is not tenable. Sociologists have gathered ample proof that joint families are as common in urban areas as in rural and that in both rural and urban areas a family may undergo a process of cyclical change from nuclear to joint and back to nuclear within a period of time.

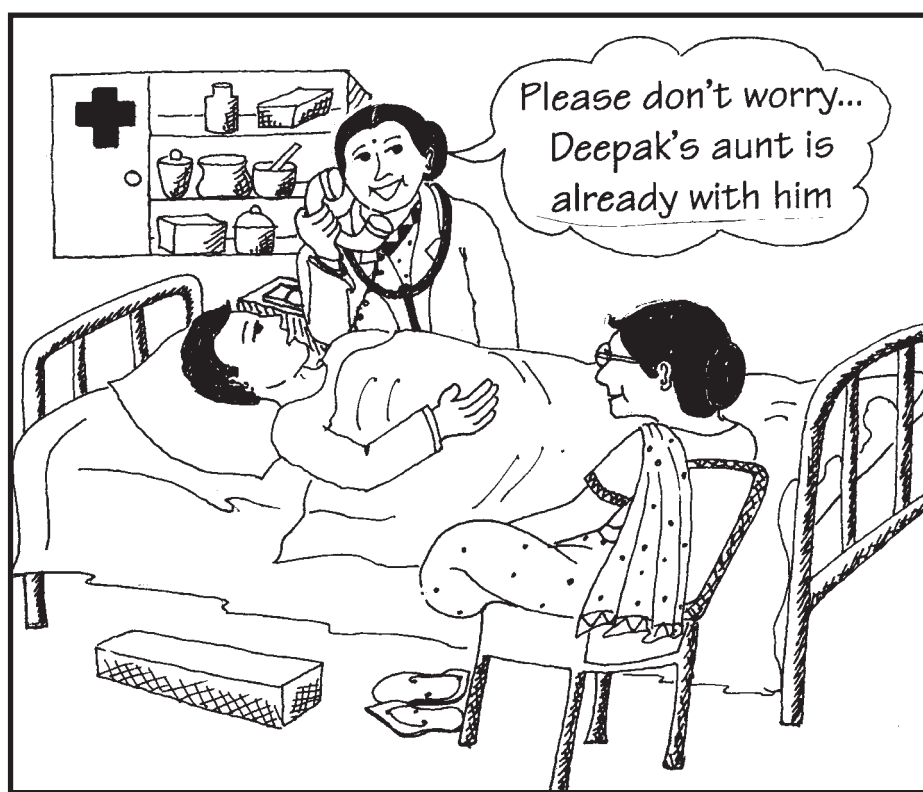
When we observe the household dimension of family in urban India, the studies by K.M. Kapadia (1956) I. P. Desai (1964), A.M. Shah (1973), R. Mukherjee (1965) indicate that there is no correlation between urbanisation and ‘separate’ nuclear households. Assumption that Indian urbanites live in nuclear households and that urbanisation leads to breaking up of joint families cannot be sustained. Some studies show that not only kinship is an important principle of social organisation in cities but also that there is structural congruity between joint family on one hand and requirements of industrial and urban life on the other. From a detailed case study of nineteen families of outstanding business leaders in Chennai city, Milton Singer (1968) argues that a modified version of traditional Indian joint family is consistent with urban and industrial setting.

The role of wider family relationships is brought out by I.P. Desai. He points out that when there is some serious illness and people need to utilise the hospital facilities not available locally, members of the family and close kin residing in the bigger cities are called in for help (see figure 5.1). Likewise when a person in rural areas needs educational or economic advancement, he calls upon his urban counterparts for help. Recent studies show the important role of family and kinship ‘networks’ for the rural based boys seeking new avenues in the urban setting. They also show how the elders negotiating with urban institutions like banks, the administration, or the polity, ask for the help of their young relatives in cities.

This does not however suggest that there have been no changes in the family structure. Some of the changes, which call attention to the gradual modification of the family structure in urban India, are:



- i) diminishing size of the family, owing to the increasing awareness of family planning measures,
- ii) reduction in functions of family as a result of relegation of certain educational, recreational and other functions previously performed by families to other institutions, and
- iii) relative equality in regard to status and rights of women, as a consequence of more and more women seeking employment resulting in economic independence of women.



**Fig. 5.1: Dependence on close kin is important also in urban areas**

The phenomenon of inter-caste, inter-communal and inter-regional marriage, no matter how infrequent, in cities points to the changing attitudes of the urban individual. Similarly one can see the change in the selection pattern too. In selection for their bride, a higher proportion of men from urban middle class background tends to favour urban educated, preferably working girls. Thus, the non-traditionality as regards bride selection is found largely in urban areas. The evidence also suggests that the new concept of wifehood, i.e., emphasis on conjugal relationship, in India is associated with urban living. There has also been some evidence of increase in age at marriage in urban areas. Simplification of rituals at marriages and incidence of court marriages in the cities reveal a gradual separation of the institution of marriage from its sacred religious complex. Attitude of Indian urban youth towards marriage reflects willingness to depart from the traditional practices but often they are not able to put it in practice due to traditional sanctions and moral pressure which have retained their rigours to an appreciable degree in cities.

Still there is a general preference for arranged marriages, marriages within one's caste group and dowry. The increasing incidence of bride burning or

dowry deaths as they are called, clearly shows the increasing emphasis on dowry both in terms of cash and goods like coloured television sets, cars etc. In this regard, value of the college-educated urban youth of India has increased in the matrimonial 'market'.

### Activity 1

Describe the nature of at least ten marriages in your own and wider family, in terms of

- i) Age at marriage for the boy and girl
- ii) Education level of the boy and girl
- iii) Occupation of the boy and the girl
- iv) if the marriage is within the caste, inter-caste, inter-communal, interregional
- v) the place of marriage ceremonies (e.g. bride's house, court, temple etc.)
- vi) the traditional gift-exchange (bride-price, dowry, any other form of giving and taking of gifts) at the marriages.

## 5.4.2 Caste

Generally caste is thought to be a phenomenon of rural India mainly associated with agrarian economy. Caste system has been viewed as a system, which has restricted the development of non-agrarian economy. It is assumed that urbanisation along with industrialisation would induce certain essential changes in the caste-based system of stratification.

Sociologists, like Ghurye (1962), Gore (1970), D'Souza (1974), Rao (1974), have conducted studies in urban areas. Their studies have shown that caste system continues to play an important role in urban areas. Opinions are, however, divided regarding the degree of persistence or degree of flexibility in the caste system found in urban setting. In this section we will discuss how the caste system has continued to persist and exert its influence in some sectors of urban social life while it has changed its form in some other sectors. For this purpose, we take examples from sociological studies of urban life in India.

When it comes to every day reality caste plays a significant role. Harold Gould's (1974) study of the *rickshawallas* of Lucknow shows that, as far as their occupation is concerned, they (i.e. the *rickshawallas*) follow secular rules but when it comes to personal, family matters, such as marriage, the caste identities are all important. Thus, a dichotomy exists between workplace and domestic situation.

To take another example, M.S.A. Rao (1974) has shown that caste system exists in cities. But he points out some significant organisational changes in the way it exists in cities. He says that due to the introduction of modern industry, growth of professions and the emergence of new occupational categories there has emerged a new class structure along with new status groups. Due to the impact of democracy and the electoral system adopted by India,

the power axis, i.e. distribution of power and the formation of different kinds of elites, has changed from the traditional system.

In respect of the change in the distribution of power, we find that in pre-British India, upper caste was also the upper class. It would seem that now with education and new types of occupations this correlation of caste and class is no longer the case. A. Beteille (1971) has pointed out that higher caste does not always imply higher class. This disharmony is most often found in the Indian cities where new job opportunities have developed.

In spite of these changes caste has not disappeared and in the process of establishing social identities it is still widely used in all parts of India. In fact, some sociologists say that it is not necessary at all that with the process of urbanisation it will give way to class system of stratification in urban areas.

The establishment of caste association in order to help their caste fellows in terms of educational and occupational opportunities, political power, etc. again reveals the vitality of caste system. The most powerful role that caste identity is playing in contemporary period is in politics which governs the power dimension. The need to gain power through the modern political System has forced leaders to mobilise people of not only one's immediate sub caste but also the wider caste group itself. Caste provides a ready made identity and people align themselves along with the caste lines. In India we have at all levels a parliamentary democracy where the number of votes become very important. Therefore, in today's India, horizontal unity of caste over a wide area, in both rural and urban sectors, provides a vote 'bank' that can ensure the election of a candidate from one's own caste.

Caste seems to have also become a basis for organising trade union like associations. These trade unions are nothing but interest groups which protect the rights and interest of its caste members, such as the, Gujarat Bania *Sabha*; the Kshatriya *Mahasabha* (Gujarat), Jatava *Mahasabha* of Agra (U.P.); etc. These are caste associations, which perform the functions of a trade union for its caste members. On the one hand, this can be viewed as the strength of a caste; on the other, as pointed out by Leach (1960) once a caste becomes a trade union-like organisation, it becomes competitive and therefore it becomes a class group.

Certain aspects of behaviour associated with caste ideology have now almost disappeared in the urban context. The rules of commensality have very little meaning in the urban context where one may not know or may ignore the caste identity of one's neighbours, friends, servants, etc. Though in family and marriage matters, caste is still quite important but other factors such as, education, occupation etc. of the partners are also just as important as caste. The frequency of inter-caste, inter-region marriages have increased with the young people coming more in contact with each other in urban areas. It is clear that caste is still significant in urban areas, although its functions have changed and become modified. We may say that it has lost some of its earlier rigidities and has become more flexible.

In the Indian context, there have been very scant sociological studies relating to neighbourhood relations in urban settlements. M.S. Gore (1970) has studied the relationships among immigrant groups in neighbourhoods of Mumbai. He tends to suggest that neighbourhood interaction is marked by a high degree of

informality and that caste, kinship and other traditional collectivities are the major basis of such participation. In this sense the concept of urban neighbourhood does not appear to be a significant feature of urban life in India.

Sylvia Vatuk (1972) has shown that there has not been any marked change in the traditional family and kinship system in the urban areas. Neither does the Indian urbanite suddenly become an anonymous, city-bred person who is totally isolated from primary contacts outside the nuclear family. She found that the kinship organisation in the old wards (*mohalla*) of Meerut city in the past, and amongst the poorer section of the population in the city even today, follows the same pattern as in the rural districts of this region. The persistence of the similar pattern of kinship organisation, as found in the villages, in the older and poorer sections of the city goes to show that there is no sharp cultural discontinuity between the masses of the pre-industrial towns and the peasants of the countryside.

Let us now go back to the discussion of the relevance of caste in politics and the nature of politics in urban area.

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## 5.5 URBAN POLITICS

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Urban areas were places where the first experiments in political representation were tried in India during the British rule. Long before state (provincial) governments were democratised, almost a hundred years ago some form of elections based on limited franchise had been introduced in the Indian cities. With only municipal governments opened for public participation, some of the most qualified persons entered public life through the municipal institutions. Even Subhas Chandra Bose had taken active interest in Kolkata municipal affairs. Mumbai had its sherifs, and the municipality at Mussoorie ran a post graduate college on its own; some others maintained hospitals. A number of princely states too had begun to associate peoples' representatives with activities like inspection of public transport systems, running of schools, and primary health service in 'capital' cities. From the point of view of the then rulers, these were half way measures to meet the demand for local government and initial training in democracy.

The independence movement had its counterparts in urban setting in the nature of promotion of the Swadeshi movement and organisation of the trade unions, the two elements of the independence movement were widely supported by urbanities of many cities. Gandhiji advocated the idea of the entrepreneurs becoming the trustees of the labour class and succeeded in organising the trade union in Ahmedabad. Trade unions, which started as political wings of political activities, have shown their relevance for elections and for acting as pressure groups.

The city government in independent India shows the nature of urban politics first in the elections to the municipal bodies, second in the working of these institutions, and thirdly in relation to state and national elections. We may ask the question- is the new political system transforming the existing socio-cultural system into new forms and are new political institutions adapted to the existing social structure? Many authors studying various aspects of urban politics

indicate the resistance of the traditional social structure in the face of democratic politics. Rosenthal's (1970: 71) study of municipal politics in Agra and Poona and Khadija A. Gupta's (1971) study of political process in Uttar Pradesh suggest that wealth, communal, sectarian and caste factors prevail over secular factors in politics and that political processes are by and large the same everywhere in urban India.

Evidence also suggests that during elections, the traditional element of caste plays a dominant role. Adrian Mayer (1958) studied municipal elections in the town of Dewas in Madhya Pradesh, and found that political party and its units were main bases of support for one of the candidates, and the management of local leaders and their kinsmen for the other. A weak political structure makes the ad-hoc arrangements based on caste kinship and neighbourhood more important for political activities. Mayer calls these ad-hoc arrangements, which may no longer be activated after elections as 'action-sets'. Robert G. Wirsing (1981) has on the other hand observed a proliferation of diverse types of voluntary organisations in urban areas. These organisations serve as major means of the democratisation of urban politics. During recent years the bodies such as Citizens for Democracy, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Sampurna Kranti Manch, Samprdayikta Virodhi Samiti, Common Cause etc. may be seen as important non-party organisations playing an important role in the process of democratisation, politicisation, and secularisation in urban areas.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Which of the following statements is correct?
  - a) Joint family is an institution of rural India associated with agrarian economy.
  - b) There is no direct correlation between urbanisation and separate nuclear households.
  - c) There is a direct correlation between urbanisation and secularisation.
  - d) The traditional correlation between caste and occupation has weakened in urban areas.

- ii) How is the institution of marriage in the cities gradually separated from its sacred religious complex today? Use three lines for your answer.

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- iii) How does the city government in independent India show the nature of urban politics? Use four lines for your answer.

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The process of urbanisation brings in its wake a host of problems, which were discussed in section 4.5 of unit 4 on Patterns of Urbanisation. The general problems of population and urban growth present the social issues which most of the developing countries are facing at the present time. In this section we will discuss how in the context of urban India, certain features of urban social structure, specially the persistence of social relationships pertaining to rural areas, give rise to the particular issues.

The pattern of social relationships and interaction among various sections of Indian cities show that both caste and religion cut across the lines of class. This gives caste and the religious affiliations a significant meaning for the emerging pattern of social mobility in urban areas. The new opportunities for jobs, available in cities and the presence of caste groups besides various religious and ethnic groups among the Indian urbanites widen the scope of inter-caste/religious/ethnic competition. Hostilities and opposition to those in profession, industry, commerce and government jobs characterise the pattern of conflict or cooperation among various groups for their share in power structure. The role of these new urban groups and their ideologies become the subject of research for sociologists interested in urban issues.

Along with the persistence of kinship and caste structures in urban areas, we also witness the co-existence of areas with a markedly rural social make-up and highly urbanised sections in Indian cities. Then, there are immigrants who live between rural and urban cultures. The interaction among these elements of urban life and emerging social relationships bring before us the issues peculiar to our urban social structure. For example, in every city we have the proliferation of slums inhabited by migrants from rural areas. The slum-dwellers provide essential services to the urban population. But they do not share the civic amenities available to citizens.

In addition, the new values of equality, autonomy and individual freedom and attitudes associated with economic growth, technological and political changes are gradually taking roots in urban populations. Often the conflict between new values and attitudes and those of caste/religion/ethnicity is felt at different levels- individual, family and the nation. To take the example of the first two levels, we find that generally in the city women have more freedom of movement and more access to education and jobs in organised sector. This is sometimes not appreciated by the older generation. Then, women in paid employment need to be away from their homes. With the wife at a full-time job outside the home, the husband may have to undertake some domestic chores, like cooking, washing, cleaning. He may have to take leave from his work if the child is sick. The traditional pattern of male-female roles within and outside the family does not provide a framework for these kinds of changes taking place in urban areas. As a result, we come across many instances of familial conflicts and role strains.

To take the example of conflict at wider levels, let us look at the norm of equal opportunity for jobs and other civic amenities. With better opportunities available to only those with higher socio-economic status, there is a growing conflict between what is believed to be possible in terms of equal opportunities



for jobs, education and other means of improving one's socio-economic status and to what actually happens in real life. In actuality, often we find caste or kinship being used as a criterion for allotting seats or selecting people for jobs rather than merit.

### **Activity 2**

- 1) Do you live in an urban area?

If yes, then carry out the following activity on the basis of your actual observation. If no, then take up this activity on the basis of your visit to a town or city. Go to a slum-area, look around and talk to the people before answering the following questions:

- a) How many people (approximately) live in the slum, visited by you?
- b) Give the number of water taps, electricity poles, primary schools, dispensaries (homoeopathic, allopathic and Ayurvedic) and public parks in that area.
- c) Is the area served by garbage - removalists?
- d) Does the area have sewage - system?
- e) Are there any public conveniences?
- f) Are those public conveniences regularly cleaned?

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## **5.7 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you studied the meaning and definition of urban social structure. You also learnt about main features of urban life as identified by scholars of urban areas in developed societies. In the Indian setting, it was pointed out that the basic institutions of family, marriage, kinship and caste continue to form the important elements of urban social structure. Then you briefly looked at the nature of politics in urban areas and finally at some of the urban issues in India.

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## **5.8 KEYWORDS**

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### **Division of Labour**

A concept referring to different people performing different functions according to the criteria of age, sex, knowledge, skill, etc.

### **Material Density**

It is the density of population as described by Emile Durkheim. It refers to simple ratio of people to land.

### **Dynamic or Moral Density**

It is the density of interaction between people of a society as described by Emile Durkheim.

**Rationality**

It is the practice of treating reason as the basis of belief and knowledge.

**Urban Social Structure****Secularisation**

The process by which religions or sacred values are replaced by scientific and rational values.

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## 5.9 FURTHER READING

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Jaiswal, Suvira 1998. *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*. Manohar: New Delhi

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## 5.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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**Check Your Progress 1**

- i)
  - a) Demographic approach,
  - b) Ecological approach,
  - c) Socio-cultural approach.
- ii)
  - a) Size of population,
  - b) Density of population,
  - c) Heterogeneity of population.
- iii) b, c, e, f
- iv) Material density refers to the simple ratio of people to land and moral density refers to the rate of interaction or communication within a population.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) b, d
- ii) Simplification of rituals at marriage and incidence of court marriage in the cities show a gradual separation of the institution of marriage from its sacred religious complex.
- iii) The nature of urban politics is shown in the city government in Independent India in
  - a) the election process of the municipal bodies,
  - b) the working of these institutions, and
  - c) the links between city politics and state and national elections.

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### Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 The Institution of Family
- 6.3 The Types of Family
  - 6.3.1 The Continuum of Nuclear and Joint Family Systems
  - 6.3.2 The Hindu Joint Family
- 6.4 Nature of Joint Family in India
  - 6.4.1 What Constitutes Jointness?
  - 6.4.2 Who Constitute a Joint Family?
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- 6.5 Developmental Process of the Family
  - 6.5.1 The Ideal of Joint Family Living
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  - 6.6.2 Factors of Change Leading to Reinforcement of the Joint Family
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## 6.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- define the nature of the institution of family
- give a description of the types of family
- discuss the nature of nuclear family in Indian society
- outline the criteria used for identifying jointness in a family
- discuss the family systems in terms of a cyclical approach
- identify the major forces responsible for change in the institution of family.

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## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Block I we talked of rural and urban social structure. We said structure refers to a pattern of arrangement of social relationships, which get institutionalised over time. In this Block we will look at some of the basic institutions of Indian society, namely, the family, marriage and kinship.

In the first unit of this Block we will look at the institution of family. We will describe the nuclear and joint family systems. We will also look into the question of changes in the Indian family.

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## **6.2 THE INSTITUTION OF FAMILY**

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Let us first define the nature of the institution of family. Broadly speaking, it refers to the group comprising parents and children. It may also refer, in some places, to a patri-or matrilineage or to a group of cognates, that is, persons descended from the same ancestor. In some other cases, it may refer to a group of relatives and their dependants forming one household. All this refers to the compositional aspect of this institution. Another aspect is that of the residence of its members. They usually share a common residence, at least for some part of their lives. Thirdly, we can also speak of the relational aspect of the family. Members have reciprocal rights and duties towards each other. Finally, the family is also an agent of socialisation. All these aspects make this institution different from other units of social structure.

Family is one of the most important social institutions. Most of the world's population lives in family units. The specific form and behaviour patterns found within a family have shown variations through time across countries of the world and even within a country. A sociologist looks at the institution both in terms of an ideal type and a reality. He/she ascertains the ideals of the family system partly because they are a guide to behaviour and also because these ideals act as values, a set of norms which are passed from one generation to another. A sociologist also studies the actual way in which a family is patterned and re-patterned within a society, in a particular group through time. She will also try to identify the forces, which have been responsible for changing certain aspects of the family units in a particular manner.

Now, in order to understand the nature of family in India, we will first look at the types of family in the manner outlined above.

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## **6.3 THE TYPES OF FAMILY**

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Normally the basic unit of social structure contains the two primary links of kinship. These are of parenthood and siblingship. In simple terms, a family usually comprises various combinations and permutations of these relationships. In the Indian context, we generally speak of the contrast between nuclear and joint family types.

A classification of families into joint and nuclear types is usually based on the way in which families are organised. For instance, the most popular definition of a nuclear family is to refer to it as a group consisting of a man, his wife and their unmarried, children. The joint family is commonly defined as the nuclear family plus all kin belonging to the side of husband, and/or wife living in one homestead.

Frequently, the term 'extended' family is used instead of the term joint family to indicate that the combination of two or more nuclear families is based on an extension of the parent-child relationship. Thus, the patrilineally extended family is based on an extension of the father-son relationship, while the matrilineally extended family is based on the mother-daughter relationship. The extended family may also

be extended horizontally to include a group consisting of two or more brothers, their wives and children. This horizontally extended family is called as the fraternal or collateral family.

In India, the family whether extended vertically and/or horizontally is called the joint family, which is strictly speaking also a property-sharing unit. Thus, the concept of joint family in India has legal and other references as well, which will be discussed in subsections 6.4.1 and 6.4.2.

The above definitions of the nuclear and the joint family are limited in the sense that they do not say anything more than the compositional aspect of the family. When we look at the wide variations through time in patterns of family living based on region, religion, caste and class in India we find that the nuclear and the joint family organisation cannot be viewed as two distinct, isolated and independent units but as a continuum, as something interrelated in a developmental cycle.

### 6.3.1 The Continuum of Nuclear and Joint Family Systems

We say that the nuclear and the joint family systems have to be viewed as a continuum. This means that these two types of family systems have to be looked at as something interrelated in a developmental cycle. The structure of a family changes over a time period in terms of size, composition, role and status of persons, the family and societal norms and sanctions. There probably is rarely a family in India, which remains perpetually nuclear in composition. Often additional members like an aged parent or unmarried brothers and sisters may come to live with a man, his wife and unmarried children. The nuclear family then, is a stage in a cycle with other structural types of families. Even when certain forces have enjoined the establishment of nuclear household, for a relatively long period of time, the ritual, economic and sentimental link with relatives who compose a joint family are often maintained. We shall discuss about these forces and impact of these forces in section 6.6.

While discussing the nature of nuclear family in India, Pauline Kolenda (1987) has discussed additions/modifications in nuclear family structure. She gives the following compositional categories.

- i) **Nuclear family** refers to a couple with or without children.
- ii) **Supplemented nuclear family** indicates a nuclear family plus one or more unmarried, separated, or widowed relatives of the parents, other than their unmarried children.
- iii) **Subnuclear family** is identified as a fragment of a former nuclear family for instance a widow/widower with her/his unmarried children or siblings (unmarried or widowed or separated or divorced) living together.
- iv) **Single person household**
- v) **Supplemented subnuclear family** refers to a group of relatives, members of a formerly complete nuclear family along with some other unmarried, divorced or widowed relative who was not a member of the nuclear family. For instance, a widow and her unmarried children may be living together with her widowed mother-in-law. In the Indian context, it is easy to find all these types of family. However, in terms of societal norms and values, these types relate to the joint family system.

### 6.3.2 The Hindu Joint Family

Much has been written about the joint family system, especially the Hindu joint family system. The **patrilineal, patrivirilocal** (residence of the couple after marriage in the husband's father's home), property owning, co-residential and commensal joint family, comprising three or more generations has been depicted as the ideal family unit of Hindu society. M.S. Gore (1968: 4-5) points out that ideally, the joint family consists of a man and his wife and their adult sons, their wives and children, and younger children of the paternal couple. In this ideal type the oldest male is the head of the family. The rights and duties in this type of family are laid down to a great extent by the hierarchical order of power and authority. Age and sex are the main ordering principles of family hierarchy. The frequency and the nature of contact/communication between members vary on the basis of sex. A married woman, for instance works in the kitchen with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. Younger members are required to show respect to the older members and can hardly question the authority or decision taken by elders even when it directly concerns them. Children of the joint family are children of all the male members in the parental generation.

Emphasis on conjugal ties (i.e. between husband and wife) is supposed to weaken the stability of the joint family. The father-son relationship (filial relationship) and the relationship between brothers (fraternal relationship) are more crucial for the joint family system than the husband-wife or conjugal relationship. The conjugal, filial and fraternal relationships can be expressed in simple kinship diagrams in figure 6.1: family relationships.

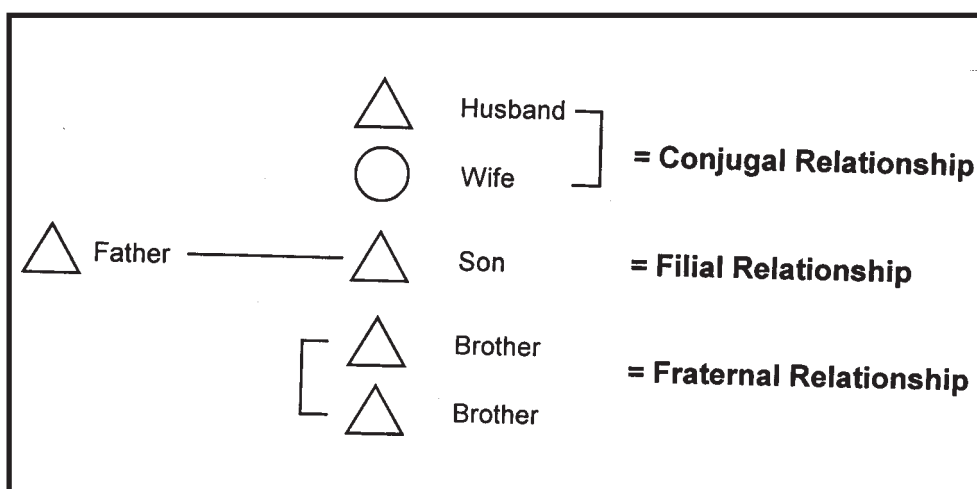


Fig. 6.1: Family relationships

In a nuclear family the husband and wife relationship is important for the survival of the system. Hence, in M.S. Gore's view, it would be inappropriate to look at the joint family system as a collection of nuclear families. Having said that joint families are not merely a collection of nuclear families we must examine what constitutes jointness. For this purpose, in a separate section we will discuss the nature of joint family in India. This will also make it clear how and why Indian society has a continuum of nuclear and joint family systems and not two distinct forms of nuclear and joint family.

- i) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark T for true or F for false against each statement.
  - a) Joint family in India constitutes a mere collection of nuclear families.
  - b) The nuclear and the joint family can be looked at as a continuum in terms of a developmental cycle.
- ii) List the four major additions/modifications in the nuclear family structure, as suggested by Kolenda.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
  - c) .....
  - d) .....

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## 6.4 NATURE OF JOINT FAMILY IN INDIA

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There are two aspects of joint family system in India based on

- i) What constitutes jointness?
- ii) Who constitutes a joint family?

Both the sub-sections will show us how the seemingly nuclear families in India are actually parts of larger family groups, which share the idea of 'jointness'.

### 6.4.1 What Constitutes Jointness?

Let us look at what is jointly shared by the members of a joint family. Their jointness is reflected in the factors of **commensality**, common residence, joint ownership of property, cooperation and sentiment of jointness, ritual bonds like worship of common deity. We shall discuss them one by one.

- i) **Commensality:** Most of the studies of joint family use commensality (eating together) as a defining criterion. The joint family is the hearth group; members cook and eat food from the same kitchen.
- ii) **Common Residence:** In some studies the joint family as the residential family group is stressed. Though it is possible to find a joint family having the same hearth but not sharing the same dwelling or vice versa, by and large commensality and common residence are taken as essential ingredients of jointness (refer to Cohn 1961, Dube 1955, Mukherjee 1969, Kolenda 1968).
- iii) **Joint Ownership of Property:** Some scholars have regarded joint ownership of property or **coparcenary** as the essence of jointness, irrespective of the type of residence and commensality. In legal terms, this is the most crucial factor used for defining a joint family.
- iv) **Cooperation and Sentiment:** Scholars like I.P. Desai (1964) and K. M. Kapadia (1958) point out that jointness should be looked in functional terms. A functionally joint family lays stress on fulfilment of obligations towards kin.



A patrilineal joint family may consist of a number of households headed by males related through the father. They may be located even at distant places and may not even have property in common. But what is common is that they identify themselves as members of a particular 'family', cooperate in rituals and ceremonies, render financial and other kinds of help; and they cherish a common family sentiment and abide by the norms of joint living.

- v) **Ritual Bonds:** The ritual bonds of a joint family are considered to be an important component of jointness. A joint family, thus, is bound together by periodic propitiation of the dead ancestors. The members perform a '*shraddha*' ceremony in which the senior male member of the joint family propitiates his dead father's or mother's spirit, offering it the '*pinda*' (balls of cooked rice) on behalf of all the members.

Another ritual bond among joint family members can be a common deity worship. In many parts of South India, each joint family has a tradition of worshipping a particular clan or village deity. Vows are made to these deities in times of joy and trouble. The first tonsure, donning of the sacred thread, marriages etc. are celebrated in or near the deity's temple. Srinivasa of Tirupathi and Subramanya of Palani are two well-known Hindu deities who have a large number of South Indian families attached to them (Srinivas 1969:71).

Still another important bond is pollution. Birth and death results in pollution and the group observing pollution consists of the members of the joint family, patrilineal or **matrilineal**. The bonds created by ancestor worship, family deities and observation of pollution persist even after the joint family has split into separate or smaller residential and commensal units (Srinivas 1969: 71).

From the above discussion of joint family it becomes clear that common kitchen or hearth, common residence, joint rights to property and the fulfillment of obligation towards kin and ritual bonds have been outlined as the main criteria for defining what constitutes jointness. Many scholars have pointed out that of these dimensions, co-residence and commensality, are the immediately identifiable characteristics of a joint family. Such a consideration, they feel, would also accommodate family patterns found in non-Hindu communities like the Muslims, Christians, etc. It would also accommodate families, which hardly have anything by way of ancestral or immovable property (Dube 1974).

### 6.4.2 Who Constitute a Joint Family?

We can look at this issue in terms of

- i) kin relationship between the members
- ii) the number of generations in one unit
- iii) the sharing of common property.

Let us deal with each of these three one by one.

#### i) **Kin Relationship between the Members**

We can say that a joint family may consist of members related lineally or collaterally or both. There is more or less an unanimous agreement that a family is essentially defined as "joint" only if it includes two or more related married couples. Also it has been observed that these couples may be related (i) lineally (usually in a father-

son relationship or occasionally in a father-daughter relationship), or, (ii) collaterally (usually in a brother-brother relationship/or/ occasionally in a brother-sister relationship). Both these types refer to the compositional aspect of the patrilineal joint family. In matrilineal systems, found in South-west and North-east India, the family is usually composed of a woman, her mother and her married and unmarried daughters. The mother's brother is also an important member of the family; he is the manager of the matrilineal joint family affairs. The husbands of the female members live with them. In Kerala, a husband used to be a frequent visitor to the wife's household and he lived in his mother's household.

Pauline Kolenda (1987: 11-2) presents the following types of joint family on the basis of the relatives who are its members.

- a) **Collateral joint family:** It comprises two or more married couples between whom there is a sibling bond. In this type, usually a brother and his wife and another brother and his wife live together with unmarried children.
- b) **Supplemented collateral joint family:** It is a collateral joint family along with unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives. The supplemented relatives are generally the widowed mother of the married brothers or the widower father, or an unmarried sibling.
- c) **Lineal joint family:** Two couples, between whom there is a lineal link, like between a parent and his married son or some times between a parent and his married daughter, live together.
- d) **Supplemented lineal joint family:** It is a lineal joint family together with unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives who do not belong to either of the lineally linked nuclear families; for example, the father's widower brother or the son's wife's unmarried brother or sister.
- e) **Lineal collateral joint family:** In this type three or more couples are linked lineally and collaterally. For instance we can have a family consisting of parents and their two or more married sons together with the unmarried children of the couples.
- f) **Supplemented lineal - collateral joint family:** In this type are found a lineal collateral joint family plus unmarried, widowed, separated relatives who belong to one of the nuclear families (lineally and collaterally linked), for example, the father's widowed sister or brother or an unmarried nephew of the father.

### Activity 1

Classify fifteen families in your neighbourhood into the categories in terms of the relatives who compose it.

### ii) The Number of Generations in One Unit

A joint family is also seen in terms of generations present in it. Some researchers, like I.P. Desai (1964) and T.N. Madan (1965) emphasise that the number of generations present in a family is important for identifying a joint family. A joint family is commonly defined as a three generational family. For instance a man, his married son and his grand children constitute a joint family.

### iii) The Sharing of Common Property

Researchers, like F.G. Bailey (1963), T.N. Madan (1961), have advocated the limitation of the term joint family to a group of relatives who form a property owning group, the coparcenary family. M.S. Gore (1968), for instance, defines a joint family as a group consisting of adult male coparceners and their dependants. The wives and young children of these male members are the dependents.

The female members have not been included in the category of the coparcenary. They have rights of residence and maintenance only as dependents. In 1937 an attempt was made to confer the same right, i.e., the right of inheritance of property on a Hindu widow as her son would have in the estate of her deceased husband. The Act enabled her to enjoy the income only from the immovable property of her husband during her lifetime.

Until the passing of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, two systems of inheritance dominated among patrilineal Hindus. In one system (called the Mitakshara school, adopted in most regions) a son has a vested interest in his father's ancestral property from the moment of his birth. The father cannot give away any part of this property to the detriment of his son's interest. Under the other system (the Dayabaga school, adopted in Bengal and Assam) the father is the absolute owner of his share and has a right to alienate his property the way he wants.

Among the patrilineal Hindus, some movable property is given to the daughters at the time of marriage as *stridhana*. With the passing of the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, a uniform system of inheritance has been established. The individual property of a male Hindu, dying intestate (having made no will), passes in equal shares between his son, daughter, widow and mother. Male and female heirs have come to be treated as equal in matters of inheritance and succession. Another important feature of the Act is that any property possessed by a female Hindu is held by her as her absolute property and she has full power to deal with it the way she likes. This Act has also given a woman the right to inherit from the father as well as from the husband. However the benefit conferred on a woman is limited when compared to the rights of the male members who still have rights to coparcenary ancestral property by birth. Daughters are not part of the coparcenary and have no birthrights.

The difficulty of looking at joint family as a coparcenary family unit is that it does not take into account those joint families, which possess little in the form of immovable or moveable property.

### 6.4.3 Variability in and Prevalence of Joint Family Living

- i) **Variability:** We identified a joint family in terms of what is shared and who shares it. We went through this exercise in this manner so that we can identify and analyse the multitude of factors that make a joint family. But we must remember that a joint family is a composite whole of both the "who and what" components. The exact composition or members and what is actually shared by these members in a particular family will vary through time and will also vary between families.

The following factors relating to the compositional aspect explain these variations within a family and between families.

- a) **The culturally patterned time of break-up:** It differs across caste, community and region. The time, when a married son or brother breaks away to form a separate residential and commensal unit, may vary within a family and between families.
  - b) **Demographic profiles:** Based on such factors like average life expectancy, average age at marriage, average number of children born per couple, age of father at the birth of various children etc., we will again find variation in the pattern of joint family living.
  - c) **The influence of education, spatial mobility and diversification of occupation** also bring about variation (CSWI 1974: 59).
- ii) **Prevalence:** By comparing seventy six studies which included family types across villages, caste communities and other population, Pauline Kolenda (1987: 78) outlined the pattern of prevalence of joint family in India. She observed that (a) joint family both lineal and collateral was more characteristic of higher twice-born castes and least characteristic among the economically poor and the untouchables, (b) there are regional differences in the proportion of joint families. For instance, the Gangetic plains showed higher incidence of joint families than Central India, i.e., in Madhya Pradesh, Western Rajasthan, parts of Maharashtra, and (c) there seem to be differences in the customary time of break-up of the joint family in various groups and places in India.

In conclusion, we can say that there is something like a patterned cycle of rearrangement of family living through time. As mentioned before, the family in India has to be viewed as a process, in terms of a developmental cycle. Some studies have described the Indian family types as stages in a family cycle (Desai 1964, Madan 1965, Cohn 1961). In the subsequent section we shall discuss this developmental cycle approach to the study of family types in India.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) List out the five criteria of jointness. Use two lines for your answer.  
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- ii) Name in three lines, the six major types of joint family structures as shown by Kolenda.  
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## 6.5 DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF THE FAMILY

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What is means by the developmental process? It denotes a movement, which occurs in a particular pattern. Developmental process of the family denotes that elements of family life take shape in a particular manner and direction. It relates

essentially to the process of fission and/or fusion occurring in the residential and compositional aspects of family living. We now look at the ideal of joint family living and elaborate the processual view of family life.

### **6.5.1 The Ideal of Joint Family Living**

The Indian patri-virilocal family can be viewed in terms of a cycle. A nuclear family develops into a joint family after the marriage of a son and coming of a daughter-in-law. After the death of the father, brothers often separate. In some places, like Andhra Pradesh, sons are expected to stay together with the parents till all the children in the family are married. After this they tend to separate. Thus, the process of fission takes place and the joint family is broken into relatively smaller family units. The parents may then choose to live with one of the sons. Some parents live alternately with all the sons. There may be other kin members who come to live with members of a nuclear family. For example a widow may come to live with her brother, his wife and children if she has no children of her own.

In spite of the alterations that occur in the compositional and/or the residential aspect of family living, what holds a family together is the recognition of oneness between the father and the son's households or between the brothers' households. A son's family is in a sense an extension of the father's family. In fact they are considered as 'one family'. It is in this family that the incoming wife has to be incorporated. Formal obligations towards relations by marriage and towards the daughters of the house are expected to be shared by the members of this 'one family'. In the developmental cycle of this 'one family', the emergence of fission in the form of nuclear households can be related to many factors.

One important factor is the high bargaining power of the wife (CSWI 1974:59-61). It has been pointed out that nuclear families develop out of joint families where the wife has high bargaining power. This means that in groups where the wife has a right to legal divorce, where bride price is given and where there is economic and social support to a woman from her natal family, there are considerable possibilities for the formation of nuclear households or fission in the 'one family'.

Those who have studied the family as a process point out that a particular type of composition of a household should be looked at as a stage in the developmental cycle. The presence of nuclear households should not be taken as indicative of change in the institution of joint family. Such families should be viewed as units, which will grow up into joint families when the sons grow up and marry. This may or may not happen in reality. Rather at the level of norms and expectations, most families try to achieve this ideal. We should also look at the other side of the coin. That is the side in which the concept of joint family living is not found for several reasons.

### **6.5.2 Inapplicability of the Ideal of Joint Family Living**

The idea of the developmental cycle of the family does not apply universally to all groups. For instance, among artisans any kind of joint family living may be more advantageous than among very poor agricultural groups where organisation of labour or pooling of labour offers little advantage (CSWI 1974: 59).

An illustration of this point can be given from the study by Cohn (1955) of the Chamars of Senapur, who are landless labourers. Among them the achievement of a joint family is difficult because of demographic, economic factors as well as due to the role of women and mobility. Let us look at these factors.

- a) **Demographic factor:** With low life expectancy there is much less chance of three generations existing at the same time.
- b) **Economic factors:** With no property, contribution to the income of the family is the major asset for this group. Since old people may not have the capacity to work and contribute to the family resources, they are not considered as essential and important persons in the family.
- c) **Role of women:** Due to the poor financial position of the family, women are required to take up paid employment outside the home. So the traditional division of labour in a joint family where women look after the home and children and men go out to work cannot operate. Women's economic activities make the continuity of the joint family difficult
- d) **Mobility:** Movement of individuals from one place to another, in search of better economic opportunity, also makes joint family living difficult.

Having discussed the factor of non-occurrence of joint family in certain groups, now we shall also look at the areas of changes in the family,

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## 6.6 CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

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In order to measure the overall changes taking place in the family as an institution in India, we need to identify the major forces or factors that have brought about changes in the family structure. A host of interrelated factors, economic, educational, legal, demographic, have affected the family in India. The impact has been differentially felt by different groups through time. Let us look at each factor separately keeping in mind that all these factors had a cumulative effect on different aspects of family living.

### 6.6.1 Factors of Change and Process of Disintegration of the Joint Family

Generally the factors leading to changes in the family are discussed in the context of the issue of disintegration of the joint family. In addition, we will discuss these factors also in the context of social changes occurring since the British rule in India.

- i) **Economic Factors:** Monetisation (introduction of cash transactions), diversification of occupational opportunities for employment in varied spheres, technological advancements (in communication and transport) are some of the major economic factors, which have affected the joint family system in India.

The economic system established by the British encouraged monetisation i.e., cash payment for services rendered and goods sold. The British also threw open opportunities for employment in government service. Those who were attracted by the employment opportunities and facilities provided by the British, often left their traditional occupations and moved to cities or towns where



these occupations were available. This meant residential separation from their ancestral home. If they were married, they sometimes took their wives and children (and even one or two relatives) along with them.

Since Independence, opportunities for and diversification of occupations have increased. With a constitutional commitment to promote equality between the sexes and to integrate women into the development process, a further impetus has emerged to draw women into varied kinds of occupations. In families where both the men and women go out to work, role relationships between different members of the family are affected.

- ii) **Educational Factors:** Again it was during the British rule that opportunities for higher education emerged in a significant way. All castes and communities had access to the facilities provided by the British with regard to education. Some of those who were able to gain access and exposure to English-medium education (exposure specially to the individualistic, liberal and humanitarian ideas) began to question some of the Hindu customs and practices relating to child marriage, denial of rights of education to women, property rights of women and ill-treatment of widows. Educated young men not only desired to postpone their marriage to a much later age than what was prescribed by family tradition, but also wanted to marry women with some educational background. Educated women (especially college educated) were expected to have a different kind of influence on family matters than uneducated or less educated women.
- iii) **Legal Factors:** Legislations regarding employment, education, marriage, and property, have affected the family system in many ways. Labour laws passed for the benefit of employees like the Indian Workmen Compensation Act (1923), the Minimum Wages Act 1948, helped to reduce the economic reliance of members on the joint family for economic support. In 1930 the Hindu Gains of Learning Act was passed whereby it was declared that the property acquired by a Hindu out of his education was his personal property though his education was paid for by the joint family. The distinction between self-acquired property and joint family property was drawn. In 1937, during the British rule a law was passed by which a woman acquired a limited right to her husband's property. She could hold the property of her husband after his death as a limited owner during her lifetime. But after she died the property devolved to the heirs (usually the sons) of the husband.

With regard to marriage, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1929, to curb infant marriages. It prescribed the minimum age (18 and 14 years respectively) at marriage for boys and girls. This Act also aimed to give women an opportunity for education. Now in India the prescribed minimum age at marriage is 21 for boys and 18 for girls.

After Independence the Hindu Succession Act (1956) was passed which gave a daughter and a son equal rights to the father's property. These legislations challenged the inheritance patterns that prevailed in joint families prior to the passing of this Act and the dependent position of women within the family.

- iv) **Urbanisation:** The process of urbanisation has also affected the pattern of family life in India. It denotes the movement of people from rural to urban areas and a shift from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations. It also

implies the adoption of an urban way of life. Urban life reflects increased density of population, heterogeneity of population, diversification and increased specialisation of occupations, complex division of labour. It also includes increased availability of educational and health facilities. Limited availability of living space, impersonality and anonymity also characterise urban life.

Partly as a result of population pressure on land, there has been a continuous influx of people into cities seeking education, jobs, medical care etc. What impact does migration to cities have on the families in villages? Residential separation due to mobility of members from one place to another affects the size and composition of the family. A man may take his wife and children along with him to establish a nuclear family in the city. There have been many studies, which show that migration to cities from villages and small towns has contributed to the rapid disintegration of large size family units. These observations have been mainly based on census data, which show a high percentage of nuclear families in cities (Mies 1980: 74). In the city, with problems of finding accommodation and limited space available for living, it becomes difficult for an average urbanite to maintain and support a large family.

The other factors which have been held responsible for encouraging smaller units are i) opportunities for higher education ii) heightened ambitions iii) increased occupational mobility iv) growing sense of individuality (i.e., thinking in terms of individual needs and ambitions rather than in terms of kinship needs and larger familial requirements).

### **6.6.2 Factors of Change Leading to Reinforcement of the Joint Family**

So far we have talked about the forces that were seen to negatively affect the joint family functioning as commensal, co-residential and large size unit. Sociologists while trying to measure the changes taking place in family life observe that urbanisation and industrialisation have, in fact, served to strengthen some aspects of joint family system. Here we will discuss three important studies to illustrate our point.

- i) K.M. Kapadia (1972), for instance, has drawn our attention to the fact that families, which have migrated to cities, still retain their bonds with their joint family in the village or town. Even after they residentially separate themselves from a joint family and form a nuclear family, they do not function as an isolated or completely independent unit in the city. These, families retain their kinship orientation and joint family ethic. This is evident from the physical presence of relatives at the time of certain events like birth, marriage, death, illness and so on. Sometimes members from the families living in a city go to the village to participate in such events or sometimes members from the rural family come to the city to involve themselves in functions or ceremonies or activities of their kin members.

The joint family ethic is very much evident in the performance of certain role obligations. These may include physical and financial assistance to kin members. A family in the city has the duty to give shelter and sustenance to all subsequent immigrants from the rural family, mostly young men in pursuit of education and work or relations seeking medical treatment in urban centres. So it can happen that in the course of time, a kind of joint family is formed in

the city, which is linked to the family in the village by close family ties, by a system of mutual rights, duties and obligations and also by the undivided family property.

- ii) Again the thesis that the joint family is dysfunctional to the process of industrialisation has been challenged by those who point out that some of the successful industrial establishments in the country are managed by the individuals who strictly live by joint family rules. They maintain coresidence, common hearth, contribute and share economic resources. In his study *The Indian Joint Family in Modern Industry*, Milton Singer (1968) points out that the joint family continues to be the norm among industrial entrepreneurs, despite changes in their material conditions of living. He observes that changes have taken place, within three generations, in residential, occupational and educational spheres. Social mobility has increased and ritual observations have been reduced in number and/or in importance. However, these alterations, he points out, have not transformed the joint family into isolated nuclear families. On the contrary, a modified joint family organisation has emerged in the urban industrial setting where even members from the ancestral home or village move into the urban setting. Thus, according to Singer, the industrial centre has simply become a new area for the working of the joint family system.
- iii) Kolenda in her study *Regional Differences in Family Structure in India* (1987: 4) observes that industrialisation serves to strengthen the joint family because an economic base has been provided to support it or because more hands are needed in a renewed family enterprise or because kin can help one another in striving for upward mobility.

No doubt the joint family that functions today in urban settings is different in many ways from the joint family which functioned in pre-independent and non-industrial India. For instance many of the coresidential, commensal joint families in urban areas remain joint because it is the norm or due to some advantages, or because of shortage of accommodation. Yet, there may be considerable separation in the management of household expenses on entertainment, education of children etc. Certain expenses may be regarded individual, like those on clothes, education, and vacation. These internal arrangements are different not only between urban and rural families but also between families in an urban area.

Among many families, across caste, class, region and communities, it is possible to find that sons along with the members of their nuclear family unit define the household of the parents as the 'main home' or 'common home'. This distinction may be given to a) the household of the eldest brother or to b) that of the brother with whom the parents live or, to c) that of the brother who lives on the ancestral or parental property. Also presence of a parental home (where one son and a parent live) or of a joint household of two brothers helps to keep the households (of parents and sons and of brothers) closer to each other, for it provides a kind of common meeting ground for all. Married daughters or sisters also come to this home. There may also be a greater sense of economic obligation between members of this "family" distributed in more than one household, residence and hearth (Dube 1974: 94).

**Activity 2**

Ask three members of three different generations, belonging to your family or your neighbourhood or friends, the advantages and disadvantages of living in a joint household. Based on their comments, write a note on this topic and compare it with those written by other students at the study centre.

**6.6.3 Emerging Patterns of Family Living**

Today there are varied patterns of family living. In urban areas both male and female members of the family may go for gainful employment outside the home. In some families the parents of the husband may live with his wife and children. While in some others, members of the wife's family may be living with the couple and their children. With both the husband and the wife going outside the home for gainful employment and with the absence or limited availability of child care facilities, presence of kin members to look after the home and children comes handy for the smooth functioning of the household. Those working couples who prefer to live in nuclear families and who fear or resist interference from kin members, try to organise their household with professional help from outside the family (like cooks, maid servants, crèches).

Aged parents, who formerly used to look towards their eldest son or other sons for support in old age, are now adjusting themselves to the new demands of family life by making economic provisions for their old age. Even within a city parents and married sons may reside separately. Another trend in family life in India is that girls are prepared to support their parent or parents in old age, and it is not impossible to find a widowed mother or parents staying with a married daughter (mainly, in the absence of sons) to help her to manage the household. Measures have been provided at the legal level to ensure that dependant old parents are looked after by a daughter if she is self-reliant even after her marriage. Bilateral kinship relations are more and more recognised and accepted today in many nuclear households in the cities.

Besides the above aspects, emerging patterns of family living include instances of domestic violence, utter lack of social and physical security for unmarried women (see Jain 1996a: 7).

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) What is meant by the cyclical view of family? Use three lines for your answer.

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- ii) List in three lines some of the factors, which have negatively affected the joint family system.

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- iii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true or F for false against each statement.
- Migration from a village to a city has affected the size of the families in which this migration occurred.
  - A joint family is totally dysfunctional in industrial towns and cities.
  - The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 gave women the right to inherit a share of the parental property.

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## 6.7 LET US SUM UP

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This unit has discussed the social institution of family in India. It has described the types of family in India and emphasised the continuum of the nuclear and the joint family system. Then, it described the nature of joint family in India and focused on what constitutes jointness and who constitute a joint family. It also discussed variability in and prevalence of joint family living in India. Then it looked at the family in terms of the developmental cycle approach and discussed the changes in the structure of joint family living. Finally, it outlined some of the emerging patterns of family life in contemporary India.

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## 6.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Commensality</b>	Relating to those who are traditionally allowed to eat together.
<b>Coparcenary</b>	Joint ownership of property amongst the male members of the family, in a patrilineal society.
<b>Matrilineal</b>	A principle to trace descent through the female line.
<b>Patrilineal</b>	A principle to trace descent through the male line.
<b>Patri-virilocal</b>	The term refers to the residence of a couple after marriage with the husband's father.

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## 6.9 FURTHER READING

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- Chakroborthy, Krishna 2002. *Family in India*. Rawat: New Delhi
- Dube, Leela 1974. *Sociology of Kinship*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay
- Gore, M.S. 1968. *Urbanization and Family Change in India*. Popular Prakashaa: Bombay
- Kolenda, Pauline 1987. *Regional Differences in Family Structure in India*. Rawat Publication: Jaipur

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## 6.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i)
  - a) F
  - b) T
- ii)
  - a) Supplemented nuclear family
  - b) Sub nuclear family
  - c) Single person household
  - d) Supplemented sub nuclear family

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Commensality; Common Residence; Common Property; Cooperation and Sentiment and Ritual bonds.
- ii) Collateral joint family, Supplemented collateral joint family, Lineal joint family, Supplemented joint family, Lineal collateral joint family, Supplemented-lineal-collateral joint family.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) In the cyclical view the nuclear and the joint family can be viewed as a continuum. A nuclear family develops into a joint family after marriage of a son and coming of a daughter-in-law. After the death of the father the sons may separate to form separate nuclear units. Later on each of these nuclear families may develop into a joint family.
- ii) Factors affecting the joint family system are (a) western secular education, (b) market cash economy, (c) salaried occupations, (d) laws, and (e) urbanisation.
- iii)
  - a) T
  - b) F
  - c) T



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## UNIT 7 MARRIAGE AND ITS CHANGING PATTERNS

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### Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
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### 7.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit aims to analyse the major features of the institution of marriage in India. After going through this unit you should be able to

- explain the universality of the institution of marriage in India
- discuss the aspect of age at marriage
- examine the different forms of marriage
- describe variations in the pattern of selection of spouse
- describe the basic rites of marriage in different communities
- outline how in different groups different kinds of material and symbolic transfer of wealth and prestige accompany marriage
- examine the possibilities and mechanisms for divorce and widow remarriage.

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## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Block I, you were introduced to the elements of unity and diversity in Indian social structure. You were told that though certain institutions like family, marriage and kinship are universal in India, there are variations in these institutions based on region, religion, language, caste, class and occupation. That is why it is difficult to make generalisation about the institutions of Indian social structure.

Keeping this observation in mind unit 6 of this Block introduced you to the various aspects of the institution of family. Unit 7 focuses on certain salient features of marriage that help us to see the common as well as different elements in the institution of marriage in India. Section 7.2 deals with the feature of universality of the institution of marriage. Age at marriage in India is discussed in section 7.3. Thus sections 7.2 and 7.3 bring out the unity that exists, across India, relating to these two features of marriage. The features discussed in the context of diversity are the forms of marriage (section 7.4), patterns of selection of spouse (section 7.5), **rites** of marriage (section 7.6), material and non-material transactions involved in marriage (section 7.7), and the possibilities and mechanisms of divorce and widow remarriage in India (section 7.8). Most of these features relate to a man or a woman's primary marriage (i.e. marriage for the first time). Secondary marriage of a widow or a separated or divorced woman is accompanied by a nominal ceremony, where there are no or little rites. Similarly, pattern of selection of spouse may differ in a primary and a secondary marriage.

In the course of discussion of each of these aspects we shall talk of the changing patterns of marriage with particular reference to the changes that have taken place since Independence. We will discuss each aspect of marriage with suitable illustrations from some of the major communities like the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians. Except for passing references, patterns of marriage that are found among the tribal population have not been described mainly because there is a separate Block in this Course on tribal population.

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## 7.2 UNIVERSALITY OF THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE IN INDIA

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Marriage is an important social institution. It is a relationship, which is socially approved. The relationship is defined and sanctioned by custom and law. The definition of the relationship includes not only guidelines for behaviour relating to sex but also regarding things like the particular way labour is to be divided and other duties and privileges. Children born of marriage are considered the legitimate offspring of the married couple. This legitimacy is important in the matter of inheritance and succession. Thus marriage is not only a means of sexual gratification but also a set of cultural mechanisms to ensure the continuation of the family. It is more or less a universal social institution in India.

The religious texts of many communities in India have outlined the purpose, rights and duties involved in marriage. Among the Hindus, for instance, marriage is regarded as a socio-religious duty. Ancient Hindu texts point out three main aims of marriage. These are *dharma* (duty), *praja* (progeny) and *rati* (sensual pleasure). That is to say that marriage is significant from both the societal as well as the individual's point of view. Marriage is significant in that it provides children especially

sons who would not only carry on the family name but also perform periodic rituals including the annual “*shraddha*” to propitiate the dead ancestors. Majority of the Hindus look upon son(s) as a support in old age to parents and as the most important source of economic enrichment to the family. Marriage, in the Hindu system, enables a man to enter into the stage of a householder. Both a man and a woman are regarded incomplete without marriage.

Even among other communities in India, marriage is regarded as an essential obligation. Islam looks upon marriage as “*sunnah*” (an obligation) which must be fulfilled by every Muslim. Christianity holds marriage as crucial to life and lays emphasis on the establishment of a mutual relationship between husband and wife and on their duty to each other.

The significance attached to marriage is reflected in the fact that only a very small percentage of men and women remain unmarried. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI 1974: 81) has indicated that only 0.5 percent of women never marry in India. By and large girls are brought up to believe that marriage is a woman’s destiny; married state is desirable and motherhood is a cherished achievement. Only a very small percentage of men and women remain unmarried by choice.

Today, marriage is still considered important and necessary, and only few individuals remain unmarried by choice. Goals of marriage are, however, undergoing changes especially for the urban and educated sections of the population. The older notions regarding large size family, (i.e., large number of children especially sons being the source of status for parents) are being replaced by preference for small size family. Marriage for self-fulfillment rather than primarily for procreation or societal welfare is also becoming prevalent.

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## **7.3 AGE AT MARRIAGE IN INDIA**

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Apart from marriage being universal, early marriage is also common in India. Though there are differences between various religious groups, classes and castes in the matter of age at marriage, the median age at marriage is low in India. As early as the 18th and nineteenth century, efforts have been made to curb infant or child marriage. Reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotiba Phule and others in the nineteenth and early twentieth century opposed child marriage. In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed (popularly known as the Sarda Act) and the minimum age for marriage for girls and boys was fixed at 14 years and 17 years respectively. The Act was made applicable to all Indians. The latest amendment (in 1978) has raised the minimum age for marriage for boys and girls to 18 years and 21 years, respectively. Though the age at marriage of females in India has been rising slowly since around the middle of the twentieth century; the level at the end of the twentieth century was low in comparison to the most of the low fertility countries (Das and Dey 1998: 92).

### **7.3.1 Low Age at Marriage**

In spite of legislations, and governmental and non-governmental efforts to educate the people about the dangers of early marriage, age at marriage is low in India. The 1971 Census data on marital status of women indicate that the average age of marriage for girls in more than one-third of the total number of districts in our

country was below 15 years (Ghosh 1984: 5). The mean age at marriage for females for the year 1991 was 18.3. The female age at marriage was lowest in Rajasthan (17.5) followed by states of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar (17.6 and 17.8 respectively) and it was highest in Kerala (22.3) followed by Assam and Punjab (21.1 and 21.0 respectively) (Census report 1991). In newspapers and journals we read about marriage melas, specially in rural areas, in which the average age of the bride is reported to be below fifteen years. In some states like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, child marriages continue (National Perspective Plan 1988).

Low age at marriage is related with the near universality of marriage in India. Marriage is regarded essential and thought of a girl's marriage is entertained right from her childhood. In some regions, the existence of clear-cut expectations, preferences, and rules regarding choice of a marriage partner also lead to early marriage. The desire and concern to preserve the chastity or purity of women is yet another factor. In fact, till the 1920's among certain upper castes, pre-puberty marriages were not only popular but also mandatory. There is the belief that the onset of puberty is the right age for marriage for a girl as she is then ready for maternity. This is also another important factor leading to early marriage (CSWI: 1974).

### **7.3.2 Rise in the Age at Marriage**

Female age at marriage rose from 16.1 years in 1961 to 19.3 in 1991. The rural urban gap in female age at marriage for 1991 is 2 years and this indicates that in spite of rise in age at marriage a wide gap persists between the rural and urban areas of the country (Das and Dey 1998: 109). It is important to point out on the basis of growing evidence that age at marriage has not been low for all communities in India. For instance, among many of the hill tribes in India the average age at marriage has been above 15 years for girls. Also among the Christians, Parsis and some educated sections living in urban areas, the age at marriage has been above the minimum age prescribed by law.

You may ask what have been some of the factors that have helped in raising the age at marriage among certain sections of the population. Research (CSWI 1974: 82) suggests that in urban areas and for the well to do in rural areas education and the need for employment of boys have raised the age of marriage. In states where the literacy rate is high, age at marriage is also much higher than in those states where literacy level is low.

While, it is encouraging to note that education has helped in raising the age at marriage, it has however led to some unintended consequences. Education combined with increasing demands for dowry have led to a rise in the age at marriage. Educated girls seek educated boys and the price (dowry) of an educated groom in the 'marriage market' is high. Since most marriages in India are arranged, parents arrange a marriage only when they meet the dowry demands. Thus, necessarily the marriages of the girls are postponed and age at marriage increases. We will talk about dowry in section 7.7.2. In the next section we discuss diverse features of marriage in India and take up first the forms of marriage.

**Activity 1**

Talk to married persons (they could be from your family or neighbourhood) on the following aspects of marriage. Note down their age, educational qualifications and religion before you ask them these questions.

- i) Has any one in your family remained unmarried after the age of 35? If, yes, what are the reasons for this?
- ii) At what age did you get married?

Relate your answers to what has been discussed in the unit, and find out if the person remained unmarried by choice or by necessity. That is to say he/she has taken a voluntary decision to remain single. Or, the person has remained unmarried because of reasons like physical defects, poor economic status of the family or dowry etc. Secondly if he/she married at an age which was beyond the minimum legal age at marriage. Compare your answers with those given by other students at your study center.

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## 7.4 FORMS OF MARRIAGE

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All the commonly listed forms of marriage, namely, **monogamy** (marriage of a man to a woman at a time), and polygamy (marriage of a man or woman to more than one spouse) are found in India. The latter, that is polygamy, has two forms, namely, **polygyny** (marriage of a man to several women at a time) and **polyandry** (marriage of a woman to several men at a time). In ancient texts of the Hindus we find references to eight forms of marriage. For details see unit 15 on Hindu Social Organisation in Block 4. These forms reflect more on the methods by which a spouse is acquired than the number of spouses one could have at a time.

### 7.4.1 Monogamy, Polygyny, Polyandry

In this section, we shall focus only on monogamy, and both forms of polygamy. With regard to the prevalence of these three forms, one has to distinguish between what is permitted and what is practised by different sections of the population through time.

- i) **Monogamy:** Among the Hindus, until the passing of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, a Hindu man was permitted to marry more than one woman at a time. Although permitted, polygyny has not been common among the Hindus. Only limited sections of the population like kings, chieftains, headmen of villages, members of the landed aristocracy actually practised polygyny.

We may say that those who had the means and the power to acquire more than one wife at a time were polygynous. The other important reasons for polygyny were the barrenness of the wife and or her prolonged sickness. Among some occupational groups like the agriculturists and artisans, polygyny prevailed because of an economic gain involved in it. Where women are self-supporting and contribute substantially to the productive activity a man can gain by having more than one wife.

Concerted efforts to remove this practice were made in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century by social reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy,

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati and others. After Independence, the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 established monogamy for all Hindus and others who came to be governed by this Act. Some of the 'other' communities covered by this Act are the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. Strict monogamy is prescribed in Christian and Parsi communities.

- ii) **Polygyny:** Islam, on the other hand, has allowed polygyny. A Muslim man can have as many as four wives at a time, provided all are treated as equals. However, it seems that polygynous unions have been restricted to a small percentage of Muslims, namely the rich and the powerful.

With regard to the tribal population, we find that the customary law of the tribals in general (except a few) has not forbidden polygyny. Polygyny is more widespread among the tribes of north and central India.

- iii) **Polyandry:** Polyandry is even less common than polygyny. A few Kerala castes practised polyandry until recently. The Toda of the Nilgiris in Tamilnadu, the Khasa of Jaunsar Bawar in Dehradun district of Uttaranchal and some North Indian castes practise polyandry. In the fraternal form of polyandry, the husbands are brothers. In 1958, C.M. Abraham (1958: 107-8) has reported that in Central Travancore fraternal polyandry was practised by large number of groups like the Irava, Kaniyan, the Vellan and the Asari.

The factors that are related to the prevalence of polyandry are

- a) desire to prevent division of property within a family (especially in fraternal polyandry)
- b) desire to preserve the unity and solidarity of the sibling group (in fraternal polyandry)
- c) the need for more than one husband in a society where men are away on a commercial or military journey
- d) a difficult economy, especially an unfertile soil, which does not favour division of land and belongings (Peter 1968).

### **7.4.2 Prevailing Patterns**

What is the position today regarding these forms of marriage? Monogamy is the most prevalent form of marriage in India. However, bigamous (having two spouses at a time) marriages have been reported among the Hindus in many parts of India. It is the man who very often commits bigamy and escapes punishment by turning the loopholes of the law to his advantage. It is the wife who is often unaware of his second marriage, and even if she is aware of it, is unaware of her legal rights and accepts her fate. Social and economic dependence on husband and inadequate social condemnation of the man's actions are some of the reasons for the wife's acceptance of the husband's second marriage.

Among the Muslims it is the man who is allowed to have four wives. Among them men enjoy greater privileges than women. A Muslim woman cannot marry a second time when her first husband is alive or if she has not been divorced by him.



- i) What is the legally prescribed age at marriage for boys and girls? Use one line for your answer.

.....

- ii) What are the three forms of marriage found in India? Use two lines for your answer.

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## 7.5 PATTERNS OF SELECTION OF SPOUSE

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There are three striking features regarding selection of spouse in India. Firstly the rules of endogamy, including those of hypergamy, indicate the groups into which a person is expected to find a spouse. Secondly, rules of exogamy, on the other hand, prohibit a person from marrying into certain groups. Both the rules of endogamy and exogamy are linked mainly to the caste and kinship structure. Thirdly, marriages in India are mostly arranged by the parents or elders.

### 7.5.1 Endogamy including the Rule of Hypergamy

We will first discuss the rule of endogamy and then show that the rule of hypergamy operates within the endogamous rules.

- i) **Endogamy:** The rule of endogamy requires an individual to marry within a specified or defined group of which he or she is a member. The group may be a caste, clan, racial, ethnic or religious group.

Religious and caste endogamy are two of the most pervasive forms of endogamy in India. Though legally permitted, inter-religious marriages are not commonly arranged or popular. In India there are innumerable castes which are divided into innumerable sub-castes which are further divided into subsections and each one of them is endogamous. The endogamous unit, for many Hindu sub-castes, consists of a series of kin clusters living in a fairly restricted geographical area. The operation of the rule of endogamy shows interesting variation by region and religion.

In South India, for instance, among many castes marriage with some relatives is preferred. In the Marathi, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada speaking areas, marriages with the cross-cousins (children of father's sisters or mother's brothers) are preferred. In North India, neither the parallel nor the cross-cousins can intermarry. In North India, on the other hand, there is a tendency to marry into villages that are not farther than twelve or thirteen kilometres from one's village. Social and economic links are restricted to a few kin groups residing in certain areas. There are spatial as well as social boundaries which limit the field of marriage and these boundaries vary from region to region.

Endogamous rules are operative in non-Hindu sections of the population too. Among the Muslims, the 'Syeds', recognised as an aristocratic class, are divided into various endogamous groups. Sometimes the endogamous group

is so small that it includes only the extended families of a man's parents. Muslims permit marriages between both cross (mother's brother's children and father's sister's children) and parallel (mother's sister's children and father's brother's children) cousins. In fact, the father's brother's daughter is a preferred mate. Among Muslims the concept of purity of blood seems to be mainly responsible for preference of marriage between close relatives particularly between children of siblings. Many Muslim groups in North and Western India consider marriage between children of two brothers as most desirable. It is held that the desire to keep the family property within the family has been another important reason for close kin marriages. It is generally believed that marriage of the near kin helps to mitigate the conflict between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and this helps to strengthen the intra-as well as inter-familial ties.

- ii) **Hypergamy:** According to the rule of hypergamy, the status of the husband is always higher than that of the wife. Those who follow this rule always seek for their daughters those men who have social status higher than their own. It is a rule whereby marriage takes place or is generally arranged within a sub caste between a girl of a lower social status and a boy of a higher social status. This practice has occurred mainly among different subsections of a caste or sub caste rather than between castes. It is found that the tendency towards hypergamous stratification is available among all castes. Each caste is divided into several sub-castes, which are again divided into hierarchically ordered groups. It is quite clear that the rule of hypergamy operates within the confines of each endogamous group.

In ancient scriptures, it is given that *anuloma* marriages, based on the rule of hypergamy whereby a girl is married to a boy from upper caste sub-caste, were permitted. It is also given that *pratiloma* marriages, based on the rule of hypogamy, whereby a girl is married to a boy from a lower caste sub-caste, were not permitted. It would seem that in ancient times hypergamy (*anuloma*) across the four fold *varna* order was acceptable while hypogamy (*pratiloma*) was not permitted.

Practice of hypergamy has been found among such groups as the Rajput and the Jat of North India, Anavil Brahmin and Patidar of Gujarat, Maithil Brahmin of Bihar, Rarhi Brahmin of Bengal and among the Kanyakubja and Saryupari Brahmin of Uttar Pradesh to some extent. It has also been found among the Nayar, Kshatriya and Ambalavasi of Kerala.

The practice has shown a regional pattern. For instance, among the Rajput of Uttar Pradesh, traditionally girls were given in marriage from east to the west direction within a sub-caste. This is so because the Rajput clans were associated with a geographic region and a corresponding rating by region. Prestige of regions increased towards the westerly direction (Karve 1965: 165-171).

In the areas where hypergamy is practised, clans and lineages are of unequal status. Research (CSWI 1976: 65) has indicated that female infanticide among the Jat and Rajput was mainly a consequence of hypergamy. This was so because the girls of the highest groups had very little choice for marriage. Boys of their group could marry lower down while they had only the boys in groups which were at least equal to their own. Dowry has been generally high in hypergamous communities. Men from the Kulin subcaste of Bengal (belonging to the Rarhi Brahmin caste) often married many women at a time and demanded huge dowries.

This is so because they are ranked as the highest subcaste and women of this group have to be married within the group.

### 7.5.2 Exogamy

Exogamous rules are complementary to endogamous rules. These rules prohibit marriage between members of certain groups. The prohibition may be so narrow as to include those members within the elementary family (i.e. marriage between a brother and sister or parent and child) or so wide to include all those with whom genealogical kinship can be traced. The prohibition placed, on sexual intercourse between persons related in certain prohibited degrees of kinship is called incest, e.g., sexual relations or marriage between a brother and sister are defined as incestuous in most groups. The definitions of these groups, however, show variations mainly by region and religion. In North India, a girl born within a village is considered the daughter of the village and hence cannot marry a boy from her own village. Thus, the village becomes the exogamous unit here. In South India, the exogamous unit in one's own generation is defined by one's own sisters/brothers and real and classificatory parallel cousins.

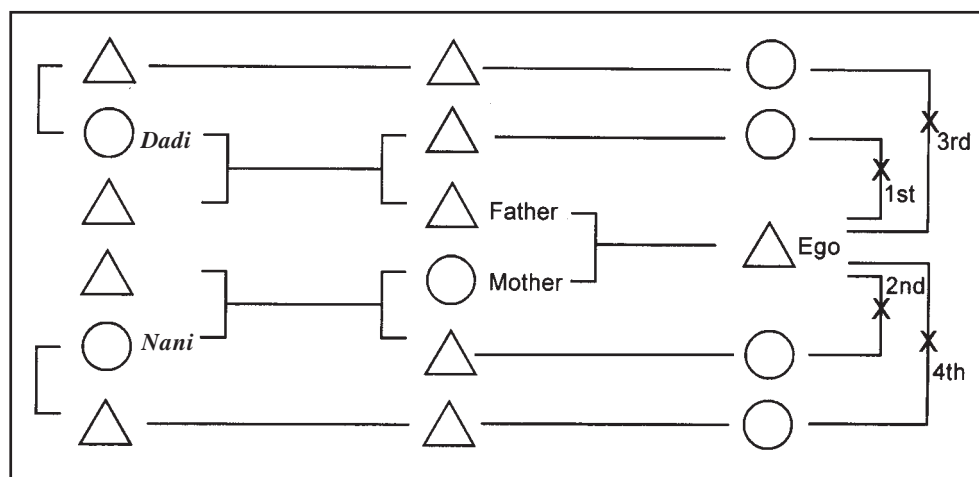
Two other kinds of exogamy, which have been prevalent among several Hindu communities in North and South India, are *sagotra* and *sapinda* exogamy.

- i) **Sagotra exogamy:** In the context of the 'twice born' castes (belonging to the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya *varna* across) India *sagotra* exogamy applies to those who trace descent from a common ancestor, usually a *rishi* or a sage. All these people cannot intermarry. The term *gotra* is commonly used to mean an exogamous category within a *jati*. One of its principal uses is to regulate marriage alliance. All members of a *gotra* are supposed to be descendants of or associated with the same ancestral figure.

A four-clan rule or four *gotra* exogamous rule prevails among Hindu castes in North India. In accordance with this four clan (*gotra*) rule, a man cannot marry a girl from (i) his father's *gotra* or clan, (ii) his mother's *gotra* or clan, (iii) his *dadi*'s, i.e. his father's mother's *gotra* or clan, and (iv) his *nani*'s, i.e., his mother's mother's *gotra* or clan. In almost all castes in the northern zone, according to Karve (1953), the marriage between cousins is prohibited. We can show the four-clan rule in a diagram in the following manner.

The 1st cross in figure 7.1 indicates the marriage of ego to a person of ego's father's *gotra*. The 2nd cross indicates the marriage of ego to a person of ego's mother's *gotra*. The 3rd cross indicates the marriage of ego to a person of ego's paternal grandmother's (*dadi*'s) *gotra*. The 4th cross indicates the marriages of ego to a person of ego's maternal grandmother's (*nani*'s) *gotra*. All the four categories of marriage are prohibited among the Hindu castes in North India.

- ii) **Sapinda:** *Sapinda* exogamy indicates the prohibition placed on the inter-marriage between certain sets of relatives. *Sapinda* represents the relationship between the living member and their dead ancestors. The term *sapinda* means (i) those who share the particles of the same body (ii) people who are united by offering '*pinda*' or balls of cooked rice to the same dead ancestor. Hindu lawgivers do not give a uniform definition regarding the kinship groups within which marriage cannot take place. Some prohibit marriage of members within seven generations on the father's side and five generations of members from



**Fig.7.1: The four clan rule**

the mother's side. Some others have restricted the prohibited generations to five on the father's and three on the mother's side. Several others have permitted the marriage of cross-cousins (marriage of a person with his father's sister's children or mother's brother's children).

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 does not allow marriage within five generations on the father's side and three on the mother's side. However, it permits the marriage of cross-cousins where this is customary. The patrilineal joint family is an important exogamous unit among Hindus. This much is quite clear from the fact that marriage is prohibited within five generations on the father's side.

Among Christians and Muslims, the elementary or nuclear family is the exogamous unit. Moplah Muslims of North Malabar in Kerala live in matrilineal units and among them matrilineage is the exogamous unit. Lineage exogamy also exists among the Muslim Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir (Srinivas 1969: 56). Among the Nayars, who are a matrilineal group, a girl can never marry her mother's brother.

### 7.5.3 Arranged Marriages

Majority of the marriages in India are fixed or arranged by parents or elders on behalf of and/or with the consent of the boy or the girl involved in marriage. When marriage is fixed by parents or elders it is called an arranged marriage. This is in contrast to marriage by self choice (popular example of marriage by self choice is the so called "love marriage"). In some instances both these types of selection of one's spouse can be found together.

The prevalence of arranged marriages in India can be traced in relation to what has been said before, that is (i) existence of the rules of endogamy which limit marriage alliance within certain groups, (ii) the rules of exogamy which disallow marriage within *gotra*, (iii) regulations about prescriptive (allowing) and proscriptive (prohibiting) rules about marriage with parallel and cross-cousins and (iv) customs which indicate a specific preference for marriage between certain types of relatives or groups. All these factors make arranged marriages the most desirable form of selection of spouse. Choice of spouse cannot be left to the decision of the young if these restrictions and preferences are to be effectively carried out. The restrictions placed on free interaction between a boy and a girl in India is yet another factor which does not allow marriage by self choice.

Though the measure of participation in choosing one's life partner has shown variations between different groups, by and large, marriage arranged by parents/elders is the most prevalent form of selection of spouse. For majority of the high caste Hindus, matching of horoscope (charts relating to one's birth under certain astrological calculations) constitutes an important element in the final choice of the marriage partner. Today apart from astrologers matching the horoscopes of a boy and a girl, computers are also used to match horoscopes. Among the Muslims, the parents, elders or *wali* (guardian) arrange a marriage (Gazetteer of India 1965: 547 and CSWI 1974: 62).

### 7.5.4 Recent Trends

To what extent are the rules of endogamy, hypergamy, exogamy and arranged marriages operative today? Intercaste marriages are now recognised by law and take place on a larger scale than before. These intercaste marriages constitute only a very small proportion of the total number of marriages taking place. They are increasing at a slow rate. Caste endogamy is still highly relevant in the context of the patterns of selection of spouse. Many caste organisations devise all kinds of strategies to confine marriages within their castes and subcastes. There are even marriage "*melas*" (fairs) to ensure that the choice of the spouse is made within the particular subcaste.

Though majority of marriages continue to be arranged by parents/elders/*wali*, the pattern of choosing one's spouse has undergone some modifications today. We find the following patterns i) marriage by parents'/elders' choice without consulting either the boy or girl, ii) marriage by self-choice, iii) marriage by self-choice but with parents' consent, iv) marriage by parents' choice but with the consent of both the boy and the girl involved in the marriage, v) marriage by parents' choice but with the consent of only one of the two partners involved. Very often, the boy is consulted and his consent is taken. Parents/elders do not think it is important to ask the girl whether she approves the match. Among urban educated classes arranged marriage with the consent of the boy and the girl is often the most preferred pattern (Blumberg and Dwarki 1980: 139). Marriages are even arranged through newspaper advertisement for both the boy and the girl.

From this discussion of the patterns of selection of spouse, we now move on to marriage rites in India.

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## 7.6 MARRIAGE RITES

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Rites constitute an important part of marriage in India. We find variations in rites not only in terms of religion but also in terms of caste, sect and rural or urban residence. Let us look at some of the basic rites in a few communities in India.

### 7.6.1 Basic Rites of Marriage in Different Communities

For the Hindus, marriage is a **sacrament**. This means that a Hindu marriage cannot be dissolved. It is a union for life. This is also reflected in the marital rites. Some of the essential rites are *kanyadan* (the giving off of the bride to the groom by the father), *panigrahana* (the clasping of the bride's hand by the groom), *agniparinaya* (going around the sacred fire by the bride and the groom), *lajahoma* (offering of the parched grain to the sacrificial fire) and *saptapadi* (walking seven steps by the bride and the groom). These basic rituals are not confined to the



twice born castes (the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya) only, but these are also performed with some variations among other castes too. Some invite a Brahmin priest to recite the *mantra* which are religious invocations. The ritual of *kanyadan* is the most popular of all the basic rituals.

If we analyse the significance of the rituals of Hindu marriage we find that they stress male primacy and superiority (CSWI 1974: 64) and reflect the notion of transfer of the bride from her father's side to her husband's side. While emphasising life partnership for the two people involved in marriage, the basic rituals exhort the bride to follow the husband, to act according to his wishes and to remain steadfast in loyalty and love. In fact, marriage is the first major *samskara* (life cycle ritual) for a Hindu woman.

In some regions, among certain castes, the pre-marriage ritual is more elaborate than the actual wedding ceremony. For instance, among certain sections of the Nayar castes in Kerala, the actual marriage constitutes only the exchange of cloth between the bride and the groom, mutual garlanding and going around the lighted lamps. The pre-marital ritual of "*talikettu kalyanam*" is more elaborate than the actual marriage ceremony (Gazetteer of India 1965: 548).

Certain sections of the Jain community (like the Digambara and Svetambara) and the Sikh community have marriage customs and rituals which are similar to those of the Hindus. The core ceremony of the Sikhs however is different. It is called "*anand karaj*" and is solemnised in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs. The main ceremony consists of the bridal couple going four times around the holy book. Appropriate verses, known as '*shabad*' are recited by the officiating priest. Unlike Hindus, Sikhs do not have any particular period or season for marriages.

Muslim marriage is not a sacrament. Rather, it is a contract, which can be terminated. Among the Muslims, the marriage rituals show variation by sect and region. Some rites of the Shia sect of the Muslims differ from the Sunni, a sect among the Muslims. However, the essential ceremony of Muslim marriage is known as the *nikah*. The ceremony is performed by the priest or the *kazi*. The *nikah* is considered to be complete only when the consent of both the groom and the bride has been obtained. A formal document known as *nikahnama* bears the signatures of the couple. Among certain sections, the signatures of two witnesses are also included in the document and the document may also contain details of the payment to be made to the bride by the groom. This payment is called the *mehr* which is a stipulated sum of money or other assets paid to the wife either immediately after the wedding or postponed till some future date.

Many of the marriage customs and rituals of the Muslims are similar to those of the Hindus. Thus, customs like smearing of turmeric (*Haldi*), applying *mehndi*, mock testing of the bride's proficiency at domestic work are as much a part of the Muslim marriage as Hindu marriage. In fact, among the Moplah Muslims of Kerala, the *nikah* ceremony is performed as laid down by Islam but their marriage is not regarded complete without the Hindu function '*kalyanam*'.

What is most significant to note in the rituals of Muslim marriage is that the custom of paying a *mehr* to the wife provides some sort of guarantee of security to the woman.



Among the Christians, the wedding takes place in a church. The exchange of the ring is an important ritual among them. Some sections of the Christians, like the Syrian Christians of Kerala, have the Hindu rite of the groom tying a '*tali*' on the bride's neck. *Tali* is a symbol of the married state of Hindu women in South India.

Among Christians, the following pronouncement, which forms a part of the marriage rites, reflects the importance assigned to the relationship of the husband and wife, rather than the relationship between the families of the husband and the wife. "Man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be one flesh." This outlook emphasises the fact that marriage is a bond between two individuals and not between two families. It does not focus on the transfer of the girl from one family to another (CSWI 1974: 45).

As a part of marriage celebrations all communities hold wedding processions and feasts. Their scale may vary according to the socio-economic status of the bride and bridegroom's families.

### **7.6.2 Customary Marriages**

While rites constitute an important component of marriage among many communities, there are sections or groups of people who do not have religious rites in marriage. Marriages with no rites are referred as customary marriages. These marriages are based on simple practices. For instance, in some groups living in the Himalayan tract, putting a ring in the bride's nose is a customary form of marriage. Customary forms of marriage are generally found among those groups where divorce and secondary marriages are permitted and practised. Secondary marriage of a widow or a separated or divorced woman is usually celebrated in a simple way, which indicates essentially the renewal of her married state (CSWI 1974: 83).

Today marriage rites have been condensed to a great extent. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 provides for secular and civil marriage before a registrar. This Act applies to all Indian citizens who chose to make use of its provisions, irrespective of religious affiliations. Civil marriage enables persons to avoid the expense of traditional weddings. However, weddings continue to be an expensive affair for a large majority of people. Large sums of money, gifts of jewellery, furniture, vessels, clothes have to be bought and generally the expenses are more for the bride's side than the groom's side. This discussion takes us to the next topic of the transfer of goods and prestige that accompany marriage in India.

#### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Define (a) endogamy (b) exogamy and (c) hypergamy. Answer in ten lines.

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- .....
- .....
- .....
- ii) What is the main feature of a customary marriage? Answer in one line.
- .....

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## 7.7 THE TRANSFER OF WEALTH AND PRESTIGE THAT ACCOMPANY MARRIAGE

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Marriage, in most cases, involves material as well as non-material transactions between the bride-giver and the bride-taker. It involves, with a few exceptions, the transfer of the wife to the husband's family.

Two major types of transfers of material wealth accompany marriage. In one, wealth travels in the opposite direction of the bride and in another it travels along with the bride in the same direction. The former is identified as bride price while the latter as dowry (CSWI 1974:69).

### 7.7.1 Bride-Price

The tradition of bride-price is found among certain patrilineal tribes and some castes in the middle and lower rung of the caste ladder. The form and amount of bride-price vary from region to region, from tribe to tribe and within a tribe from time to time. Some pay only cash, some others only in kind while some pay both in kind and cash. Payment in kind includes a wide variety of things like clothes, ornaments, tools and implements, liquor, grain, cattle, goats and other forms of livestock. For instance, among the Uraon tribe of Chotanagpur a man takes sets of clothes for the bride's relatives. Bhumias of Orissa give cash, five or six sarees and three goats as bride-price (CSWI 1974: 69). Bargaining for bride-price is also common. In some tribes, the groom offers his services to the bride's father as a form of bride-price.

Under the local influence of high caste values and practices, some groups have given up their custom of bride-price and have adopted the custom of dowry. For example, the peasants of the villages of Karnataka and the Godia (or the cowherds) caste in Andhra Pradesh have given up their custom of bride-price and adopted the custom of dowry (CSWI 1974:70).

Bride-price or the payment in cash and/or kind to the bride's father by the groom's father reflects the transfer of authority over the bride from her father to the groom and his family. The idea of compensation for the loss of a productive worker is also implicit in it. The bride's family loses a productive worker when the girl gets married and leaves her parental home. So, the bride's family is paid a compensation for this loss (CSWI 1974: 69-72). The girl is a source of wealth and prestige to her natal family, that is the family in which she is born. In this sense, the transaction implies the transfer of all that the girl stands for. Now, let us look at another form of transaction of wealth and prestige that accompany marriage in India.

### 7.7.2 Practice of Dowry

Broadly speaking, dowry refers to a specific category of gifts given by the bride's side to the groom's side. This set of gifts symbolises the transfer of wealth from the bride's side to the groom's side. This act confers prestige and honour to both the sides. The bride-giver gains prestige within his community by giving dowry while the bride-taker receives both wealth and prestige in his own and other communities. Of late it has become groom-price.

Today, in legal terms, dowry constitutes what is given to the son-in-law and or to his parents on demand either in cash or in kind by the bride's side. There are, of course, regional variations in the practice and people's understanding of the term 'dowry'. Some view it mainly as 'groom-price' and often the price paid to the groom depends on the groom's qualifications, job, social status regardless of the bride's parents' ability to pay the price demanded by the groom's side. Some include in the custom of dowry i) what is given to the bride during and after the wedding, during occasions like festivals, child birth, initiation etc. in the first few years of marriage ii) what is given to the bridegroom before or after marriage and iii) what is presented to the in-laws of the girl.

Here, we need to note that (a) dowry constitutes an array of gifts given to the groom's side over time and (b) what is given at the time of the wedding is substantial and conspicuous. Goods that constitute dowry are i) movable property like sarees, jewels, silver vessels, cash, vehicles like car, tractor and ii) immovable property such as land, house, factories, jobs etc.

The form and amount of dowry and purpose to which dowry is put have shown variations based on caste, class, region and socio-economic status. Among the landowning castes of Andhra Pradesh (like Reddy, Kamma) a father may give to his daughter land and jewellery. The cash may be handed over to the groom or his parents but the land is registered in the name of the daughter. Money also is deposited in the name of the bride or put in trust for her. In North India, where there has been a tradition of giving large utensils to the girl, the utensils generally come under the use and control of the in-laws. The amount of cash involved in dowry varies mainly according to the socio-economic status and expectations of the groom's community as well as the socio-economic status of the bride's family. Again, the gift in cash or in kind involved in dowry may be put to productive purposes or just hoarded as wealth by the bride, the groom and/or his family (CSWI 1974: 70-72).

The practice of giving gift to the girl at the time of and after the wedding has been viewed as *streedhana*. This means that the gifts given to the daughter are a kind of property given to the daughter of the house who has to leave her natal home to join her husband. *Streedhana* reflects the notion of female right to property (CSWI 1974: 70 72). It is looked as a source of wealth for the married daughter to fall back in times of crisis and need. In many regions of South India, the gifts (ornaments, vessels) given to the daughter belong to her exclusively and she has the right to use them the way she wants. Her in-laws generally do not claim possession over them.

Today, the practice of dowry has taken a very ugly turn. As mentioned in section 7.3.2, in many instances, the practice of dowry has worsened. Educated girls look out for boys who are more qualified than them. Highly qualified boys demand

a high dowry. As a result of increase in dowry demand, parents often are unable to get their daughters married. If they do, they get them married beyond their means and are subject to different kinds of continuing pressures in the form of dowry demands from the groom's side. We often hear of dowry deaths or the girl being sent back to her parents' home for not fulfilling the dowry demands. Today, we even hear cases of unmarried girls committing suicide in order to ease the burden of their anxious, guilt-ridden parents, who have not been able to settle a marriage for them.

In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act. In 1984 and again in 1986, the Act was amended to make the law more stringent and effective. For instance, today, the husband and his family can be penalised for demanding dowry if his bride dies within seven years of the marriage in other than normal circumstance. We even have a Dowry Prohibition Cell to look into complaints about dowry.

All this does not mean that there are no marriages taking place without dowry. There are progressive young people who voice their strong opinion against dowry and marry without it. There are at the same time, young, educated people who accept this practice and say they see no harm in it. Some get away by saying that it is their parents (whose wishes they never want to disobey) who perpetuate this practice. Even among other communities, like the Muslim and Christian, some people demand dowry. Often, discord in family is caused because of the continuous demand for dowry even after marriage. This may lead to divorce. Let us look at the issues of divorce and remarriage in India.

### **Activity 2**

Take newspapers of a week. Read the columns, which have reported about dowry. The newspaper can be an English daily or in any other regional language. Then, write a note on the nature of reporting of such issues in the newspapers. Compare your note with those written by other students at your study center.

## **7.8 DIVORCE AND WIDOW REMARRIAGE**

No discussion of marriage is complete without considering the issues of divorce and remarriage. Here, we look first at the possibilities and mechanism of dissolving a marriage and then discuss briefly the question of widow remarriage in India.

### **a) Divorce**

The possibilities and mechanisms of dissolving a marital union have varied through time, between and within communities. Hindu marriage is in theory a sacrament and irrevocable. However, among many *non-dwija* (or non-twice born) castes, divorce is customarily allowed. When we say non-twice born castes, we mean those castes, which do not observe the practice of performing the life-cycle rituals or Hindu *Samskara*. Their performance symbolises the second birth or social birth of a biological person and hence the term twice-born for the first three categories of Hindu castes—the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya, which must and do perform these rituals. The notion that marriage is indissoluble has gradually been eroded and through legislation, the right of divorce has been introduced in all legal systems in India.

The grounds for divorce have been spelt out both by custom and by law in different communities. During 1940-48, several provinces and states passed laws permitting divorce for Hindus. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 introduced and 'clarified the grounds for divorce'. It has been available to all Indians who have chosen to register their marriages under this Act. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 was amended several times since 1955 (the next one being in 1976) to incorporate a wide range of grounds for divorce available to both men and women coming under the purview of this Act. Some of the important grounds for divorce outlined by law are i) impotency, ii) lunacy (for a specified time period), iii) disappearance for seven years, iv) contagious disease, v) rape, vi) homo-sexuality, and vii) bestiality (sexual relationship between a human being and a lower animal). Now adultery and cruelty have also become the grounds on which divorce may be sought. The condition that one can apply for divorce after three years of marriage has been reduced to one year. The waiting period of divorce by mutual consent is now only 6 months.

Among the Muslims, marriage is a contract and divorce is allowed. Muslim law provides for different types of divorce of which *talaq* and *khol* need special mention. *Talaq* is an exjudicial divorce. It becomes effective if pronounced thrice unilaterally by the husband. It signifies the power the husband has to divorce his wife at will. The other form of divorce *khol* takes place by mutual consent.

Public attitude to divorce in a Hindu dominated culture is not yet very liberal in spite of the legal permission for divorce. In many communities of the Indian population, divorce even when it is required is not sought, despite legal provisions. Even in cases where women have turned to the legal system for help, law is not very clear about the rights of a woman in her marriage. For instance, the respective judgments of Andhra Pradesh High Court and Punjab High Court in two cases relating to the Hindu woman's right in the matter of being a wife or a mother reflect the ambiguity. In one case in Andhra Pradesh the judgment favoured the woman. Her right to decide whether she wanted to bear the child of the husband whom she did not find compatible was upheld. In the other case in Punjab, the wife was held guilty for refusing to bear a child by her spouse whom she did not find compatible. Women activists point out that though our constitution supports the notion of equality between sexes, the laws passed to promote such a notion have not been able to end the discrimination shown toward women. Even among the Muslims, where divorce has been permitted for a long time, laws favour men more than the women (Ghosh 1984).

#### **b) Widow Remarriage**

Certain sections of the Indian population have a tradition of widow remarriage. Levirate alliances have been reported among the Ahirs of Haryana, some Jats and Girjans and several castes in U.P. and among the Kodagu of Mysore (Gazetteer of India 1965: 541). In a levirate marriage, a man is obliged to marry the widow of a brother.

In many castes of the Hindu fold, widow remarriage has been customarily sanctioned and practised. Only those castes which imitate the life-style and values of the high castes adopt the practice of banning widow remarriage. Widow remarriage is permitted among the Muslims, Christians and Parsis. Among the Jains local and caste customs determine the issue.



Generally, everywhere the widower has the right to remarry. The 1971 census of India showed that there were 8 million widowers as against 23 million widows (CSWI 1974: 77). In the year 1991, among the elderly (60+ age group) the percentage of widows was 60.7 and that of widowers was 19 (Census of India 1991). It is often said that the problem of widow remarriage is the problem only of a section of society because only the high castes put a strict ban on widow remarriage. Not only this, in the past, widows of some priestly castes, royal families were also expected to commit the practice of sati or widow burning. The practice of widow burning comprises self-immolation of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband. Respect is paid to such women who end their lives as a mark of devotion to their husbands.

As early as in the nineteenth century, reformers like Vidyasagar, fought against the practice of sati and exploitation of widows. In 1856, the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act legalised the marriage of widows of all castes. Traditional notions about widow remarriage and the treatment of widows still seem to be prevalent. Widows are still regarded as inauspicious; they are not expected or permitted to participate in certain religious and social functions. It is shocking to hear that widows are still burnt alive on their husband's pyre and there is a section of the population, which glorifies such act. The most recent case of law being enacted to protect the woman victim is the law against the practice of widow burning or sati. This was passed by the Parliament in response to a national demand and reaction following the burning of a young educated woman, Roop Kanwar, on the funeral pyre of her husband in Deorala, a village in Rajasthan. The Act is called Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) What are the two major types of the transfer of material wealth that accompany marriage? Answer in four lines.  
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.....  
.....
- ii) Write T for true and F for false against the following statements.
  - a) Dowry is punishable by law.
  - b) *Talaq* and *Khol* are the two types of divorce available to Muslims.
  - c) Muslims, Christians and Parsis do not permit widow remarriage.

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## 7.9 LET US SUM UP

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We began with the two strikingly common features of marriage in India. Namely, that almost everyone marries and that the age of marriage is low in India. We then moved on to the diversity in its patterns. We discussed three different forms namely monogamy, polygyny and polyandry, and about the patterns of selection of spouse. In this context we spoke of endogamy, hypergamy and exogamy. Then we said that though marriages are mostly arranged in India, today it is possible to find



other methods of selecting one's spouse. Rites constitute an important part of marriage in every community. We outlined the differences in this area by illustrating them from a few communities like the Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Then we discussed the transfer of wealth and prestige that accompany marriage. In the last section on divorce and remarriage we discussed these issues with reference to major communities. While discussing each of these aspects, we took note of the important legislations and other factors, which have had an impact on the institution of marriage in India.

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## 7.10 KEYWORDS

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<b>Anuloma</b>	Marriage between a man of higher social position and a woman of lower social position is called anuloma ("with the hair") and is, within certain limits, approved
<b>Monogamy</b>	A form of marriage in which a person is married to one person at a time
<b>Polyandry</b>	A form of marriage in which a woman is married to two or more men at a time
<b>Polygyny</b>	A form of marriage in which a man is married to two or more women at a time
<b>Pratiloma</b>	A woman marrying beneath her social position is called <i>pratiloma</i> (against the hair) and is strongly disapproved
<b>Rites</b>	Prescribed and established forms of ceremony
<b>Sacrament</b>	A formal religious act that is sacred as a symbol .of spiritual reality
<b>Sagotra</b>	People belonging to the same <i>gotra</i> or a clan

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## 7.11 FURTHER READING

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Ahmad, Imtiaz (ed.) 1976. *Family, Kinship and Marriage Among Muslims in India*. Manohar: New Delhi.

Augustine. J.S. (ed.) 1982. *The Indian Family in Transition*. Vikas Publishing House: New Delhi

CSWI (Committee on the Status of Women in India) 1974. *Towards Equality*. Department of Social Welfare, Government of India: New Delhi

Kapadia, K.M. 1972. *Marriage and Family in India*. Oxford University Press: Bombay

Jain, Shobhita 1996a. *Bhart mein Parivar, Vivah aur Natedari*. Rawat Publishers: Jaipur.

Karve, Irawati 1994. The Kinship Map of India. In Patricia Uberoi (ed.) *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi

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## **7.12 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) 21 years for boys and 18 years for girls.
- ii) The three forms are monogamy, polygyny and polyandry.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i)
  - a) Endogamy: A rule of marriage whereby an individual is required to marry within a specified group of which he/she is a member.
  - b) Exogamy: A rule of marriage whereby an individual is required to marry outside the group of which he/she is a member.
  - c) Hypergamy: A rule of marriage whereby a girl is married to a boy whose social status is higher than her own. It occurs mainly among different subsections of a caste/subcaste rather than between castes.
- ii) Customary marriages do not involve rites.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) The two types of transfer of material wealth that accompany marriage are bride-price where wealth travels in the opposite direction of the bride and dowry in which wealth travels along with the bride, towards the groom.
- iii)
  - a) True
  - b) True
  - c) False

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## UNIT 8 KINSHIP-I

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### Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Definition of Kinship System
- 8.3 Main Approaches to the Study of Kinship System in India
  - 8.3.1 Indological Approach
  - 8.3.2 Anthropological Approach: Descent and Alliance
- 8.4 Dimensions of Kinship System
- 8.5 Kinship System in North India
  - 8.5.1 Kinship Groups
  - 8.5.2 Kinship Terminology
  - 8.5.3 Marriage Rules
  - 8.5.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin
- 8.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.7 Keywords
- 8.8 Further Reading
- 8.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 8.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you should be able to

- define the kinship system
- describe the main approaches to the study of kinship system in India
- discuss major aspects of North Indian kinship system.

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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So far you have learnt about the social institutions of family and marriage in India. As family takes its form with the help of kinship rules, norms and patterns, it is necessary that we learn about the different forms of kinship in India. This will then provide you with a holistic understanding of social relationships involved in family and marriage.

Since India is a land of immense diversity, its different regions reflect different systems of kinship. In the limited scope of two units, it is not possible to even outline all the various types of kinship systems found in India. As the country's two major geographical divisions, the north and the south, present two distinct forms and have been described in sociological literature as such, we introduce you to the North Indian and South Indian systems of kinship. You must remember that this does not mean that there are no further varieties of kinship systems in certain pockets of both North and South India. Indeed. India's north eastern

parts, as well as, other regions in its west and south provide many other types. To have a glimpse into these systems you may like to read the books and articles mentioned in the section on Further Reading and List of References. The studies and articles that have been used in our units to discuss kinship in North and South India essentially describe and analyse kinship systems found among the numerically dominant Hindu populations.

In this unit we first define the kinship system and then discuss main approaches to the study of kinship systems in India. Next, the unit focuses on the major aspects of patrilineal kinship system in North India.

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## 8.2 DEFINITION OF KINSHIP SYSTEM

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Unit 7 of the first electric course in Sociology gave a simple definition of the kinship system. It said that the kinship system refers to a set of persons recognised as relatives either by virtue of a blood relationship or by virtue of a marriage relationship. In sociology, all blood relationships are known by a technical term, **consanguinity**. Similarly, all relationships through marriage are given the term **affinity**. For example, the relationships between mother and son/daughter, sister and brother/sister, father and son/daughter are consanguinal, while relationships between father/mother-in-law and daughter-/son-in-law are affinal.

Mostly, it is the social recognition of these relationships that is more important than the actual biological ties. Networks built around kin relationships play a significant role in both rural and urban social life in India.

In order to describe in the span of two units (8 and 9) the patterns of kinship in North and South India, we first give you an idea of the main approaches to the study of kinship in India.

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## 8.3 MAIN APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF KINSHIP SYSTEM IN INDIA

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Sociological studies of kinship in India cover descriptions, comparisons and analytical problems based on the findings from various regions. Approaches to the study of kinship can be broadly classified under two headings (i) the Indological approach and (ii) the Anthropological approach. Here, we will discuss these approaches one by one.

### 8.3.1 Indological Approach

As the social institutions of Indian society are rooted in literary and learned traditions, many sociological studies have made use of textual sources for explaining the ideological and jural bases of our institutions. For example, K.M. Kapadia (1947) has used classical texts to describe Hindu kinship. *Hindu Social Organisation* by P.H. Prabhu (1954) is also based on Sanskrit texts. Similarly, Irawati Karve (1940, 43-44 and 1958) and G.S. Ghurye (1946, 1955) have extensively worked on Indian kinship system. Both have used textual sources to explain kinship pattern in different regions of India from a socio-historical perspective. We can, therefore, say that Indological approach to the study of kinship has provided a framework to understand the elements of continuity and change in the system (see Jain 1994).

### 8.3.2 Anthropological Approach: Descent and Alliance

Anthropologists have looked at kinship systems from the point of view of **descent** and **alliance**.

#### A) Descent Approach

Kinship in our society is used for establishing clear-cut corporate social units. Each one of us is a member of such a cooperating and closely bound group of people. One can depend upon the help and support given by such people. Such cooperating local groups are always larger than elementary families of spouses and their children. When these groups are recognised or defined on the basis of shared descent, anthropologists call them descent groups. Formally speaking there are six possible avenues for the transmission of descent group membership, from parents to children. These are

- i) patrilineal — where descent is traced in the male line from father to son,
- ii) matrilineal — where descent is traced in the female line from mother to daughter,
- iii) double (duolineal or bilineal) — where descent is traced in both the father's line as well as mother's line for different attributes such as movable property in one line and immovable in another,
- iv) cognatic (bilateral) — where attributes are transmitted equally through both parents. Here no unilineal groups can be formed but group structure can be cognatic, that is, the group of kinpersons on the father's and mother's side. Membership can be acquired through either the father or the mother,
- v) parallel descent — a very rare form of descent where descent lines are sex specific. Men transmit to their sons while women to their daughters, and finally
- vi) cross or alternative type descent — this is also very rare. Here men transmit to their daughters and women to their sons.

In India, we generally find the patrilineal and matrilineal descent systems. Of the two, patrilineal system is more common. The description and analysis of kin relationships in a descent group have given us a fairly comprehensive sociological understanding of certain types of kinship systems in India. For example, E.K. Gough (1956) has discussed the unity of the lineage with corporate rights on land. She has focused on roles and inter-personal relationships in the wider kinship. T.N. Madan (1965) has studied the role of kinship as an organising principle in the Kashmiri Brahmin society. He has brought out the strong patrilineal ideology that characterises kinship system of the Kashmiri Pandits. In section 8.5.1, we will see in detail how the study of descent groups has helped our understanding of patrilineal kinship system in North India. Sociologists like, A.C. Mayer, T.N. Madan, Oscar Lewis while studying kinship organisation in North India, have taken the descent approach. They have described in detail various levels of kin groups and their activities.

In sociological studies the terms 'line', 'lineal', 'lineage' etc. with or without the prefix 'patri' or 'matri' have in the past been used in at least four different ways.

- i) they have been used to denote corporate descent groups, i.e., lineage proper,

- ii) often employed to denote the chosen line of inheritance, succession etc. in a given society,
- iii) in the study of relationship terminologies the expression “two line prescription” has sometimes been used to refer to terminological structures which are consistent with “bilateral cross-cousin marriage”,
- iv) regardless of which lines (matriline or patriline or both) are chosen for the above three purposes, lineal relatives refer to one’s ascendants or descendants. Lineal relatives are those who belong to the same ancestral stock in a direct line of descent. Opposed to lineal relatives are collaterals who belong to the same ancestral stock but not in a direct line of descent.

All of these usages, except the fourth, are context specific. i.e., they refer to particular situations. Here, social relations and groups are emphasised and sociologists study them in terms of interaction, norms and values of a particular society. For example, some scholars, following the theory of lineages or descent groups, have discussed the relation between mother’s brother and sister’s son in patrilineal societies. They use the idea of ‘complementary filiation’, i.e., the relationship ego has with the relatives on the mother’s side in a patrilineal society. In a matrilineal society it refers to the relationship ego has with the relatives on his father’s side. In a patrilineal society a person’s maternal group is the affinal group of that person’s father. This is the group, from which the person’s father has taken a wife. For this reason some sociologists like to consider the question of affinity in its own right, rather than as a complementary set of relationships. We may say that in descent approach, the emphasis is laid on social organisation of descent groups. As a result, there is little focus on the ‘affinity’ aspect of relationships. Now, in the next sub-section we look at the approach, which focuses on relationships arising out of marriage alliance.

## B) Alliance Approach

Another concept that figured prominently in the study of kinship systems in India is that of alliance. Kinship includes the consideration of the patterns and rules of marriage. When a sociologist pays special attention to these aspects of kinship, we say that he/she is following the alliance approach to understand the patterns of kinship. Many studies of kinship in India have focused on marriage as an alliance between two groups and on kinship terminology, as a reflection of the nature of alliance. Because of their concentration on relationships arising out of marriage, we say that these studies follow the alliance approach. The main exponent of this approach is Louis Dumont (1950, 1953, 1957 a and b, 1959, 1962 and 1966). He has emphasised the role played by marriage in the field of kinship in South India. By showing the opposition between consanguines and affines as reflected in the Dravidian kinship terminology, Dumont has made an important contribution to our understanding of kinship system in India in general and of South India in particular. He has applied to South India a structural theory of kinship. It brings out the repetition of intermarriage through the course of generations. This pattern highlights the classification of kinsmen into two categories of parallel and cross relatives.

The alliance approach to the study of kinship has helped sociologists to discuss and explain the distinction between bride-givers and bride-takers. In addition, it has also included the discussion on the notion of **hypergamy** (i.e., the bride-



takers are always superior to bride-givers), practice of dowry in relation to hypergamy and ideas of exchange in marriage.

In unit 9 of this Block we will focus on most of these aspects in relation to South Indian kinship. Now we turn to various dimensions of kinship systems in both North and South India. A discussion of these dimensions in the following section will provide us with a framework for our discussion of kinship systems in both North and South India.

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## 8.4 DIMENSIONS OF KINSHIP SYSTEM

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In order to describe the features of kinship systems found in North and South India, we need to focus on certain aspects. Here, we are going to identify four aspects.

- i) **Kinship Groups:** Kin relationships provide both a method of passing on status and property from one generation to the next effective social groups for purposes of cooperation and conflict. So we need to identify the form of descent or of tracing one's relationships. In other words, we speak of the social groups within which relatives cooperate and conflict. That is why, we need to describe kinship groups.
- ii) **Kinship Terminology:** The list of terms used by the people to refer to their kin relationships expresses the nature of kinship system. This is why by describing kinship terminology, we are able to throw light on the kinship system. Most features of the kinship system of any society are usually reflected in the way kinship terms are used in that society. Generally a person would apply the same term to those relatives who belong to the same category of kin relationships. In this case, these relatives would also occupy similar kinship roles.

In describing a kinship terminology, it is usual to denote the speaker by the name of ego. The word ego means I in Latin and refers to the first person singular pronoun. The speaker or ego can be either the male or the female. Secondly kinship terms can be divided into two types. One covers the terms of address. This means that certain kinship terms are used when people address each other. Then there are those terms, which are used for referring to particular relationship. These are known as terms of reference. Sometimes, the two types may be expressed by one term only. Thirdly, you would also like to learn how to write long kinship terms in short. For example, if we wish to write mother's brother's daughter, we may do so by writing mbd. Take another example, father's sister's daughter's son can be described as fzds. Here, 'z' stands for sister and 's' for son. In the same way you can write in short ffbfd for father's father's brother's daughter. This method of writing kinship terms is useful when one is describing various sets of kinship terms.

**Activity 1**

Write in short form the following kinship terms.

Father's father, Father's mother, Father's brother, Father's brother's wife, Father's brother's son, Father's brother's daughter, Mother's brother, Mother's brother's wife, Mother's brother's son, Mother's brother's daughter, Mother's sister, Mother's sister's husband, Mother's sister's son, Mother's sister's daughter. Check your short forms with those of other students in your study centre.

- iii) **Marriage Rules:** Just as kinship groups describe the form of kinship system found in a society, so also rules for marriage, categories of people who may/may not marry each other, relationships between bride-takers and bride-givers provide the context within which kin relationships operate. Talking about these issues gives us an understanding of the content of kin relationships. It is therefore necessary to speak of marriage rules for understanding any kinship system.
- iv) **Exchange of Gifts:** Sociologists like to describe social relationships between various categories of relatives. As there are always two terms to any relationship, kinship behaviour is described in terms of pairs. For example, the parent-child relationship would describe kinship behaviour between two generations. In the two units on kinship system in North and South India, we are not dealing with any particular social group. We cannot therefore describe kinship behaviour. Instead we consider the chain of gift giving and taking among the relatives for understanding the behavioural aspects of kinship system. This discussion gives us an idea of how kinship groups interact and kinship roles are played by particular kin persons. Here, in the units 8 and 9, we shall look at behavioural aspect of kinship that is expressed in ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin.

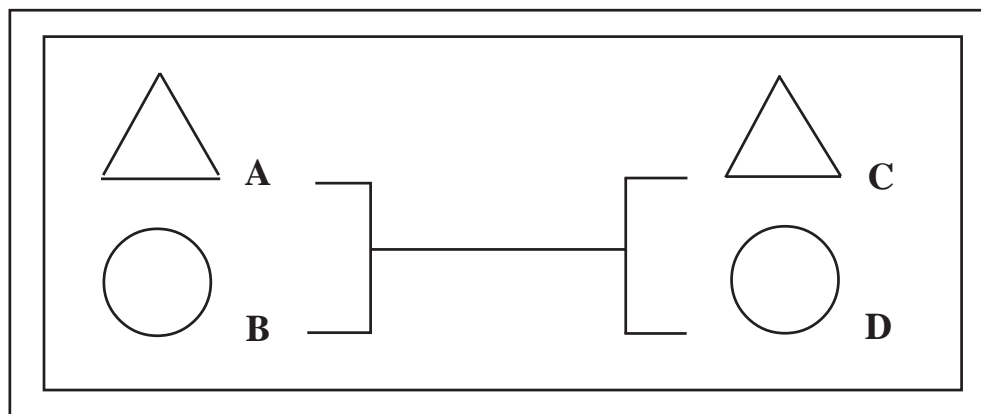
In this way, we feel that by describing the above four dimensions of the kinship system in relation to North and South India, we will be able to give you a fairly general picture of the patterns of kinship in the two regions.

Before ending this section on dimensions of kinship systems, let us also mention that the depiction of different types of kinship groups, marriage rules and their implications is made much easier by the help of kinship diagrams. Sociologists and anthropologists invariably use them for explaining various kinship structures. For following a kinship diagram you need to simply remember the following ways of drawing kinship diagrams.

**Kinship Diagrams**

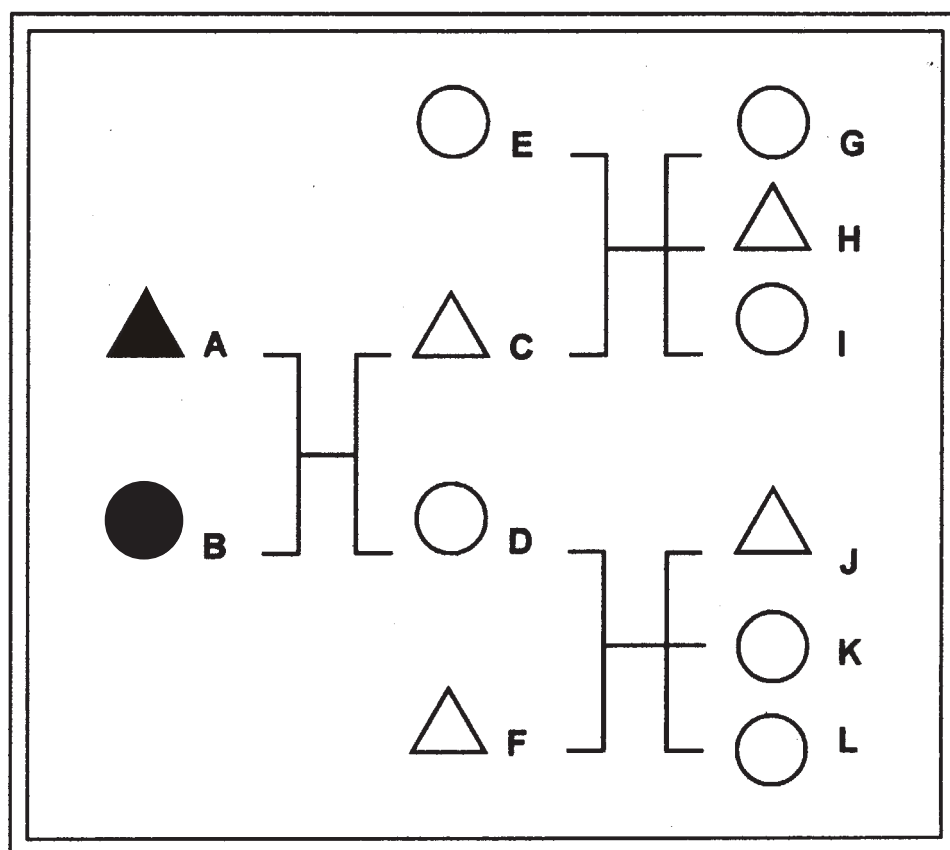
- i) The symbol  $\Delta$  refers to a male and the symbol  $\bigcirc$  refers to a female. When these symbols are shown in black, i.e.,  $\blacktriangle$  or  $\bullet$ , it means that the particular male or female is dead.
- ii) The symbol [ refers to sibling relationship. It expresses brother/brother, sister/sister or brother/sister relationships. The symbol ], on the other hand, expresses the husband-wife or the marriage relationship.
- iii) Thirdly, a horizontal line — connecting the symbols [ and ], denotes filiation or the relationship between the parent/s and child/children.

Thus, with the use of above symbols, kin relationships are expressed to denote genealogical connections and to depict the structure of kinship groups. Let us take an example and see what the following diagram shows.



**Fig. 8.1: Basic kinship diagram**

This diagram shows that A is married to B, and C and D are the children of A and B. This simple diagram can be extended endlessly with the help of the same symbols. In this example you can further show that both C and D have their spouses and children. We can show that C is married to E, and G, H and I are the children of C and E. Similarly, D is married to F, and J, K and L are the children of D and F. This diagram will also show that GHI are the cross-cousins of JKL and that A and B are grandparents of G, H, I, J, K and L and they are now dead. Similarly, you can also locate mother's brother of J, K and L and father's sister of G, H and I. This diagram is drawn in the following manner.



**Fig 8.2: Elaboration of basic kinship diagram**

In this unit we shall use some simple kinship diagrams to explain the implications of marriage rules in both North and South India.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Define, in six lines, with examples, consanguine and affinal categories of kin.

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- ii) List the two approaches to the study of kinship in India.

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## 8.5 KINSHIP SYSTEM IN NORTH INDIA

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Let us first define what we mean by North India. For purposes of describing the kinship systems found in India, Irawati Karve (1953: 93) identified four cultural zones the Northern, the Central, the Southern and the Eastern zones. The northern zone, according to Karve, lies between the Himalayas to the north and the Vindhya ranges to the south. In this region, the majority of the people speak languages derived from Sanskrit. Some of these languages are Hindi, Bihari, Sindhi, Punjabi, Assamese and Bengali. In such a large region, we cannot say that there is one kinship system. The differences of language, history and culture bring about a high degree of variation within the region. We may, however, try to look at the pattern of kinship organisations of the communities in this region on the basis of broad and general features. We can describe the basic structure and process of kinship system in this area in terms of four features (mentioned in section 8.4) that is i) kinship groups, ii) kinship terminology iii) marriage rules, and iv) ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin. Now, we take up each of these features to discuss the kinship system in North India.

### 8.5.1 Kinship Groups

Sociological studies in various parts of North India show that social groups, such as patrilineage, caste, subcaste provide the basis for cooperation or conflict among the people. We now discuss these groups.

- i) **Patrilineage:** We can say that broadly speaking kinship organisation in North India is based on unilineal descent groups. When the lineage membership group is traced on the basis of shared descent in one line, we call it a unilineal descent group. In North India, we have mostly patrilineal descent groups. This means that the descent is traced in the male line from father to son. Members of patrilineages cooperate as well as show antagonism in various situations. Let us see how this takes place in terms of a) cooperation, b) conflict and c) inheritance of status and property.

a) **Cooperation**

Members of a patrilineage cooperate in ritual and economic activities. They participate together in life cycle rituals. In settlement of disputes, the senior men of the lineage try to sort out the matter within the lineage. Cooperation among lineage members is strengthened because they live close together in the same village. As the farm-lands of lineage members are normally located in the same village, they set up their houses almost next to each other. In this situation, there is constant exchange of material resources from the household of one member to another. This pattern of cooperation is amply described in the studies of kinship patterns in North India by Lewis (1958: 22-23), Minturn and Hitchcock (1963: 237), Beremen (1963: 173), Nicholas (1962: 174). In terms of theoretical approach to the study of kinship we can say that these studies follow the descent approach because they examine the pattern of cooperation and conflict in descent groups.

b) **Conflict**

Lineage members help each other, but conflict also characterises kinship relations among them. For example, T.N. Madan (1965: 201) shows how in a Kashmir village, rivalry among brothers leads to partition of the joint family. Later, this rivalry takes more intense form in the relationships between the children of brothers.

c) **Inheritance of Status and Property**

From one generation to the next, transmission of status and property takes place according to certain rules. In North India, these generally pass in the male line. In other words, we have a predominantly patrilineal mode of inheritance in North India. For this reason, composition of patrilineage becomes very important. Thus, the lineage fellows cooperate for economic and jural reasons. They share jural rights and therefore they cooperate in order to keep the rights. However, they also fight among themselves about who is to get more benefits from those rights. Pradhan (1965) has described how the Jats and other landowners of Meerut and other districts around Delhi have a certain portion of the village lands and how it cannot be transferred out of the lineage. To keep the land within the lineage, its male members have to remain united. Thus, it becomes a main principle of their social organisation. Let us now discuss the second kinship group.

- ii) **Clan:** A lineage is an exogamous unit, i.e., a boy and a girl of the same lineage cannot marry. A larger exogamous category is called the **clan**. Among the Hindus, this category is known as *gotra*. Each person belongs to the clan of his/her father and cannot marry within the clan or *gotra*. One usually knows about the common ancestor of lineage members as an actual person. But the common ancestor of a clan is generally a mythical figure. The members of a lineage live in close proximity and therefore have greater occasions for cooperation or conflict. Common interests or action do not characterise the relationships among clan members because they are usually scattered over a larger territory and their relationships are often quite remote. These relationships do become significant only in the context of marriage. That is why we will discuss this point once again in section 8.5.3 on marriage rules.

- iii) **Caste and Subcaste:** Besides lineages and clans, the kinship system operates within the families of the caste groups, living in one village or a nearby cluster of villages. As castes are endogamous, i.e., one marries within one's caste, people belonging to one caste group are kinspersons in the sense that they are already related or can be potentially related to each other. Caste-fellows generally come forward to help each other when others challenge their honour and status. They may also hold rituals together and help each other economically.

Subcaste is the largest segment of caste and it performs nearly all the functions of caste, such as **endogamy** and social control. In this respect, we can say that the internal structure of the subcaste would provide us the framework within which we can see the operation of kinship system. The members of a subcaste cooperate as kinspersons. They, depending on the context, work together as equals in the sphere of ritual activities and political allies in socio-economic activities. As Vidyarthi (1961: 53-57) has shown in the case of a very small subcaste, one may trace one's relationship with most members of the subcaste. On the other hand, in the case of a subcaste spreading over many villages, one may be limited to maintaining relations with only a part of the total number of kin. Klass (1966) in his study of marriage rules in Bengal calls this part of the total as one's 'effective jati' i.e., those people of the sub-caste with whom one actually has relationships of cooperation or conflict.

Among the subcaste kin, we should also include those related to a person through marriage. Here, generally a person's kin through mother are called uterine kin and those through spouse are known as affinal kin. These relatives are not members of one's family or lineage or clan. They are expected to help and support each other and, actually do so when an occasion arises for such an action. While a person belongs to only one lineage, one clan or one subcaste, he would always have a string of relatives who do not belong to his lineage/clan/subcaste.

Here we should mention how sociologists, following the descent approach to study kinship systems, try to explain the fact of special place of the relationship between a person and his/her mother's brother. For example, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1958) went to the extent of coining a new term to express this relationship. Following the principle of filiation (i.e., the relationship between a father and son in the case of a patrilineal society), a person's relationship with his mother's brother is to be understood by the idea of filiation on mother's side or the principle of 'complementary filiation'. Without going into further details about this theoretical issue, we would like to tell you that those following the alliance approach like to explain the same fact in terms of repetition of intermarriage through generations.

- iv) **Fictive Kin:** We should also mention, in passing, the recognition of fictive kinship among villagers. Often, people, who are not related either by descent or marriage, form the bonds of fictive kinship with each other. We find the evidence of such a practice in many tribal and village studies. You may refer to the studies by B. Bandopadhyay (1955), L. Dube (1956), S.C. Dube (1951), S.K. Srivastava (1960) and L.K. Mahapatra (1968, 1969). On the basis of common residence in a village in North India, unrelated individuals may usually behave like brothers.



Mahapatra (1969) points out that fictive kinship is a mechanism to provide even such kin who are not ordinarily found in a particular situation. For example, in North India where village **exogamy** is a normal practice, it is rare to find a brother to a daughter-in-law living in the same locality. She can get a brother only through a fictive relationship. In urban context, you must have frequently come across small children who call any older man ‘uncle’ and an older woman ‘aunty’. This shows how easily we make use of kinship idiom in our day-to-day behaviour towards total strangers. These transitory relationships do not however assume much importance in terms of actual kin ties and behaviour associated with them.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Name in one line the three kinship groups in North India.  
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- ii) Discuss in four lines, the bases of cooperation and conflict among members of a patrilineage in North India.  
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### 8.5.2 Kinship Terminology

A comparison and analysis of the various kinship terms helps us to understand the kinship structure, its make-up and the behaviour associated with each term. In other words, kinship terms provide the context and the idiom for our social relationships. In this sense, kinship terms do not just tell us about biological and social relationship. They help us to look at the whole way of social life. Only after studying the language, values and behaviour of the particular people can we fully appreciate the significance of their kinship terms. Many times the same kinship term is used to denote different meanings in different contexts. This is the reason why the study of kinship terms is closely associated with the study of language and culture. Here, we discuss how this is the case in relation to the kinship terms used in the linguistic regions of the northern zone.

#### i) Descriptive Nature of North Indian Kinship Terms

The kinship terminology is the expression of kinship relations in linguistic terms. In the case of North India, we can call the system of terminology as descriptive. This is because the kinship terms generally describe the relationship from the point of view of the speaker. In a few words, even the most distant kin relationships can be accurately described. Unlike the English terms, uncle, aunty, cousin, which do not reveal age, patrilineal/matrilateral ties, the North Indian kinship terms are very clear. For example, when we say *chachera bhai*, it can be easily translated as father’s younger brother’s (*chacha*’s) son, who stands in the relationship of a brother (*bhai*) to the speaker. Similarly, *mamera bhai* means mother’s brother’s (*mama*’s) son. According to L. Dumont (1966: 96), the North Indian kinship terminology is descriptive in the sense that it describes elementary relationships starting from Ego. The elementary relationships of filiation upwards and downwards, siblingship (sister/brother) and marriage comprise the first set of terms. Then we

have the relationships of the second order. These are formed by combining two elementary relationships, i.e., filiation + filiation, filiation + siblingship, siblingship + filiation, marriage + filiation, marriage + siblingship. The third order of relationships is represented by filiation + marriage + filiation. Further, for Dumont (1966), the North Indian kinship terminology is not a classificatory type of terminology because it does not classify the kinship terms according to the number of principles of opposition. However, to emphasise the patrilineal descent, we find a clear-cut distinction made between parallel and cross-cousins. The children of one's brother are *bhatija* (for male child) and *bhatiji* (for female child). The children of one's sister are *bhanja* (for male child) and *bhanji* (for female child). A person's parallel relatives are members of his/her descent group and therefore they also live nearby in the same village. In contrast, a person's sister's children or cross relatives are members of a different descent group. They are also residents of a different place. This distinction between brother's children and sister's children which is made in the North Indian kinship terminology is also of importance in the context of kinship system in South India. This we will see in section 9.2.2 of unit 9. Now we see how kinship terms signify social behaviour.

## ii) Social Behaviour

Irawati Karve (1953) has given a list of kinship terms in North Indian languages. She makes use of kinship terminologies to describe and compare kinship systems in various parts of India. She studies the terms and also uses the findings for understanding the influences which have played a part in shaping them. Besides Irawati Karve, we can also give another example of the analysis of Indo-Aryan kinship terms, made by G.S. Ghurye (1946, 1955). He has highlighted the jural and ideological aspects of kinship systems through a comparison of kinship terms in North Indian languages. For example, among the Sarjupari Brahmins the term '*maan*' refers to the bride-taker. In ideological terms, '*maan*' reflects the high status of the bride-taker as compared to the bride-giver. In jural terms it denotes the fact that bride-takers do not share property with the bride-givers.

## iii) Kinship Terms Signifying Social Behaviour

The very usage of kinship term also makes clear the kind of behaviour expected from a kin. For example, Oscar Lewis (1958: 189), in his study of a North Indian village, has described the pattern and relationship between a person and his elder brother's wife. This is popularly known as *Devar-Bhabhi* relationship, which is characteristically a joking relationship.

As a contrast to the joking relationship is the behaviour of avoidance between a woman and her husband's father. Similarly, she has to avoid her husband's elder brother. The term for husband's father is *shvasur* and for husband's elder brother is *bhasur*. *Bhasur* is a combination of the Sanskrit word *bhratr* (brother) and *shvasur* (father-in-law), and is, therefore, like father-in-law.

### Activity 2

Write down the kinship terms in your language for the following relationships.

Father, Father's brother, Father's brother's son, Father's father. Father's father's brother's son, Brother, Brother's son, Mother's brother, Mother's father, Mother's brother's son, Mother's sister, Mother's sister's husband, Father's sister, Father's sister's husband.

Now, distinguish your consanguines and affines among these relatives.

### 8.5.3 Marriage Rules

Because every time a marriage is contracted, new kinship bonds come into being, we can clearly see the relevance of marriage rules for discussing the patterns of kinship organisation. In the context of North India, we find that people know whom not to marry. In sociological terms, the same thing can be expressed by saying that there are negative rules of marriage in North India. We can also say that marriage is allowed only outside a defined limit. Let us see what this limit or the rule of exogamy is in North India.

#### i) **Clan Exogamy**

Belonging to one's natal descent line is best expressed in matters of marriage. No man is allowed to marry a daughter of his patriline. In North India lineage ties upto five or six generations are generally remembered and marriage alliances are not allowed within this range. In such a situation the lineage turns into the clan and we speak of *gotra* (clan) and *gotra bhai* (clan mates). Widely used Sanskrit term *gotra* is an exogamous category within a subcaste. Its main use is to regulate marriages within a subcaste.

#### ii) **The Four Clan Rule**

In this connection, you may refer to the four-*gotra* or four-clan rule, already shown in Figure 7.1 of Unit 7. In Irawati Karve's (1953: 118) words, according to this rule, a man must not marry a woman from (i) his father's *gotra*, (ii) his mother's *gotra*, (iii) his father's mother's *gotra*, and (iv) his mother's mother's *gotra*. In other words, this rule prohibits marriage between two persons who share any two of their eight *gotra* links. This means that the rule of exogamy goes beyond one's own lineage. Another related kind of exogamy, which exists in North India, is village exogamy. A village usually has members of one or two lineages living in it. Members belonging to the same lineage are not permitted to intermarry. This principle extends even to the villages, which have more than two lineages. In other words, a boy and a girl in a village in North India are like a brother and sister and hence cannot intermarry.

It is important here to give you a word of caution. We have spoken about lineage, clan and subcaste in relation to organisation of kinship patterns. But we have not mentioned terms like *kutumb*, *biradari*, *khandan*, *bhai bandh* etc. These denote various colloquial meanings of the general terms (lineage, clan and subcaste) in local languages. The local terms are used in various contexts to signify different levels of kinship arrangements. In our discussion, we have limited ourselves to social structure and function in broad terms and avoided conflicting usages of local terms. Now we look at the groups within which marriage is preferred/prescribed, in the context of North India.

#### iii) **Marriages within the Subcaste**

Associated with local terms is the idea of the status of various units within the subcaste. Taking the example of the Sarjupari Brahmin of Mirzapur district in Uttar Pradesh, studied by Louis Dumont (1966: 107), we find that each of the three subcastes of Sarjupari Brahmins of this area is divided into three houses (kin groups or lineages) which range hierarchically in status. The marriages are always arranged from lower to higher house. This means that women are always given to the family, which is placed in the house above her own. In this context, we can

also refer to the popular saying in North India that ‘the creeper must not go back’. The same idea is reflected by another North Indian saying that ‘*pao pujke, ladki nahin le jainge*’ (i.e., once we have washed the feet of the bridegroom during the wedding ceremony, we cannot accept a girl from his family, because this will mean that we allow that side to wash our feet or allow the reversal of relationships). This shows clearly that marriage rules in North India maintain a hierarchic relationship between the bride-givers and bride-takers. In terms of negative rules of marriage in North India, the above description reflects the rule that a man cannot marry his father’s sister’s daughter or his patrilineal cross-cousin. This is called the rule of no reversal, as depicted in Figure 8.3.

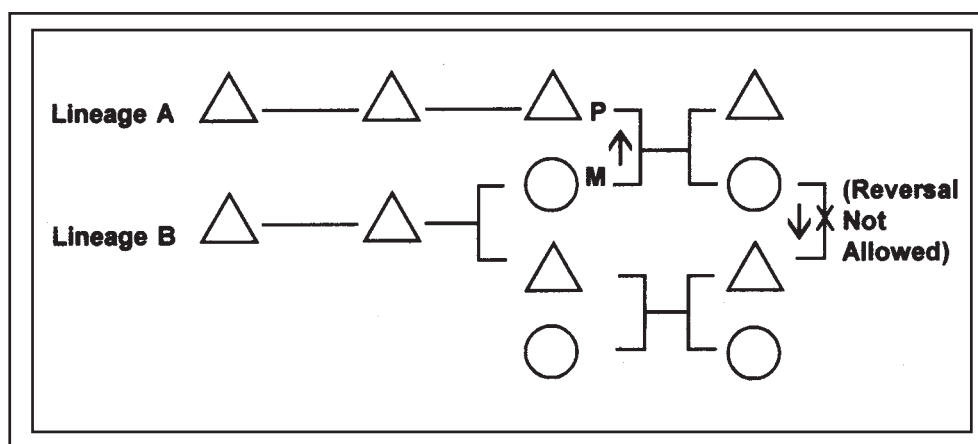


Fig. 8.3: The rule of no reversal

As shown in figure 8.3, lineage B has given the woman (M) in marriage to the man (P) of lineage A. P is given the high ritual status of ‘pao puj’ in marriage ceremonies. If P’s daughter is married to the man of lineage B, then P will have to give the same high ritual status to the man of lineage B. But lineage B is, according to the rule of hypergamy, lower to lineage A and therefore, this marriage will be a reversal of roles. In North India, such a reversal is not allowed and thus, we find the rule of prohibition on marriage with patrilineal cross-cousins.

Another principle should also be mentioned here. It is rule of no repetition. This means that if the father’s sister has been married in a family (*khandan*), one’s own sister cannot be given in marriage to that same family (Dumont 1966: 104-7). The term family or *khandan* is used here as a smaller unit of a lineage. This rule of no repetition implies the negative rule of prohibition on the marriage with matrilineal cross-cousins. In other words, a man cannot marry his mother’s brother’s daughter. This can be depicted in a simple kinship diagram (see Fig. 8.4).

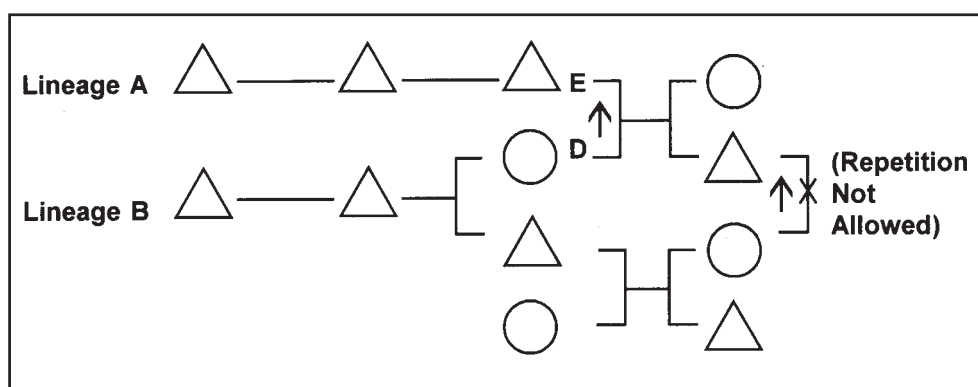
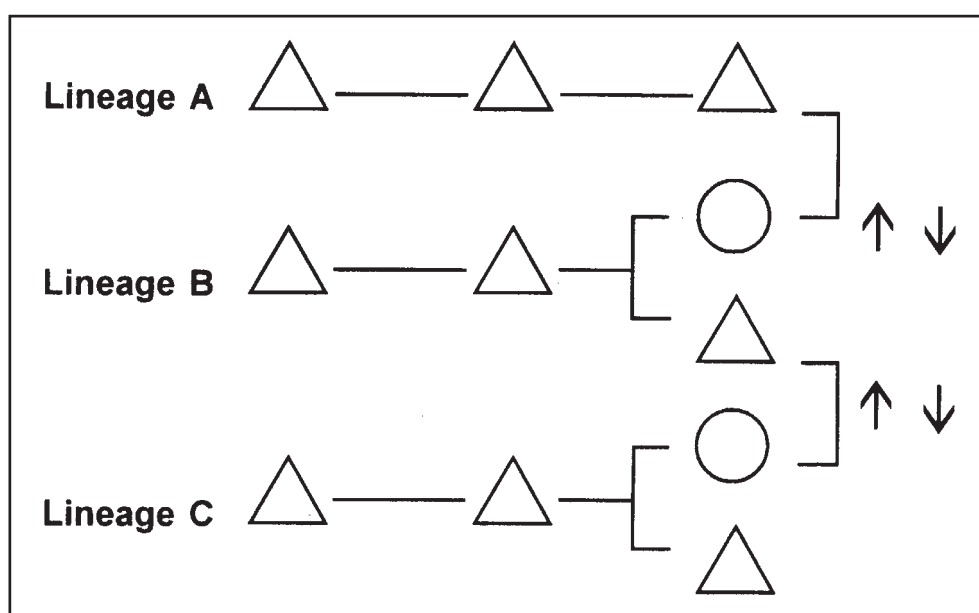


Fig. 8.4: The rule of no repetition

As depicted in Figure 8.4, lineage B has given women D in marriage to the man E of lineage A. In the next generation, if a woman is again given in marriage to a man of lineage A, then a repetition will occur. A prohibition on repetition shows that matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is barred in North India. Thus, we find that both patrilineal and matrilineal cross-cousin marriages are not allowed in North India. In other words, the two rules, the rule of no reversal and the rule of no repetition, put together define the negative rules of marriage in North India.

Highlighting the structural implications of marriage rules in North India, T.N. Madan (1965) in his study of the Kashmiri Pandits distinguishes three classes of wife-givers and wife-takers (these are the terms used by T.N. Madan in the place of bride-taker and bride-giver, used in this unit) from the perspective of the household (i) those who give it wives and those who take wives from it, (ii) those who give wives to those in class (i) and (iii) those who take wives from class (i). These three classes have unequal relationships. However honour and prestige go in the opposite direction to women in marriage. This means that wife-takers are superior to wife-givers and by the fact of giving a wife to a group, one receives honour and prestige within one's own group. Figure 8.5 shows how the rule of hypergamy in North India acts as a form of exchange between women and dowry on the one hand and prestige and honour on the other.



**Fig. 8.5: Hypergamy in north India as an exchange**

In figure 8.5, A, B and C are patrilineages which are ranked by high to low status. The upward arrows indicate that lineage C has given the woman and dowry to the man of lineage B. As bride-givers, the lineage C is lower to B and the lineage B is lower to A. The rule of hypergamy accords lower status to bride-givers. At the same time by giving the women and dowry to high-status lineages, the lower status lineages gain prestige and power within their groups. Thus, the downward arrows indicate the movement of prestige and honour in the direction opposite to women and dowry. In other words, women and dowry are exchanged for prestige and honour among the hierarchically arranged lineages of a subcaste/caste in North India.

### 8.5.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin

Ceremonial exchange of gifts on the occasions of life cycle rituals provides us with the understanding of a patterned behaviour among various categories of kin. Generally, the bride-givers, in correspondence with their inferior status vis-a-vis bride-takers, initiate the process of gift-giving during marriage and continue to give greater amounts of gifts. In other words, you can say that gift-giving and receiving is a well-defined social activity (see Jain 1996 b). Let us take two examples of this behaviour.

L. Dumont (1966: 91) has pointed out that mother's brother (uterine kin) and wife's brother (affinal kin) have similar ceremonial functions. Not only this, as wife's brother becomes, after a few years, mother's brother to the children, there is little difference between the two. A.C. Mayer (1960: 232) has described in his study of kinship in a village in Malwa that all gifts given by one's mother's brother are called *mamere*. In contrast to the gifts given by the mother's brother, there are gifts known as *ban*, given by one's **agnates**. *Ban* is the term used also for the gift, which is given by other relatives such as the groom's sister's husband to the groom's wife's brother. This shows that the groom's sister's husband (or father's sister's husband in the context of the ascending generation) is viewed to be a part of agnatic kin vis-a-vis the groom's wife's brother (or mother's brother for the ascending generation).

In sociological vocabulary we can put the same thing in this way. We look at the groom's sister's husband (zh) or father's sister's husband (fzh) as a wife-taker. Similarly, we look at the groom's wife's brother (wb) or his mother's brother (mb) as a wife-giver. Now if the gift to A's wife-givers (i.e., mother's brother or wife's brother) by A's wife-taker (sister's husband or father's sister's husband) and by A's agnates are known by the same term '*ban*' then we can say that in opposition to A's wife-givers, his agnates and wife-takers have been merged into one category. This is so because for the groom's wife's brother (or mother's brother) the groom is a wife-taker and groom's wife-taker is his sister's husband or father's sister's husband. These two sets of wife-takers are on one side and the wife-givers are on the other.

To this example of ceremonial gift-giving at wedding we can add one more, given by L. Dumont (1966: 93-5). He has shown a similar distinction being made between wife-givers and wife-takers (the terms used by L. Dumont) in the context of gift-giving at the end of mourning in a village of Gorakhpur district in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Here, the main mourner is generally a son or an agnate of the deceased. The ceremony of tying a turban on the head of the main mourner is done by an affine who has taken a wife. In other words, the turban is preferably tied by sister's husband (zh) or father's sister's husband (fzh). Then again for the ceremony of *shaiyyadan* (gift of a bed), a sister's husband (zh) or father's sister's husband (fzh) is asked to receive the gift. This ceremony emphasises their status as wife-takers. The priest clearly asks for those who have taken the daughters to come forward for receiving the *shaiyya* (bed). Thus, of the two kinds of affines (the wife's-taker and wife-giver) the affines of the wife-taking type are preferred over the affines of wife-giving type. In the hypergamous situation (as has already been explained in section 8.5.3 on marriage rules) wife-takers are higher than the wife-givers and therefore in ceremonial gift-giving they remain at the receiving end while the wife-givers remain at the giving end.



Flow of gifts from affinal kin (wife's relatives) and uterine kin (mother's relatives) have also been recorded in the studies made by F.G. Bailey (1957) in Orissa and Oscar Lewis (1958) in Rampur. According to A.C. Mayer (1960), the function of the gifts made by uterine and affinal kin is similar, i.e. to enhance the status of wife-takers. In sociological terms, we say that this type of exchange of gifts shows the hypergamous nature of marriage in North India. In other words, the woman is always given into the group, which is higher in status, and the flow of gifts from the family maintains this distinction forever. This, in turn, explains the nature of kin relationships in North India.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) What is the significance of learning kinship terms? Use three lines for your answer.

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- ii) Explain the four-clan rule of marriage in North India. Use seven lines for your answer.

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## **8.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you have learnt about the definition of kinship system and then about the main approaches to the study of kinship system in India. The unit has focused on major aspects of kinship patterns found in North India. These aspects have been discussed in terms of kinship groups, kinship terminology, marriage rules and ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin.

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## **8.7 KEYWORDS**

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<b>Affinity</b>	Relationship by marriage is described as 'affinity'.
<b>Agnate</b>	Related through male descent or on the father's side
<b>Alliance</b>	In the context of kinship studies, the bond between two families following a marriage is described as relationship of 'alliance'.

<b>Clan</b>	A group united by a common ancestor is called a clan. In the context of Indian society, subcaste sharing a common <i>gotra</i> is called a clan.
<b>Consanguinity</b>	It refers to the state of being related by blood. All blood relatives of a person are his/her consanguine.
<b>Descent</b>	Derivation from an ancestor is called descent. There are various ways of derivation and hence different systems of descent are found in human societies.
<b>Endogamy</b>	When marriage is specifically required within a group, this specification is called the rule of endogamy.
<b>Exogamy</b>	When marriage is specifically required outside a group, this specification is called the rule of exogamy.
<b>Hypergamy</b>	When marriage is specifically required in an equal or higher social group or subcaste, this specification is called the rule of hypergamy.

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## 8.8 FURTHER READING

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Dube, Leela 1974. *Sociology of Kinship*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay

Jain, Shobhita 1996a. *Bharat mein Parivar, Vivah aur Natedari*. Rawat Publishers: Jaipur

Karve, Irawati 1953. *Kinship Organisation in India*. Deccan College Post-Graduate Research Institute: Poona

Madan, T.N. 1965. *Family and Kinship A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir*. Asia Publishing House: New Delhi

Uberoi, Patricia (ed.) 1994. *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi

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## 8.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Persons related by blood are called consanguinal relatives. Persons related through marriage are known as affinal relatives. Relationship between father and son/daughter or between brother and brother/sister is an example of consanguine relationship while the relationship between a person and his wife's brother can be given as an example of affinal relationship.
- ii) The two approaches to the study of kinship in India are a) Indological and b) anthropological.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The three kinship groups in North India are (a) patrilineage, (b) clan and (c) subcaste.

**Family, Marriage and Kinship**

- ii) In ritual and economic sphere, members of a patrilineage come together. Living side-by-side they exchange a number of services, material resources among each other. Lineage members often face conflicting interests when it comes to property matters. Brothers fight over land and other property.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Learning of kinship terms helps us in two ways. Firstly, it tells us about the makeup of the kinship system, secondly, it also throws light on behaviour-patterns associated with each relationship to which the term is applied.
- ii) The four-clan rule is used in North India to explain the limit of exogamy. It says that a person cannot marry a woman from (i) his father's *gotra*, (ii) his mother's *gotra*, (iii) his father's mother's *gotra* and (iv) his mother's mother's *gotra*.

**Structure**

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Kinship System in South India
  - 9.2.1 Kinship Groups
  - 9.2.2 Kinship Terminology
  - 9.2.3 Marriage Rules
  - 9.2.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin
- 9.3 A Comparison of North and South Indian Kinship Systems
  - 9.3.1 Differences
  - 9.3.2 Similarities
- 9.4 Kinship Organisation in Matrilineal Communities in North-East and South-West India
  - 9.4.1 Matrilineal Descent System
  - 9.4.2 Matrilineal Groups in North-East India
  - 9.4.3 Matrilineal Groups in South-West India
- 9.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.6 Keywords
- 9.7 Further Reading
- 9.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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**9.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you should be able to

- discuss two main kinship groups in South India
- outline main features of South Indian Kinship terminology
- describe preferential rules of marriage in South India
- distinguish between gifts exchanged between various kin groups at the time of marriage in South India
- compare the North and South Indian kinship systems in terms of differences and similarities between them
- give an account of matrilineal kinship system in North-east and South-west India.

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**9.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous unit, you learnt about the broad patterns of patrilineal system in North Indian kinship. Now, this unit will deal with broad patterns of kinship in South India. Here too, the main system is that of patrilineal kinship, with the exception of matriliney in the state of Kerala. The patriliney in both North and South

India outlines the major component of kinship system in India and that is why we have devoted more space to its description. Only at the end of this unit, we have given an account of matrilineal kinship as found in South-west and North-east India.

In this unit, we will confine to the broad patterns of patrilineal kinship organisation that has been discussed by sociologists. We will also give a brief note on the variations found in Kerala. Because of the paucity of space, we will not go into other regional variations.

As with kinship system in North India in unit 8, here too we shall discuss in section 9.2 the South Indian Kinship system in terms of the following four features, (i) kinship groups, (ii) kinship terminology, (iii) marriage rules and (iv) ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin. In section 9.3, we compare the North and South Indian patrilineal kinship systems. We show the similarities as well as differences between the two regions. Then in section 9.4, we discuss kinship organisation in matrilineal communities of North-east and South-west India.

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## 9.2 KINSHIP SYSTEM IN SOUTH INDIA

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Let us first define the area that we will include in our discussion of South Indian Kinship System. The states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are generally considered as South India where the languages of the Dravidian family are spoken. In the region occupied by these four states, we find a fairly common pattern of kinship organisation. Like in the North, we find diversity in the kinship pattern in the South too. We must not forget that in this region, the state of Kerala is distinct because of its matrilineal system of descent and the practice of inter-caste hypergamy. Secondly despite common elements, each of these four linguistic regions may have its distinct socio-cultural patterns of kinship. Having defined the area, let us now begin with a discussion of kinship groups.

### 9.2.1 Kinship Groups

Kin relatives in South India are mainly categorised in two groups namely, the patrilineage and the affines.

**Patrilineage:** In South India, just as in North India, relating to various categories of kin beyond one's immediate family implies a close interaction with members of one's patrilineage. The **patrilocal** residence amongst the lineage members provides the chances for frequent interaction and cooperation. Thus, the ties of descent and residence help in the formation of a kin group. Such a group is recognised in both South and North India. For example, K.Gough (1955) in her study of the Brahmins of Tanjore district describes patrilineal descent groups, which are distributed in small communities. Each caste within the village contains one to twelve exogamous patrilineal groups.

Dumont (1986) in his study of the Pramalai Kallar of Madurai in Tamil Nadu describes kin groups in terms of patrilineal, patrilocal and exogamous groups, called *kuttam*. All members of the *kuttam* may form the whole or a part of one or several villages. It may be subdivided into secondary *kuttam*. Each *kuttam* bears the name of its ancestor, which is also the name of the chief. The name is inherited by the eldest son who is also the holder of the position of chief in the group.

The ritual activities, in which the *kuttam* members participate, show its significance as a unit of kinship organisation. During harvest season, when food is plenty, all the members of the group are invited and they collectively worship in the temple of the *kuttam*.

In the economic sphere, as land is owned by the male members of the *kuttam*, we find that after the death of the father, there are frequent fights between brothers or coparceners, as opposed to the free and friendly relations among affinal relatives. Thus, it is said amongst the Kallar that brothers or coparceners do not joke. The coparceners are known as *pangali*. In the classificatory system of South Indian kinship terminology, they are opposed to the set of relatives, known as *mama-machchinan*. More of this will be given in sub-section 9.2.2 of this unit.

**Affinal Relatives:** Opposed to the members of a patrilineage, we have the kin group of affinal relatives (those related through marriage). Beyond the patrilineage are the relatives who belong to the group in which one's mother was born, as well as one's wife. They are a person's uterine (from mothers side) and affinal (from wife's side) kin, commonly known as *mama-machchinan*. In this set of relatives are also included the groups in which a person's sister and father's sister are married. The nature of interaction between a patrilineage and its affines, as described by Dumont (1986) is always cordial and friendly.

**Indirect Pangali:** If group A is one's patrilineage and group B has one's *mama-machchinan* (uterine and affinal kin), then members of group C, which has *mama-machchinan* of group B, will become classificatory brothers to people in group A. Such classificatory brothers are called *mureikku pangali* (see Dumont 1950: 3-26). These relatives, though called a kind of *pangali*, are never confused with actual coparceners or sharers of joint patrilineal property. Beyond this circle of relatives, the rest are only neutral people.

From this discussion of kinship groups, we now move on to the description of kinship terminology. The South Indian kinship terminology places particular emphasis on affinal relationships, which are the main interest of those who follow the alliance approach.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) What are the two kinship groups in South India? Use one line for your answer.

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- ii) In terms of South Indian Kinship groups, what is an affine of your affine to you? Use one line for your answer.

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### 9.2.2 Kinship Terminology

The linguistic expression of kin relationships in Dravidian languages follows a clear-cut structure with a great deal of precision. Main features of this system, according to Louis Dumont (1986: 301), are that (i) it distinguishes between parallel and cross-cousins and (ii) it is classificatory. Let us discuss these two features.

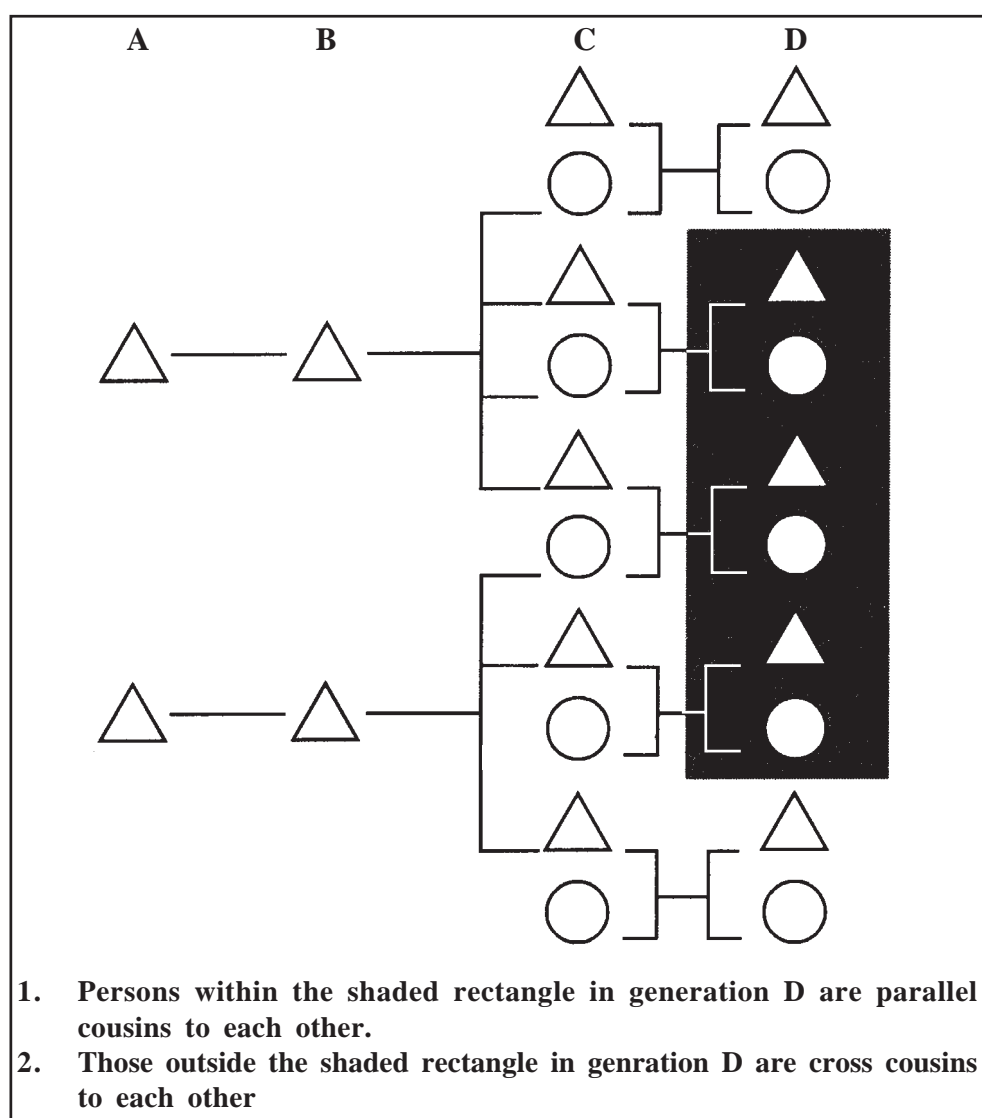
#### i) Parallel and Cross-cousins

Parallel cousins are those who are the children of the siblings of same sex. This means that children of two brothers, or, of two sisters are parallel cousins to each



other. Cross-cousins are those, who are the children of the siblings of the opposite sex. This means that children of a brother and a sister are cross-cousins.

The kin terminology in South India clearly separates the two categories of cousins. There are very good reasons for doing so because in South India, parallel cousins cannot marry each other while cross-cousins can. If the system of terminology does not distinguish between the two categories, there would have been utter confusion in the minds of the people. But as any speaker of one of the four Dravidian languages will tell you, there is never any doubt as to who is one's parallel cousin, with whom you behave as a brother/sister and who is one's cross-cousin with whom one is to remain distant and formal. The parallel cousins are referred as brothers/sisters. For example, in Tamil, all parallel cousins are addressed as *annan* (elder brother) or *tambi* (younger brother) and *akka* (elder sister) or *tangachi* (younger sister). Cross-cousins are never brothers/sisters. They are referred, for example in Tamil, as *mama magal/magan* (mother's brother's daughter/son) or *attai magal/magan* (father's sister's daughter/son). Figure 9.1 will further clarify this simple formulation.



**Fig. 9.1: Two categories of cousins**

This system of kinship terms is in agreement with marriage among close relatives. It separates all descent lines into those with whom one can marry and those with whom one cannot marry. The terminology clearly tells that in a man's own

generation, males are either his brothers or brothers-in-law. Similarly females are either sisters or potential spouses. Perhaps in this very sense, Morgan (1981: 394) described the Dravidian kinship terminology as ‘consistent and symmetrical’.

For the sake of comparison, let us clarify that in North India, all cousins (be they parallel or cross) are considered consanguine or brothers/sisters. They are not allowed to marry each other. Then in this respect, you can see how North Indian kinship system is different from the one in South India and how the kinship terminology reflects this distinction.

## ii) **Classificatory Nature of Kinship Terminology**

The distinction between parallel and cross-cousins combined with the classificatory nature of terminology makes the Dravidian kinship terms a mirror image of the kinship system in South India. The terminology becomes classificatory in the following manner.

The person’s own generation is terminologically divided into two groups.

- a) One group (known as *Pangali* in Tamil) consists of all the brothers and sisters, including one’s parallel cousins and the children of the father’s parallel cousins.
- b) The other group comprises cross-cousins and affinal relatives such as wife/husband of the category (a) relatives. In Tamil, this category is called by the term of *mama-machchinan*.

Let us see how the two classes of kin divide relatives in one’s own generation and in both ascending and descending generations.

### **One’s Own Generation**

This bi-partition applies to the whole generation of a person. All one’s relatives in one’s own generation are systematically classified in this way. There is no third category of relatives. People falling into neither category are not considered to be relatives. The Tamil term for category (a) is *pangali*, which means ‘those who share’. The word *pangali* has connotations of both the general and the specific kind. In its general sense, it refers to classificatory (*murei*) brothers, who do not share a joint property. They are all reckoned as *pangali* (brothers). In its specific sense, the word ‘*pangali*’ refers to strictly those people who have a share in the joint family property. Here we are more concerned with the classificatory (*murei*) connotation of this term.

The two categories (*pangali* and *mama-machchinan*) are both opposed and exclusive to each other. This classification, which has been explained above in terms of relatives in one’s own generation, is applied to groups, lineages, villages and so on. Let us now understand this bi-partition in terms of both the generation above one’s own and the generation below one’s own. In other words, we will see how the two categories of kin are observed in one’s father’s generation and in one’s children’s generation.

### **Ascending Generation**

Two classes of male kin are distinguished in the father’s generation. One class is the side of the father, and the other class is the side of the mother’s brother. With one’s father (in Tamil, *appa* or *aiya*) are classified in one group all his brothers

(*periyappa* or father's elder brother, *chittappa/sinappa* or father's younger brother) and also the husband of mother's sister (also termed *periyappa* or *chittappa/sinappa* in Tamil). With the mother's brother (*maman*) are classified father's sisters' husbands (also termed *maman* in Tamil). All immediate affines, for example, the father-in-law, are classed with the corresponding cross-relatives, i.e. the mother's brother or the *maman*.

### Descending Generation

In the generation below one's own we have again the same principle operating. With one's daughter and son are classified children of one's parallel cousins. In Tamil, one's daughter is called *magal* and one's son is *magan*. So are one's parallel cousin's children. On the other hand are placed one's daughter-in-law (*marumagal* in Tamil) and son-in-law (*marumagan*, in Tamil). The children of one's cross-cousins come in this category. This has to be so because they are potential spouses for one's children.

### Affines of Affines

The principle of classificatory relationship into the categories of *pangali* and *mama-machchinan* extends to even those who are the affines of one's affines. As we have already seen, the rule is that one has to assign a class to each relative. If A is the affine of B who is an affine of C, then the relationship between A and C has to be, according to the above formulation, that of a *murei pangali* or classificatory brother. This is so because anyone who is related to you, and is not your *mama-machchinan* then has to be your *murei pangali* or classificatory brother.

Thus, we have seen how at the level of three generations — that of one's own, of one's father and of one's children — all kin relationships are classified into two opposite and exclusive categories. Secondly, this principle is also extended to those who are the affines of one's affines.

Now we need to mention other features of kinship terminology in South India. One is the factor of age distinction which classifies all kin into those older and those younger to ego (i.e. the person who is the speaker). The other is related to the distinction in terminology on the basis of sex.

### Age and Sex Distinction

By separating the older and younger relatives, the ego's generation is divided into two parts. Similarly, the father's generation is also divided into two parts. In Tamil brothers and sisters and parallel cousins older to ego are called *annan/akka*, respectively, and those younger to ego are called *tambi/tangaichi*, respectively. In the same way all brothers/sisters and parallel cousins older to one's father are called *periyappa/periyamma* and younger one's are *chittappa/sinnappa/chithi sinnamma*, respectively.

The sex distinction is paired, says Dumont (1986: 302), with the alliance distinction. As soon as a distinction is not necessary for establishing an alliance relationship, it is merged. This is what we find in the case of kin terms applied in grand-parental and grand children's generation. For the generation of one's grandchild, one does not distinguish between one's son's and daughter's children. Both are referred in Tamil, as *peran* (grandson) or *peththi* (grand daughter). Similarly, maternal grandfather/mother and paternal grandfather/mother are designated by a common term *tata* for grandfather and *patti* for grandmother. Merging of the sex distinction

in generations of grandparents and grandchildren shows the boundaries where the relationship of alliance ceases to matter and the two sides can be assimilated into one category.

The above description of kinship terminology in South India should not give you the impression that there are no variations in this general picture. In fact, particular features of kinship terms in specific regions are of great interest to sociologists. For example, Louis Dumont (1986: 301-9) has discussed, in particular, the features of kinship among the Pramalai Kallar of Tamilnadu. But here we are concerned with only the general and broad scheme of kinship terminology.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Define, in three lines, parallel cousins and cross-cousins, as per south Indian kinship system.

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- ii) Name, in three lines, the two categories of relatives in one's own generation, as per kinship system in South India.

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- iii) Give, in three lines, one example of kinship term in South India to show the merging of sex distinction.

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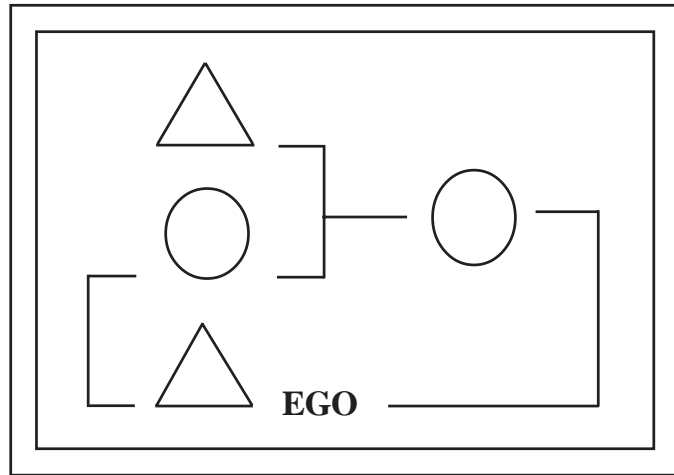
### 9.2.3 Marriage Rules

Kinship system in South India is characterised by positive rules of marriage. This means that preference for a particular type of alliance in marriage is clearly stated and practised. Remember that in the context of North India we have said that negative rules of marriage tell us whom one should not marry. In South India the marriage rules are quite clear about who one should/can marry.

#### Three Types of Preferential Marriage Rules

The preferential marriage rules are of the following three types.

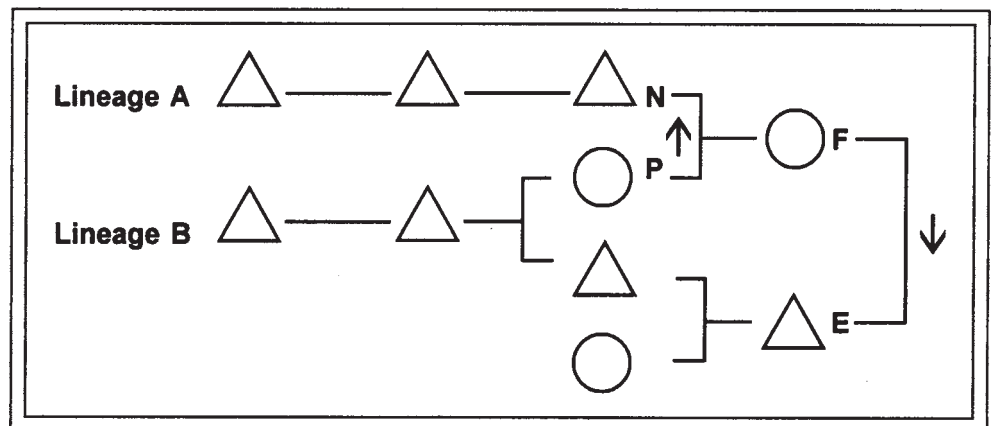
- i) In several castes in South India, the first preference is given to the marriage between a man and his elder sister's daughter. Among the matrilineal societies like the Nayars, this is not allowed. A simple diagram in figure 9.2 will show this positive rule of marriage.



**Fig. 9.2: Marriage with the elder sister's daughter**

The figure 9.2 shows that ego is married to his sister's daughter. This is the most preferred form of marriage.

- ii) Next category of preferred marriage is the marriage of a man with his father's sister's daughter (fzd). In other words, we can also say that a woman marries her mother's brother's son (mbs). In this kind of marriage, the principle of return is quite evident. The family, which gives a daughter, expects to receive a daughter in return in marriage. In other words we can say that when an ego marries her mbs, she is given in marriage to the family from which her mother had come. Thus, principle of return is followed in this type of preference. Often, this process takes two generations to materialise. With the help of a kinship diagram in figure 9.3 we will see how this rule operates.

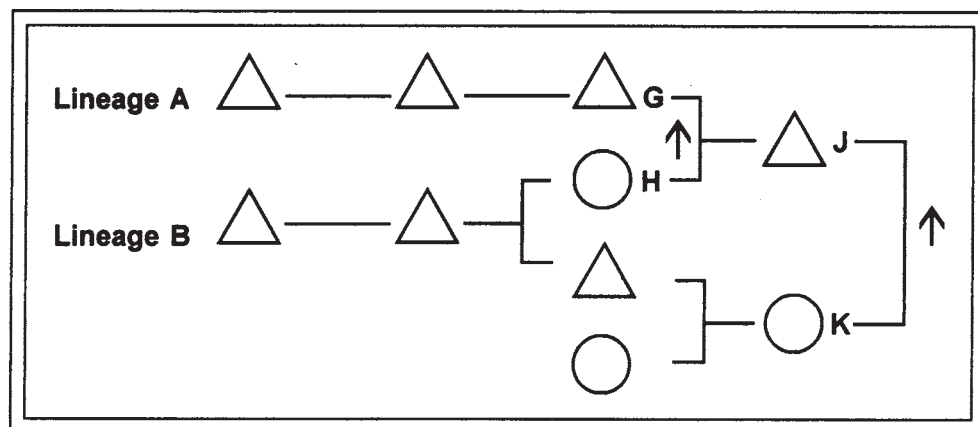


**Fig. 9.3: The rule of return in marriage**

Lineage B gave the woman (P) in marriage to the man (N) of lineage A. In the next generation, lineage A gave the woman (F) to the man (E) of lineage B. Thus, a man's marriage with patrilineal cross-cousin reflects the positive 'rule of return' in South India.

- iii) The third type of preferential marriage is between a man and his mother's brother's daughter (mbd). In a way, this is the reverse of (ii) above. Some castes, such as the Kallar of Tamil Nadu, Havik Brahmin of Karnataka, some Reddy castes of Andhra Pradesh, allow only this type of cross-cousin

marriage. In the castes which have type (iii) of preference, there is always an underlying notion of superiority or hypergamy. This is not present in South India to the extent that is found among the bride-takers in North India. But in this type of marriage, the principle of no-return or a 'vine must not be returned' is practised and therefore the bride is given only in one direction. The bride-takers are considered to be somewhat higher to bride-givers. That is why this rule of no return. Thus, where a man marries his mother's brother's daughter his family is again receiving a woman from the family, which gave his mother to his father's family. This process is only unidirectional, as is shown in the kinship diagram in figure 9.4.



**Fig. 9.4: The rule of no return or the rule of repetition**

Figure 9.4 shown that lineage B gave the woman (H) to the man (G) of lineage A. In the next generation lineage B gave again a woman (K) to the man (J) of lineage A. Here a man's marriage to his matrilineal cross-cousin indicates the positive 'rule of repetition' among some castes in South India.

When one set of brother and sister marry another set of brother and sister, there is no distinction between patrilineal and matrilineal cousins in the cases of marriage of their children. Then the question of preference for (ii) or (iii) type does not arise, because the children of each set are cross-cousins to the other and they can and do marry. This is basically a form of the above three types only and does not constitute a separate type.

In the above three types of preferential marriage in South India we find a definite tendency towards marriages within a small kin group. This group is just outside one's immediate family. The family seeks to strengthen the already existing kin relationships through marriage. Thus, a woman may find that by marrying her mother's brother (mb) her mother's mother (mm) and mother-in-law are one and the same person. Or, if she marries her mother's brother's son then her mother's mother and her husband's father's mother are one and the same person. These examples go to show that marriages take place within the limited kin group. This also shows that village exogamy is not practised in South India. The agnates and affines can be found living in the same village. Affines in South India, living in the same village, are commonly involved in each other's social life. This kind of situation is rare in the context of kin groups in North India. But there are some other restrictions regarding marital alliances in South India. We shall now look at them.



In this context it is necessary to see what are the restrictions imposed with regard to marriage between certain relatives. For example, in certain castes a man can marry his elder sister's daughter but not younger sister's daughter. Also a widow cannot marry her deceased husband's elder or younger brother or even his classificatory brother. Here we find that for each individual, the prohibited persons for marriage differ. Then there is, of course, the rule that a person cannot marry in one's own immediate family and one's lineage. The lineage in the case of the Kallar subcaste is known as *Kuttam* (Dumont 1986: 184). All individuals in the lineage are forbidden to marry persons of the lineage.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) What are the three preferential marriage rules in South India? Use four lines for your answer.

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- ii) Is it possible to have village exogamy in South India? Use three lines for your answer.

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### **9.2.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin**

The process of gift-giving and taking reflects the principles governing the separation/assimilation of various categories of kin relationships. This is the reason why we look at this aspect of kinship behaviour. Gifts and counter-gifts in South India from certain persons to other persons or from certain groups to other groups can be distinguished in two categories.

- i) Gifts passing from the bride's family to the groom's family or the reverse can be seen as a series of exchanges between affines. This is one category of gift-exchange.
- ii) The other category of gift-giving and taking occurs within each of the two groups. We can call it internal exchange of gifts. It is sometimes possible for a person to make/receive gifts from both sides. Because of the positive rules of marriage between relatives, often certain individuals are placed in the positions of receivers and givers at the same time. In other words, there is a process of merging of relationships.

### **Examples**

Let us take some examples of both categories from ethnographic studies made in South India.

## Examples of Category One

Louis Dumont (1986: 256) in his study of the Pramalai Kallar subcaste of Tamil Nadu mentions a gift of money from the bridegroom's father to the bride's father. It is known as '*parisam*'. The bride's father uses this money to get jewels for his daughter. But he is expected to spend twice the amount he receives. Thus, we may say that the bride's jewels are paid for half-in-half by the two families. This particular ceremony marks the beginning of the giving and taking of gifts between affines. It continues for a period of at least three years.

Then, the birth of the first child gives rise to another cycle of gift-exchange. In fact, among the Pramalai Kallar after three years of marriage or after birth of a child, when the newly weds set up an individual household, the bride's parents provide the household articles. This gift is called '*vere pona sir*', literally meaning 'the gift for going apart'. So from '*parisam*' to 'the gift for going apart', we witness the series in which a gift is made and it is returned after 'doubling' its content. The series begins with a gift from the groom's side and ends with a gift from the bride's side. Thus, though there is a reciprocity of gifts between affines on both sides, it is quite clear that the bride's side ends up paying more. In other words, gifts from the groom's side are mere excuses for getting more gifts from the bride's side. Having seen the nature of gifts passing from the bride's family to the groom's family, now we also discuss the gifts given and taken within each group of affines.

## Examples of Category Two

At weddings, both in the bride's house and in the groom's house, respectively, a collection (usually in the form of cash) is taken from the relatives present at the occasion. This is called the '*moy*' among the non-Brahmin castes in South India. The same is practised by the Brahmins under the name of 'writing the *moy*'. A person is given the charge of recording the amount of cash/kind given by a particular person. In this gift-giving also, there is the principle of reciprocity. One gives '*moy*' to those who have already given or will give on similar occasions. Louis Dumont (1986: 256) tells us that among the Pramalai Kallar, the mother's brother is the first person to contribute to the *moy*. After the mother's brother other relatives make their contribution. Usually the money thus collected goes towards the expenses incurred for the marriage feast.

In the cycle of internal gifts, the role of the mother's brother is quite prominent. After a child is born to a family, the mother's brother gives gifts on various occasions in the child's life. Among the Pramalai Kallar (see Dumont 1986: 256) the mother's brother gives to his sister's son at birth a gift of land or money. In a way, we can say that the gifts given by mother's brother are a continuation of the series, which started at the mother's wedding. Then we called it an exchange of gifts between affines. Now, the mother's brother, an affine of ego's father, is merged in relation to the affines in ego's generation, among the common relatives of one group, either of the bride/or the groom. Secondly, the special place of the gifts made by the mother's brother points to the obligation the female side has to the male side. This is seen in the continuity maintained by the relatives on the mother's side in terms of gift-giving even to the next generation.

## Element of Reciprocity in Gift-giving

In conclusion, we may say that in the context of kinship behaviour at ceremonial exchanges of gifts in South India, the element of reciprocity is present, though the

bride-givers have to pay more gifts than they receive. In comparative terms, we may say that in North India, the gifts travel from the bride-givers to bride-takers in a unidirectional manner. As a result, the bride-givers, in turn, receive the enhanced prestige and status in their own community. In South India, the positive rule of marriage means that gifts are exchanged among close relatives. There is always the difference in the amount of gifts both sides exchange but their flow has to remain both-sided. It cannot be as unidirectional as it is in North India.

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) Describe, in four lines, the two categories of gifts, given at marriage in South India.

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- ii) Are gifts at marriage, in South India, unidirectional? Use three lines for your answer.

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### **9.3 A COMPARISON OF NORTH AND SOUTH INDIAN KINSHIP SYSTEMS**

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In this section we shall first look at differences in the kinship system in North and South India. Then we will also discuss the elements of similarity between them.

#### **9.3.1 Differences**

We have already seen how in North India the kinship system is characterised by negative rules of marriage. The South Indian kinship system, on the other hand, is characterised by positive rules of marriage. In North India, a marriage alliance links one family with an entirely new family and in fact one village with another village. In South India, most marriage alliances occur within a small kin group and the emphasis is laid on relationships on both the father's and mother's sides. Further, there is almost no territorial exogamy. This results in co-activity among the affines. In North India co-activity takes place among only the lineage members. One's affines generally live in other villages and do not participate in one's day-to-day affairs. Thus, following the negative and positive marriage rules we encounter different types of kinship bonds in North and South India.

Following the composition of kinship groups the kinship terminology in North India reflects the separation of kin related by blood from those related by marriage. While in South India, the kinship terminology emphasises the symmetry of relationships between the affines. The South Indian or Dravidian terminology is structured on the principle classificatory kin relationships and divides a generation

into parallel and cross relatives. This distinction is crucial in South India which is irrelevant for the purpose of marriage alliances in North India.

Secondly, marriage alliances in North India follow the principle of hypergamy. This means that the bride-givers are distinctly inferior to the bride-takers. In South India, preferable marriage is with one's matrilateral and sometimes patrilineal cross-cousin and sometimes intergeneration (between mb and zd). This situation makes it difficult to brand the bride-takers as superior to the bride-givers. Already related kin cannot be treated as lower or higher after a marriage. It is easier to treat bride-givers as lower in North India because marital alliances are mostly made between unrelated and relatively unknown family groups. With reference to the Dravidian or South Indian system, Dumont (1986: 299) considers that the principal marriage (usually a person's first marriage) links the persons of equal status. He calls it isogamy, i.e., the marriage between two equals. What we need to remember here is that the notion of hypergamy or the status of bride givers being lower than the status of bride-takers, also exists in South India but it is much less common because of the already existing relationships.

Thirdly, we can also look at the differences between the two systems in terms of status of women. In North India, a girl enters the family of total strangers when she gets married and leaves her natal home. Her behaviour in her father's house is quite different from how she is expected to behave in her father-in-law's house. In South India, from the woman's point of view, there is little difference between her family of birth and the family of marriage. She is not a stranger in her husband's house.

### 9.3.2 Similarities

We have discussed the kinship systems without talking much about the link between caste and kinship. This does not mean that their relationship is either weak or irrelevant. The fact is that in both North and South India, caste and kinship are inextricably intertwined. The all India system of hierarchy and social stratification permeates the kinship system as well. The notions of purity and pollution are found influencing the kinship systems in terms of protecting the purity of one's blood.

Another basic similarity is unilineality of the two kinship systems. In both North and South India, we find the application of one principle of descent either matrilineal or patrilineal. Irrespective of a society being either patrilineal or matrilineal, the kinship systems in both regions emphasise the role of affinity in social relationships and networks. This means that relationships established through marriages are important in both systems. The distinction between bride-givers and bride-takers is recognised in both North and South India. Undoubtedly, the degree of emphasis on affinity does highlight the essential difference between the two systems. Yet, Dumont (1961, 1964 and 1966) has tried to discover the underlying similarities between the kinship systems in North and South India. According to him, the very recognition of the distinction between bride-givers and bride-takers across North and South India shows the basic similarity in the kinship system.

#### Activity 1

Read section 9.3, subsection 9.3.1 and 9.3.2 and list the differences and similarities between kinship system in North and South India. Then, work out differences in the position of women in both the regions and write a short note on this theme.

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## 9.4 KINSHIP ORGANISATION IN MATRILINEAL COMMUNITIES IN NORTH-EAST AND SOUTH-WEST INDIA

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In section 9.2 of this unit, we said that both North and South India have variations in kinship systems. Having outlined broad patterns of kinship organisation in patrilineal societies we now give a brief account of the less common types of matrilineal descent system in India. These are in contrast to patrilineal descent system and provide us with examples of quite different patterns of kinship.

Matrilineal communities in India are confined to south-western and north-eastern regions only. In North India, the matrilineal social organisation is found among the Garo and Khasi tribes of Meghalaya and Assam. In South India, matriliney is found in Kerala, in parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep. Among the matrilineal groups of both the Hindus and the Muslims in these regions property is inherited by daughters from their mothers. Let us in brief discuss what a matrilineal system is. Then we will look at the patterns of kinship organisation in the above mentioned societies.

### 9.4.1 Matrilineal Descent System

In a matrilineal descent system, the children trace relationship through mother. A matrilineal descent system should not be confused with matriarchal system. In matriarchy, women also hold power. In matriliney, though descent is traced through women, power does not normally lie in their hands. Social control and power of decision-making regarding land and other property is held by men. Thus, we can clearly say that in matrilineal system women perpetuate the line of descent and children follow the social status of their mother. Through the mother they acquire a right in property. Correspondingly, we also notice that here, the birth of a male child is not a special occasion.

Matrilineal descent is linked with those economic systems which recognise women's independence and their right to organise their living arrangements themselves. In these systems, men do help in some economic activities, like hunting, fighting and trading. In some cases, large-scale changes in the economic system do not reflect corresponding changes in the traditional social organisation. Often even the change in religion has not much affected the patterns of kinship and marriage. Yet, we cannot say that the factors such as market economy, access to education, legal changes, diversification of occupational structure, have brought no changes in matrilineal communities. These have definitely affected patterns of residence after marriage, rules of succession and structure of authority in the family. Now we first discuss the pattern of kinship organisation among the matrilineal communities of north-east India.

### 9.4.2 Matrilineal Groups in North-east India

The matriliney is represented, in the north-east, mainly by the Garo and the Khasi in the states of Meghalaya and Assam. We will now discuss in brief the broad features of the kinship organisation in each of these two groups.

#### i) The Garo

Among the Garo tribals who are found mainly in the state of Meghalaya, a matrilineage is represented by the households of daughters. These households come



out of the original household (consisting of a woman, her daughter and her son-in-law) which is continued by retaining one daughter within its fold. The husband (*nokma*) of this daughter inherits the rights and duties of the head and manager of the household (*nok*), while the daughter inherits the property. Unmarried daughters and sons live with their mother, while married daughters, except the one living in the original household, set up households near their mother's house. The married sons leave their mother's house to join their wives.

A matrilineage is understood by the term *machong*, which refers to an extended group of kin, living in a locality. All members of a matrilineage or *machong* trace descent from a common mother. The children take the name of their mother's clan. In the matter of tracing descent and passing on property, mother is the pivot around which the Garo society revolves. But decision-making regarding land and other property and management of the affairs of the household (*nok*), lie with men. As authority is exercised within the framework of a lineage, some men of the lineage have to remain in the village within its fold, while others may go and live in the families of their spouses. Thus, a Garo village generally includes most women of the core lineage (or lineages) together with their husbands and off spring. In addition, it has also some men who belong to these core lineage (or lineages).

In this way we can clearly see that a cooperating group in a Garo village comprises a unilineally related core. So kinship relationships begin with those in the immediate family and extend to the cooperating group (*nok*) and lineage (*machong*). Further they extend to the village and village cluster. The Garo are divided into two phratries (*katchi*). A phratry is a kinship unit of the tribe. The two kinship units among the Garo are named the *Marak* and the *Sangma*, respectively. There are no inter-marriages between the two phratries. The dual social organisation of the Garo gives them the ever-widening circles of kin relatives within each phratry.

Kinship groups are involved in the process of settling disputes. Mostly members of a matrilineally defined kindred take action in these matters. The institutionalised role of the headman (*nokma*) is the basis of the organisation of local village groups.

After marriage the pattern of residence is matrilocal. This means that after marriage the son-in-law lives in his wife's parents' house. He becomes the *nokrom* of his father-in-law. After the death of the father-in-law, a *nokrom* marries his wife's mother and becomes the husband of both the mother and the daughter. According to Burling (1963) a man's marriage with his mother-in-law is only an economic arrangement to enable the son-in-law to succeed his father-in-law as the head of the *nok*. The Garo have the custom of avoidance between a mother-in-law and her son-in-law during her husband's life-time. That is why the marriage between the two after the father-in-law's death, is seen only as an economic arrangement by Burling (1963). If a woman becomes a widow before there comes a *nokrom* or a son-in-law in the family, she cannot remarry without the permission of the family of her deceased husband. However, children from such a union belong to the lineage of the mother.

Property owned by a matrilineage (*machong*) cannot pass out of it. It goes from mother to daughter. In a family of more than one daughter the mother selects her heiress (the *nokna*). At the present time, other daughters in the family also get a small portion of the parental property at their marriage. These daughters usually set up their own family units. In a matrilineage a son cannot inherit property. A man as a husband can however make full use of his wife's property during her life-time.



As mentioned before, some male members of the lineage remain in the village. These people manage the day-to-day affairs of their sisters' families. This is known as the *nokpan* system in which the mother's brother or the maternal uncle has a very important place. He has a strong hold over his sister's children and acts as their father.

Chie Nakane (1968) has shown that the Garo have two lines (i) the line of ownership of property and (ii) the line of authority and management of property. She says that the functions of both the lines are equally strong. The first line is taken care of through the wife while the second line is managed through the husband. Thus, the co-residential core among the Garo is that of husband and wife.

The rules of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage (a man's marriage with his mother's brother's daughter) and mother-in-law marriage (a man's marriage with his mother-in-law) are the two mechanisms to end the problems which arise out of the contradiction between the above mentioned two lines. Secondly, among the Garo, divorce is a rarity. However, incidence of adultery does lead to divorce. So also does the refusal of work.

## ii) **The Khasi**

The Khasi are a matrilineal tribe, which lives in the hills of Meghalaya. These tribals are matrilineal in descent. This means they trace their descent through the mother. Inheritance and succession are also through the mother. Residence after marriage is matrilineal. This means that a man after his marriage lives with his wife's parents. The Khasi have exogamous clans, that is, two persons belonging to one clan cannot marry each other.

They have a classificatory kinship terminology. This means that they address their lineal relatives (father, son etc.) by terms, which are also applied to certain collateral relatives. For example, the same term is applied to the father and to the father's brother. In other words, the terms for siblings are also applied to parallel cousins.

The Khasi rules of marriage allow the matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. But levirate (marriage of a widow with her husband's brother) or sororate (marriage of a widower with his wife's sister) marriages are not allowed. They do not also practice hypergamy, i.e. woman's marriage into a group higher in status than her own group. Polygyny (a man's marriage to more than one spouse at a time) as well as polyandry (a woman's marriage to more than one spouse, at a time) are unknown among the Khasi. A man may have a mistress. Among some sections of the Khasi, children from his mistress equally share inheritance rights to the father's property, if any is acquired by him, with other children in the family.

The Khasi follow the rule of **ultimogeniture**. This refers to the system of inheritance by which the youngest daughter in the matrilineal societies (son in patrilineal societies) succeeds to the property. Thus, among the Khasi, the youngest daughter is the heiress. She, her husband and children live with her mother and father. She performs the family ceremonies and propitiates the family ancestors. The youngest daughter gets the main share of the property and other daughters are entitled to a share of their mother's property on her death only. The other daughters normally move out after their marriage and birth of first or second child. They live **neolocally** in nuclear family households with their husbands and children.

The status of the man who marries the youngest daughter is quite different from that of the men who marry other daughters. The husband of the youngest daughter is the head of the household in which his wife and her parents live. The men marrying other daughters are, on the other hand, the masters of the houses they build and manage. Among the Khasi, the ideal type of co-residence after marriage comprises a woman with either her husband or her brother.

The function of the line of ownership of property, i.e., the line of the mother is stronger than that of the line, which manages the property, i.e., the line of the father.

The Khasi say that all members of a clan descend from a woman ancestor. They are called 'one clan'. The 'one clan' is divided into sub-clans, which originate from those who descend from one great grandmother. The next division is the family, which comprises the grandmother, her daughters, and the daughters' children, living under one roof. The male child is generally lost to the family he marries into. As a husband, the man is looked upon as a begetter. All property acquired by a man before marriage belongs to his mother. After marriage the property acquired by a man goes to his wife. The wife and children inherit such property. The youngest daughter receives the major share upon the death of a man's wife. If there is no daughter, only then the acquired property of a man is equally divided among the sons.

### Activity 2

Read Section 9.4, subsections 9.4.1 and 9.4.2 and list main features of matrilineal system among the Garo and the Khasi tribals of Meghalaya.

## 9.4.3 Matrilineal Groups in South-west India

The state of Kerala in the south-western region of India has been the main seat of matrilineal communities. Here we will discuss in brief the case of the Nayar community. We will also look at the features of the matrilineal Muslim community in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep.

The Nayar of Kerala present a unique type of matrilineal society and the Lakshadweep Muslims present a rare example of the absence of the social unit of husband, wife and children. Let us look at the two cases.

### i) The Nayar example

The kinship institutions of the Nayar have been described and analysed by many anthropologists and sociologists, e.g., by F. Fawcett (1915), K.M. Panikkar (1918), L.K.A. Iyer (1909-12, 1932), Aiyappan (1932, 1934), K. Gough (1952).

It was K. Gough (1952) who first pointed out that the Nayar are a named category of castes and they have three different systems of kinship. These systems operate in North Kerala, in Central Kerala and in Southern areas around Travancore. These are three cultural divisions of the state of Kerala. In a book (*Matrilineal kinship* (1962), edited by Schneider and Gough) Gough has looked at the kinship systems of the **retainer** Nayar castes (one of the three ranked groups among the Nayar of Central Kerala) and of the Nayar of North Kerala.

The Nayar of Central Kerala follow the practice of visiting husbands. Thus, they do not have the institution of the elementary family in which husband, wife and

children live together under one roof. Gough focused on the practice of matriliney among the Nayar before the arrival of the British in India. As far as its traditional practices of matriliney are concerned, the Nayar community has presently changed a great deal.

In the traditional system, the Nayar had three ranked groups, namely, (i) the Nayar royal lineages, (ii) the lineages of Nayar chieftains, lineages of village headmen and (iii) the retainer Nayar castes. In this system the Nayar women were allowed to marry the Nambudiri Brahmins of South-west Kerala. They could also marry in some other higher castes of the Nayar group/s and of course, in their own groups. This clearly shows that the Nayar practised hypergamy, i.e., married their women in the groups, which had social status higher than their own group. This provided an example of inter-caste hypergamy between the Nayar women and Nambudiri Brahmins of South-west Kerala.

Among the Nayar, the term *taravad* was applied for the clan, and the lineage. It also referred to the property group. Members of a *taravad* or a lineage were involved in activities of cooperation at the pre-puberty and marriage rites of girls and at the funeral of a member of the *taravad*. The lineages were linked through hereditary ties of mutual cooperation at these ceremonies. Gough (1962) shows that the linked lineages had special roles to play. These roles outline the kinship organisation of the matrilineal units of the retainer Nayar castes.

In terms of the management of land and other property, the matrilineage was not the important unit. Instead we find that property groups were the main legal units. These operated within the local caste group. The oldest male member, known as *karanavan*, was responsible for the economic activities of the property group (*taravad*).

Gough has described the interpersonal kin relationships within the matrilineal group and has shown the closeness between mother and son. There was, on the other hand, the relationship of avoidance and constraint between a man and his sister's son. A man was to avoid his sister's daughter and behave formally towards his younger sister. These are some of the significant features of kinship among the Nayar. In a *taravad* a male observed the incest prohibitions between himself and the junior women. These prohibitions helped in maintaining the solidarity of the descent group. Within the matrilineage sex relations were not allowed. So also they were forbidden within a certain range of affines and with men of lower castes.

The emphasis being on the solidarity of the lineage group, marriage was the weakest institution among the Nayar. For example, Gough has shown that among the retainer Nayar castes, a woman had a number of husbands at a time. She was also visited by men of appropriate groups. The same was true for a Nayar man who visited a number of women of appropriate groups. In this situation, 'marriage', or better referred as *sambandham* (the term used by the Nayar communities) involved very few obligations. There was no ceremony at any point to mark the event. The procedure to legitimise the birth of children was quite simple. A legally obligatory payment to the midwife attending the delivery and gift of cloth to the mother were made by some man/men of appropriate rank, having *sambandham* ('marriage') relationship with her. This was all that legitimised children. As a mark of married status a woman wore *tali* or the marriage badge throughout her life. The woman and her children observed pollution at the death of her ritual husband. They did nothing when any particular visiting husband died. Here we have mentioned

the term 'ritual husband'. Let us see what it refers to in the context of the Nayar marriage.

J.P. Mencher and H. Goldberg (1967) have described the unusual kinship and marriage system found among the patrilineal Nambudiri Brahmin of the south-west Kerala. This group is shown to have a complementary system and to survive with the help of the Nayar group only. Let us see how it worked.

Land owned by a Nambudiri patrilineage was indivisible and it was managed by the eldest male in the patrilineage. Among the Nambudiri Brahmin, only the first son could marry within the caste and could have up to three wives at a time. In other words, he was allowed to practice polygyny. The remaining sons of the group had *sambandham* (marriage) relationships with Nayar women. Such a Nambudiri Brahmin, who forms *sambandham* with a Nayar woman, is called her 'ritual husband'. The children from these unions always belonged to the lineage of Nayar women only. In this way the Nambudiri men could check their children by Nayar women from claiming a share in their lineage property. Here we find that both the Nambudiri patrilineal group and the Nayar matrilineal group insist on maintaining their autonomy. Further, kinship relationships within respective lineages remain strong. The result is that affinal relationships arising out of *sambandham* alliances are quite weak. The strong descent ties and weak affinal links in this case are related to the kind of private ownership of land in Kerala. We shall not go into the details of this aspect. Rather we will now look at kinship terminology and changes brought in kinship system among the Nayar. Gough has shown the nature of father-child relationship among the Nayar. The Nayar kinship terminology has no term to specify father. A person in the Nayar *taravad* had no obligations towards the patrilineal kin. Thus, the terminology clearly emphasised the matriliney.

On the basis of recent changes in the practice of matrilineal kinship organisation among the Nayars, it is said that the Nayars of Central Kerala are increasingly accepting the idea of elementary family. K.R. Unni (1956) has studied the changes in the pattern of residence among the Nayar of Central Kerala. He has concluded that these Nayars were changing from a matrilineal to bilateral kinship system. This means that they have begun to emphasise the relationships on the sides of both the mother and the father.

### Activity 3

Draw a map of the state of Kerala. Show the three cultural divisions of the state, in terms of the operation of matriliney among the Nayar. State which of the three divisions had three ranked groups.

### ii) Matrilineal Muslims of Lakshadweep

Now we shift to a discussion of the matrilineal Muslim community of Lakshadweep. These matrilineal Muslims are descendants of Hindu immigrants from Kerala. Later, they were converted to Islam. They follow duolocal residence. Duolocal residence implies that the husband and the wife reside separately. In this context it means that the husband visits his wife's home at night. The common unit of matriliney on the island is the *taravad*. A *taravad* here is a group of both the males and the females with common ancestress in the female line. Name of a *taravad* is used by its members as prefix to their own names. By the fact of taking birth in a *taravad* each person gets the right to share the *taravad* property. This right passes through

the female members. A male member has the same right of using the property of his *taravad*. The *taravad* is an exogamous unit, i.e., a member cannot marry another member of the same *taravad*. The *taravad* may comprise one domestic group or a number of domestic groups.

In this community, the father has a special role, which is associated with these people's conversion to Islam. He has to substantially spend money on ceremonies linked with his children's life cycle rituals. Leela Dube (1969) has shown how the influence of Islam has affected the patterns of kinship and marriage in this community. The Islamic practices of a patrilineal social structure have affected the form of kinship relationships, operating in a matrilineal framework. Regarding the inheritance of property on the island, Leela Dube (1969) has shown that marriage is quite fragile on the island. It incorporates few rights and responsibilities. People manipulate the inheritance of property on the basis of both the matrilineal and Islamic (patrilineal) principles. Islam provides procedure for easy divorce and islanders use it frequently. The institution of *taravad* as a unit of production and consumption, however, remains basically matrilineal.

These accounts of matrilineal communities give us a picture of contrast from the commonly found patterns of patrilineality in India. In the limited scope of two units (Units 8 and 9) we have attempted to look at both the most common pattern of patrilineal kinship systems and the less-common systems of matrilineal kinship organisations in some parts of India.

### **Cheek Your Progress 5**

- i) Fill in the blanks
  - a) Matrilineal Muslim community of Lakshadweep comprises descendants of ..... from Kerala.
  - b) The common unit of matrilineality in Lakshadweep is .....
- ii) Can a male and a female member of a *taravad*, in Lakshadweep marry each other? Use three lines for your answer.  
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## **9.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we discussed the main features of patrilineal kinship system in South India. This was done in terms of kinship groups, kinship terminology, marriage rules and ceremonial exchange of gifts among the kin. Then we noted how kinship systems in the two regions compare in terms of similarities and differences. Finally we also gave an account of matrilineal kinship system in North-east and South-west India.

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## 9.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Neolocal</b>	This term refers to residence after marriage. In this type of residence, the husband and the wife set up an independent household.
<b>Patrilocal</b>	In this type of residence after marriage, the married couple lives with the husband's father's family.
<b>Retainer</b>	This term is used to refer to a person or a group of persons, attached or owing service to a household. In the context of the Nayar castes, it refers to those Nayar who were attached to Nayar chiefs.
<b>Ultimogeniture</b>	This term refers to a system of inheritance by which the youngest son/daughter succeeds to the estate in a patrilineal/matrilineal society, respectively.

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## 9.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) In South India, we find two types of kinship groups, namely the patrilineages and the affinal relatives.
- ii) In terms of South Indian kinship terminology, an affine of my affine is my classificatory *pangali*.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Parallel cousins are the children of the siblings of same sex. Cross-cousins are the children of the siblings of opposite sex.



## Family, Marriage and Kinship

- ii) In South Indian patrilineal societies, all relatives in one's own generation are divided into two categories, namely, the *pangali* and *mama-machchinan*.
- iii) To refer to one's grandfather on both the mother's side and father's side, in Tamil, there is only one term, *i.e.*, *tata*. This is an example of merging of sex distinction existing between the parents of one's parents.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) The three preferential rules of marriage in South India are
  - a) a man should marry his elder sister's daughter.
  - b) a man should marry his father's sister's daughter.
  - c) a man should marry his mother's brother's daughter.
- ii) It is not usual to find village exogamy in South India. This is so because in South India, rules of marriage allow marital alliances within close kin groups.

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) The two categories of gifts given at weddings in South India comprise (a) those gifts which are given by the bride-givers to the bride-takers and vice-versa; and (b) those gifts which are given to the bride/bridegroom by the paternal and maternal and other relatives of the bride/bridegroom.
- ii) By and large, gifts given at weddings in South India are not unidirectional. There is an element of reciprocity in them, that is both the bride's side as well as the bridegroom's side exchange gifts.

### Check Your Progress 5

- i)
  - a) Hindu immigrants
  - b) *taravad*
- ii) No, the *taravad* in Lakshadweep is an exogamous unit and therefore a member is not allowed to marry another member of the same *taravad*.

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### Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Features of a Rural Economy
- 10.3 Traditional Rural Economy
  - 10.3.1 Ancient Period
  - 10.3.2 Medieval Period
- 10.4 Colonial Rural Economy
  - 10.4.1 De-industrialisation
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- 10.5 Rural Economy after Independence
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## 10.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you will be able to

- state the main features of a rural economy
- discuss the nature of Indian rural economy from a historical perspective which would briefly cover traditional and colonial periods
- describe the rural economic situation after Independence.

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## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous two Blocks of this course we looked at some important facets of rural and urban social structures as well as the variations found in social institutions like family, marriage and kinship. In this Block we are going to focus on the economic and political aspects of Indian social structure.

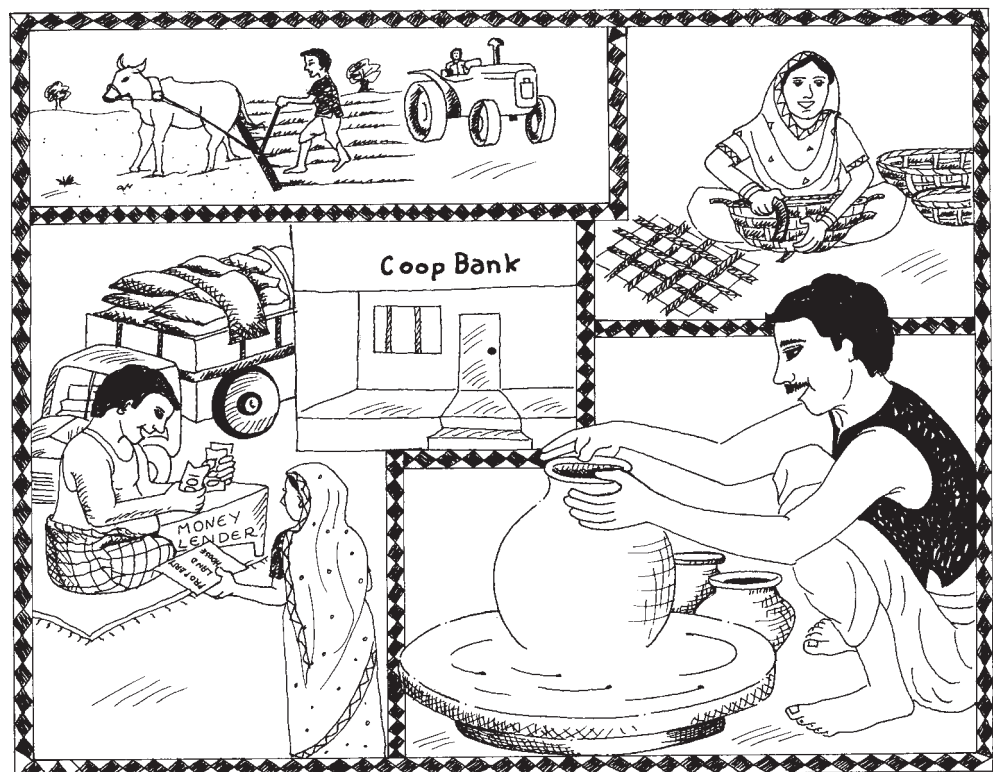
In units 10,11 and 12 of this Block we will look at the rural and urban economy and the problem of poverty in rural and urban India. In unit 10 on rural economy we will discuss the nature of India's rural economy in a historical perspective.

The section 10.2 gives an outline of the main features of a rural economy. Section 10.3 discusses the nature of rural economy in ancient and medieval periods of Indian history. Rural economy during the colonial rule is described in section 10.4. We then look at some important changes in rural economy since Independence in section 10.5.

## 10.2 FEATURES OF A RURAL ECONOMY

Generally speaking the concept of economy deals with production, distribution and consumption of material goods and services. Material goods are produced with certain means, raw materials, technology and labour. Moreover, people enter into social relations for organisation of production. Produced goods are distributed among the various sections of society. Society also fulfils the need of different kind of services. Further, we find that historical experiences of human society show changes in economic life over a period of time, which is accompanied by changes in society as a whole. We have therefore taken a historical perspective to describe rural economy in India. Let us first define the term 'rural'.

Such criteria as demographic, economic, ecological and socio-cultural are used to identify what is rural. The popular definition is that it is an area pertaining to the country as distinguished from a city or a town. Agriculture is its main economic activity.



**Fig. 10.1: Rural economy**

In the case of rural economy land is the primary means of production. Land is made fertile by human labour. The rural people live in villages and produce a variety of crops by means of technique and their labour power. Moreover,

village and cottage industries also have been traditionally an important part of rural economy. A cottage industry is a home-based industry, which generally produces finished goods. A graphical representation of various constituents of rural economy is shown in figure 10.1.

The level of material prosperity of society is determined by the level of production and the mode of distribution of products among the different strata of society. Our discussion of India's rural economy would therefore deal with the issues of ownership and control of land and other assets, and technique of production. It includes a description of the organisation of production and accompanying social relations. It will also include a discussion of inter linkage between agriculture and village industries. For the sake of simplicity of presentation, we have discussed these issues in a historical perspective.

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### 10.3 TRADITIONAL RURAL ECONOMY

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Rural economy has been dominant in India since ages. Agriculture is its base, which provides food for the whole population and raw materials for rural and urban industries. In 1981, seventy-six per cent people of the total population lived in villages, sixty-three per cent of India's population were dependent on agriculture as their source of livelihood and sixty per cent of the working population was engaged in agriculture. Later figures show that 74.3 per cent in 1991 and seventy-two per cent of the total population in 2001 lived in villages. Agriculture was the means of livelihood for 60.5 per cent and 58 per cent of the total workforce in the years 1991 and 2001, respectively. The census figures since 1981 clearly show that there is a decline in the per centage of the people engaged in agricultural sector over the years. The Economic Survey 1999-2000 acknowledged that the overall employment growth in agricultural sector declined from 2.75 per cent in 1972-78 to 2.37 per cent in 1988-94, even while the survey reiterated that the higher growth of the economy could be sustained only if agriculture and the allied activities grow at an average annual rate of four per cent (Economic Survey 1999-2000). Agriculture constituted forty per cent of the national income. In 1991, agriculture and the allied activities constituted the single largest (almost thirty-three per cent) contributor to the GDP. Though in the year 2001 the income from agriculture and allied activities has declined to 24.9 per cent, it still makes a significant contribution to our export.

Let us now look at the nature of the rural economy in ancient and medieval periods of time.

#### 10.3.1 Ancient Period

Rural economy in India goes back to the Indus Valley Civilisation (c. 2600-1500 B.C.). This was an urban civilisation having a wide agricultural base. Plough cultivation was known to the rural people. Its evidence was found in archaeological excavations at Kalibangan in Ganganagar, Rajasthan. Crops like wheat, rice, peas, seasamum and cotton were grown in the flood plains of the Indus river and its tributaries. Foodgrains from the rural areas were stored for the townsmen. This is testified by the existence of granaries at various Indus towns. Potters made earthen wares and metal workers manufactured articles of copper and bronze. Ram Sharan Sharma (1983: 198) observes that

the chief basis of Indus urbanisation could be the taxes and tributes collected from the peasants living in the vicinity of the towns. This form of economy however changed to pastoral and semi-nomadic way of life.

**i) Pastoral Economy**

In the beginning of the Rigvedic period (c. 1500-1000 BC) there occurred a complete rupture with the earlier economy. The life of the Rigvedic people was pastoral and semi-nomadic. Their main occupation was cattle rearing. Cows, goats, sheep and horses were domesticated. Pasture ground was under common control. Towards the end of the period people started settling in villages. They also took to cultivation by means of the plough drawn by oxen. Arts and crafts such as leatherwork and wool weaving were practised. The society was largely egalitarian and unhierarchical.

**ii) Agricultural Economy**

During the later Vedic Phase (c. 1000-600 BC) agricultural economy became predominant. Cattle remained the chief movable property of the people. The wooden plough with the *khadira* ploughshare was used for cultivation. Crops such as barley, wheat, rice and lentils were grown. Various arts and crafts were practised like that of carpenter, weaver, leather-worker, metal-worker, potter etc. Functional specialisation of labour took place and the society was organised on caste and *varna* lines. The Brahman performed prayers and rituals. The Kshatriya earned their livelihood by means of war and government. The Vaisya were engaged in agriculture and Shudra formed a small serving order. Land was possessed by families. Cultivation and allied activities were conducted with family labour. There were no *karmakara* or hired labourers. Taxes and tributes were collected in kind from the peasants by the king and his officers. The priests and warriors had hardly any connection with the primary aspect of production (Sharma 1983: 116). The beginnings of the *jajmani* system could be traced to this period.

**iii) Introduction of Iron**

Iron-based production in agriculture and crafts became central in the age of the Buddha (c. 600-322 BC). Now, iron ploughshare, socketed axes, knives, razors, sickles and other tools were used for productive purposes. Rice, wheat, barley, millets, pulses, sugarcane and cotton were grown extensively. A considerable portion of land was possessed by the two upper *varna*, that is, the Brahman and the Kshatriya. But a greater part of the land was in the hands of *gahapati* (peasant proprietors) belonging to the Vaisya *varna*. Peasants paid taxes directly to the king. Villages supplied food for the king, nobles, merchants, soldiers and artisans who lived in towns, with the growth of urbanisation.

**iv) State and Agriculture**

State control of agriculture became an important feature of the Mauryan period (c. 322-200 BC). Big farms were established and managed by the state. Slaves and hired labourers belonging to the Shudra *varna* were employed in them. Moreover, the state provided tax concessions and support in the form of cattle, seed and money to the Vaisya and Shudra to settle in new settlements for extension of agriculture. Royal tax on agriculture was one-sixth of the produce,

which could be raised in the time of emergency. State provided some irrigation facilities and levied cess for the same. But in the post-Mauryan period (c. 200BC-AD 300) no state farm was maintained. Land was mainly in the possession of individual cultivators.

#### v) **Feudal Relationships**

A feudal type of society started emerging during the Gupta period (AD 300-600) which gradually got stabilised. Land grants were made by the Gupta emperors, their feudatories and private individuals which created a class of powerful intermediaries between the king and the masses. Grants of land and villages were made to the Brahmans and temples. They got the land cultivated by permanent as well as temporary tenants belonging to Vaisya and Shudra *varna*. They collected land rent from the peasants without any obligation to give a share of it to the king. The feudatories were also assigned administrative powers in their areas. But free peasants cultivating land with their family labour and paying taxes to the king in areas not gifted to anyone probably still possessed a major portion of the land. At the same time their position depreciated due to imposition of various taxes. Further, land grant became more common during the post-Gupta period. Grants of land to officials in lieu of cash salaries got intensified in this phase. The grantees could deprive peasants of their means of production and curtail their rights to the use of land and pastures.

Village economy assumed a somewhat self-sufficient character with the decline of trade and urban centres. Local needs were met through local production. The *jajmani* system got reinforced by the royal charters instructing the peasants and artisans to stick to their villages. Artisans were paid in kind for their services to the peasants at harvest time.

Thus through the increase in landlords we find the development of a feudal type of society. These landlords had control over the instrument of production operated by the peasants. Society was divided into two basic classes, one of landlords and the other of peasant producers (Sharma 1985: 18).

### 10.3.2 Medieval Period

A judicious combination of agriculture and village cotton industries based on agricultural products characterises the medieval rural economy. Production was mainly for local consumption. But a part of the rural produce entered local trade. Villagers bought only a limited number of things from outside like salt, iron and a few consumer goods. Money hardly entered into transaction in the villages. The *jajmani* system continued with the mode of payment of kind. Now let us take a brief look at the state of farming, arts and crafts, trade and the nature of classes in rural areas during this period.

#### i) **Farming**

It was a period of abundance of cultivable land. Agriculture provided food for people and fodder for cattle. A large number of crops were grown such as wheat, barley, millet, peas, rice, sesame, gram, oilseeds, cotton etc. Land was irrigated by wells, dams and canals. Some water-lifting devices were also used. But generally use of the traditional implements in agriculture and crafts continued. The vast area of land depended mainly on nature (rainfall) for sustenance, as is largely the case even now.



## ii) Arts and Crafts

A variety of arts and crafts based on agricultural produce were practised in rural areas. Villagers manufactured ropes and baskets, sugar and jaggery (*gur*), bows and arrows, drums, leather buckets, etc. Various categories of craftsmen specialised in their hereditary caste occupations such as weaver, carpenter, leather-worker, blacksmith, potter, cobbler, washerman, barber, water-carrier, scavenger and oil-presser. These manufacturers and craftsmen fulfilled most of the needs of the rural people. Irfan Habib (1963: 60) observes that there would have been little left that a village would need from outside.

## iii) Trade

Both long distance inter-region trade and local trade were carried during the medieval period. Long distance caravan trade dealt in high value goods. Banjara (nomadic groups) monopolised trade in goods of bulk like foodgrains, sugar, butter and salt. Local trade largely meant the trade between towns and villages. Townsmen received from the rural areas foodstuffs to eat and raw materials for manufacturing various goods.

### Activity 1

Visit your local grocery/textiles/general stores where you buy your household requirement like food items, pots, pans, vessels, toothpowder, table, chair, cloth etc. Request the shop owner/manager to show you the various items that are produced by the local cottage industry. After you have done this, (a) locate craftspersons who make some of these items and observe how they actually work and (b) discuss with them the cost they incur while making the goods, the training they have had to make them, how they market them and what profits they get. Then on the basis of what you have observed and heard, write a brief report of about two pages on a “cottage industry”. Compare, if possible, your report with those of other students at your Study Centre.

## iv) Classes in Rural Areas

During the medieval period the entire rural population was divided into two broad classes, i.e. the big land-holders who collected land revenue from peasants in addition to owning tax-free land and the masses comprising peasants, artisans and landless labourers. The big land-holders constituted the rural segment of the ruling class headed by emperor and his nobles. They were known as *khirt*, *mugaddam* and *chaudhuri* during the Sultanate period and *deskhmukh*, *patil*, *nayak* and usually *malik* during the Mughal period. They had a good life without directly participating in the process of production. They collected land tax from the peasants and owned their own land free from taxes. They were generally prosperous enough to ride horses, wear fine clothes, own good houses, gold, and silver ornaments and thus maintain a high standard of life.

The peasants constituted the majority of the rural population. They cultivated their land with family labour and earned their livelihood. They had to pay land tax, which was usually, one-third but sometimes reached one-half of the produce. Land revenue was generally paid in cash. In addition, the peasants



had to pay other taxes e.g. *shari* (house tax) and *charai* (grazing tax) under certain rulers like Allauddin Khilji. Having been subjected to various taxes they had a very hard life to live.

Landless labourers formed another significant portion of the rural population. They worked on the land of wealthy landholders. They were in agricultural bondage of the large landowners. Some were slaves of the plough and others in domestic slavery of wealthy land-holders. They constituted a service class of hereditary serfs (Moreland 1983: 112).

In general, it has been observed that the life of the peasants, landless labourers and artisans was hard. Contemporary writings show that the masses sold their children during droughts and famines simply for the sake of their survival.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Tick the right answer.

The first evidence of plough cultivation during the ancient period was discovered at

- a) Pataliputra
- b) Hastinapur
- c) Kalibangan.

- ii) Tick the right answer.

During which period did the first state farm start?

- a) The Gupta period
- b) The Mauryan period
- c) The Mughal period

- iii) Match the following sets.

- |                              |                |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| a) Indus Valley Civilisation | a) Pastoral    |
| b) Later Vedic Society       | b) Landlordism |
| c) Rigvedic Society          | c) Agrarian    |
| d) Medieval Period           | d) Urban       |

- iv) What were the two important classes that comprised the rural population during the medieval period? Use two lines for your answer.

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## 10.4 COLONIAL RURAL ECONOMY

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The rural economy underwent some important changes during the colonial rule in India. De-industrialisation, new land revenue settlements, like the *zamindari*, *ryotwari* and *mahalgari* systems and commercialisation of agriculture were some of the important features of the rural economy during

this period. The measures introduced by the British also caused a considerable strain to the *jajmani* system. Let us look at each of these points one by one.

### 10.4.1 De-industrialisation

The British colonial rule in India shattered the traditional rural economy. It broke up the sustainable pattern of growth of rural economy. The healthy union between agriculture and village industries was destroyed. Indian economy was subordinated to the interests British trade and industry.

Rural artisan industries were hard hit under the British rule. Domestic goods were made with primitive techniques on a small scale. They could not compete with mass-produced machine made cheaper goods imported from Britain. The cotton spinning and weaving industries suffered the most. Silk and woollen textiles also were badly affected. Similarly, tanning, dyeing, oil-pressing and iron industries suffered due to introduction of machines for these purposes. Moreover, introduction of railways hastened the process of decline of the rural industries. Now, the British goods could reach the remotest corner of the rural areas. Increased export of agricultural raw materials from India for British industries injured Indian handicrafts.

The ruin of village arts and crafts led to de-industrialisation of rural economy. There was a rapid decline in the per centage of population dependent on industries from 18 per cent to 8 per cent (Sarkar 1983: 30). Cotton spinners and weavers in the villages were almost wiped out as a result of mill-made cloth from England. The other village artisans too were affected by imports from England. As a result, the dependence of people on agriculture increased. This strained the traditional *jajmani* system (see sub-section 10.4.4).

### 10.4.2 New Land Revenue Policy

In different parts of the country the British introduced three types of land revenue settlements i.e., the *zamindari*, the *ryotwari* and the *mahalwari* systems. But they had similar consequences everywhere. A very oppressive class of landlords emerged and the peasantry got impoverished. Let us examine each of these systems one by one.

#### i) Permanent Settlement

Under the permanent settlement (also known as the *Zamindari* settlement) the *zamindars* (landlords) were given hereditary ownership, over very large tracts of land known as *zamindaris*. They had to pay a certain portion of the land revenue they derived from the peasantry to the colonial government keeping the rest for themselves. The share of the government was fixed in perpetuity. However, the landlords could raise the rate of land revenue collected from the peasants at their will for their own advantage. This they normally did in order to meet the growing desire for an extravagant life style. The result was disastrous for the tenants, as they grew impoverished. Moreover, the peasants were made mere tenants being deprived of their long-standing rights to the soil and other customary rights. Further, the peasants had to pay land rent in time irrespective of good or bad harvest failing which they were dispossessed of their land by the landlords. This forced them to take loans from the money-lenders or from the *zamindars* (landlords) themselves. The peasants were even compelled to sell part of their land for paying the rent. Their indebtedness kept on mounting and added to their poverty.

## ii) **Ryotwari Settlement**

In the *Ryotwari* areas the cultivator was recognised as the owner of his land, subject to the payment of land revenue directly collected by the state, which acted in practice as a *zamindar*. The rate of land revenue was periodically revised and raised compelling the peasants to get trapped in indebtedness to the money-lenders or lose land in case of inability to pay the dues.

## iii) **Mahalwari Settlement**

The *Mahalwari* settlement of land revenue was made by the government with landlords or heads of families who collectively claimed to be the landlords of the village or the estate (*mahal*). In this case also the peasants suffered in the same manner. Therefore, Bipin Chandra (1977:187) rightly commented that the peasantry was crushed under the triple burden of the government, the *zamindar* or landlord, and the money-lender. Thus the peasants life under this system was characterised by poverty and famine.

## iv) **Consequences of the New Policy**

Other important consequences of the new land revenue policies were the ruin of most of the old *zamindars* and rise of new landlordism. The government was very rigid in collecting land revenue from the *zamindars*. The old *zamindars* had lived in villages. They were lenient in collection of revenue from the peasants especially in bad times. Therefore, failure in payment of revenue on their part to the government resulted in the dispossession of the *zamindari*. The government then auctioned off the *zamindari*. In most areas these came into the possession of merchants and money-lenders. These new *zamindars* generally lived in towns and were very ruthless in the collection of land revenue even in case of failure of crops. In addition, the process of subinfeudation grew up. Subinfeudation means that the landlords sublet their right to collect land revenue to other persons on profitable terms. They in turn also sublet their rights to the other. Thus developed a chain of rent-receiving intermediaries between the state and the actual cultivator. The burden of cultivators increased. In sum, Bipin Chandra (1977: 189) observed that as a result of overcrowding of agriculture, excessive land revenue demand, growth of landlordism, increasing indebtedness and growing impoverishment of the cultivators, Indian agriculture began to stagnate and even deteriorate, resulting in extremely low yields per acre.

### **10.4.3 Commercialisation of Agriculture**

Another impact of the British rule was commercialisation of agriculture. The rate of land revenue was high. It had to be paid in cash. Moreover, the manner of collection of revenue was also very rigid. Hence, the cultivators were forced to sell a significant portion of their produce in market after harvest, at low prices. The cultivator was to remain half-fed or go empty-stomach. There was no improvement in the technique of agricultural production, which could enable cultivators to produce surplus grains for sale in the market. In fact it was a forced entry of cultivators in the market economy.

Further, foreign capital was invested in plantation of indigo, tea and coffee in India. The produce was meant to be sold in the European market. Cotton was also exported from India to feed the British textile mills. This increased the

penetration of money economy in rural areas and interlinked the Indian economy with the international market for serving the British interests. The Indian peasant was made to bear the burden of wildly fluctuating market prices, which accentuated their misery. Growing of commercial crops and high-priced foodgrains like wheat instead of poor person's food-crops such as jowar, bajra or pulses often caused havoc in famine years. Production of commercial crops required higher inputs, which increased the dependence of the peasantry on money-lenders for more loans. Thus they remain trapped in indebtedness. Sumit Sarkar (1983: 32) aptly remarks that for the vast majority of poorer peasants, commercialisation was often a forced process.

Due to abject poverty of peasants and landless labourers the *zamindars* and money-lenders could exact forced labour and *begar* from them and impose on them illegal exactions. The practice of serfdom and debt slavery prevailed widely. Social tyranny over the masses was perpetuated (Sarkar, 1983).

#### **10.4.4 The *Jajmani* System**

In an earlier part of the unit (10.4,1) we observed that the British colonial rule shattered the traditional rural economy and caused a strain on the *jajmani* system. We have discussed about the *jajmani* system in one of our earlier Blocks of this course (Block 1 unit 2 on rural social structure). We shall look at this system here in the context of our discussion on rural economy.

The *jajmani* system was a very important rural social institution in traditional India. It grew up during the ancient phase of Indian history when occupational differentiation and specialisation of various arts, crafts and menial services developed and owners and non-owners of land emerged in villages. It maintained its vitality in the medieval period. But it started declining during the colonial period and now it is very weak in villages. It is known as *baluta*, *aya*, and *miland* in different regions of India.

The *jajmani* is a system of economic, social and ritual bond between different castes in villages. Landowning upper and intermediate castes are patrons and others belonging to poor lower castes serve the patrons. The patrons are known as *jajman* and the service castes are called *Kam Karnewale* or *Kamin* or *Purjan*. The service castes like carpenter, blacksmith, potter, barber, leather-worker and water-carrier offer their services to the landowning upper and intermediate castes, e.g. Rajput, Bhumihaar and Jat etc. in the North and Kamma, Reddi and Lingayat etc. in the South. The service castes are usually paid in kind. They are also entitled to other considerations like free house site in addition to free food, clothing etc. on certain occasions e.g. festivals, birth, death and marriage.

The *jajmani* relations also extend to neighbouring villages. The service castes have their *jajmans* (clients) outside the village where they live. Wherever problems regarding rights and obligations or other matters related to the *jajmani* system develop, they are settled by the caste panchayats and village panchayats.

However, the *jajmani* relations primarily operate at family level. Each family in the village maintain an enduring (hereditary), exclusive (family to family) and multiple (economic, social and ritual) bond with other families belonging to different castes and occupations and thus continue with the patron-client relationship.

In his study of the *jajmani* system, Wiser (1969: xxiii) emphasised the element of reciprocity and defined the system as, "... the various castes of a Hindu village in north India are interrelated in a service capacity. Each serves the others. Each in turn is master. Each in turn is servant. Each has his own clientele comprising members of different castes, which is his *jajmani or birt*".

But the elements of domination and exploitation also are very much there in the *jajmani* system which have been studied by Beidelman (1959), Oscar Lewis (1956) and others. The landowning powerful patron castes dominate and exploit the poor artisans and menial castes who serve them.

Still a significant number of families are found in villages continuing with the *jajmani* relations. But the system has become very weak over the years in the modern period. This has happened due to various changes taking place in the rural areas, such as, increasing commercialisation of agriculture and growth of capitalist farming, increasing circulation of money, wage labour, urban migration, education and dissociation of caste and occupation.

### Check Your Progress 2

i) Tick the right answer to the following question.

Which of the following caused de-industrialisation of the rural economy during the colonial period?

- a) Preference of craftsmen for urban life
- b) Import of goods from England
- c) Preference of craftsmen for agriculture.

ii) Match the following sets.

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| a) Ryotwari System  | a) Land revenue settlement with landlords                               |
| b) Zamindari System | b) Land revenue settlement with family heads and landlords collectively |
| c) Mahalwari System | c) Land revenue settlement with landlords who are the cultivators       |

iii) Tick the right answer to the following question.

Which of the following characterised the traditional *jajmani* system?

- a) Reciprocity and dominance
- b) Only reciprocity
- c) Exchange of gifts

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## 10.5 RURAL ECONOMY AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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Since Independence a lot of changes have taken place in the rural economic scene. In this section we shall focus on land reforms, the green revolution and rural development programmes and impact of new economic policy on rural economy.

### 10.5.1 Land Reforms

After Independence of India from the British rule various land reform measures were introduced to change the agrarian structure for establishment of a prosperous and egalitarian society. Here we will first look at the changes and then discuss their impact on rural economy.

#### A) Changes in the Agrarian Structure

- i) First step was the abolition of the *Zamindari* system. Its objective was to bring the cultivators into direct relationship with the state through eliminating the intermediary interests of the *zamindars* and the chain of subinfeudation. The intermediaries were allowed to retain their *khudkasht* i.e. land for personal cultivation. The rest of their land had to be with the tenants for which the *zamindars* were compensated by the revenue. This measure led to eviction of tenants on a large scale by the *zamindars* who claimed major portion of their land as *khudkasht*.
- ii) Secondly, the tenancy reform measure taken by the state aimed at providing security of tenure, reduction of rent and facilitating acquisition of ownership rights by tenant cultivators. Usually when tenants were found to be cultivating the land for a continuous period of five years they were declared permanent or 'protected' tenants who could not be easily evicted by the landowner. Land rent was reduced. It was one-fourth or one-sixth of the value of the gross produce. The tenants got the right to acquire ownership of land they cultivated by paying rent for a limited number of years, say, eight years or ten years. A substantial number of tenants acquired security of tenure and ownership of land. But this measure also led to the eviction of tenants. Subtle and concealed tenancy arrangements were made. The phenomenon of share-cropping became more common. Landlords continued to exploit tenants.
- iii) Thirdly, ceilings were imposed on present family landholdings as well as on future acquisitions. The state had to acquire surplus land from the big landowners with due compensation and distribute the same among the marginal peasants, small peasants and landless agricultural labourers. However, delay in enactment and implementation of the law enabled the landlords either to sell off their surplus land or to partition the land and transfer the same in the name of relatives and friends and thereby evading the law to a great extent.
- iv) Another land legislation concerned consolidation of fragmented landholdings of landholders. Once implemented this measure would promote adequate investment of capital and inputs in land and boost efficiency and economy in agriculture.

#### B) Impact of Land Reforms

The overall impact of land reforms was far from satisfactory. Smaller tenants were evicted from land in large number and forced into highly exploitative system of share-cropping. They received much less protection and suffered



more than the bigger ones. Continued dominance of landlords was maintained. It was found that in spite of the land reforms the land concentration did not change much. For example Chattopadhyay (1989: 123-124) showed that in 1954-55, about 47 per cent of households in the size-class of 0.00 to 0.99 acres owned 1.38 per cent of land. Even in 1971-72, this size-class consisting of about 45 per cent of households owned only 2.07 per cent of land. But in 1954-55, about 1.5 per cent of households in the size-class of 40 acres and above, owned about 20 per cent of land. Further in 1971-72 about 2 per cent of households in size-class 25 acres and above owned about 23 per cent of land.

However, the intermediate classes of peasants have benefited replacing the older *zamindars* in politico-economic matters to some extent in the country side. The power of the feudal families is on the wane throughout the country.

Since Independence the National government amended the constitution thirteen times to incorporate 277 land laws in the Ninth Schedule in favour of the land reforms. The latest was in 1995, the Seventy-eighth amendment of the Constitution to incorporate 27 land laws in the Ninth Schedule. According to the Government reports, since the inception of the ceiling laws, the total quantum of land declared surplus in the entire country till 2001 is 73.66 lakh acres. Out of this about 64.95 lakh acres have been taken possession of and a total area of 53.79 lakh acres have been distributed to 55.84 lakh beneficiaries, of whom about 36 per cent belong to scheduled castes and around 15 per cent belong to scheduled tribes.

### 10.5.2 The Green Revolution

A process of very important biological and mechanical innovations in agriculture begun since the mid-sixties is known as the Green Revolution. In the beginning, it covered the states of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. Gradually, it has penetrated into certain areas of some other states. In these areas, cultivators use high yielding variety of seeds, high doses of chemical fertilisers, abundant supply of water for irrigation, and modern agricultural implements like tractors, powered threshers, tubewells, pumpsets, etc. The total area under the high-yielding-varieties programme was a negligible 1.9 million hectares in the financial year of 1960. Since then the growth has been spectacular, increasing the same to nearly 15.4 million hectares by the financial year of 1970, 43.1 million hectares by the financial year of 1980, and 63.9 million hectares by financial year 1990. The rate of growth decreased significantly in the late 1980s, as additional suitable land was not available.

This important change in agriculture has increased the cropping intensity, total output and productivity of agriculture. Demand of agricultural labourers has increased. Employment of hired labourers in agriculture has become more prevalent. Gap in supply of labour in states like Punjab has been filled by migrant labourers from other states, e.g., Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Further, the progressive farmers cultivate their land under personal supervision rather than leasing out to tenants. In addition, they lease-in land from poor peasants who cannot afford costly inputs required for cultivation. According to Andre Beteille (1986: 89) the most striking features of these farms is that they are organised in a manner which resembles more a business enterprise than a feudal estate.

The major benefits of the Green Revolution in India were experienced mainly in northern and north western India between 1965 and early 1980s; the programme resulted in a substantial increase in the production of food grains, mainly wheat and rice. Food-grain yields continued to increase throughout 1980s, but the dramatic changes in the years between 1965 and 1980 were not duplicated. In the 1980s, the area under high yielding varieties continued to increase, but the rate of growth overall was slower. The Eighth Five Year Plan aimed at making high-yielding varieties available to the whole country and more productive strains of other crops.

Let us now look at some other aspects of the impact of Green Revolution on rural society.

**i) Causes of Disparity in Agricultural Production**

The Indian Green Revolution created wide regional and interstate disparities. The plan was implemented only in areas with assured supplies of water and the means to control it, large inputs of fertilizers, and adequate farm credit. These inputs were easily available in some parts of the states of Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh; thus, yields increased most in these states. In other states, such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, in areas where these inputs were not assured, the results were limited or negligible, leading to considerable variation in crop yields within these states. As discussed by Bhalla (1974: 109) the Green Revolution has led to accentuation of inter-region and inter-district disparities in agricultural productivity and income. However, gains of this progress have been unevenly distributed among various agrarian classes. The benefits have largely gone to large landowners. Marginal and small cultivators are unable to obtain higher output because of their small landholdings. In addition it has been pointed out that marginal and small cultivators are highly indebted to cooperative and other financial institutions for financing the high cost-inputs for agriculture (Johar and Khanna 1983: 424). Bhalla (1974: 109) found that the gap between the non-progressive and progressive cultivators had also widened.

**ii) Class Differentiation**

The Green Revolution has also resulted in differentiation within the peasant class, which is a sign of capitalist growth in agriculture. In her study of Haryana agricultural holdings operating 15 acres or less, Utsa Patnaik (1987: 199-208) found two peasant classes. The first one were the rural well-to-do and the labour hiring classes of the rich and middle peasants. The second one were the rural poor, the remaining classes of the peasantry, e.g. small and poor peasants. The former possessed large household assets, virtually monopolised modern agricultural equipments and sold nearly three-fifth and over two-fifths of their output in the market. But the latter owned meagre household assets, traditional livestock and implements and sold merely one-third of output in market. The new technology therefore, favoured the large landholders and small landholders did not derive much benefit out of the new technology.

The benefits of the Green Revolution and rural development programmes have been mainly cornered by the big landowners and rich peasants. The small peasants and agricultural labourer are steeped in poverty, unemployment and underemployment even at the beginning of twenty-first century. The gap between the rural rich and the rural poor has in fact widened.

Growth of a capitalist trend in agriculture has been noted in a study done on the Punjab economy with regard to land relations, capital accumulation and existence and increase of wage labour. Regarding land relations Utsa Patnaik's study noted that 10 per cent of farmers owning more than 20 acres of land, own more than 37 per cent of land. Capital accumulation was observed in that the top 10 per cent of the farmers accounted for 68.75 per cent of tractors, 24.72 per cent of the tube wells/pumping sets, 20.40 per cent of the threshers and 42.86 per cent of the land purchased in Punjab. Further, the proportion of pure tenants had fallen and the proportion of agricultural labourer to the total agricultural workforce had increased from 17.3 per cent to 32.1 per cent between 1961 and 1971. In the year 1991 a majority of 66.8 per cent of the main workers were employed in agricultural and allied industrial sectors. Out of the total agricultural workforce 40 per cent were agricultural labourers. As per 2001 census 26.7 per cent of the total workforce are agricultural labourers and about 70 per cent of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Cash wages of agricultural labourers have increased but a more than proportionate increase in prices has eroded their real wages. The relative share of the labourers in agricultural income has declined in comparison with other classes (Johar and Khanna 1983).

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) What were the four major steps taken since Independence to strengthen the agrarian economy? Use five lines for your answer.

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- ii) What is "Green Revolution"? Use five lines for your answer.

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- iii) What has been the impact of Green Revolution? Use 6 lines for your answer.

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### 10.5.3 Rural Development Programmes

When India achieved Independence its rural economy was plagued with extreme backwardness in agriculture and village industries, poverty, unemployment and underemployment. The government launched a series of development programmes for rural areas to meet these challenges. First, the Community Development Project (CDP) was started in 1952. Its main emphasis was on economic growth and minimum all-round development of the whole community with the help of local participation. It covered programmes like improvements in agriculture, animal husbandry, village and small industries, health and sanitation, social education etc. However, its experiences showed that the benefit of development was cornered by the already rich and powerful rural upper classes who are rich and powerful.

Therefore, the strategy of development was changed in the early 1970s. Then, growth with social justice became the motto, programmes were designed to benefit special target groups, e.g., small and marginal peasants and agricultural labourers with special emphasis on the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and women. Since early 1970s a number of programmes were launched like the Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and agency for Marginal Farmer and Agricultural Labourer (MFAL), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). Further Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) was set to promote rural village industries.

Though in per centage terms, rural poverty reduced from 56.44 per cent of the country's population in 1973-74 to 37.27 per cent in 1993-94, the estimated number of rural poor was about 193 million and this led the government to review and restructure the anti-poverty and rural development programmes. The *Swarnajayanthi Gram Swarojgar Yojana* (SGSY), a holistic self-employment programme, is the result of such latest review and restructuring programmes. It was launched in 1999 replacing the earlier self-employment and allied programmes such as IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA etc. In September 2001, the *Sampoorn Grameen Rozgar Yojana* was launched with the objective of attaining gainful employment, food security and strengthening of infrastructure in rural areas. The *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana* was launched in December 2000 with the objective of providing connectivity, by way of an all-weather road to the unconnected habitations of the rural areas. The *Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana* was launched in April 2000 for helping the rural poor in the construction of dwelling units. For the infrastructure creation and wage employment generation, a new scheme namely, *Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana*, which was a streamlined and comprehensive version of *Jawahar Rozgar Yojana*, was launched in April 1999. The National Social Assistance Programme came into force from August 1995. It aimed at providing social assistance to the poor households in the rural areas.

Though it is too early to assess the working of these new programmes, the mere fact that most of these new programmes are improved versions of old ones points to the truth that despite this plethora of programmes the problem of rural poverty, unemployment, underemployment and backwardness of agriculture in majority of the states are still with us after many years of Independence.

**Activity 2**

Visit the nearest Block Development Officer of your village or any other village and find out from her/him about all the rural development projects launched for the village. Talk to a few villagers and find out

- a) for whom the programmes were launched
- b) who has benefited most by them
- c) what visible changes have the projects brought for the socio-economic development of the village.

Then write a report in about three pages on the basis of the information you have gathered. Compare, if possible, your report with those written by other students at your Study Centre.

### **10.5.4 Impact of New Economic Policy on the Rural Economy**

Since 1991 Indian economy has been exposed to economic liberalisation and globalisation in line with structural adjustment and stabilisation policies initiated by International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Structural adjustment policy advocated privatisation, import liberalisation and export-led growth and while stabilisation policy emphasises reduction in fiscal deficit through withdrawal of subsidies given to industry, trade and agriculture. There has been a shift in the Indian economic policy from State-oriented development strategy to market oriented development, leaving the decisions of production and distribution to the market signals (Parthasarathy 2003). The impact of the economic reforms on the rural economy has been in varied forms.

The reform measures such as the reduction in fiscal deficit, reduction of subsidies, devaluation of rupee, export orientation and reduction of agricultural credit adversely affected the rural poor especially in terms of food security, which relates with production, distribution and pricing of the food-grains. The agricultural sector was worst affected by the fiscal contraction, which invariably resulted in a disproportionate cut in capital expenditure (Teltumbde 1996). Agricultural sector is the mainstay of the rural Indian economy around which socio-economic privileges and deprivations resolve and any change in its structure is likely to have a corresponding impact on the existing pattern of the social equity. The shrinkage of the flow of resources to the rural sector, a misconceived interest rate policy which discriminated against agriculture, a sickening rural delivery credit system, the emergence of a new banking culture nurtured by reforms, which is far from friendly to agriculture and rural development, all go against the interests of rural economy (Majumdar 2002).

The bank credit to the agriculture as a per centage of net bank credit fell consistently to 12.4 per cent in March 1995 from 17.4 per cent in March 1990. The flow of financial resources to agriculture, both in terms of long-term capital and working capital declined sizeably. It has had an adverse impact on agricultural industries and in turn on rural employment (Mundle 1993). There has been a cut in the bank credits to the non-agricultural industries as well. In 1992, the rural workers in secondary and tertiary sectors showed a decline of 6.3 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively from the pre-Reform

level in 1989-90. Curiously, the primary sector showed a hefty increase of 10.1 per cent in the same period. In rural area nearly 50 per cent farming households have less than 1 acre land. For meeting the two ends they need supplementary work in non-agricultural sector. In absence of this work however, they end up engaging themselves with the sundry work related to their tiny farms and declare themselves as the agriculture workers. This increase in the primary sector jobs thus indicates partial unemployment of workforce. The decline in non-agricultural jobs and the overall employment are attributed to the cut in the government expenditure on various poverty alleviation programmes, during the reform period (Joshi and Little 1996: 238-239).

After one full decade since the inception of the economic reforms, the grim performance of the agricultural sector made the Union government to rethink its approaches to the rural development. This is clear from the statement of the finance minister made in the parliament, “it is my firm belief that sustained and broad-based growth of agriculture is essential for alleviating poverty, generating incomes and employment, assuring food security and sustaining a buoyant domestic market for industry and services” (Union Budget 1999-2000).

#### Check Your Progress 4

- i) What do you understand by Community Development Programme? Use five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Tick mark the correct answer.

Which of the following governmental programme is meant for the generation of gainful employment for the rural poor?

- a) *Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana*
- b) *Sampoorn Grameen Rozgar Yojana*
- c) *Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana*
- d) All of the above

- iii) Write in seven lines the impact of the economic reforms on the agricultural sector.

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## 10.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have discussed the rural economy of India as obtained at different periods of time. We began our discussion with an outline of the main features of a rural economy. We then proceeded to describe the nature of the rural economy during the traditional period. In this period (comprising the ancient and medieval periods) we observed that there was a healthy inter-linkage between agriculture and the village cottage industries. During the colonial period we noted that the balance between agriculture and cottage industries was upset by the British economic policy. De-industrialisation, new land revenue settlements and commercialisation of agriculture were some of the features of the colonial economic policy. We also observed that the reciprocal system of exchange that existed between different castes in a village (the *jajmani* system) was affected by the economic measures introduced by the British in India. In our discussion of the rural economy since Independence we focused on land reforms, green revolution and rural development programmes. In the last sub section (10.5.4) we discussed the impact of economic reforms on the rural economy.

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## 10.7 KEYWORDS

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<b>Green Revolution</b>	The Green Revolution signifies very important biological and mechanical innovations made in agriculture which is reflected in the use of high yielding variety of seeds, chemical fertilisers, tractors, pump sets etc. It first occurred in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh and gradually spread to specific pockets in some other states. It has led to significant increase in agricultural production and cropping intensity.
<b>Jajmani System</b>	Traditionally, the <i>jajmani</i> system was an important social institution in rural India. This system bound together the landowning upper castes and the service castes and menial workers belonging to the lower castes in an enduring bond of economic, social and ritual relationship. This contained both the elements of reciprocity and dominance. The system has significantly declined in modern period.
<b>Land Grants</b>	The origin of land grants goes back to the Satavahanas (235 B.C.-A.D. 225). But it became common during the Gupta period and onwards. Grants of land and villages were made by the King and their feudatories both to the Brahmins and government officials. The donees collected land rent from the peasants without any obligation of sharing it with the ruler. They were

also granted administrative rights in their areas. Thus, they were economically, socially and politically dominant in their domains without any effective control by the ruler. This reflects the feudal character of Indian society.

### **Subinfeudation**

The phenomenon of subinfeudation was an important consequence of the colonial system of land revenue settlement in India. Under the system the *zamindar* had the right to collect land revenue from the peasants and pay a fixed share to the British rulers retaining the rest for themselves. However, *zamindar* sublet their right of revenue collection to other people who also entered into similar agreement with others each having a share in the land revenue. Thus, there developed a chain of intermediaries between the estate and the actual cultivators. This is known as subinfeudation.

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## **10.8 FURTHER READING**

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## **10.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) c
- ii) b
- iii) a) \_\_\_\_ d)  
b) \_\_\_\_ c)  
c) \_\_\_\_ a)  
d) \_\_\_\_ b)

- iv) The two broad classes which comprised the rural population during the medieval period were i) the big landholders and ii) masses comprising peasants, artisans and landless labourers.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) b
- ii) a) = c)  
b) = a)  
c) = b)
- iii) a

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) The four major steps have been
- abolition of the *Zamindari* system,
  - tenancy reforms which aimed at providing security of tenure, reduction of rent and facilitating the tenant cultivators to acquire ownership rights,
  - ceilings on family landholdings, and
  - consolidation of fragmented landholding of landholders.
- ii) The Green Revolution is a process of change involving important biological and mechanical innovations in agriculture. Cultivation uses high yielding variety seeds, high doses of chemical fertilisers, abundant supply of water for irrigation and modern implements like tractors, threshers, tubewells, pumpsets etc. to cultivate the land.
- iii) The impact of Green Revolution has been
- increased crop intensity, output and productivity of agriculture,
  - increased demand for agricultural labourers,
  - increase in disparities in agricultural production between regions, and
  - differentiation within the peasant class.

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) In the early 1950s the government started some programmes for the development of the rural areas with a special emphasis on economic growth and minimum all round development of the whole of the rural community with the help of the rural participation.
- ii) d
- iii) The policy decisions such as the reduction in the fiscal deficit, reduction of subsidies, devaluation of rupee, export oriented production and reduction of agricultural credit adversely affected the agricultural sector and the rural poor. The decline in the flow of the financial resources to agriculture both in terms of long-term capital and working capital had accentuated the problems of the agricultural industries and in turn rural employment.

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## UNIT 11 URBAN ECONOMY

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### Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Features of an Urban Economy
- 11.3 Traditional Urban Economy
  - 11.3.1 Ancient Period
  - 11.3.2 Medieval Period
- 11.4 Colonial Urban Economy
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  - 11.4.2 Growth of Modern Industries
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- 11.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 11.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit on India's urban economy you will be able to

- explain features of an urban economy
- describe the traditional structures and processes of urban economy
- outline the impact of the colonial rule on urban economy
- examine the developments in urban economy after Independence.

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### 11.1 INTRODUCTION

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In unit 10 we dealt with the main features of India's rural economy. In unit 11 we will discuss its urban economy. We begin the unit with a brief introduction to the concept of economy.

In section 11.3 we discuss traditional urban economy in a historical perspective. Ancient period concerns the issues of urbanisation, occupational structure, trade and commerce, the **guild system**, social classes, and their relationship. Medieval period also covers identical issues in addition to the system of large-scale production in **royal karkhanas** or workshops. Section 11.4 deals with the

impact of colonial economy. Here, we witness the destruction of traditional urban economy and stunted growth of modern industries. The latter led to the emergence of capitalist economy and new social classes, namely, the capitalist class and the industrial working class.

The focus of section 11.5 is centred on the developments in urban economy after Independence. Here, we have taken up the issues of the industrial policy of the Government of India and its impact on **organised and unorganised sectors** of urban economy, social classes and the problem of dissociation of caste from traditional occupations.

## 11.2 FEATURES OF AN URBAN ECONOMY

The concept of economy can be understood in terms of economic structures and processes relating generally to production, distribution and consumption of material goods and services. Economic structures deal with institutional network under which production of goods and performances of services are organised. The mode of organisation of goods and services gives rise to various groups and classes. Social resources are distributed amongst them in an even or uneven manner. Against this broad framework we shall discuss the issues related to Indian urban economy. Before we outline the issues, let us clarify the meaning of the term urban.

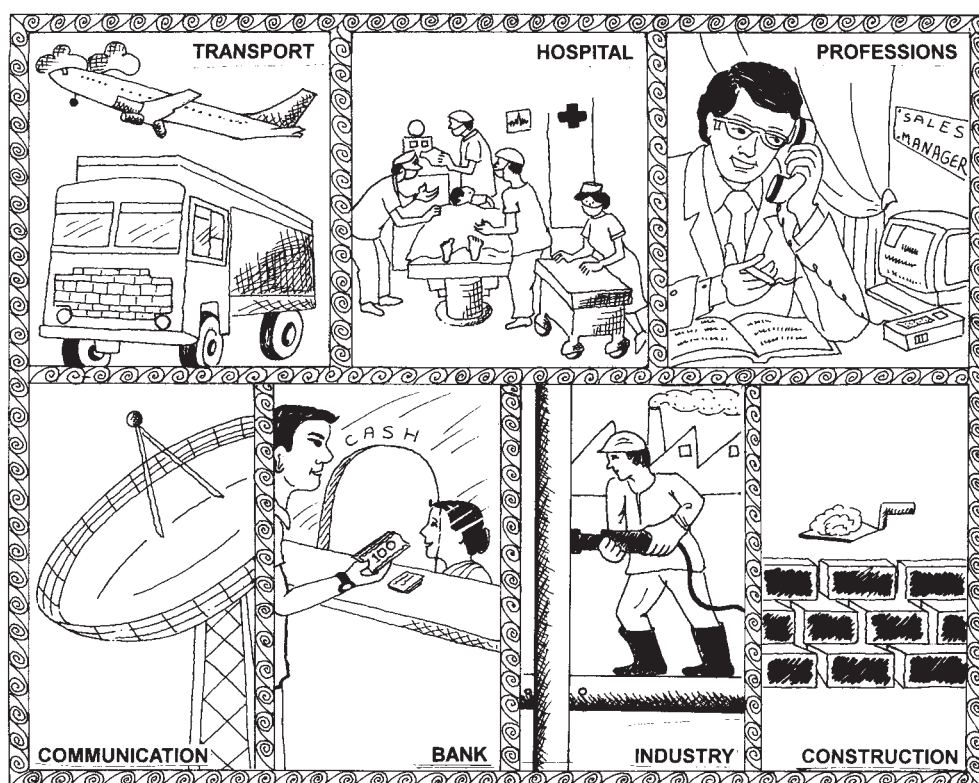


Fig. 11.1: Urban economy

In Block 1, unit 5 of this course we have already discussed the meaning and important features of urban social structure. To recapitulate, urban relates to or constitutes a city or a town. Several criteria, such as demographic, ecological and socio-cultural attributes are used to identify an urban area. Social scientists

emphasise that the important feature of a city is the presence of a market and a specialised class of traders in it. Other religious, political, economic, technological, and complex administrative structures found in a city complement the trade and commerce network. Thus, it is the flux of market economy and commerce, which brings together people of different socio-cultural backgrounds in an urban area. An urban economy is clearly demarcated from the rural economy due to the predominance of industrial and service sectors in it, as against the predominance of agricultural sector in rural economy, keeping these points in mind, we will discuss specific issues like industrialisation, trade and commerce and technological development in our description of urban economy (see figure 11.1). We begin this account by discussing the traditional urban economy in ancient and medieval periods of Indian history.

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## **11.3 TRADITIONAL URBAN ECONOMY**

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Traditional patterns of urban economy in India cover both the ancient and medieval phases. Let us now look at the ancient phase.

### **11.3.1 Ancient Period**

Urban economy has been an integral part of Indian economy since ages. The earliest Indian civilisation i.e. the Indus Valley Civilisation (c.2600-1500 BC) is known as a well-developed urban civilisation which had a broad rural agrarian base. Archaeological excavations have revealed that many cities and towns flourished in the Indus valley, e.g. Harappa and Mohenjodaro (now in Pakistan), Lothal, Kalibangan, Banwali (in India).

But the onset of the Rigvedic phase (c. 1500-1000 BC) marks a complete break with the earlier urban civilisation. The Rigvedic people lived a semi-nomadic and pastoral life. Gradually, they settled in villages and agriculture became their main occupation during the later Vedic-Period (c. 1000-600 BC). We hear of sixty towns in the contemporary literature, including the famous ones such as Rajagriha, Pataliputra, Sravasti, Kausambi, Varanasi etc. Towns and cities continued to prosper during the Maurya and post-Maurya phase and even under the Gupta dynasty. But the country had to undergo a process of urban decay in the post-Gupta period. This trend got reversed only from the ninth century onwards. Let us now look at certain aspects of the urban economy during this period, relating to trade and commerce, arts and crafts, guild system and social classes.

#### **i) Trade and Commerce**

As we know non-agricultural occupations are the predominant feature of urban economy. Trade and commerce are important activities. Evidences of both external and internal trade in the ancient period are found in the contemporary literature and archaeological remains. Trade and commerce witnessed both the periods of prosperity and decline.

Same was the case with regard to towns and cities in ancient India. Internal trade was carried on by merchants in urban manufactures and food-grains. The use of metallic coins since the age of Buddha promoted economic transactions. India's network of external trade covered distant lands, e.g., Rome, Arabia, Persia, China and south-east Asia. Luxury goods were the main items



of foreign trade. They comprised the products of crafts such as fine handicraft goods, ivory objects, pots etc. Foreign trade was in favour of India. The Roman writer Pliny was forced to lament that Rome was being drained of gold on account of her trade with India (Sharma 1983: 144).

## ii) Arts and Crafts

Another important aspect of the ancient urban economy was the practice of various arts and crafts in which a large number of people were engaged. This included woodworkers, smiths, leather-workers, potters, ivory workers, weavers, painters etc. These craftsmen were socially organised into various castes. Elders trained the younger members in hereditary caste occupations.

## iii) Guild System

A remarkable feature of the organisation of urban economy was the prevalence of the guild system (*sreni*). As against the *jajmani* system in the rural economy urban craftsmen and traders had formed craft and trade guilds. Members of a particular guild belonged to the same craft or trade. There were guilds of potters, smiths, weavers, ivory etc. These guilds played a very important role in organising production and in shaping public opinion (Thapar 1976:109). The vast majority of artisans joined guilds because these bodies provided them security from competition as well as social status. The guilds fixed rules of work and the quality of the finished product and its price to safeguard both the artisan and the customer. They also controlled the prices of manufactured products.

Various guilds were localised in different areas of towns as per their specialisation. The guilds were headed by their respective heads called *bhojaka* who were assisted by a small council of senior members. The guild court controlled the conduct of guild members through enforcing customary usages of the guild (*shreni-dharma*) which had the force of law. The leaders of the guild were very powerful in urban life. They were respected by the rulers.

There were also other types of workers bodies such as workers' cooperative, of which *Puga* was well known. *Puga* included artisans and various craftsmen associated with a particular enterprise. For example, the construction of cities and temples was carried over by cooperatives, which included specialised workers like architects, engineers, brick-layers etc.

Moreover, the guilds also acted as a banker, financier and trustee. People deposited money with the guilds and got interests in return. But generally these functions were performed by a different category of merchants, known as the *sreshthins* or financiers (Thapar 1987: 112).

## iv) Social Classes in Ancient India

Now, we can move on to the question of urban social classes. The king and nobles, priests, traders, administrators, military personnel and other functionaries lived on taxes, tithes and tributes collected from urban as well as rural areas. Panini indicates that the king and richer section of urban population employed as many as a dozen varieties of attendants to take care of their personal comforts (Sharma 1983: 126). They lived a life of luxury and pleasure. According to Vatsyayana, they resided in beautiful houses, enjoyed music and played with courtesans at night (Bhattacharya 1988: 189-90). But the common urban people

comprising the artisans, labourers, servants and slaves had to cater to the needs of the privileged class and lead a hard life for themselves.

### Check Your Progress 1

i) Tick the right answer of the following questions.

Which of the following does characterise the urban economy of India?

- a) The dominance of agricultural sector
- b) The dominance of industrial and service sectors
- c) Only the service sector
- d) None of these

ii) What kind of occupations did members of an ancient guild belong to?

- a) Similar
- b) Different
- c) Agricultural
- d) None of above

iii) Describe the guild system (*sreni*) in ancient India in about seven lines.

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### 11.3.2 Medieval Period

The medieval period was marked by the development of towns, cities and industries, trade and commerce etc. In this section we shall talk of these as well as the organisation and technology of production and social classes in medieval India.

#### i) Growth of Towns, Cities and Industries

India witnessed a spurt in urbanisation during the medieval period. A large number of administrative, military, manufacturing and trading centres flourished during this period. There were big cities and towns such as Delhi, Daulatabad, Cambay, Broach, Lakhnauti, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore, Dacca etc. Of the Sultanate period, Ibn Batuta says that Delhi was enormous in size, large in extent and great in population, the largest city not only in India but the entire Islamic East (Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982: 82). Ralph Fitch who came to India during the Mughal rule, observed that Agra and Fatehpur Sikri were each larger than London (Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982: 262).

In these towns and cities many industries were considerably developed during this period, e.g., textiles, metal-work, stone-work, leather-work, sugar, indigo, paper. Minor industries included ivory work, coral work, imitation jewellery etc. Textile manufacture was the biggest industry. It comprised production of cotton cloth, woollen clothes and silks. The allied industries of embroidery, gold thread work and dyeing were also carried on in many cities.

## ii) Trade and Commerce

Trade and commerce was conducted on an extensive scale. Surplus grain from the countryside was generally carried to the neighbouring towns or transported to a *mandi* (or market town) for distribution all over the country. Agricultural raw materials like cotton and indigo were also brought to towns for manufacturing various goods, e.g., cloth, dye etc. Urban industrial goods were usually made for sale in a suitable market.

Some merchants specialised in wholesale trade and others in retail trade. The former was called Seth or Bohra and the latter Beopari or Banik. In South India, Chetti formed the trading community. The Banjara or the nomadic people moved from place to place with a large stock of foodgrains, salt, ghee etc. The Sarraf specialised in changing money, keeping money in deposit or lending it, or transmitting it from one part of the country to the other by means of *hundi* which was a letter of credit. There were Sahu (moneylenders) and Mahajan (bankers) who advanced loans to support commercial undertakings but their main business was to lend money at most profitable rate of interests.

Foreign trade was also considerable during this period. Indian exports comprised a variety of indigenous products such as textiles (especially cotton), agricultural produce, precious stone, indigo, hides, cornelians (a kind of gemstone), spikenard (an aromatic Indian plant, also refers to the ointment made from this plant), opium and even slaves. But the articles of import consisted of certain luxury goods like articles of silks, velvets, furnishings and decorations in addition to some metals e.g., gold, silver and copper. All kinds of horses and mules were also imported. India was connected with Damascus, Alexandria and the Mediterranean countries through the Arab merchants. Indian goods also reached the East African coast, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Persia, Malay Islands and China. Marwari and Gujarati many of whom were Jain, were engaged in coastal trade and trade between the coastal parts and north India. The Muslim Bohra merchants, Multani and Khurasani participated in trading activities.

## iii) Organisation of Production

Now we will come to the mode of organisation of production, which made possible trade and commerce on an extensive scale. In fact, there were no factories or large-scale industrial enterprises in the modern sense of the term (Ashraf 1988: 124). Family was the basic unit of production. Each caste comprising a number of family units specialised in a particular art or craft. A process of continuous proliferation of artisan castes met the demands of increasing diversity of goods and specialisation. The artisan castes were localised in different parts of cities and towns.

Usually, the traders bought their goods from artisans for sale in the market. Sometimes the producers also sold their goods independently in periodical

fairs. In some places enterprising businessmen engaged a number of craftsmen to manufacture articles under their own supervision. The royal workshops known as *Karkhana* also employed large number of craftsmen to meet the needs of the royal establishment. Moreover, for certain specific purposes such as construction of magnificent buildings, shipbuilding and extraction of minerals a variety of specialised craftsmen and workers worked together. But such units of production were ad hoc in-nature.

#### iv) **Technology of Production**

Further, the technology of production was backward and almost stagnant in comparison with other advanced contemporary civilisation such as Western Europe and even China. For example, India's world famous textiles were produced without the use of multi-spindle wheels known to China and the water-powered throwing mills with 200 spindles of the Italian silk industry. India did not know the use of coal and had no proper cast-iron. There was no familiarity with the techniques of deep mining. The chemical industry was primitive. Though the manufacturing sector met most of the internal needs and produced for a considerable foreign trade, this was achieved within a framework of relatively stagnant and backward technology. Raychaudhuri and Habib (1982: 291-5) rightly observe that the overall picture was surely not of any distant announcement of industrial revolution.

#### v) **Social Classes in Medieval India**

Medieval urban society of India comprised two broad social classes. The emperor, nobles and rich merchants formed the privileged class. Their standard of living was very high. The imperial household set the standard of conspicuous consumption, which was emulated by the nobles. The royal family lived in magnificent palaces. A large number of servants and slaves were employed to take care of the royal comforts. Alauddin Khilji had 50,000 slaves and Feroze Shah Tughlaq had collected 1,80,000 slaves. Most of the articles of royal use were worked in gold, silver, costly embroidery and jewels. Similarly, the nobles and wealthy merchants lived an ostentatious life. They had large and beautiful houses, used very costly articles of apparel and kept a large mass of servants, slaves and retainers.

On the other hand, the common urban people comprising artisans and craftsmen, servants and slaves, foot-soldiers and petty shopkeepers lived a life full of misery, oppression and exploitation. Some artisans were protected by kind patrons. But ordinary artisans were underpaid, flogged and kicked by the minions or assistants of nobles and traders alike (Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982: 297). Both male and female servants and slaves performed specialised functions in domestic and non-domestic services of the privileged class. They were also used as an object of display. Payments to the servants were very low. Slaves were very cheap, even cheaper than animals. A woman slave for domestic work cost from 5 to 12 *tanka* (the monetary system introduced in medieval India), a concubine, 20 to 40; untrained slave boys, 7 or 8 *tanka*; and trained slaves, 10 to 15 *tanka* during Alauddin Khilji reign. However, the most inferior horse (*tattu*) was priced at 10 to 25 *tanka* and a *milch* buffalo cost 10 to 12 *tanka*. Moreover, the slaves were treated as chattels. To be freed by the master was an act of commendable charity but for the slaves themselves to flee was a sinful assault on private property (Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982:

92). Thus, there was a glaring disparity between the privileged ruling classes who maintained a highly ostentatious life-style and the poor people lived in misery and suffered from oppressions and exploitation.

In the next section on colonial urban economy, we will see how the traditional urban economy in India changed its character under the impact of colonial rule of the British.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) What were the two marked features of medieval urban economy? Use three lines for your answer.

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- ii) Tick the right answer of the following question.

What was the main feature of the mode of organisation of production in medieval India?

- a) Large scale modern industrial enterprises
- b) Family as the basic unit of production
- c) Huge factories
- d) All of the above

- iii) In about six lines describe the state of technology of production during the medieval period.

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- iv) What was the condition of servants and slaves in medieval urban economy? Use six lines for your answer.

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## 11.4 COLONIAL URBAN ECONOMY

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Though various European trading companies came to India, it was the British East India Company, which succeeded in establishing colonial rule over the country. In the beginning they carried on trade with the permission of and under the patronage of Indian rulers. They were obliged to bring bullion from their countries to India for exchange with Indian goods. But the British victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 marked a watershed in Indian history. The British gradually expanded their colonial rule over more and more territories in India and drained out the country of its huge wealth. The flourishing urban handicrafts collapsed. Later some modern industries were set up on capitalist lines, which led to the growth of new social classes in India. In this section we shall focus on destruction of urban handicrafts, growth of modern industries and the new social classes which emerged during this period.

### 11.4.1 Destruction of Urban Handicrafts

During the colonial rule, there was a sudden and quick collapse of the urban handicrafts for which India was famous all over the world. The urban industries that rapidly declined included textiles, shipping, iron-smelting, paper, glass, metals, tanning, dyeing etc. There were various factors responsible for this. The disappearance of the native states lowered the demand of urban handicrafts. But the discriminatory policies followed by the colonial rulers proved disastrous. They imposed heavy duties on import of goods from India to England. They followed a policy of one-way free trade, to facilitate invasion of India with British manufactured goods. Official patronage to British goods and the policy of exporting raw materials from India for feeding British factories and introduction of railways badly hurt Indian handicrafts. The severity of British oppression and exploitation of the urban craftsmen compelled them to abandon their ancestral possessions and occupations. Indian handicrafts made with backward techniques could not compete with machine made cheap goods from England, which flooded the Indian market.

Thus, deprived of both external and internal markets, the handicraft industries declined and almost collapsed by 1880. Gadgil (1984: 45) observes that India in the eighteen eighties afforded the spectacle of a huge country with decaying handicrafts, with any other form of organised industry almost non-existent and a consequent falling back upon land. Hence, India was de-industrialised and further ruralised. The poverty of the people aggravated. William Bentinck, the Governor-General of India, reported as early as 1834-35, "The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India" (quoted in Chandra 1977: 184).

### 11.4.2 Growth of Modern Industries

Some of the traditional urban industries, which survived to some extent, had to undergo numerous organisational changes. But the most important development from organisational and technological point of view in India's urban economy started in the second half of the nineteenth century when large-scale machine based industries were set up in the country. These industries were capitalist in nature. The private owners of factories employed large number of workers under one roof. The production was aimed at maximisation of profit and manufactured goods were sold in the market.



In the 1850s cotton textile, jute and coal mining industries were established which marked the beginning of the machine age in India. There was a continuous but slow expansion of these industries. A number of other mechanical industries developed in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, i.e., cotton gins and presses, rice, flour and timber mills, leather tanneries, woollen textiles, paper and sugar mills, iron and steel works, and such mineral industries as salt, mica and saltpetre. During the 1930s, cement, paper, matches, sugar and glass industries developed.

Two things are worth noting regarding the growth of modern industries. Firstly, the growth of the modern industries was controlled mainly by the foreign managing agencies. Foreign capital was formed as against Indian capital. Secondly, modern industrialisation had some unintended consequences on the economy of India. Let us explain these two points in a little more detail.

#### i) **Foreign Capital**

However, growth of all these industries was exceedingly slow and very stunted. Most of them were owned or controlled by British capital. The plantation industries such as indigo, tea and coffee were almost exclusively under European ownership. The Indian capitalists had a large share in certain industries, e.g., cotton textile and sugar. But generally they were controlled by foreign managing agencies. Moreover, the colonial government followed a deliberate policy of favouring foreign capital as against Indian capital. No protection was provided to infant Indian industries as done in the West, including Britain. India lacked capital goods industries like steel, metallurgy, machine, chemical and oil, which could have provided a strong base for further industrialisation of the country. In addition, the industrial development was extremely lop-sided regionally. Industries were concentrated in a few regions and cities. Large areas of the country remained completely underdeveloped. As Amiya Bagchi (1980: 442) has rightly observed the economy of India remained poor, basically agricultural and colonial.

#### ii) **Consequences of Modern Industrialisation**

Despite all these crippling drawbacks, modern industrialisation played a very important role in one sense in India. There developed a unified national economy as a result of introduction of the modern factory system of production, commercialisation of the economy and the spread of modern transport system. Desai (1987: 124) observed that Indian economy became more unified, cohesive and organic.

#### **Activity 1**

In your daily life you use several manufactured goods and products like, tea, coffee, cooking oil, tools, newspaper etc. find out and list at least five items which are produced by companies initially founded by the British capital. Check if possible, your list with those prepared by other students at your Study Centre.

### **11.4.3 New Social Classes**

The growth of modern industries in India during the colonial rule gave rise to two important social classes of the contemporary society, i.e., the capitalists or

the **bourgeoisie** and the working class or the **proletariat**. These classes were completely new in Indian history. Though they formed a very small part of the Indian population, they represented new technology, a new system of economic organisation, new social relations, new ideas and a new outlook (Chandra 1977: 193). They were national in character. They were integral parts of a single national economy and polity. They had a wide social base to organise on an all-India level for furthering their interests (Desai 1987: 214). Now let us look at the classes that emerged during this period.

**i) The Capitalist Class**

The capitalist class comprised industrial, commercial and financial capitalists. They owned and controlled the means of production and distribution of goods. Their main objective was to maximize profit on the capital, which they invested in industry, trade and finance. Exploitation and oppression of the working class enabled them to increase their assets and maintain a high standard of living.

Dominant capitalists in colonial India were of British origin. But Indian capitalists also had gained considerable share in various enterprises. The traditional Indian business communities did survive and even flourish during this period. This group included the Marwari bania, the Jain, the Arora, the Khatri and the Chettiar. But their position was secondary in relation to the British capital. In the beginning, they served as dependent traders of the British in the capacity of agents of British export-import firms. They also thrived as money-lenders. Gradually they started channelling their accumulated capital in developing indigenous capitalist industries, e.g., textile and sugar.

**ii) The Other Classes**

There were also two more classes in urban areas. The class of petty traders and shopkeepers were bound up with modern capitalist economy. As a result of new system of education and administration, an educated middle class had emerged consisting of the professionals such as lawyers, doctors, professors, journalists, clerks etc.

**Check Your Progress 3**

i) Tick the right answer of the following questions.

Which of the following characterises colonial urban economy of India?

- a) Destruction of traditional handicrafts
- b) Growth of new classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat
- c) Beginning and development of modern industries
- d) All of these

ii) What was the reason for the de-industrialisation of Indian economy?

- a) Indians refused to produce goods for the British.
- b) The policy of the British rulers was such that they exported raw materials from India and flooded the Indian market with their own manufactured goods.

- c) The Indian craftsmen became poverty stricken and were not able to get the raw materials.
- d) The Indian goods were not of very good quality.
- iii) What was the unintended consequence of modern industrialisation in India? Answer the question in about six lines.

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## **11.5 URBAN ECONOMY AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

Urban economy after Independence saw a series of changes. Some of these changes were unintended but most were due to planned socio-economic reforms introduced by the new government. Let us focus on the following features of urban economy after Independence.

- Industrial policy and its impact
- Form and organisation of urban industries in both the organised and the unorganised sectors
- Social classes
- The relationship between caste and occupation in urban India since Independence

### **11.5.1 Industrial Policy and its Impact**

The industrial policy of the government of India after Independence aimed at economic development of the country through rapid industrialisation. It was realised that basic industries had to be set up which would curtail foreign dependence and help in achieving economic self-sufficiency. The problem of social and regional inequalities also had to be resolved through the establishment of a 'socialistic' pattern of society.

For describing the industrial policy and its impact it seems appropriate to review the following aspects.

- i) Mixed economy
- ii) Government regulation of industrial development
- iii) Gradual decontrol of industries
- iv) Government policies and industrial development
- v) New economic policy

### i) **Mixed Economy**

The concept of ‘**mixed economy**’ provided the framework under which the task of economic and social development was to be achieved. ‘Mixed economy’ meant co-existence of both the public sector (owned and controlled by the government) and the private sector (owned and controlled by individuals or families or private bodies) in the national economy. Accordingly, the government classified industries into three categories. The state assumed the exclusive responsibility of the industries included in the first category. In this category, there were seventeen groups of industries e.g. arms and ammunitions, atomic energy, iron and steel, heavy machine building, heavy electricals, minerals, railway, shipbuilding, telephones, electricity etc. The second category comprised industries which had to be progressively state owned, but in which private enterprise also was expected to supplement the efforts of the State. They included twelve industries such as machine tools, essential drugs, fertilisers and road transport. In the third category lie the rest of the industries, including consumer goods industries and their development had been left to the private sector (Government of India 1987: 419). Thus, the industries, which are of basic and strategic importance or in the nature of public utility services, are placed in the public sector. They required large investment, involved long gestation period and could yield delayed return. This could be afforded only by the State. The private sector grabbed the consumer goods industries giving quick profits on investment and involving negligible risks, if any. Let us see how the government regulated the industrial development in India.

### ii) **Government Regulation of Industrial Development**

The Government guided the overall industrial development in the country through adopting resolutions and licensing policy, making policy statements and the five-year plans. The Industries (Development and Regulation) Act of 1951 made it essential for the private sector to take license from the government to set up new industrial units or effect substantial expansion of existing plants. This enabled the government to lay down conditions regarding location of industries, minimum size, etc. The Act also empowered the government to give instructions to industries for rectifying drawbacks if they had any. The government could also prescribe prices, methods and the volume of production and channels of distribution. Further, the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act (MRTP) was passed in 1969 to prevent the concentration of economic power in the hands of big business and trading houses to the common detriment. The Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) was also enacted to control imports and keep the balance of payment situation under reasonable limit.

### iii) **Gradual Decontrol of Industries**

Gradually, there occurred a shift in the industrial policy of the government. The Industrial Policy Statement of 1973 permitted large native private business houses and foreign companies to take part in the establishment of unreserved core industries. In 1975 the government delicensed twenty-one industries and allowed expansion of foreign companies and monopoly houses in thirty other important industries. In 1980, further expansion of the private sector was encouraged through regularisation of unauthorised excess capacity. Before 1980 the government had set a certain limit of production for the private sector

industries. Therefore, the excess production, which these industries made or had, the potential to make was not legally allowed. After 1980 the government, allowed these industries to produce in excess in order to encourage their growth and development.

Further, after 1984 the industrial licensing policy became more liberal. The asset limit of MRTP companies has been raised from rupees twenty crores to rupees one hundred crores. Twenty-three industries have been delicensed for MRTP and FERA companies. A forty-nine per cent rise in capacity has been permitted for undertaking modernisation. Nearly two hundred reserved items have been dereserved and made open for the medium and large-scale sector. Emphasis in the public sector has been on optimum capacity utilisation, and not on expansion. Thus, now the industrial policy is clearly oriented in favour of the large and medium enterprises in the private sector. The growth of the public sector has been reduced. Some of the protections granted earlier to the small-scale industries have been withdrawn.

#### iv) **Government Policies and Industrial Development**

India has witnessed considerable industrial development after Independence. A number of basic and critical industries have developed which were almost non-existent or very weak during the colonial period.

Take for example the iron and steel industries, heavy machines and tools and heavy electricals etc. They have provided a strong base for further industrialisation of the country. Self-sufficiency has been attained in the production of many goods and performance of various services. A significant change has taken place in the nature of import. There is a shift from import of commodities to import of technical know-how in this area.

The public sector has expanded rapidly in terms of investment, turnover, capital formation, export, import substitution and the range of products. The number of enterprises in this sector has increased from 5 in 1951 to 221 in 1985 and the investment in public sector has increased from rupees 29 crores to 42,811 crores during the same period (Government of India 1987: 429). This has been further increased to 2,74,114 crore in 242 enterprises by the year 2001 (Government of India 2003: 538). Now the public sector produces diverse goods of great importance e.g. steel, coal copper, aluminium, engineering products, fertilisers, basic chemicals, drugs, petroleum products, minerals, locomotives, aircrafts and ships. In 1997, the government had identified eleven Public Sector Enterprises (PSE) as *Navratnas* and decided to give enhanced powers to the Board of Directors of these PSUs to facilitate their becoming global players. Two of these, namely, IPCL and VSNL have since been privatised and from August 2000 onwards there were only nine *Navratna* PSEs (Government of India 2003: 539).

The dominance of the private sector did not decline even though the public sector had initially expanded rapidly. The private sector produced a variety of consumer goods. It contributed about seventy-six per cent of net domestic product (1982-83) and constituted over ninety per cent of the total employment in the country, which, of course, included employment in agriculture. Further, the number of private sector companies had increased from 29,283 in 1957 to 93,294 in 1984 (India 1986:164). Agriculture was almost entirely under private ownership. The total asset of large industrial houses had increased manifold,

e.g., that of the Birla from rupees 283 crores to 4,112 crores and of the Tata from rupees 375 crores to 3,699 crores during the period 1963 to 1985 (see Table in Datt and Sundharam 1988: 348). Therefore India's economy was not really a mixed economy and to call it a socialist economy would be almost meaningless. In fact, it was essentially capitalist. This issue will be examined further in the next section.

#### **v) New Economic Policy**

Since Independence the government of India came out with different industrial policies from time to time such as the Industrial Policies Resolutions of 1948, 1956, and policy statements of 1970, 1973, 1980 and so on. The deregulation of the Indian economy began in the 1980s. In the 1980s it was felt that the policy of 'license permit raj' was preventing the blossoming of private initiative and choking the industrial growth. In the mid-1980s began the era of an open economy known as liberalisation, de-licensing and de-control (Chowdhary and Chowdhary 1997: 73). Some of the important measures taken were relaxation of MRTP and FERA companies, delicensing of major industries and provision for incentives for export production.

Following the liberalisation policy of the 1980s the government announced major economic reforms in 1991, known as the New Economic Policy. It stood for the opening up of the economy to the private sector and reduction in government expenditure in social sector. The Economic Reforms launched in July 1991 in India were in response to the economic and political crises that erupted in early 1991 (Prasad and Prasad 1993). The economic crises comprised a steep fall in the foreign exchange reserve, galloping inflation, large public and current account deficits and mounting domestic and foreign debt. In politics, the fall of two governments in a short span of four months, from November 1990 to March 1991; deferment of presentation of the union budget, fairly long political interregnum till the elections etc. reflected an unprecedented chain of crises. These events led to a sharp erosion of confidence in India among lenders, down gradation of India's credit rating and consequently cut off of international credit lines from private or commercial sources and this forced the Indian government to announce major changes in its economic policies. These included new industrial policy, exim policy, exim scripts, a policy for small scale and cottage industries, devaluation of rupee and so on. Among the policies, which aim to liberalise the whole economy, the new industrial policy occupies the foremost place with an aim to raise industrial efficiency to the international level and, mainly through it to accelerate the industrial growth (Misra and Puri 2001).

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

i) What do you understand by Public Sector Undertaking?

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ii) What are the implications of new economic policy to the industries?

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### 11.5.2 Organised and Unorganised Sectors

We now shift our attention in this section from the discussion on industrial policy to the issue of structure, forms and organisation of urban industries.

Indian urban economy has been seen as dual in nature comprising organised or formal sector and unorganised or informal sector. The organised sector possesses some or all of such characteristics as large-scale operation in terms of capital and labour, wage labour, advanced and modern technology, public and private ownership are found in the organised sector. Regulated and protected markets for labour and output, formal nature of employment and the requirement of formal educational qualification or training in skill for its workers are also some of the other features. On the other hand the unorganised sector enterprises feature small-scale of operation in terms of capital and labour, private or family ownership, labour intensive, backward technology, unregulated market, unprotected labour and easy to start due to usually no need of licence or registration (Satya Raju 1989: 12-13; Aziz 1984: 6-8).

The nature of employment in the organised sector is wage labour. But in unorganised urban sector both wage labour and self-employment are prevalent. Workers are employed on wages in activities like manufacture and repair, construction, trade, transport and other services including domestic service. The areas of self-employment activities comprise hawking, peddling, pushing carts, and plying manual rickshaws and so on.

In India, the Government has mainly emphasised the organised sector for promoting economic development of the country. We shall now look at (i) modes of production, and (ii) small scale industries.

#### i) Modes of Production

Indian economy is characterised as 'multiform' in nature when it is seen from the point of view of the **mode of production** (Medovoy 1984, Shirokov 1980). It comprises both the capitalist and the pre-capitalist forms though the dominant and ascending tendency is that of capitalism.

Before going further in our explanation, we must understand the term 'mode of production'. The concept of mode of production has been described by Marx as comprising of firstly, the forces of production and secondly, the relations of production. The forces of production consist of such items as, the capital, the tools and machinery, raw material, and so on. The relations of production are the relationships between the owners of the means of production and the labourers who sell their labour for wages in the labour-market.

According to Marx, the development of society undergoes different phases in history from primitive, ancient, asiatic, feudal, capitalistic and socialistic to ultimately communist type. With these phases of historical development coincides the development of the different modes of economy. Primitive society had primitive mode of production, and ancient society had slave mode of production. Asiatic society had asiatic mode of production based on agriculture and irrigation. Feudal society had feudal mode of production based on the division of the landlords and serfs. In the capitalist society we have the capitalist mode of production in which the classes of capitalists and workers exist.

This description, given by Marx, of the historical development of societies and the consecutive changes in the mode of production is called historical and dialectical materialism. Thus, when we say that in Indian economy we find both the capitalist and the pre-capitalist form, we mean it only in terms of the mode of production. Indian economy still has some elements of asiatic and feudal modes of production. In this sense the Indian economy is **multi-form** or multi-structural in nature. There is a coexistence of several modes of production.

Large-scale private enterprises are undoubtedly capitalist in character. They employ big size of capital and wage labour and advanced technology of production. They have the inherent capitalist motive of maximising their profit. The public sector enterprises are also essentially capitalist in nature. Though they are owned and controlled by the government, they serve the interests of the private sector through providing them essential capital goods, services and infrastructural facilities.

#### ii) **Small Scale Industries**

Small-scale industries are divided into three categories (Shirokov 1980:294). The first category comprises domestic and cottage industries producing traditional goods and depending on family labour. They are based on natural raw materials and traditional tools. Though some of them employ semi-finished factory products, their production is meant for local consumption. Therefore, they are largely pre-capitalist in nature and remain outside the network of industrial capital. The second category consists of industries, which produce modern commodities by traditional methods, e.g., hand-weaving, soap-making and match manufacture. These industries utilise factory raw materials, semi-finished products and ancillary materials. But their means of production remain traditional. Hence, they are partially connected with the industrial capital.

The third category includes modern small units and ancillaries. They use industrial sources of power, raw materials, wage labour and modern means of production such as tools and machineries. They supply large-scale industries with certain producer goods. As a result, they constitute an integral part of the reproduction of industrial capital. While the first category is usually found in rural areas, other two categories of industry are spatially located in urban and semi-urban setting.

Thus, the mode of production is heterogeneous in character. But the gradual expansion of capitalist industrial network has made it the dominant mode of production in the national economy over the years. Despite that the significance of the unorganised sector has not declined much in the national economy. Its share in the National Income was 73.4 per cent in 1960-61 and stood at 66.1

per cent in 1979-80 (Breman quoted in Satya Raju 1989: 30). According to 1971 Census, about 91 per cent of the total workforce, as against 92.3 per cent as per 1961 Census, was engaged in various informal sector activities including agriculture. Moreover, some studies of large urban centres, e.g., Kolkata, Mumbai and Ahmedabad have estimated that the employment opportunity in the informal sector was around forty-five per cent of the workforce (Lubell 1974, Joshi and Joshi 1976, Papola 1977). In towns and smaller cities, this ratio must be much higher due to the preponderance of informal sector activities.

According to the 1991 census the per centage of the work force engaged in the unorganised sector is 90.42 per cent and in terms of GDP about 63 per cent value added comes from this sector. As per the survey carried out by the National Sample Survey Organisation in the year 1999-2000 93 per cent of the total workforce is engaged in the unorganised sector (National Sample Survey, 1999-2000).

The economic restructuring set forth in the 1990s as a part of the new economic policy has an impact on both the organised and unorganised sectors of labour in India. The new economic policy, which operates under an open and liberalised economic regime, has emphasised a deregulated regime, with less emphasis on regulation of labour and employment conditions. This has resulted in the casualisation of workers. This is accompanied by the government policies away from the protection of employment through introduction of exit policy, voluntary retirement scheme, national renewal fund and withdrawal of pro-labour legal provisions (Mamkoottam 1994). Industrial activity in organised and unorganised sectors of urban economy has also generated the emergence of social classes. It is therefore necessary to discuss them.

### Check Your Progress 5

- i) Tick the right answer.

What does the concept of 'mixed economy' refers to?

- a) The prevalence of the private sector
- b) Existence of the public sector
- c) Coexistence of the public and the private sector
- d) None of these

- ii) Why has the nature of Indian economy been described as 'multi-form'? Describe in about seven lines.

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### 11.5.3 Urban Social Classes

With the increasing rate of industrialisation in India after Independence, the country has witnessed a significant rise in numerical strength as well as bargaining position of the three main urban social classes, i.e., i) the capitalist class ii) the working class and iii) the urban middle class.

#### i) The Capitalist Class

The capitalists own and control industrial, trading and financial enterprises. Public sector industrial, trading and financial enterprises largely serve the needs of the private capitalists. The capitalists are guided by the motive of maximisation of their profit. They exploit the workers through paying them less than the value of the products produced by the latter. They use various means like their chamber of commerce and industry, newspaper and journals to safeguard their interests and influence the formulation and implementation of government policy to their advantage. A variety of formal (e.g., Chamber of Commerce) and informal arrangements (such as cocktail parties) knit them together with the dominant strata in politics, bureaucracy, the professionals and so on. Due to their inward looking attitude they try to maintain and strengthen joint family bonds and consolidate their family strength by marriage ties with other business houses. Despite their inherent internal competition and conflicts in the arena of production and services for increasing profits, they stand united for the production of the capitalist system in the country. They exercise a quiet dominance in the life of the country (Saberwal 1978).

#### ii) The Urban Working Class

The urban working class consisting of both the wage labourers and self-employed workers is poor, powerless and largely unorganised on class lines. They constitute the exploited class. They are exploited more in the unorganised sector than in the organised sector. The wages of the workers in the unorganised sectors are lower than those in the organised sector. Women workers and children are more exploited in the unorganised sector because they are paid less than the adult male workers. Though the workers in the organised sector have their trade unions for furthering their interests, their affiliation with various political parties with different ideological orientations hinder the growth of unity of the working class. Wide income differentials between the workers in the two sectors, technological heterogeneity and social heterogeneity of workers on the older lines of segmentation (e.g., caste, language, religion) obstruct the process of the development of an all-encompassing working class consciousness and organisation for safeguarding and promoting their interests.

#### iii) The Urban Middle Class

In addition to the two major urban classes, the middle class also has increased rapidly after Independence. The members of this class are engaged in a number of professions such as teaching, journalism, law and administration. They are also employed in managerial and supervisory positions in industry, trade and commerce. Though the elite section of this class enjoys all privileges of life, the standard of living of the majority section is of an average quality. This class is socially dispersed and unorganised. Essentially this class does not stand for a radical restructuring of society. But a section of this class has aligned itself with the toiling masses of the people for effecting social transformation.

Before ending this section, we shall also discuss the issue of the creation of new occupational opportunities. This discussion will also include the association of caste with traditional occupations.

### Activity 2

Observe the economic activity in the place where you live in terms of

- a) the number of factories located in your place
- b) the goods manufactured in your place
- c) the number of cottage industries
- d) the number of government owned and the number of private owned industries.

Write a two page report on the topic: “The economic activity in the place where I live”.

## 11.5.4 Caste and Occupation

It is generally said that the association of caste with traditional occupation has become very weak in the urban economy as a result of diversification and occupational structure and creation of new occupational opportunities. Moreover, it is also held that the rate of occupational mobility is high in the urban areas. We have some empirical studies on these issues. After discussing the ethnographic material, we will also look at business communities in India.

### i) Some Case Studies

In his study of the city of Chandigarh, Victor D’Souza (1968) found that the occupational structure of different caste categories was different and it was not consistent to any remarkable degree with the occupational caste hierarchy both in case of the Hindu and Sikh castes. Harold Gould’s study of fifty *rickshawalas* of Lucknow revealed that this occupational category comprised twenty-seven Hindus ranging from the highest and purest Brahmin caste to the lowest and most defiled Chamar caste, four Nepali Hindu and nineteen Muslim. This gives an example of a complete disintegration of the occupational feature of the caste system (Gould’s article in Rao 1974: 296). In his study of the emergence of industrial labour force in Bombay, M.D. Morris (1965) observed that the labour force was drawn from all castes, high and low, chiefly consisting of Maratha migrants from Ratnagiri district (see Rao: 1974). A.B. Mehta’s study (1960) of domestic servants in Bombay shows that the bulk of them belonged to the low castes and were immigrants, (see Rao: 1974). The separate studies of clerks conducted by B.K. Khurana and N.J. Umrigar found that they were drawn from upper castes (see references to these works in Rao 1974).

Further, there are some studies on social and occupational mobility of the scheduled castes. Sunanda Patwardhan’s study (1973) of scheduled castes of Poona shows a varying degree of association between caste and traditional occupation. The ratio of association comprises Chamar (Shoemaker): 69 per cent; and Mahar: nil (see table in Rao 1974: 317). It is evident from the figures that the Mahar had completely dissociated from their traditional occupation.

They had taken up white-collar occupation. A limited proportion of people from other scheduled castes also had entered into non-traditional occupations. Hence, a positive correlation between caste and occupation was not found in this study. Lynch's study (1969) of the Jatav of Agra also gives evidences of social mobility among this caste.

## ii) **Business Communities in Urban India**

Regarding the business communities it has been observed that the history of business in India has been the history of certain social groups such as specific castes. But here it must be noted that business communities are not always found coterminous with caste groups. A number of studies have treated religious and regional groups as castes e.g. the Parsi, the Jain and the Marwari. In fact, the Parsi and the Jain are religious communities outside the framework of the caste system. Historically speaking, the Marwari belong to the region of Marwar in Rajasthan. They gradually spread their business activities all over India over a long period of time.

In fact, business opportunities have been seized by diverse social groups such as Bania, Parsi, Lohana and Muslim in Gujarat, Brahmin in Bengal, Khatri in Punjab and Chettiar in the South. Some lower caste-groups without having any traditional association with entrepreneurship have taken up business like the Ramgarhia (a caste of high skill artisans) in Punjab and the Mohishya (the low caste peasant community) in the Howrah region (Tripathi 1984:16-17). In reality, a constellation of forces have been operative in the emergence of development of business enterprise. According to N.R. Sheth (1984), these forces include psychological factors. The psychological factors are motivations, socio-cultural traditions, skills, and attitudes relevant to business. Economic opportunities, political stability and support for congenial business environment also help the development of business enterprise. Contact with contemporary business system and exigential pressures generated on social groups during the periods of social change operate in the emergence of the business community (Tripathi 1984: 18).

## **Check Your Progress 6**

i) Who are the capitalists? Answer this question in about five lines.

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ii) Who constitute the urban middle class? Use five lines for your answer.

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- iii) What are the factors associated with the emergence and development of business enterprise? Use 10 lines for your answer.

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## 11.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have talked about the nature of urban economy in India. We discussed the main features of the traditional urban economy in the ancient and the medieval period of Indian history. Then we discussed the main features of the colonial urban economy. Here we examined the process of destruction of urban handicrafts under the impact of colonial rule in India. We also described the growth of modern industries and the emergence of new social classes in India. We went on to discuss the urban economy after Independence. We focused on the impact of industrial policy on the economy, the role of the organised and the unorganised sectors, social classes in urban India and finally the relation between caste and occupation.

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## 11.7 KEYWORDS

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**Bourgeoisie and Proletariat** The capitalist class is known as the bourgeoisie. This consists of industrial, financial and mercantile capitalists. They own and control industrial, trading and financial enterprises. They exploit the working class for maximisation of their profit and expansion of their enterprises. They constitute the dominant class in the capitalist society. But working class known as proletariat is the exploited and powerless class. This class does not own the means of production. The workers work for wages in the capitalist enterprises to earn their livelihood.

**Guild System (*Sreni*)** The guild system known, as *sreni* in the contemporary literature was a very important

feature of the ancient urban economy in India. Urban craftsmen and traders had organised themselves into different guilds. Members of a particular guild practised similar occupation. These guilds played a very significant role in organising production and in shaping public opinion.

### **Mixed Economy**

India has adopted the path of 'mixed economy' for economic development of the country after independence. The concept of 'mixed economy' refers to the co-existence of both the public sector and the private sector in the national economy. The public sector is owned and controlled by the government but the private sector is owned and operated by individuals, families or private bodies.

### **Mode of Production**

This is a phrase, which one comes across frequently in the writings of Karl Marx. It refers to both, forces of production and relations of production. Forces of production include things like the tools, machines, capital, land etc. Relations of production include the relationships between the owners of production and the workers.

### **Multiform Economy**

This refers to prevalence of both the pre-capitalist and capitalist mode of production in the context of Indian economy.

### **Organised and Unorganised Sectors**

Indian economy has been viewed as dual in character comprising organised or formal sector and unorganised or informal sector. The organised sector possess the characteristics such as large-scale operation in terms of capital and labour, wage labour, modern technology, public and private ownership, regulated and protected markets for labour and output, skilled labour etc. Small-scale operation, private or family ownership, labour intensive, backward technology, unregulated market and unprotected labour are on the other hand the important features of the unorganised sector enterprises.

### **Royal Karkhana**

Royal *Karkhana* or workshops emerged during the medieval period for production of goods to meet the needs of the royal establishment. A large number of craftsmen belonging to different occupations were employed by the ruler for production of goods

under royal control and supervision. The production in these workshops was not meant for sale in the market but only for consumption of the royal establishment.

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## 11.8 FURTHER READING

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Desai, A.R. 1987. *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay

Jayapalan, N. 2002. *Urban Sociology*. Atlantic: New Delhi

Misra, S.K. and V.K. Puri 2001. *Economics of Development and Planning*. Himalaya Publishing House: New Delhi

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Rao, M.S.A., (ed.) 1974. *Urban Sociology in India*. Longman: New Delhi

Saberwal, S., (ed.) 1978. *Process and Institution in Urban India*. Vikas: New Delhi

Shirokov, O.K., 1980. *Industrialisation of India*. Peoples Publishing House: New Delhi

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## 11.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) b
- ii) a
- iii) In ancient India the urban craftsmen and traders had formed craft and trade guilds. Members of a guild belonged to the same craft or trade. These guilds provided its members security from competition as well as social status. The guilds fixed rules of work and the quality of the finished product and its price to safeguard both the artisan and the customer.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The two marked features of urban economy in medieval India were the growth of towns and cities and development of trade and commerce on an extensive scale.
- ii) b
- iii) The technology of production was low as compared with other advanced contemporary civilisations such as Western Europe and even China. This was specially evident in such areas of production like textiles, coal, cast-iron, mining and chemical industry.

- iv) Servants and slaves performed specialised functions in domestic and non-domestic services of the privileged class. The servants were low paid. Slaves were sold at a very cheap rate to the rich and were treated as objects. Slaves became free when the master freed them. It was not easy for the slaves to flee from this bondage.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) d
- ii) b
- iii) The unintended consequence of modern industrialisation was that, with the introduction of the modern factory system of production, commercialisation of economy and the spread of transport throughout India, the Indian economy became more unified. It became more cohesive and organic.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) All industries that are owned and controlled by the government come under public sector. Industries such as arms and ammunitions, atomic energy, iron and steel, heavy machine building etc. fall under this category.
- ii) The economic reforms opened up the economy to private sector. It resulted in liberalisation of economy and de-licensing and de-control of industries. The new economic policy led to the relaxation of MRTP and FERA companies, delicensing of major industries and provided incentives for export production for boosting the industrial development.

**Check Your Progress 5**

- i) c
- ii) The nature of Indian economy has been described as 'multiform' from the point of view of its mode of production. It has both pre-capitalist as well as capitalist forms, although the capitalist form is more dominant. The pre-capitalist forms refer to the other forms of mode of production like, ancient and feudal mode of production.

**Check Your Progress 6**

- i) The capitalists are those who own and control industrial, trading and financial enterprises. One of the characteristic features of the capitalists is that they are guided by the motive of maximisation of profit.
- ii) The urban middle classes occupy such positions as managerial and supervisory in industry, trade and commerce. They are also in professions such as, medical, teaching, journalism, law, administration, and so on.
- iii) A host of psychological, social, economic and political factors are responsible for the emergence and development of business enterprises. These factors are motivations, socio-cultural traditions, skills and attitudes required for business and economic opportunities. Political stability and support and exigencies created by certain groups in times of social change are also facilitating factors.

### Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Concept of and Approaches to Poverty
  - 12.2.1 Concept of Poverty
  - 12.2.2 Approaches to Understand Poverty
- 12.3 Historical Dimension
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  - 12.4.2 Magnitude of Rural and Urban Poverty
  - 12.4.3 Rural-Urban Linkage of Poverty
- 12.5 Poverty and The Five-Year Plans
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  - 12.5.2 Growth with Social Justice
- 12.6 Persistence of Poverty
  - 12.6.1 Economic and Political Factors
  - 12.6.2 Socio-cultural Factors
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- 12.8 Let Us Sum Up
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### 12.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- define the concept of poverty
- explain the various approaches to understand the phenomenon of poverty
- describe rural and urban poverty in a historical perspective
- state the nature and extent of poverty in contemporary India
- summarise the approaches adopted in the Five-Year Plans towards the problem of poverty
- explain the persistence of poverty in India.

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## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the first two units of this Block you learnt about the rural and urban economy of India. In this unit, you will look at one of the socio-economic problems of our country, namely the phenomenon of poverty in rural and urban India.

To understand the phenomenon of rural and urban poverty in India, we first discuss the general and broad concept of poverty and view different approaches to understand it. Then, against this background, we describe the rural and urban poverty in the country in a historical perspective. This section is followed by a discussion of the nature and extent of poverty in contemporary India. In addition, we examine the approaches adopted in the Five-Year Plans towards this problem and discuss its persistence. Finally, we look at the alternative ways of eradicating poverty.

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## 12.2 CONCEPT OF AND APPROACHES TO POVERTY

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Poverty is a broad concept with many aspects to it. In this unit, we will discuss it in economic terms. Here, poverty is viewed as a level of living that is so low that it inhibits the physical, mental and social development of human personality.

Let us first look at this concept of poverty and then discuss various approaches to study this phenomenon. Against this background, we will discuss, in the latter parts of this unit, rural and urban poverty in India.

### 12.2.1 Concept of Poverty

The problem of poverty has been with the human culture and civilisation since ages. In the beginning the human beings were dependent on nature for the fulfillment of even their basic needs for survival such as food, clothing and shelter. The society was at a low level of social organisation and technological development. The state of poverty was general in nature faced by all members of society.

Gradually, there occurred great progress in social organisation and technological development. Human beings started producing food and clothes and building houses for themselves. They also produced various other articles for maintaining a comfortable life. This conquest of the human being over nature has gone a long way over the ages.

However, the fruits of socio-economic progress have not been equally shared by all sections of society. Society has been broadly divided into two classes i.e. the rich and the poor. The rich people are economically rich, politically dominant and socially superior. But the common masses are economically poor, politically dominated and socially inferior. On the one hand, we find affluence of the ruling class and poverty of the mass on the other. This type of poverty of the weaker sections of society is a social product. It is intrinsically related to the prevailing socio-economic structure of society. The poverty of the masses is generated and perpetuated by the social system. It has been called 'artificial' poverty (Joshi 1986: 213). This means that poverty is a socially created state. It is multi-dimensional in nature comprising economic, political, social and



cultural aspects. But economic poverty constitutes the basis and gets reinforced and perpetuated by political, social and cultural backwardness.

### 12.2.2 Approaches to Understand Poverty

Poverty has been defined differently in the developed and the developing countries because of their different levels of economic development. There are two main approaches to the problem of poverty-the '**nutritional**' approach and the '**relative deprivation**' approach.

#### i) The Nutritional approach

This approach has been adopted in the developing countries. In this case, poverty is measured on the basis of minimum food requirements. This is calculated in terms of consumption of adequate calories (generally 2250 calories) to maintain working capacity of a person. People who are unable to fulfil this bare minimum in food consumption due to their low income are placed below the '**poverty line**'. The concept of poverty line is used to demarcate the poor from the non-poor. It is formulated in terms of an income level, which is considered to be adequate for enabling a person to maintain a minimum level of consumption of goods and services. Persons whose income level is below the poverty line are identified as poor. This is a measure of 'absolute' poverty i.e. poverty defined with reference to some predetermined standard or norm.

#### ii) The Relative Deprivation approach

In case of the developed countries, the 'relative deprivation' approach has been adopted for measuring poverty because fulfillment of minimum need of food is not the major problem. Here, poverty is seen in terms of relative deprivation of a class or a section of population against the privileged ones. Poverty is perceived in terms of an exclusion of a class or section of population from average living patterns, activities and participation in social life because of lack of resources e.g. wealth, income, education and political power. The emphasis is more on social inequalities than nutritional requirements.

The 'nutritional' approach to poverty is highly deficient in nature because it excludes essential non-food requirement for human living. In defining poverty, we must include essential non-food requirements like clothing, housing, education and health-care facilities, which are as important as the essential food requirements for an average human life in a civilised society. We cannot reduce human life to sheer animal life, which is concerned only with basic survival needs.

Against this backdrop of the concept of and approaches to poverty, we will now look at the phenomenon of rural and urban poverty in India. This discussion will be in terms of a historical perspective.

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## 12.3 HISTORICAL DIMENSION

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While discussing the historical dimension of poverty in our country, we will view this phenomenon in ancient, medieval and colonial periods of Indian history.

### 12.3.1 Ancient Period

The roots of contemporary rural and urban poverty in India go deep down the history of the country. The Rigvedic society was basically tribal, semi-nomadic, pastoral and largely egalitarian. According to Sharma (1980) it was a pre-class society at a very low level of socio-economic development. Poverty was a general problem of the people. In the third book of the Rigveda a prayer is offered to God to drive away poverty and famine. But the *varna*-based inequalitarian society developed during the Later Vedic period and onwards with the growth of agrarian settlements, towns and cities. A full-fledged class-based social order was formed in the age of the Buddha and has continued ever since. Thus, we witness a change from a stage of general state of poverty to a stage of socially-generated poverty during the ancient period.

In the ancient Indian society the king, nobles, holders of land grants, and rich merchants constituted the privileged class. They belonged to the Brahman, Kshatriya and a section of the Vaisya *varna*. They enjoyed a prosperous life through appropriation of surplus produced by the working people. They did not directly participate in the process of production. But the common people comprising peasants, artisans, craftspersons, labourers, servants and slaves were very poor. They belonged to Vaisya and Shudra *varna* and the untouchable castes. They suffered from multiple disabilities and deprivations e.g. economic, political, social, religious and cultural. The peasants had to pay heavy taxes to the privileged ruling class with little left for their survival. The artisans and craftspersons also suffered from exploitation and oppression of the rulers. The servility of the Shudra assumed various forms. They worked as domestic servants and slaves, agricultural slaves, hired labourers and artisans. Manu mentions seven kinds of slaves - a captive of war, a slave of maintenance, a son of a female slave, one purchased for money, a slave obtained as a present, a hereditary one, and one condemned to slavery for any offence (Punit 1982). The masses lived in absolute poverty, which was created by inequitable distribution of social resources and reflected in their utter misery. Kalhana, a Kashmiri poet in ancient India, in his book "*Rajatarangini*" refers to a drought in the beginning of the eighth century as follows.

One could scarcely see the water in the Jhelum, entirely covered as the river was with corpses soaked and swollen by the water in which they had been long lying... The King's ministers and guards became wealthy as they amassed riches by selling stocks of rice at high prices.

### 12.3.2 Medieval Period

During the medieval period, socially created poverty of the masses was perpetuated in the kingdoms and empires ruled by both the Muslim rulers and the Hindu rulers. The ruling class comprising the king, nobles, *zamindars* (landlords), *jagirdars* and the rich merchants and traders thrived on the surplus produced by the working people and lived a highly ostentatious life. But peasants, craftspersons, artisans, labourers, servants and slaves lived a miserable life despite their hard labour. Nikitin, a foreign traveller, who visited the Vijayanagar empire which was ruled by the Hindu rulers, observed that the land was overstocked with people; but those in the country were very miserable while the nobles were extremely opulent and lived in luxury (Punit 1982).

Moreover, the severity of drought and famines forced people at times to barbarism. Abdul Hamid describes in *Badshahnama* that in one of the bad years of the so called 'golden age' of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, 'destitution at last reached such a pitch that men began to devour each other, and the flesh of a son was preferred to his love'. Economic misery of the common people continued unabated along with their socio-political deprivations. Poverty of the masses amidst affluence of the privileged ruling class could be a valid description of the medieval period as was the case in the ancient period.

### 12.3.3 Colonial Period

The British colonial rule over India added an alien exploiter and oppressor. This accentuated the problem of poverty of the country in general and the Indian masses in particular. Indian economy was subordinated to serve the interests of British capital. In the previous two units of this Block we looked at these aspects. A huge amount of wealth was drained out of India to enrich the British ruling class. The peasants were ruthlessly exploited and oppressed by the *zamindars*, money-lenders and the state under the new land revenue system. Rural artisans suffered from the decline of rural household industries. Urban craftsmen were exploited and oppressed by the British traders and their agents. A number of towns and cities, which were famous for their manufactures, declined and became desolate. Reporting on the decline of urban handicrafts William Bentinck, the Governor-General, said in 1834-35 "the bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India" (Chandra 1977: 184). The growth of modern machine-based capitalist industries also resulted in exploitation of the workers by the capitalists.

Further, the occurrence of frequent famines and the high losses of life in them reflect the high magnitude of poverty and starvation, which had taken root in India during this period. According to William Digby's estimate, over 28,825,000 people died during famines only in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1943, nearly thirty lakh (three million) people died in the famine of Bengal. Moreover, the grim situation of India's poverty in the nineteenth century was recognised by many English officials in India. Charles Elliot remarked "I do not hesitate to say that half the agricultural population do not know from one year's end to another what it is to have a full meal". William Hunter observed that "forty million of the people of India habitually go through life on insufficient food" (Chandra 1977:194 - 95). The condition became worse in the twentieth century. The quantity of food available to an Indian declined by as much as twenty-nine per cent in the thirty years between 1911 to 1941 (Chandra 1977: 195).

### Check Your Progress 1

Tick the right answers of the following questions.

- i) What does the nutritional approach to poverty tries to measure?
  - a) The health of the urban population
  - b) Poverty on the basis, of minimum food requirements
  - c) Relative poverty of the poor as compared to the rich
  - d) Poverty on the basis of the income level of the rural population.

- ii) What is the main purpose of the relative deprivation approach?
  - a) Measure poverty of those below the poverty line
  - b) Determine the privileges of the rich
  - c) Assess the minimum food requirements
  - d) Assess the deprivation of a section of population as compared to others
- iii) Explain in about five lines the concept of poverty.

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## 12.4 POVERTY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

The problem of poverty in India after Independence can be described in terms of the social classes, castes or groups afflicted with poverty in rural and urban areas. It can also be discussed in terms of magnitude of the problem and the linkages between rural and urban poverty.

### 12.4.1 Rural and Urban Poor

In India, large sections of the population live in abject poverty. The poor live in rural and urban areas. In the rural areas, they consist of small landholders, agricultural labourers, artisans and craftsmen. They mainly belong to the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes.

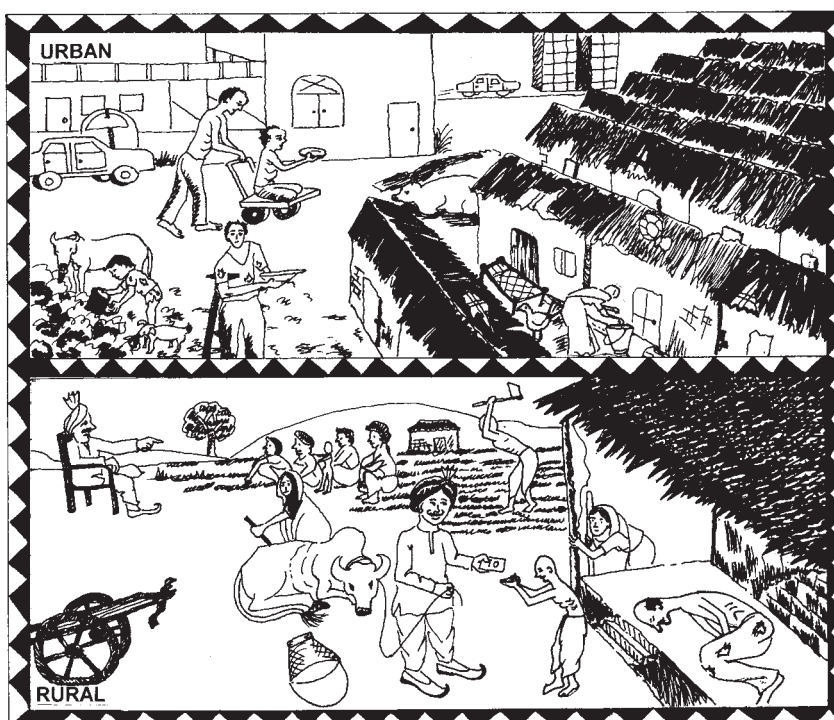


Fig. 12.1: Urban and rural poverty

In urban areas, the poor people are usually engaged in the unorganised sector and some low paid jobs in the organised sector. They are employed in unskilled, semi-skilled and also some low-income skilled jobs. They work as wage earners in industries, trade, commerce, transport and construction industry. A large number of them are also engaged in self-employed activities as rickshaw-pullers, shoe-repairers, vendors, owners of teashop and pan-bidi shop and even beggars. The urban poor living as slum dwellers and pavement dwellers are found in abundance in Indian towns and cities. Figure 12.1 shows the predicaments of both rural and urban poverty.

The condition of both the urban and the rural poor is miserable. They own very few or negligible assets. Their income and expenditure are very low. Their wages are meagre. Many of them are unemployed and underemployed, which enhances their pangs of poverty. The rate of literacy is lowest among them. They do not enjoy much of the benefits of available health facilities. They do not get even enough food to eat. Their housing condition is sub-human or inhuman. They are severely exploited and oppressed by the privileged class both in the rural and urban areas.

### 12.4.2 Magnitude of Rural and Urban Poverty

The magnitude of poverty in India has been estimated in terms of the nutritional criterion, which takes into account only the minimum food intake of a person to maintain working capacity. But some non-food items such as clothing, housing, education and health-care are also equally essential for a minimum standard of human living and hence must be considered while analysing poverty. Moreover, in a developing country like India, we find that the privileged class enjoys all available modern amenities and also indulges in conspicuous consumption. This means that they buy goods and services which enhance socio-economic status and which are not affordable to the poor. The majority of the people are, on the other hand, not able to fulfil their minimum needs. There is a situation of wide socio-economic inequalities. Therefore, a proper approach to the problem of poverty has to take into consideration the prevailing inequalities with regard to distribution of assets, income and consumption expenditure both in the rural and urban areas.

Several economists and planners have estimated the number and proportion of people living below poverty line. The 'poverty line' as mentioned in the earlier section 12.2 is expressed in terms of an income level which is considered to be adequate for sustaining a minimum level of consumption. For instance consumption of food items giving 2250 calories of energy to a person per day is deemed necessary for maintaining working capacity. This is one norm against which poverty line is defined. Presently in our country, following the recommendations of Expert Group on Proportion and Number of Poor separate deflators are used for rural and urban areas of different states. The State - specific consumer price index of selected commodity groups for the agricultural labourers was used as price deflator for the rural areas and State-specific retail price movement of consumer price index for the industrial workers for the urban areas.

In India we find differences in the estimates of poverty. This is mainly due to two reasons. First, the analysts have adopted different methodology in their calculation. Secondly, fluctuation occurs in the level of poverty due to rise, in



the level, in periods of bad agricultural growth and decline in the time of good harvest. However, there is complete unanimity on the fact that the absolute number of the poor has increased over the years from 131 million in 1960-61 to about 273 million in 1984-85 (Datt and Sundharam 1988: 294). The proportion of people below the poverty line is also very high. It was about forty per cent of the population after forty years of Independence even if we take the official figure of the plans. Moreover, the number of the rural poor is more than four times the number of the urban poor. During 1993-94 the absolute number of rural poor was 244 million (24 crore and 40 lakh) whereas the number of urban poor was 76 million (7 crore 60 lakh) (Ninth Five-Year Plan 1997-2002). Rural poverty directly affects urban poverty because most of the urban poor are migrants from the villages. These people have been driven out of their villages due to poverty there (Datt and Sundharam 1988).

At the national level, the incidence of poverty on the Head Count Ratio declined from 44.48 per cent in 1983 to 26.10 per cent in 1999-2000. It was a decline of nearly 8.5 per cent points in ten year period between 1983 and 1993-94 (NSS 50th round, 1993-94), followed by a further decline of nearly ten per cent points in the period between 1993-94 to 1999-2000. In absolute terms, the number of poor declined from about 323 million in 1983 to 260 million in 1999-2000. The decline has not been uniform either across states or across rural and urban areas. While the poor in the rural areas declined from 45.65 per cent in 1983 to 27.09 per cent in 1999-2000, the decline in urban areas has been from 40.79 per cent to 23.62 per cent during this period (NSS 55th round, 1999-2000). Although there is a broad consensus among the scholars (Deaton 2002, Sundaram and Suresh 2002) that poverty had indeed declined substantially in the 1990s, the magnitude of the decline remains a point of contention because the official estimates based on the NSS fifty-fifth round are not likely to be comparable with earlier rounds of NSS, due to changes in the design of the fifty-fifth round consumption module. According to Deaton's estimates in 1999-2000, 29 per cent of India's population live below the official poverty line (Deaton 2003). The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) aims to reduce the poverty ratio by 5 per cent points by 2007. This means bringing down the poverty ratio in the country to 21 per cent from the 26.1 per cent (official data) in 1999-2000.

Now let us look at those factors, which explain the nature and extent of rural and urban poverty. The factors considered here are (i) unequal distribution of wealth (ii) the pattern of per capita expenditure on consumption (iii) the pattern of possession of assets (iv) illiteracy and health and (v) regional differences in the patterns of poverty.

#### **i) Poverty and Unequal Distribution of Wealth**

We discuss now the question of unequal distribution of personal income, which throws some light on the nature of poverty in India. Estimates of distribution of personal income made by various reputed organisations and noted scholars reveal the existence of concentration of economic power in both the urban and rural areas in the country. This is reflected in the prevalence of a wide range of variation between the income of the top and the bottom levels of the population. According to the estimate of the Reserve Bank of India from 1953-54 to 1956-57, in the rural areas, the top five per cent of the population had seventeen per cent of the aggregate income while the bottom twenty per cent



had only about nine per cent of the income. Moreover, in the urban areas, the top five per cent of the population had twenty six per cent of the aggregate income but the bottom twenty per cent had only seven per cent of the income. Hence, the gap in income between the top and the bottom income group is wider in the urban areas than in the rural areas. Moreover, it is also evident that the fruits of economic development have been appropriated over the years by the rural and the urban rich. Similar trend has been observed in other studies (Datt and Sundharam 1988).

## ii) **The Pattern of Per capita Expenditure on Consumption**

The pattern of the per capita expenditure on consumption among the rich and the poor section of the population is another indicator of the magnitude of economic inequality, poverty and the gap in the standard of living. There has been an increase in average per capita real consumer expenditure both in the urban and rural areas. Despite this increase the condition of the bottom forty per cent people in the urban areas and five per cent in the rural areas has worsened in the absolute sense. This is reflected in decline in their real consumption expenditure over the years. Moreover, the disparity in the level of expenditure between the top five per cent and the bottom five per cent of the population has been gradually increasing and in the urban areas it is becoming more acute than in the rural areas (Bose 1980:17). As per the results of the National Sample Survey fifty-fifth round on household consumer expenditure in 1999-2000, the average per capita monthly expenditure in urban India has grown to Rs. 529 as against Rs.486 in 1994-95 (an increase of 15.6 per cent) and that of the rural India it has grown to Rs.304 from Rs.281 (an increase of eight per cent) during the same period. At the same time the NSS data shows a higher incidence of unemployment in both rural and urban areas (NSS fifty-fifth round, 1999-2000). It is clear that the gains of economic progress have been cornered by the rich people. On the other hand, the standard of living of the lower income groups has either remained stationary or has positively deteriorated over the years.

## iii) **The Pattern of Possession of Assets**

The pattern of possession of assets in rural and urban areas also gives an idea about the extent of poverty in India. The people living below the poverty line have very few or almost negligible assets. The structure of landownership would reveal the highly inequalitarian nature of asset distribution in rural areas. Data on ownership of land during the 1950's shows that about 47 per cent of the population owned either no land or less than one acre of land and accounted for about 1.38 per cent of the total land resources. Various land reform measures have been adopted by the government. However, the heavy concentration of land has remained practically unaltered. The twenty-sixth round report of the National Sample Survey for the year 1971-72 shows that about two per cent of the rural households own about twenty-three per cent of the land areas while about forty-five per cent of the households own only two per cent of the land (Chattopadhyay 1989: 123). Moreover, it has also been observed in some studies that in the two decades between 1961 and 1981 the proportion of cultivators came down from 52.3 per cent to 41.5 per cent while during the same period the per centage of agricultural labourers increased from 17.2 per cent to 25.2 per cent of the total labour force. This reflects an increasing incidence of pauperisation of the rural poor (Chattopadhyay 1989: 123). During

the period 1983 to 1999-2000, the per centage of persons in the labour force at the national level declined from 66.5 per cent in 1983 to 61.8 per cent in 1999-2000 (NSS fifty-fifth round, 1999-2000). The deterioration in the employment situation will augment the incidence of poverty.

Moreover, in the urban areas there are large sections of pavement dwellers who possess very few or almost no assets. The decaying tenements of the slum dwellers and the hutments of squatters are the burning examples of urban poverty. According to the 1971 Census, sixty-six per cent of the households in cities with a population of more than one lakh live in one room tenements. In 1981, at the national level, nearly seventy-three per cent of the households were living in houses with two or less rooms and this rate declined marginally to seventy one per cent in 1991 (National Human Development Report 2002). The National Building Organization (NBO) has estimated that the shortage of housing units increased from 14.5 million in 1971 to 16.7 million in 1977 (De Souza 1983: xxi). On the other side we witness a large increase in the assets of the privileged section of the urban population. For example, the total assets of top twenty large industrial houses increased from rupees 1,346 cores in 1963-64 to 20,138 crores in 1985 (Datt and Sundharam 1988: 348).

#### iv) **Illiteracy and Health**

Regarding educational facilities we find that it is mainly the poor people who are illiterates both in the rural and urban areas. In 1981, it was observed that about sixty-four per cent of India's population were illiterate. The rate of illiteracy was seventy per cent in rural areas and forty-three per cent in the urban areas in 1981. The national illiteracy rate was around forty eight per cent and thirty-four per cent in the years 1991 and 2001, respectively. Moreover, the absolute number of illiterates has also increased from 300 million in 1951 to 438 million in 1981 according to a report of the Institute of Economic Growth published in 1988. Further in the case of health facilities, it was found that fifty-five per cent of the rural population was not served even by primary health centres. The urban poor also could hardly afford expensive medical treatment in towns and cities. Both illiteracy and poor health status generate living conditions which reflect poverty.

#### **Activity 1**

Visit a slum and observe the living conditions of the poor who live there. Interview members (male and female adults i.e. above twenty years of age) of five families on such aspects of their life like:

- a) occupation and family income per month
- b) regularity of employment
- c) size of the family
- d) educational status of each family member and how they came to live in this slum

Discuss, if possible, the-information you have gathered with other students at the Study Centre.

An important aspect of poverty in India is its differential distribution in different regions, towns and cities. In 1981 The largest number of the urban poor is found in the state of Uttar Pradesh where about forty per cent of the state's total urban poor lives below the 'poverty line' and the least number of them were in Haryana constituting about seventeen per cent of the urban population of the state. Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu had more than fifty per cent of the people below the poverty line in 1983. By 1999-2000 while Tamil Nadu and West Bengal had reduced their poverty ratio by half, Bihar and Orissa continued to be the poorest states with poverty ratio of forty-seven and forty three per cent, respectively. Rural Orissa and rural Bihar were the poorest among the rural areas in 1999-2000 and among the urban areas the poorest three states were Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar (NSS fifty five round, 1999-2000). On the whole, one-fifth of the total urban population lives in slums or squatter settlements. The slum population of most of the cities in India during the seventies was estimated at twenty to thirty per cent of the total urban population. This was true of Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai (De Souza 1983: xiii-xiv). Among the metropolitan cities Kolkata and Mumbai had the largest number of people living in slums in 1981, numbering 3.03 million and 2.83 million respectively according to a paper published by the National Institute of Urban Affairs in New Delhi in 1989.

### **12.4.3 Rural-Urban Linkages of Poverty**

It has been observed that the problem of poverty in India is mainly a problem of rural poverty. According to the estimate of the Seventh Plan, out of about 273 million people below the poverty line about 222 million lived in rural areas while only fifty million lived in urban areas in 1984-85. According to the National Sample Survey estimates in 1999-2000, the head count ratio of the rural poor is 27.1 per cent and that of the urban poor 23.6 per cent (National Sample Survey 1999-2000).

Moreover, it has been said that the urban poor of India are only an overflow of the rural poor into the cities and that essentially they belong to the same class as the rural poor (Dandekar and Rath 1971). We find that a large number of rural poor migrate to urban centres due to lack of work in villages and growing opportunities of employment in towns and cities. The largest cities have attracted the largest number of rural migrant workers because, unlike the small towns, they offer a wide range of employment opportunities. Most of these people are engaged either in low income self-employment activities or low paid unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in the unorganised sector of the urban economy. The primary reason for rural-urban migration is economic, and the rural poor migrate to the cities in search of employment rather than better employment opportunities (see De Souza 1978: xv). The rural poverty is carried over to the urban areas by the channel of rural urban migration. This is very evident in slums and squatter settlements, environmental deterioration, sub-standard housing and low levels of health and nutrition of the urban poor.

Social and cultural factors also play an important role in facilitating the migration of the rural poor to the urban centres. The rural migrants depend upon kinship, caste and regional networks not only for decisions with regard to the choice of destination but also for their early and easy adjustment to the

difficult conditions of urban living. They get automatically pushed into the slums or squatter settlements where their kin-members, castemen, acquaintances or friends live. These people help them in getting employment or give financial assistance in the beginning. It has been pointed out that the spontaneous settlements of the urban poor are not merely collections of sacks and huts but communities of fellow migrants. Each is based on a network of primary ties based on language, region, village, caste or kin. It has enabled the rural migrants coming from small village communities to become familiar with and acculturated in the complex and diversified environment of a metropolitan city (De Souza 1983: xvi).

Moreover, the urban poor maintain their linkages with their families in rural areas by visits and remittances. They go to their villages during harvesting, festivals and other ceremonies like marriage and death. In time of difficulty or unemployment they fall back on the traditional but scanty, sources of income available in their villages. Most of them continue to maintain their roots in villages.

The rural poor join the mass of urban poor after reaching the towns and cities. In this way, rural poverty is carried over to urban areas. But the natural increase in the population of the urban poor has also become significant in recent years because of the number of the urban poor who are permanently settled in towns and cities. In our next section we will turn our attention to the approach and concern at the governmental level toward the problems of poverty in India.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) State whether the following statements are true or false.

Mark a T or F against each statement.

- a) Urban poverty and rural poverty are independent of each other.
- b) Though there is a lot of poverty since independence the rich too have become poorer.
- c) The per capita consumer expenditure has increased during the current period.
- d) In rural areas forty-five per cent of the households own about twenty three per cent of land.

- ii) Who constitute the rural poor in India? Use four lines for your answer.

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- iii) Outline the nature and magnitude of the housing problem of the urban poor in about ten lines.

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- iv) What have been the five factors, which have helped in throwing light on the nature and magnitude of the problem of rural and urban poverty in India? Answer in five lines.

## 12.5 POVERTY AND THE FIVE YEAR PLANS

The Constitution of India (1950) aimed at securing justice, liberty and equality to all the citizens and constitutes the country into a socialist, secular and democratic republic. According to the Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution, the State assumed the responsibility of securing adequate means of livelihood to all citizens, a proper distribution of the material resources of the country. It assumed the responsibility of preventing concentration of wealth to the common detriment. The aim was to build up a social order, which stands for the welfare of the people. The resonance of these Constitutional commitments implying removal of poverty has permeated into all the Five-Year Plans in a tacit or categorical terms. For example, the Second Five-Year Plan stated that the benefits of economic development must accrue more and more to the relatively less privileged classes of society. The focus of the Ninth five-year Plan was growth with social justice and equity. The Tenth Plan aims at economic growth with a stronger thrust on employment generation and equity. As mentioned earlier it envisages to reduce the poverty ratio by five per centage points from twenty-six per cent to twenty-one per cent by 2007 and by ten points further to eleven per cent by 2012.

Moreover, the Plans have sought to lay special emphasis on the common person, the weaker sections. But the efficacy of the approach and strategy adopted for resolving the problem is very doubtful. Let us now outline the two approaches that have been adopted in the Five-Year Plans.

### 12.5.1 Growth Oriented Approach

In the beginning, India's Five-Year Plans laid emphasis on the growth of economy of the country as a whole through raising production and the per capita income. It was postulated that the benefits of rapid economic growth would automatically trickle down to the poor people and raise their living standard through providing them more employment opportunities, higher income and more wages. Moreover, no distinction was made between rural and urban poverty and the latter was considered to simultaneously vanish with the former.

The Government began with the Community Development Project (CDP) in 1952. Under this project the whole community in a particular area was taken as a homogeneous unit. The emphasis was given on economic growth. The project covered the programmes like improvement in agriculture, animal husbandry, village and small industries, health and sanitation, social education etc. Moreover, an effort was made to effect changes in the pattern of landownership through various land reform measures such as the abolition of the *zamindari* system, tenancy reforms, ceilings on landholding and distribution of surplus land to the small landholders and landless people. Further, in the nineteen sixties, antipoverty programmes concentrated in places and in crops where these could significantly raise production. The important programmes comprised the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) and the Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (IAAP) launched in 1960 and 1964 respectively. Since the mid-sixties, the Government has mainly helped the better off farmers and big landowners to raise agricultural production through adopting modern technology in the form of use of High Yielding Varieties (HYV) of seeds, chemical fertilizers, tractors, water pumps etc.

In course of time it was realised that the benefits of these development programmes have been largely cornered by the privileged section of the rural population. The impact of land reform measures was also very limited. The conditions of the poor did not improve. In fact, their number increased both in rural and urban areas.

### 12.5.2 Growth with Social Justice

When it was observed that the **growth oriented approach** was a failure in effecting the trickling down of benefits of development to the poor, the five-year plans started giving special emphasis on the cause of social justice. The motto of development since the early seventies became **growth with social justice**. Special programmes were launched to benefit the backward areas and backward section of the population e.g. small and marginal farmers and landless labourers and especially those belonging to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes.

#### i) Programmes in Rural Areas

In rural areas, various programmes came into operation such as Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers (MFAL) and Drought Prone Area Programmes (DPAP). The concept of *Antyodaya* (all-round development of all poorest section in each village) came in 1977. 'Food for Work' programme was started in the same year to provide employment to the rural poor particularly in slack season. This programme



was christened National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) in 1980. Special subplans were introduced to remove regional disparities and development especially of the hill and tribal areas. Minimum Needs Programme was launched to secure to the rural areas certain basic amenities in the field of education, health, drinking water, electrification, roads and home sites for the poor. Further, the national scheme of Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) was started in 1979 with a view to removing unemployment among the rural youth. The Rural landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) was initiated in 1983 to offer more employment opportunities for the rural landless. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) aimed at providing assistance to families below the poverty line to raise their income and assets over the poverty line. The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) has been launched in April 1989 for removal of unemployment. *Indira Awas Yojana*, which was launched as a sub-scheme of *Jawahar Rozgar Yojana*, was implemented as an independent scheme since 1996 with the aim of helping the rural in the construction of the dwelling units. *Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana*, launched in April 2000 is implemented in the rural areas through the country following the pattern of the *Indira Awas Yojana*. *Samagra Awas Yojana* is a comprehensive housing scheme launched in April 1999 with a view to ensure integrated provision for shelter, sanitation and drinking water for the rural poor. The *Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana*, a new and holistic self-employment programme for the rural poor was launched on April 1999, replacing the earlier self-employment and allied programmes such as IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA etc. *Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana*, which was a re-structured, streamlined and comprehensive version of the erstwhile *Jawahar Rozghar Yojana* was launched in April 1999. National Social Assistance Programme came into effect from August 1995. It is aimed at providing social security in case of old age, maternity and the death of the primary breadwinner of the family. However, it can be said that the impact of these programmes has been very marginal on the problem of poverty in the country. Corruption, leakages and incapacity to create permanent asset have made these programmes unsuccessful to a large extent. The Government has nonetheless come out with new programmes, sometimes replacing the old ones, hoping to mitigate the problems of poverty in the rural areas.

### Activity 2

Go to a village and visit an area where the poorest sections of the population live. Observe their living conditions. Talk to at least 5 adult members living there about

- a) their source of income
- b) their caste status (i.e. high or low)
- c) their awareness of old and new anti-poverty programmes.

Write a two page report on the basis of the information you have gathered. Compare, if possible, your report with those written by other students at your Study Centre.

### ii) Programmes in Urban Areas

Further, in case of urban poverty we find a gradual change in the perception of the planners. Urban poverty was not seen as a distinct problem in the early

Five-Year Plans. It was treated only as an off-shoot of rural poverty. But this problem was addressed directly with the Seventh Five-Year Plan. This plan envisaged a multi-pronged strategy to resolve the problem. It aimed at (a) providing gainful employment to the unemployed, particularly, women and youth, (b) raising the earnings of those already employed in low paid jobs, (c) increasing the productivity and earnings of those who were self-employed workers, and (d) improving the access of the urban poor to basic amenities like education, health-care, sanitation and safe drinking water (Seventh Plan 1985 Vol 1: 32). For this, the plan proposed to take up a few pilot projects in selected urban areas.

The various programmes meant for removing urban poverty are grouped under three categories (a) shelter and services, (b) employment, and (c) public distribution and nutrition. Shelter and services related programmes include provision of housing, environmental improvement of slums, programmes concerned with the welfare of children, women and youth. The Prime Minister of India announced a centrally sponsored scheme called Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana (VAMBAY) on 15th August 2001 to ameliorate the condition of urban slum dwellers living below the 'poverty-line'. The National Slum Development Programme was launched in August 1996 with the primary objective of the development of the urban slums. Employment related programmes concern with helping the urban poor in self-employment through providing credit and loans on concessional rates and upgradation of their skills. *Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana*, launched in December 1997, is one such programme aimed at providing gainful employment to the urban unemployed and underemployed through encouraging the setting up of self-employment ventures or provisions of wage employment. The urban poor get benefit from the Public Distribution System (PDS) which supplies certain essential goods like cereals, edible oils, kerosene oil etc. at fair prices. The general programmes of mid-day meal, special nutrition programme and integrated child development services are also expected to help them. In order to make PDS more focused and targeted towards poor, the *Antyodaya Anna Yojana* has been launched in 2000. The scheme contemplates identification of 10 million poor families and providing them with twenty-five kilograms of foodgrains per family per month at a low price of Rs. 2/kg for wheat and Rs. 3/kg for rice.

The economic reforms started in the 1990 have an adverse effect on the PDS system. The food distributed through PDS is subsidised by the Government to the extent of the difference between the issue price of foodgrains and their economic cost to Food Corporation of India (FCI), the agency which incurs the cost of transportation, storage and administration of the stock of foodgrain. In the wake of the economic reforms the government reduced the subsidies drastically and such reduction hit poor drastically. For ensuring supply of foodgrains to the PDS system in face of export attraction due to the devaluation of rupee, for maintaining their level of production in spite of sharp rise in input prices and for political consideration of assuaging the rich farmers' lobby, the government had to increase the procurement prices of rice and wheat (Bandyopadhyay 1995). This compounded the reasons for the increase for the prices of the commodities in the fair shops. In June 1997 the government announced Targeted PDS or TPDS in the place of Revamped PDS or RPDS of the early 1990s. The TPDS introduced the idea of differential entitlements

for different categories of citizens based on the formulae that identified below poverty line (BPL) households (Chatterjee and Measham 1999). The steps taken by the government resulted in reducing the population covered by the benefits of PDS.

However, we must note that most of these programmes expected to benefit the urban poor are general in nature. There exist only a few programmes specifically meant for the urban poor, most of which are in the shelter sector. Further, most of these programmes are at their experimental stage. They do not cover even a small fraction of the urban poor. Many programmes are floundering and some are already showing signs of malfunction.

On the whole the measure undertaken to deal with the problem of poverty in rural and urban areas seems to be inadequate. At this point, it seems quite relevant to ask the question what are the factors, which are responsible for the emergence and persistence of the phenomenon of poverty that no amount of efforts seems adequate. Let us examine the causes of poverty.

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## 12.6 PERSISTENCE OF POVERTY

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In India, we find co-existence of abject poverty of the masses and affluence of the privileged class both in the rural and urban areas since ages. The failure of the government in resolving the problem of poverty has been generally attributed to rising population, havoc of natural calamities such as drought and flood and character deficiency of individuals. It is true that the country is still at a low level of economic development. But it is also certain that the major benefits of development have been concerned by the richer section of the population.

In reality, poverty in India is a social product and not a natural phenomenon. It has been socially generated and reinforced and perpetuated. It is a consequence of extreme socio-economic inequalities. It results from differential position of different social classes, castes and groups in economic, political, social and religious domains of society. Roots of poverty lie in the economic, political and social set up of society. Demographic, natural and psychological factors are off-shoots of the highly inequalitarian structure of society though they play an important role in perpetuating poverty. Now let us look at the important economic, political and socio-cultural factors, which have led to the persistence of this problem.

### 12.6.1 Economic and Political Factors

The basic economic factor responsible for the problem of poverty in India is the highly unequal distribution of the economic resources of the country among various social classes and castes. We find wide inequalities in distribution of assets and income between the rich and the poor both in rural and urban areas. The productivity of labour remains low in agriculture due to highly unequal distribution of landholdings. Big landowners generally do not care much for raising agricultural production because their needs are fulfilled even at low level of production. The small and marginal farmers do not possess enough resources to make adequate use of modern inputs for raising productivity. The agricultural labourers do not feel much motivated to work hard due to their

low wages. The limited spread of the Green Revolution in agriculture has not helped much in removing the problem of mass poverty. In addition, the benefits of limited agricultural growth in agriculture have been grabbed by the rural rich. Similarly, in the urban areas also the fruits of economic development have gone to the rich. The urban poor have to lead a miserable life due to their employment in low paid jobs in the unorganised sector, low income activities of self-employment and the problems of unemployment.

Further, the political factor has also contributed to the prevalence of mass poverty in India since ages. The state power has been controlled by the privileged ruling class both in the urban and rural areas. The ruling class controls the state machinery. It directly or indirectly protects and promotes its class interests. But the mass of the poor people have always remained powerless.

### 12.6.2 Socio-cultural Factors

The caste system has been an important factor in perpetuating poverty of the masses. The rigid stratification of the caste system imposed severe restrictions on occupational mobility. Generally speaking, a person born in poor lower caste lived and died in the same social position. The caste system imposed social distance between castes, with regard to marriage, food, habitation and general social interaction. The upper castes were considered socially and ritually superior and the lower castes were declined inferior. The upper castes practised discrimination against the lower castes in social and religious matters.

Moreover, the belief in '*karma*' justified the inequalitarian and just social order. It held that poverty is the consequence of one's *papa karma* (bad deeds) in earlier births. Performance of *varna dharma* was considered essential for a better life in future birth. In this way, a systematic and concerted effort was made to ward off any challenge to the existing social system in which the majority of the people suffered from abject poverty while the ruling class lived a happy and ostentatious life.

Further, nowadays priority is given to values, which emphasize the fulfillment of one's self-interests. Materialism has got an upperhand over humanitarian values. We witness a mad rush among the rich people for raising their social status through indulging in conspicuous consumption, i.e., consuming those goods and services which reflect one's financial strength and prestige like buying jewellery, cars, latest electronic gadgets, etc. This emphasis on materialism and pursuit of self-interests has helped to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. It has also bred alienation and dehumanisation.

The problem of poverty continues as ever with an added momentum. The poor have strong feelings of marginality, of helplessness, of dependence, of inferiority, sense of resignation, fatalism and low level of aspiration. These tendencies are transmitted from one generation to the next. Therefore, the children of the poor are very often not psychologically geared to take full advantage of the changing conditions or increased opportunities that occur in their life. Thus the problem of poverty perpetuates endlessly.

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## 12.7 ERADICATION OF POVERTY

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Having noted the root causes of poverty, we can say that the real constraints to growth with equity are located primarily in the institutional or in the politico-

economic sphere. In an underdeveloped country like India where great mass of the people live in abject poverty, a social welfare solution is not suitable. Eradication of the problem of massive poverty is not possible within the prevailing social, political and economic order. In fact, this gigantic problem cannot be resolved without a fundamental transformation of society itself, which would involve redistribution of wealth and equitable sharing of the growing prosperity and changes in the power structure in favour of the poor.

Adoption of an essentially capitalist path of development has accentuated the problem of poverty and the chasm between the rich and the poor. This trend has to be reversed in favour of a truly socialist path of development. The country would have to give first priority to ending the system which has generated inequality and mass poverty. In fact, we have to wage a struggle against socio-economic and political inequalities in order to alleviate the problem of poverty. Land should go to the tiller. The public sector should be expanded rapidly and progressively to encompass the whole economy with increasing participation of workers in management. Labour intensive programmes of development such as housing, irrigation and communication should be given emphasis to remove the problem of unemployment and underemployment. Wages of workers also have to be raised to improve their living conditions. Equal access to essential social services like education and health should be provided to all. Moreover, we have to put an end to the raising consumerist culture, which has a very damaging impact on the society as a whole. Both the rural and urban poor have to organise themselves and fight for effecting such structural changes in society.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Expand these abbreviations and match the following programmes with their dates of commencement.

a) NASP	1) 1997
b) SJSR	2) 2001
c) PMGY	3) 1999
d) JGSY	4) 2000
e) VAMBAY	5) 1995

- ii) Briefly state in about six lines why emphasis is laid on growth with social justice in the Five-Year Plans since the nineteen seventies.

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- iii) What is the basic economic factor responsible for the problem of poverty?  
Use five lines for your answer.

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## 12.8 LET US SUM UP

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We began this unit by outlining the definition and approaches to the phenomenon of poverty. We said poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and does not merely indicate lack of money. We outlined the nutritional and the relative deprivation approaches to the phenomenon of poverty. We then moved on to look at poverty as it existed in different periods of time in India like in the ancient, medieval and colonial periods of time. We observed that abject poverty of the masses and affluence of the rich have co-existed in India for centuries. In our discussion of poverty in contemporary India, we first identified the poor in rural and urban India and then moved on to describe the nature and extent of poverty and the linkage between poverty in rural and urban areas. Removal of poverty has been one of India's national primary concerns. We looked at the Five-Year Plans in terms of the approaches adopted towards finding a solution to the problem of poverty. We outlined the programmes launched for the rural and urban poor. We also observed that these measures have been inadequate and we examined the deep-seated economic, political and socio-cultural factors that have generated the problem of poverty. We concluded by pointing out that possibility of eradicating the problem effectively will be high if we adopt a socialistic path of transformation of society where the inequalities between the rich and the poor will be greatly reduced.

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## 12.9 KEYWORDS

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### **Growth Oriented Approach and 'Growth with Social Justice'**

Growth oriented approach which was adopted in the early Five-Year Plans gave major emphasis on raising national income. The development programmes launched with this view treated the whole community in a particular area as a homogeneous unit. But in the growth with social justice approach special programmes have been initiated to benefit the poor and backward sections of the population, especially the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women. The cause of social justice has been given some consideration in this case.



## Nutritional and Social Deprivation Approaches to Poverty

The nutritional approach to poverty takes into consideration only minimum food intake of a person deemed essential for maintaining his working capacity. But the relative deprivation approach takes into account unequal access of wealth, income, education, political power etc. which are considered essential for average living pattern, activities and participation in social life.

## Rural and Urban Poverty

## Poverty Line

Poverty Line has been defined differently in the developed and the developing countries. In India, the nutritional approach has been adopted in defining the poverty line. In this case poverty is measured on the basis of minimum food requirements in terms of adequate calorie intake (generally 2250 calories) of a person to maintain his working capacity. People who have lower income than necessary for fulfilling their minimum food requirements are placed below this 'poverty line'. This is a measure of absolute poverty, which does not include non-food essential requirements such as clothing, housing, and education in defining poverty.

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## 12.10 FURTHER READING

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Deaton, Angus and Jean Dreze 2002. *Poverty and Inequality in India: A Re-examination*. Princeton, Research Programme in Development Studies: Delhi School of Economics

Dutt, R. and Sundharam, K.P.M. 1988. *Indian Economy*. S. Chand and Company: New Delhi.

Fonesca, A.J. (ed.) 1971. *The Challenge of Poverty in India*. Vikas Publishing Company: New Delhi.

Punit, A.E. 1982. *Profiles of Poverty in India*. Deep and Deep Company: New Delhi.

Visaria, Pravin 2000. *Poverty in India During 1994-98: Alternative Estimates*. Institute for Economic Growth: New Delhi

## 12.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) b
- ii) d
- iii) The concept of poverty has many dimensions to it. In economic terms, it can be viewed, as a level of living which is so low that it inhibits the physical, mental and social development of human personality.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) F      b) F      c) T      d) F
- ii) In rural areas, they consist of small landholders, agricultural labourers, artisans and craftsmen. They mainly belong to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes.
- iii) A large section of the urban poor belongs to the category of slum and pavement dwellers. The decaying tenements of the slum dwellers and the hutments of squatters are the burning examples of urban poverty. According to 1971 census sixty-six per cent of the households in cities (with a population of more than one lakh) lived in only one room tenements. The National Building Organisation estimated that the shortage of housing units increased from 14.5 million in 1971 to 16.7 in 1977. The head count ratio of the urban poor constitutes 23.6 per cent of the total population (National Sample Survey 1999-2000).
- iv) The five factors have been
  - i) unequal distribution of wealth
  - ii) pattern of per capita expenditure in consumption
  - iii) the pattern of possession of assets
  - iv) illiteracy and health
  - v) regional differences in patterns of poverty.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i)
 

a) National Social Assistance Programme	1995
b) <i>Swarna Jayanti Rozgar Yojana</i>	1997
c) <i>Pradhan Manthri Gramodhaya Yojana</i>	2000
d) <i>Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana</i>	1999
e) <i>Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana</i>	2001
- ii) When it was observed that the growth oriented approach was a failure in trickling down of benefits of development to the poor, the Five-Year Plans started giving special emphasis on the cause of social justice. Hence the motto of development since seventies became growth with social justice.
- iii) The basic economic factor responsible for the problem of poverty in India is the highly unequal distribution of wealth in the country among the various social classes and castes.

### Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 The Political Domain
  - 13.2.1 What is a Political System?
  - 13.2.2 The Notion of Power
- 13.3 State, Nation and Society
- 13.4 Emergence of Indian Nation State
  - 13.4.1 Absence of the Idea of a Nation before 1858
  - 13.4.2 Growth of Nationalism in India
- 13.5 Nature of Politics in Independent India
  - 13.5.1 Strategy at the Political Level
  - 13.5.2 Strategy at the Economic Level
  - 13.5.3 Forces which Challenge Nation building Efforts
- 13.6 National Integration
- 13.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.8 Keywords
- 13.9 Further Reading
- 13.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 13.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you should be able to

- define a political system and state its constituents
- define and distinguish between state, nation and society
- trace the emergence of the Indian nation state
- describe the strategies and challenges involved in the task of nation building
- define national integration and describe the forces threatening national integration.

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### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the first three units of this Block you learnt about the economic dimensions of social life in rural and urban India. In the following two units of this Block you will look at the political dimension of Indian social life. In this unit we shall discuss some concepts and issues related to politics at national level in India.

Section 13.2 of this unit identifies the political domain in our social life. In the next section, 13.3, we discuss the three inter-related concepts, namely, **nation**, **state** and society. We then relate this general discussion to the emergence of

the Indian nation state in section 13.4. Next, in section 13.5 we examine the strategies and challenges associated with the task of **nation-building** in India. Finally, the last section, 13.6, deals with the issue of national integration.

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## 13.2 THE POLITICAL DOMAIN

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Let us here identify the political domain in our social life. For this purpose, we first discuss that the power dimension of social relationship is recognised as a **political system**. Then, We look at both the wider and restricted meanings of the term power.

### 13.2.1 What is a Political System?

We find that for establishing social relationships people interact with one another. In doing so, they very often pursue their self-interests. These self-interests sometimes run contrary to the interests of others as also to the interests of the society. To serve their own interests people use the means of power and control the interests of others. This situation invariably leads to conflict. For maintaining an orderly arrangement of social relationships, we need to both resolve the conflict and coordinate diverse activities of people. This is generally done by exercising power and imposing some kinds of constraint on people's behaviour. When social relationships are organised around the dimension of power, we say that we now move from the general area of social interaction to a more specialised area of power relationships. When the power relationships are systematised and ascribed specific functions, we speak of them as a political system. Thus, political systems develop whenever the relationships among individual and groups are organised according to the exercise of power and its various manifestations. These might range from sporadic meetings of village elders in simple societies to highly organised states. In order to understand the specific manner in which power operates at the national level, it is appropriate for us to first understand the notion of power and its relation to the definition of political system in general. Then we can also look at its link with the specific case of nation-states.

### 13.2.2 The Notion of Power

The ability to do something or anything, or to act upon a person or things, is the definition of power as given in the dictionary. Viewed in this way, power is a basic concept in social sciences. It implies the influence that any person, group or organisation brings to bear on the actions of others. In this sense, anyone seeking to serve an interest by eliciting a response from others is described as exercising one's power. This means that one has social power, which can be used to make another person do what is wanted. This social power is essentially an aspect of inter-personal relationships.

Let us see what happens if we were to take the use of social power as a criterion to define the political system. This would imply that almost all human actions and interactions would fall in the domain of politics. This would be the widest possible definition of politics. The political scientists do not accept it. Let us see what they have to say.

**Delimiting the Domain of Politics:** The political scientists argue that this view of politics reduces it to the level of a very commonplace and broad subject. They therefore delimit the domain of politics and reserve the term

‘politics’ to designate the domain where social power is used in public sphere rather than in private sphere. Thus, for example, what happens within the family, in terms of power relations, is not included in the category of politics. When the family or its representative participates in the affairs of the neighbourhood or the village by influencing others’ opinions and actions, it is described as politics. Viewed in this way, power and its various manifestations, such as, authority, coercion, force etc. are the recognised terms for discussing politics.

**Concept of Authority:** For further delimiting the special field of political relations, it is useful to apply the concept of authority. It refers to the legitimacy of the use of power. When power relationships in the public domain become regularised, and therefore to some extent predictable, they are also closely guided by the appropriate norms. People acknowledge the right of the political authority to exercise power. This implies the existence of a clear system of acceptance of the political institutions through which the authority or the legitimate use of power is exercised. In other words, power becomes authority because the actors involved in this relationship accept (to a greater or lesser degree) the legitimacy of those issuing commands. They are not physically compelled to comply, they do so willingly. Such systematised political relations are generally referred to as political systems.

**More Restricted View of Politics:** Taking an even more restricted view of politics, sociologists, like Max Weber, confine the political relations to an organisation of individuals. For them, this organisation is to be territorially defined. Secondly it has to be based on the ultimate sanction of physical force. In other words, Max Weber is referring to the notion of state as it has emerged in the modern sense. For the purpose of describing political relations at the national level, we need to focus on this restricted meaning of politics.

But as sociologists, we should not forget that political relationships are also present in those societies, which do not have a specialised political institution like the state. In a large number of tribal societies, political authority is not based on territory. For example, the nomadic tribals like the Gujjar in India and the Roma or Gypsies in Europe have councils to regulate the behaviour of deviant members, to settle disputes, to provide social security to their members. Yet, they do not have a state. In unit 16 of Block 5 of the first elective course in Sociology we have discussed at length these types of political organisations.

Here, as we are dealing with political relations, at the national level, in a society which has a fully developed state, we need to discuss the concepts of state and nation. Only then we can proceed to follow the story of the emergence of nation-state in India.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) What are the two essential requirements for an orderly arrangement of social relationships? Use four lines for your answer.

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ii) What is a political system? Answer in five lines.

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iii) Define power and authority in the context of politics. Use five lines for your answer.

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iv) What do we mean when we say there is a restricted view of politics? Use seven lines for your answer.

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### 13.3 STATE, NATION AND SOCIETY

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While discussing politics in modern times, we generally talk of the state, the nation and the society. In the context of Western European experience, the three terms are somewhat coterminous. This is not so in the case of many other places. It is, therefore, essential that we first define these terms.

- i) **State:** The state is a political association, which is characterised by
- a) territorial jurisdiction,
  - b) a more or less non-voluntary membership,
  - c) a set of rules which define the rights of its members by way of a constitution and
  - d) claims to legitimacy of power over its members.



The member of a state is usually referred to as a citizen. More often than not, the state is coterminous with nationality.

- ii) **Nation:** The term refers to group of people who have developed solidarity on the basis of common identity of culture, religion, language and state etc. The national identity of any group, which defines itself as such, may be based on any number of criteria, such as the place of residence, ethnic origin, culture, religion, language.
- iii) **Society:** It is the broadest category of social organisation which includes a large number of social institutions, like kinship, family, economy and polity. In this sense, the term society refers to social relationships which are interlinked. In interacting with each other people form social relationships. Repeated and regularised patterns of social relationships become institutionalised and hence as a relational concept society includes the study of social institutions.

On the other hand, as a substantial concept the term society is a general term which may encompass the state or the nation. It can also be coterminous with either or both of them. For example, the Germanic Society may include the German speaking people of East Germany, West Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland etc. Take another example, Hindu society may include the citizens of Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The state may similarly include a number of societies. For example, the Indian State includes diverse societies based on region, religion or language. The tribal societies, such as the Bhil, the Gond or the Naga, form an integral part of the Indian State.

Having discussed the concepts of state, nation and society, we now turn to the nature of politics in Indian society. For this purpose, in the next section, we will discuss the emergence of Indian nation state. You may ask what is a nation state. A nation state refers to a state organised for governing a nation, or perhaps two or more closely related nations. The territory of such a nation is determined by national boundaries and its law is determined, at least in part, by national customs and expectations. In this sense, India can also be discussed as a nation state and to discuss the nature of its national politics, we must first look at the way in which the Indian nation state emerged.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) What is a society? Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) What is a nation? Use about three lines for your answer.

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iii) What is a state? Use about three lines for your answer.

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## 13.4 EMERGENCE OF INDIAN NATION STATE

Indian national politics is influenced by the historical experience of nation-building. This experience is marked by efforts to bring together a large number of social groups in a common national identity. The nature of national politics in the post-independence period can be easily grasped if we outline a brief sketch of the historical experience. Here, we first describe the situation in India before 1858, when there was a relative absence of the idea of nation. Then we look at the period of British rule when growth of nationalism took place in India.

### 13.4.1 Absence of the Idea of a Nation before 1858

Before the advent of the British rule in India and establishment of sovereign rule of the British crown in 1858, India was characterised by a large number of small and large political units. These units waged a constant struggle to maintain their authority over the dominions and protected themselves from the attacks by other political units. Although there were some large scale empires such as the Maurya, the Gupta, the Chola and the Pandya, the entire country that we know of as India was never united politically under any rule. As such, we had no 'Indian State' to speak of until the British imposed their **hegemony** on India.

This does not, however, mean that we had no Indian national identity. Even without a politically unified territory, many factors combined and gave the country an identity of oneness. Although people lived all their lives in villages, these villages were not as self-contained isolated islands as was made by some Western scholars. People moved for marriage, for pilgrimage and for trade. The religious beliefs, practices and institutions provided the people a unifying force (Kothari 1986). One example of the unity can be seen in the setting of four seats of religious authority in four corners of India by Adi Sankaracharya. We may thus see the awareness of commonality, however nebulous it may be. This awareness grew out of one's participation in the world which existed beyond one's immediate geographical area. This consciousness did not, however, get translated into the political domain and we had therefore no national identity in the sense in which we talk of it today. The identity of the commonality that we had before the British can perhaps be best expressed as a cultural identity as a nation and not as a political identity as a nation.

### 13.4.2 Growth of Nationalism in India

The establishment of the British rule, although it enslaved us, paradoxically also started a process of our liberation. It made us think of ourselves as not

only a cultural unity but also as a political unity. The growth of nationalism can be seen in the efforts made by Indians for removing the British rule from this country.

Although we were always divided in numerous ways in terms of language, religion, ethnic composition, two factors facilitated the emergence of Indian nationalism.

- i) One was the presence of a common enemy, i.e., the British rule, and
- ii) the other was the existence of a common cultural identity that preceded the unification of India as one state.

The various struggles, violent, non-violent, constitutional, extra-constitutional against the British further unified the diverse groups in India. Thus, Nehru's well-known phrase 'unity in diversity' was not merely a cliché (cliché is a phrase made common by repetition), but a factual description of the Indian experience. Our purpose is, here, not to go into the details of the Indian national movement. Rather we need to discuss how our nation state came into being. For this purpose we shall in the next section describe how during the post-Independence period a modern nation state developed in India. We should also remember that the process of nation-building was not complete on attaining independence. It is, in fact, a continuing process and is reflected in the nature of politics. We can also say that it is a process of translating cultural identity into a political national identity. Let us now look at the nature of politics in independent India so that we can make out how this translation takes place.

### Activity 1

Read a book written by Mahatma Gandhi like *My Experiments with Truth* or by Jawaharlal Nehru like *The Discovery of India* or by any other leader of the national movement for independence on the freedom struggle. Look at what the author has to say about

- a) the attitude of the British toward the Indian leader's cause for freedom
- b) the people who joined hands in freedom struggle (men/women from different regions, castes, classes and religions)
- c) the important events which marked the struggles for independence

Make a two-page note on the above points and discuss, if possible, your note with the notes of other students in the study centre.

## 13.5 NATURE OF POLITICS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

The major task for the independence movement was not merely to attain political independence from the British rule but also to develop a modern nation state. We can say that some definite steps in this direction were taken at the political level while others were at the economic level. We can discuss both types of strategies followed in India for nation-building.

### 13.5.1 Strategy at the Political Level

The political organisation, which was carrying out the activity of nation-building in India, was mainly the Indian National Congress Party. This political party consisted of diverse sections of population and activists, in some cases, with diametrically opposite political ideology. The members of the Congress Party belonged to different strata of society from the so-called untouchables on the one hand and to the Brahmin and Thakur on the other. There were those who swore by Marxism and some others who wanted '*Hindu Rashtra*' and yet others who wanted to promote Islamic nationalism. Such diversity was not accidental. The leaders of the party were drawn from the urban professional classes. They were convinced that nation-building was as important as political independence. Hence the major thrust of their political activity was to bring together as many diverse groups as possible. The same theme is also visible in the politics after the independence of India.

**The Constitution:** The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, was the first attempt at nation-building. We have a written constitution, which is a comprehensive document. It provides the foundation or the design of the government. Let us see what this design is.

India has a federal government. A federal government in India implies that authority is divided between the centre and the states. The Constitution has established a parliamentary system of government at both the centre and the states. The word 'parliament' has different connotations, the important ones being that it is an assembly of representatives of the people and it is a body of persons gathered for discussion. In our context, parliament refers to the legislative organ of the government. The President is the constitutional head of the country and the council of ministers headed by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is the head of the executive which is responsible to the Lok Sabha. The parliament consists of the President and the two Houses, namely the Council of States (Rajya Sabha) and the House of the People (Lok Sabha).

In the states, the council of ministers is headed by the 'Chief Minister' who is responsible to the Legislative Assembly. Every state has a legislature. Some states have one House while others have two. Where there is one House it is known as the Legislative Assembly or *Vidhan Sabha* and where there are two Houses, one is called the legislative Council (*Vidhan Parishad*) and the other is known as Legislative Assembly (*Vidhan Sabha*). India is a parliamentary democracy and this means that the government is derived from public opinion. It requires political parties, rule by the majority and a responsible government through discussion. Figure 13.1 shows the different constituents of Indian national politics.

By way of building up a united nation state the Constitution of India also lays down, among other things, some "Fundamental Duties" of Indian citizens. Some of them are (a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem, (b) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all people of India, (c) to protect natural environment, (d) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform, (e) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture and so on. Our Constitution not only provides fundamental rights to citizens but also gives directives to the state to provide the necessary

economic, social and political benefits to the citizens. It goes to the credit of the leaders of the early phase of independent India, who were sensitive to the potential disruption of the Indian polity. Our national leaders believed that the Constitution of India would help to integrate the people into a united nation.

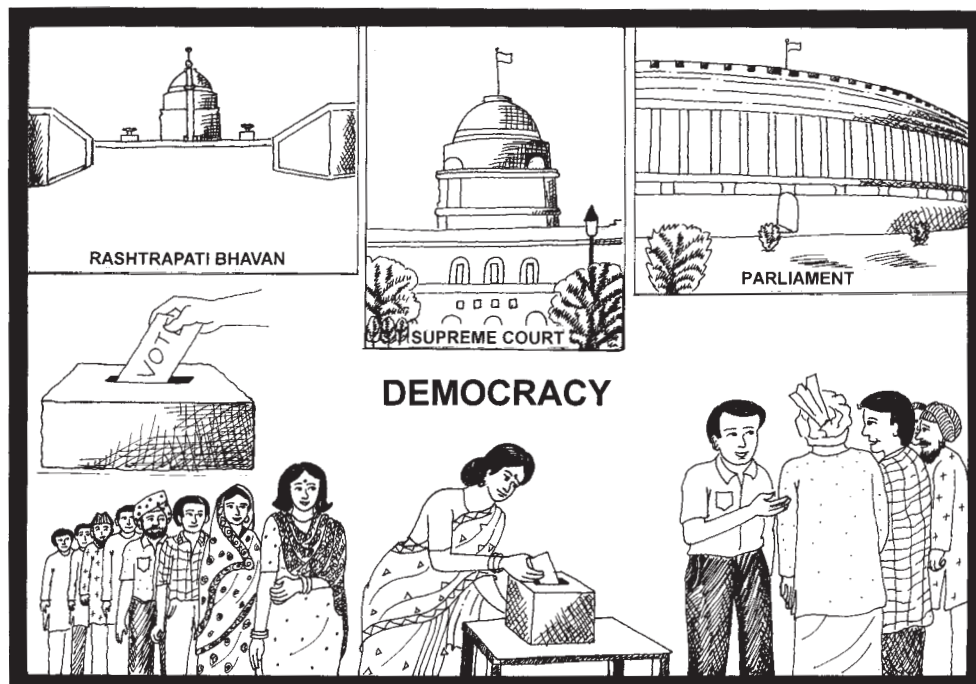


Fig. 13.1: National politics

**Socialist Pattern:** The adoption of socialist pattern of society in order to curb or reduce inequalities in society constituted another attempt of the Indian polity toward nation-building. This too helped to contain divisive tendencies. The inclusion of as many segments of the population as possible was achieved by granting special privileges to the scheduled castes, the tribals, the backward classes, the other backward castes and the religious minorities.

One of the remarkable features of the early phase was that despite the struggle for political power, political parties had no major dissension regarding the thrust of politics. The thrust was to keep together diverse elements of the population and to include the hitherto excluded categories into the mainstream of national politics.

You should keep in mind that the process of nation-building is not yet complete. This is one reason why we cannot and should not say anything much with finality about this process. Instead, we should now turn to the process of nation-building at the economic level.

### Check Your Progress 3

- What are the two factors, which have helped the emergence of Indian nationalism? Answer in four lines.

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- ii) Outline the attempts at nation-building at the political level? Use four lines for your answer.

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- iii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true or F for false against each statement.

- a) The Members of the Indian National Congress Party at the time of attainment of independence were drawn from one caste mainly.
- b) A federal government denotes that authority is divided between the centre and the states.
- c) India is a parliamentary democracy.
- d) The parliament consists of the President and the two houses namely the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha.

### 13.5.2 Strategy at the Economic Level

The second major step taken by the political leadership was the economic resurgence of the country. Any political regime gains legitimacy when it can satisfy the needs of the people. The satisfaction of the people in turn depends upon the availability of goods to be distributed. Hence the first task for the Indian state was to build the economy. This was more so in the light of the bad shape of Indian economy at that time. The colonial policies of the British were largely based on exploitation of the raw materials available in India at cheapest possible rates, to be used by industry in Britain. India was used as market place for their finished goods. The result of the policy was that industry did not develop in the country. The little industrialisation that took place during the British rule was due to its importance in international politics. This did not at all help the economic development of the country. Thus, it was inevitable that after the independence, definite steps were taken to revise the economy. Formulation of Five-Year Plans for regulating the economic activity was one such step. For this purpose the Government of India established the Planning Commission.

The planning process is not merely an economic activity. It is also a political activity. The Planning Commission not only decides about which sector has to produce how much, it also allocates projects to various states. This is where political decisions have to be made. Let us take a concrete example. Suppose the government decides to establish a steel plant. It is not only in terms of the economic viability of location of a steel plant that a decision is made. The Commission takes into account the costs and benefits in economic terms and it also considers the decision in terms of possible offsetting regional imbalance in location of industries. Similarly, the balance has to be maintained between the various interest groups, which have emerged around different sectors of the economy. For this purpose, take the simple example of the use of electric power. How much electricity should be made available to industry as against



agriculture is a political decision. In the economic sphere, as in the social and political spheres, national politics has followed the policy of reconciling different interests and thereby avoiding conflicts to surface.

The Indian nation state not only concentrated on making available goods for distribution, but it also decided to follow the path of distributive justice. Distributive justice refers to achieving a fair and equal distribution of goods and services among all people. The intentions for distributive justice are clear in India's adoption of a socialist pattern of society. A socialist pattern of society denotes that people have equal opportunities and equal rights. The state as an administrative device guarantees individuals their rights. It distributes goods and services equally and fairly for the welfare of the people. It also strives for elimination of rigid systems of control. For example, private property is permissible in India, but only in so far as it does not amount to a system of control of the owner over another who does not own it. We can also find instances of distributive justice in many social legislations, such as the Industrial Disputes Act, which protects the rights of the industrial workers, or, the Untouchability Offences Act, which protects the untouchable castes from discrimination or the Hindu Marriage Act, which grants rights to Hindu women. Thus our nation-building efforts involve not only goals of development but also equality and social justice. The latest in terms of strategy at the economic level is adoption of the New Economic Policy of liberalisation of economy. About this step you here already read in Unit 12 and therefore we would now proceed to look at the factors, which have challenged our efforts for nation-building.

### 13.5.3 Forces which Challenge Nation-building Efforts

A host of interrelated factors have disrupted efforts to achieve goals of equality and social justice as well as building a nation state. We can see at least three main forces.

- i) The diversity of groups which constitute Indian society
- ii) Regional and cultural identities
- iii) Casteism.

Let us take a brief look at each of these forces.

- i) **Diversity of Constituents:** India is a heterogeneous society. It is made of a number of diverse groups. The first potential threat to the Indian nation state lies in this plurality. The Indian society was and is divided in terms of religion, caste, language and ethnic origin.

The British were able to somewhat control the diverse groups by following the policy of pitting one group against the other. But the divisive tendencies were sharply manifested even during the nationalist movement when different groups apparently united to remove the British rule from India.

One of the more serious challenges that Indian national leaders in India face even now is how to integrate the interests of the divergent groups. Each of them has its own distinctive aspirations, history, and way of life. Attempts to minimise confrontation between conflicting groups do not always succeed. As we have already seen, the adoption of an egalitarian

model of society is one important strategy to contain the divisive tendencies. It is, of course, necessary that these divisions are not allowed to threaten the nation state.

- ii) **Regional and Cultural Identities:** The task of nation-building has also faced a threat from regionalism. We find that national politics in our country is still marked by emergence of regional nationalities. This is quite evident in the formation of states on linguistic basis. It is also evident in demands by some regional identities such as the Gorkha for Gorkhaland and by some tribals for a separate Jharkhand state before November 2000. But there have been instances that the government of India conceded to such demands for a separate state. The agitation started by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha for a separate state impelled to establish the Jharkhand Area Autonomous council in 1995 and finally a full-fledged state in November 2000 (India 2003).

You should not take this to mean that the regional identities should not be emphasised. Some may like to argue that regionalism does not augur (foretell) well, it harbingers political disintegration of the country. But as the nation has faced such problems earlier, the process of reconciliation has given its polity the ability to accommodate regionalism within its orbit. The **politics of reconciliation** harmonises the diverse interests of various groups in a national framework.

Despite the early gains of consolidation of the nation state, diverse cultural identities asserted themselves. One example of this is the opposition in the southern states to Hindi as the national language. Another example is the demand for reorganisation of states. Yet another example is the assertion by religious minorities of their right to regulate the lives of their members.

As a matter of fact, the national level politics has recognised the existence of regional and cultural identities and the central government has even provided legal sanctions. The Constitution of India recognised fifteen national languages till 1992. In 1992 through a Constitutional Amendment (71st Amendment) three more languages were added to the Eighth Schedule and making the list of national languages to 18. As on 2003 there are 18 national languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution (India 2003). It allows each state to carry out its administration in the regional language. It does not interfere in the religious, social and political activities of the minorities. To some people this may appear to provide special protection to the minorities. The number of people holding this view is not very small. But then there are others who consider protection of the rights of minorities as a major gain for the nation. This keeps the nation state together and forges a political unity.

- iii) **Casteism:** The issue of casteism in national politics has been discussed again and again by a number of people, public men, scholars and laymen alike. Caste is one of the more distinguishing institutions of Indian society. Its role in the political sphere is of recent origin. It is widely observed that caste has become the major basis for political articulation. This is so mainly because caste provides the mechanisms for bringing people together. This is also the requirement for a successful democratic state. By politicising the institution of caste, political process in India has assumed a unique

character. Political parties in India are formed on the basis of caste alliances and voting behaviour of the Indian electorate can be described in terms of caste identity.

As casteism is considered a social evil and caste ideology does not go well with the egalitarian model of a socialist society, role of caste in national politics is viewed as a necessary evil. It is seen a factor which poses a challenge to the task of nation-building. All the same in the absence of an alternative basis for people to come together, caste continues to play a decisive role in Indian national politics.

From what we have discussed so far, it is obvious that the task of building a nation state is not an easy exercise. A growing realisation is that national integration is the key to achieving a political identity. We shall in the next section discuss the concept of national integration.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- i) What was the strategy at the economic level to build up a nation state? Use five lines for your answer

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- ii) What are the three main forces, which pose a challenge to nation-building efforts? Use two lines for your answer.

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- iii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true or F for false against each statement.

- a) The politics of reconciliation involves efforts to harmonise the diverse interests of various groups in a national framework.
- b) In India each state does not have the right to carry out its administration in its own regional language.
- c) Caste is one of the important basis for political articulation.

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## 13.6 NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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National integration is a process of developing the different parts of the national social system into an integrated whole. In an integrated society, social institutions and values associated with them have a high degree of social acceptance.

However, linguism, communalism, social inequalities and regional disparities are some of the factors, which threaten the ideal of national integration in India. Let us look at each of them one by one.

- i) **Linguism:** India is a multi-linguistic nation. Language has become, specially since Independence, a powerful source of political articulation. For instance, in the South, particularly in Tamil Nadu, language sentiments have been propagated among the people for getting power within state politics.

The language problem has two aspects, namely (i) medium of instruction at the level of school, college and public service examinations, and (ii) meeting the demands of non-Hindi and Hindi-speaking radicals.

Responding to the first aspect, the Government of India decided to implement a three-language formula. This consists of (a) teaching the regional language, or mother-tongue when the latter is different from the regional language, (b) Hindi or another Indian language in the Hindi speaking area and (c) English or another modern European language. Today for the Union Public Service Commission in India examinations can be written in Hindi or English or in any regional language of the country.

Regarding the second aspect of the language problem, namely, demands of Hindi and non-Hindi speaking radicals, the Government of India passed the Official Language (Amendment) Act, 1967. This Act decided that English will continue to be the official language of the Indian union for all the non-Hindi speaking states until these states themselves would opt for Hindi (Kishore 1987: 41). Thus, Hindi is today only one of the official languages of the Indian Union. The provision made under the above mentioned Act and the three-language formula have helped to reduce the possibility of conflict on the basis of language.

- ii) **Communalism:** Broadly defined, communalism refers to the tendency of any socio-religious group to maximise its economic, political and social strength at the cost of other groups. This tendency runs counter to the notion of the secular nation state that India purports to be. Secularism in the Indian context is defined as the peaceful coexistence of all religions without state patronage to any of them. The state is to treat all of them equally. Yet, in a secular state like India, we very often hear, see and read about communal conflicts. While making conscious efforts towards the goals of democracy and socialism, the Indian nation state has not been free of communal clashes (Kishore 1987: 69).

### Activity 2

On the basis of the information you have gathered from newspapers, magazines, radio and TV about caste and politics note down the following facts.

- i) Caste composition of major political parties in your state
- ii) What role did the caste factor play in your state in the last Lok Sabha elections?

Describe the role of caste in terms of the issues raised in the election campaign.

- iii) **Social Inequalities:** In every society, there is a system of social stratification. Social stratification refers to inequality in society based on unequal distribution of goods, services, wealth, power, prestige, duties, rights, obligations and privileges. Take for example, the social inequalities, created by the caste system. Being a hereditary and endogamous system, the scope for social mobility is very little. Social privileges and financial and educational benefits are by and large accessible to only upper caste groups.

Processes of change, such as democratisation, westernisation and modernisation, have helped to broaden the accessibility to privileges to a wide range of people. Today caste and politics are also very closely associated. Various commissions for backward castes have been formed for reserving seats for their members in educational and occupational spheres. This is a reflection of the politicisation of caste affiliations. While measures to uplift the hitherto exploited and suppressed section of the population are necessary, overemphasis on caste identities has a disintegrative effect on the process of nation-building.

- iv) **Regional Disparities:** The unequal development of different regions of India has negatively affected the character of national integration. The unequal development has become the major cause of many social movements after the independence. For instance, the erstwhile Jharkhand movement, which involved tribal groups from Bihar, M.P, Bengal and Orissa, stressed the backwardness of the region among other issues. While demanding a separate state, people involved in this movement argued that the rich natural resources of the area have been drained out to benefit others. The dissatisfaction caused by the perceived and/or actual threat of material deprivation has led people to think that the socio-economic development of their region is not possible if they continue to be a part of the Indian Union. Finally the National Government conceded their demand for a separate state and the three new States of Jharkhand, Uttaranchal and Chhattisgarh were formed in November 2000. The demand in the case of Jharkhand was for a State comprising of tribal areas of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. The new State was created encompassing only parts of Bihar State. The regional disparities in terms of socio-economic development have at times proved to be a threat to the concept of united nation state.

In brief, we can summarise this section by saying that various forces pose a challenge to national integration in India. The government and those concerned with the task of nation-building have utilised many strategies, like planned socio-economic development and expansion of education and mass communication and at times even reorganising the existing states to strengthen and promote the concept of national integration.

### Check Your Progress 5

- i) What is national integration? Use four lines for your answer.

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- .....
- ii) What are the factors which threaten the ideal of national integration in India? Use four lines for your answer.

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- iii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true or F for false against each statement.

- a) The three language formula was adopted by way of responding to the problem of medium of instruction at school, college and public service examinations.
- b) Hindi is the only official language of the Indian Union today.
- c) India is a secular state.

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## 13.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we discussed the various aspects of national politics. First we identified the political domain in which we discussed the notion of power and its dimensions. We then moved on to define concepts like state, nation and society. In the context of Indian national politics we briefly traced the emergence of Indian nation state and the strategies adopted at the national level to build up a nation state. We also looked at the forces, which have challenged the task of nation-building. In our last section we outlined the issues related to the task of national integration, which we said, is essentially a process of building up a nation state.

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## 13.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Hegemony</b>	Imposition of power by a small group of people over a large number of people
<b>Nation</b>	A group of people identifying themselves as such on the basis of political and cultural commonality
<b>Nation-building</b>	The process of development of national identity
<b>Politics of Reconciliation</b>	The political processes that reconcile divergent political interests
<b>Political System</b>	Those arrangements of society, formal or informal, which are based on power and wherein authoritative decisions are made



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## 13.9 FURTHER READING

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Kishore, Satyendra 1987. *National Integration in India*. Sterling Publishers: New Delhi

Kothari, Rajni 1986 *Politics in India*. (First printed in 1970) Orient Longman: New Delhi

Wallace, Paul and Ramashray, Roy (ed.) 2003. *India's 1999 Elections and Twentieth Century Politics*. Sage Publications: New Delhi

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## 13.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Co-ordination of people's different activities and resolution of conflict emanating from clash of interests are the two requirements for an orderly arrangement of social relationships.
- ii) A political system refers to a system of social relationships among individuals or groups organised around the exercise of power and its various manifestations. The manifestations refer to authority, coercion and force.
- iii) Power is the ability to achieve whatever effect is desired. It implies the influence any person or group or organisation has on the action of others. Authority is the legitimisation of power. Both the concepts are used in the context of politics.
- iv) A restricted view of politics confines the definition of political relations to an organisation of individuals who live in a particular territory. This organisation is also based on the sanction of physical force. This restricted view fails to take note of such political relations, which are not territorially defined.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Society refers to social relationships that are inter-linked. It is also a category of social organisation, which includes a large number of social institutions like kinship, family, economy, polity and communities and association.
- ii) A nation refers to groups of people who have developed solidarity based on common identity of culture, religion, language and state.
- iii) A state refers to a political association, which is characterised by territorial jurisdiction, non-voluntary membership, and a constitution. It also claims to have legitimacy of power over its members.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) The two factors which facilitated the emergence of Indian nationalism are (a) the presence of a common enemy (b) the existence of the cultural identity of oneness that preceded the unification of India as one state.
- ii) The adoption of a constitution and a socialist pattern of society constituted the major attempts at nation-building at the political level.
- iii)
  - a) F
  - b) T
  - c) T
  - d) F

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) The five-year plans constitute an important strategy at the economic level for nation-building. The Planning Commission is given the responsibility of deciding which sectors has to produce how much and what projects have to be allocated to each state. The principle of distributive justice guides the distribution of goods and services.
- ii) The three main forces are diversity of constituents, regional and cultural identities and casteism.
- iii)
  - a) T
  - b) F
  - c) T

### Check Your Progress 5

- i) National integration is a process of integrating the various and diverse elements of a national social system into a unified whole.
- ii) The factors, which threaten the ideal of national integration in India, are linguism, communalism, social inequalities and regional disparities.
- iii)
  - a) T
  - b) F
  - c) T

### Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Region, Regionalism and State
  - 14.2.1 Region
  - 14.2.2 Region and Indian Polity
  - 14.2.3 Regionalism
  - 14.2.4 State and Indian Polity
- 14.3 Regionalism in Indian Politics
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- 14.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.8 Keywords
- 14.9 Further Reading
- 14.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 14.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- state the meaning of region, regionalism and state in the context of Indian Polity
- describe the process of regionalism in Indian Politics
- examine the geographical, historical and cultural, economic and politico-administrative bases of regionalism
- explain the different forms of state and regional politics in India
- discuss the significance of regionalism for national politics.

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## 14.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit of this Block we looked at certain aspects of national politics. We focused mainly on the issue of nation-building. The unit on National Politics provided the framework for looking at politics at the regional and state level. In unit 14 we are going to discuss some important dimensions of state and regional politics. We begin the unit by defining the terms region, regionalism and state in section 14.2. In section 14.3 we elaborate a little more on the issue of regionalism in Indian politics. From here we move on to discuss bases of state and regional politics. The geographical, historical, cultural, economic and politico-administrative bases are examined in section 14.4. In section 14.5 we describe the various forms of state and regional politics. Significance of regionalism for national politics is outlined in section 14.6.

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## 14.2 REGION, REGIONALISM AND STATE

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Region, regionalism and state are closely interrelated concepts. Let us look at each of them separately and see how they are significant for our discussion of Indian Polity.

### 14.2.1 Region

The term region is difficult to define. It is understood in different ways in different contexts. However, it has been generally defined as “a homogeneous area with physical and cultural characteristics distinct from those of neighbouring areas” (IESS 1972: 377).

A region can subsume a number of nations such as Arctic region, the region of South East Asia, the Far Eastern region, and so on. A region can be used for a nation such as the sub-continent region of India. It can be used for the eastern region, western region, northern region or southern region in India. The states in India also form distinct regions. Further, there can be sub-regions within a state like the Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh, Vidarbha region in Maharashtra, etc. A village area can also be referred to as a region. Thus, region is a relative term, the meaning of which changes with its usage. When we talk of a region, what we generally imply is that it is socio-culturally distinct and that it is sufficiently unified to have a consciousness of its customs, traditions, values and ideals. Because of this consciousness the people of the region possess a sense of identity distinct from the rest of the regions be it a nation or a continent or the earth itself.

### 14.2.2 Region and Indian Polity

Let us now see how this concept is significant for our discussion of Indian polity. A region is characterised by a widely shared sense of togetherness among the people. This togetherness results from a wide variety of sources like geography, **topography**, religion, language, customs and mores, political and economic stage of development, way of living, commonly shared historical experiences, etc. Region provides the basis for the emergence of regional identity. It results in loyalty towards the region and ultimately takes the shape and form of regionalism. It gives way to regional politics.

The politics of regionalism in India has both positive and negative aspects. Speaking in positive terms, it implies an intense desire for concretising an identity based on such interest as ethnic, language, religion, etc. For example, the erstwhile Jharkhand movement which covered wide regions of Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, had come together as a unified group to protect and promote their socio-economic and political interests. This process involves reaffirming their identity as tribal groups. The movement finally succeeded in forcing the government in reorganising the states and the formation of Jharkhand State came about on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2000 as the 28th State of the Indian Union. It has been carved out of the State of Bihar and it largely comprises forest tracks of Chhotanagpur plateau and Santhal Paragana.

The negative aspects of regionalism is that it can threaten nation-building efforts such as, the demand for Khalistan in Punjab which is giving rise to terrorism and violence within and outside Punjab. The positive aspect has been ignored by most of the analysts of Indian political situation. Analysts of regionalism point out that this phenomenon reflects the psychology of relative deprivation on the part of people of an area. They point out that deprivation is deliberately inflicted on them by those in power, particularly when socio-economic programmes have resulted in wide economic disparities among various regions. This has led to discontentment and agitation among the backward or not so developed regions of the country.

The concept of region is therefore, closely linked with the concept of regionalism. Now let us see what regionalism means.

### 14.2.3 Regionalism

Regionalism is one of the major forces shaping the nature and texture of Indian politics. It has been found operating in combination with other political forces. It is rare to come across examples of unalloyed regionalism. It occurs in real life in varying mixture with linguism and communalism. There are even examples of regionalism coexisting with casteism. In such cases it becomes difficult to decide whether a given political phenomenon should be called regionalism or some other politically relevant social force like linguism (Mathur 1990: 120-167).

So the question arises what is regionalism. Regionalism can be defined as a phenomenon in which people's political loyalties become focused upon a region. In other words, it implies people's love of a particular region in preference to the country and in certain cases in preference to the state of which the region is a part. Thus the phenomenon of regionalism is centred around the concept of region.

### 14.2.4 State and Indian Polity

We have already defined "state" in the previous unit on national politics. Let us look at it here in greater detail for understanding state and regional politics. State is generally understood in terms of certain common features that it exhibits. These common features generally found in all states are

- i) population
- ii) a fixed territory

- iii) government
- iv) sovereignty.

Let us look at each of them one by one.

- i) **Population:** State being a human institution population is its obvious element. The composition of a state is a significant factor as it defines the nature of that society. A population can be homogeneous, i.e. a population which shares similar language, values, customs, etc. Or it can be heterogeneous, i.e. a population which has different and varied languages, values, customs, as in the case of India.

A nation state was conventionally understood to be derived from the idea of homogeneous population. However, in modern times a nation state is not necessarily connected with a homogeneous population. In modern parliamentary democracies like India, U.S.A. etc. political parties cut across social, religious, linguistic and cultural boundaries. This interweaving of alliances and interests creates a consensus in a plural society.

- ii) **Territorial Boundary:** This is considered to be an essential feature of a state. Land, water and air space comprise the territory of state. The territory of a state may differ from place to place and there are no accepted rules about the total size of the territory of a state.
- iii) **Government:** Government and state are very often used inter-changeably. But basically government is part of the state. It is the machinery for the formulation of public policies and regulation of common affairs. It refers to the organisational aspect of the state.
- iv) **Sovereignty:** According to political scientists the most important characteristic of the state is sovereignty. It implies the supreme power of the state, which might be vested in either one person or in a body of persons. For example, in India sovereignty is vested in the office of the President.

In unit 13 we described the main features of the Indian nation state. We said that the Indian nation state is a parliamentary democratic republic which has all the associated components like a parliament, “responsible” cabinet (one which is accountable to its people), independent judiciary, electoral machinery, and so on which qualify it to be called a democratic state. Till 2000 the Indian nation comprised of 25 states and 7 union territories. In the year 2000 three more states were added to the list of states. These were Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand. An area having a distinct cultural regional identity was carved out of Madhya Pradesh and the State of Chhattisgarh was formed on 1st November 2000 as the 26th State of the Indian Union. The 27th State of the Indian Union, Uttaranchal, which was carved out of Uttar Pradesh, came into being on 9th November 2000. As mentioned earlier Jharkhand, which was formed on 15th November 2000, is the 28th State of the Indian Union. The various States of the Indian Union have been divided primarily on a linguistic basis for administrative purpose. This division and decentralisation of power makes the Indian nation a federal nation and balance of power is created between the Centre and the States.

The Indian Constitution has established a ‘dual polity’ consisting of the Union Government at the Centre and State Government at the periphery. In fact the



founding fathers of the Indian Constitution called India as “Union of States”. By this they indicated among other things, that the country and the people were divided into different states for convenience of administration and that the country was an integrated whole living under the rule derived from a single source, namely the Constitution.

In order to regulate the relationship between the centre and the states and also to preserve the identity of the centre as well as of each state, the Constitution of India has prescribed separate areas of operation and interaction for centre and states. The areas relate to legislature, administration, finance, planning and development and trade and commerce.

The Constitution has assigned certain powers to the centre and certain powers to the states. The powers have been enlisted under three headings.

- 1) **The Union List (List I):** This list gives the centre exclusive authority to act in matters of national importance. The Parliament has the power of making laws with respect to such matters like defence, foreign affairs, railways, currency etc.
- 2) **The State List (List II):** This list gives the state matters like police, local government, public health etc.
- 3) **The Concurrent List (List III):** This list consists of subjects on which the Parliament and State Legislatures can make laws. The subjects include education, agriculture, marriage, divorce, transfer of property etc. In case of a conflict between the Central law and State law with regard to subjects in List III, the Central law prevails over the State law.

By and large in the legislature sphere the centre is given a greater scope for intervening in the legislature of the state. In administrative and financial spheres too, the dominant position of the centre vis-a-vis the state can be seen. For instance, the centre exercises administrative control over the states through the All India Services like IAS and IPS. The recruitment for these services are done by the centre. Persons recruited through the All India Services hold key positions in both the central and state government administrations. Thus these services try to ensure administrative uniformity, cohesion and national integration.

Against this pattern of division of powers and responsibilities between the centre and the state prescribed by the Constitution we can examine some important issues relating to state politics in India. Many states are dissatisfied with the amount of power and autonomy given to them. They often resent the legislative, administrative and financial control the centre has over them. The role of the Governor (a post controlled by the centre), the right of the centre to impose President's Rule in a state, the control of the mass media by the centre are some of the important factors which generate centre-state friction.

Apart from issues, which involve centre-state relations, there are other issues in state politics, which are generated by factors within a state. Caste, language, political parties tribal identities, immigration, unequal development of different sectors within a state are some of the important factors which throw light on the nature of state politics. We can cite many examples relating to politics based on intra-state issues. In Karnataka sometime ago there was a confrontation

between the Kannada speaking and Marathi speaking sections of the population. In Assam, the Bodos want to form a separate state of their own as they feel their ethnic interests are at a stake if they remain a part of the state of Assam. In Tamil Nadu, the anti-Brahmin movement challenged the socio-economically advantageous position that the Brahmins enjoyed hitherto.

When many states have similar demand or the same woes, they merge together over an issue, thus providing the ground for regional politics. When an issue transcends the boundary of a particular state, we then talk of a regional issue.

The socio-cultural and economic diversity in India gives rise to regionalism and regional politics. In the next section we will trace the development of regionalism.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Define the concept of region in about five lines.

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- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Make a T or F against each statement.

- a) Region is a reality term, the meaning of which changes with its usage.
- b) A region is usually characterised by a widely shared sense of togetherness among people.
- c) Regionalism is a totally negative phenomenon.

- iii) What are the four common features found in many states? Use three lines for your answer.

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## **14.3 REGIONALISM IN INDIAN POLITICS**

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Regionalism is a pre-independence phenomenon. It became predominant in post-independence period. The politics of regionalism started with the implementation of constitutional reforms under Government of India Acts of 1909, 1919, and 1935. The establishment and role of Justice Party in Chennai, and to a lesser extent, of Akali Dal in Punjab in pre-independence period are examples of emerging regionalism in India.

After independence there are four major landmarks in the development of regional politics.

- i) After independence, democratic form of government was established. Its main aim was nation-building on the principles of democracy, **secularism** national unity and social justice. All parts of the country wanted a fair deal in nation-building. They started competing with each other for their development. Anything short of expectation led to **disenchantment** and it resulted in the emergence of regional politics.
- ii) There was integration of the Princely States. Small states were integrated with the big states. People continued to nurse loyalties to old territorial units. This was the most important factor for the success of Princes in elections. The Princes often received overwhelming support in their former territories in the newly created states and relatively much less in other parts of the same state.
- iii) Reorganisation of states on linguistic basis also played a very vital role in the development of regional politics. Twenty eight states were reshaped and reduced to 14 states along with centrally administered territories. Later new states were created, then for example Bombay was divided into Gujarat and Maharashtra, Punjab into, Punjab and Haryana. But these states were not constituted entirely on linguistic basis. Many other factors like ethnic-cum-economic considerations gave us Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Jharkhand, Haryana, Punjab and Chhattisgarh. Language-cum-culture factors created Maharashtra, Gujarat and Uttaranchal; historical and political factors are responsible for U.P. and Bihar; integration of princely states in and need for viable groupings gave birth to M.P. and Rajasthan; language and social distinctiveness resulted in the creation of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Mysore, Bengal and Orissa. Thus various factors have played a decisive role in the composition of the Indian federation.

In spite of all these considerations, language remained the most important factor in the reorganisation of states. It became such an important force in the context of regionalism that linguistic regionalism gained ground in Indian politics.

- iv) Another factor which gave rise to regional and parochial tendencies in the country was the personal and selfish ends of politicians. Immediately, after Independence the struggle for power started among some parties. For enhancing their own authority and prestige, the regional and state leaders did not hesitate to weaken the authority of the centre or in some cases of states. The creation of more states meant more governors, chief ministers, Members of Legislative Assembly or MLAs etc. The professional politicians explored the narrow and sectarian sentiments of ignorant masses for fulfilling their personal and selfish ends. Keeping these landmarks in mind, let us now examine the bases of regional and state politics.

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## 14.4 BASES OF REGIONAL AND STATE POLITICS

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Regionalism is a multidimensional phenomenon. Its bases are varied. Here we will discuss the geographical, historical, cultural, economic and politico-administrative bases of regionalism.

### 14.4.1 Geographical Basis

Usually people relate their regional identity to certain specific geographical boundaries. After independence integration of Princely States resulted in the merger of small states into new big states. The loyalties of citizens were torn between old territorial boundaries and new territorial structures. As pointed out earlier this was the major factor responsible for the success of princes in elections particularly when they contested from their former territories in the newly created states. However, it would be wrong to over estimate the importance of geographical boundaries. It is true that memories of old geographical boundaries of princely states still haunt the people and are exploited by political leaders but it can hardly be denied that they are yielding place to new and bigger territorial identities like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

### 14.4.2 Historical and Social Bases

Historical and social bases constitute the bedrock of the politics of regionalism. Several components in this category are not only important individually but also in conjunction with each other.

- i) **History:** It supported regionalism with cultural heritage, folklore, myths and symbolism. The most striking example is that of Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu and Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and Telugu Desham (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh. But history cannot be considered as the most important basis of regionalism. Economic and political factors have combined with history to generate regionalism. This can again be seen in the change in the stand of DMK from secession to one of autonomy within the federal framework of the Constitution.
- ii) **Language:** Language is perhaps the most important mark of group identification. Language expresses the shared life, thought structure and value patterns of people. It has the capacity to unite the people together and make them work to improve their common destiny. In this sense linguistic homogeneity strengthens a positive movement.

As early as 1920, Congress had accepted the principle that language must be adopted as criterion for demarcating the territorial boundaries of provincial units. Establishment of State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) in 1955 was the result of demand for formation of regional units based on linguistic regionalism. SRC could not completely follow the principle of one language one state. This could not be treated as the sole criteria for the demarcation of state boundaries. Bilingual states like Bombay, Punjab, etc. were created. However, splitting up of Bombay in 1960, Punjab in 1966, and Assam since mid-sixties into linguistically more homogeneous states gave further impetus to linguistic regionalism in Indian politics.

If language had been synonymous with region, the political aspiration of every linguistic group would have been satisfied by the formation of separate states. This, however, is neither a reality nor a foreseeable possibility. The first reason being that languages spoken in India run into hundreds. Even if major languages are taken into account, large groups

of linguistic minorities are bound to be left inside the state whose language cannot be enshrined in the constitution as an official language.

Secondly, Hindi speaking people are distributed over a very large territory. Their number is over 300 million at the beginning of twenty first century. One state cannot be created for them. They have been divided into six states namely, U.P, Bihar, M.P., Rajasthan, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh and a couple of Union territories. There has rarely been a demand for the formation of single state of Hindi speaking people. On the contrary there have been demands for separate states comprising languages or dialects within this wider linguistic group. This can be found in the occasional demand for a Maithili or for recognition of Rajasthani, Haryanvi, etc. as scheduled languages in the Constitution.

Thus regionalism is closely associated with language but is not synonymous with linguism. Regionalism can take place inside a linguistic state (for example creation of Marathi speaking Maharashtra). The seven states of North East India refer to themselves as seven sisters. They have tried to form common bonds on the basis of their problems of development. They have also tried to develop a regional identity. These seven states include Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. In other words, language is not the sole generator of regionalism. It is one of the several bases of regionalism in India. In most cases of linguistic regionalism many interrelated factors are usually found to be working together.

### Activity 1

Take a map of India which has all the States and Union Territories marked on it and identify

- a) the main language spoken in each State and Union Territory
- b) the southern states which were involved in the anti-Hindi movement in the 1960s
- c) the seven states of the northeast India which refer themselves as seven sisters.

- iii) **Caste:** An important example of the caste factor providing impetus to linguistic regionalism can be seen in the case of Tamil Nadu. Tamil regionalism gained ground as a result of non-Brahmin movement. Non-Brahmin castes of Tamil speaking region had been able to provide a powerful united thrust against Brahmins who had earlier enjoyed unquestioned dominance in economy, society and polity.
- iv) **Religion:** Religion like caste does not play a significant role except when it is combined with dominance and linguistic homogeneity as in Punjab or fed on a sense of religious orthodoxy and economic deprivation as in Jammu and Kashmir.

If casteism reinforced and propelled linguistic regionalism in cases of Tamil Nadu, the demand for the formation of Punjabi Suba though presented in linguistic garb had religious overtones. They were mainly responsible for

evoking people's political loyalties on massive scale rather than their love for their mother tongue. It is difficult to qualify the mix of communalism and linguism in this particular case. But some studies make it very clear that demand for Punjabi language state was certainly reinforced by regular invocation of Punjabi speaking masses' loyalty towards Sikh religion (Majeed 1984).

Taking into account these three factors i.e. language, caste and religion one can say that the study of regionalism in Punjab and Tamil Nadu makes it very clear that political movements for regional demands were carried out formally in the name of language but in reality they had substantive non-linguistic bases too.

#### **14.4.3 Economic Basis**

Economic factor is the crux of regional politics. India is a developing country. The resources are limited while the demand for resources for the development of various regions is unlimited or disproportionate to resources. Economic policies have led to regional imbalances and wide economic disparities among various regions resulting in discontentment among them. It may be recalled that most of the demands for constituting new states were primarily based on allegedly unfair and unequal distribution of development benefits and expenditure in multi-lingual states. The erstwhile movements for a separate Uttarkhand state in the hill districts of U.P., a Jharkhand state carved out of parts of Bihar and the demand for a state of Bodoland comprising a part of Assam may be counted as examples of this type. The demand for separate states in these instances are mainly on the belief that these regions have been economically deprived by their respective states. Economic factors have usually assumed prime importance in regional politics.

#### **14.4.4 Politico-administrative Basis**

The politico-administrative basis of regionalism is also important but politics as such does not create regionalism. It only accentuates regionalism. Politicians take advantage of the situation of regional discontentment and unrest. They convert it into movements for strengthening their individual and factional support bases. It is a known fact that fighting within Congress gave rise to Telangana agitation. Regional political parties like TDP (Andhra Pradesh), DMK (Tamil Nadu), Akali Dal (Punjab) have been surviving because of regional sentiments. Border dispute, like the one between Maharashtra and Karnataka, is also based on regional sentiments. Other important facts of politics of regionalism are the real or assumed charges of political discrimination among various regions by the central ruling elite.

#### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) What were the four major landmarks in the development of regional politics in India? Use ten lines for your answer.

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ii) List the bases of regionalism. Use six lines for your answer.

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iii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T for true or F for false against each statement.

- a) Regionalism is not synonymous with Linguism.
- b) Language and religion are the only two bases of regionalism.
- c) Perception of economic deprivation has been one of the root causes for demands for separate statehood.

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## 14.5 FORMS OF STATE AND REGIONAL POLITICS

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Regional Politics has taken mainly four forms.

- i) Demand for state autonomy
- ii) **Supra-state** regionalism
- iii) **Inter-state** regionalism and
- iv) Intra-state regionalism

Here we will be discussing in greater detail only one of the forms of regional politics, namely supra-state regionalism.

### 14.5.1 Demand for State Autonomy

The first and the most challenging form of regional politics was in the demand of people in certain states or regions to secede from the Indian Union and become independent sovereign states. Such demands occurred soon after independence but they are non-existent now. The important examples in this context are that of the Plebiscite Front (Kashmir), Mizo National Front (Lushei Hills of Assam), Nagaland Socialist Conference (Naga Hills District of Assam) etc.

### 14.5.2 Supra-state Regionalism

This implies that more than one state is involved in the issue of regionalism. It is an expression of group identity of some states. They take a common stand on the issues of mutual interest vis-a-vis another group of states. The group identity is usually in relation to certain specific issues. It does not in any way imply the total and permanent merger of identity of the states into the identity of group. Rivalries, tensions and even conflicts do take place among a few states belonging to a group. For example, the rivalry existing between south and north India on such issues as language or location of steel plants illustrates the point. The grouping of the North Eastern States for greater access to economic development is another instance. Let us refer to the language issue once again in order to illustrate how supra-state regionalism is found in India.

South India is separated from North along several differentials, Geographically south is composed of peninsular uplands or Deccan, the mountain ranges of Eastern and Western Ghats and coastal plains. In terms of political history too, south has never been incorporated into the empires of the North. This was done for the first time during the British regime. Some of the regional and state issues of regionalism are shown in figure 14.1.

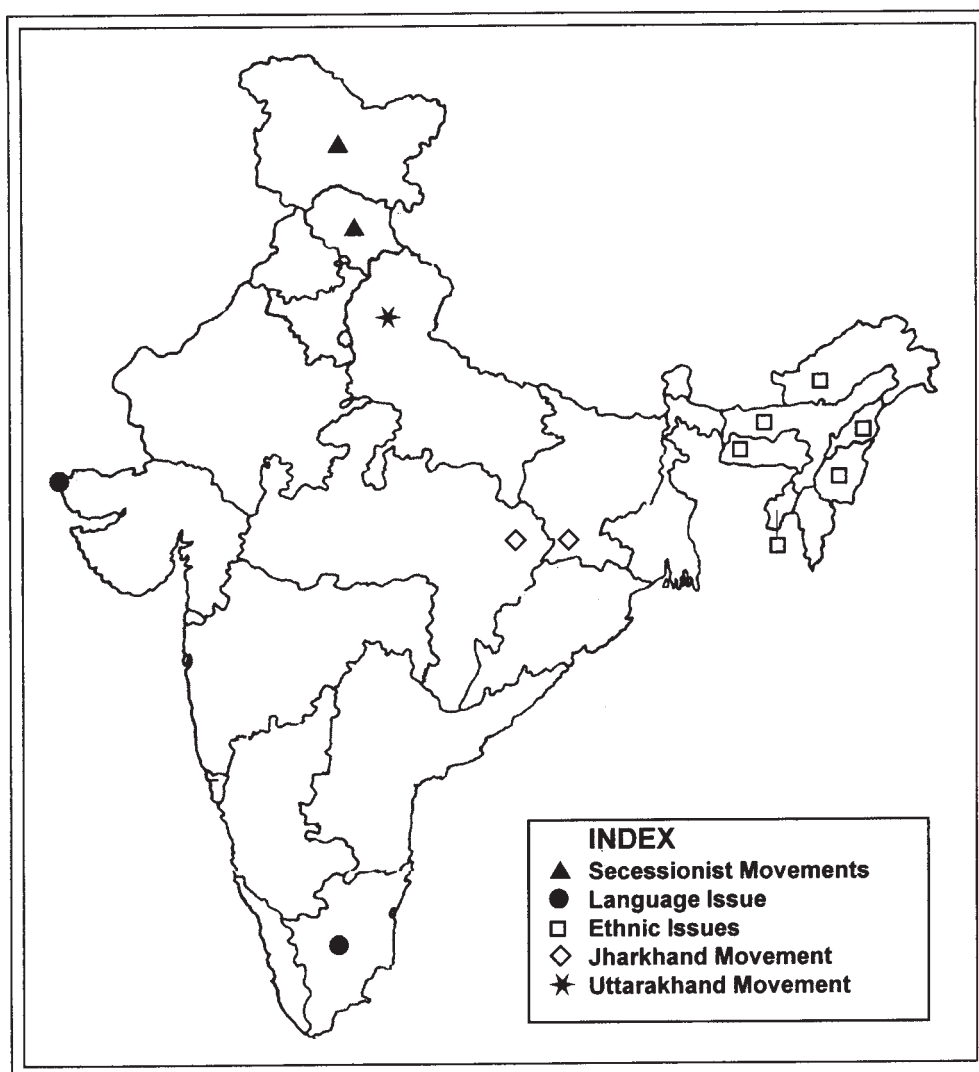


Fig. 14.1: Regional and state issues in India from 1960s to 1990s

After independence a major rift was caused over the issue of the official language for India. The Constitution envisaged the replacement of English by Hindi for official purposes of the Union as the language of communication between the centre and the states and between states. The state legislatures of Indian Union were given authority to adopt one or more languages including Hindi for use as the state language. The Constitution provides that the official language of the union should be Hindi with Devanagiri script, with international numerals for a period of 15 years from the commencement of the Constitution. However, parliament could by law extend the use of English as the link language. The attempt to introduce the provision regarding the official language has generated more intense language rivalry than unity.

The opposition to Hindi found its strongest political expression in the southern states. Most of the people in these states as well as those in the non-Hindi speaking areas of Eastern India objected to the imposition of Hindi. It was feared that their own languages would be ultimately replaced by Hindi, which they considered inferior. The adoption of Hindi as an official language and as a compulsory subject in schools was seen as imposition of a comparatively underdeveloped language upon those whose language contains a richness of thousands of years.

In the 1950's several movements to oppose the imposition of Hindi sprang up. In 1956, the Academy of Tamil Culture convened in Chennai the Union Language Convention which stated in a resolution that it would be greatly unjust to make any other language (meaning Hindi) take the place of English when a population of 100 million are totally unacquainted with that language. Significantly this Convention included representatives from different political organisations i.e., Rajagopalachari (Swatantra), Ramaswamy Naickar (D.K.), Rajan (Justice Party), Annadurai (DMK) and many others. At a National Conference held on 8th March 1958, Rajagopalachari declared that 'Hindi is as much foreign to non-Hindi speaking people as, English to protagonists of Hindi'.

Growing opposition to Hindi in south India led Nehru in 1959 to assure the people of South that (a) there will be no imposition of Hindi on them and that (b) English will be an associate regional language which can be used for official purpose so long as people require it. The decision would be left not to the Hindi speaking people but to the non-Hindi speaking people.

In late 1964 many things revived the southern fears of "Hindi Imperialism". With the death of Pt. Nehru the southern fear about imposition of Hindi had revived. The alarm grew at the expiry of 15 years when Hindi was to be used in place of English as the official language. The fears of Southern non-Hindi states could not be removed even by the Official Language Act, 1963 which made possible the continued use of English both at the centre and in the states.

On the Republic Day in 1965, in pursuance of Act 343 of Indian Constitution Hindi became the official language of India. The southern states reacted vehemently. The DMK party designated 26th January 1965 as a day of mourning. The student community started an agitation, against the imposition of Hindi. The DMK, which led this agitation, gained greater prestige. It became the ruling party in the state of Tamil Nadu when the elections took place after two years.

The DMK urged that all the fourteen languages be the official languages of the respective states with English as the link language between the states and the centre. The communists as well as Kamaraj favoured a three-language formula (viz. English, Hindi and the mother tongue). In June 1965 it was announced that proposal given by Kamaraj (the president of the Congress) has been accepted. The language policy resolution of the Government of India gave official recognition to Hindi, English as well as the regional language. The policy resolution also indicated that steps should be taken to develop Hindi. English continued to be recognised as an important link language.

The events described above show that the language became an important issue around which supra-state regionalism developed.

### Activity 2

Collect a week's issue of one of the local newspapers of your State or Union territory. Cut out those columns that have reported about supra-state regionalism. Make a file of them. Note down the following from these columns.

- i) The states involved in the issue or issues
- ii) What is or what are the issues involved?

Discuss if possible, the information you have gathered with other students at the Study Centre.

### 14.5.3 Inter-state Regionalism

It is related with state boundaries and involves overlapping of one or more state identities, which threaten their interests. River water disputes, in general, and other issues like the Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute in particular can be cited as examples.

### 14.5.4 Intra-state Regional Politics or Sub-regionalism

This refers to regionalism, which exists within a state of the Indian Union. It embodies the desire of a part of a state for the identity and self-development. It may also reflect a notion of deprivation or exploitation of a part of the state at the expense of another. This type of regionalism can be found in many parts of India. The important examples of this kind of **sub-regionalism** are a Vidharbha in Maharashtra, a Saurashtra in Gujarat, a Telangana in Andhra Pradesh, an East U.P. in Uttar Pradesh and Chattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh.

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## 14.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF REGIONALISM FOR NATIONAL POLITICS

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Regionalism is not significant merely as a disintegrating force. Regionalism is not opposed to national integration. Both can exist together in a creative partnership. Both are in favour of development. Regionalism stresses the development of a region and national integration for the development of the nation as a whole. If we want to reconcile the competing claims of regionalism and national integration the political system of the country should remain federal and democratic.

Regionalism is not disruptive of national solidarity. The important condition for national solidarity is that nationalism should be able to hold the different types of regional sub-nationalities together. In other words, there should be healthy reconciliation between regionalism and nationalism.

Regionalism can make federalism a greater success. In this aspect the accentuation of regional identities should not-become problematic. It is quite natural that regional communities, who are conscious of their distinctive culture, should interact with federal government on the basis of more equal partnership. It will reduce the centralising tendencies in a nation and power will shift from the centre to the states.

Conceived in any form, regionalism and sub-regionalism are unavoidable in a country as vast and diverse as India. Their existence is not only an important condition for the expression of genuine national sentiment, but it is logically generated because of the establishment of the nation state. Nothing is, therefore, more basic to the concept of federalism than regionalism and sub-regionalism.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) What are the many forms of regional politics in India? Spell them out in about four lines.

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- ii) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

What does supra-state regionalism consist of?

- a) Regionalism which is confined to a state
- b) Regionalism between one state and another
- c) Regionalism which goes beyond one or two states where interests of one group of states conflict with the interests of another group
- d) None of the above

- iii) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

What does sub-regionalism comprise?

- a) Desire of one part of a state for self-identity and self-development
- b) Emotional identification of people of a state
- c) Desire for the unity and development expressed by people of a group of slate
- d) None of the above

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## 14.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have discussed some important aspects of regional and state politics. We began by defining the concepts of region, regionalism and state specially in the context of Indian polity. We then moved on to discuss the development of regionalism in terms of the four major landmarks since independence. Here, we talked about competition between states for a share in the development benefits; continued expression of loyalties to old territorial units, meaning the Princely States; reorganisation of state on a linguistic basis and the struggle for power, authority and prestige by political parties and individuals. Next we examined the geographical, historical, social, economic and political-administrative bases of regionalism in India. We pointed out how language and economic deprivation plays a very important role in generating regionalism. While outlining the forms of regionalism, we mentioned four forms namely demand for state autonomy, inter-state, supra-state and intra-state regionalism. We discussed supra-state regionalism in great detail. Finally, we talked of the significance of regionalism for national politics.

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## 14.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Disenchantment</b>	To be disillusioned or disappointed
<b>Intra-state Issue</b>	Any issue which involves one region with another within a state
<b>Inter-state Issue</b>	Any issue which involves one state with another
<b>Sectarian</b>	Pertaining to a certain section of society
<b>Secularism</b>	An ideology which accepted religions as equal or which Separates religion from polity.
<b>Sub-regionalism</b>	It relates to a distinct region in terms of socio-cultural, historical, etc. feature within a state.
<b>Supra-state</b>	Any issue which involves more than one state
<b>Topography</b>	The outlining features as surface configuration of a land area

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## 14.9 FURTHER READING

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## 14.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) A region has been defined as an area, which is homogeneous. It is marked by certain physical and cultural characteristics which sets it apart from those of neighbouring areas.
- ii)
  - a) T
  - b) T
  - c) F
- iii) The four common features found in many states are (a) population (b) fixed territory (c) government and (d) sovereignty.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The four major landmarks were
  - a) competition between states for a share in national development and dissatisfaction over their allotted share in it.
  - b) continued nurturance of loyalties to old territorial units in spite of integration of Princely States.
  - c) reorganisation of states on a linguistic basis.
  - d) struggle for power, authority and prestige by parties and individuals.
- ii) The bases of regionalism are
  - a) geographical boundaries
  - b) history - cultural heritage, folklore and symbolism
  - c) social factors like language, caste, religion
  - d) economic policies and economic disparities
  - e) politico-administrative factors
- iii)
  - a) T
  - b) F
  - c) T

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Regional politics has taken mainly four forms in India. These are, demand for state autonomy, supra-state regionalism, inter-state regionalism, and intra-state regionalism.
- ii)
  - i) c
  - ii) a

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### Structure

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### 15.0 OBJECTIVES

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When you have read this unit you should be able to

- describe the concepts of *dharma*, *karma*, *artha* and *moksha* and their relevance to Hindu social structure
- list and describe some aspects of Hindu marriage and family
- describe *varna*, *jati*, caste councils and associations and *jajmani* system among the Hindus
- explain and describe some Hindu festivals.

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## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Blocks 2 and 3 of ESO-12 you learnt about social institutions of our society. In this Block, you will learn about social organisation of different religious groups in India. In this unit, we deal with the social organisation of the Hindus.

Generally speaking, the process of doing things in an orderly fashion is called organisation. When we speak of social organisation, we talk about the arrangement of actions which conform with the norms and values of society. Thus, to understand the social organisation of a particular society, in this case Hindu society, we need to study the systematic ordering of social relations, including changes that have taken place over time in them.

In any description of social organisation of a people we need to refer to the ideological basis of the way the people act. In this unit also, in section 15.2 we introduce you to some fundamental concepts of Hindu religion upon which Hindu social institutions and collective activities are based. The religious concepts of the Hindus give us the ideological basis of the ways they organise their socio-economic activities, their festivals and rituals. We have, therefore, discussed some of the major ideas of Hinduism. In section 15.3 we give a demographic profile of the Hindu community in India. In section 15.4 are discussed aspects of its basic social institutions, namely, of marriage and family.

In section 15.5, we describe the arrangements of Hindu social categories which operate within a well-ordered Hindu social system across regions. As examples of collective behaviour of the community, the festivals and pilgrimage among the Hindu are discussed in section 15.6. Thus, our description of social life around marriage, family, inheritance, caste and festivals gives us a comprehensive picture of Hindu social organisation.

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## 15.2 RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS AND HINDU SOCIAL ORGANISATION

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Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It is a religion followed by several racial and ethnic groups. The Hindu sacred texts deal with the ethical behaviour of an individual of a family and of society in general. They also discuss and prescribe rules of administration, politics, statesmanship, legal principles and statecraft. The rules of conduct apply to personal and social life. Here, we will discuss only some religious concepts, which provide an understanding of the ways in which Hindu society is organised.

### 15.2.1 Concepts of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*

A life of righteousness for a Hindu is possible through the fourfold scheme of practical endeavour. It comprises the concepts of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*.

- i) *Dharma* is honest and upright conduct or righteous action.
- ii) *Artha* means a righteous and honest pursuit of economic activities.
- iii) *Kama* is the fulfillment of one's normal desires.
- iv) *Moksha* is liberation, that is absorption of the self into eternal bliss.

Related to these four concepts are the concepts of *karma* and *samsara*. Depending upon one's deeds (*karma*) one is able to reach the stage of *moksha* or liberation. The stage of *moksha* or liberation is a term for describing the end of the cycle of birth and rebirth. The cycle of birth and rebirth is known as *samsara*. The Hindus believe that each human being has a soul and that this soul is immortal. It does not perish at the time of death. The process of birth and rebirth goes on until *moksha* is attained. This cycle of transmigration is also known as *samsara*, which is the arena where the cycle of birth and rebirth operates. One's birth and rebirth in a particular state of existence is believed by the Hindus to be dependent on the quality of one's deeds (*karma*). For a Hindu, the issue of liberation is of paramount significance (Prabhu 1979: 43-48). Let us discuss a little more about these two concepts, i.e., *Karma* and *Samsara*.

### 15.2.2 *Karma* and *Samsara*

The concepts of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* are related to tenets of *karma* and *samsara*. *Karma* is a word used for all activity or work. *Samsara* is the term used for the arena where the cycle of birth and rebirth continues to operate until one attains liberation. This is also called the theory of reincarnation or *punarjanma*. Actions are divided into good or bad on the basis of their intrinsic worth. Good deeds bring fame, merit and are the path to heaven. Bad deeds bring notoriety and lead to punishment and life in hell. It is recognised that an individual's overall position in a future life depends on the way he or she lives the present one. This belief, which gave a positive or negative value to certain actions, developed into a general theory of actions and is called the *karma* theory. The concept of *karma* is fully developed and woven into the belief in re-birth, which in turn is related to the belief concerning heaven, hell, and *moksha*. An individual's fate after death is determined by the sum total of grades and attributes of his or her actions or deeds (*karma*) during his or her life. Better birth and status is obtained if there is a surplus of many good deeds in a person's life. Otherwise one's status falls in the next life. Another related belief is that the world moves in a cyclical process (birth and death follow one another). By following one's *karma* prescribed within the fourfold scheme of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha* an individual strives to get out of this otherwise infinite cyclical process of birth and death. Depending on one's previous and present *karma*, one prospers or suffers in this world. Later after death he either gains heaven or is punished with life in hell. Thus a human being after death may become a denizen or inhabitant of heaven or hell, may be reborn as an animal, or even be reborn as a tree. All this depends on one's *karma*. An individual usually wanders through many births till he or she finds final release or *moksha*.

#### Activity 1

Make a list at least six of the Hindu sacred books, which mention the four concepts of *dharma*, *artha*, *karma* and *moksha*. Compare, if possible, your list with those prepared by other students in the Study Centre.

### 15.2.3 Relevance to Hindu Social Structure

The belief in *karma* and *dharma* has direct relevance to Hindu social organisation, which is based on an arrangement of castes into a graded order.

This hierarchy, in turn, is linked with the quality of one's *karma*. One can say that if one's actions are good, one will be born in a higher caste in the next birth. Hindu society is supposed to be governed by rather strict rules of caste behaviour. There are, on the other hand, some general rules governing the behaviour of all members irrespective of caste. Castes coexist with different norms of behaviour and a continuity with the past in terms of one's actions in the previous birth. Whatever position one may be born into, one must fulfil the functions, without attachment, without hatred and resentment. Whatever may be one's *dharma*, its performance through one's *karma* brings blessings.

Each person has a duty (*dharma*) appropriate to one's caste and one's station in life. As mentioned before, the term *dharma* refers to honest and upright conduct or righteous action. *Dharma* has two aspects; one normative and the other naturalistic. The normative aspect refers to duty or path to be followed. The naturalistic meaning implies the essential attributes or nature, for example, the *dharma* or nature of water is to flow. The Hindus believe that one must follow one's *dharma* to achieve ultimate liberation from the cycle of births and deaths in this world. An individual belongs to a family and a caste group and has to perform his or her *dharma* (in the sense of its naturalistic aspect) accordingly. The main aim of following one's *dharma* is to eventually achieve *moksha* or liberation. *Dharma* relates not only to the caste but also to the different stages in one's life. As part of following one's *dharma* a Hindu goes through the life cycle rituals which are carried out in the context of marriage, family and caste. Let us now look at the size and spread of the Hindu community in India.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Describe briefly the concepts of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) How is the belief in Karma relevant to Hindu social organisation? Use two lines for your answer.

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## **15.3 PROFILE OF HINDU COMMUNITY IN INDIA**

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Hinduism is one of the most ancient religions of the world. Its earliest literary productions were the four Vedas. These comprise hymns and ritual ceremonies of the early Aryan settlers, who were a pastoral and agricultural people. The

Vedic period covers about 2500 B.C. to 600 B.C. The Upanishadic teachings, also of this period, contain philosophical reflection of human life. The period of the Epics succeeded that of the Upanishads. In the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* philosophical doctrines were often presented in the form of stories and parables. Many other doctrines followed including the *Bhakti* movement of Ramanuja, Vaishnavism, Saktism, Brahmo and Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna, and Aurobindo. Thus, Hindu doctrine developed in several stages.

Demographically the Hindus are the largest percentage of the population of India comprising 82.64 percent in 1981 (G01 1984). Even though the absolute number of people who follow Hinduism increased from 549 million in 1981 to 672 million (82.4 percent) in 1991, there was a marginal decrease in terms of percentage points (Census of India 1991). We find that in some states of India the percentage of Hindus is somewhat higher or much lower than the national average. In 1981, those above it included Himachal Pradesh (95.4), Orissa (95.4) and Madhya Pradesh (92.9). In 1991, in ten States the percentage of Hindus was above the national average. Himachal Pradesh (95.8 percent) has the highest concentration of Hindus. In 1981 those below the national average included the States of West Bengal (76.9), Sikkim (67.2), Manipur (60.0), Kerala (58.1), Punjab (36.9), Jammu and Kashmir (32.2), Meghalaya (18.0) and Nagaland (14.4). In comparison, a total of four States had Hindu population less than 50 percent in 1991 with the lowest being in Meghalaya (5.04 percent). The low figures are due to other religious denominations being higher. The percentage increase for 1971-81 among Hindus was highest in Nagaland (88.4) followed by Sikkim (47.2). Total population rose by 24.69 per cent during 1971-81 and for Hindus the rise was 24.15 per cent. This was in keeping with high fertility and low mortality rates found in this community.

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## 15.4 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY AMONG THE HINDUS

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Before we discuss specific institutions of the Hindus in India, let us emphasise how widely spread this community is. Consequently, in the areas of marriage or family, there are regional variations. What you will read in these pages is a generalisation covering the common elements and mentioning in passing about the variations. By and large, to marry and raise a family is a sacramental activity for the Hindus. Let us first look at the institution of marriage and then at the family in the Hindu community.

### 15.4.1 Hindu Marriage

Marriage is a sacred duty for all Hindus. It is an obligatory sacrament because the birth of a son is considered by many Hindus as necessary for obtaining *moksha*. In order to perform important rituals towards gods and ancestors, the sacred texts decree that it is obligatory for a Hindu to be married and have male descendants. Today, a large number of Hindus may, however, not believe in and practice these traditional ideas and associated customs.

Marriage is considered to be one of the sacraments sanctifying the body, mind and soul of the groom and bride. Therefore at the proper age and time, every Hindu woman and man is expected to get married. A wife is considered to be instrumental in helping her husband fulfil the four kinds of *purushartha*,



namely, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* (see Section 15.2). According to this view of marriage, a man is thought to be incomplete without wife and children. Figure 15.1 demonstrates the traditional Hindu marriage.

When we discuss Hindu marriage, we should also speak of the eight forms of marriage, which describe the ways marriages are traditionally consecrated among the Hindus.

### 15.4.2 Eight Forms of Hindu Marriage

Before enumerating these eight forms, let us make it clear that here we are not talking about the usual usage in sociology regarding the forms of marriage. In sociology we discuss monogamy, polygamy and group marriage etc. under the topic of forms of marriage. In that respect, it will suffice to note here that monogamy (i.e., a man is married to one woman at a time) is the usual form of marriage among the Hindus. But various forms of polygamy are also found in the Hindu community. A widow is allowed to remarry among lower castes.

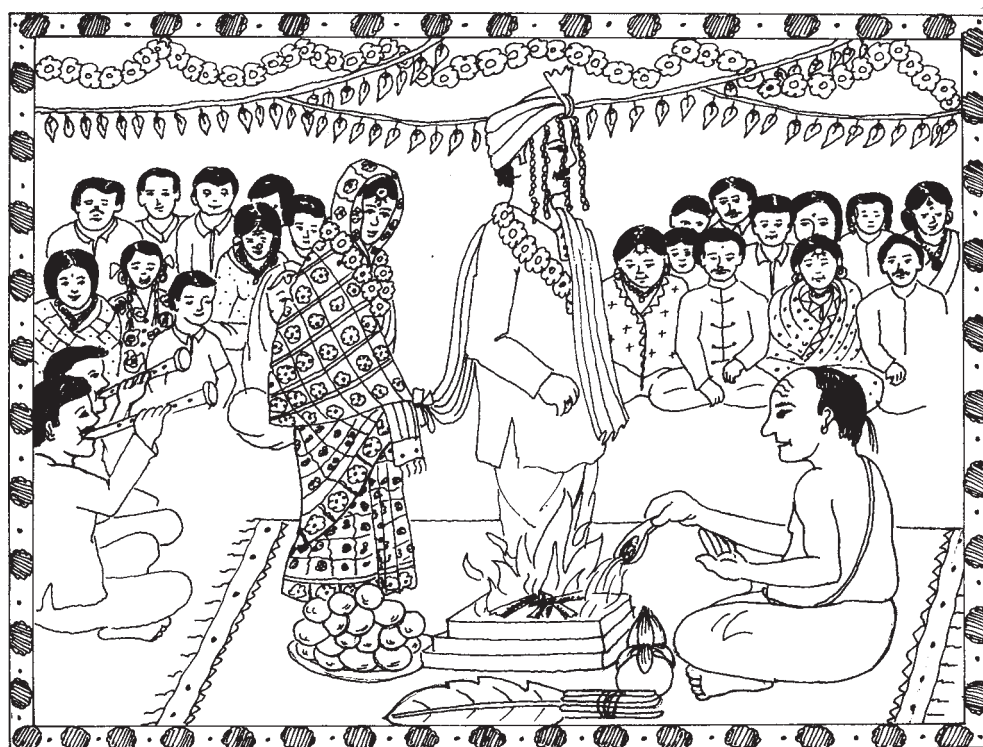


Fig. 15.1: A Hindu marriage

Higher castes usually prohibit widow marriage. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 permits divorce on the grounds of insanity, leprosy, adultery, etc. A detailed discussion on these points has already been given in unit 7 of Block 2 of this course. Coming back to the forms of marriage among the Hindus, only the first four of the following eight forms bring purification to ancestors on the sides of father and mother, the remaining four forms produce no such value (Pandey 1976: 159-169). The eight forms are given below.

- i) **The *Brahma* form:** It comprises the gift or giving away of the daughter by the father to a man, who has learnt the Veda.
- (ii) **The *Daiva* form:** It involves the giving away of the daughter by the father to a priest, who duly officiates at a sacrifice, during the course of its performance.



- (iii) **The Arsha form:** It consists of the daughter being given away by the father to a man after receiving a cow and a bull from the bridegroom, not with an intention of selling the child, but in accordance with the requirement of the *dharma*.
- (iv) **The Prajapatya form:** In this form of marriage, the father gives away his daughter to the bridegroom and addresses the couple to perform their *dharma* together.
- (v) **The Asura form:** It involves a payment by the bridegroom to the bride's father for obtaining a wife.
- (vi) **The Gandharva form:** Here the bride and the bridegroom agree to marry at their own consent. Such a decision to marry is consequently consecrated by going through the sacred rites of marriage.
- (vii) **The Rakshasa form:** This is described as a marriage, through force.
- (viii) **The Paishacha form:** In this form, a man first seduces a woman (who may be intoxicated or mentally retarded) and subsequently marries her.

Of these eight forms of marriage, the giving away the daughter by her father described in the first four is considered as the ideal form. The right to give a maiden in marriage is held by the father, the grandfather, the brothers, the kinspersons and the mother, in that order.

The Hindus lay stress on pre-marital chastity on the part of both the male and the female (Prabhu 1979: 153-154). The marital bond is also to be respected through mutual fidelity. There are also forms of endogamy (marriage within a certain group) and exogamy (marriage outside the group) for which rules are laid down. These rules are designed to regulate the Hindu marriage in the sense of specifying the choice of spouses within specific groups (see sections on Rules of Marriage in units 8 and 9 of Block2 of ESO-12).

### 15.4.3 Endogamy

The widest category of endogamy for a Hindu is his or her *varna*. Within each *varna* are several castes and sub-castes which are considered to be the categories for endogamy in the region. We do also come across some inter-caste/ inter-subcaste marriages in contemporary times. Yet, these are few and far between. The rule of caste/ subcaste endogamy is the prescribed mode followed by most of the Hindus all over India.

### 15.4.4 Exogamy

As regards the rule of exogamy, a Hindu is enjoined not to marry within his own gotra. The word '*gotra*' in this context denotes one's extended family or the clan. The *gotra* of a family is usually named after the ancestor who founded the family. People with a common ancestor are not allowed to marry each other. At present, the rule of exogamy is usually defined in terms of prohibition of marriage within five generations on the mother's side and seven generations on the father's side. However this rule can be circumvented by letting someone of a different *gotra* do the *kanyadaan*, that is the rite of giving the daughter away in marriage (Madan 1965). There is a clearly defined limit upto which persons are considered to be related in such a way that their marriage cannot be permitted.

There are marked differences in north India and south India in this regard. In north India, a marriage between both the cross and parallel cousins is prohibited while in south India, cross-cousins are allowed to marry. Thus, the *gotra* rule, as understood in north India, does not apply to the Hindus of south India.

The most common form of marriage is that the bridegroom and his group goes to the bride's home. There the bride is given away by the father or her guardian with due rituals and ceremonies. Variations, of course, occur according to the region and caste. The salient features of the marriage rites and their significance are described in unit 7 of Block 2 of this course.

The continuity of the family is one of the objects of marriage. We will now examine the family in the context of the Hindu community.

### 15.4.5 The Hindu Family

For a Hindu, the event of marriage signifies the completion of the *brahmacharya ashrama* i.e., the stage of a celibate-life. Marriage heralds the beginning of the householder stage (*grihastha*). Now, begins the process of the preservation and continuity of the *kula* or the family. A Hindu home symbolises the continuity of its living members, past members that are no more and future members that are yet to come. The living members are considered to be the trustees of the home. It is supposed to belong to the ancestors and includes the interests of the male descendants of the family. The individual as such does not belong to the home. One only performs one's *dharma*. The home is the place where *dharma* and *karma* are practised by the people who are enjoined to remain detached yet conduct the affairs of the world (Prabhu 1979: 216-217). For a Hindu, his or her life in the stage of a householder is lived and regulated in terms of *dharma* and *karma*. In performing these two activities, one also performs one's *artha* and *kama*. This process leads one towards the final goal, *moksha*.

### 15.4.6 The Form of Hindu Family

The most striking feature of a Hindu family is its jointness. That is to say the unit of residence is often not confined to the parents and their children only. It usually includes three generations living under the same roof and sharing the family property in common. Concerning the joint family and the nuclear family among the Hindus, unit 6 of Block 2 of ESO-12 gives a fairly detailed description. What we need to emphasise again is that the joint family (in India in general, and among the Hindus in particular) is believed to be the ideal form of family. In practice, we find many combinations and permutations of family living among the Hindus.

Whether living in a nuclear or a joint family most Hindu families prefer that each member goes through some basic life-cycle rituals. These sacraments have been prescribed by the sacred texts and are meant for purifying body and mind. The sacraments are supposed to help make the human being into a social being. Some of them purify a human being in the present life and others help in the life-after-death. From birth to death, the sacraments (rituals) help in organising and disciplining the life of the Hindus, and enabling them to perform the *dharma* in accordance with their status. There is diversity in the observance

of the sacrament. Depending on the region and caste, different numbers of sacraments are observed. There are rituals from which women are excluded. Yet other rituals have special significance for them. Thus for a female the nuptial ceremony is regarded as being of equal significance to the sacrament of *upanayan* (the stage when a male child is initiated into the study of the Veda).

### Activity 2

If you live in a nuclear family then stay for some days in the joint family of one of your close relatives.

If you live in a joint family then arrange to stay with relatives who live in a nuclear family for some days.

In either case make comparisons, in terms of the following points, between the two types of family life in your notebook: i) size, ii) range of kin relationships, iii) pattern of authority and iv) division of labour.

Write a note of 1000 words on comparisons observed by you.

### 15.4.7 Relations among Family Members

As the concepts of *dharma* and *karma* are so much a part of the Hindu way of life both at normative and behavioural levels, we find that each member in the family has his or her prescribed *sacred duty*. General principles of differentiation on the basis of age and sex regulate the relations within the Hindu family, in terms of precedence, obedience and subservience.

Males are more respected than females, and members senior in age command more respect than the younger members. For example, the father is respected more than the mother and has greater authority. The father's mother by virtue of her age, is respected by all members who are younger to her. It is considered ideal for a man and wife to live with all their married sons in a joint family. They are to be respected and cared for by the sons and their wives and children. It is expected that the sons and their wives will perform their duties to the satisfaction of the parents, and thereby earn their blessings and religious merit.

The sons have a right in their fathers' ancestral property. The age old rules of inheritance which are still customary gave ownership and inheritance rights to males, while they give only maintenance rights to females. These customary rules continue to prevail even today. The Hindu Succession Act and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, however, introduced some changes. The Act makes the husband legally responsible for the maintenance of his wife and children. According to this Act (which is also applicable to Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs), the property of a Hindu comes down to his sons, daughters, widow and mother. Daughters legally have a share equal to that of sons in their father's property. In actual practice customs and tradition continue to be so powerful that very few women are able to take advantage of their rights. From being a member of the primary group, such as the family, one goes on to being a part of one's lineage and subcaste/caste. The largest category of this belongingness for a Hindu can be expressed in terms of the idea of *varna*. Let us now understand the *varna* system among the Hindus.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Describe the rule of exogamy among the Hindus. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Discuss family interaction among the Hindus. Use about six lines for your answer.

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## **15.5 THE VARNA SYSTEM**

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The broader aspects of activities in the sphere of economy and polity form a very important part of social life. For a Hindu, these activities take place within the context of a Hindu view of life. A Hindu is born into a *jati* (caste) and follows his *dharma* in this birth to improve the future birth. A discussion of the four stages, called *ashrama*, of a Hindu's life, and the divisions of the Hindu community into the *varna* categories and caste groups, would provide us a framework to look at the bases of the politico-economic activities of the Hindus.

### **15.5.1 The Four Varna**

The Hindus are divided into four *varna* namely, Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. These four categories are ranked from higher to lower in the order mentioned here. This means that Brahman is ranked as the highest and the Sudra the lowest. The *varna* system of dividing the members of the Hindu society is an ideological construct which is mentioned in their religious texts. Each *varna* is also associated with particular occupations. A Brahman is supposed to be a priest by profession, a Kshatriya to be a warrior; a Vaishya to be a trader; and a Sudra to be a worker. All Hindus recognise this system and can place their identity in terms of one of the four *varna*. Most of the basic ideas on *varna* system and its links to the concepts of *karma* and *dharma* are generally present in the thinking of Hindus (Prabhu 1979: 321). Village studies carried out by Marriott (1959), Dube (1955), Srinivas (1977) and Carstairs (1957) also confirm this view. This division of society into four categories is however better visualised in terms of caste groups into which the

Hindu society is divided. Before we proceed to the discussion of caste groups, let us also briefly talk about the four stages of a man's life, which provide us an understanding of the Hindu view of the various socio-economic and political activities, to be performed at different stages.

### 15.5.2 The Four Stages of Life

The Life of a Hindu is considered to be divisible into four stages, namely

- i) *brahmacharya ashram*
- ii) *grihastha ashram*
- iii) *vanaprastha ashram*
- iv) *sanyasa ashram*

It is the *dharma* of a Hindu to pass through these stages in one's life. The male members of Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya *varna* pass through four different *ashram* (stages) in their life. The first *ashram* is called *brahmacharya ashram* (the educational stage) from which the fourth *varna*, viz., *Sudra* and women of the first three *varna* are barred *Brahmacharyashram* ends (after studentship) at marriage. Celibacy is prescribed till marriage.

The second stage of life is called the *grihasthashram*. During this a man rears a family, earns a living and performs his daily personal and social duties. Following this a man gradually enters the third stage of life called the *vanaprashthashram*. During this stage the householder relinquishes his duties in the household, and devotes his time to religious pursuits. His links with his family are weakened. During this *ashram* a man retires into the forest with or without his wife leaving behind the householder's cares and duties. The final phase of a Hindu's life begins with the stage known as the *sanyasashram*. In this stage one attempts to totally withdraw oneself from the world and its cares by going to the forest and spending the rest of life in pursuit of *moksha*. The four stages of a Hindu's life just described are together called the *varnashrama* system. There is an ideal scheme, which correlates the *vamashrama* phases to ages at which a particular *ashram* begins. However, it is the endeavour that is important and not the age at which this begins. Thus Hinduism permits young unmarried sanyasi, as well as those who never go beyond *grihasthashrama*. Thus there is nothing compulsory about living life in the *varnashram* scheme. It is, however, highly recommended (Prabhu 1979:73-100).

At present most Hindus do not systematically go through the *varnashrama*. They do, however, accept these stages to be the ideal ways in which a Hindu should spend his life. Like the four *varna*, the four stages of life are models. In real life, we find that occupations associated with each *varna* are not followed precisely in accordance with what is written in the sacred texts. Today a Brahman may be employed in a shoe company, selling shoes to all the customers irrespective of their *varna* or caste. As we said before, the Hindus are divided into castes or *jati* which are hereditary groups.

### 15.5.3 Jati

*Jati* or castes are hereditary groups in **hierarchical** relation to one another, similar to the hierarchy among *varna*. Brahman castes are the highest while

untouchable castes are the lowest. Those between these two extremes are placed according to regional hierarchies.

A caste group can be seen as an extended kin group because members of a caste marry among themselves. Caste endogamy is also explained by the term ***beti vyavahar*** as against ***roti vyavahar***. *Beti vyavahar* refers to the practice of giving and taking of the daughters (*beti*) of different families within a caste. *Roti vyavahar* means only the giving and taking of food (*roti*) with certain categories of people. It is possible to have *roti vyavahar* with people of castes other than one's own. Lower castes accept cooked food and water from higher castes but the opposite is traditionally not permitted. There are certain rules and conditions which regulate the type of food which is accepted when offered to a person of higher caste. The caste groups claim their superior status by showing the evidence of their dietary practices in terms of acceptance/non-acceptance of food and water from particular castes. Besides food, there are also customary discriminatory practices related to different caste groups. For example, the untouchable castes were not permitted to enter certain parts of upper caste streets or houses and temples. This is a typical example of the idea of purity and pollution on which the ideology of caste is supposed to be based. When we consider a caste to be high or low on the basis of its purity or pollution level, we refer to it as a ritual hierarchy of castes. The level of purity/pollution is judged by the prevalent practices relating to acceptance/non-acceptance of food, entry to sacred places and widow-remarriage. In all these hierarchically arranged caste-groups, the scheme of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* is followed without hatred or resentment towards the lower or the higher group. In other words, people born into a caste accept the sacred duty (*dharma*) of their caste and do not question the right to the higher caste-people to social privileges. Within their own caste they organise themselves for fulfilling several purposes. Let us say a few words about caste councils, which have specific functions in regulating the behaviour of their caste members.

#### **15.5.4 Caste Councils and Caste Associations**

Generally each caste has its council. The leaders in the council are usually the elderly members of the caste. Caste councils act as a judiciary for caste groups and help settle disputes related to marriage, separation, divorce or any other untoward behaviour of their caste members. The caste councils are localised covering many villages.

Caste associations are recent phenomena. They are engaged in various activities. For example, they run educational institutions, cooperatives, hospitals, old age homes and orphanages. From time to time they print and distribute among their members pamphlets containing information about new rules of behaviour regarding marriage ceremonies, gifts, widow remarriage, etc. They also publicise the nature of punishment to be meted out to defaulters. These associations are generally regional. They also act as political pressure groups. The caste councils and caste associations regulate the behaviour of caste members.

#### **15.5.5 Interdependence among Castes**

There is interdependence among caste groups. A member of a caste not only interacts within his own caste but also with other castes. Both aspects are very important for the socio-economic and political organisation of the Hindus. We shall now discuss a little about the inter-caste relationships.



For the Hindus, the caste system is a coherent and comprehensive system with rituals and occupational hierarchy. The occupational division of castes also helps to maintain equilibrium in the economic sphere. Being religiously oriented, members of different castes accept their rituals and occupational position. Within the framework of caste ideology, they perform their *dharma* and *karma* and endeavour to improve their present and future life. In both the ritual and economic spheres, members of different castes are dependent on one another. Members of different castes are vertically organised which is more manifest in the rural society. The context of Hindu social organisation is to be seen as a system of interdependence among the members of different caste groups. The *jajmani* system is an important aspect of this interdependence.

### 15.5.6 *Jajmani* System

In rural areas of India, it was found that a village generally comprises several Hindu castes, each living in different clusters. These castes have relationships of giving and taking of services among one another. Usually the peasant castes are numerically preponderant. Due to their numerical majority and also their economic power they have been called dominant castes by sociologists. The dominant caste needs services of the carpenters, blacksmith, potter, barber, washerman for various farming and ritual activities. The peasants pay in cash and kind for these services from other castes. The castes providing these services depend for their livelihood on the patronage of the dominant caste. In turn, the servicing castes also give support to their patrons in matters of political group formation. The relationship of patron and client among these interacting caste groups usually continue from generation to generation. Thus, the villagers are bound in a system of the exchange of services. Without this exchange the normal day-to-day life may not run smoothly. This is why this aspect is a very important part of Hindu social organisation.

The interdependence among caste groups is also evident in the ritual sphere apart from politico-economic activities. Pilgrimage, worship, recitation of holy texts, life cycle ritual ceremonies, fairs and festivals are rituals which bring together members of different castes. Without a whole series of interaction among them, these activities are just not possible. The instance of a Hindu wedding (one of the life cycle ritual ceremonies) is a case which illustrates this point. Here, a Brahman priest is needed to perform the sacred rites, the barber is required for the shaving and bathing, the drummer beats the drums, the washerman brings freshly laundered clothes, the untouchable takes the charge of sweeping the floor, the gardeners bring flowers and so on.

We can also look at the temple activities as an example of interdependence among castes. Members of different castes perform their respective sacred duties (*sva-dharma*) for the up-keep of the temple. The priestly castes perform the worship, the goldsmith caste provides ornaments for the idols, other castes provide services like cooking, tailoring, filling water, playing drums and so on. Among the Hindus, temples do not figure as prominently in terms of organised systems, as such institutions as the Mosque and Church of the Muslims and Christians respectively. People belonging to different castes organise and perform their duties to earn religious merit and improve their life after death. Each person considers his or her contribution to the temple as

one's duty and improves his or her *karma*. No task is less or more important when performed in the context of one's caste membership and one's *ashram* in life. This shows that the ritual aspect of social activities of caste groups forms an important part of social organisation. This aspect is most reflected in collective behaviour at festivals, fairs and pilgrimages. This is the reason why we are now going to discuss here the festivals, fairs and pilgrimages among the Hindus.

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## **15.6 FESTIVALS AND PILGRIMAGES**

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Festivals, pilgrimages and other ceremonial occasions are usually linked with religion. As such they show how both personal identity of the individuals as well as collective identity of the groups are highlighted by the patterns of interaction during these events. Festivals manifest the social cohesion and solidarity of the community. We begin our discussion of this aspect of social organisation by describing festivals, fairs and pilgrimages among the Hindus.

### **15.6.1 Festivals**

Most of the Hindu festivals are linked to the arrival of particular seasons. For example, the festival of *Diwali* marks the arrival of winter season while that of *Holi* signifies the beginning of summer season. Some festivals are associated with eclipses and movements of the heavenly bodies such as the moon and other planets. Many festivals are held in the honour of the deities like Krishna, Siva, Durga, Lakshmi and Rama, e.g., *Dussehra*, *Durgapuja*, *Janmashtami*, etc. Local festivals have their roots in the ecology of the region, celebrating myths associated with plants like coconuts, *tulsi* (*basil*), the sacred tree, or with animals, like elephants, snakes and monkeys. There are regional festivals connected with the agricultural cycle such as the occasion of first ploughing, sowing or harvest. Among the artisans, carpenter, blacksmith and brass-workers, people worship the deity called Vishwakarma.

We shall not go into the ritualistic aspect of these festivals. The emphasis here is on the role these festivals play in social life of the people. During festivals, people in a locality get together and their participation in a common activity enhances their feeling of belonging to a community. These occasions also provide the chance to people for buying and selling special commodities. By preparing special food and wearing special clothes, people bring about the feelings of freshness and change in their day-to-day life. This regenerates them for carrying the routine activities. Recurrence of festivals and associated rituals strengthens their faith in the stability and integrity of their social order.

Festivals like *Holi*, *Diwali* and *Dussehra* are celebrated on a scale, which includes participation of Hindus as well as non-Hindus. They provide occasions for a meeting across religions.

Associated with festivals are fairs, which are held at prescribed times on a holy spot. Sometimes, fairs assume independent significance and attract the participation of cross-section of society. Some famous fairs such as the fair of Sonapur or Pushkar draw people from all over the country. In these fairs, craftsmen bring their special artware, artists come to present their shows, agricultural surplus is brought for selling, brisk trading is carried on in cattle,

horses, elephants. Each fair is both a religious and a secular occasion and people participate in both with equal enthusiasm.

**Activity 3**

Describe in five pages at least two festivals of your area in terms of the following points.

- i) major social groups celebrating them,
- ii) main events taking place during their celebration,
- iii) time of the year for their celebration, and
- v) special significance of these festivals.

Compare, if possible, your description with those of the other students of your Study Centre.

**15.6.2 Pilgrimage**

Not very different from a fair is a pilgrimage. The cultural unity of the Hindus is expressed in the institution of pilgrimage. When a pilgrim goes to the southern pilgrim centre at Rameshwaram, he or she also aspires to reach the northern end of the country, at Badrinath. Most pilgrims also aspire to go to Puri in the east and to Dwarikanath in the west.

In these places of pilgrimage, there is often a fair being held during the periods pilgrims arrive in large numbers. Generally, people go to these places in large groups. Such groups are mostly formed on the basis of kin relationships. They may also include neighbours, friends and business partners.

Different sects of Hinduism have acquired pilgrim centres around the whole country over time. Besides the four centres in the four directions, the Sakta sect has more than fifty centres of pilgrimage. There are seven places of pilgrimage, dedicated to the Sun god, Surya. One of them is in Multan, in West Pakistan. Despite linguistic, racial, and cultural differences, most Hindus undertake long and arduous journeys to the many varied pilgrim places. This adds an important dimension to their social life.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Show the difference between a caste council and a caste association. Use about six lines for your answer.

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- ii) Name six pilgrim places associated with Hinduism. Use three lines for your answer.

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## 15.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have studied the social organisation of the Hindus. We began with religious concepts like *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*, *karma* and *samsara* which are the basis of Hindu social organisation. We discussed marriage and family, among the Hindus including forms of marriage and family, endogamy, exogamy and family relations. We then examined caste groups among Hindus. We discussed the varna system, *jati* and the *jajmani* system. Finally we described festivals and pilgrimages among the Hindus.

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## 15.8 KEYWORDS

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<b><i>Artha</i></b>	Activities pertaining to the economic aspects of life. e.g., earning a livelihood.
<b><i>Beti Vyavahar</i></b>	The phrase refers to a relationship in which social groups can intermarry.
<b><i>Brahmcharya Ashram</i></b>	That stage in life, which is associated with studentship and celibacy.
<b><i>Dharma</i></b>	Good, upright, and righteous conduct.
<b><i>Grihasta Ashram</i></b>	The stage of the householder, earning a living and rearing a family.
<b>Hierarchical</b>	An order of ranking which goes from top to bottom, or vice versa. The caste system is an example of this kind of ranking.
<b><i>Jati</i></b>	Caste groups arranged in a hierarchical order. There are very many <i>jatis</i> in India, running into thousands.
<b><i>Karma</i></b>	The concept of <i>karma</i> refers to a belief in the efficacy of actions of a person, either good or bad.
<b><i>Moksha</i></b>	Liberation from birth and death and regaining of oneness with the Supreme Being.
<b><i>Roti Vyavahar</i></b>	The phrase refers to a relation of exchange of food between two social groups.
<b><i>Sanyasa Ashrama</i></b>	That stage in life when free from family life one devotes oneself solely to deeds leading to moksha.
<b><i>Samsara</i></b>	The process of birth and rebirth, which continues till the soul is finally free.
<b><i>Vanaprastha Ashram</i></b>	The life of a forest wanderer who lives a detached life free from all bondages. This is a stage before sanyasa.

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## 15.9 FURTHER READING

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Gould, H.A. 1987. *The Hindu Caste System*. Chanakya Publications: Delhi.

Patel, S. 1980. *Hinduism: Religion and a Way of Life*. Associated Publishing House: New Delhi

Prabhu, P.H. 1979. *Hindu Social Organisation: A Study in Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundations*. Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.: Bombay.

Radhakrishnan, S. 1979. *The Hindu View of Life*. Blackie and Son Pvt. Ltd.: Bombay.

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## 15.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) A Hindu can live a righteous life by following the fourfold scheme of practical endeavour. Thus *dharma* is honest and upright conduct or righteous action. *Artha* means a righteous pursuit of economic activities. *Kama* is the fulfillment of normal desires or cravings. *Moksha* is the culmination of the self into eternal bliss.
- ii) Hindu social organization is based on an arrangement of castes into a graded order. One's birth in a particular caste depends on that person's *karma* in post-life.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The rule of exogamy among the Hindus is mainly guided by the rule of *gotra* exogamy. This means that persons of similar *gotra* cannot marry each other. Secondly, in north India, relations of certain degree on both father's and mother's side cannot marry each other. In south India, parallel cousins cannot marry each other. Then, there are various rules of exogamy applied in particular regions.
- ii) In the Hindu family, interaction is arranged along the lines of precedence, obedience and subservience. Males are usually more respected than females, and the old are given more respect than the young. A joint family life is considered an ideal form of family. Only sons have a right in ancestral property, while females have only maintenance rights. The Hindu Succession Act and Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956) have made women eligible for inheritance.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Traditionally, each caste has a caste council. Its jurisdiction covers several villages. It acts as a judiciary for settling disputes related to marriage, separation, divorce or any other untoward behaviour of a caste-fellow. A caste association is, on the other hand, a recent phenomenon, arising out

## **Social Organisation**

of the needs of many castes or sub-castes to merge in order to involve in multi-faced activities. Such association covers a much larger area in its jurisdiction. It also acts as a political pressure group.

- ii) The four pilgrim centres of Hindus are in four directions, Badrinath in the north, Rameshwaram in the south, Dwaraka in the west and Puri in the east. The Kashi and Prayag are also considered as holy places, which devout Hindus like to visit at least once in their lifetime. In south India, Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Guruvayur in Kerala and Mantralaya in Karnataka are famous pilgrim places, which Hindus of all denominations visit.



### Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Emergence of Islam and Muslim Community in India
- 16.3 Tenets of Islam: View on Social Equality
- 16.4 Aspects of Social Organisation
  - 16.4.1 Social Divisions among Muslims
  - 16.4.2 Caste and Kin Relationships
  - 16.4.3 Social Control
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  - 16.4.5 Life Cycle Rituals and Festivals
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- 16.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.7 Keywords
- 16.8 Further Reading
- 16.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 16.0 OBJECTIVES

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On going through this unit you should be able to

- describe briefly the emergence of Islam and Muslim community in India
- list and describe the basic tenets of Islam with special reference to its views on social equality
- explain the social divisions among the Muslims
- describe the processes involved in the maintenance of social control in the Islamic community
- describe the main features of Muslim marriage, family and systems of inheritance
- list the main festivals celebrated by the Muslims
- indicate some of the external influences on Muslim social practices.

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### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit we examined the various facets of Hindu Social Organisation. In this unit we are going to look at some important aspects of Muslim social organisation. We begin our examination with an introductory note on the emergence of Islam and the Muslim community in India. We will proceed to describe the central tenets of Islam, elaborating the view of Islam on social equality, in a little more detail. This will be followed by a discussion

on certain aspects of Muslim social organisation. We shall focus on social divisions among the Muslims, the way the Muslim community tries to maintain social control, their institutions of marriage and family, their system of inheritance and festivals. We shall also look at some of the external influences on Muslim social practices.

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## **16.2 EMERGENCE OF ISLAM AND MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN INDIA**

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The word 'Islam' means submission to the will of Allah. The followers of Islam called Muslims believe that Quran is the true word of Allah. They believe the Quran was revealed to mankind through the medium of his Prophet and messenger, Muhammed. Islam came into being in the early seventh century in west central Arabia but its systematic formulation and establishment took place only in 622 AD, when Muhammed emigrated from the city of Mecca to Medina. Thus Muslim calendar records events from the first lunar month of that year July 16th 622 AD.

Prior to the emergence of Islam in Western Central Arabia, there were only clusters of warring tribes. Prophet Muhammed brought in a number of social reforms and established a well ordered set of beliefs and practices. Islam, as a religion, became established in this region and began to spread as a political community or "ummah" with its own laws and socio-political institutions. Today Muslims form about one seventh of the world's population. They are highly concentrated in Asia and Africa. Their tiniest concentration is in Oceania (includes Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia).

With regard to the emergence of Islam in India, it was introduced into India by Arab traders, who gradually established settlements on the western and eastern coasts of south India. They obtained permission to practice their religion. Sind was conquered by the Arabs early in the eighth century and north west Punjab by the Turks in the eleventh century. The Delhi Sultanate was established by 1206 AD. It was about the sixteenth century that Mughals built up an extensive empire. The establishment of Muslim government at any place was usually followed by the construction of a mosque and other related socio-religious activities. As the Muslim rule strengthened in India, their numbers also increased. The large numbers of Muslims in India are mainly due to conversion (Gazetteer of India 1965: 466-467).

Today numerically the Muslims comprise the largest minority community in India. According to the 1981 census Muslims constituted around twelve percent of the total population in India. In 1991 also their strength remained same as in the previous decade, around twelve percent of the total population. In 1981 Jammu and Kashmir had the highest percentage of Muslims (64.19 percent). In 1991, the Muslim population was highest in Assam. In Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Orissa the Muslim population is low. In Kerala and in West Bengal Muslims formed nearly 21 percent of the total population of those states in 1981. Assam (28.43), Kerala (23.3), Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal were the States, which had Muslim population in 1991 above national average. Some States such as Sikkim and Meghalaya had Muslim population less than 1 percent.

## 16.3 TENETS OF ISLAM: VIEW ON SOCIAL EQUALITY

As mentioned earlier in section 16.2, Islam means submission to or acceptance of the will of God. Its perfect form is found in the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah (acts and sayings of Prophet Muhammed). Islam is a monotheistic religion, i.e. it believes in one God who is considered the Creator of the universe, of time and space whose law governs everything that exists. The Quran is the word of God, revealed to his messenger, Prophet Muhammed, in order to lead mankind on a righteous path. The Muslims believe that there will be a 'Last Day' when God will judge all mankind. The belief is that on the judgement day, those who have led a good life will be rewarded and those who have led a bad life will be punished.

The important commands of Islam are prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, performance of all that is enjoined and abstinence from what is forbidden and *Jihad* or striving in the way set by God with all the resources at one's disposal. The social rules of behaviour include among other things the observation of the principles of equality and brotherhood among Muslims and of earning one's livelihood through personal labour. The totality of beliefs and practices is called the *Shariah* (path) of Islam (Gazetteer of India 1965: 468-469). Now let us examine the Islamic view of social equality in order to understand the link between what is believed and what is practised in relation to their social organisation.

Islam is claimed by its believers to be a religion of equality. There are a number of Quranic verses that instruct the Muslims that in evaluating an individual they should not accord much importance to such factors as race, nationality, or ancestry. What matters is the extent to which a Muslim practices the teachings of the Quran.

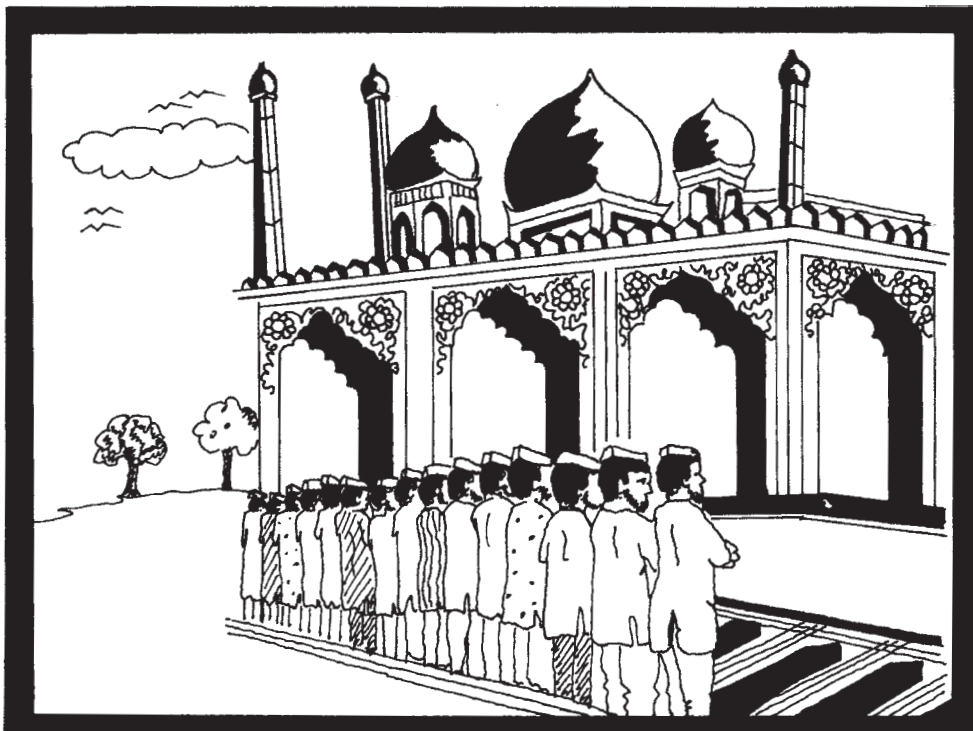


Fig. 16.1: Prayer at a mosque

Muslims insist that the principle of equality be upheld in day-to-day living. All Muslims irrespective of their group affiliation could say *namaz* together and that they need not observe restrictions on eating and drinking together whenever an occasion arises. It is also held that there are no formal restrictions on inter-group (caste) marriages, and that, in fact, Islam encourages it. The existence of an inter-group hierarchy is also denied. Figure 16.1 shows a prayer being held at a mosque.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Briefly describe the emergence of Islam. Use five lines for your answer.

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- ii) What are the important commands of Islam? Use five lines for your answer.

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- iii) What is the Islamic view on social equality? Use twelve lines for your answer.

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## 16.4 ASPECTS OF SOCIAL ORGANISATION

In this section, we shall look at certain aspects of Muslim social organisation. We find that though Quran recommends the egalitarian principle and provides the ordering principles for social behaviour. In reality there are social divisions among Muslims. Then we discuss the Islamic sanctions relating to family, marriage and inheritance. The next section deals with some festivals celebrated by Muslims. But first let us look at the social divisions in Muslim society.

### 16.4.1 Social Divisions among Muslims

The most popularly known division among the Muslims, all over the world, is the division between Shias and Sunnis. They hold the divergent views of and interpretations over Islamic texts and tradition. In India, a vast majority of Muslims are Sunnis (Gazetteer of India 1965). Apart from these kind of divisions there are also other kinds of social groupings among Muslims in India, which reflect the influence of Hindu beliefs and practices specially those relating to caste system.

Muslims in India are divided into two major sections, (i) those who claim to be the descendants of early Muslim immigrants and (ii) those of indigenous origin whose ancestors were converted to Islam. The former section has often been called *Ashraf* or *Shurafa* (singular *sharif*, Arabic words, meaning honourable), while the latter section does not have a specific name. In Bengal, according to Risley (1908), it was designated as *Ajlaf* (for clean occupational castes) and *Arzal* (for unclean castes).

Here, we will first discuss the *Ashraf* category of Muslims and then Muslim converts of Indian origin.

#### i) *Ashraf* category of Muslims

In the Muslim social hierarchy, the descendants of immigrants from Persia, Afghanistan, Arabia and Turkistan are recognised as the highest category of Muslims in India. The Indian Muslim castes, known as Sayyed, Shaikh, Mughal and Pathan comprise this category.

Sayyed are considered to be descended from Fatima's line. She was the daughter of the Prophet Muhammed. As direct descendants of the Prophet, Sayyed are accorded highest social status among the Muslims. They are subdivided into two lineage sections, Hasani and Husaini. After the names of the descendants of Hasan and Husain. Further subdivisions of Sayyed are called Jafari from Jafar as Sadiq, Rizvi from Ali ibn Murtaza and so on. Some Sayyed subdivisions are named after the disciples of Sayyed saints such as Chishti, Jalali and Qadiriya (Blunt 1931).

In the second rank of social hierarchy of the Muslims come the Shaikh. They are considered to be the descendants of early Muslim migrants of Mecca and Medina. They trace their descent from either (i) The Ansar or Ansari (the helpers), meaning those who provided shelter to the Prophet and his followers, or (ii) the Muhajirum the immigrants, meaning those who were citizens of Mecca and migrated to Medina as the followers of the Prophet.

The Mughal and Pathan subdivisions of the *Ashraf* rank third in the social hierarchy of the Muslims. Both are almost equal in social status. Those who

came to India with the Mughal (concept form of the word Mongol) armies and subsequently settled here were known as the Mughal. Their main subdivisions, based on different ethnic and tribal origins, are Chagtai, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmans and Qizilbarh.

The Pathan are descendants of those who migrated to India from Afghanistan or from the Pashto-speakers of the North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan. At present, regional subdivisions of Pathan Muslims are based on their prolonged residence in one or the other parts of India, e.g., Rohila Pathan are the inhabitants of Rohilkhand region. Mostly, the Pathan have four major sub-sections namely, Yusufzai, Lodhi, Ghani and Vakar. These sub-sections are further divided into sub-sub-sections, such as, Ghilzai, Mohammed, Mohammedzai, Tarin, Durrangi.

Among the *Ashraf* groups, are also included those pseudo-*Ashraf* who claim descent from one of the Ashraf caste. Ansari (1959-60: 37-38) has given several examples of attempts by some groups for raising their social status through their claims to Ashraf descent. Ansari has given a long list of certain castes, mentioned in the 1931 census report of Uttar Pradesh. These Muslim castes have tried to raise their social status by claiming new surnames and also corresponding high social status.

### ii) **Muslim Converts of Indian Origin**

The Muslim converts of Indian origin are generally called by their caste names. In this group are placed three distinct groups, namely, converts from high caste of the Hindus, converts from clean occupational castes and converts from unclean occupational castes (Bhangi or sweeper, Chamar or tanner). We will briefly speak about each of the three groups.

#### **Converts from High Castes**

In the social hierarchy of the Muslims in India, converts from high castes of the Hindus are placed below the rank of *Ashraf*. Many of the Rajput branches of a family in north India have Muslim branches, e.g., the Bais, Bhatti, Bisen, Chandel, Bargujar, Chauhan, Pawar, Rathore, Tomar. At times some of these groups try to mix with higher-ranking groups of Muslims (see Ansari 1959-60: 40). By and large these converts still follow some of the Hindu practices, e.g., they do not marry first cousins, either cross or parallel. Islamic law allows the marriage of near-kin whereas among the Hindus in north India, prohibition regarding marriage extends to distant degrees of kinship relations on both father's and mother's sides.

#### **Clean occupational Castes**

Clean castes are those, which are permitted contact with higher castes under certain rules. These are opposed to unclean castes which are not permitted any contact with higher castes. The matter of cleanliness is considered in terms of the nature of one's traditional occupation. Some occupations involve necessary contact with the persons of higher castes. People who perform such occupations belong to clean castes. For example, a barber has to necessarily come in close contact with his client. A barber belongs to a clean caste.

The castes, belonging to clean occupations rank below the *Ashraf* and Muslim Rajputs, comprise the bulk of Muslim population in India. The descendants of the converts from Hindu clean castes belong to this category. The process of



conversion often involved either groups in different castes of the whole caste group. Many castes of this kind have both Hindu and Muslim sections. For example, it is common to find a carpenter, tailor, laundryman, potter, barber, and goldsmith in both the Hindu and Muslim communities.

These sections operate exclusively in matters of family, marriage and kinship while they also act as one in trade union activities. We can divide these castes in three groups, namely, (a) castes without a Hindu counterpart in existence at present, (b) castes with a larger Muslim section and a smaller Hindu section, (c) castes which are opposite of (b), i. e., with a smaller Muslim section and a larger Hindu section. Let us briefly discuss each of these groups.

Ansari (1959-60: 41-42) includes the following castes of Uttar Pradesh in this group.

- a) Atishbaz (firework maker), Bhand (jester), Bhatiyara (innkeeper), Bhishti (water carrier), Gaddi (grazier), Momin Julaha (Muslim weaver), Mirasi (Musician), Qassab (butcher), and Faqir (beggar). According to Ansari, all these castes have exclusive Muslim following. Only in some cases there are Hindu castes with similar occupations. But these groups are known by different caste-labels. For example, a Bhishti (water carrier) in Hindu community is known as Kahar.

- b) Castes with larger Muslim and smaller Hindu section in Uttar Pradesh, according to Ansari (1959-60: 46) are known by the following names.

Darji (tailor), Dhuniya (cotton carder), Kunjra or Kabariya (green grocer), Manihar (bangle maker), Saigalgar (metal sharpener), and Rangrez (cloth printer).

Ansari's account of these castes is based mainly on his study of the 1931 census reports. It is possible that this situation has now changed. In fact, we need fresh data on this aspect to say something with certainty.

- c) Castes with larger Hindu than Muslim sections have obviously provided few followers to Islam. Speaking about Uttar Pradesh, Ansari (1959-60: 47) includes Dhobi (Laundry man), Kumhar (potter), Nai or Hajjam (Barber) and Teli (oil presser) in this group.

Muslim sections of these castes are identified on account of their separate caste councils (Panchayat). These are endogamous castes, practising their own ceremonies and customs.

### Unclean Castes

Lastly, we have the Muslim untouchables, occupying bottom place in the Muslim social hierarchy. These people do the menial tasks, including scavenging and sweeping. They are descendants of converts who retained their low social status along with their caste name, occupation and poverty. For example, a Bhangi (scavenger), either a Muslim or a non-Muslim, is not permitted to enter a mosque. In theory, it is possible for a Muslim Bhangi to pray in a mosque, but in practice his entry into a mosque is disapproved. On the other hand, an untouchable Muslim is permitted to learn Quran while an untouchable Hindu is not supposed to learn religious texts.

### 16.4.2 Caste and Kin Relationships

Having discussed social divisions among the Muslims, let us now see how

these divisions reflect the operation of caste and kin relationships in Muslim social organisation. Cultural characteristics constituting caste among the Hindus may in turn be used to evaluate the situation of Muslims in India. Such a discussion will help us to follow the interrelation between caste and kinship systems. We can see how caste relationships also act as kin groups. These cultural characteristics may be put as follows.

- i) caste is endogamous
- ii) it involves occupational specialisation
- iii) castes are hierarchically ordered
- iv) there are restrictions on social intercourse and commensality.

### i) **Endogamy: Zat & Biradari**

Muslims use the term **zat** (equivalent of caste) to express the purity of descent. The *zat* is, therefore, primarily an endogamous unit of society. The households belonging to each *zat* in the village conceive of themselves as a collectivity and designate themselves as ***bhai-band or biradari*** (literally caste-brotherhood). This solidarity among the members is not merely a fictional notion, but rests on demonstrable kinship linkages. Since all the households belonging to each caste are descendants of one common ancestor, or a few related common ancestors, who had settled in the village at the time it was established or subsequently related by ties of common descent. On account of the custom of preferential cousin marriage prevalent among some *bhai-band* or *biradaris*, there always exists a tie of descent among them.

The *biradari* resembles caste in the features of its inner structure, e.g. membership is determined only by birth and the group boundaries are maintained through endogamy. However, violations of the rules of endogamy are not dealt with in an identical manner; they range from mere disapproval to outright excommunication. Among the *Ashraf*, the caste brotherhoods are subdivided again into *Biadharis* (marriage circles) to provide a restricted circle in which to choose a wife. Sometimes the endogamous circle becomes so narrow that it includes only the extended kinship group of the person's parents. Such a limited kinship group is generally termed a *kuf*. Whereas the *Biradari* generally functions for all ceremonial intercourse, the *biadhari* (marriage circles) within the *Biradari* is restricted to the choosing of wives. The Muslim Rajputs are very endogamous, but do not marry first cousins as the Ashrafs do.

#### **Activity 1**

Read carefully the section on the Muslim concept of 'Biradari'. In your own community what does 'Biradari' constitute? Write a small note of a page on "Composition of Biradari in my Community". Compare, if possible, what you have noted down with those written by others at the Study Centre.

Some of the occupational castes such as the Qasab (butcher), Manihar (bracelet maker) are almost strictly endogamous and they generally do not marry outside their castes. Certain other occupational castes, such as Julaha (weaver), Nai (barber), Kumhar (potter) may even practice isogamy (marrying equals). Finally

the Bhangi (scavenger) caste is confined to itself for marriage purposes. A clean caste person would not and does not like to establish marriage relations with Bhangis.

## ii) Occupational Specialisation

The second attribute of caste or *Biradari*, which resembles the Hindu caste, is their association with a traditional occupation. An exception to this is the various *Ashraf* groups whose names are indicative of their origin or descent. But in the case of many others groups the various names are indicative of the respective traditional occupations.

Since the division of castes entails a degree of occupational specialisation amongst them, the relationship among the different castes tends toward economic interdependence. The different castes participate in this system in different capacities according to their place in the productive organisation revolving around land. The *Ashraf* groups, who are predominantly landowners and whose principal occupation in the village is cultivation, form the nucleus of the system of economic interdependence among the castes. They are referred to as the *jajmans*. Muslim castes, whose names imply a traditional occupation, render specialised and traditional economic and ritual services for their *jajmans*. Some of the Muslim castes in this respect are Barhai (carpenter), Darzi (tailor), Dhobi (laundryman) Kumhar (potter), Lohar (blacksmith), Nai or Hajjam (barber), Sunar (goldsmith) Teli (oil presser) Bhishti (water carrier), Gaddi (grazier), Julaha (weaver), Qasab (butcher) etc. Each of these occupational castes, with both Hindu and Muslim section, is sometimes united for trade-union purposes. But for social and ceremonial purposes each section is generally limited to itself. In cases of marriages, ceremonial feasts, ritual observances, each communal section of every caste functions as a distinct and separate unit.

## iii) Hierarchical Ordering

The third important attribute of caste is the hierarchical ordering of various Muslim groups. Every Muslim caste has its definite place within the total social organisation. Each caste is considered to be either high or low in relation to other castes. The *Ashraf* castes top the social ranking when compared to the other Muslim castes. Further, every Muslim belongs to a certain caste, his/her social status is, therefore, defined and often fixed according to the status of the caste to which he/she belongs. All the Muslim castes, like Hindu castes, are graded into a hierarchical scheme. The *Ashrafs*, almost by common consensus, are assigned the highest position in the ranking strata by virtue of their supposed descent from Prophet Mohammad. The Bhangis and Chamars are assigned the lowest rank. The Muslim Rajputs are ranked lower than *Ashraf* but are considered higher than the various clean occupational castes. The latter are superior to the Muslim untouchables but inferior to Muslim Rajputs.

## iv) Restrictions on Social Intercourse and Commensality

Finally, one observes the presence of restrictions on social intercourse and commensalism (i.e. eating together) among the various Muslim castes. The various *Ashraf* groups observe no restriction in inter-group commensality among themselves. There are, however, several restrictions on commensal relations with the rest of the caste groupings who are considered inferior to the *Ashrafs*.

The various *Ashraf* groups assign low status to the non-Ashraf groups because it is maintained that the latter do not observe certain ritual cleanliness (*paki*).

### 16.4.3 Social Control

Having described how Muslim social organisation is internally differentiated and hierarchically ranked, we shall now turn to other organisational aspects of Muslim society, specially those which restrict and control individuals and groups within the prescribed normative framework. Such an organisation takes two forms: direct control through a governing body, such as a council, and indirect control through public opinion. The Hindu social organisation operates and maintains itself through an operation of both these forms. Let us look at both of them in a little more detail. When particular acts of individuals are not approved by their caste fellows they become the victim of severe criticism. If a violation is serious, the criticism takes the form of action and the offender faces a social boycott the extent of which varies according to the nature of the offence. The other mode of control, through an authoritative body, is generally practised among the occupational castes where such a body is known as the panchayat. membership in the caste panchayat generally includes all the adult males of the caste; the caste headman, known as *Sarpanch* is usually elected. In a situation of emergency, generally when a member of the caste has committed an offence, the whole panchayat is summoned to hear the case. The caste panchayat then gives its judgement. The most frequent punishment among them is a strict social boycott which is termed as *hugga pani band* (i.e. such a person is not welcomed or entertained by fellow caste members) or *zat biradari bahar* (expulsion from the caste brotherhood).

Among *Ashraf* and some of the higher occupational castes like higher Hindu castes, no authoritative caste council functions. Instead, the general caste opinion of approval and disapproval passes through the communicative network among caste members. Among the *Ashrafs*, joint family functions as the basic unit which controls its members in almost all social and personal matters; in the case of most occupationally related castes which have well organised caste Panchayats, the joint family remains comparatively less significant in social affairs. Among Muslims, Bhangi (Scavenger), Dhobi (washerman), Teli (oil presser), Julaha (weaver) etc. have well organised panchayats which function both as trade unions and as social organisations.

After looking at the pattern of social control among the Muslims, we will discuss in the next section the patterns of family, marriage and inheritance among them. Before proceeding to the next section, let us complete Check Your Progress 2.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- (i) What are the three distinct groups representing caste like subdivisions among Muslim converts? Use five lines for your answer.

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(ii) What is zat among the Muslim? Use six lines for your answer.

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(iii) What are the means by which the Muslim community in India exercises social control? Use five lines for your answer.

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**16.4.4 Family, Marriage and Inheritance**

The regulation of the Shariah along with the traditions of the Prophet provides us with a framework for identifying practices relating to Muslim marriage, family and inheritance. The Shariah consists of regulations pertaining to marriage, family and inheritance. The traditions of the Prophet include records of the Prophet’s own manner of living and pronouncements on various matters of daily life. These traditions have become a source of normative guidance for Muslim social life. Let us discuss these traditions relating to family, marriage and inheritance in Muslim society in greater detail.

**i) Family**

Muslims, like other communities in India, live in small and large households. Both types of families, i.e., joint family and nuclear family, are found among the Muslims. The size of the family varies from four to eight members or as large as twenty five in number. Vast majority of the joint families are located in the rural areas and more nuclear families are located in urban areas.

**Patrilineal and Matrilineal Family:** Muslim family is usually patrilocal and patrilineal. After marriage the couple establishes the family at the place of the husband. Exceptions to patrilineal family are rare but not altogether absent. For instance, with the absence of a male heir, the head of the family may invite his daughter and her conjugal family to establish residence in his house. In such a situation, son of the daughter is adopted and becomes the legal heir to property. Another example of departure from the normative type of patrilocal and patrilineal family is the matrilineal families found in Lakshadweep Islands, Malabar district (Kerala) and Ratnagiri districts (Maharashtra) in India (Saiyed, A.R. and Saiyed, V.V. 1982: 117).

**Family Break-up:** In Islam, celibacy is discouraged and Muslims are enjoined to marry and multiply. Although divorce is a common phenomenon among

Muslims, Islam does not permit divorce to be taken lightly. This is indicated in the Prophet's words, "of all things Allah has made lawful for his servants, the most hateful to him is divorce," (Saiyed, A.R. & Saiyed, V.V., 1982:115). Thus Islam wanted to provide both for family stability as well as divorce in situations where marital maladjustments render healthy family life impossible.

**Husband and Wife:** Among Muslims, it is the duty of the husband or head of the family to provide for the maintenance of the family. In Islam, the wife has a legal right to be maintained by the husband. The social life of the majority of the Muslim women is confined within the family. She spends a major portion of her time in taking care of household matters and in the upbringing of children. Her social and emotional needs are fulfilled by her family. In fact her role and function in the family determines her social position in the family.

**Sons and Daughters:** Within the Muslim family sons and daughters generally do not enjoy equal social position (Menon 1981: 84). In the past even the birth of a girl was considered as an unfortunate and unpleasant event in the Muslim family (Menon 1981: 17). However, these days children are given equal treatment in routine general matters. But in important matters such as education, choice of career, choice of partner in marriage, the daughters are sometimes discriminated and sons are favoured.

**Segregation of Women:** Another notable practice among the Muslim families is '*pardah*' or seclusion of women. Majority of Muslims still live in joint families, where women reside in separate part of the house called '*Zanana*' (Menon 1981:21). The seclusion of women from participation in certain spheres of life is enforced through the custom of '*pardah*'. In the past, this custom was considered as a symbol of higher social position of the family. Social change and education has made some dent in this custom. Yet even today this custom remains an important aspect of the Muslim family.

### ii) Marriage

In Block 2, unit 7 on Marriage and its Changing Patterns, we described some aspects of a Muslim marriage. Let us examine here the essential features of Muslim marriage in the context of Islamic religion, which has provided the ideological foundation for social behaviour.

**Nikah:** Marriage among Muslims is known by the Arabic word '*Nikah*'. It takes place in the form of contract and is not considered as sacrosanct (exceedingly sacred). It is obligatory in character. Muslim law maintains that the main objective of '*Nikah*' is procreation and legalisation of children. The essential elements of Muslim marriage are: a) marriage proposal is made by or on behalf of the concerned parties; b) acceptance of the proposal in the presence of one or two male and two female witnesses; c) settlement of Dower or *Mehr*.

The arrangement of marriage is largely the responsibility of the parents, particularly that of the father. In the past, bride or bridegroom had no say in the selection of his or her partner. This disadvantage was even more glaring in the case of female. With the passage of time male members of Muslim community have acquired some freedom in the choice of their spouse. In case of woman the situation has not much changed



**Age at Marriage:** Islamic law does not specify any particular age limit for marriage. The only condition is that a minor girl cannot join the husband after marriage. Although young girls may be married but the girl should join the husband only after attaining maturity. This interpretation is not related to age but to attainment of puberty. According to the latest amendment of 'Child Marriage Restraint Act' of 1929 the minimum marriageable age of male and female is 21 years and 18 years respectively. Nevertheless early marriage is still widely prevalent in the Muslim community.

**Marriage Ceremony:** The ceremony of Muslim marriage, i.e. '*Nikah*' is conducted by 'kazi'. It is customary to recite verses from Quran so as to seek Allah's blessings for the couple. Consent is sought from both the individuals. In order to complete the marriage ceremony, a formal document '*Nikahnama*' is prepared. Notwithstanding other aspects, '*Nikahnama*' specifies the nature of Dower or *Mehr*. *Mehr* is a particular sum of money or property, which the bride is entitled to receive from bridegroom in consideration of marriage. It's a sort of guarantee for the security of the woman. *Mehr* is an indispensable custom without which no Muslim marriage can acquire social or legal legitimacy. *Mehr* is not a fixed amount of money or property. It varies according to the social and economic status of the concerned families. The mode of payment is also flexible. It can be paid either immediately after the marriage or postponed till some mutually agreeable future date.

***Mehr* and Dowry:** Islamic Law never mentioned about dowry. But in reality it has become a common practice. Broadly speaking, the amount of *Mehr* has been reduced to a mere symbolic value. Usually it is several times smaller than the dowry, which the parents of many girls pay at the time of marriage. Thus the ritualisation of *Mehr* and the increasing practice of dowry have adversely affected the status of Muslim women and their marriage prospects.

**Polygamy:** A notable practice associated with Muslim marriage is polygamy or plurality of wives. In Islam, a Muslim male may have four wives at a time. However, he must be able to treat them on equal and just bases. In India, this practice of plurality of wives became popular during the Muslim Rule. These days it is becoming less prevalent. It has considerably decreased among the urban and educated sections of Muslim population.

Islam permits marriage between both parallel and cross cousins. A notable preferential choice is whereby a male marries his father's brother's daughter. Mohammedan Law also provides for certain restrictions in marriage so far as other communities are concerned. A Muslim woman cannot marry a '*Kithabian*' or non-Muslim. But a male can marry a '*Kithabia*'. Let us make it clear that '*Kithabia*'(n) is an individual who believes in a religion revealed through a book (other than Quran) but does not engages in the practice of 'idol' or 'fire' worship, etc.

**Divorce and Remarriage:** Under Muslim Personal Law, husband enjoys unlimited freedom in matters of divorce. He is permitted to divorce his wife according to his own pleasure or without assigning any reason or cause. On the other hand, a woman does not enjoy such a freedom. This custom has resulted in man's domination and power over the woman. Although the Prophet gave to the women, the right of obtaining separation on reasonable grounds but in practice this is not so. In general there are two types of divorce, i.e.

'*talaq*' and '*khol*'. *Talaq* is exjudicial divorce and it becomes effective when the husband unilaterally pronounces the word '*Talaq*' thrice. In '*Khol*', divorce takes place by mutual consent.

After divorce a woman is not free to remarry immediately. She is supposed to wait for a specified period before seeking remarriage. This period is called '*iddat*'. On the whole '*talaq*' is considered the most detestable custom in Islam. In India, with the 'Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act', 1939, Muslim woman got the right to divorce her husband on certain specified grounds but men still enjoy much greater freedom as compared to women in matters of divorce.

The Quran and Islamic tradition favour widow marriage. The responsibility for marrying a widow lies with her parents. Although the provision for widow marriage is clearly stated yet until recent times such marriages were presented because of socio-cultural considerations.

**Inheritance:** Though Islamic society is patrilineal, women in Islam enjoy the right to inherit property. Islamic jurisprudence defines not only the scope of the property a woman may own-by inheritance, by gift and by the fruits of her own labour but also recognises the absolute ownership of it. Both daughters and widows inherit property, including land and houses, from their parents and husbands. Islamic law grants women, even if childless, remarried or divorced complete rights over their inherited property. However, women inherit smaller shares of wealth than men do, a son's share is twice that of a daughter.

### 16.4.5 Life Cycle Rituals and Festivals

Life cycle rituals and festivals constitute important elements of every religious community. They serve, apart from other things, the purpose of reaffirming one's faith in one's religion. Some of the (important Muslim ceremonies include life-cycle rituals around birth, marriage and death. A few important ones are (i) the naming of the child (ii) circumcision which is done by a barber or in a hospital (iii) the *Bismillah* ceremony, which initiates a child into reading Quran. Feasts and celebrations associated with these ceremonies and festivals not only make for social solidarity among the believers but also allow people from different socio-religious backgrounds to meet and know each other. Let us now look at some important festivals among Muslims. They have two main festivals, namely, *Id-ul-Fitr* and *Id-ul-Azha*.

On the last day of *Ramzan* and on the sighting of the moon, we have *Id-ul-Fitr*. A prayer service is held. Muslims exchange embraces and greetings after prayers and participate in feasting and merriment. As is clear, these major religious activities and festivals make for social solidarity among Muslims and strengthen their social organisation

*Ramzan* occurs in the ninth month of the calendar. It is the month of self-purification, and commiseration with the poor. Quran is recited regularly.

Another important festival is *Id-UL-Adha* or *Bakr-Id*. It is celebrated on the tenth day of the month *Dhul Hijja*. This involves a sacrifice made by pilgrims and performed as part of the ceremonies of *Hajj* in Arabia. The ceremony is observed simultaneously by all Muslims the world over. The Muslims offer food among household members, friends and relatives and the poor. The celebration of the Prophet's birthday, *Idi-Milad* and death anniversaries of

famous saints have also been added to the list of Muslim festivals. Besides these festivals, many Muslims celebrate several Hindu festivals. For example, the Moghul converts gave official status to celebration of *Diwali* and *Holi*.

*Mubartam*, is the first month of the Muslim calendar, commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Husain. Ta'zia processions of the Imams grave are carried out on this day. *Muharram* is not a festival in the usual sense of the term but a commemoration and a period of mourning. On the appearance of the new moon the *fatihah* (opening chapter of the Quran) is recited in the *imam bara* and some refreshment (*sherbet*) taken. The observance lasts ten to twelve days.

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## 16.5 EXTERNAL INFLUENCE ON MUSLIM SOCIAL PRACTICES

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Let us in this section mention some studies which indicate the nature of outside influences on Muslim social practices. Ahmed (1974: 326) in his study of Muslim family in Bihar, found that the importance of '*mehr*' has decreased in the families he studied. Muslims there had incorporated the practice of dowry. Saiyed (1976) has observed that the Muslim Kokni women of Ratnagiri do not inherit landed property though Islamic law provides for it. D'Souza (1976: 167) in his study of Moplah Muslims of Kerala points out that Moplah marriage is considered incomplete without the Hindu function "*Kalyanam*". There is ample evidence to show that British rule and the national movement for independence had made a dent on the Muslim *purdah* system. Educated Muslim women discarded their *purdah* and began to emerge prominently in spheres that were hitherto inaccessible to them. Quarratulain Hyder (1979) has pointed out that literature and journalism became the domain of Muslim women in India. However, it has to be mentioned here that the process of emancipation was mainly confined to the urban middle class women (Saiyed A.R. and Saiyed V.V. 1982:123).

### Activity 2

Give examples which show the influence of Muslim social organisation in the following fields.

- 1) Music
- 2) Food
- 3) Dance
- 4) Literature
- 5) Architecture
- 6) Painting

To help you out, here is an example that the *sherwani* and *churidar* are dresses, which reflect the influence of Muslim style of dressing up. Compare your list, if possible, with those written by other students at the Study Centre.

These outside influences, however, have not led to a notable decrease in concern with religious socialisation and the promotion of religiosity among the Muslims. Muslim parents, irrespective of their group status or socio-economic status insist on providing religious education to their children. Emphasis on daily prayers, fasting, group recitation of Quran by women are some features of this concern for religious training. In a pluralistic society like India, Muslims as a minority group seem to feel that it is their duty to cultivate an Islamic religious cultural identity in their children (Saiyed and Saiyed V.V. 1982:132).

In fact today there is a process of **Islamisation** going on wherein various Muslim groups and sub-groups are giving up their practices and customs which resemble those that are present in Hindu communities. In practice this has meant greater observance of their religious traditions and marked turning toward Islamic practices and symbols under the influences of Islamisation. Muslims are rigidly adhering to the law of the *Shariat*. The process of Islamisation has provided a stronger internal unity to Muslims and made them effective politically, as are other organised groups.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Tick the right answe of the following question.  
What is the Islamic view of marriage?
  - a) Islam does not consider marriage as obligatory.
  - b) Islam looks upon marriage as essential and obligatory.
  - c) Islam encourages celibacy.
- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark T or F against each statement.
  - a) Divorce is permitted in Islam.
  - b) In India, all Muslim families have been found to be patrilineal and patrilocal.
  - c) In Islam, women do not have the right to inherit property.
  - d) The Hindu influences on Islamic social practices can be seen in many areas like marriage, family and inheritance.
  - e) *Ramzan* is a Muslim festival celebrated in the first month of the Muslim Calendar.
- iii) What is meant by Islamisation? Use seven lines for your answer.

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## 16.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have described some important aspects of Muslim social organisation. We began by a brief description of the emergence of Islam in general and growth of the Muslim community in India. We talked of the important tenets of Islam with a special focus on its view of social equality. We noted that the word Islam means submission to or acceptance of the will of God. Islam is a monotheistic religion and Quran is the most sacred and holy book of Muslims. In our examination of the aspects of social organisation we looked at the social divisions among Muslims as well as the means they employ to exercise social control. We examined the caste like divisions among Muslims and the role of the Panchayat on exercising social control. Marriage, family, and inheritance are described under the heading 'Aspects of Social Organisation'. We focussed on rules regarding marriage, divorce and inheritance. Regarding family we observed that the Muslim family is by and large patrilineal and patrilocal. We concluded our examination with a note on the external influences on Muslim social practices.

## 16.7 KEYWORDS

<i>Ashraf or Shurafa</i>	Both are plural forms of the Arabic word <i>Sharif</i> , meaning honourable. The groups belonging to this category claim to be the descendants of early Muslim immigrants.
<i>Ajlaf</i>	A convert Muslim, especially from a lower Hindu caste.
<i>Bhai-band or biradari</i>	A related group consisting of a member of a caste, literally, brotherhood or an association of kinsmen.
<b>Islamisation</b>	Cultural process whereby groups and individuals distinguish themselves from non-Muslims by purifying themselves of the so called un-Islamic customs and practices.
<i>Jajman</i>	Patron, the recipient of ritual and economic services under the <i>jajmani</i> system.
<i>Namaz</i>	Prayer, the Islamic form of worship supposed to be performed five times daily.
<i>Paki</i>	Ritual purity required before prayers and other religious observances.
<i>Zat</i>	Urdu equivalent of the word, ' <i>Jati</i> ' meaning the effective endogamous unit of the caste system.

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## 16.8 FURTHER READING

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## 16.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Islam means act of submission to Allah. Its holy book is the Quran, and this was revealed to man through Muhammad the Prophet. It came into existence in the early seventh century in West Central Arabia. Its systematic formulation took place in 622 A.D. when Muhammad went from Mecca to Medina.
- ii) The important commands of Islam are prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, performance of all that is demanded of a Muslim. Abstinence from what is forbidden and striving for what is set as the right path by Allah are also a part of the commands.
- iii) According to the teachings of Quran all men are equal and no one should be evaluated on the basis of such factors like race, ancestry or nationality. The principle of equality is to be upheld in day-to-day life. Islam expects every Muslim irrespective of his group affiliations or status, to say 'namaz' together and not to observe any kind of restrictions on social interaction relating to marriage and commensality.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The three distinct groups are
  - a) converts from Hindu high castes
  - b) converts from clean occupational castes
  - c) converts from unclean occupational castes
- ii) Muslims use the term *zat* to express the purity of descent. *Zat* is thus an endogamous unit of society. *Zat* also involves occupational specialisation. They are hierarchically ordered and tend to have an ideological and religious basis.
- iii) The Muslims exercise social control with the help of direct means through a governing body like a council or panchayat and indirect means through public opinion such as social boycott by the community of which the violator is a member.



- i) b
- ii) (a) T  
(b) F  
(c) F  
(d) T  
(e) F
- iii) Islamisation is a process of social change wherein various groups of Muslims give up their practices and customs, which resemble those that are present in Hindu communities. It has also meant strict adherence to Islamic practices and symbols.

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## UNIT 17 CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ORGANISATION

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### Structure

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### 17.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit describes the social organisation of Christians in India. A study of this unit will enable you to

- explain the origin of Christianity in India
- list and describe the common features of Christian faith
- describe the Christian social organisation in terms of family, the role of the priest, church and Christmas among Syrian Christians of Kerala
- identify and explain the areas of relationship between Christian and Hindu social life in Kerala.

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## 17.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit we have looked at Muslim social organisation. In this unit we are going to familiarise you with the social organisation of another community, namely, the Christian community. Since the community of Christians has different bases of social organisation depending upon the region of a particular group, we have chosen one specific community as an example. It is called the Syrian Christian community of Kerala. Its social organisation is discussed here with reference to family and church.

The spatial and demographic dimensions of the Christianity in India are examined in section 17.2 Then we have a brief discussion on the origin of Christianity in India, with special reference to Kerala and Goa, and the eastern and north eastern parts of the country. Next, we describe the basic tenets of the Christianity. Then we begin with our case study of the Syrian Christian community of Kerala also known as the Christians of St. Thomas. Here, we discuss the case of Syrian Christian family in India. Here, we examine the role and status of the husband's mother, husband's father, the grandparents and the mother's brother in the family. Besides these we also discuss the aspects of patrilocal residence, patrilineage and inheritance in the Christian family. Next, we describe the role of priest, church and Christmas in Syrian Christian social organisation. Lastly, we analyse how the Hindu rituals and the elements of castes are in practice among the Christians of Kerala.

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## 17.2 ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

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In this section, we shall first discuss the spatial and demographic dimensions of the Christian community in India and then state briefly how Christianity first spread in Kerala and Goa and later in the eastern and north-eastern states.

### 17.2.1 Christian Community: The Spatial and Demographic Dimensions

In India there is no one homogeneous Christian community, but there are many different ones, organised around regional, language and sectarian bases. There are Kerala, Goan Tamil, Anglo-Indians in North India, Naga and North East Indian Christians, who are different in their language, socio-cultural practices and economic status. It is difficult to speak about a general Christian way of life in India for these very reasons. There are many churches, many denominations or groups, many sects or brotherhoods among them.

According to the 1981 Census there were 18 million Christians in India and the percentage of Christians in India's population accounted to 2.43 per cent. The total Christian population had almost kept up with the national increase of 24.69 per cent over 1971-81. In 1991 their population was 2.32 percent of the total population. However, the distribution of Christian population has been very uneven in India. There are dense settlements of Christians in some parts of the country while in other regions there are small and scattered Christian communities. In Andhra Pradesh, in the year 1981, the Christians represented 2.68 percent of the total population. In Kerala the percentage of Christians was 20.6. So also Manipur had a 29.7 per cent Christian population.

In fact, Meghalaya with 52.6 percent and Nagaland with 80.2 percent registered the highest concentration of Christian populations. Tamil Nadu had 5.78 percent Christian which was over twice the national average. Very low percentages of the Christian population had been recorded in some central and northern states of the community. For example, Jammu and Kashmir 0.14 percent, Madhya Pradesh 0.7 percent, Rajasthan 0.12 percent and Uttar Pradesh 0.15 percent. In 1991, the highest concentration of Christians was found in Nagaland (87.46 percent) and Meghalaya (85.73 percent). In some States such as Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana etc. the Christian population was very low.

### 17.2.2 Christianity in Kerala and Goa

Christianity came to Kerala through the work of St. Thomas, a disciple of Jesus in the first century and in the fourth century through the influence of traders from Syria. Accounts show that St. Thomas, a follower of Jesus, converted several Nambuthiri Brahmins to Christianity. Thomas is said to have landed in the ancient port of Muziris in 52 A.D.

The Christians of St. Thomas were very prosperous, and historians write that the local kings were very pleased with them and gave them several privileges.

In 345 A.D. a Christian, Thomas of Cana set out with permission from the Bishop of his land, and came to Kerala with a number of Christians from Jerusalem, Baghdad and Nineveh.

The Indian Church of St. Thomas came into a close relationship with the Persian Church from the time of the arrival of this immigrant group. However, in the sixteenth century, Persia lost control over the Indian church for the St. Thomas Christians came under the ritual domination of the Portuguese who had arrived in India for purposes of trade. When the Portuguese arrived in India they found a well established Christian Church, where the believers spoke of themselves as being “the Christians of St. Thomas”. They are also called the Syrian Christians.

This period began with the ‘discovery’ of a sea route to India by Vasco de Gama in 1498. Trade was not their only concern. The priests who followed the first Portuguese travellers and discoverers began the establishment of Portuguese rituals in the Churches of Kerala. The Christians of St. Thomas loved their ancient ceremonies, and they did not want to transfer their loyalty from the Patriarch of the East (who was like their Pope) to the Pope of Rome.

It was only in 1653 that the St. Thomas Christians were able to free themselves from Portuguese domination. At this time a division was created in the community of St. Thomas Christians, between those who followed the Pope, and those who followed the Patriarch of the Eastern churches. Historical events, such as the coming of the English divided the community into several more groups. Some of these are called the Anglican (now a part of the church of South India) Mar Thoma, Evangelical and the **Yakoba**. The Yakoba are themselves divided into two parties because of a church quarrel. Yet, all these groups or denominations share a similar culture. The church practices of each of the group is somewhat different.

In 1509 Alfonso de Albuquerque saw that if the Portuguese were to consolidate their commercial interests they must have a permanent residential interest in India. Goa became central in this interest, and along with administrators the ships of the Portuguese also carried priests. Evangelical work among the native people of Goa began with the work of Franciscan friar Antony de Loueo in 1517. In 1542, Francis Xavier arrived in Goa, and soon after he began his work amongst the Paravas, the fisher-folk in the Coromandel Coast.

The Dutch followed the Portuguese in the colonisation of India and consequently, its commercial exploitation. However, they were not zealous in spreading the Christian faith, and they did not arouse the deep hostility that the Portuguese did. The English followed the Dutch, and they spread the Gospel through missionaries (Menachery 1973).

### **17.2.3 Christianity in the East and North East**

In 1793, Carey and Thomas of the Baptist Missionary society arrived in Kolkata, where they proceeded to translate and print the Bible in the vernacular. In 1806, Rev. Caludius Buchanan was already writing about the importance of the dissemination of the Bible in Malabar, and he was aided in his plans by the British Resident in Travancore. Benjamin Bailey spent decades in the translation of the Bible in Kottayam, Kerala.

In the North East hills of India the first attempt to preach Christianity was made by William Carey, the founder of Serampore College near Calcutta. He sent one of his early converts named Krishna Chandra Pal to the Khasi hills in 1813.

Christian Missions were from a very early period interested in education. Western ideas were introduced through the schools and colleges set up by Christian missionaries, and in turn had its impact in the growth of the National movement. We know how close Mahatma Gandhi was to C.F. Andrews and how the gentleness of Jesus' life made a profound impact on the ideas on non-violence that Gandhi evolved, for liberating the country from its colonial fetters (Neil 1984). Since it is not possible to present an account of the social organisation of all Christian communities in India, we are here selecting only one section of Indian Christians for this purpose. In the following sections you will learn about the Syrian Christian social organisation.

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## **17.3 TENETS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH**

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However, in spite of regional variations as described above there are certain tenets, which unite Christian life and experience all over the country. The first of these is that all Christians believe that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is their saviour. They believe that Jesus was born to Mary, a virgin, and that God, the Father, sent him to redeem people of their sins. The concept of virgin birth, is accepted alike by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians in India. Christianity asserts that Jesus was the Son of God. However, Jesus' father on earth was Joseph. He was a carpenter who protected Mary and took her away to Bethlehem where the baby Jesus was born in a stable. The story of the poverty surrounding Jesus' birth is a very important one for Christians. It establishes the background of much of what Jesus taught, and the manner in which his teachings celebrated poverty, meekness and humility.

### 17.3.1 The Life of Jesus

The life of Jesus is the central principle around which Christians in India organise their ritual life. The two most important religious festivals of the Christians are Christmas and Easter. Christmas marks the anniversary of Jesus' birth, and is celebrated by attending the Church, eating festival food, wearing new clothes and greeting friends and neighbours. In India, there would be differences among Christians in the kind of festive food that is served, or the kind of clothes that are worn. These are, however, regional differences of custom. The belief that Jesus' birth must be celebrated and this celebration unites Bengali, Punjabi, Tamil, Goan, Malayali, Konkani or Naga Christians. Similarly, all Christians mourn the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday, and celebrate his Resurrection, or victory over death on Easter Sunday. All Christians believe that Jesus was killed by his enemies who hated what he taught; but on the third day, he arose from the tomb and convinced his followers of his divinity, for soon after he ascended to heaven. The Christian church then came into existence with the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus. The Eucharist service, which is the central part of Christian rituals, enacts the life of Jesus. It is like a sacred drama, which is performed so that the Christians may continually remember the life of Jesus, hear again his teachings, and try to live their lives in the way that he taught his disciples. Let us now briefly discuss the various elements of Christian faith.

### 17.3.2 Various Elements of Christian Faith

Christianity is a historical religion, and all Indian Christians accept that their Master, born in the Middle East, was Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible is the sacred book of the Christians. It provides the basis for Christian beliefs and the norms for Christian behaviour. The Four Gospels (a part of the Bible) of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to be found in the Bible are often read by all Christians in the country. These are memories of Jesus' life; they affirm that Jesus is authentically human, as well as Lord, Messiah (Christos, the Son of God).

For all Christians in India as elsewhere, the reality of God is affirmed in Jesus' life on earth. All Christians accept the propriety of speaking of God in a three-fold manner, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a problem of great theological complexity, and among Christians there can be differences in the interpretation of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let us, for our purposes merely say that all Christians believe in the Trinity. They believe also that the Universe has been divinely created, that people are sinful, and that Jesus was sent to earth so that people and God could become reconciled. The Christian Church was founded by Jesus and his spirit is constantly present and sustains all the Church and all believers. Finally, all Christians believe that all human life (human history) must one day close, and then will follow the day of judgement when people will either be rewarded or punished according to the kinds of life they have led.

#### Activity 1

Read the section on the Tenets of Christian Faith carefully. Now describe briefly the tenets of your own religion, or, any other religion. Compare, if possible, your note with those of other students at your Study Centre.



## Check Your Progress 1

- i) How did Christianity come to Kerala? Use three lines for your answer.

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- ii) Which colonial powers were interested in evangelisation (teaching and spreading the ideas of the Gospels)? Use three lines for your answer.

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- iii) Briefly state the teachings of Christianity. Use eight lines for your answer.

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## 17.4 THE CHRISTIANS OF ST. THOMAS: AN EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ORGANISATION

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Christianity, like any other religion, is a way of life. Differences in the social organisation of Christianity will arise from the historical, cultural, political and geographical environment in which the community is founded. Thus the social organisation of Christians in Goa, Delhi, Punjab, Nagaland or Tamil Nadu will differ from one another depending upon the region and its culture and/or sectarian differences. The social organisation of Christians of St. Thomas, called the Syrian Christians, has been described in order to show you the specific nature of organisation of a particular Christian community in India. It is only one example of Christian life in our country, but it may help you to understand what Christianity is about. The following sections describe Christian social organisation in terms of family, the role of Priest, Church and Christmas among Syrian Christians of Kerala. The interaction between and some common rituals of the Christians and Hindus have also been referred. In the earlier sections, the origins of Christians in India and some of their basic beliefs have been given. All this should give you some ideas regarding the social life and organisation of the Christians in India.

### 17.4.1 The Christian Family

The Syrian Christian family is a very close knit one. Let us look at Christian family relationships, and see what they say about this particular Indian Christian community.

#### The Husband's Mother

When a Christian bride enters her husband's home, her husband's mother would have a very important role to play in her new life. Close relations between a Syrian Christian husband and wife, specially in the early years, are thought to be unseemly. When they move into an independent household with the birth of children, that husband and wife complement each other, but a certain reserve always marks their relationship.

The closeness of family bonds, which characterises the Syrian Christian family, is a tribute in fact to the relationship between a woman and her son's wives. It is not merely cooking and the organisation of the household that a bride learns from her husband's mother. She learns the Christian virtues of charity and piety as well. However, there are often tensions between the two women, since the relationship is an unequal one.

#### The Husband's Father

The relation of a Syrian Christian woman to her husband's father is one of respect. He is the head of the household till the time of his death. However, by the time he is about sixty years of age, he may retire from active social life. While actual control of property may be in the hands of the sons, the father is treated with great respect, and his advice is always sought. It is he who leads the family at prayer when after dinner the family kneels together on the carefully laid out reed mats. Further, it is the father who gives formal permission, necessary economic assistance and the blessings when a couple want to set up house separately. The relationship between sons and fathers is one marked by devotion, affection, obedience and respect on the one side, and by patronage and authoritarianism on the other. This relation, full of tensions, is also reflected in the relation of the bride to her husband's father.

For many Christians, while they live in **nuclear households** (consisting of parents and their unmarried children) the ideal family that they generally desire are **three generations**, in which all the sons bring their brides into the paternal households, and live all together with their children. However, in practice, amongst the Syrian Christians, the sons set up separate households with the birth of children.

#### The Grandparents

For these Christians, grandparents play a very important role because they live close by. The paternal grandmother is an important person in the life of the child, particularly as the child grows up. A teasing relationship is often evident. Even before they go to formal school, they accompany their grandmother every day to the parish church. It is to her that they recount the events of the day. She teaches them stories from the bible and songs about Jesus.

On the other hand, with the grandfather the relationship is one of great formality. This is the consequence of authoritarianism and patrilineality. The grandfather in the Christian household is the *griha nayakan* (head of the house) and this idea of domestic authority is pervasive, he leads in family prayers, gets priority in being served the best at meal times, makes all important decisions regarding property, money and the arrangement of marriages.

### The Mother's Brother

The mother's brother is of great importance to the children. Gifts from the mother's brother are received on occasions of marriage and birth. The mother's brother always brings abundant quantities of fruit and sweet foods called *palaharam* when he comes to visit. Many Christmas vacations are spent at the mother's brother's house with the maternal grandparents. Here the children are honoured and beloved guests.

As they grow up, however, their father's house becomes more important. It now becomes the centre of their life, particularly when they are sons. It is to this house and property that they will be **heirs**. This is "their own house" as opposed to their "mother's brother's house".

### 17.4.2 The Patrilocal Residence

Patrilocal residence (staying in the same locality as the father) is of great importance to these Christians. Brothers always live in neighbouring houses, food and garden products are often shared. They visit each other, celebrate rituals and ceremonies in each other's houses, share sorrows and difficulties. The link between them is that they are of the same blood and the same name.

### 17.4.3 The Patrilineage

For the Syrian Christian, the patrilineage is important, and the significance of house names must be understood in this respect. A man is better known as Vazhapallil Paul or Pallivadikal Thomas, for the house name carries the ideas of property, privileges and lineage. It expresses the idea of patrilineal **descent** or of membership in a lineage organised around the male descendants of an ancestor.

In contrast to descent is filiation, which relates an individual to both parents, not merely to the father and his male relatives. The relation of children to their mother is in striking contrast to their relation with their father. It is to the mother that the young child turns to for every need, and she mediates between the child and the father, the latter being a distant figure. In fact, among these Christians all women should be like Mary, the mother of Jesus. They must be gentle, soft and humble like the *matav* (mother).

Women are never formally included in the affairs of the outside world, those relating to the domain of property and income for instance. Even in the question of marriage it is the fathers who meet, discuss financial and practical matters and fix the alliance. Women cook, clean, take care of children and are devoted to the religious life, spending much time in prayer and attending devotions at the Church.

### 17.4.4 Inheritance

Till 1986, women were given *stridhanam* by their fathers, which was seen to be their share in father's wealth. It was controlled not by women, but by the husband's father. After a Supreme Court ruling in 1986, a woman may inherit equally with her brothers should her father die without writing a will. Written wills, however, ensure even today that it is sons who inherit property, while daughters are given away in marriage with *stridhanam*, which is never really hers to use, since her husband's father or her husband will control it.

Inheritance customs express the dominant place of the father in the Syrian Christian household. Traditionally the concept of equal share was never of importance to the Syrians. Property was divided according to the whim of the father, or according to the need of his children. The question of manipulation and favouritism arose frequently. The writing of wills has always been very popular amongst these Christians, and the father has absolute control over his sons.

What does this brief discussion of the Christian family show? It describes patriarchal authority which is in fact the basis of Christian social organisation. The next section will discuss the church in the context of Christian social organisation.

#### Activity 2

Read Sub-section 17.4.1 once again. By now you would be aware of the role of the husband's father in a Syrian Christian family. Now, note down in about fifteen lines the role of husband's father in the family of your own community. Compare, if possible your note with those of other students at your Study Centre.

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## 17.5 THE CHURCH

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Here we will look at the priest, the church and the celebration of a Christian festival, i.e. Christians, in order to understand more aspects of Christian social organisation.

### 17.5.1 The Priest in Christianity

The Christian priest is greatly respected by his parishioners. When he conducts prayers and offers the sacrifice (as the central rite of Christianity is called) he stands in place of Jesus Christ. He has the power to reveal the sacred world to those who believe. The Christian priest is a man of God. Amongst the Yakobas, the priest is expected to grow a long beard, and wear a round black cap, loose trousers and a flowing black or white gown. These are the signs by which a priest is known. He must be always calm and disciplined. When he goes to the Church he must not talk to anyone, all of his being must be directed to God. When people are in trouble, ill, suffering or dying he must be with them. At times of joy, feasting, marriages, births, entering a new house, he must be present to bless the occasion. No one will start a celebratory meal without the priest. If the village is having an exhibition of fire-crackers on a feast day or a function, the priest must be present. He is given the best place to sit in, the best food, and the greatest respect.

The prelates or Bishops of the Church are treated with even greater respect. It is only on festivals and other important occasions that the people meet them. At other times they live in the monastery in meditation and prayer. The Bishops are the leaders of the community. Every Christian knows them by sight and by name. To be related to a Bishop in anyway is of great value. As soon as the Christians see a Bishop, all conversation stops, every one stands at attention. Even if the Bishop is younger than many of his parishioners, they express great respect, almost awe. Those who come to him must bow their heads and receive a blessing with his handcross. To have a Bishop officiate at a baptism or marriage or funeral is considered to be a very great honour.



Fig. 17.1: The Christian church

### 17.5.2 The Christian Church

In this section, we will describe the architecture and interior of the church. The construction of the traditional Syrian church in Kerala (see figure 17.1) follows the principles laid down by the Hindu *Shastras* on architecture. It is surrounded by a courtyard on all sides. The walls are similar to Hindu temple walls in height, width and design. Inside, the Church is whitewashed; sometimes there are religious paintings on the wall or ceilings. These pictures tell the story of Jesus, and often have pictures of St. Thomas, who is said to have brought Christianity to Kerala. The altar is placed on a higher platform, and no one may climb the steps upto this sanctuary. It's a holy place. Only the priests and his assistants are allowed access to the altar, the holy vessels, the cross and candles that are kept there. There are no chairs or pews in the traditional Syrian Church. The floor is covered with reed mats, and on these the people kneel and pray. The men stand on the left side facing the altar; the women stand on the right side. There is an aisle between them, down which

the priest's assistants will walk swinging the container of burning incense, which purifies the air. Many churches have silver or bronze oil lamps that have wicks burning in them. The devotees come and pour oil into these lamps and each will light a wick in honour of Jesus. In each of these churches there will usually be a large stone cross in the outer courtyard, which can be seen from very far away.

The church is the heart of Christian social life. People in the villages visit the church every evening for *Sandhya Namaskaram* and in the morning for *Vishudha Qurbana*, the Holy Sacrifice. The Holy Sacrifice is a symbol of the life of Jesus. The priest, through the rituals of the church, acts out of the great mystery of the life of Jesus. The mystery of religious belief lies in that moment and practical reality is kept away, while the sacred world is for that moment brought closer.

Everyday, the people participate in the great mystery of the Sacrifice, and specially on Sundays the churches are full. The two greatest festivals are Christmas and Easter, which are celebrated with great joy. In fact, for many traditional Christians, the perception of time is not according to the Western calendar year, but centres around the life of Jesus. It begins with the birth of Christ.

We will now discuss Christmas celebrations amongst these Christians as an example of their religious life.

### 17.5.3 Christmas

Twenty five days before Christmas are days of Lent or abstinence, to mark the coming of great Joy.

The days before Christmas are days of hectic activity. The house is cleaned and made ready for guests. On Christmas Eve all the churches are open, decorated with green leaves and plants. The houses on the roadside look bright with lights. The streets are full of children. Each Christian house is marked by a big star, because when Jesus was born, a bright star was seen in the sky. There is usually among these Christians of Kerala, no practice of decorating a tree, buying new clothes or sending greeting cards. What is given great importance is going to Church, eating an elaborately cooked meal and spending the day together with relations and friends. Those who are wealthy have their houses white-washed, while others clean, polish and wash their houses for a week.

The first part of the Christmas service begins on the twenty-four evening. The main service takes place in the early hours (3 a.m.) of the twenty-fifth of December. In the evening prayers, the priest tells the people about the birth of Christ to Virgin Mary. He tells them of the wise men who came from the East and gave Jesus gifts, and how shepherds came to see the child who was born in Bethlehem. The priest tells the people again how poor Jesus was born in a manger, wrapped in rags amongst animals. After these hymns and prayers of the evening, the people go home.

At 3 a.m. on Christmas morning all the Christians will be walking to their church. They bring with them oil, candles and incense as gifts for the church.



In the Church, the priest wears very beautiful golden and green robes, the candles are all lit, and the Church is filled with the fragrance of incense. In the Christmas songs and prayers that follow an important place is given to Mary. She is *deva mata* (mother of God) *rajmakal*, a princess and David *putri* (a daughter of King David).

After the celebration of Qurbana (Holy Sacrifice) the people kiss the Cross and leave their gifts of incense and oil. They are like the shepherds and the wise men who came to Jesus at his birth and left offerings for him.

Dawn breaks as people leave the Church. The narrow roads and bylanes are full of early morning worshippers each greeting the other. No one is dressed in his or her newest or best, all come to Church in simple ordinary clothes, usually white cotton. It is enough that they have woken up at 2.30 a.m. to express their devotion and belief in the birth of Jesus.

Having described one of their rituals, we shall now try to show in the next section, how Christianity in India is to be understood in relation to its regional cultural dimensions. Here we have described the relation of Christianity to Hinduism in Kerala.

## Check Your Progress 2

- i) Describe the family organisation of the Christians in Kerala. Use about seven lines for your answer.

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- ii) Outline the importance of the priests in a Christian society. Give your answer in about three lines.

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- iii) How do the Syrian Christians celebrate Christmas? Give your answer in about three lines.

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## 17.6 THE RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO HINDUISM IN KERALA

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The Christians of Kerala are in a specific cultural relationship to their Hindu neighbours. We will take some examples here in order to understand how the Christian and the Hindu share many aspects of their social life together. Let us first look at calendar and time.

### 17.6.1 Calendar and Time

The Malayalam era follows the Christian era by 825 years. It is still used in everyday speech when referring to the past, for marking the dates of the establishment of churches, houses and gravestones. If you wish to know which year 2005 is in the Malayalam era, you only have to subtract 825 years.

The months have names different from the Western calendar months. Each month has a certain attribute or character. Thus *Karkadam* (July-August) is considered to be the worst, a time of rain and hunger. *Kanni* (September-October) is thought to be a bad and inauspicious month, and during this period house construction will not begin, nor will marriages take place. *Dhanu* is the best season, and it is the time of Christmas, which the Christians celebrate with great joy.

The calculation of time according to moments is still done by the *nazhika*. The day is divided into 60 *nazhikas*, and each *nazhika* is 60 *vinazhikas* (24 seconds). This precise way of calculating time is used by people in making traditional (Ayurvedic) medicines, which follow given rules, held by both Hindus and Christians to be life laws of nature.

Days have special significance in terms of auspicious and inauspicious. Wednesdays are considered so dangerous that there is a saying that even a leopard cub will not emerge from its mother's womb. Fridays and Tuesdays were considered auspicious by both Hindus and Christians for oil baths and washing the head in the most elaborate fashion. On these days men would avoid travel, as this would cause extra work on a day which belonged to the women. Let us look at another example, that of house building, now.

### 17.6.2 Building of Houses

The Hindu *asari* (craftsman) who builds for the Christian, follows the customs and rules that he would for a Hindu client. The Christian places wholehearted trust in the *thachan* or carpenter who follows the rules laid down by the *Thatchu Shastra*. These are rules of measurement, location and construction. The Christian house is in architectural style essentially like any Hindu house of similar status. A traditional house-builder said, "In this matter the Christians have full faith in the Hindu *Shastras*. They know that if we do not do as the books say then some misfortune will befall the house or the occupants."

### 17.6.3 Elements of Caste in Christianity

The Syrian Christians of Kerala believe that their ancestors were Brahmans who were converted to Christianity by St. Thomas, a follower and friend of Jesus who came to Kerala in 52 A. D.

The Christians believe that when they converted from Hinduism to Christianity, they were forced to break away from their original caste group. However, their caste status is maintained by them because they are careful to behave in certain ways, which are in keeping with caste defined behaviour. They maintain the traditional boundaries and distances between high and low castes, even though this is against the moral laws of Christian life. It was the only way in which they could survive, and survive they did for almost two thousand years. Adaptation and compromise were the two laws by which this Christian community lived for many centuries. Even today, in spite of the many changes brought about by modernisation, they sustain their daily life, many of the traditional customs of the past. Let us look at some of these.

Like the Hindus, they have faith in horoscopes; like their Hindu neighbours they too tie the *tali* or marriage locket; they observe death pollution often to fifteen days, and the rituals of bathing to remove death pollution called *pula kuli*. Like the Hindus, they celebrate *onam* and *vishu* (harvest and new year festivals). They also celebrate *annaprasanam* (first feeding of a child with rice).

### **Check Your Progress 3**

Select the correct answers of the following questions.

- i) How many years separate the Malayalam era from Christian era?
  - a) 825 years
  - b) 625 years
  - c) 925 years
  - d) 725 years
- ii) Whose rules and customs are followed by the craftsman while building the house for a Christian client in Kerala?
  - a) Hindu client strictly
  - b) Both Hindu and Muslim clients
  - c) Muslim client only
  - d) None of the above

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## **17.7 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, we have first given a general picture of Christian community in India and then described common features of Christian faith. For discussing Christian social organisation, we selected the example of Syrian Christian community and examined family, role of priest, church and Christmas among the Christians of St. Thomas. Thus, through a case study of Syrian Christians of Kerala, this unit has given you an understanding of Christian social organisation.

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## 17.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Descent</b>	A principle, which symbolises the importance of birth in allocating group membership and individual identity.
<b>Heirs</b>	Descendants who will inherit a name, status and property.
<b>Nuclear household</b>	This would consist of father, mother and their unmarried sons and daughters.
<b>Stridhanam</b>	Women's wealth. A women's share in her father's property given to her at marriage.
<b>Three generations</b>	This would consist of a man, his son, and his son's son, along with their dependents, in a patrilineal society.
<b>Yakoba</b>	A term used to refer to a particular Christian sect amongst the Kerala Christians.

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## 17.9 FURTHER READING

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- Vishwanathan, Susan 1995. *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi

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## 17.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- Christianity is believed to have come to Kerala in 52 A. D. through the teachings of St. Thomas, a disciple of Jesus.
- The colonial powers interested in evangelising India were the Portuguese, to some extent the Dutch and the British.
- Christianity teaches belief in the Trinity-the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost Spirit. Jesus came to earth to redeem men of their sins. All Christians believe that one day there will come the day of the Judgement, when good will be rewarded and evil punished. It teaches its people to abide by the moral code outlined by the Bible, their holy book.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The family organisation of the Christians in Kerala is patrilineal. The father is the head of the household. He wields immense power over the other members of the family. Sons have a relationship of filial devotion obedience and respect, towards their father. Daughters are sent away by marriage and are given *stridhanam*, but their bonds with the natal family remain strong.
- ii) The priests are the leaders of society. They are given much importance and respect.
- iii) The Syrian Christians celebrate Christmas by going to Church, by greeting each other and by eating festive food.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) a
- ii) b

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## UNIT 18 SIKH SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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### Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Who are the Sikhs?
- 18.3 Ideological Basis of Sikhism
  - 18.3.1 How Nanak Founded Sikhism
  - 18.3.2 Nanak's Concept of God
  - 18.3.3 Sacred Scripture
  - 18.3.4 Uniqueness of Sikh Scripture
  - 18.3.5 The *Granth sahib* and the Guru
- 18.4 Restructuring of Religious Ethos among the Sikhs: The Institution of *Khalsa* and Five Emblems
- 18.5 Sikh Institutions
  - 18.5.1 The *Gurudwara*
  - 18.5.2 *Sadh Sangat*
  - 18.5.3 *Guru ka Langar*
- 18.6 Sikh Worldview and Economic Orientation
- 18.7 Let Us Sum up
- 18.8 Keywords
- 18.9 Further Reading
- 18.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 18.0 OBJECTIVES

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After you have studied this unit you should be able to

- describe the spatial and demographic aspects of the Sikh community
- state some of the basic tenets of Sikhism
- explain the significance of Sikh scriptures for the Sikh community, religious life and activities
- describe Sikh institutions like Gurudwara and Sadh Sangat
- explain the economic orientation of the Sikhs.

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### 18.1 INTRODUCTION

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Following the description of social organisation of Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities, we now give you an account of Sikh Social Organisation. First, the unit tells you about the Sikh community and then gives the ideological basis of Sikhism. Since the sacred scriptures of the Sikhs play an important part in their social life, we also discuss them in detail. Taking up of arms for



self-defence by the Sikhs is discussed in section 18.4. Next, the unit describes some of the Sikh institutions, which are significant for discussing the Sikh social organisation. Lastly, the unit looks at Sikh worldview and economic orientation. Thus this unit introduces you to those institutions of Sikh social life which the Sikhs do not share with their Hindu and Muslim brethren.

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## 18.2 WHO ARE THE SIKHS?

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The Sikhs are those who follow the teachings of ten leaders, whom they call **Guru**. All these Gurus lived between 1469 A.D. and 1708 A.D. in Punjab. This State is the Northern part of India.

Over the centuries, guided by the Gurus, the Sikh religion expanded and increased its strength in India. However, in 1947 Punjab was divided between India and Pakistan. Many Sikhs who had lived in what became Pakistan were made homeless. They had to migrate to different countries. Sikhs have settled in many parts of the world including the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States of America, Germany and Kenya. There are not more than 12 million Sikhs in the world. Most of these are settled in Punjab. They comprised a little less than 2 per cent of India's 800 million population in 1981. In 1991 their strength was 1.99 percent of the total population. The Sikhs are spread all over India. They are also in many professions including business, academics, civil service, medicine and defence of India.

As per the 1981 census (Government of India 1984) we find that the Sikh population by head of household was 1.96 per cent of the total population of India. However, there were differences in state-wise percentages. Thus in Haryana they constituted 6.21 percent, while in Punjab they constituted 60.75 percent of the population of the two states respectively. These were the two states where Sikh percentage was higher than the national average. However, there were states where this average was much lower. These states included Andhra Pradesh (0.03), Bihar (0.11), Gujarat (0.07), Rajasthan (1.44) and so on. In terms of percentage increase over 1971-81 this had been most in Sikkim (242.5) which had 0.10 percentage of Sikhs. In Orissa (39.85) and in M. P. (44.5) the percentage increase in Sikh population over 1971-81 had been 26.15. In 1991, Punjab (63 percent) and Haryana (5.81 percent) were the only two states, which had Sikh population higher than the national average. There were only a handful of people who follow Sikkism in States such as Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura etc.

Over 80 percentage of the Sikhs are farmers. Next to this profession, army career is the next most popular vocation. They form ten per cent of the armed forces. The Sikh farmers played the leading role in the Green Revolution in the Sixties raising the wheat yield per acre by three hundred per cent! Again three of the nine Indians who climbed Mount Everest were Sikhs. They are eminent in many areas of life in India.

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## 18.3 IDEOLOGICAL BASIS OF SIKHISM

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The Sikh religion clearly represents a case of fission and fusion in the religious ideology of Indian society. Around five hundred years ago, it had its origins in

the wider religious revolt, called *bhakti* movement which was primarily directed against the bigotry and caste-based narrowism in which the then Hindu religion in a specific region was steeped. In this variant of Hinduism, the caste system which was founded upon the notion of ritual purity and pollution and accorded top position to the Brahmin and lowest to the Shudra was particularly isolated for its inhuman bias. The same *Bhakti* movement also tended to define the relationship between man and the God in simple terms of 'devotion', 'supplication' and purity of conduct.

The movement thus tended to build a fraternity of the devoted ones, bound together in their common love of God. It came down with a heavy hand upon the iniquitous caste system, which imposed upon the lowly 'untouchables' a variety of indignities and restrictions. These included those concerning **commensality**, interdining, marriage and even of physical contact. It is worth mentioning here that the untouchables under the caste system were denied any social status or identity. The status they were accorded was that which accrues to a slave and one, which reduces a human being to the level of a 'commodity'.

Sikhism strongly denounced this caste-sanctioned inequity and declared a fraternity of God's beings. In this there were neither any barriers nor any caste-based system of inequality. Thus a spirited affirmation of the principle of religious egalitarianism and a contemptuous rejection of the purity-pollution barrier by Sikhism became a point of fission which tore away this newly-born religion from the then practised brand of Hinduism.

Simultaneously, Sikhism also declared an open revolt against an endless array of 'inhuman' practices carried on in the name of religion, most of which were simply repugnant to human sensibility and sensitivity (Sher 1982: 4-5). But, sanctioned as they were by the Brahmans themselves, who were the ritual leaders of the Hindu society, they were hardly challenged with any degree of effectiveness. Thus, the cycle of mental and moral domination by Brahmans continued, oppressing all the castes - but most of all, the lowly untouchables. Sikhism emerged and evolved as a revolt against all this religious bigotry and irrationality.

We shall now first look at the religious ideology which outlines the emergence and growth of Sikhism and describe how this religion was founded.

### 18.3.1 How Nanak Founded Sikhism

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak who was born in the year 1469 in a place called Talwandi-Nankana Sahib, now in Pakistan. His father, a high caste Hindu called Kalyan Chand (also fondly addressed as 'Kalu') of the Bedi Kshatriya clan, was a village accountant in the service of the local Muslim landlord. Nanak received an education in traditional Hindu lore and the rudiments of Islam. Early in life he began associating with holy men. For a time he worked as the accountant of the Afghan chieftain at Sultanpur. There, a Muslim family servant, Mardana who was also a musician, joined him. Nanak began to compose hymns. Mardana put them to music and together they organised community hymn singing. From the offerings made, they organised a free canteen. Even now, no payment is required to be made for eating in such a place which is maintained from voluntary donations by 'devotees' and is fondly called *guru-ka-langar*, or the free kitchen of the spiritual master.

Here Muslims, as well as Hindus of all castes eat together. It is not just the question of different castes having the facility of eating together; rather they had to eat together in order to show conformity to Sikhism, since denial of caste-barriers was the basic characteristic of Sikhism.

At Sultanpur, Nanak had his first vision of God, in which he was ordered to preach to mankind. One day he disappeared into the water while bathing in a stream. Reappearing from it on the third day, he proclaimed: “There is no Hindu, there is no *Mussalman*”.

Many miracles and marvels are associated with the life of Guru Nanak. It is important to remember that many incidents of his life as passed down historically sharply highlight some fundamental features of Sikhism. In other words, principles of religious morality in Sikhism are not taught or preached as abstractions. Rather, they are illustrated and affirmed in the way the Sikh gurus lived their lives. This character of the Sikh norms and morals adds a touch of immediate familiarity to the religion and its fundamental precepts. It removes from them the mystique, which often shrouds principles of religious morality.

For example, Guru Nanak, in one of his spiritual sojourns to Haridwar, demonstrated the futility of propitiating the far-off and unknown gods. Nanak saw some high caste pilgrims throw water in the direction of the sun by way of propitiating their ancestors. On seeing this he began to throw water in the opposite direction. When asked to account for this ‘odd’ behaviour of his, he explained that he was trying to water his fields. He said that these were only a few hundred miles away while the sun and the ancestors were in any case located much further.

In another incident, Nanak demonstrated the sanctity of honestly earned bread, another central canon of Sikh faith. While stopping over in a town during one of his spiritual wanderings, he deliberately chose to dine at the house of a poor carpenter, rejecting an invitation from a rich money-lender. There he demonstrated that he was correct. He squeezed the bread of the money-lender. Drops of blood came out of it. He then squeezed the bread of the carpenter. Drops of milk came out of it. He said that the money-lender earned his livelihood by exploiting the poor while the carpenter earned his livelihood through honest means. Hence he preferred to dine with the carpenter.

The purpose here is not to lend unqualified credulity to this ‘folk’ version of the incident. Instead the idea is to emphasise the popular perception held of both the Gurus and Sikhism. These incidents also illustrate popular beliefs in the pragmatic and livable character of Sikh faith.

Another central canon of Sikh faith has a direct relevance on the connection between religious precept and the practical day-to-day morality. This is a positive injunction by the Gurus for a virtuous engagement in the duties of a householder rather than withdrawal from the world as idealised in Hinduism or in Buddhism. The withdrawal from the affairs of this illusion-ridden world is idealised in Hinduism. It prescribes the eventual superiority of *sanyasa*, total withdrawal from the world, as something that everyone should try to approximate in the last stage of life. In Buddhism it is idealized via the formal injunction of Buddha that eventually, one should totally cut oneself off from both the urge to act and the fruits of one’s actions (*karma*).

This message is brought home by the founder of Sikhism in the way he lived his life. He interspersed his spiritual sojourns or wanderings with the life of a peasant-householder. Consequently, asceticism, penance, celibacy and so on have hardly any place in Sikhism (Singh 1987: 316).

### 18.3.2 Nanak's Concept of God

Theologically, Nanak's concept of God is proximate to the concept of *shudha-advaita* (pure or unqualified monism) which is an important school of Hindu *vedantic* philosophy. Accordingly, Nanak holds that the only entity, which exists in the world, is that of God and what everything else, in one way or the other, partakes of that entity. So much so that even *maya* or 'illusion', which mystifies this supreme reality, is created by God.

God, according to Nanak, is a 'formless', timeless, all powerful master-creator who is not influenced by feelings of jealousy and discrimination. As such he fears none and favours none. Nanak also addresses God by some 'personal' names such as Rab, Rahim, Govinda, Murari and Hari (Singh 1987: 317). As it can be easily seen, these invocations of God are derived both from Muslim as well as Hindu pantheons. But, perhaps the most important reason for choosing these invocations lies in the creed that Nanak was evolving. He wanted to emphasise the centrality of one-and-the-same-God apart from his diverse manifestations, as visualised by different religions. As such, he chose them from amongst the most popular usages then current among both Hindus and Muslims.

Nanak chose **Wahi-guru** as the specific way of addressing God by the members of Sikh faith. The term literally means 'hail O Guru'. Thus, an invocative or exclamatory expression has, by way of usage, turned into a proper noun.

### 18.3.3 Sacred Scripture

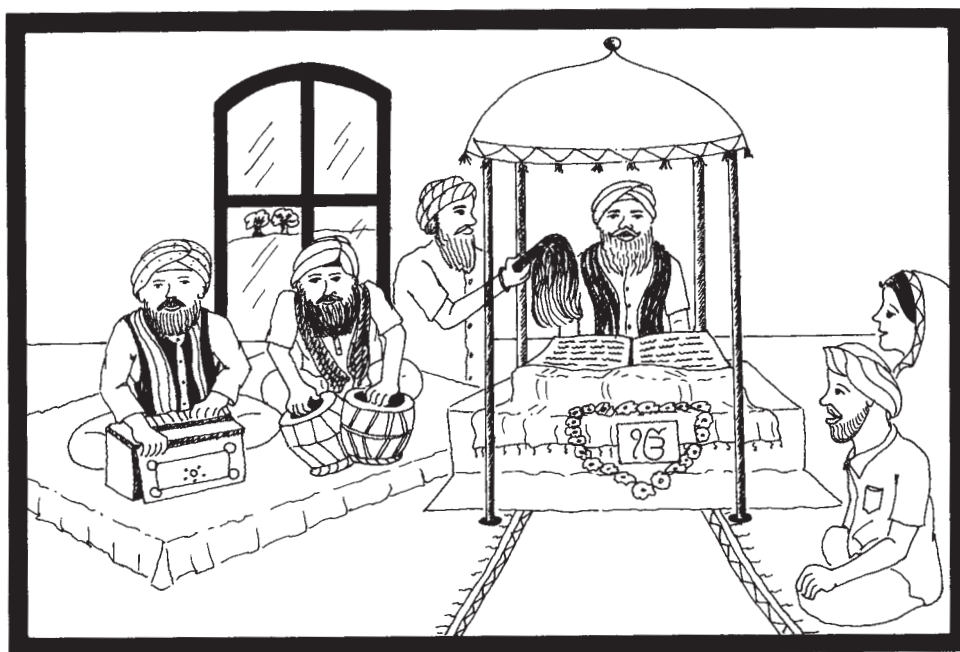
Every religion or religious system centres around a sacred text or set of texts having a governing or a regulating effect upon its followers and their life. Varying from religion to religion, the sacred text or texts contain, among other things, a set of instructions to be obeyed by the followers. These instructions regulate a certain range of their temporal activities.

For example, certain religions like Islam give detailed instructions to be followed. These cover virtually all the major situations that one may encounter in one's life. These may range from the minute method of worship and prayer to the death rites. They also provide rules for distributing the property of deceased parents between the heirs. On the other hand, there are religions like Hinduism which do not go into all those details about the way temporal life should be led. Hinduism stresses all the same many do's and don'ts which should be strictly pursued. These include rules regarding purity and pollution or rules regarding choice of the marriage mate. Sikh scripture represents almost an extreme case of emphasising only the central canons or ethical morals which should be followed by the Sikhs in their day-to-day life.

The sacred scripture of Sikhs-The *Adi-Granth* or as reverentially called, the *Granth sahib*, was compiled by the 5th Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev. It is in the script known as **Gurumukhi**, currently recognised as Punjabi (Singh 1982: 693). However, the hymns included in the Granth are in several languages, such as Persian, old Punjabi, medieval Prakrit, Hindi, Marathi, Multani and

several local dialects, with an abundant treasure of Sanskrit and Arabic vocabulary. The *Granth* is the life-blood of Sikhs and is worshipped by them as respectfully as they would respect and worship their living guru. That is why, the *Granth* is normally addressed by Sikhs as *Guru Granth Sahib*, as if it is a living guide, master or a guru.

The *Granth* is handled by the devotees more like a person than a book. It is placed on a comfortable seat, flanked by colourful silken cloth sheets, which are regularly changed. It is impossible to find these clothings unclean or unkempt. The *Granth* is opened with a fine and graceful mannerism to the chanting of specific hymns in the small hours of the day. It is put to rest once again with a punctilious religious routine. After the *Granth* is closed for the night it is draped in fine colourful sheets and placed in a secluded 'room' specifically made for the purpose. All such rituals are maintained at all religious functions or at such functions as marriage or death where the presence of the *Granth* is considered necessary. The *Granth* is placed in all places of Sikh worship-called Gurudwara (the guru's bode). Figure 18.1 shows that the *Granth* is kept with great reverence in a **Gurudwara**.



**Fig. 18.1: The Gurudwara**

Some Sikh devotees also place it in their homes and look to its upkeep with all the prescribed rituals and religious solemnity. This characteristic sanctity accorded by the Sikhs to their religious scripture, the *Granth*, is incomparable with any other known religion. To understand this peculiarity one must look at the following aspects of the Sikh history, given in sub-sections 18.3.4 and 18.3.5.

### Activity 1

For a Sikh, the *Granth Sahib* acts as a living guide or master. Give an example from your religion or any other religion you know of a sacred text, which may be compared to the *Granth Sahib*. Write one page on how this scripture guides the followers of the religion.



### 18.3.4 Uniqueness of Sikh Scripture

A unique feature of Sikh scripture, which is not shared by any other religious scripture, lies in that it includes religious hymns not merely of the Sikh gurus, but also of several Hindu as well as Muslim saints who were contemporaries of the Sikh gurus. Most of these Hindu saints whose hymns have been included were drawn from the lowly castes, such as cobbler, butcher, barber, etc. who normally occupy bottom rungs of the Hindu caste ladder. The daily readings and recitations from the *Granth* make no distinction whatsoever between hymns of the Sikh guru and those of other. This aspect of the Sikh scripture, even though normally viewed as a 'good' and humanistic feature, still remains a puzzle. This is because no religion makes it a part of its daily worship to recite instructions or hymns not belonging to their own founders.

This can be understood only when we appreciate the central emphasis underlying the Sikh theology, philosophy and ethics. Sikhism emerged, as emphasised above, as a critique and refinement of the then existing ideas of religion and religious morality. As such, it tended to emphasise the relevance of some of the universal human values such as brotherhood and equality. It also emphasises the irrelevance of status whether economic or caste, in one's quest for God. It explains why 'saints' and devotees from across the religious and caste boundaries found their honoured place in the *Adi Granth*. They upheld these values.

What is the spiritual status of 'gurus' vis-a-vis God? It is important to re-affirm that Sikhism is a strongly monistic religion. That is why the ten Sikh gurus, even though held in utmost reverence, are not equated with God. There is only one God or *Akalpurush* (or the 'timeless being') who alone 'deserves' to be worshipped. The injunction of the much-honoured tenth guru of Sikhs, Guru Gobindsingh to his followers is noteworthy: Anyone, who calls me "God", shall perish in the fire of hell. This, however, does not imply that in terms of their religious sentiment, the Sikhs always find it possible to keep to a clear distinction between the two. Despite this, it needs to be stated that the *Granth* emphasises the 'inevitable' and instrumental role of the 'guru' in realising God. Let us also mention how the sacred book *Granth* came to be equated with a guru.

### 18.3.5 The *Granth*sahib and the Guru

The line of Sikh gurus, starting from their founder-Guru Nanak, went as far as the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. He enjoined upon Sikhs to regard the sacred *Granth* as their 'Guru' and turn to it for all advice and instruction for seeking direction of life. We find that today it is worshipped and read with regard and reverence.

Another historical circumstance, which nurtured this attitude of Sikhs for their sacred scripture, is the long period of persecution and suffering undergone by them at the hands of the Muslim rulers, starting from the time of their fifth guru, Guru Arjan Dev (1581-1606), to much after the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1709), in fact, till the execution of Banda Singh Bahadur (in 1716) who took over the military leadership of the Sikh community after assassination of the tenth guru. Of the ten Sikh gurus, fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev ('guru' between 1581-1606) and the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur ('guru' between 1664-1675) were executed by the Muslim rulers, whereas the



last and the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ('guru' between 1675-1708), was assassinated by British hired assassins. Banda Bahadur took over the military command of the Sikh community after the tenth guru and for eight years defied the Mughals and devastated large tracts of eastern central Punjab. He was eventually captured along with seven hundred of his followers, and was executed in Delhi in the summer of 1716. During all these long years of struggle when they were hunted for their creed and at times even pushed into the remote forests, the *Granth* continued to be the centre of their day-to-day existence and chief source of inspiration.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Write three lines on Guru Nanak's concept of God.

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- ii) Write four lines on the uniqueness of the Sikh scripture.

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## 18.4 RESTRUCTURING OF RELIGIOUS ETHOS AMONG THE SIKHS: THE INSTITUTION OF *KHALSA* AND FIVE EMBLEMS

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The pacifist religion of Guru Nanak took to arms by the time of Guru Hargobind. Less than hundred years after Guru Nanak's passing away in 1539, Sikhism accepted use of arms for self-defence. The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, the father of Guru Hargobind, had earlier been executed by the Muslim rulers. Fifty years later, in 1699, taking to arms was formally incorporated into the main corpus of Sikhism by Guru Gobind Singh via the institution of *Khalsa*. This had taken place as a result of severe repression and persecution let loose by the Muslim rulers against the Sikhs. Let us discuss the institution of *Khalsa*, which restructured the religious ethos among the Sikhs.

*Khalsa* literally means "the pure" (from the Persian *Khales*, also meaning 'pure'). On April 13, 1699, Guru Gobind Singh baptised the first batch of five Sikhs and gave them the common surname, Singh (lion). Kaur 'lioness' is the corresponding surname given to all Sikh women (Uberoi. 1969: 123-38).

The Sikhs were baptised by Guru Gobind Singh in the famous five emblems. All start with a 'k'. All believers are to maintain these in order to keep the status of a 'sikh'.

First of the Ks is **Kesa** (hair). A *Khalsa* must keep the hair unshorn. A *Khalsa* who cuts off his hair is a renegade (*patit*). The holiness of unshorn hair is

older than Guru Gobind Singh, the founder of Khalsa. Many of the earlier Gurus followed the tradition of letting the hair and beards grow. The other four are **Kangha** (comb); **Kacch** (drawers) worn by the soliders; **Kirpan** (sabre); and **Kara** (bracelet) of steel, commonly worn on the right wrist.

The baptism of Sikhs into the material qualities of valour and fearlessness meant a departure from the earlier pacifist tradition. Yet it inherited an essential continuity with the past tradition in more than one way. The first of the baptised Sikhs were drawn from five different caste groups. This underscored the essential equality between men of all castes and creeds as emphasised by the founding Guru Nanak. Yet another continuity with the past lay in the concept of *Sant Sipahi* (saint-solider). This implied that a Sikh would not wield a sword for the sake of doing so. Instead, it was to be done for a right cause and for the defence of one's just rights. In addition, a Sikh was supposed to lead a noble, virtuous and pure life.

As already mentioned above, Sikhs made a strong impact upon the Mughal rulers via Banda Bahadur but did not have a strong political organisation to displace them by their own rule. The subsequent course of the evolution of *Khalsa* political power was simple. For some years the *Khalsa* vanished into the hills. However, when Mughal power waned due to the invasion in 1738-1739 of the Persian Nader Shah, they re-emerged into the plains.

The Sikhs formed into *misls* (from Persian *mesals*, meaning both "example" and "equal"). They began to demand protection money from towns and villages. The series of invasions by Ahmad Shah Durrani, 1747-1769, completely destroyed Mughal administration. In the battle of Panipat in 1761 the Afghans crushed the rising Maratha power in the north. In the gap thus created, the Sikhs moved in as rulers of the Punjab (Singh 1987: 744).

This situation of political instability in Punjab eventually culminated in Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) establishing the first and the last kingdom of Sikhs in Punjab, stretching right upto the Khyber pass in the north. Ranjit Singh was an enlightened and secular king and ruled till 1839 (Singh 1963).

He respected all religions and gave liberal benefices to sacred places of all religions (Math 1981 and Honigberger 1981). This was followed by ten years of internecine warfare and palace stratagems plus clever political machinations by the British which ended finally in the annexation of Punjab by them in 1849. The annexation was followed by a period of an inexplicable intimacy between the Sikhs and the British. The Sikhs strongly sided with the British administration in quelling the mutiny of 1857 and also enlisted in large numbers in the British army at the time of First World War.

Some writers, for example, Khushwant Singh (1987: 745), maintain that this expression of loyalty on the part of Sikhs reflected a longing for peace and order after long years of bloodshed and disorder in Punjab.

The unprovoked massacre of four hundred innocent people by the British at the Jalianwala Bagh, Amritsar, on April 13, 1919, set the Sikh against the British. Secondly, despite the popular Sikh protest the British sided with the *mahants*, the hereditary priests controlling the *gurudwaras*. Thus Sikhs turned completely against them. These factors as well as the rising temper of the independence movement pushed the Sikhs into the national movement, now

led by Mahatma Gandhi. Independence in 1947 was accompanied by partition of the country and the Sikh community suffered enormously through pillage and manslaughter. At present, there are problems of compatibility between the perceived interests and political aspirations of the Sikhs on the one hand and the national policy on the other (Gandhi 1981: 52-66). From this description of political history of the Sikhs, we now turn to their social institutions.

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## 18.5 SIKH INSTITUTIONS

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Sikh institutions seem to emanate from the centrality of ethos, philosophy and theology of Sikhism. Quite a few of the institutions like marriage, kinship, property are, on the other hand, common between the Hindus and Sikhs. Almost all the important festivals of Hindus are celebrated by Sikhs as well.

Social ties between the Hindus and Sikhs including the marital ties continue to thrive. Many sub-caste groupings among the Punjabis underlying the main caste categories like Aroras, Khatris continue to be common between them. Even though Sikhism came up primarily as a revolt against the Hindu legacy of caste, it continues to use caste titles as a principle of social location and departure. These are, however, shorn of the purity-pollution barrier. We discuss here those institutions, which are peculiar to the Sikh community. Around these institutions can be observed much of the collective behaviour of the community.

### 18.5.1 The *Gurudwara*

Literally meaning the guru's abode this is the Sikh name or nomenclature for a place of worship. This is the seat of the holy *Granth* and of regular recitations from it, interspersed by singing of religious hymns. There are some *gurudwaras* associated with important happenings in the lives of the gurus. *Gurudwara* Sisganj in the Chandni Chowk of Delhi is associated with the martyrdom of the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur. *Gurudwara Bangla Sahib* is associated with the 8th Guru Harkishan. There are over 200 historical *gurudwaras* associated with the Gurus. These are controlled by the *Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak* Committee (S.G.P.C.) set up by the Sikh *Gurudwara* Act of 1925—offerings are made at *gurudwara* and are used for their upkeep as well as the Khalsa schools and colleges. Golden Temple of Harmandir *Sahib gurudwara* at Amritsar is the most sacred *gurudwara* of Sikhs. It has the same sanctity for Sikhs as Kashi for Hindus, Mecca for the Muslims, Vatican for the Catholics or Jerusalem for the Jews.

It was built by the fifth guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606 AD). The foundation of the temple was laid down by Sayyid Main Mir—a Muslim saint of Lahore. This fact in itself highlights religious catholicity of Sikhism. There are certain other features of this temple, which dramatise, symbolically, certain essential features of Sikhism and its philosophy.

First of all, the temple was made at the ground level lower than the rest of the city—a fact which, according to some underscores the humility of the founding gurus. Second, the temple has four main gates, which open in four different directions, which is taken to mean that the temple was thrown open equally to all the four castes. Some others, however, interpret this feature thus: the Golden

Temple has four doors in the four natural directions in order to instruct people of other religions who believe the abode of God to be in a certain direction or at a certain place. However, God is not confined to a certain direction. So, according to them, *Harmandar* means 'mandar' or temple for 'har'. This means it is for every one. In this phrase, the word 'mandar' is a Sanskritik expression, whereas 'har' is a Persian expression.

There is yet another feature of Golden Temple, which takes us right to the centre of the Sikh religious ethos. The complex of the Golden Temple is made up of two parts. First is the main part, called *harmandar*. It is set in the centre of a tank. The tank itself is located by a wide corridor for the pilgrims to go around as an act of religious supplication. *Gurbani* or the religious hymns from the *Granth* are sung or recited in this part of the temple for most part of day and night.

The second part of the sacred complex, which lies outside and ahead of the main gate of the *Harmandar*, is called *Akaltakht* or God's court. Since the very inception of the *Harmandar* the *Akaltakht* has been the seat of temporal authority of the Sikh gurus. They sat there, as if on the 'throne' vis-a-vis their followers and considered issues of temporal import including political issues. These two seats of 'spiritual' and 'temporal' authority were and are regarded as integral parts of the basic ethos of the Sikh community. Thus, the idea of separating 'religion' from 'polities' does not appeal to the Sikhs.

### **18.5.2 Sadh Sangat**

No act of Sikh worship is complete without the holy gathering or *Sadh Sangat* which is virtually equated with God's presence. Such a gathering or '*sangat*' is supreme. It can take any decision, whether of religious or temporal import, which is binding upon the rest of the community. It can even censure reprimand, or punish a person for any impropriety committed by him. Maharaja Ranjit Singh is on record having received punishment in the form of cuts of cane upon his skin from a religious gathering at Golden Temple, Amritsar, for an act of moral impropriety committed by him. Gurus, particularly Guru Gobind Singh, have in several hymns recognised the superiority of *Sadh Sangat* over their own commands.

### **18.5.3 Guru ka Langar**

As it has been highlighted in the opening section of this unit, the secular and equalitarian character of Sikhism was manifested through the institution of *langar* community kitchen. Here everyone, without any discrimination of caste and creed, sat together and ate in company. This is also sometimes called the principle of *pangat* or the queue. This again indicates the equal status of everyone in the presence of the Guru.

Even though initiated by the founding Guru Nanak, the institution of *langar* was formalised by the Guru Angad at a place called Goindwal. This was approximately 20 miles away from the city of Amritsar. Every *gurudwara*, big or small, has a *langar* attached to it and is maintained from offerings made at that *gurudwara*.

As indicated above, there has been an inflow of a certain caste bias from Hinduism into the social life of Sikhs. This is reflected especially in the area

of marital selection. But the said caste bias stayed far short of its traditional rigour and severity with which it is encountered in the Hindu social life. This has been made possible by repeatedly de-emphasising the caste inequality through the institutions of *sangat* and *langar* in the day-to-day life of the Sikhs.

These institutions, therefore, prove functional for maintaining equality, so essential for the very survival of Sikh religious ethos.

### Activity 2

Write a note on your religious institutions, which are similar to *Gurudwara*, *Sadh Sangat* and *Guru ka Langar*. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes prepared by other students at your Study Centre.

## 18.6 SIKH WORLDVIEW AND ECONOMIC ORIENTATION

The basic orientation to engage in economic activity flows, at least partly, from one's religious norms and values. This is what has been a major idea in Max Weber's (1976) analysis of the origin and development of the spirit of capitalism in contemporary Europe. The argument presupposes that the individuals in question are religious enough to let religious values hold away over them.

Thus, it has often been argued that a majority of the Sikh families, even after they were completely uprooted at the time of the partition of the country in 1947, built themselves to both 'fame' and 'prosperity'. Sikhs have been proverbially projected as compulsive do-gooders even in the teeth of most adverse circumstances. Their long-standing history of sufferings and persecution imparted the kind of fortitude that lies tacit under a highly resilient attitude. Second, a highly 'secular' and equalitarian attitude, which is reinforced by their institutions of *langar* and *sangat*. A part of their daily religious routine also seems to import the kind of pragmatism and realism which is required in the pursuit of business.

Still another mental attribute, which is conducive towards the same and is that of demystifying reality. This is apparently encouraged by the simple way some of the basic canons of their religion have been stated and repeated. The high 'achievement' orientation of their personality is evidenced by the fact that Sikhs today are found in virtually all the western countries, specifically in large numbers in Canada, the United States of America and United Kingdom where economic opportunities are relatively greater.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Write five lines on *Sadh Sangat* in Sikhism.

.....

.....

.....

- ii) Discuss the Sikh's economic orientation in five lines.

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## 18.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have studied the social organisation of Sikhism. We then studied the sacred scripture and religious sentiment in Sikhism. We then provided information on Sikh historicity. We also indicated that which is unique in Sikh scriptures. *Khalsa* and political history were discussed including the expansion of Sikh power. Sikh institutions and their worldview were also considered. We have therefore, given an adequate overview of the Sikh community and institutions.

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## 18.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Akalpurush</b>	Timeless Being
<b>Commensality</b>	Ritual seating and eating together of a particular group
<b>Guru</b>	Religious teacher
<b>Gurudwara</b>	Guru's abode-a place of worship
<b>Gurumukhi</b>	Punjabi script
<b>Guru ka Langar</b>	Community kitchen
<b>Kacch</b>	Under-drawers
<b>Kangha</b>	Comb
<b>Kara</b>	Bracelet of metal
<b>Kesh</b>	Hair
<b>Kirpan</b>	Sword or Sabre
<b>Wahi-Guru</b>	Hail O' Master



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## 18.9 FURTHER READING

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Banerjee, A.C. 1983. *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Religion*. Munshiram Manoharlal Pvt. Ltd.: Delhi

Census of India 1981 (1985) *Series-1 India Paper 3 of 1984, Household Population by Religion of Head of Household*. (ed.) V.S. Verma, Registrar General and Census Commissioner for India

Dhillon, D.S. 1988. *Sikhism: Origin and Development*. Atlantic Publishers: Delhi

Singh, Gopal 1987. *The Religion of the Sikhs*. Allied Publishers Private Limited: Delhi

Singh, D, and A Smith 1985. *The Sikh World*. Macdonald and Company: London

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## 18.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Nanak's concept of God is that of pure monism. Nanak holds that only one entity exists, and that is God. Everything else partakes in the nature of God.
- ii) Sikh scriptures are unique in that they include hymns of both Hindu and Muslim saints. Many of these Hindu saints were from low castes like butcher and cobbler. These are recited without distinction of hierarchy at prayers.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) *Sadh Sangat* is the holy gathering, which is virtually equated with God's presence. Such a Sangat has decision-making power, which is binding on the community. For example, Maharaja Ranjit Singh received cuts by a cane at Golden Temple, Amritsar, for moral impropriety.
- ii) Economic orientation flows from the religious orientation. They have been compulsive 'do gooders' in the face of adverse circumstances. The economic success, however, does not denigrate the religious side of life.

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## UNIT 19 ZOROASTRIAN SOCIAL ORGANISATION

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### Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Profile of the Zoroastrian Community in India
  - 19.2.1 Origin and Location in India
  - 19.2.2 Population Strength
  - 19.2.3 Role in Socio-Economic Life
- 19.3 Tenets of Zoroastrianism
- 19.4 Aspects of Social Organisation
  - 19.4.1 Rites of Initiation and Death
  - 19.4.2 Marriage and Family
  - 19.4.3 Inheritance and Succession
  - 19.4.4 Parsi Panchayat
  - 19.4.5 Festivals
- 19.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.6 Keywords
- 19.7 Further Reading
- 19.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 19.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- outline the origin of Zoroastrianism in India
- state the population strength and spread of Parsis in India
- describe the role of Parsis in the socio-economic life of India
- list and describe the basic tenets of the Zoroastrian faith
- describe the basic Zoroastrian rites relating to initiation and Zoroastrian death
- describe the Zoroastrian customs relating to marriage, family, inheritance and succession
- outline the role of the Parsi Panchayat.

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### 19.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Block 4 you have so far read about the basic features of social organisation of the Hindu, Muslim, Christian and the Sikh communities. In this unit, we describe social organisation of another community, which has made its presence significant in India. We introduce you to some of the basic features of the

Zoroastrian social organisation. Zoroastrian popularly known in India as Parsis are following of Zoroaster. They are adherents of the religious system taught by him. Following this we have discussed location and population strength of Parsis in India. We discuss their role in the socio-economic life of Indian society. Then we describe the basic tenets of the Zoroastrian faith and rites relating to initiation and death, customs relating to marriage, inheritance and succession. Next are described the role of the Parsi Panchayat in the Zoroastrian community and the important festivals celebrated by Parsis.

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## 19.2 PROFILE OF THE ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY IN INDIA

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Before we trace their origin and location in India, let us briefly state the origin of Zoroastrianism.

### 19.2.1 Origin and Location in India

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest religions of the world. It takes its name from “Zarasthustra” (Zoroaster) who probably lived around the beginning of the first millennium B.C. His life period is dated diversely by historians as being anywhere between the fourth to ninth century B.C. Another name for Zoroastrianism is “**Mazdaism**” and is derived from the name of the religion’s supreme God “Mazda” (meaning wise) or *Ahura Mazda* (meaning wise Lord). Fire is worshipped as a symbol of ‘*Ahura Mazda*’ since it has the characteristics of purity and brightness.

The roots of Zoroastrianism can be located in an Iranian tribal and basically pastoral society. Research suggests that historically this religion originated in the eastern and south central regions of the Iranian world. It began between the great mountain ranges of the Hindukush and Seistan, an area that today is divided between Iran and Afganistan. By 500 B.C. Zoroastrianism had become the leading faith in Persia and Medea (now modern Iran). The Iranian-Zoroaster influence faced a serious challenge with the conquest of Iran by the Islamic Arabians in the seventh century A.D. The exodus or mass migration of Zoroastrians into other regions of the world can be seen to be a direct result of the forced Islamisation of Iran. [Kulke 1978: (4)].

The Zoroastrian religion was introduced in India about eighth century A.D. It is said that the first batch of Zoroastrians or Parsis reached Diu about 766 A.D. However, they abandoned it and set out for another place of residence. They took refuge in Gujarat. During their voyage to Gujarat from Diu their ship was overtaken by a storm. The voyaging Parsis took a vow that if they reached the shore in Gujarat safely they would establish the most sacred fire temple (called Atash Behram) there. The vow was duly fulfilled and a fire temple was consecrated in Sanjan (in Gujarat) where the Parsis landed safely. They took to agriculture and horticulture in and around Sanjan. As their numbers increased they spread to other parts of Gujarat. When the Muslims conquered Sanjan in the fifteenth century, the sacred fire was moved frequently and finally established at Udvada. The fire temple in Udvada is looked upon as the most sacred temple of the Parsis. Zoroastrian immigrants to India are said to have come from Pars. This is why they are known as Parsee. (Parsi

also sometimes spelt as Parsee). The Parsi community has adopted Gujarati as their official language. Let us now look at their numbers.

### **19.2.2 Population Strength**

The Zoroastrian population around the world is estimated to be roughly 1,30,000 of which 82,000 are believed to be in India. Of this 82,000, more than 78.5 percent are reported to be living in Bombay. The strength of the Parsi population in India has varied between 80,000 and 82,000 as is evident from the recorded population censuses between 1881-1981. Their strength decreased to 76,382 by the year 1991. The Parsi community in India is found mainly in Maharashtra and specially in Bombay, Gujarat and Deccan. In 1991 a majority of 79.2 percent of Zoroastrians lived in Maharashtra, followed by Gujarat (16.92 percent).

### **19.2.3 Role in Socio-Economic Life**

Migrating to India over 1300 years ago, the Parsis have been an important part of the economic, political, educational and social life of India. Prior to and during the Muslim rule they lent their support to Hindu princes whenever it was needed. They played an important role in the Mughal administration. Following the arrival of the British they were among the first people to adopt to the western style of life and to English education. The Parsis began in India as a small mercantile community. They excelled themselves in trade and commerce. Two of the leading areas of economic activity in the nineteenth century, shipbuilding and the textile industry, owe their rapid growth mainly to the investment and trading initiative of the Parsis. Thus, early growth of the modern shipping industry in India is associated with the name of a Parsi family the Wadias. They were commissioned by the British for the management of the biggest shipyard in Bombay continuously for 150 years from 1735-1885. Another Parsi, D.R. Bannaji owned a personal fleet of thirty trading vessels (i.e. ships). Between 1915 and 1925, nearly 20 percent to 30 percent of the cotton mills in Bombay were owned by Parsis (Gaubha 1979: 115-127).

Parsis have also been contributing greatly to the steel, chemical, cement, and other heavy industries. This has been so both during the British India and post Independent India. We have all heard about the Tata family. They were pioneers of the steel industry in India. Today they also run a host of other industries such as jute, chemical, tea, textile, printing, insurance, and so on. The Tata family is not only associated with industry but also with education and social work.

Parsis eminent in the political, economic, educational and social work in India during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries included B.M. Malabari, S.S. Bengali, N. Fardoonji, P.M. Mazban, Sir P. Mehta, Sir D. Wacha, Maneckji, D. Petit, J. Tata, C.J. Readyymony and so many others.

The Parsis began in India as a small mercantile community. Gradually, a number of their families became successful industrial entrepreneurs, merchants, educationalists, social reformers, lawyers and pioneers in many other fields.

Proof of their open attitude with regard to occupational selection lies in that many of the Parsis derive their family names from the occupations their ancestors pursued in India. Many of their descendents still do so. Interesting family titles

thus include: Unwala (wool dealer), Kapadia (cloth dealer), Jhaveri (jeweller), Motiwala (pearl dealer), Biscuitwala (biscuit dealer), Batliwala (bottle dealer), Ginwala (wine dealer), Sodawaterwala (Soda dealer), Mondalwala (wine dealer), etc.

### Activity 1

Take the map of India and mark the following items.

- a) The states where the Parsis are predominantly concentrated
- b) The location of their first fire temple
- c) The location of the plant of Tata Iron and Steel Company

Cross check your answer, if possible, with those given by other students at your Study Centre.

In general, Parsis are represented in different jobs. There is evidence to indicate that they have held many types of posts (Gaubha 1979: 115). Supportive data for this is available as early as the middle of the nineteenth century.

Currently more and more Parsis are establishing themselves in the scientific and other professions. Homi J. Bhabha was the pioneer of nuclear research in India and General S.H.F.J. Manekshaw is the first Field Marshall of the Indian Army. Modern education is widely shared by all the various communities in India and the entrepreneurial skills of communities like Sindhis, Punjabis and Marwaris have come to the fore in modern India. However, Parsis continue to do well in most fields of endeavour (Kulke 1978: 51-55). Socio-economic life of this community is influenced by the tenets of Zoroastrianism. We shall now describe the main features of this religion.

## 19.3 TENETS OF ZOROASTRIANISM

Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism preached monotheism (belief in one supreme God and a deep moral life. He was against idol worship and over emphasis of ritual sacrifice. The basic tenets of Zoroastrianism are outlined mainly in two texts. The first of these is the *Avesta* or the *Zend Avesta*—it is a collection of texts gathered in writing roughly between the fourth and sixth century A.D. The second is the *Gatha* which comprises texts which are attributed to Zarathustra. These belonged initially to the oral tradition. The *Gathas* are five in number. The first four are ethical and philosophical. They describe and emphasise the omnipotence of or all pervading nature of “*Ahura Mazda*”. They also deal with the problem of evil due to the activities of the evil spirit. The fifth *Gatha*, is a hymn on the occasion of Zoroaster’s daughter’s marriage. The *Gathas* are written in *Avesta* which closely resembles Vedic Sanskrit. *Ahura Mazda* is considered to be the supreme God. He is the creator of heaven and earth, day and night, light and darkness. Life is seen as a struggle between the forces of good and evil.

The evil spirit is “*Angra Mainyu*”. One has to choose between good and evil. The ethical dualism (dualism indicated in the existence of good spirits and evil

spirits) that Zoroaster preached, emphasised that there are differences between human actions motivated by goodness and those that are motivated by evil.

Purity in thoughts, words and deeds implies the will to do good. Anything that is not guided by this motive is apt to turn into evil. Therefore the primary task of man is to live a righteous life. He must fight against the evil spirits along with his creator *Ahura Mazda*. They will be helped by a host of good spirits. One who lives a righteous life attains paradise. This is described as a state of immortal holiness in thought, word and deed. If one leads an impious life that person is condemned to an eternal hell of evil thoughts, deeds, and physical torment. The Parsis believe that the soul lives on after death. It meets its fate on the day of judgement, under the supervision of *Ahura Mazda*.

An important feature of Zoroastrianism is that it does not preach celibacy, asceticism, renunciation or self denial in life. It demands strict purity in thought, word and deed. This consists of abstinence from acts like adultery, rape, and the like (Cornoy 1961: 865).

Purity is essentially associated with fire. For the Parsis fire is worshipped as a symbol of purity, energy, force, light and radiance. And fire is a symbol of *Ahura Mazda*. Zoroastrian temples take the form of fire temples and are of three grades—*Atash Behrams*, *Agiaris* and *Dadgahs*, in that order of sacredness. Once the sacred fire is installed in a fire temple it must always be kept alive (always kept burning). The interior of a Fire temple is shown in the figure 19.1.

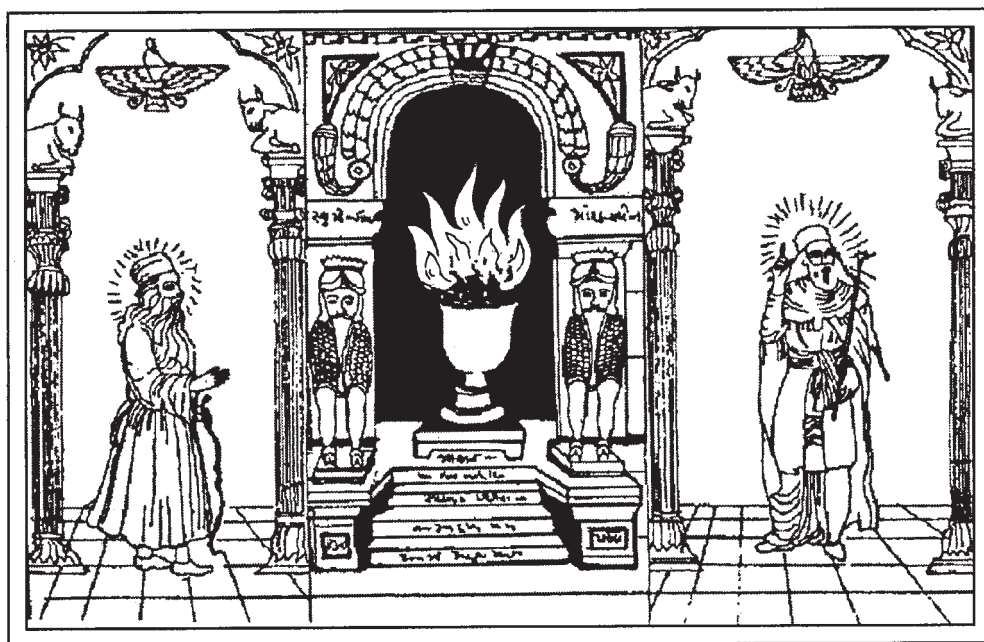


Fig. 19.1: The Fire temple

Many fire temples are places of pilgrimage for the Parsis. The oldest fire is known as the “Iranshah” which is supposed to have been burning for more than 1300 years. This is in Udvarda. All Parsis have sacred flames burning in their houses also. These flames are kept burning constantly. In the fire temple the priest reads portions of the sacred scripture—the *Avesta*, five times a day. In each household, a Parsi is also expected to say prayers five times each day.



The translation of the sacred texts, including the Avesta was completed in 1820, from Pahlavi (ancient language) to Gujarati. The average Parsi is thus able to have access to the sacred texts for daily use in prayers. Zoroastrianism does not advocate fasting for religious merit.

The *Gathas* of Zoroaster is another source of information about Zoroastrian belief. They present the picture of a society in which agriculture and herds of domestic animals had come to be looked upon with affection. In the sacred prayer “Behram Yesht” the reverence that is shown to the cow is evident. This aspect of Zoroastrian faith (respect to the cow) reflects the interaction with Hinduism as Hindus also look upon the cow as a sacred animal. We will now discuss some of the rites, rituals and customs observed by the Parsis relating to birth, initiation, death, marriage and family. These reflect the belief systems discussed above. They also indicate the adaptations the Parsis have made as a result of the interaction with local dominant population and their rulers at different points in time.

Zoroastrian beliefs are closely linked with the way day-to-day life is carried on by the members of Parsi community. In the next section, we will see how basic rites and religious ceremonies form an important part of Parsi social life.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Who was the founder of Zoroastrianism?  
.....
- ii) What is the other name for Zoroastrianism?  
.....
- iii) What is worshipped among the Parsis as a symbol of the supreme God?  
.....
- iv) Where are the Parsis found in India?  
.....
- v) What are the two important sources of information about Zoroastrianism?  
.....

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## **19.4 ASPECTS OF SOCIAL ORGANISATION**

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In this section we describe important life cycle rituals relating to birth and death. The social institutions of marriage and family are also discussed here. The Parsi system of inheritance and succession, the Panchayat and Festivals also figure in our discussion of the social organisation.

### **19.4.1 Rites of Initiation and Death**

Even though Zoroastrianism does not emphasise ritualism especially rituals sacrifices, there are some basic rites and religious ceremonies which form an integral part of the organisation of Parsi social life.

i) **Rites of Initiation**

Initiation rites mark the birth of a child into the Parsi family. On this occasion the child's lips are steeped in *haoma* (the sacred liquor). Full membership into the community is granted only when the child (both to a boy and a girl) attains the age between seven and fifteen. He or she then receives the girdle or cord called the *Kushti* or *Kusti*. This ceremony usually takes place before a child attains puberty. This initiation rite is called *Navjot* or *Naojote* (meaning new birth) and marks the admission of a Parsi boy or a girl into Zoroastrian faith. In addition, there is a host of other purificatory rites, which are often performed by many Parsis. They include the *padyab* (meaning ablution) *nahn* (meaning bath) or washing of one's body. The *bareshtnum* is a complicated ritual performed at special places with the participation of a dog. The left ear of the dog is touched by the person concerned. The gaze of this animal is believed to put the evil spirit to flight. The purification rites for the initiation of priests and corpse-bearers, involve, apart from other things *gomez* (consecrated urine), originally cow's urine following Indo-Iranian practices and ideas (Cornoy 1961: 579-581).

ii) **Death Rites**

The Parsi custom of disposing the dead is indeed unique. Death rites are probably the most elaborate of the Parsi rites. These reflect, among other things, their attitude to life and life after death. Parsis do not burn or bury their dead lest this should pollute fire or earth and make them liable to a strict punishment. They carry the dead body, amidst elaborate rituals, to a place built high up for this purpose. This is called a *dokhma* or 'Tower of Silence'. The body is left there to be eaten up by vultures.

The removal of the dead body (for its final disposal) must only be done during the daytime. As for the Tower of Silence, its interior consists of three concentric circles, one each for men, women and children. The corpses are exposed without any dress. The vultures do not take long (an hour or two at the most) to remove the flesh off the bones. The bones are dried by the sun, and later swept into a central well. Formerly, the bones were kept in an ossuary, (the place where bones of the dead are deposited) or what they called *astodan*, to preserve them from rain and animals. The morning of the fourth day is marked as the most solemn observance in the death ritual. It is believed that the departed soul reaches the next world and appears before the deities who are to pass judgement over it. The souls, they believe would be judged in the presence of *Ahura Mazda* and his helping spirits.

**19.4.2 Marriage and Family**

Marriage is solemnised and sanctified by a religious ceremony but it is a contract. The prayers are recited from the Avesta. As a result of Hindu influence, prayers are recited in Sanskrit too (CSWI 1974: 48). Marriage is, by and large monogamous. Consent of both the boy and girl is essential for finalising marriage. Zoroastrianism prescribes strict monogamy. Religious tradition does not approve of child marriage. Dissolution of marriage (divorce or separation) is allowed under certain conditions. In fact in 1936, The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act outlined clearly conditions under which divorce can be allowed. It also stated that both parties in marriage (husband and wife) could initiate

divorce proceedings. This law has been based on the liberal principles of Zoroastrianism, which grants rights to both men and women.

A Zoroastrian woman is considered as an equal partner in marriage and family. Both men and women are entitled to religious and secular education. Parents of the bride and the groom contribute to the expenses involved in setting up of their new household. A woman enjoys inheritance rights both in her capacity as a daughter and as a wife. Remarriage is allowed and a widow does not have to forego inheritance rights over her husband's property if she remarries (CSWI 1974: 4).

Thus Zoroastrianism has sanctioned liberal attitudes and practices regarding marriage and family. However, some of the less liberal attitudes and customs of the local population with which the Parsis came into contact have also made their impact on the institutions of marriage. Research has pointed out that by the seventeenth century A.D. Parsis settled in Gujarat had begun to pattern their social relationships after the Hindu society. Thus child marriage became common, some males practised bigamy or polygyny and widow remarriage was not easy. The evil practice of dowry also became prevalent. Horoscopes (birth charts) came to be prepared for Parsi children by Hindu priests (Bulsara 1968: 17-18).

These customs, especially dowry, bigamy, polygyny, child marriages, ban on widow remarriage, and divorce, came to be challenged by the enlightened sections of the Hindu and Parsi community including the members of Parsi Panchayat. Many members of Parsi community pointed out that these customs were not sanctioned by Zoroaster and therefore had to be stopped. Their concerted efforts indeed led to the removal of many of these practices. For instance, as a result of the vigorous campaigning by the social reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the 1929 Sarda Act was passed. This act penalised marriages of girls below 14 years of age and boys below 18 years. However, by this time (1929) there were hardly any child marriages among the Parsis. In fact, since then, the age of marriage has been rising, and since the 1960's the average age at marriage for Parsi men have been between 25-28 years. For Parsi women this is between 23-25 years (Bulsara 1968 : 26).

One important aspect regarding marriage and family, in which women suffer a disability even today, has been the aspect of inter-religious marriage. The child of a Parsi father and non-Parsi mother, whether in wedlock or out of it, can be initiated into the Zoroastrian faith by the Navjote or Naojote ceremony. However, neither by religion nor by law can a child of a Parsi mother and a non-Parsi father be admitted into Zoroastrianism. The steady decline in the size of the Parsi population can be traced, (to some extent) to the increasing number of marriages between Parsi women and non-Parsi men. Children born of such marriages are not recognised as Zoroastrians. Hence the decline in the number of members enumerated as Parsis. The Parsi community has not been able to stop such inter-religious marriages since Parsi girls enjoy the right to choose their spouses. Conservative members have their reservations and resentment against marriage between a Parsi and a non-Parsi. A Parsi boy's marriage with a non-Parsi girl is accepted with greater grace than the marriage of a Parsi girl with a non-Parsi boy. Since Zoroastrianism is not a proselytising

religion (it does not preach or practise conversion) it does not easily accept non-Parsi members into its fold.

Parsi girls marrying a non-Parsi boy by the 1954 Special Marriage Act have made a claim to the Parsi Panchayat that they must be given the right to visit the fire temple and remain a Parsi. It must be pointed out that these girls (those marrying non-Parsis) do not lose their rights of inheritance or intestate succession (CSWI 1974: 49).

### **19.4.3 Inheritance and Succession**

A feature of the rules governing the Parsi intestate (without making a will) is that the share of male heir is double that of a female heir of the same degree. For example, if a male Parsi dies leaving a widow and children, the property will be divided so that the share of each son and widow will be double the share of each daughter. Further if a male Parsi dies leaving one or both parents in addition to his wife and children, the property will be divided so that the father will receive a share equal to half the share of a son. The mother will receive a share equal to half the share of the daughter. On the other hand if a female Parsi dies intestate her husband and her children, will receive an equal share of her property.

Among Parsis adoption is not recognised by custom or law for purposes of inheritance and succession. A Parsi widow without any children, can adopt a son on the 4th day of her husband's death. This is for the temporary purpose of performing certain religious rites for the dead man. This adoption is for a limited purpose and does not grant any property rights on the adopted "*palak*".

What is clear, from these Parsi rules of inheritance and succession, is that while they recognise the woman's right to inheritance and succession, the Parsi daughter's share of her father's property remains half of that of a son. It must be pointed out that most of these provisions were enacted in 1939. At that time these rules conferred more rights to women than the then existing Hindu and Muslim laws.

#### **Activity 2**

See the movie *Pestonjee* or any other film made on the Parsis. If you cannot see a movie on Parsis, read a book or magazine or journal, which has any articles, related to the Parsis. Note down what you have learnt from this activity about the Parsi marriage and family. Discuss the same with other students in the Study Centre.

### **19.4.4 Parsi Panchayat**

Earlier we had mentioned that the Parsi Panchayat (also called *Anjuman*) played a role in reforming certain practices which reflected the infiltration of non-Zoroastrian elements into Parsi institutions (eg. child marriage, ban of remarriage, polygyny etc). In this section we will briefly examine the role of the Parsi Panchayat in India.

From the time Parsis landed in India, there were some members among them who negotiated with the rulers and traders on behalf of their community. Gradually the Parsi Panchayat or Council of Elders came into being. This was

established in Surat and Navsari around the middle of the seventeenth century. It consisted of both priests and laypersons. In this context, it is important to talk of the divisions, which have existed, in Parsi society in India.

In India, the Parsis are divided into two sections: namely the *Mobeds* (or priests) and *Behdin* (or laity). Priests for a long time were exclusive and intermarriage was seldom permitted. Only the son of a priest could become a priest. In terms of the Parsi Panchayat, in the seventeenth century though priests were members of the Panchayat, the laity members played a greater role in the economic role of the Parsis in India. Towards the last quarter of the seventeenth century the British started developing Bombay into their main trading centre. The Parsi community began to make full use of this trading venture in Bombay. The Parsi Panchayat played an active role in promoting the economic interests of the community. It also provided some inner stability and order to the Parsi community (Kulke 1978: 62).

The Bombay Panchayat was formally recognised to punish members of the community who went against the traditionally accepted Parsi norms (religious and social). Punishable acts included committing bigamy or insulting members of the priestly class. A person requiring divorce and permission to marry a second wife had to represent his case in writing to the Panchayat. When the bad conduct of a wife was established the Panchayat used to punish the guilty woman by taking her securities (her jewels, maintenance charge, funeral expenses on her death) before granting the husband permission to remarry. Those who were given permission to marry a second time had to get their marriage ceremony performed only by the priest named by the Panchayat. This would vary depending on whether the applicant belonged to the *Shehenshah* sect or the *Kadmi* sect.

Here we need to mention another social division. The Parsis are divided into two sections on the question of pronunciation of the *Avestan* prayers and the intercalation (this word means, to insert as a day on the calendar) in the Iranian-Zoroastrian calendar. In ancient Iran the length of the year was known to be 365 days and 6 hours. This difference of 6 hours was made up once in 120 years by adding one month known as *Kabisa*. Those who followed this method called themselves *Kadmis* or *Kadims*, meaning the ancient. While the Parsis who did not follow this calendar came to be known as *Shehenshahis*. Fire temples are open to both these sections. Intermarriage among these sects is quite common. For the *Shehenshahi* Parsis the New Year falls at the end of August, while for the *Kadmis* it falls a month ahead at the beginning of August. The Parsi Panchayat kept these divisions in mind when it tried to arrive at any decision.

Those who violated the rules were to be turned out of the community and punished, as the Panchayat thought proper. Besides obtaining permission from the Panchayat to marry a second time (when the first wife is alive) a man had to very often pay the Panchayat some amount of money as charity (Bulsara 1968: 28).

Among the punishments which could be imposed by the Panchayat were forbidding: (i) priests to enter the house of the person punished; (ii) the person to visit the Parsi temple; and (iii) the person to go to the Tower of Silence. Other punishments included beating the offender with a shoe, shaving a



woman's head, and excommunicating the deviants from the community and so on. The Panchayat continued to wield a strong influence over the religious-social life of the community till 1830. After this the sons of the old members took over and began considering their positions in the Panchayat as personal possessions. They behaved high handedly and in a biased manner. Henceforth, the Panchayat became an institution of class discrimination. Thus serious breaches like bigamy were now glossed over by the Panchayat, so far as the richer members of the community were concerned. This made some of the 'elderly' members resign their positions on the Panchayat. It had virtually become a powerless institution. The British Government also withdrew its recognition from the Panchayat.

In 1865, a Parsi Law Reform Association and later in 1961 a Government Commission worked on drafting a bill which gave the Parsi community, a written law of their own. It was entitled the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act of 1865 and Parsi Succession Act of 1865. These Acts have been amended in subsequent years to liberalise and facilitate legal proceedings relating to marriage and succession.

### **19.4.5 Festivals**

So far we have discussed the emergence of Parsi community in India, their basic tenets, some of the important rites and customs of the Parsis and the role of the Parsi Panchayat. There is another area of Zoroastrian social organisation that reflects the collective entity of the Parsis. The area which rejuvenates the Zoroastrian way of life are the Parsi Festivals.

Feasting is a necessary component of Parsi worship. In other words it is not just a 'desirable' or an expected mode of behaviour but one that is religiously enjoined upon Parsis. It follows directly from their fountainhead, Zoroaster, who enjoins every Parsi to lead a happy and joyous life. The principal festivals in the Parsi year are the six seasonal festivals, *Gahnbars* and the days in the memory of the dead at the Parsi year's end. Also, each day of the month and each of the twelve months of the year is dedicated to the deity. The day named after that month is when the great feast day of that particular deity is held. The new year festival, Noruz or Navroz is the most joyous and beautiful of Zoroastrian feasts. It is a spring festival in the honour of *Rapithwin*, who is the personification (i.e. considered as person) of noonday and summer. The festival to *Mithra or Mehragan* (noble spirits) was traditionally an autumn festival. This festival was as honoured as the spring feast of *Norus*.

As you have observed in this unit, the Parsis provide an interesting variation from other communities. Though numerically small and localised in a few regions in the world, they are significant in terms of their economic and social strength in India.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Fill in the blanks in the statements given below.
  - a) The initiation site, which marks the admission of a Parsi boy or a girl into the Zoroastrian faith, is called .....
  - b) The place where the dead body of a Parsi is disposed is called .....



- c) The new year festival of the Parsis is called .....
- ii) State whether the following statements are true or false.
- a) Zoroastrianism prescribes strict monogamy.
- b) Low age at marriage is prevalent among the Parsis today.
- c) A daughter and a son acquire an equal share of the father's property when the father dies intestate.
- d) The Parsis Panchayat consists of both the priest and laymen.

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## 19.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, you were introduced to the social organisation of the Zoroastrian community in India. Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism (deriving its name from its supreme God, *Ahura Mazda*) was introduced in India around the 8th century A.D. We described how this community came to be localised in and around Gujarat and we mentioned their population strength at around 76,382 in India 1991. We pointed out that the Parsis (as they are referred to in India) have made a significant contribution to the economic, political, educational and social development of India. In order to have an understanding of their social organisation we looked at their basic tenets or belief systems. We noted that fire is worshipped as a symbol of their supreme God *Ahura Mazda*. We pointed out that Zoroastrians believe that a person has to make a choice between leading a good life or leading an evil life. We then moved on to describe their rites of initiation and death, their customs relating to marriage, family, and laws of inheritance and succession. We observed that in the Parsi society both men and women enjoy rights of succession and inheritance. We also described the Parsi Panchayat and the festivals of the Parsis. We have thus given an adequate overview of Parsi social organisation.

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## 19.6 KEYWORDS

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<b><i>Ahura Mazda</i></b>	Name given to the supreme God of the Zoroastrians, which means, "Wise lord"
<b><i>Avesta</i></b>	A collection of texts gathered in writing roughly between 4th and 6th century A.D. and attributed to Zoroaster or Zorathustra
<b><i>Dakhma or Dokhma</i></b>	Also known as 'Tower of Silence' where the Zoroastrians dispose the dead
<b><i>Mazdaism</i></b>	Another name for Zoroastrianism derived from the name " <i>Mazda</i> " meaning supreme Lord
<b><i>Navjot</i></b>	An initiation rite by which a boy or girl is admitted into the Zoroastrian faith

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## 19.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The founder of the Zoroastrianism is Zarathustra or Zoroaster.
- ii) The other name for Zoroastrianism is Mazdaism.
- iii) Fire is worshipped as a symbol of the supreme God.
- iv) The Parsis are found mainly in Gujarat, Maharashtra especially in Bombay and Deccan.
- v) The two important sources of information about Zoroastrianism can be derived from its texts, the Avesta and the Gatha.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i)
  - a) Navjot
  - b) Dakhma/dokma or Tower of Silence
  - c) Navroz/Noruz
- ii)
  - a) T
  - b) F
  - c) F
  - d) T

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## UNIT 20 CASTE - STRUCTURE AND REGIONAL PATTERNS

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### Caste Structure and Regional Patterns

### Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Definition of Caste Structure
  - 20.2.1 *Varna* and Caste
  - 20.2.2 Features of the Caste System
- 20.3 Dimensions of Regional Variations
  - 20.3.1 Caste Structure and Kinship
  - 20.3.2 Caste Structure and Occupation
  - 20.3.3 Caste Structure and Power
- 20.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.5 Keywords
- 20.6 Further Reading
- 20.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 20.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you will be able to

- define the structure of caste in India
- describe the dimensions of regional variation of caste
- explain the relationship between caste structure and kinship, caste structure and occupation, and caste structure and power.

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### 20.1 INTRODUCTION

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The importance of caste in determining the nature of human groups and human relationships in India should be very evident to you from your study of earlier units of ESO-12. Caste can be identified as the single most important factor in the understanding of rural and urban India and its social, economic and political institutions.

In the previous Block, Block 4 of ESO-12, you learnt about the major religious communities and their social organisation. In this context you learnt about the significance of caste as a system of stratification found in nearly all the communities, especially amongst the Hindus. In this unit, we will tell you more about this system of stratification.

This unit will discuss the structure of caste as a regional reality. It will emphasise and denote the nature of caste groups as they exist in different parts of India. To be precise, a regional perspective of the caste system will be provided in this unit.



We begin by defining the caste structure in section 20.2. Then we have described the dimensions of regional variations of caste structure in India in section 20.3. In the process of presenting this regional profile of caste system in India we have explained to you the relationship between caste structure and kinship in section 20.3.1, caste structure and occupation in section 20.3.2; and caste structure and power in section 20.3.3. Finally, in section 20.4 we have given the summary of this unit.

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## 20.2 DEFINITION OF CASTE STRUCTURE

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Caste is a system of social stratification, which lies at the very root of social structure of most social groups in India. By social structure, we mean the persistent pattern of social interaction existing within and among social groups. These patterns of interaction are guided by the **normative system** of the society.

Caste structure is thus a pattern of social behaviour in which groups and individuals are guided by prescribed set of norms, values and sanctions. The groups and individuals occupy specific statuses within and in relation to other groups. In this system individuals are born into a certain caste and thereby acquire the role and status associated with that caste identity.

Sociologists have defined caste or (as locally referred to) '*jati*' as a "hereditary, endogamous, group which is usually localised. It has a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed, among other things by the concepts of pollution and purity, and generally maximum commensality i.e. interdining occurs within the caste" (Srinivas 1962:3). This definition describes the ideal form of caste system. However in real life there are innumerable variations and **permutations** in terms of structure and functioning of caste system.

Being a dynamic reality, which is highly flexible, it has shown tremendous variations from one region to another. But then we must ask, what is it that enables us to identify a caste? For this we must understand the relationship between the *varna* and *jati* or caste.

### 20.2.1 *Varna* and Caste

In theory, the caste system is interlinked with the '*Varna*' model which divides the Hindu society into four orders, viz., Brahmana, (Brahman, traditionally, priest and scholar), Kshatriya (ruler and soldier), Vaishya (merchant) and Shudra (peasant, labourer and servant). The first three castes are '**twice-born**' or '*dvija*' since the men from these castes are entitled to don the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of *upanayana*, which the Shudras were not allowed to perform. The untouchable castes are outside the *varna* scheme.

The term '*varna*' literally means colour and it was originally used to refer to the distinction between *Arya* and *Dasa*, in ancient India. According to the Rig-Veda, it was not applied to any classes, such as Brahman, Kshatriya, etc. However, the classes which existed at that time later came to be described as *varna* and the original distinction between *Arya* and *Dasa* gave place to the distinction between *Arya* and Shudra (Ghurye 1950: 52).

The caste system is an all-India phenomenon of which the *varna* model provides an all-India macro-structural scheme. In other words, the *varna* model only provides a framework within which the innumerable variations of castes throughout India are found. According to Srinivas (1962: 65) the *varna*-scheme is a 'hierarchy' in the literal sense of the term because the criteria of ritual **purity and pollution** are at the basis of this differentiation. Generally speaking, the higher castes are also the better off castes, and the lower castes are generally, the lower classes. However, this association between caste and class is not always true. A caste can be ritually high but ranked lower in the local caste hierarchy because this hierarchy is determined by secular factors like economic, political, educational status also. Thus, one of the most striking feature of caste system, as an actual reality has been the vagueness in the hierarchy, especially in the middle rungs.

According to the *varna* scheme there are only four categories. This scheme excludes the untouchables and its number is same throughout India. But this is not true in reality since even during the vedic period, occupational groups existed which were not subsumed by *varna*, although one cannot be sure whether these groups can be called castes or not. According to Ghurye, in each linguistic region, there are about 200 caste groups which are further subdivided into about 3,000 smaller units each of which is endogamous and provides the area of effective social life for the individual. Therefore, one can say that the *varna* scheme refers at the most only to the broad categories of the society and not to the actually existing effective units (Srinivas 1962: 65).

Srinivas states that the *Varna* scheme has certainly distorted the picture of caste but it has also enabled ordinary men and women to understand and assess the general place of a caste within this framework throughout India. It has provided a common social language, which holds good in all parts of India. This sense of familiarity, even when not based on real facts leads to a sense of unity amongst the people (Srinivas 1962: 69). Thus, the Indian society (by which we basically mean the Hindu society) has been full of changes and improvisations. But these changes have been against the background of the *varna* hierarchy. It is the *varna* frame which remains more or less constant while castes vary from region to region. Figure 20.1 shows that a *varna* may include different castes and these castes may divided into different subcastes.

### **Activity 1**

Talk to any five adult persons in your neighbourhood about the relationship between caste, family and occupation. Ask them?

1) What is their occupation?

What is their father's occupation?

What is /was their grandfather's occupation?

2) If they are following their father's or grandfather's occupation what has been the changes in terms of skill and technology?

3) If they are not following their caste occupation, then what is the reason for this departure

Write a note of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with the reports of the other students at your Study Centre.

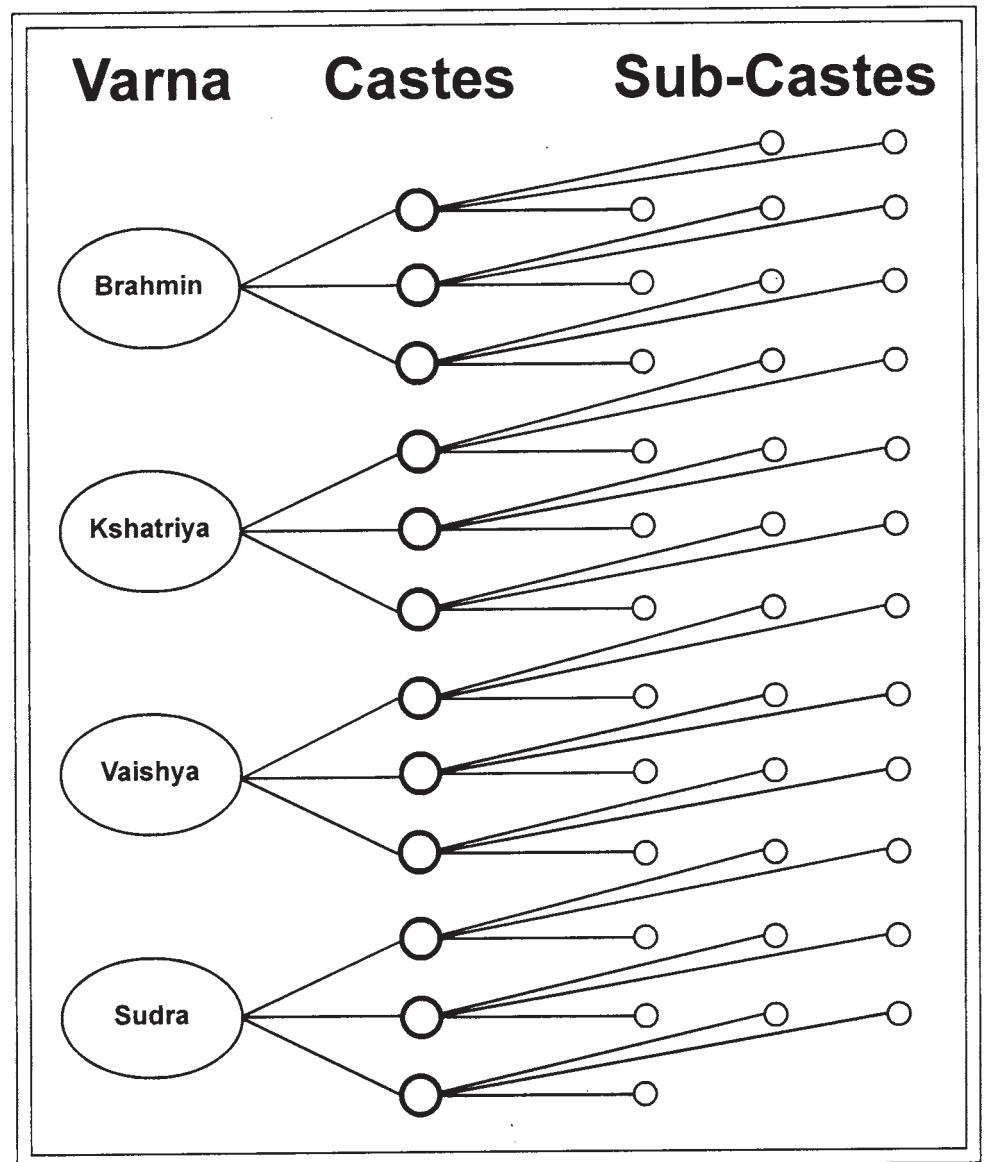


Fig. 20.1: The Varna model of caste system

### 20.2.2 Features of the Caste System

The main features of caste system are

- i) hierarchy,
- ii) endogamy,
- iii) association with a **hereditary** occupation,
- iv) restrictions on food and social intercourse,
- v) distinction in custom, dress and speech, and
- vi) civil and religious disabilities and privileges enjoyed by different sections of the society (Ghurye 1950: 50).

The Hindu society is divided into segmental divisions of caste. Caste is an ascribed status since caste membership is acquired by birth. The hereditary caste groups are arranged into a social and ritual hierarchy, with Brahmins at

the top, next the Kshatriyas, then Vaishyas followed by the Shudras. In the social hierarchy the lowest rung of the caste society is of the untouchables who are ritually the most impure. Thus, the concept of hierarchy forms the crux of the caste society. Each caste is considered to be more pure or impure than the other in the ritual sense of the term. The very shadow of some castes was once considered polluting. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the Shanar or toddy tappers were to keep 24 paces away from a Brahman. In Kerala, a Nayar could approach a Nambudiri Brahman but could not touch him, and a member of Tiyyan caste was supposed to keep himself at a distance of 36 steps from a Brahman (Ghurye 1950). Therefore traditionally the castes considered to be untouchable were forbidden entry into the upper-caste houses. In South India, even till the British period, certain parts of the town and cities were inaccessible to the untouchable castes.

Endogamy or marriage within one's own caste or sub-caste group is an essential feature of caste system. It is one of the main reasons for the persistence of caste system. People generally married within one's own caste group.

Traditionally, each caste was associated with an occupation. *Jajmani* system, about which you have already learnt in previous units, found in rural India enabled each caste to have a near monopoly over their hereditary occupation. Each caste was also ranked higher or lower on the basis of the ritual purity or pollution of their associated occupations. Thus, the Chamar castes of north India were considered untouchables since their occupation involved use of leather.

Each caste had its own caste council or panchayat where the grievances of its caste members were heard. These caste-councils headed, generally by the elder members of that caste, had the power to excommunicate a member from his or her caste if they did not accept caste restrictions. Caste restrictions operate in marriage, commensality or inter-dining and general social intercourse, as well.

In this section we have given an outline of the essential features of caste system. However caste structure has several variations. These variations are made clear when we examine its functioning in different regions of India. There are basically three dimensions in which we can examine the variations in the caste system. Therefore, in the next section we will begin by discussing the dimensions of regional variations under which we will describe the relationship between caste structure and kinship; caste structure and occupation; and finally caste structure and power.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Define the concept of caste in about four lines.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- ii) List some of the features of caste system in India. Use about four lines.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- iii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.

- a) Caste status is an ..... status.
- b) Ritual ..... and ..... determines the place of a caste in the caste hierarchy.
- c) The term ..... literally means colour.
- d) *Varna* is an all India category while ..... varies from one region to another.

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## 20.3 DIMENSIONS OF REGIONAL VARIATIONS

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Caste as a regional reality can be seen in the different patterns of caste-ranking, customs and behaviours, marriage rules and caste dominance found in various parts of India. For the sake of clarity, we are going to explain the dimensions of regional variations in terms of three aspects: caste structure and kinship; caste structure and occupation; and caste structure and power. However, these are only a few of the regional variations that are outlined here in this unit. In reality great diversity exists between regions as well as within regions.

### 20.3.1 Caste Structure and Kinship

Caste structure is intimately related to the kinship system amongst the Hindus in India. The sole reason for this relationship lies in the endogamous nature of caste system. Caste is basically a closed system of stratification, since members are recruited on the criteria of ascribed status. In other words, an individual becomes a member of a caste in which he or she is born. Thus it is an ascribed status. Even if there is social mobility in the caste system through the process of Sanskritisation, urbanisation, etc., it is only a positional change rather than a structural change.

A person remains the member of his/her caste irrespective of his/her individual status. Any movement in the structure occurs in the social mobility of the caste group in the local hierarchy of the society, which is only a shifting of its position from one level to another.

Kinship is a method or a system by which individuals as members of society relate themselves with other individuals of that society. There are two types of kinship bonds. One is consanguinal and the other is affinal. Consanguinal ties are ties of blood such as, between mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, etc. Affinal ties are ties through marriage, such as, between husband and wife, man and his wife's brother, etc. (For further details refer back to unit 8, Block 2, ESO-12).

Kinship in India is largely an analysis of the internal structure of the sub-caste. Sub-caste is the largest segment of a caste and it performs nearly all the functions of caste like **endogamy**, social control, etc. For example, (the Brahman caste has several sub-castes like, the Gaur Brahmans, the Kanyakubjis, the Saraswat Brahmans, etc. It is these segments of the main caste of Brahmans, which form the effective functioning group within which social interaction, marriage etc. takes place. However, these segments are also subdivided and have a regional connotation too, like the Sarjupari Brahmans of North India are those who originally lived beyond the river Saryu or Ghaghara.

The effective caste group is the caste population of a single village while the effective sub-caste group within which marriage and kinship takes place is composed of the people belonging to the region around the village having several scores of settlements. Due to the practice of endogamy and restriction in social intercourse a person marries within the sub-caste group, or at the most caste group in India, which extends generally, beyond the village to a larger region.

Kinship system found in various parts of India differs from each other in many respects. However, generally speaking, we can distinguish between the kinship system in the Northern region, the Central region and the Southern region.

North India is in itself a very large region, having innumerable types of kinship systems. This region includes the region between the Himalayas in the North and the Vindhyas in the South. In this region a person marries outside the village since all the members of one's caste in a village are considered to be brothers and sisters, or uncles and aunts. Marriage with a person inside the village is forbidden. In fact, an exogamous circle with a radius of four miles can be drawn around a man's village (Srinivas 1955: 12).

Hypergamy is practised in this region according to which a man takes a wife from a clan which is lower in status to his own clan. That is, a girl goes in marriage from a lower status group to a higher status group within a sub-caste. The effect of this **hypergamy** and village exogamy is that it spatially widens the range of ties. Several villages become linked to each other through affinal and matrilineal links.

In his study of the Ramkheri village in Madhya Pradesh, Adrian Mayer (1960) not only described the Rajput caste and other sub-castes of the village but also the region around it as well.

The clans, lineages, and *kutumbs* are all part of the internal structure of the caste at the same time being part of the kinship organisation. These groups are all the time increasing and branching off with time.

The organisation of family in the northern region is mainly patriarchal and patrilocal. The lineage is traced through the male, i.e. patrilineal system is followed in this region. It is patriarchal because authority lies with the male head of the family and it is patrilocal because after marriage the bride is brought to reside in the house of the bridegroom's father.



Generally, in most of the castes in the north such as the Jats, an agricultural caste of South Punjab, Delhi and Haryana the “four-clan” rule of marriage is followed. According to this rule,

- i) a man cannot marry in the clan to which his father (and he himself) belongs;
- ii) to which his mother belongs;
- iii) to which his father’s mother belongs; and
- iv) to which his mother’s mother belongs (Karve 1953).

In this region a person avoids marriage with kins who are related to him or her five generations on the mother’s side and seven generations on the father’s side ideally. However, in reality as discovered by Mayer in his study, these rules can be broken in some cases (for further details see unit 8, Block 2, ESO-12).

In the northern region, therefore, marriage with cousins, removed even by two or three degrees is viewed as an incestuous union. In most parts of this region, as mentioned earlier, village exogamy is practised by most of the castes, especially the Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes. This rule is known in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab, as the rule of *Sassan*.

In Central India which includes Rajputana, the Vindhya, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Orissa we find the general practice of caste endogamy. Hypergamy is most characteristic of the Rajputs of this region and village exogamy is also found in this region. However, in this region especially in Gujarat and Maharashtra amongst some caste communities we find cross-cousin marriages being practised. Here there is a tendency for a man to marry his mother’s brother’s daughter. But marriage with the father’s sister’s daughter is taboo. The preference for a single type of cross-cousin marriage seems to move away from the taboo of marrying cousins of any class in the northern region. Thus, in many ways this preference suggests a closer contact with the practices of the southern region.

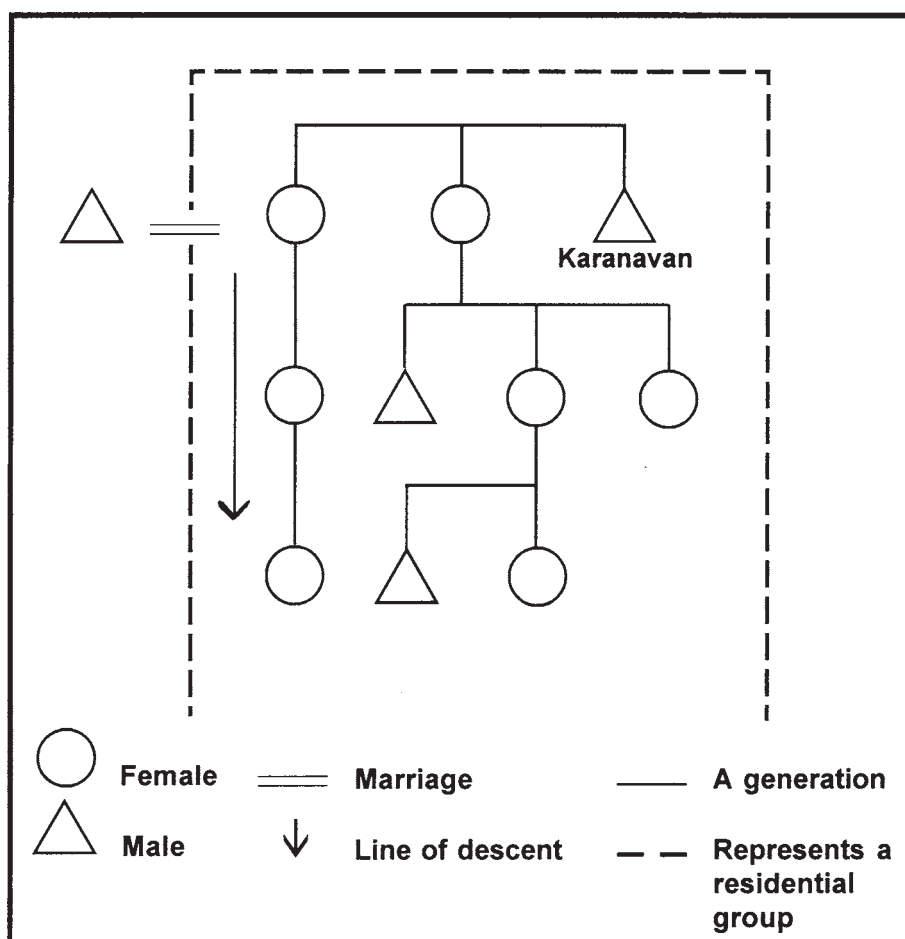
The Southern region comprises the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala where the Dravidian languages are spoken. This region is distinct from the northern and central regions of India in the sense that here we find basically preferential rules of marriage. Here a man knows whom he has to marry while in most areas in the north a man knows whom he cannot marry.

Most of the parts of the Southern region except some, like the Malabar, follow the patrilineal family system. Here also we find exogamous social groups called *gotras*. The difference between the exogamous clans in the north is that a caste in a village is held to be of one patrician and therefore, no marriage is allowed within a village. Sometimes even a group of villages are supposed to be settled by one patrilineage and marriage between them is prohibited.

In the South, there is no identification of a *gotra* with one village or territory. More than one inter-marrying clans may live in one village territory and practise inter-marriage for generations. Thus, the social groups, which are formed due to this kind of marriage pattern in the South shows a centripetal tendency (of moving towards a centre) as against the centrifugal (of moving away from the

centre) tendency of social groups found in north Indian villages. In the South, a caste is divided into a number of gotras. The first marriage creates obligations about giving and receiving daughters. Hence, within exogamous clans, small endogamous circles are found to meet inter-family obligations and a number of reciprocal alliances are found in South Indian villages.

Apart from castes, which are patrilineal in the southern region, we also find some castes, such as the Nayars of Malabar district who follow matrilineal system of kinship. A typical Nayar household is made up of a woman, her sisters and brothers, her daughters and sons and her daughter's daughters and sons. Amongst the Nayars, property passes from the mother to the daughter. But the authority even in this system lies with the brother, who manages the property and takes care of his sister's children. Husbands only visit their wives in this system. The Nayar matrilineal house is called a *Tharavad* (see figure 20.2). Nayar is a broad category of castes of which not all of them follow the same kinship system (Dube 1974: 26)



**Fig. 20.2: A Tharavad**

The relationship between the caste structure and the kinship system is so intertwined that we cannot understand one without understanding the details of the other. In this section we have explained the regional variations found in the relationship between the caste structure and the related kinship pattern. Now let us see the way in which caste is related to occupation.

### 20.3.2 Caste Structure and Occupation

All over India today we find that caste restrictions are not as meticulously observed as they were some decades ago. The hereditary association of caste with an occupation used to be a very striking feature of the caste system. It was so much a part of the caste system that some sociologists even argued that “caste is nothing more than a systematisation of occupational differentiation” (Srinivas 1965: 1-77). In fact, it can be said that caste was a system, which ensured an occupation to everyone, and therefore it was a method to control competition between social groups in the economic sphere.

However, as Srinivas says, the occupational aspect of the caste system would have broken down completely in the context of a growing population, if not for the surplus population in all occupational categories like artisans, traders, servicing castes falling back on agriculture. Traditionally agriculture was a common occupation for all castes and Brahmins, Kshatriyas and even Vaishyas have been dependent on agriculture.

A caste is considered to be high if its characteristic way of life is high and pure and it is considered to be low if its way of life is low and polluting. By the term ‘way of life’ we mean whether its traditional occupation is ritually pure or polluting. For example, the occupation of the Brahmin Priest is ritually pure while the traditional occupation of a leather working caste like the Chamar of U.P. is considered to be ritually polluting. But the remarkable aspect of caste system is that the presumed hierarchy of ‘way of life’, which includes diet, occupation, etc. does not often correlate with the observed order of caste ranking found in several regions of India. For example, in spite of the trader castes being vegetarian (which is considered to be ritually higher) in Rampura, a village of Mysore, they are ranked ritually lower than the non-vegetarian peasant castes of the same village (Srinivas: 1955).

Another discrepancy between caste occupation and ritual ranking is that washing, sweeping and such other activities are done by everyone but when the members of the caste whose traditional occupation is to perform those activities do it, then it is considered to be polluting. Thus, it is the traditional association of a caste with an occupation, which determines its rank in the local caste hierarchy (Mckim Marriott 1959).

In the association of caste structure with a hereditary occupation the “*jajmani* system” forms the framework. The *jajmani* system, as you have already read in unit 2, Block 1 of ESO-12 is a system of economic, social and ritual ties between different caste groups in the villages. Under this system some castes are patrons and others are service castes. The service castes offer their services to the landowning upper and intermediate castes and in turn are paid both in cash and kind. The patron castes differ from one region to another depending on the socio-economic and political status of the castes. For example, the Rajput, Bhumihar and Jat are the patron castes in the North and Kamma, Reddi and Lingayat in the South. The service castes comprise Brahmin (Priest), Barber, Carpenter, Blacksmith, Water-carrier, Leather-worker, etc.

Thus, to understand regional variations we have to know something about the ownership of land, the land tenure status and adherence to the *jajmani* system. These economic organisations depend a lot on the caste structure and regional topography and vice versa.

There is a congruence between high caste status and land ownership. At the top of occupational hierarchy stands a group of families, which control and own most land rights in the village/region. They also belong to the caste occupying the highest rank. Next in the hierarchy would be estate managers, landowners of relatively smaller size who are drawn from the castes who occupy a position next to the highest ranking castes. Smaller tenants and sub-tenants occupy the middle ranking caste groups. Finally, labourers are drawn from the lowest ranking caste (Such association between caste and class rank and traditional occupation has been mentioned by such sociologists as Ramkrishna Mookherji and Andre Beteille 1966).

The tendency of land ownership by the high castes serves to maintain and reimpose the existing caste hierarchy. However, with the changing times, impact of colonial rule and the consequent introduction of western education, this general association of higher caste with higher class (in terms of ownership of land, wealth and power) has been disturbed (Beteille 1966:3).

However, in spite of these changes the ritual criteria of caste ranking remain important. Although even in the ancient times it was not all-important, as secular criteria of wealth and power of which land ownership is an important aspect did determine the status of a caste. The early nineteenth century account of Abbe Dubois, a famous French philosopher, who travelled extensively in South India, exemplifies this aspect very clearly when Dubois (1928: 23) stated, “thus the caste to which the ruler of a country belongs, however low it may be considered elsewhere, ranks amongst the highest in the ruler’s own dominions, and every member of it derives some reflection of dignity from its chief”.

When we observe the regional patterns, we find that in the plains of Uttar Pradesh, two or more cultivating castes coexist. There is also the presence of a large number of scheduled caste groups, which have a numerical preponderance in the population. They generally constitute the labour force in this region. Caste groups are many and are heterogeneous in nature. There is a lack of uniformity in ranking and therefore, the caste structure is not well defined as is found in the southern regions.

In Bengal, as Andre Beteille reports, the Hindu population did not have the Kshatriya and Vaishya *Varna*. There was a large assortment of groups at the bottom known collectively as *Chandala* or *Asprishya*, who were technically exterior to the four-fold *varna* scheme. Traditional Bengal had five categories of Brahmans—Saptasati, Madhya deshi, Rarhi, Barendra, and Baidik. Of these the last three have had a recognisable and significant identity and an eminent position in the social hierarchy of Bengal. At the other end of the caste ladder (the only two which were found in Bengal) were the sudras. Sudras were also in turn divided into ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ castes based on their hereditary occupation (Beteille 1977).

In Orissa, as reported by Bailey, in his study of Bisipara, an Oriya hill village, the Warrior castes owned most of the land and combined soldiering with farm management. The outcastes, referred to as ‘*praja*’, were their servants. The other castes, including the Brahmans were in a position of economic dependence and political subordination to them (Bailey 1966:122-127).

Turning our attention to regions that are clearly dominated by the presence of one agricultural caste we find the case of Haryana and Punjab. In these states we find the dominance of a single agricultural caste referred to as the 'Jats'.

As compared to the north, in the district of Tanjore, we find a clear-cut hierarchy existing in the caste system with Brahmans as land-owners. The Hindu social structure is clearly demarcated between the Brahmans, the non-Brahmans and the Adi-Dravidas. The Brahmans are the landowners; the non-Brahmans are the tenants, sub-tenants service giving castes while the Adi-Dravidas generally constitute the category of landless agricultural labourers (Gough 1966:90)

These are only a few of the regional variations. We have outlined its general pattern to reveal the relationship between caste-structure and occupation. Now in the next section we will examine the relation between caste structure and power.

**Activity 2**

Recount some incidents in which you overcame your caste restrictions. Write a note of about a page. Compare it, if possible, with the notes written by other students at your Study Centre.

**20.3.3 Caste Structure and Power**

Central to caste system are caste panchayats and leadership. These power structures are highly formalised in certain caste groups and informal in others. The panchayat literally means a group or council of five. In a village it refers to a group that presides over, and resolves conflict, punishes people transgressing customs and launches group enterprises. It must be remembered that the village panchayat is quite different from the legislative use of the term panchayat. The usage, after the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1922, refers to a statutory local body, formed through elections, vested with legal powers and charged with certain governmental responsibilities. In certain villages traditional caste panchayats and leaders are still a powerful means of control. The democratic panchayat with legislative powers and traditional panchayat may overlap in certain regions.

Regional caste structures, in part, account for variations in their respective power structure. It is important to know what qualifies caste for regional dominance. According to Srinivas (1966), a caste is said to be dominant when it is numerically the strongest in the village or local area and economically and politically exercises a preponderating influence. The status of a dominant caste appears to rest on such criteria as

- i) the control of land and economic resources;
- ii) numerical strength;
- iii) a relatively high ritual status in the caste hierarchy; and
- iv) educational status of its members.

The above factors combine to place a particular caste group in a position of political dominance. A near monopoly of management rights in local resources (usually agricultural land) and control of the same gives the group an ability to

control the lives of the others. Numerical strength alone may not place a group in a bargaining position. It needs an economic power base to backup its strength. Once economic rights are in possession, however the size of a group does become important. The control of resources by members of a dominant caste lead in turn, to making decisions for others, which constitutes real dominance.

Regional variations that account for dominant caste can be explained by

- i) the degree to which a single large land holding caste controls a set of dependent castes,
- ii) rigidity of caste ranking,
- iii) the existence of two or more dominant caste groups in a region.

Studies from various parts of India suggest that dominant castes do not exist everywhere. Areas where a landowning group has been able to establish itself in proportionally large numbers, and yet maintain distinctive character (by strictly regulating marriage and descent) that dominance has been possible. Local power flows mainly from land, which is the main source of wealth. Power is safeguarded if it is confined to a unified and numerically preponderant caste group. Numbers alone do not guarantee power. Caste groups numerically preponderant, but with divided loyalties, creating disunity, may not wield power. It is only when a caste group becomes politically united that it becomes a political force. This is very important because in the new democratic political system where every vote counts the numerical preponderance of a caste group gains an additional meaning. Power may also accrue to a *jati*, when its members have effective connections with the power of the village panchayats.

In regions where religious groups and tribals are intermixed and no single caste possesses enough land, power or numerical strength, in such a condition, there is bound to be dual or multiple domination in a region.

### **The Regional Dimension of Power**

After a discussion about the features of dominant caste, let us see how they present themselves in the regional context.

Let us illustrate with examples, the correlation between caste and power structures. Karve (1953), in her study of the Malabar Coast has pointed out certain distinct features present in a region.

The order of dominance among castes parallels the order of caste rank. The exclusive nature of high-ranking castes is further reinforced by ritual notions of purity and pollution. High ranking Brahman castes of this region possess landed wealth, power and control, besides the traditional right to perform rituals; they also have right to religious learning and worship at temples. Subordinate castes are obliged to worship according to their ritual prescriptions and they do not have the right to religious texts like, the Veda, Upanishad, etc. Their economic and political subordination further enhances the dominant position of high-ranking castes. Organisation of ritual and temple services, concentration of land holdings correlates caste rank with secular power and promotes consistency in the total hierarchy of inter-caste relations. In regions where caste and power hierarchy overlap there is a definite concentration of power,



wealth and land invested with high ranking caste groups. Correspondingly ritual sanctions reinforced the superordinate status of upper caste groups and subordinate status of the lower caste groups. Thus, this correlation leads to the minimising of disputes.

Regions, which do not reveal a major correlation between caste and power structures, are characterised by certain features very different from the earlier example. Caste ranking may not be clear-cut and may promote disputes about caste ranking and status within the hierarchy. Caste groups of equal rank may be constantly disputing over their mutual positions in the hierarchy, resulting in dissent and dispute over ranking. Such conflicts get consolidated over a period of time resulting in formalised factions within the caste groups. Factions may promote disputes between them. Lack of clarity in caste ranking results in a diffused power structure, with no single caste group wielding economic, political and ritual clout. The Coromandal region of South East coastal India validates the above arguments.

In the districts of Punjab, Haryana and parts of U.P., especially in the upper Ganges districts, middle ranking castes such as the Jat, Ahir, Kurmi, etc. wield substantial amount of power and hold positions of dominance. The agricultural castes wield substantial power, and are numerically preponderant in some of these regions.

Political and economic interaction among castes in this region, however, forms a somewhat imperfect hierarchy as political and economic power is diffused. Ritual and secular power may not coincide everywhere. The region is marked by a lack of rigid stratification of castes, lack of concentration of political and economic power in a single caste group, resulting in the diffusion of political power.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Describe the relation between caste and kinship in about five lines.

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- ii) Discuss one of the ways in which we find a discrepancy between occupational status and the caste ranking. Give an example. Use about six lines.

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iii) Define the concept of dominant caste in about three lines.

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## 20.4 LET US SUM UP

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This unit has introduced you to the aspects of regional variations evident in caste structures. This was done by first defining caste structure. Then we have explained the dimensions of regional variations. This we did by relating caste to kinship, occupational and power structures. We have examined the intimate link between caste and kinship system in India. Then we have explained the correlation of caste and occupational structure. Here, we have described the discrepancies between ritual hierarchy and the secular hierarchy relating to the occupation and land ownership pattern of different castes.

Lastly, we have discussed the features of dominant caste, in relation to caste and power structure. A combination of essential features served to make caste groups of varying statuses prevails in a dominant position. We also noted how certain areas show a correlation between the ritual and secular power of caste groups while diffused political and economic powers result in the rise of more than one caste group into positions of power in some other areas.

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## 20.5 KEYWORDS

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<b>Endogamy</b>	It is the custom of marrying within one's own social group such as the caste group.
<b>Hereditary</b>	Anything, like name, status or property, which has been transmitted from one generation to the other genealogically.
<b>Hierarchy</b>	It is one of the most essential aspects of caste stratification in India. It seeks to place one caste above or below another caste on the criteria of ritual purity and pollution.
<b>Hypergamy</b>	The practice of giving a woman in marriage to a clan, which is higher in social status than the status of the clan to which the woman belongs, within the same caste group.
<b>Normative System</b>	It is the body of norms, values, beliefs and ideas, which guide social behaviour in a society.
<b>Permutations</b>	The number of ways in which a social group, like a caste group, can be arranged.
<b>Purity and Pollution</b>	It is an abstract notion which considers certain activities, objects and occupations ritually pure or polluting in the caste society. For example,

vegetarianism is considered ritually purer than non-vegetarianism. Both these concepts are necessarily relative to each other.

**Twice-Born**

The castes belonging to the first three *varna*, i.e., Brahmans, Kshatriya and Vaishya, whose male members undergo the thread ceremony called the “*Upanayan samskara*” are called the twice-born or ‘*dvija*’.

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## 20.6 FURTHER READING

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Dass, Aravind and Sita Deulkar 2002. *Caste System: A Holistic View*. Dominant: New Delhi

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## 20.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Caste is a form of social stratification, which divides the society into various social groups, which are placed in a hierarchical order on the criteria of mainly ritual purity and pollution. It is hereditary and endogamous. It has a traditional association with an occupation and observes maximum commensality.
- ii) The main features of caste system are
  - a) hierarchy
  - b) endogamy
  - c) association with a hereditary occupation.
- iii)
  - a) ascribed
  - b) purity, pollution
  - c) *varna*
  - d) caste

## Check Your Progress 2

## Caste Structure and Regional Patterns

- i) Caste is an ascribed status i.e. its members are born in a caste group. Every person has his or her consanguines and affines in the same caste group since caste is endogamous by nature. Thus, it has been said that the kinship organisation which includes the family, lineage, clan are part of the internal structure of a caste. Thus, caste and kinship are inter-twined with each other.
- ii) In some regions we find that caste might be following ritually purer habits in diet, customs, dress, etc. but still it is placed lower than a caste which follows ritually polluting customs, in the local caste hierarchy. The reasons for this could be secular criteria of wealth and power and so on. For example, in a Mysore village the trader castes who were vegetarians were placed lower than the locally dominant peasant castes who were non-vegetarians.
- iii) Dominant caste is that caste which is relatively high in ritual rank and whose members are numerically the strongest in the village/ region and economically and politically most powerful in the area.