

UNIT 19 PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL UNITY: CASTE AND TRIBE

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19.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to :

Explain the caste system and the process of its politicisation in the colonial and independent period.

Describe the social consequences of the politicisation, and the process of

modernisation of the caste system.

Understand the diverse cultural patterns and problems of tribes in India.

Identify the impact of urbanisation and industrialisation in the social lives of tribes.

Explain various approaches to the integration of the tribes in national life.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

The unit begins with the description of the caste system in India. It analyses the inequality practised in caste system. The process of politicisation of caste ideology, both in the colonial and in the post-independent electoral politics, has been dealt in greater detail. The unit also touches upon the grievances of the scheduled castes and of the backward classes which manifested in the form of various caste movements in India.

The diverse ethnic, language and cultural patterns of the tribes are discussed in the second section of this unit. The problems of ecological imbalances, land alienation, indebtedness are also explained in this unit. The consequences of social change in tribal society caused by urbanisation are also discussed here. Lastly, the approaches towards tribal development are also examined in the unit.

19.2 CASTE SYSTEM

Caste (Jati) as a system practises inequalities. These are justified on the basis of birth, pollution and purity of occupations. Among castes, there is not only inequality of wealth, income and power but also cultural and social segregation on the assumption that some castes are more pure than others. These factors determine their social ranking.

The jatis were ranked traditionally using a varna of Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaisyas (traders, artisans), Shudras (agriculturists and service groups) and Outcastes (those who suffered or are suffering from untouchability or those outside the caste hierarchy).

There are, however, some common cultural and social features of caste. These are : hereditary occupational specialisation, ascription of status and membership by birth, degrees of ritual purity and pollution and consequent social segregation and endogamy. Traditionally, the social hierarchy of caste was more or less based on occupational hierarchy and division of labour. It was based on a system known as the 'Jajmani' or patron client relationship through which all caste groups were inter-related, both by economic and ritual relationship of reciprocity and social gradation.

19.3 CASTE IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Caste system operated as a local or regional institution of social ranking and division of labour. Its larger social organisation, the caste-panchayats rarely extended their boundary beyond a few local villages. Its role in national integration was not ritual but social and economic. The products of artisans, tenant cultivators and working classes were traded far and wide. The surplus generated by these caste groups and appropriated by the landlords and rulers led to consolidating the foundations of principalities or even empires in India. The studies of ancient and medieval empires reveal a close relationship between technological facilities (irrigation, land, development equipment, etc.) provided by the political authorities, the level of productivity in craft and

agriculture and the degree of political social and cultural stability in the empire. The role of caste and caste panchayats in this process was, however, very indirect and marginal. Castes were not politicized and functioned largely as economic and occupational groups of status ranking. These enjoyed relative autonomy from political authorities of the state. It was also true that the concept of a nation-state as emerged in India during the struggle for independence did not exist in the ancient or the medieval period of its history. The political authority and its system of governance was highly decentralised.

19.3.1 British Policy towards Caste : Segregation of Identities

The colonial administrator was interested in caste and religion in India partly for reasons of understanding the social practices and institutions of a people whom they looked forward to govern. More importantly, it was also to show that India did not constitute an integrated social, cultural, economic and political unit, and hence could not constitute a nation. Their methods analysing caste and culture presented the Indian social profile as a fragmented and not as an organic whole. The social units, such as caste, tribe and religion got more than life-size portrayal and the elements of linkages between caste, economic structure and policy, etc. Were simply neglected.

The social, economic and political policies of British colonialism show contradictory elements. On the one hand, their concern for economic and social upliftment of the depressed castes, tribes and other exploited sections of society is reflected in numerous reform measures through legislation and administrative rules. On the other hand, one witnesses a deliberate effort to politicise caste, tribe and religious communities so as to legitimise their claim to independent and separate identity. They disregarded those institutions and practices which bound these various social entities into an organic system of inter-dependence in cultural, economic and political domains. No doubt, most such relationships had elements of inequality or even exploitation, but the down playing of linkages led to the emergence of caste identity which was contrary to the processes of national integration.

19.3.2 Social Reform Measures under British Rule

Apparently, the concern for social reforms by the British administration is reflected in their attempt to identify the depressed castes (scheduled castes after independence) through the Census of 1931; in the abolition of Caste Cutcherry in Calcutta in 1769 where until then Brahmins were treated as sole interpreters of Hindu caste laws; in the legislation of Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850; in fact, to protect the interests of convert Christians and the legislation of a Special Marriage Act in 1923 under which persons belonging to any caste could intermarry, etc. These social legislation's reflect British attempts to establish a rational socio-legal system in India. Yet, the negative elements in their social policy on caste, either consciously or unconsciously, promoted casteism and encouraged communalism in India. Separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims on the basis of religion were introduced in 1909. Later, similar provisions were also made for the Sikhs in Punjab, and the Anglo-Indians and the Christians in a few other states. The introduction of a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes or the 'menial' castes was also mooted in the First Round Table Conference by Dr. Ambedkar. This proposal was accepted in principle in the Third Round Table Conference. It was opposed by Mahatma Gandhi as it would have fragmented the Indian society, in addition to perpetuating the caste disabilities. Gandhiji undertook a 'fast unto death' to oppose this proposal and finally Dr. Ambedkar was persuaded to

give up the demand for separate electorates in favour of 'reserved seats' for Scheduled Castes in Assemblies and the Parliament, in addition to other forms of reservation. The agreement between Gandhi and Ambedkar for reserving seats for scheduled castes is known as 'Poona Pact'.

19.3.3 Caste-Consciousness and Sanskritisation

On the other hand, through the policies regarding social institutions and their administration the British rule activated the process of local and regional consciousness as never before in Indian history. This went contrary to the needs of national integration and smooth emergence of India into a nation-state. The colonial power ruled India by a policy of divide and rule.

The census enumeration on the basis of caste led to a sudden rise in caste consciousness and caste identity among people as a tool for recognition of social status and access to privileges by the caste state. There was widespread movement among castes and sub-castes to get themselves enumerated and the census was seen as an opportunity to lay claim to a higher caste status. It was assumed that once higher caste status was recognised through census enumeration, other social privileges would follow or could be claimed. Not only were there scores of court litigations following claims and counter-claims for higher status in the caste hierarchy through the census operations, but the claim was also associated with cultural practices and modes of living. The process of 'Sanskritisation' as described by M.N. Srinivas refers to the claim for higher status within the caste system by the lower castes by adopting the ritual practices, style of life and ideology of the higher castes. As a corollary, it meant renouncing the customs, rituals and styles of life of their own considered to be lower in nature. Sanskritisation reflected the aspirations of the lower castes for status mobility. It got impetus in a social and administrative context introduced by the new colonial administration. A new meaning and significance to the identity of caste was given in the process. The British Administrator ethnographers, John C. Nesfield, Denzil, C.J. Ibbeston and H.H. Risely in 1885 worked out a schedule for identification of the social, kinship, cultural and ritual features associated with the caste system in India. It led to the ethnographics survey of India, and later to Census operations. Caste was for the first time officially given legitimacy as a social entity. The same procedure was adopted by the British colonialism towards religious groups and tribes.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note :** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of this unit.

1) What is meant by Caste?

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2) Endogamy means marriage with caste

Yes.....

No

- 3) Jajmani is system of reciprocal exchange of goods and services among the caste.

Yes

No

- 4) Why was the idea of separate electorates for the depressed classes dropped by Gandhiji?

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19.4 CASTE IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

The policies that British colonial rule pursued activated the process of politicisation of castes and strengthened their self-awareness. The Congress movement for Independence and its leadership kept on fighting against such policies on the basis of a nationalist secular ideology. Soon after freedom was achieved, the social framework of the policies was evolved in the Constituents Assembly and adopted in the Constitution of India. Constitution of India recognises only the civic status of a person in all matters to do with law and state. For the historically deprived and depressed sections of society, such as the depressed castes, tribes and minorities, it offers special provisions in addition to their civic rights.

The protective discrimination in favour of scheduled castes is a measure of our national commitment to establish an equalitarian society. It strengthens the forces of national integration by accelerating the pace of development and social mobility in a segment our society which was long been exploited. It ensures a balanced social and economic growth apart from reinforcing emotional integration, necessary for the nation-building process.

19.4.1 Caste and Electoral Politics

Electoral politics has led the caste associations, which formerly served only social, charitable or educational purposes, to jump into the political arena. Vote banks on caste lines have now appeared. The political mobilisation of caste has led to new forms of caste alliances. This has initiated a process of 'fusion' and 'fission' in the caste structure.

The involvement of democratically elected bodies in the decision making process and distribution of economic resources and opportunities made caste organisations conscious of the need to enter into the electoral arena to gain power and resources. It influenced their response in three broad stages :

- i) It reinforced caste identities, increasing caste rivalries. The examples are, Mahar and Maratha rivalry in Maharashtra, Kamma and Reddy antagonism in Andhra Pradesh, Lingayat-Vokkaliga rivalry in Karnataka, Rajput-Bhumihar rivalry in Bihar, etc. In South India, most such rivalries also had a touch of anti-Brahminism.
- ii) These caste rivalries with a sharpened sense of identity had soon to give way to caste alliances because of the demands of caste politics. This led to the process of fusion

among castes. The objective was mainly to enlarge the political base to gain power and access to resources. Consequently, many caste associations emerged through fusion of castes, such as the Kshtriya Mahasabha in Gujarat, Vannyar Kula Sangham in Tamil Nadu, and the Ahir, Jat, Gujjar, Rajput (AJGAR) association in Uttar Pradesh which was mooted, though not fully exploited. The effort was to unite the peasant castes into a single unit for electoral politics. Several political parties on the basis of caste following emerged in different parts of the country.

- iii) The process of fusion, however, after operating for some time resulted into the third phase, that of fission process in caste association. The fission process in caste associations results from internal tensions on the basis of economic, social and political rivalries which mature due to uneven distribution of the share in power and resources among the competitive castes. Since, in a caste association all castes that fuse together do not have an equal numerical strength or level of social and economic development, those placed better in relative position take the lion's share of the opportunities and resources, leaving the less well placed units far behind. This leads to disillusionment and tensions and eventually the caste associations begin to develop fissures and the break-up starts.

19.4.2 Consequences of the Politicisation of Caste

The process of fusion and fission in caste associations have been analysed in terms of its contribution of political modernisation and national integration. We may find that each step towards transformation of castes into caste associations is also a step towards weakening of the ritualistic form of caste consciousness and caste loyalties, as it leads to emergence of the secular objective of alignment.

It contributes, though indirectly to the sharpening of civic consciousness in an uneasy psychological and cultural relationship with the traditional caste ideology.

Caste as Interest Groups

When a caste or a group of castes organises itself for fulfilling certain interests, which are primarily related to these castes, the caste works as an interest group. The attempt towards organisation of castes in order to realise political and economic objectives weakens traditional ritual significance of caste. In the caste interest group, the focus clearly shifts from principles of birth and kinship to social, economic and cultural deprivations which unite otherwise desperate castes together.

If caste associations function as mere interest groups in society and articulate political, economic and social demands of people through legitimate civic means and procedure, these do not come in the way of national integration. But the mindless and parochial expression of casteism can harm the process of national integration.

Caste Movement in India

We have discussed how colonial administration promoted caste consciousness in India and how even a separate electorate was offered to the scheduled castes before independence. The latter could, however, be averted following the signing of Poona Pact between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Even as the British attempted to divide Indians on the basis of caste,

religion, language, region, etc., various caste movements took place in India in the early twentieth century. These movements related to the depressed caste and backward classes.

Depressed Castes and Backward Class Movements

The castes which suffered social discrimination of untouchability, and which were poor were known as Depressed Castes before they came to known as Scheduled Castes. The depressed caste movements had the character both of protest and reform movements. The emphasis on reform originated in the first phase of national movement when the depressed castes, as we mentioned earlier, attempted sanskritisation by shedding their supposedly impure ways of life and attempted adopting beliefs and life-ways of the 'twice-born' castes in order to claim superior caste status. The Nadars in Tamil Nadu claimed Kshatriya status. The Nadars in Tamil Nadu claimed Kshatriya caste status and organised their association in 1910 known as the Nadar Mahajan Sangham. The Chamars and Nonyas in Uttar Pradesh similarly claimed the status of Chauhan Kshatriyas. Many such cases of sanskritisation were witnessed both before and after independence. There were also movements, which anti-caste orientation and challenged the Brahmanical ideology of varna and caste. Jotiba Phule's movement in Maharashtra was one such example. The Satyashodak Samaj in Maharashtra, the Self-Respect Agitation in Tamil Nadu and Veerasaiva Movement in Karnataka were against the caste system as such; Dr. Ambedkar led the scheduled castes in Maharashtra and other parts of the country and exhorted them to adopt Buddhism to get out of their caste disabilities. He formed Scheduled Caste Federation of India for achieving his goals. He later changed its name to Republican Party of India (RPI). The movement led by Ambedkar was a major success in Maharashtra where Mahars in large numbers converted to Buddhism. It spread to many northern states after independence. Such movements were basically anchored in the ideology of protest.

The scheduled caste movement also took an ideological form by attempting to replace the sacredotal interpretation of the origin of varnas by a secular intepretation based on class domination for perpetuation of power. They tried to reinforce their argument through evidence from history and mythology.

Bahujan Samaj Party

The schedule Caste movement has been further strengthened with the formation of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in 1984. This party was formed by Kasi Ram. Before it came to be known as the BSP, it was preceded by the organisations known first as BAMSEF (Backward Muslims Scheduled Caste Federation) and later as DSS (Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti). BSP believes that it represents the Bahujan Samaj (Majority of Indian Society) which consists of the non-high castes - the low castes (Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes) and minorities. The high castes have always dominated the majority. The problems of the Bahujan Samaj can be solved only if they run the government. With this perspective the BSP has contested elections in North Indian states, specially, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. BSP even formed a government in Uttar Pradesh in 1995 headed by Mayawati.

Backward Class Movement

The backward class movement prior to Independence had a middle caste base. The Lingayat Education Fund Association and Vokkaliga Sangh in Mysore, Yadava and Kurmi Mahasabhas in U.P. and the Maratha movement in Maharashtra are a few examples. Several other such

movements emerged after the end of colonial rule. These two were both reform and protest movements.

After independence, backward classes were recognised as a separate social category in addition to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes for protective discrimination but the policy of identifying them, whether on the basis of caste or income and education remained nebulous. The onus for it was shifted mainly to the states of the Indian union. Different states have now followed different policies on reservation of posts, access to offices, education and other resources for the backward classes. The matter is still being debated although reservations for them have been provided for in most states in India.

The backward classes acquired national significance in 1990 with the introduction of Mandal Commission Report. The V. P. Singh Government implemented the Mandal Commission in 1990. The report aimed at providing 27 per cent reservation in government jobs to the socially and educationally backward classes known as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The introduction of the report resulted in wide-spread protest in North India. But later, all political parties agreed to support the reservations for the OBCs. The supreme court of India also upheld the reservation of jobs for OBCs as suggested by the Mandal Commission. But it suggested at that benefit of the reservation should not be given to the privileged section among the OBCs, which were described by the Supreme Court “Creamy Layer” among them.

19.5 MODERNISATION, NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND CASTE

Modernisation introduces new elements of dynamisms in social structures and values in a society. Its growth reinforces the processes of social and cultural modernisation in India have now gone a long way in unfolding themselves. This process was reinforced through the Constitution, democratic electoral politics, social and economic reforms all oriented to eradicating inequalities and exploitation from society. Massive efforts in the fields of education, science and technology, industrialisation, economic growth, social reforms and distributive justice were made through planning. These development have deeply influenced the social structure, values and practices of caste groups in India.

Initially, the emergence of caste associations as organisations of protest and reform were viewed as forces that strengthened casteism. Some sociologists predicted that caste would become stronger and stronger in India as time passed. But it was soon observed that caste associations merely articulated adaptive responses of our society to cultural, social and economic demands of modernisation. Their focus was not on caste or casteism as such, but on mobilisation of people along caste identity for participation in modernisation processes as alternative identities did not exist or had not yet evolved. This was amply reflected in the processes of fusion and fission among castes. These processes showed the adaptability of caste to go beyond its typical structural boundary of a kingroup of sub-caste to directions of both vertical and horizontal spread.

As occupational mobility gained momentum, there was growth in education, urbanisation and industrialisation and market forces in the country. The caste identities came under pressure. The widespread practice of monetary wages and penetration of market in the villages has made the economic role of the jajmani system almost redundant. Hereditary specialisation of occupations has ceased to hold sway in the economy. Massive migration to cities has broken the bonds of economic and ritual reciprocities based on caste. The abolition of landlordism and introduction of

panchayatiraj has given a serious blow to patronage and exploitation of lower castes by the upper caste and classes.

Thus, modernisation process in India has considerably weakened the social structural and cultural bases of the caste system. In the structural domain, hereditary occupations have ceased to be sacrosanct, jajmani relations have all but disappeared from most part of the country, the disabilities of social interaction especially 'untouchability' has already started weakening with introduction of new modes of transport, growth of urbanisation and industrialisation. Now, its practice or support is a cognizable penal offence. We find that a large number of voluntary associations in India have already renounced the principle of caste for their membership. They are based on social objectives, professional interests and public causes. Caste may undergo adaptive transformation beyond recognition from its traditional mode of existence. All such processes step by step strengthen the forces of national integration.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note :** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of this unit.

1) What is Protective Discrimination?

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2) How do caste association act as interest groups. Explain.

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3) Modernisation process has weakened the caste system in India.

Yes No

4) What are the major factors which affected the caste system after independence?

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19.6 TRIBAL CULTURES : DIVERSE PATTERNS AND PROBLEMS

The tribal cultures of India can only be conceived of as a dimension of Indian civilisation. From ancient times, some tribal groups were in contact with the advanced civilisation. References to such contact could be traced to the days of 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharat' wherein the tribal communities are described as 'Jana' in contra-distinction to 'Jati' or caste society. The people were different in physical appearance, worshipped their own gods and lived in hills and forests.

19.6.1 Tribal Population in India

India has a large tribal population consisting around 7 per cent of the total population. The tribal people are concentrated in four regions. They form a majority in the north-eastern states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya. However, the majority of the tribals live in the belt of middle India from Gujarat to Bengal. In states like Madhya Pradesh and Orissa the tribals account for more than 20 cent of the population. In Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan, the percentage of tribals ranges between 4 to 15 per cent of the total population. However, in the entire middle Indian zones, the tribals are in a majority only in 13 districts. The third zone of tribal concentration is the 'Cishimalayan Region' extending from Kashmir to Sikkim. In the far South, we have the fourth area of concentration but the population is rather small. Nearly 450 distinctive tribal groups live in the country varying in size from around four million to a bare two dozen. Their styles of living are largely determined by their means of subsistence which includes a wide spectrum of activities such as hunting and food gathering. Artisan groups are engaged in different types of arts and crafts, and some are employed as industrial labour. Tribals practice all main religions of India; Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Some others still follow their traditional faiths. The general notion that the tribals are concentrated in areas unsuited for settled agriculture is not true since the bulk of the tribal population in the country derives its subsistence from settled agriculture either on plateaus or plains. There are, however, some tribes which are settled in such areas where plain type of agriculture cannot be attempted on account of the uneven terrain.

19.6.2 Tribal Languages

Indian tribal groups speak a number of languages which fall into families such as the Indo-Aryan group and the Dravidian group. Among the Indo-Aryan languages, there are some which are scheduled as tribal such as Bhil. Language, however, is not an immutable factor. While a tribal community cannot change its ethnic identity, it can become proficient in the main regional language. The first step in such a process is usually Bilingualism. Sometimes, this is a transitional phase followed by the decline and the ultimate extinction of the tribal language. This process has gone on for hundreds of years and many tribal communities, particularly the smaller ones, have lost their original tongues and speak one of the main languages of India. Thus, half of the Gonds of middle India do not even know Gondi but speak Hindi, Marathi and Telugu according to the region in which they are settled. Amongst some of the tribes in Orissa, the ritual prayers and the magical formulae are also spoken in Oriya. When the tribal community is affected by linguistic assimilation, it also absorbs a number of ideas and concepts and accepts diverse behaviour patterns.

19.6.3 Ecological Imbalances and the Tribes

Nature has enduring influences on the life of the tribes. Forms of tribal economy have evolved based on the availability of the natural resources around. Tribal communities have subsisted for a long time with a reasonable standard of health and comfortable abode in their natural habitats. However, on account of a variety of factors, this ecological balance has been disturbed in many forest regions; wild life has been destroyed as a result of large scale poaching for game and profit. Vegetation has also changed considerably because of depletion of forest resources. Both these factors have affected the natural diet of the tribals.

Increasing pressure of population and decreasing command of our resources, such as restrictions in the exploitation of reserved forests, have further added to this imbalance. In some areas, where food resources are inadequate, the tribals have to subsist on bitter non-edible roots and tubers or go without food for a stretch of time. In many places, materials with which huts are constructed, are also difficult to find. Thus, they are finding it hard to meet the basic needs of food and shelter. Most of these tribes have an extremely low level of literacy and a near stagnant population. They have been pushed on all sides by advanced communities, both tribal and non-tribal. Some of them face special health problems and are in a precarious state of existence. The Abujhamanas of Bastar, Bando Poroja of Orissa and the Onge and Jarawa of Andamans are cases in this point.

19.6.4 Problems of Tribal Peasants

The bulk of Indian tribal societies correspond to the classic description of peasant economics, which comprise 'a system of small producers with simple technology and equipment' often relying primarily for their subsistence on what they themselves produce. It is the policy of the government to minimise the extent of shifting cultivation, promote terrace cultivation and apply the new agricultural strategy to the tribal region and to accelerate the flow of capital for agriculture therein. There has been a diffusion of improved agricultural technology by governmental agencies. Efforts are being made to develop innovative technologies which would yield results in drought-prone areas and highlands. At present, much of the settled cultivation is at subsistence level and the majority of the tribal produce is not marketed. They sometimes make distress sales in order to buy some necessities. However, pockets of modernised agricultural farming are emerging among the Munda and Oraon of Chotanagpur, the Gond and the Korku of middle India, Badaga and the Mulla Kurumba of the Nilgiris. Cash crop of coconut has turned the Nicobares into an affluent community. The incidence of cash cropping has been reported from the parts of tribal Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra, Orissa and Chotanagpur.

Land Hunger, Land Alienation and Landlessness

In the central zone of tribal concentration agrarian issues stand at the centre of development. In the western zone, we find land scarcity and land hunger. This is due to the expulsion of the tribes in those regions by the more vigorous Rajput, Maratha and other Hindu peasantry. Other contributory factors to land hunger are low productivity of land, the primitive mode of agriculture and the continued exploitation of tribals by others against whom protective legislation do not afford sufficient safe-guards and the non-diversification for tribal economy.

In all part of middle India attempts have been made to prevent alienation of land from tribals to the non-tribals, but these have not been successful on account of several loopholes in the law that were discovered later on. The Dhebar Commission made a number of recommendations to curb

this menace. Agrarian issues in tribal areas, are extremely important since the tribals do not have any accumulated surplus and in drought-prone areas, failure of monsoon leads to distress on an unusual scale. In many areas, conditions of perpetual scarcity prevail.

Indebtedness and Bonded Labour

Traditional money-lending has been one of the worst forms of exploitation in almost all tribals areas of India. The money-lender engage the tribals as bonded labourers in lieu of the money loaned. The interest on the debt and non-economic exploitation of the tribals is so high that the tribals are not able to return the loan, and they are not free to work anywhere else until the loan is cleared. There are instances where the loans taken by a tribal was transferred to his sons.

The system has been prevalent in many areas where it is known by different names. Efforts have been made to abolish bonded labour by legislation, but it has not been realised that liberation from bondage is not as important as identification and rehabilitation. The rehabilitation schemes have got to be stepped up if a breakthrough in this respect is to be achieved.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of this unit.

- 1) The tribals are predominantly subsistence producers
Yes No
- 2) Ecological imbalance have adversely affected tribals.
Yes No
- 3) The term “Mongoloid” is related to
 - a) Physical feature of the Tribe.
 - b) Language of the Tribe
 - c) Economy of the Tribe.(Tick mark the correct answer)
- 4) In the process of interaction between the tribals and non-tribals, the tribals have got more access to land and other natural resources.
Yes No
- 5) Mention the major problems faced by tribal peasants.
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19.7 TRIBALS IN AN URBAN SETTING

Only a small fraction of tribals in India live in towns. It is true that for long time the tribals were very far from the urban setting. However, in recent times some tribal population has migrated to urban areas on account of the setting up of administrative centre, growth of communications and the rising pace of industrialisation, particularly in the tribal belt.

19.7.1 Industrialisation and Detribalisation

Whereas urbanisation is a slow process and urban values take some times to be absorbed by people, industrialisation involves a much more drastic change. In an industrial setting, efforts are made by migrant groups to concentrate in particular areas. However, this is no longer possible after a considerable lapse of time and the people tend to be dispersed.

After the first Five-year plan, when steps were taken to take the country on the path of industrialisation in a big way, it was discovered that the most suitable locale for setting up of steel plants would be in certain areas in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa where both iron and coal were found. But all these areas are in the heart of the tribal region. Even before Independence, in the coal mining belt of Jharia and Raniganj, tribals were found in large numbers. So is the case with the steel town of Jamshedpur which lies in the heart of the land of the Ho. The iron and coal mines at Gua and Noamundi and copper Mines at Mosabani and the bauxite mines at Lohardaga lie in the same areas. Thus, industrialisation has transformed tribal society; not only the persons directly employed in the industries but their dependents and other people.

19.7.2 Monetisation and Spread of Education

The introduction of money economy has led to radical changes in the lives of the urban tribals. It has transformed the traditional communal goals with the goals related to personal achievement and individual careers. This has resulted in a drastic change in the structure of the family and the roles of men and women in it. The respect of the young for their elders, of women for men, of the commoner for the headmen accompanied by elaborate ritual and etiquette also have little place in an industrial society. The newly achieved status in industry affects the form and nature of leadership. A man who enters as a labourer becomes a foreman by successive promotions and thus, acquires middle class status. Such social mobility was unknown earlier. It also leads to the emergence of a self-conscious status group and ultimately to the growth of a class system, which is generally unknown among the tribal groups in middle India and which, militates against the tribal norms of an egalitarian society.

Modern educational facilities which are available in the town have introduced a fundamental shift of emphasis in the 'Theories of Causation'. This new scientific and rational orientation has reduced the belief in superstitions and witchcraft. In the industrial setting, there is a growth of consciousness about one's rights and privileges. In fact, the trade unions all the time underline this idea. Thus, urban industrial tribals have more opportunities of voicing their grievances and demanding a right to mould their own destiny.

19.7.3 Change in the Social Life of the Tribals

The most fundamental change is the loss of homogeneity. Migrant tribal labour have to live in the midst of other labourers in shanty towns and in that situation, their individual characteristics tend to be blurred. Studies around Ranchi and Jamshedpur have shown that tribal youth have joined criminal gangs and are quite active in them. In the urban industrial areas there is a tendency of expanding group identity beyond the tribe. Inter-tribal marriages, association with political organisation and trade unions cut across tribal lines. Radios, movies and newspapers and more recently, TV sets bring news of the world which were beyond the comprehension of the tribal in a rural society. This leads to an expansion of his universe and his world view and also to a rise in the level of their aspirations.

In the past a tribal looked to his kin for help in times of stress, unemployment or illness. Lineage ties represented security. Now, the conjugal family is more important than the lineage. Leisure time activities are an index of social change. Through them, we can study tensions, frustrations and values. Most of the activities are not only pleasurable but also goal oriented. In tribal villages, they drank rice beer, had love affairs, performed dances, recited folk tales and riddles, visited neighbours and gossiped about the doings of kindred. In such activities men, women and children had their specific roles. Most of these activities have been replaced in the urban setting by others such as going to movies, theatres, foot-ball matches, etc.

Food habits are also changing fast. In the village people were satisfied with rice and vegetable or pulses or sometimes non-vegetarian food. Now, wheat flour is being consumed together with larger quantities of vegetables, meat, fish, eggs and milk. Taking tea has become a regular habit.

There has been free mixing between the tribals and the non-tribals. A number of marriages have been reported between them. Linguistic acculturation is taking place at a fast rate. The importance of religion in tribal life has declined.

It seems that in the urban setting, most of the distinctive tribal features are being obliterated and the tribals are becoming more and more a part of mass society. They are advancing towards integration of population. The concrete shape of this synthesis or reintegration is in the process of being forged.

19.8 APPROACHES TO TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

The tribals are a special concern of the nation in view of their low technological development, general economic backwardness, complex problems of socio-cultural adjustment to distinctive cultural identity. It is, however, necessary to define our approach to the tribal problem. The three models or approaches are to conserve, assimilate and integrate.

19.8.1 Conservationist Approach

The conservationist model stems from the effort made in the past to isolate the tribals. During the colonial rule the government through its policy of exclusion or partial exclusion desired to keep the tribals in a state of comparative isolation from the rest of the population. This approach was justified on account of the conditions obtaining at that time. The hands of administration could not reach the hills and forests. Many British administrators felt that there should be no

interference with the tribal way of life as it was more satisfying than that there should be no interference with the tribal way of life as it was more satisfying than obtaining in other parts. It was the colonial policy to insulate the tribals from the surging wave of the national movement.

The policy of isolation has been erroneously attributed to the anthropologists who were supposed to conserve the tribal culture in its archaic form for their own study. Verrier Elwin did propose at one point of time the Parkland theory for the tribes so that unregulated contact leading to serious exploitation by outsiders did not take place. After independence, however, he was all for a policy of constructive intervention in tribal areas.

19.8.2 Assimilationist Approach

The assimilationist approach was proposed by social workers and voluntary agencies engaged in humanitarian work in tribal areas. They were inspired by a spirit of service and idealism. However, their reformist approach was capable of injuring tribal's sensibilities. This approach emanated from the notion of Professor Ghurye that the tribals were only backward Hindus who had been pushed back into the hills and the forests by technologically more advanced populations.

A variant of this approach is that of the Christian missionaries who felt that the tribal problem could be solved if the tribals could be converted to Christianity. If the conversion of tribes to a new faith adds to national solidarity without alienating them from the majority of their neighbours and equips them for better participation in modern life, there can perhaps be no opposition to this. But if it detribalises and disintegrates these communities without offering them any alternative satisfaction, the approach can hardly be said to offer any serious solution.

19.8.3 Integrationist Approach

The third approach is that of integration in which attempts are made to bring the tribals in the mainstream of national life without destroying their distinctive identity. Indian culture is like a mosaic in which its separate elements add to its beauty. Anthropologists regard the integration of the tribes into the mainstream of Indian life as a natural desirable goal. They only insist on care and caution on planning for the tribes and emphasise restraints in certain areas against innovation of doubtful value. The essential elements of anthropological thinking on the problem have been largely incorporated in national policies. They have emphasised the importance of understanding tribal culture, identifying not only their different problems but the integrative forces in their life bringing out the vital linkage in their cultural fabric. They have pleaded for cautious formulation of development plans with a view to harmonise tribal needs with regional and national interests. They recommend a careful watch on the trends set in motion by these measures with a view to eliminating elements that destroy their social solidarity and kill their zest for living. The ideas of Pandit Nehru, our first Prime Minister, regarding the guiding principles of tribals' development, were very ably set forth by Verrier Elwin as the 'Tribal Panchsheel'. The five fundamental principles of this Panchsheel are that people should develop along the lines of their own needs, the dominant populations should not impose anything on them, tribal rights in lands and forests should be respected; we should try to build up their own leadership for developmental work; there should be no over-administration of these areas and as far as possible, efforts should be made to work through their own social and cultural institutions and finally, the result of all these should be judged not by the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

The problems of the tribals in India have afforded a good opportunity for constructive thinking and planning social change so as to bring them as soon as possible close to the mainstream of national development. It has now been recognised by all concerned that the tribal problem is not just an extension of the problems of the rural poor. The three models which have been mentioned above are not exclusive but mutually complementary. We must conserve what the tribals themselves consider the best element in their culture and they must imbibe and assimilate the rich cultural heritage of other populations and thus, integrate with them not only at the social plane but also at the emotional plane. Until this goal is achieved nation building in India will be a far cry.

Check Your Progress 4

- Note:** i) Use the space for your answers.
ii) Check your answer with the given at the end of this unit.

1) What is Detribalisation?

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2) In the urban setting the tribals maintain their homogenous character.

Yes No

3) What are the three major approaches for the integration of the tribes in the national life?

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4) The Britishers followed the integrationist approach for tribal development.

Yes No

5) What are the five features of Tribal Panchsheel?

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19.9 LET US SUM UP

Caste as a system practices inequality. This inequality has its origin not only in the normative structure, but also on the economic and political domain of the society. There indeed was a close nexus between caste and various institutions.

The British used caste as a tool against national integration. On the one hand, their measures strengthened the process of sanskritisation; on the other hand, it gave rise to the phenomena of caste-consciousness.

In the post independence period, caste has been an important element of electoral politics. Political modernisation (fusion of various castes and widening of the basis for membership) weakened ritual aspects of caste.

It is assumed, on the basis of trends in development, that the caste system may undergo a transformation beyond recognition from its traditional modes of existence.

The tribals represent a diverse pattern of ethnic plurality in India in terms of language and economy. In recent years due to ecological imbalances, culture and economy of the tribes have been adversely affected. Besides, there has also been the problem of land alienation, landlessness, indebtedness, etc., among the tribal peasants. Industrialisation, education, monetisation and urbanisation have accelerated the process of social change among the tribals in the urban setting.

Historical experiences depict that in the process of tribal and non-tribal interactions, the tribals have failed to gain substantially. Considering the diversity of the tribals in India, it is surprising they have accepted the integrationist approach for their development in national life. It speaks for their development according to their own requirements.

19.10 KEY WORDS

Caste : Endogamous social organisation based on principles of hierarchy, purity and pollution and hereditary occupation.

Caste Fission : Manifestation of internal tension of the caste group on the basis of economic, social and political rivalries.

Jajmani : A system of reciprocal exchange of goods and services based on patron-client relationships between the caste groups.

National Integration : A process of assimilation of diversified groups into a single national entity.

Sanskritisation : The process of shedding the supposedly immune ways of life and attempts of adopting the beliefs and ways of lives of the twice born castes in order to claim superior caste status by the lower castes.

Jhum Cultivation : It is a form of cultivation of crops in some parts of hills areas. The undergrowth is burnt down in the winter. The sub-soil is covered by a shed and this acts as fertilizer. After cultivating a plot for one or two seasons the groups move to another area where the same process is followed. This process is also terms as 'Slash' and Burn or Shifting Hill Cultivation.

Cash Crops: Crops which are exclusively produced to sell in the market to earn cash or money.

Detribalisation : A process of shedding the beliefs, values, norms and ways of lives of the tribals by the tribal people.

Egalitarian : Non-stratified, where every member of the society has equal social status.

Parochial Leadership : Localised and regional leadership.

19.11 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Beteille, A: *The Idea of Natural Inequality and Other Essays*, Delhi : Oxford University, 1983.

Rao, M.S.A. : *Social Movement and Social Transformation : A Study of Two Backward Class Movements in India*, Delhi.

Sarkar, Sumit : *Modern India : 1885-1945*, Delhi : Macmillan, 1983.

Singh, Yogendra : *Social Stratification and Social Change in India*, Delhi : Manohar, 1977.

Srinivas, M.N. : *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*, Asia Publishing House, 1962.

19.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS /EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Caste is a normative system of social stratification. As a system, caste practices inequality. This is justified on the basis of hereditary or ascribed social status, the ideas of purity and pollution and occupational specialisation.
- 2) Yes
- 3) Yes
- 4) It would have fragmented the Indian society in addition to perpetuating the caste disabilities of this section of our people.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) It provided for the reserved seats in the legislative assemblies and the Parliament, reservation in the Government services, educational institutions and protective discrimination in all government related programme of social and economic development for the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes.
- 2) These articulate political, economic and social demands through legitimate civic means.

- 3) Yes
- 4) a) Urban areas.
- 5) The adoption of the constitution, electoral, politics, social and economic reforms, education, science-technology, industrialisation, planning and reform movements have affected the caste system.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Yes
- 2) Yes
- 3) Physical feature of the Tribe.
- 4) No.
- 5) The major problems of the tribals peasants have been land alienation, landlessness, indebtedness, bonded labour, predominantly subsistence cultivation with backward technology.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) It is a process of loosing tribal cultural patterns.
- 2) No
- 3) Conservationist, assimilationist and integrationist approaches.
- 4) No
- 5)
 - i) To develop according to their own genius.
 - ii) No imposition of the policy of the dominant population.
 - iii) To build up their own leadership.
 - iv) No over administration
 - v) Result be judged by quality of human character.